Lee County Recovery Task Force Attainable & Resilient Housing Workshop

Session 1 – Meeting Minutes

8:30 AM – 10:30 AM | JUNE 9, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Call to Order

On June 9, 2023, the Workshop facilitators, Jon Romine and Terry Ware, convened the Attainable & Resilient Housing Workshop: Financial Incentives at 8:35 AM with the following panelists present:

- Marcus Goodson
- Nelson Taylor
- Amy Yearsley
- Frank Wells
- Tom Rossi
- John Talmage
- Jeannie Sutton
- David Hyyti
- Joe Bonora
- Melanie Schmees
- Stan Gimont

The following Branch members were present:

- Fred Forbes
- Phyllis Calloway
- Lee Ford
- Dan O'Berski
- Marco Villalobos
- Stephanie Wardein
- Jennifer Hagen

- Gary Griffin
- Marion Briggs
- Therese Everly
- Richard Durling
- Sharon Woodberry
- Chris Simoneau

Workshop Topic Discussion

Mr. Ware asked if the current financial incentives are enough to offset the costs of resilience development. Mr. Goodson underscored the importance of underserved populations not being missed. He said there is a chance to rebuild.

Mr. Ware asked how dependent the region was on federal subsidization.

Mr. Goodson stated that there is an extreme dependency on federal subsidization. Mr. Talmage reiterated the need for affordable housing.

Mr. Romine asked if anything has been done across the Lee County region, in terms of housing solutions for today and for the future. The participants stated the following:

- Not enough has been done to help the community partners;
- Revisit the gap in funding;
- Look to other states, such as Montana, with similar politics and legislation;
- Keep transportation in the conversation;
- Using commercial or industrial land for multifamily or residential areas;
- Look at the data and what households look like;
- Incentivize affordable and attainable rates to offset market rate prices;
- Hold politicians at the state and local levels to what they have promised;
- Determine ways to incentivize mixed income projects;
- Look at models for workforce-attainable housing;
- Find ways to remove obstacles that have been identified; and
- Subsidizing options for housing businesses.

Mr. O'Berski asked about the mechanisms the County can take to de-risk housing barriers. The panelists brought up the following:

- There are challenges with hiring a grant writer and compliance reviewers;
- Increased advocacy efforts for a continued ask to the legislature; and
- Reducing red tape at the state and federal level.

Mr. Romine asked if there were examples of local governments creating a funding mechanism to offset the additional expenses to build workforce housing. The panelists stated the following:

- Looking at governments, such as Miami-Dade, which have a food and beverage tax that goes towards workforce housing and homelessness;
- Look at incentives and how to bring the cost of housing down;
- Looking to large multi-family properties and policies that can facilitate the development;
- Ask the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for waivers; and
- Utilizing a four percent tax credit for building a pipeline without competition to get leverage.

Mr. Romine asked about the workforce, now and for the future, from an institutional perspective.

Ms. Schmees stated that along with higher paying jobs for the community, the workforce cannot afford to live locally.

Mr. Ware asked how that impacts the cost of housing, in terms of building resilience. The facilitators stated the following:

- It will increase prices;
- Building structures that are resilient is non-negotiable;
- Finding a balance for the biggest bang for your buck; and
- Finding building codes that have been well aligned and are more resilient is key.

The facilitators asked how to reduce the burden to get projects to move forward. The answers were as followed:

- Asking the government for relief;
- Find ways to get rid of the administrative burden to ensure there is no fraud;
- Having social awareness of "how we got here;"
- Spend money to look at the pockets to see how the problems can be fixed;
- Building with an incentive front;
- Identifying models for different levels of income for a project;
- Mixed-use properties and overlays to incentivize development;
- Mixed-use overlays to reduce open space requirements;
- Adaptability and redevelopment as communities evolve; and
- New market tax credits.

Mr. O'Berski asked if it would be possible to increase funding and linear growth, and if the government can help to own some projects, such as a parking garage.

Mr. Everly stated that if the region does not receive the money, there will be missed opportunities. She reiterated that 4% would be a great incentive and way to get leverage. She also shared her support of the idea of land banking and land trust.

Mr. Talmage stated that there has been a strategy in the works, and it will soon emerge. He stated that information gathering from individual assistance programs has given more insight into the needs. Ms. Sutton said there is data of who was present before the hurricane to help find sustainable funding sources. She stated that the HUD funding is not a sustainable model and does not align with the long-term needs.

The panelists also suggested the following:

- Identifying gaps in the workforce to build a financial case for HUD;
- Identifying a linkage fee that can sustainably fund the workforce housing and development;
- A regional housing impact fund where banks and other contributors fund and minimize gaps;
- Looking for a pipeline or overlay of executions;
- Identifying renewable sources;
- An opportunity for land banking and capitalization on a land trust model;
- A political consensus;
- Identifying segments of the market who cannot get subsidies and funds to build housing; and
- Other funding streams, besides insurance, for infrastructure.

Next Steps and Questions

There were no next steps or further questions discussed.

Public Comment

Betsy Haesemeyer stated that disabled housing could not get money through government assistance because many were in the barrier islands. She asked if this meant affordable and workforce housing could not be in the barrier islands.

Mike Love stated that affordable housing cannot be dropped in the middle of communities, such as Dunbar, without changing the community. He stressed that the Dunbar community was never built for anyone but low-income field workers. In many cases, people do not return to Dunbar because it is not set up for the current generations. He stressed the importance of funding in the area so it can thrive and be resilient.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked all members and panelists for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 10:32 AM on June 9, 2023.