

Lee County Recovery Task Force Supporting Business & Workforce Workshop

Session 3 – Meeting Minutes

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM | JUNE 7, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | ARTS AND CULTURE

Call to Order

On June 7, 2023, the facilitator of the Workshop, Tessa LeSage, convened the Supporting Business & Workforce Workshop: Arts and Culture at 1:35 PM with the following panelists present:

- Nancy MacPhee
- Mike Fiigon
- Roxana Barba
- Nicole Perino
- Gordon Knox

The following Branch members were present:

- Fred Forbes
- Stephanie Wardein
- Janel Trull
- Laura Siebenmorgen
- Jim Magnus
- Sandy Stillwell
- Jen Hagen
- Angela Katz
- David Cambareri

Workshop Topic Discussion

Ms. MacPhee began the conversation by stating that the majority of visitors come to Lee County for the beach and the cultural experiences, especially the arts. There has now been a shift in focus to inland culture within Lee County. She stated that from an economic point of view, it is important to preserve.

Ms. Perino said putting sculptures and artwork around Downtown Bonita Springs has led to the city's focus. She stated that there has been a collaboration with Center of the Arts, which has brought visitors to the community from all over the country. Mr. Fiigon stated that arts and culture is a huge economic driver.

Ms. LeSage asked how communities can help their arts communities build back in the wake of a disaster. Additionally, if there is a need for sector-specific approaches. The panelists stated the following:

- Arts councils being among the first to be reached out to, following a disaster;
- Having an umbrella for the arts sector and creating a government position appointing someone to oversee arts and culture in the region, besides marketing;
- Having a voting member from the arts and culture sector;
- Finding a sector-specific approach;
- Looking at applicable grants;
- Look into extensions for programs and virtual adaptations to help post-disasters; and
- Potential collaborative groups to ensure access for people in the community.

Ms. LeSage asked how to be more helpful in providing support to cultural institutions and receiving recovery resources more quickly. Additionally, how to better know the uptake or use of business supporting programs by arts institutions.

Ms. MacPhee stated that there has been a large pivot that has led to virtual collaborations. Mr. Fiigon suggested finding ways to make it easier for those impacted by a disaster to spend their resources.

Ms. MacPhee said this is an opportunity for expenses to be eligible under state statute. Philanthropic organizations could be an opportunity for financial opportunities.

Ms. LeSage asked what the next steps would be like.

Mr. Knox said it would start by sitting down and looking at this from a city planning perspective to see what the capacities are, as well as neighborhoods and warehouses. He suggested working with universities and Captiva to see what is possible and realistic about

the scale and scope of the infrastructure. Mr. Knox also suggested putting together a vision and outline of how this will work with intentions. Additionally, finding well-recognized institutional partners that bring recognition and history, while utilizing construction funding to build a center. Mr. Knox suggested a studio space as a start to support artists after a hurricane.

Ms. LeSage asked if there were ways to better understand the impacts of disaster on artists. Additionally, how we can help artists weather the current storm of cascading disasters with deep economic impact.

Ms. MacPhee stated that many cultural locations transitioned into feeding sites following the disaster. She stated that if artists and organizations were involved early on, it could help to identify expected participation. Additionally, incentives to improve the infrastructure that can benefit us after a disaster.

Ms. LeSage said this would be prioritizing arts and culture as part of resilience before a disaster, identifying infrastructure that exists and hardening them, and providing support during down time. She then asked what it would take to do this.

Mr. Knox said that it would include partnerships in the cultural sector being unified during disasters and a way to revitalize the region. Additionally, it would include reaching out, and being able to provide the following:

- A go-to place for organizations;
- A forum of open discussion to talk about the resurgence of a healthy arts ecology;
- A recognition that the city is focused on the recovery; and
- A convening of the organizations to figure out what is needed.

He encouraged the panelists and members to see what resources are available and to find models as potential solutions. Additionally, engaging artists to figure out how to be a part of the solution.

Ms. Rull stated that part of it is having something in place prior to the storm. Thinking of things prior to a storm to figure out resources and making sure they have a seat at the table would increase resilience.

Ms. LeSage asked how organizations can be supported through the difficulties. Ms. Barba said pre- and post-storm planning. Additionally, involvement with organizations and identifying needs and resources can be helpful. For long-term sustainability, it would be a commitment to supporting artists and organizations through robust and reliable grant programs that are thought through, connecting artists with businesses and institutions,

helping with preservation and tourism, and involving voices of new artists that bring the voices together, public, and private.

Ms. LeSage stated that the Cultural Resources Branch indicated that the Lee County area has a vested interest in growing a more robust arts community. She asked what the future of arts and culture in Lee County is and how can the region push the community to the “next level,” to gain increased national notoriety.

Ms. Perino stated that the Center of the Arts in Bonita Springs hired a new Executive Director, who has experience from all over the Country and in Europe.

Mr. Fiigon suggested partnerships with universities and schools around the area.

Ms. MacPhee stated the importance of getting the communities involved to think about the future and the next big idea. Additionally, seeing what is sustainable and the infrastructure that can accommodate things such as exhibits.

Mr. Knox stated that a set of facilities that could be pre-Broadway or opportunities for workshopping popular art programs would bring more people to the area.

Ms. Hagen asked if there were recommendations or examples for saving historical and cultural buildings before and after the storm. How to rally for restoration instead of demolition.

Mr. Fiigon stated that there are certain exemptions due to ordinances. He said there are grant-funded opportunities for historic structures to build back and repair. He stated a need for designated staff who can work with individual businesses to prioritize a list of needs.

Next Steps and Questions

There were no next steps or further questions discussed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked all members and panelists for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 PM on June 7, 2023.