

Lee County Recovery Task Force Supporting Business & Workforce Workshop

Session 4 – Meeting Minutes

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM | JUNE 7, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | GROWTH SECTORS

Call to Order

On June 7, 2023, the facilitator of the Workshop, Tessa LeSage, convened the Supporting Business & Workforce Workshop: Growth Sectors at 3:31 PM with the following panelists present:

- John Talmage
- Tamara Pigott
- John Shannon
- Melanie Schmees

The following Branch members were present:

- Sharon Woodberry
- Stephanie Wardein
- Laura Siebenmorgen
- Marion Briggs
- Jim Magnus
- Matthew Leger

Workshop Topic Discussion

Ms. LeSage asked what the growing sectors in Lee County needed to be more successful and part of a more diverse and resilient economy.

Mr. Talmage stated that there are sectors that are coming to Lee County and seeing growth in the area, such as apparel, boat, and mechanical manufacturing, which has brought over 35,000 jobs. There has been less than a 1% vacancy rate. Ms. Pigott stated that this starts

and ends with air service. In order to grow as a community, a bigger airport is needed. It helps diversify the economy, but there is nowhere to put another plane. Mr. Shannon stated that construction would be a large part.

Ms. LeSage asked if there are suggestions for how to get credentials. Mr. Talmage stated that a space in the workplace for classroom opportunities is needed. Additionally, finding ways to apply certificates to those formerly incarcerated and handicapped.

Mr. O'Berski asked what the next round of technical assistance would look like, and what are the next steps for businesses and applicants. Mr. Talmage suggested stipend programs that are funded by the government that can help provide opportunities to de-risk the proposition. He stressed the importance of finding ways to help mom and pop businesses benefit as much as larger businesses.

Ms. LeSage followed by asking how to get them to succeed.

Ms. Pigott stated that workforce housing is important and should have some sort of talent attraction that can help with subsidizing housing costs. She said that the cost of insurance is too high and makes housing unaffordable. Mr. Talmage stated that there are long commutes for workers, therefore jobs should move to more residential and mixed vertical-use areas. He said that educating others is important, as well as micro-credentialing.

Mr. O'Berski suggested an office where businesses can come and interact with students and create a culture of education. This would be a co-working space to have training programs. Mr. Talmage said that educating the businesses is also key.

Ms. Giraldo stated that supporting business and workforce growth encompasses retention, affordable housing, transportation, quality of life, arts, culture, and diversity that seem to only be found in urban centers. She asked what some ideas are to incentivize quality of life from the business and housing development perspective that are tangible in a development process. The answers were as followed:

- Integration of smaller communities with information centrally located;
- Create housing in proximity to parks, social gathering locations, and communities;
- Creating a space where people want to be there either for living or recreation;
- Incorporate arts and culture into housing choices;
- Having a consensus about the Live Local Act; and
- Have younger generations fulfill job needs in the area.

Ms. LeSage asked how Lee County can foster resilience in the tourism industry, especially following Hurricane Ian. The panelists suggested the following:

- Finding pockets of entertainment and attraction throughout the community/region;
- Diversify entertainment and attraction options;
- Consider what people want today and shift gears to accommodate;
- Creating a pipeline with projects currently taking place;
- Providing training opportunities for small businesses (i.e., online courses such as OpenSesame); and
- Creating a mailing list with all small businesses in Lee County to share information.

Ms. LeSage asked what the region needed to be prepared for with the growth of automation. The panelists stated:

- The ability to be nimble;
- Have transferrable skills;
- Create sustainable opportunities for life-long learning; and
- Working alongside technological advances.

Ms. LeSage stated that the fishing and shrimping industries were also harmed by Hurricane Ian and remain at risk for future storms. She asked if there are ways to help protect these industries to ensure their ongoing viability in the face of continued risk. The panelists suggested the following:

- Looking for government solutions to an entity that can receive funding;
- Alternatives to privately owned docks;
- Increased transportation;
- Mixed-use spaces;
- Rethinking the seasonal community; and
- Being a part of conversations about transportation alternatives (i.e. light rail or Brightline).

Next Steps and Questions

There were no next steps or further questions discussed.

Public Comment

Wes Sprecher stated there is an opportunity to look at Local Mitigation Strategies (LMS) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants for job training. He stated that

having an online resource for every business owner in the community to have certified credentialed and non-credentialed communities would be utilized.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked all members and panelists for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 4:53 PM on June 7, 2023.