

Housing Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

12:30 PM – 2:00 PM | JUNE 13, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 12:34 PM on June 13, 2023, Jon Romine, facilitator, convened the Housing Branch meeting. The following members were present:

- Marion Briggs
- Richard F. Durling
- Kevin Besserer
- Bradley Alix
- Sharon Ralston
- Malaina Mote
- Dan O'Berski
- Diana Giraldo
- Marcia Davis
- Amy Yearsley
- Lee Ford

Facilitators and Branch Support:

- Jon Romine, Collaboratory
- Ilani Fernandes, Hagerty Consulting
- Robbie Heere, 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 that the current phase is moving towards the build-out of the Recovery and Resilience Action 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 shared an update on discussions from the RTF on Community Master Plans, Community Engagement, and the Project Intake Form.

Initiatives Feedback

Mr. Romine explained the meeting materials provided to Branch members including documents that capture Initiatives and comments made about the Priorities identified by the Branch. Mr. Romine provided the explanation, listed the Initiatives, and opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Besserer asked about the context of the projects and how funding will work in creating the Initiatives.

Mr. Romine provided context for where the planning process and funding mechanisms will align with the Initiatives. He reminded the members that the Branch will only vote toward the end of the process to recommend Initiatives to the RTF.

Mr. Durling stated that there are other factors, such as green infrastructure, that work against affordability. The costs of increasing codes also should be factored into discussions on resiliency. He encouraged the Branch to think creatively to lower the costs of building housing. He stated that in this area, the average person cannot afford to buy or build a home for an average person.

Ms. Giraldo stated that when it comes to affordability, the transition between renting and home ownership is huge and asked how to support the area for green and resilient buildings. She stated that the smaller solutions will be derived from the bigger picture and will eventually be a lesser burden in the future.

Mr. Durling suggested that the lowest-lying areas should be bought out by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); the costs need to be weighted with private property rights. He suggested parking and drainage deregulation that increased costs over time and removing regulations.

Ms. Giraldo said now that public issues have been identified, there is a need to look through these for solutions.

Mr. Ford stated that there is a need to rebuild, however, there is a reality to the cost of rebuilding in storm-prone areas. He stated that this is larger than a governmental issue; large employers and institutions should come together to address the issues of their sector, such as housing their workforce. He underscored the need to have every potential partner at the table.

Ms. Davis encouraged mixed-income market rate units that can leverage 4% Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) funds. She proposed that affordable housing or workforce development for 2-5 years would cover the rising costs of insurance.

Mr. Besserer stated that the government does not necessarily do a good job of owning housing and did not believe that it would be a good entity to own the Initiatives. Ms. Davis stated that outside entities are better staged to develop and run programs about housing.

Ms. Yearsley provided background on the Projects submitted to the Project Intake Form. Ms. Davis and Mr. O'Berski requested to see all the Projects submitted by jurisdictions.

Ms. Briggs discussed the existing partnerships between Lee Health, the School District, and nonprofit developers. She stated that a public-private partnership be utilized to fix the issue of affordable housing.

Mr. Romine summarized the discussion on being intentional in developing workforce housing to create a model for fixing the problems.

Mr. O'Berski stated that most of the government response does not have a planned action plan. He said that buyouts and using money from recovery to buy out coastal areas are not the best use of funds.

Mr. Besserer suggested utilizing metal roofs to lower insurance rates. Mr. Romine summarized the conversation about improving resilience that will lower the costs of insurance. He reminded Branch members that the form is open until July 1, 2023.

Mr. Durling stated that regulations and fees are related to the higher costs of housing. Ms. Davis stated there are ways to waive impact fees using enterprise zones but that only impacts a small portion of the population. Additionally, grant funds can help offset impact fees for certain programs.

Mr. Durling cautioned that the goal of home ownership is slipping away and suggested deregulation and providing affordable homes.

Mr. Besserer suggested bringing down interest rates using the model that was suggested in Cape Coral to lower first-time homebuyer's interest rates.

Mr. Ford stated that public-private partnerships with a shared common interest would be a great step forward. He stated that the only way to change that is a mutual partnership to lower costs together. What is our plan for resilience and moving forward.

Workshop Feedback

Mr. Romine provided an overview of the Workshops and Initiatives that were identified in those sessions.

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 11, 2023, from 12:30 PM to 2:00 PM.

Public Comment

Bill Veach stated that the Town of Fort Myers Beach workforce housing is compliant and is working on the redevelopment of the area. He stated that most people of Fort Myers Beach have lived there for decades, but Hurricane Ian destroyed the small cottages. He shared the difficulty in competing with market priced housing, but the Town is also working to make the area creative and resilient.

Nicole McHale asked that the Branch not forget about the barrier islands and the individuals that have been displaced. She suggested more workforce housing be created on the islands.

Marsha Ellis stated that opportunity exists when the private sector puts in mechanisms for permanent affordability. She stated the importance of funding, so people can age in place. She suggested community ownership models and suggested the use of riskfactor.com.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked the members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 1:51 PM.