

Natural Resources Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM | JUNE 16, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET,
SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 10:31 AM on June 16, 2023, Jon Romine, facilitator, convened the Natural Resources Branch meeting. The following members were present:

- Chris Wittman (on behalf of Daniel Andrews)
- Bethany Brosious
- James Evans
- Kate Gooderham
- Holly Milbrandt
- Ron George
- Fred Forbes
- Bill Ribble (on behalf of Joanne Ribble)
- Justin Mahon
- MaryBeth Saunders
- Melissa Perez-Gonzalez (on behalf of Maya Robert)

Facilitator and Branch Support:

- Jon Romine, Collaboratory
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting
- Ilani Fernandes, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Mr. Romine provided a review of the work of the Recovery Task Force (RTF) and its Branches. Mr. Romine reviewed the timeline for the RTF, emphasizing the move from Phase One to Phase Two of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (the Plan).

He noted the purpose of the meeting:

- Review Workshop sessions and key outcomes;
- Review and validate potential Initiatives; and
- Discuss what Initiatives require a Technical Brief.

Recovery Task Force (RTF) Updates

Mr. Romine reviewed the work of the Recovery Task Force from its last meeting, including discussions around Neighborhood Master Plans, Community Engagement, and the Project Intake Form.

Workshop Feedback

Mr. Romine provided an overview of the Workshops and Initiatives that were identified in the sessions. He summarized the key solutions identified in the Workshops, specific to education, workforce, and community resilience.

Mr. Evans brought up the land-use permitting side of housing. Members discussed increasing density in some areas that are more sensitive, such as the barrier islands and those in coastal high hazards. The Branch emphasized the importance of not letting the incorporation, protection, and enhancement of natural resources be an afterthought.

Initiatives Feedback

Mr. Romine provided an example of an Initiative, the Projects that support it, and the method to understand the documents prepared by the Branch.

Ms. Gooderham brought up the increase of blue-green algae in the environment.

Members suggested an educational awareness campaign on the economic impact of natural resources. Additionally, a draft of green-infrastructure policies.

Mr. Evans suggested that underground lines allow for scenic roadways and the ability to have major benefits, more than just aesthetics. Members also suggested mapping mixed-use centers and hubs to preserve areas in a resilience overlay. Ms. Brosious stated that identifying those parcels that are going to be priorities would be helpful in an overlay.

Mr. Wittman asked what measures will be created to ensure the implementation of the Initiatives. Mr. Romine summarized the role of Branch members in developing Initiatives.

Mr. Forbes stated that he did not support opening the county Disaster Recovery Grant Reporting System as he felt that the effects were still being felt from those decisions.

Mr. Evans supported renewable energy and stated that Sanibel is leading by example to get buildings to be solar-powered. Members stated that the use of solar arrays and covering stormwater ponds can reduce algae growth.

Ms. Gooderham asked if there was coordination in understanding the ecosystem of water quality. Mr. Romine summarized the conversation as the need to validate the water quality issues currently occurring and how to plan and fund for the future.

Mr. Forbes brought up the concern of clay pipes being used during septic-to-sewer conversions that have been leaking. He suggested that the Infrastructure Branch look into wastewater.

Mr. Evans stated that the use of reused water can also contribute to surface and groundwater quality and would need advanced treatment.

Ms. Gooderham brought up beach renourishment and the need to include that as a project for conserving and preserving natural resources.

Mr. Wittman asked if the current infrastructure could support higher-density hubs and an increase in the population overall.

Mr. Mahon suggested that nutrient reduction be its own Initiative to properly address Red Tide and harmful algae blooms as they are directly connected.

Ms. Gooderham suggested an annual report card on resilience be created for accountability purposes.

Branch Technical Briefs

Mr. Romine explained the development of Technical Briefs, Branch Action Plans, and Initiatives in the development of the Plan.

Questions and Next Steps

The next Branch meeting is scheduled for July 14, 2023, from 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM.

Public Comment

Marsha Ellis stated that the Brightline would run on the interstate not the Seminole Line. She encouraged reducing insurance costs for people who use green infrastructure. She

expressed the need to protect the water resources and sources of water. Additionally, integrating hazard mitigation into the plan for resources moving forward to support natural resource efficiencies. She suggested that the Branch create policy recommendations as a place to start.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked the Members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 11:50 AM.