

Housing Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

12:30 – 2:00 PM | JULY 11, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100,
FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 12:31 PM on July 11, 2023, Jon Romine, Facilitator, convened the Housing Branch meeting. The following members were present:

- Gary Griffin, Branch Lead
- Marion Briggs
- Chris Simoneau
- Richard F. Durling
- Kevin Besserer
- Sharon Ralston
- Karen Rodriguez
- Becky Guttery on behalf of Dan O'Berski
- Diana Giraldo
- Marcia Davis
- Amy Yearsley

Facilitators and Branch Support:

- Jon Romine, Collaboratory
- Tessa Lesage, Collaboratory
- Shanna Snider, 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, indicating the project is nearly halfway complete and emphasizing the transition to Phase Two of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (the Plan) which includes identification and confirmation of Initiatives to

align with Branch-specific Priorities. He noted the purpose of the meeting was to review the Initiative matrix and identify Technical Briefs as needed.

Branch Initiatives Discussion

Mr. Romine reviewed the purpose of developing Initiatives to support Branch Priorities that will be incorporated into the Plan. He reminded Branch Members of their role in Initiative development including confirming the prioritization of current Initiatives, identifying gaps in Initiatives that need to be addressed, as well as assigning Initiative leads, measures of success, implementation steps, and funding mechanisms, to achieve Branch Priorities.

Mr. Romine provided the Members with guiding questions for consideration and introduced the Initiatives that support the first identified Branch Priority.

Mr. Simoneau asked for more information on the Housing and Urban Development and Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding. Tanya Shannon, Deputy Directory of Recovery, Hagerty Consulting, was recognized to discuss the CDBG-DR funding distribution mechanisms. She provided details on the competitive grant program and added that additional points will be awarded to prioritized projects through the ResilientLee planning process.

Mr. Besserer shared his support for using artificial intelligence (AI) technology to expedite the permitting process.

Ms. Giraldo asked about Projects that may not be included in the matrix. Ms. Shannon stated that Projects were submitted by RTF and Branch Members.

Members asked for resources and points of contact to direct constituents inquiring about CDBG-DR grant funding.

Mr. Romine introduced the Initiatives identified for the second priority: Zoning and policy changes in planning that increase density and redevelopment. Mr. Besserer asked the Members about the feasibility of an Initiative on conditional approval in development.

Ms. Briggs explained that prior to approval developers will typically spend a substantial amount of money. Mr. Besserer further discussed the approval process and the support needed to expedite the process to reduce the cost barrier associated with development.

Ms. Giraldo asked for a Technical Brief on the relationship between the implementation of the Live Local Act (SB 102) and the developer's request to speed up the approval process. Members discussed the feasibility of a form-based code. Ms. Yearsley said that the municipalities are working to implement the Act. Ms. Giraldo suggested an electronic method to submit applications could expedite the process.

Mr. Besserer requested a Technical Brief on the state law components on commercial development and how the City of Fort Myers has implemented the components since last year.

Mr. Romine introduced the Initiatives that support the third priority: Address workforce housing issues and development incentives for vulnerable populations and communities, particularly regarding homeless individuals. Mr. Griffin asked if this priority is related to transitional housing in defining homelessness which Mr. Romine confirmed. Ms. Giraldo stated that the members created this framework to provide recommended steps for the implementation of the Plan.

Mr. Besserer requested a Technical Brief regarding the North Carolina Hurricane Florence buyout program. Ms. Yearsley asked for point-in-time data from the County Human and Veterans Services Department to determine homelessness and transitional housing needs. Mr. Griffin stated that the projects listed are new projects and may not address flooded areas that were previously affordable.

Mr. Romine introduced the fourth priority: Address immediate and long-term issues related to insurance that individual homeowners and others are facing. Members expressed that insurance issues rest at state and federal levels.

Ms. Davis suggested addressing increasing premiums with a low-income fund for insurance cost assistance. Members requested a Technical Brief on insurance and the potential for a funding program. A Technical Brief on the National Flood Insurance Program 2.0 and policies to support homeowners with the increased cost of insurance was suggested by Mr. Besserer. Ms. Yearsley stated that insurance is a barrier to affordable housing.

Mr. Romine introduced the fifth priority: Increase communication and overall improve information available for community education regarding available federal and state programs and the requirements for those programs. Mr. Romine stated that Collaboratory is moving forward with a coordinator for housing assistance.

Members agreed to revise this Initiative to include a regional approach to sharing information. Members suggested that the Regional Planning Council have a seat at the table to share information on housing programs.

Mr. Ford shared his support for public-private partnerships for building housing and suggested they participated in the planning process.

Branch Technical Briefs

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

Questions and Next Steps

The next Branch meeting is scheduled for July 18, 2023, from 12:30 to 2:00 PM.

Public Comment

Mike Love from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) asked if attendees could access a copy of the material to better participate in the process. He stated that non-profits will go to non-profits that build affordable individual homes; communities are bigger than individual units. Mr. Love suggested that public-private partnerships be an Initiative to effectively produce more homes.

Stephanie Wardein from Lee Health suggested considering the housing needs in particular areas, especially those where tarps remain. She asked if there were efforts in place for re-tarping roofs as the hospitals have received increased cases of mold-related diseases.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

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