

# Cultural Resources Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

## Meeting Minutes

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM | JUNE 29, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

### Call to Order

At 6:02 PM on June 29, 2023, Terry Mazany, facilitator, convened the Cultural Resources Branch meeting. The following Branch members and supporting personnel were present:

- Will Prather
- Janel Trull
- Matt Johnson
- Charles Barnes
- Lydia Antunes Black

Facilitators and Branch Support:

- Jon Romine, Collaboratory
- Terry Mazany, Collaboratory
- Jaesa Rogers, Hagerty Consulting
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting

### Introductions

Mr. Mazany provided an overview of the Recovery Task Force (RTF), its structure and work, and the Cultural Resources Branch's responsibilities, specifically, related to development of the ResilientLee Recovery and Resilience Plan.

He noted the purpose of the meeting:

- To convene arts, cultural, and historical stakeholders to identify Initiatives that represent their priorities for recovery in the ResilientLee Recovery and Resilience Plan. Members are encouraged to think of Initiatives in the following topical areas:
  - Capital needs of the sector;
  - Sustainable funding mechanisms; and

- Alignment of the sector.

## Planning Process Updates

Mr. Mazany outlined the Initiative Development Process and actions necessary to develop Initiatives to be incorporated into the ResilientLee Recovery and Resilience Plan.

## Initiative Discussion

Mr. Mazany described the purpose of the meeting and highlighted that advocacy of arts and culture is a priority for Lee County. He prefaced the conversation by detailing steps for building a collective voice to inform the Branch of priorities of the arts and culture sector to ensure it continues to thrive and be a dynamic part of the regional economy. Branch members recognized members of the community that were attending as representatives of various organizations:

- Jim Brock, representing the Ghostbird Theater Company, stated that performance and exhibition spaces are the two greatest challenges artists are currently facing. Space is required for collection holding, including museums and historical societies.

Ms. Black spoke about sites that remain damaged and are not 100% operational. While sites are currently being utilized, it does not mean they are fully recovered, and the need remains for short-term capital funding investments. Ms. Black summarized considerations for the short-term mitigation of sites, including resources necessary to operationalize sites, opportunities for future stakeholder engagement to identify and refine priorities, storytelling as needs continue, and priority actions that provide equity to the sector.

Mr. Johnson stated that comprehensive stakeholder engagement provides resiliency in the community. Arts and culture need to be represented in short- and long-term recovery conversations when large projects are being discussed to ensure all needs are being addressed.

Kimberly Sena Moore stated that Lee County differs from large cities, like Chicago, and arts and cultural sites aren't as easily accessible.

Mr. Mazany challenged the arts and cultural representatives present to connect with organizations, venues, and artists across the area.

Andrew Kurtz stated that customers are declining to drive to frequent evening performances. The turnout of arts and cultural organization stakeholders at the Cultural

Resources Branch Meeting demonstrates that the sector will step up when asked and will continue participating to bolster recovery while ensuring that the sector is represented.

- Molly Deckart stated that the community has a unique opportunity to lean into cultural tourism as a sector. We need spaces, public art, and districts that encourage walkable and accessible programs to support artists and grow this community in the way it needs. We need a sustainable and dedicated funding source at the county level to create an additional anchor for the area.
- Brian Weaver stated that a business plan exists as a model to mix public transportation with arts and culture. Cape Coral has considered this as a public transportation program. Public transportation is one of the most difficult things in this area. The template is already written.
- Jennifer Denike, representing the Florida Repertory Theater, stated that accessible transportation such as para-transport is always an issue for individuals that need it.
- Jim Griffith, representing the Syndey & Burne Davis Arts Center, stated that culturally rich communities have support from leadership because of the power that the arts can provide. He asked how we show leadership here that value.

Ms. Black stated that members are trying to get not just programming dollars but capital dollars that elevate the places and spaces that can provide all the things this area needs. Members discussed funding models in the area and being part of the conversation at the County-level. Now there are no resources for capital improvement. She asked attendees “How do we ensure representation at the county-level?”

- Ellen Vaughan, representing the Mound House, asked if across the country there are any examples that we can pull from in a county of this size.
- Kimberly Sena Moore, with Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), stated that this area is one that does not have oversight. Having someone at the county level as an arts representative that has a budget as a decision maker would be important.

Ms. Black described that arts and culture organizations do not have debt service as there is a seven-dollar economic return for every one dollar invested in the arts of this area.

Ms. MacPhee stated that as a counterpoint, those bed tax funds are governed by state statute. She stated that there has not been a movement to champion arts funding with the bed tax.

