

Lee County Recovery Task Force Critical Infrastructure Workshop

Session 1 – Meeting Minutes

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM | JUNE 5, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | NATURAL RESOURCES

Call to Order

On June 5, 2023, the Workshop facilitator, Jon Romine, convened the Critical Infrastructure Workshop: Natural Resources at 9:04 AM with the following panelists present:

- Maya Robert
- Roland Ottalini
- Jeff Harney
- James Evans
- Nicole Ladevaia
- Jo Muller
- Mike Sprayberry

The following Branch members were present:

- Kate Gooderham
- Daniel Andrews
- Bill Ribble
- Fred Forbes
- Joanne Ribble
- Frank Bonafilia
- Marco Villalobos
- Dan O'Berski
- John Roth
- Ryan Carter

Workshop Topic Discussion

The facilitator, Mike Sprayberry, asked the panelists what is needed to rethink the relationship between natural resources and resilience.

Panelists determined that the region was dependent on natural resources for flood protection and water supply. It was stated that natural resources are a driving resource for the economy, and the preservation of natural resources is the best way to make the Lee County region more resilient.

The facilitator then asked the panelists for suggested solutions, which included the following:

- Educating the public about the surrounding natural systems in the area;
- Protecting natural resources;
- Looking for restoration funding will serve as a buffer;
- Ensuring the best efforts are being put forward during “blue sky days;” and
- Using this as an opportunity to harden the infrastructure with strong funding streams.

Ms. Gooderham stated that natural resources should be viewed as infrastructure that is cheaper and less stressful to keep in good health, such as Lake Okeechobee. Mr. Evans underscored the importance of the Natural Resources Branch having a cost-benefit analysis to assess the benefits of the natural resources/industries.

The facilitator asked if there were ways to increase access to natural resources for all community residents.

Panelists felt that they were not aware of the issue in terms of access to natural resources at the County-wide level. They felt that the Lee Plan helped add a level of protection to the natural habitats.

The facilitator asked when the best-known vulnerability assessments were scheduled and when the results were available. Additionally, if there was more information needed to determine the risk to the natural infrastructure, and how other communities set priorities.

Mr. Ottolini stated that Lee County is getting ready to release data that has information tailored to infrastructure and other needs. This includes projections and data that can help inform the holistic approach. Mr. Evans stated that Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) did a vulnerability analysis and took a community approach. He said that a lot of what was predicted came true with Hurricane Ian, therefore it’s important to build back on top of setbacks that were noted. Ms. Ladevaia stated that there has been a study on the duality of

watersheds for Charlotte and Lee County and the data available from the study had recommendations from community partners.

Mr. Sprayberry suggested looking and making sure to take low-hanging fruit along the way to take care of the issues such as hardening water infrastructure.

Mr. Forbes stated that Bonita Springs created a plan that addressed the issue regarding flood planning. Ms. Ribble stated that one of the biggest challenges is getting the community's buy-in.

The facilitator asked if there were other potential solutions and the participants agreed as follows:

- Acquiring land to create buffers and using conservation as a tool;
- Finding nature-based solutions, such as living shorelines, building dunes, and converting seawalls;
- Improving natural resources for development/redevelopment in large infrastructure and hardening of utilities; natural-based solutions;
- Pursuing funding for flood-mitigation projects;
- Educating the public pertaining to natural drainage systems; and
- Reviewing projects such as beach restoration, in Lee County.

Next Steps and Questions

Mr. Sprayberry stated that there has been a lot of attention in North Carolina pertaining to septic-to-sewer infrastructure, which is a focus up and down the coast. He stated that interpersonal relationships are key, and this is a great opportunity to make Lee County better.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked all members and panelists for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 10:18 AM on June 5, 2023.