

Housing Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

12:30 PM – 2:00 PM | SEPTEMBER 7, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET,
SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 12:31 PM on September 7, 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
- Bradley Alix
- Karen Rodriguez
- Dan O'Berski
- Diana Giraldo
- Marcia Davis
- Amy Yearsley

County Liaison:

- Tim Gillmore

Facilitators and Branch Support:

- Jon Romine, Collaboratory
- Tessa Lesage, Collaboratory
- Tracey Phillips, Hagerty Consulting
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Mr. Romine, Facilitator, provided a review of the work of the Recovery Task Force (RTF) and its Branches since the last meeting. Mr. Romine provided an update of the involvement of all stakeholders, including Lee County. He noted the purpose of the meeting to discuss the Draft Branch Initiative Profiles.

Overview of RTF Member One-on-One Meetings

Mr. Romine provided a summary of the meeting conducted by the ResilientLee Support Team (Support Team) to meeting with jurisdictional staff and leadership. Mr. Romine explained that twelve meetings have been conducted to date to brief each member of the Recovery Task Force.

Branch Action Plan

Ms. Phillips provided clarity on the development of action plans and the goal of the planning process to create recommendations (i.e., terminology change to align with the evolving direction of the project).

Review of Branch Initiative Profiles

Mr. Romine introduced the draft Initiative Profiles of the Housing Branch. He reminded members that these are drafts and are subject to change based on feedback from members. Mr. Romine introduced the first Initiative Profile for the Housing Branch members to review. Ms. Phillips reviewed the concept across Branches of overlapping Initiative Profiles and reminded members of the next steps to combine Initiative Profiles.

Members discussed prioritization to accomplish the next steps and goals of the Plan. Mr. Durling stated that some of the Initiative Profiles described are short term goals instead of longer term or aspirational goals. Ms. Phillips described how resilience planning can help prepare for the next storm and improve the Plan. Members discussed long-term and short-term permitting challenges post storm and actionable solutions to those challenges. Members discussed the long-term recovery and resilience of housing in Lee County.

Mr. Besserer brought up the use of AI technology in other counties in Florida to improve the speed and efficiency of the permitting process. Members suggested that the Initiative Profile language describe the improvement of permitting process that can be ramped up to handle post storm recovery. Ms. Phillips suggested expanding the definition of

permitting to not confuse development and codes with building permits. Members discussed the feasibility of the Initiative Profile related to permitting. Members explored the idea of an emergency permit for building in order to speed up the recovery of housing quickly post storm. Members discussed that the post disaster component of permitting would be in the Planning & Capacity Branch.

The members also discussed affordable housing permitting to increase the housing stock, which is the purpose of H01: Housing Development Program Initiative. The stand-alone expedited permitting initiative would not be viable unless it is incorporated into other Initiatives. Members built consensus around the feasibility of a single application for a jurisdiction to use in building permits and combining this with the cross-jurisdictional Initiative Profile H03: Regional Coordination and Cooperation.

Members expressed concerns about H02: CDBG_DR Fund Planning Initiative and reached consensus to eliminate this Initiative Profile. Ms. Phillips described the fund mapping process regarding CBDG-DR.

Mr. Romine introduced H03: Regional Coordination and Cooperation Initiative to members. Members discussed the feasibility of regional coordination for this initiative and the purpose of a regional approach to planning.

Members reached a consensus to combine initiatives H03: Regional Coordination and Cooperation Initiative and H04: Mixed-Use Overlay Initiative. Ms. Giraldo suggested that the layering of developments should be informed by a collaborative approach. The members agreed that joining the Regional Planning Council is not viable. Members suggested that a regional approach is needed by all jurisdictions.

Ms. Phillips suggested that fund mapping creates opportunities for the use of equity dollars and affordable housing. Members discussed intensity and density and the need to broaden the Initiative title to incorporate thoughtful zoning. Mr. Griffin asked if projects are inside the scope of the Branch's duties to review. The Support Team answered that specific projects are not the complete list of activities that could support resilience and recovery.

Mr. Griffin stated that the Board of County Commissioners can accept all parts or none of this Plan. The Board of County Commissioners' vote on the Plan will be the final step in this project. Members discussed the County's involvement in the planning process as a stakeholder. Mr. Gillmore stated that there is support for being a part of this process and approving this plan.

Mr. Besserer stated that the utility expansion creates an affordability problem for housing development. Members discussed the resilience of building affordable products and the cost of utilities in certain areas of the County.

Questions and Next Steps

Members were asked to provide feedback on Initiative Profiles by September 13, 2023.

Public Comment

Bob Soter congratulated the Branch members for their work in this important process. He explained increasing tree canopy would be a key economic and resilience measure for this area. The grant would include faculty and staff from Florida Gulf Coast University and appreciated their support.

Marsha Ellis commented on Initiative H04 and the language of the mixed-use overlay and had concerns. She explained that residential and commercial spaces in proximity are a red flag. When discussing housing affordability and exposing people to increased risk of ethylene oxide, she stated that it is not compatible to have commercial and residential spaces so close to each other. She commented that the housing crisis is caused by market rate manipulation. She also commented that Initiative H01: Expedited Permitting and new development have been a barrier for people who need new roofs, and the problem could be made worse by mixing up the permitting process. She expressed support for Cape Coral's process; she spoke about the types of permits and accurate mapping of where folks live. She stated her support for opportunities for irrigation, specifically supporting purple pipe projects.

Betsy Haesemeyer commented that housing application assistance is needed for those people with low incomes and renters who apply to multiple non-refundable applications.

Sophia Brubaker commented on behalf of Sunshine Village in Iona, which provides seniors with the ability to have affordable homes and a social neighborhood. They are seeking support for their residents to preserve affordable housing in Lee County and thanked members. She commented that most single-family homes destroyed were in the Iona-McGregor area and were mainly occupied by seniors. She suggested creating a senior center in the area and Branch members could be at the forefront of the plan. She thanked the members of the Branch.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked the members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 2:05 PM.