Mr. Johnson stated that the bed tax is only one method to fund, not the only funding source. There needs to be more alignment of the sector to do that. There are many other funding sources that are not just the bed tax.

- Marylee Mann stated that she was aware of the limitations of the bed tax, but it would also take a major effort. Bed tax has been given for performances. Barbara B. Mann has received some bed tax dollars for performances but allowing those dollars for arts facilities would require an amendment.
- Hank Hendry stated that for historic preservation, the area is losing historical structures with regularity, including the Beach School and the Cape Coral Yacht Club building. The McCollum Hall could be a potential space for performance. He stated that historical preservation is a way to recycle and use these buildings for performance spaces.

Mr. Mazany stated that the Collaboratory is an example of historic preservation. It was also built to resilient standards.

- Sharron McAllister stated this discussion needs to be heard at the county and state levels. We now are the home of corporate headquarters for some powerful companies. In larger cities, those companies donate large amounts of dollars in those places. She summarized this as the private capital component.
- Stephanie Webb, representing the City of Palms Youth Choir, stated that when discussing sustainability, the major fund went out the door. She stated that everyone is going for the same audience. She asked if there are more ways to collaborate and approach big funders to get a bigger bang for our buck.

Mr. Mazany provided FutureMakers as an example of the collective nature of getting grant funding.

- Tom Hall, representing himself as an arts consultant, stated that developers and those involved avail themselves of arts and culture benefits without contribution. He asked if there is a method to bring in developers to help sustain funding. There could be an opportunity for additional funding through that.
- Patricia Rice, representing Choral Artistry, stated that the problem is marketing. She stated that everyone wants to give to certain sectors such as kids, vets, and pets. Culture and arts also bring joy, and this area does not have marketing advocates to demonstrate the impact of this sector. She stated that every corporate person already has their pet project. Arts needs to be included in the conversation to change the messaging to advocate for sustainable funds.
- Andrew Kurtz stated that the transformation of Miami took the City of Miami putting their actual dollars and investment into the arts. It was done in those cities using the arts organizations of those areas and funding those organizations to provide facilities and capital to provide staff so programs could operate. That led to a walkable downtown. The shift in thinking must happen at a high-level. The long-term change must come from leadership who controls the dollars and invests the money to ensure

it happens. Without change we will still be a small town with a million people. He stated that if the leaders took the money and invested in the people that are capable, the area will have a generational change.

- Molly Deckart, representing the Alliance for the Arts, asked attendees to think about their needs and how to come together for space and infrastructure.
- Alyona Ushe, representing the Center for the Arts in Bonita Springs, stated that the cultural affairs office in Washington, DC and Arlington, VA invested in theaters and provided funding and marketing.
- Sam Ankerson, representing the Shell Museum, stated that housing is a need. He suggested prioritizing arts and culture workers who can't afford to live here.

Mr. Prather brought up the need to address affordable housing as more prevalent than ever. He stated that he housed 25 actors and rent has gone up three times in a year and a half. Customers have lost homes and this area has an affordable housing crisis. He suggested incorporating the arts and cultural community to create and inspire solutions to that problem. He stated that living here is no longer a competitive advantage than the cost of living in other states like New York.

- Amy Ginsburg stated that the City of Cape Coral is large and there is a lot of vacant space that could be an opportunity.

Ms. Trull stated that often the vacant land is not built on but parceled out. She explained that utilizing that land is not a simple process.

- Andrew Kurtz stated that there are lots of opportunities, but housing is the issue. She suggested that affordable housing and creative solutions to support a thriving arts community be prioritized.

Ms. Black discussed the workshops and how they are available on YouTube. Those are being integrated into other branches. Is the number one priority a seat at the table? Is it a county staffer that can advocate and bring us together or is it a funding mechanism? It is very difficult to run an organization and coordinate a bed tax change.

- Kimberly Sena Moore, with the Bower School of Music at FGCU, suggested starting with the county government. The statewide arts advocacy group and the NEA can track data and the economic impact of the arts. Information is most likely out there. She stated that St. Pete and Sarasota are more comparable and are the best example.
- Andrew Kurtz stated that we need space and an art district with affordable housing. He stated that people cannot live here but by creating an art district and space, the community can create the destination just like they did in St. Pete. He suggested using Florida examples of arts and similar sized communities for best practices. Examples of

the structure instead of concept like historic preservation in Saint Augustine or public art driven by public dollars in Sarasota. He stated it starts with investment of public dollars. We need something like the Tourist Development Council on the marketing aspect for the same policy and funding aspect that had a funding source that could then distribute public dollars for the growth of the industry for the entire county. There are models all over the area. Structure at the Lee County level.

