

Lee County Recovery Task Force Critical Infrastructure Workshop

Session 3 – Meeting Minutes

2:00 PM – 4:00 PM | JUNE 21, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | POWER

Call to Order

On June 21, 2023, the Workshop facilitators, Terry Mazany and Lee Mayfield, convened the Critical Infrastructure Workshop: Power at 2:05 PM with the following panelists present:

- Rob Price
- Charlotte Miller
- Clark Hawkins
- Carlo Fassi
- Jeff Pearson
- Allan Ruth

The following members were present:

- Robert Dillalo
- Laura Siebenmorgen
- Fred Forbes
- Bill Ribble
- Ryan Carter
- Lee Ford
- Troy Churchill
- Steven Sarkozy
- Chris Simoneau
- Stephanie Wardein
- George Smith
- Trish Lassiter
- Ryan Berger
- Alvin Henderson

- David Cambareri
- Diana Giraldo
- Marion Briggs
- Sandy Stilwell Youngquist
- Kate Gooderham

Workshop Topic Discussion

Mr. Mayfield stated that infrastructure is a large sector, and a lot of time can be spent on it. He began the discussion by asking what priorities surfaced to the top post-Hurricane Ian. The panelists identified the following:

- Hardening infrastructure such as wooden or concrete poles and traffic signals;
- Building underground infrastructure which has shown signs of resilience, except during storm surges;
- Hardening transmissions;
- Elevating substations through grants such as those from FEMA;
- Elevating signal cabinets;
- Restoring and hardening lift stations; and
- Looking into by-pass pumps in place of generators for less maintenance.

Mr. Mayfield stated that water and power utilities should be considered first responders. He asked what would be most helpful in empowering companies pre-storm with stakeholders to help recover faster. The panelists stated the following:

- Upgrading and relocating service centers in service territories;
- Assistance with the permitting process including permitting for acquisitional land and restricted properties;
- Moving projects in cue forward, such as a transmission substation;
- Assistance with easement acquisitions and having them built into plans; and
- Coordination when plans are being made so facilities can be identified.

Mr. Mayfield stated that the utility companies are not just planning for hurricanes, but trying to accommodate the growing community. He asked if they were involved in the funding process after storms, and what would be helpful. The panelists stated the following:

- Any type of funding request [from Florida Power and Light (FPL)] goes through the Public Service Commission, which has a storm recovery charge to fund the requests; and
- Lee County Electric Cooperative (LCEC) is involved with FEMA funding and reimbursements.

Mr. Price stated that from a Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) perspective, the projects from the County do not rank high in the grant process, however, there has been a large emphasis on utility projects post Hurricane Ian.

Mr. Churchill asked if there was a priority list the utility providers have for healthcare facilities/group homes/ physician homes that are in a pre and post-storm checklist. The panelists stated the following:

- FEMA and LCEC conduct an annual review to identify critical infrastructure facilities and what the County has deemed most important per jurisdiction;
- Lee County has had an emphasis on 9-1-1, hospitals, government facilities, medical facilities, fire rescue, and other emergency response centers;
- If everything is a priority, nothing is a priority;
- Response depends on the damage to the feeders and can mean judgment calls are made with the resources available;
- Having staff available in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) who can be activated to prioritize critical facilities is key;
- Identifying critical infrastructure to determine where resources need to go and what needs to be restored to get the facilities open infrastructure is helpful during and post-disasters;
- The County would appreciate coordination efforts with the utility providers for a more strategic way of restoring signals;

Mr. Forbes asked FPL how many of the main transformer substations were causing a power outage. Ms. Miller stated that no transmissions were lost, however, there were lines that were down due to vegetation or salt intrusion/storm surge. She stated that the infrastructure that could receive power received it within eight days. Additionally, evaluations are being done to ensure safety criteria are taken into account for outages, which might look like underground systems, but cautioned about the time it would take.

Mr. Churchill asked what impacts TECO Energy (TECO) faced, and if there was any exploration in natural gas for generators and healthcare facilities.

Mr. Fassi stated that within a few days, about 99% of the services were back online.

Ms. Gooderham asked what were the weakest links, such as a powerline over Pine Island Sound to Sanibel. Mr. Hawkins identified the transmission system in the radio line as the weakest link for LCEC.

Ms. Giraldo stated that in general, building energy consumption is a big factor for all buildings and critical facilities which are used for the recovery process. She asked, for resiliency and looking into the future, would the providers agree that implementing energy benchmarking to the government buildings and shelter is an important factor as we seek energy efficiency and support of solar installations to help in the recovery efforts and beyond. Additionally, she asked what incentives the energy providers or other branches of government are providing for the energy hardening of buildings.