- Jon Romine stated that a County-level division would be a possible structure that has authority including an advisory board. He stated that a Czar could be appointed with the need for a sustainable funding mechanism. He stated that the sector needs to be aligned.

Ms. Black stated that someone suggested seating shade structure and festivals or performances to do all those outdoor spaces. A sustainable capital funding mechanism is needed.

- Andrew Kutz stated that most are in retrofitted facilities that are not meant for performing arts. Because of that, the facilities do not meet the need and have issues that need to be addressed. Providing funding to help with deferred maintenance for all spaces would be great. Operating dollars are also needed to stabilize organizations.

Mr. Johnson stated that older facilities have deferred maintenance and are not resilient. Organizations are mostly in older buildings or repurposed facilities. There is a realistic number that could be brought up for cultural facilities. He suggested that attendees take inventory of the physical needs of their facilities.

- Trent Brown, representing Choral Artistry, stated that small funds get us going right away to generate things that we need for artists and performing arts. It may not do anything for those that go from place to place to place. There is no cultural center. There would need to be a cultural center to run camps and meet. He stated that more facilities are needed. More spaces to do things year-round so that they are not competing during season. He asked the attendees how to beat regionalism in this area and supported the idea of a cultural arts center.

Ms. Black asked attendees “how do we make sure that all areas are represented?” She stated that the Alliance for the Arts could not be that cultural center. She stated that building a space could be possible, but the area would be difficult to get to and be equitable.

The members supported an Initiative around creating a County-level cultural arts division with an arts and culture officer to drive the area with funding programs.

- Patricia Rice stated that a cultural center could also be a method with satellites for those who are travelers. She stated that musicians or smaller groups who do not have spaces

need a hub or place in each community. She stated that everyone is out there on their own doing what they need to do to survive.

- Andrew Kurtz suggested that there are examples elsewhere of new housing facilities with host retail or cultural space on lower levels and residential space on higher levels. If there is a group working with developers on housing, areas for art or exhibition space could be a component.
- Molly Deckart stated that the batch of data that studies economic impact of the arts will be published soon and includes aspects for how the public interacts with the arts and returns on investment. She stated that we have a vibrant arts scene that is operating on fumes. We have various cultural centers for events. She stated that we can do amazing things by empowering smaller organizations. She supported a cultural czar that can continue collaboration with groups. She expressed that there needs to be an opportunity to come together to support meetings of arts and culture.

Mr. Barnes asked the people to be supportive, but a representative must be included at the table. Looking at the dollar amounts, there needs to be an equitable solution to be able to tell the history of the area.

Mr. Prather stated that it is important not to forget the barrier islands including Matlacha and Pine Island. He stated that the destinations and barrier islands need support.

Ms. Black asked the attendees if their organization received FEMA funding. Three people raised their hands showing that very few people received FEMA funding.

- Patricia Rice stated that the biggest difference is in their insurance, increased costs are hurting.

Ms. Black stated the need to organize a mechanism for disbursing funds including for mitigating and fortifying facilities to provide shelter and food services.

- Lorretta Menuet, representing the Center for the Arts, stated that attendees need to keep the momentum of the meeting as a group going.
- Patricia Rice stated that we are legitimate businesses and entrepreneurs and need to be considered as such in the contributions to the community.

Ms. Trull supported the idea of being like other places in Florida. We need to better amplify who we are as arts and culture. We need to do a better job of amplifying what we already have. We are happy for attractions and marketing dollars but need help amplifying. She supported the idea of mapping all cultural locations and that there are continuous meetings.

- Kimberley Sena Moore stated that the marketing piece is the economic impact and how it changes the landscape of the area. She stated that the arts education piece is also

important. The social cohesion in bringing communities together and providing food or spaces was obvious post-disaster.

- Cesar Aguilera stated that maintaining and growing institutions and the need to maintain the talent here. He asked: “what are we doing to keep and attract talent?”
- MaryLee Mann stated that public transportation is the number one reason why people are unable to attend arts and culture activities. Residents do not drive at night anymore.
- Jon Romine summarized how the arts and culture needs a sector strategy that is layered with transportation, housing, workforce, messaging as sub-Initiatives. This will help in defining how to achieve the vision of the sector.

## Questions and Next Steps

The next Branch meeting is scheduled for July 12, 2023, from 8:30 AM to 10:00 AM.

## Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Mazany thanked the members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 7:53 PM.