Ms. Miller stated that resiliency does not make a huge difference in the restoration of power. The electrical panels that were used by FPL were working soundly and appropriately.

Mr. Mayfield asked if there were additional collaborations during the first weeks post-disaster, that could help with resiliency. The panelists identified the following:

- Being at the EOC is critical when discussing issues that come up real time;
- Having crews pre-assigned to each EOC to assist in debris removal and other needs;
- Doing outside collaboration to discuss challenges during restoration;
- Having a mutual understanding of the process to ensure EOC support and collaboration;
- Assistance with procurement and permitting/streamlining the process to remove red tape; and
- Identifying responsible parties and payment to make restoration quicker.

Mr. Mazany asked if there were any issues finding temporary housing due to the large number of house devastations and parties from outside of the region assisting. The panelists stated the following:

- There was difficulty finding housing and hotels;
- FPL brought in sleep trailers and RVs and placed them on staging sites;
- LCEC adapted a basecamp model to house 500,000 personnel

Mr. Mazany asked if there were pre-positioned agreements already in place or if work can be done to arrange them ahead of time. The panelists identified the following:

- FPL has already identified staging sites;
- Staging sites may vary depending on the store location; and
- Larger staging sites are pre-identified but can be more difficult for smaller areas.

Mr. Mazany asked the panelists what solutions or innovations they would want to be incorporated in the Recovery and Resilience Plan. The panelists stated the following:

- FPL is happy with the processes and how the restoration efforts were;
- Identifying items that are in supply-chain delays and order pre-disaster;
- Talk with manufacturers on items that might need to be saltwater proof;
- Putting storm kits together prior to storms; and
- Raising the substations and transition systems.

Mr. Churchill asked how solar power and panels fared during and after the storm.

Ms. Miller stated that there's a focus on solar fields for FPL, and they're built to hurricane-strength standards. She stated that very few panels were damaged, and it was not an issue.

Mr. Hawkins stated that LCEC shares power with FPL.

Ms. Wardein asked if there was a solution to bank energy that could be redistributed. Ms. Miller stated that it is now cost-effective and will be implemented in the near future. FPL is looking towards a long-term vision of solar and no fuel or gas.

Mr. Churchill asked if lift stations could serve as a banking area for power. The panelists stated the following:

- FPL is more focused on larger scaled banking, but there is the technology for smaller scaled banking;
- The County has explored the option, but it is expensive and not a lot of testing has been done, especially against hurricane conditions; and
- The County has coordinated with Florida Gulf Coast University, but there was not much excitement in that industry for signal systems.

Mr. Sarkozy asked if there was a program to standardize a panel to plug and play at various spots. He stated that this is a common problem with shelters not being able to get temporary power generation to be effective. The panelists stated the following:

- There are generators with quick connects, however, no wires were sent with the generators;
- Generators and tools were delivered based on availability;
- Generators needed "dirty power", not "clean power";
- Florida Department of Transportation takes care of state roads, while the County run generators run on gas; and
- Make funding requests to increase redundant feeds.

Mr. Mazany asked if there were any Public Utility Easements (PUE) that have been mapped out and if so if any coordination has been done with government agencies for fast-tracking approvals.

The panelists stated that PUEs have not been mapped out, are time-intensive, and can be expensive.

Mr. Berger asked how the outlook has changed pre and post storms, in terms of funding and prioritization.

Mr. Hawkins stated that there is an opportunity to move projects up and update them as needed. However, there is still a waiting process for authorization from FEMA. There are still projects from Hurricane Irma that have not been approved yet.

Mr. Berger stated that most of the barrier islands are subaqueous and asked if there was a thought process of building redundancies or if it would be overhead.

The panelists stated that it would be an overhead concept, but there are ideas of putting transmission underground. This would require looking at the costs of projects to see what's cost-effective in the FEMA process.

Mr. Mayfield asked the panelists to identify big-ticket projects or ideas to prepare for future storms.

Mr. Price identified a project that would connect an advanced traffic management system with a public safety dispatch system along with a transit bus system that would give the ability to expand the preemption footprint county-wide. It would build a communication block that would give the traffic management system more information about where calls and EMTs are going along with buses to maintain headways. He stated that it is a costly project but would allow a controller to make timing adjustments in advance so that things are not kicked out of coordination.

Ms. Wardein asked if there was a discussion towards a collaborative effort where power, water, and utilities have a streamlined effort for funding streams to think creatively or develop assets as new construction begins.

Mr. Hawkins stated that the developers are the best people to deal with when building infrastructure and undergrounding new facilities.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Mazany and Mr. Mayfield thanked the panelists and participants of the Workshop. The meeting was adjourned at 3:53 PM on June 21, 2023.