

Sales Tax Focus Group Meeting Minutes
February 13, 2014, at 3:00pm
18500 Murdock Circle, Room B106, Port Charlotte, FL 33948

INTRODUCTION:

1. INTRO OF EACH MEMBER AND STAFF:

All present members and staff introduced themselves together with organization/department affiliation.

2. INTRO OF FACILITATOR:

Brian Gleason, Facilitator began by welcoming everyone to the group. He asks that everyone in this group to please be on time. He states that the committee must determine the ranking of the projects, so the group as a whole can decide if they would like to rank the projects weekly based on the information heard, or the committee can wait until the end and do a ranking of all the projects that they have heard about since the beginning.

3. REVIEW PURPOSE OF COMMITTEE AND DEADLINES:

Kelly Shoemaker gave a brief overview of past Tax implementation back in 2008. Ms. Shoemaker explained that the purpose of this group is to provide a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners on how the sales tax money should be spent, if the referendum is approved. Ms. Shoemaker states that this group is a diverse representation of the County in that there is an assortment of representation from different area organizations. Kelly states that this will not be the only source of input the Board of County Commissioners will be looking at to make their decisions on how the tax money will be spent. Ms. Shoemaker states that this is only one of the methods that will be used. There will be a survey available online, emails from residents to the Commissioners and community conversations for which ideas will be brought to the Board of County Commissioners for review. This group is being asked to score each project based on the project worthiness for the dollars. The final ranking of the projects from this group will go to the Board of County Commissioners on the April 22, 2014 Board of County Commission Meeting. The Board of County Commissioners at that point will decide which election (primary or general) and they will make the decision on which projects will receive the sales tax monies.

4. SUNSHINE LAW:

Janette Knowlton, County Attorney, explains in detail what the Sunshine Law is. Ms. Knowlton gives an explanation on the history of the Sunshine Law and how it pertains to this group. Ms. Knowlton states that a public meeting is a gathering of two or more members of the same board and informs this group that this also pertains to indirect communication such as non-face-to-face contact i.e., emails, phone calls, blogs, etc... All meetings have to be held in a place open to the public, adequate to accommodate the number of people who are attending, media may attend, and the public has the right to be heard at some point during the decision making process within reasonable proximity to a meeting where official action is taken. Ms. Knowlton explains that minutes will be taken at all meetings of this group and that everyone in this group be aware that minutes are not verbatim, rather a brief summary of what is being said. Ms. Knowlton informs the group of the potential penalties of the Sunshine Law and that everyone needs to understand what it means and must take it very seriously.

5. DISCUSS SALES TAX FUNDS:

Mr. Burger informs the group of a broad overview on what is the \$.01cent sales tax is.

A. EXPLAIN SALES TAX REVENUE:

Mr. Burger states that the sales tax applies to all transactions subject to state tax. The sales tax is limited to the first \$5,000.00 dollars on one (1) specific item. The sales tax must be extended to the finance plan or to construct infrastructure. The sales tax may not be applied to operations or ongoing maintenance. The sales tax must be enacted by the majority of the Board of County Commissioners and then approved by the voters in a county wide referendum.

B. AMOUNT OF REVENUE EXPECTED:

Mr. Burger reviews with the group that the expected revenue fluctuates from approximately \$16 million to \$22 million. He states that the foreseen expected revenue generated from the sales tax if approved, is approximately \$18 million per year.

C. REVIEW WHAT % GOES TO CITY:

Mr. Burger informs the group that the sales tax monies will be allocated to the county and city based on a percentage formula based on current population figures.

6. DISCUSS PROCESS:

A. Criteria and weighting

Hector Flores explains in detail the project sheets, criteria for scoring the proposed sales tax, and weight each criteria have for each category of the individual proposed projects. The Project Sheets consist of budgeting criteria, other funding sources, project impacts and costs, and the cost of operations. There is an overall scoring sheet that gives justification on who or what the project may impact. The scoring sheet is broken down into twelve (12) questions and how this group scores the project based on its' importance, whether most important, somewhat important, or little importance, each section has a numerical value for which will be totaled up at the end for final ranking to the Board of County Commissioners.

B. Ranking Process

Ms. Shoemaker asks the group to review the ranking sheet. Ms. Shoemaker goes over in detail what each scoring includes and how it will be presented. She explains that each week, the scoring will be entered into an Excel spreadsheet which will automatically rank each of the projects based on the weight gathered by this group.

Julie Mathis questions to ensure her understanding that the Board of County Commissions does not have to approve their recommendations, in that the recommendations of this group, is just that, recommendations. Ms. Shoemaker responds that she is correct.

Tom Cavanaugh asks Ms. Shoemaker where the list of Forty (40) projects came from? Ms. Shoemaker responds that advisory groups have written the administration and have asks for certain projects be listed for consideration, discussions from the Charlotte County Assembly, Charlotte County Commissioners have been requested to consider certain projects based on conversations on what the needs are in the community, and some of the Charlotte County staff have given their input to help generate the list of 40 potential projects.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Joan Fischer would like to know how this meeting and group of personnel were created. How was the

information on this meeting given to the public. She states that there should be general public involved in the group since that is the majority of our population. She asks how many Charlotte County residents are involved with this group. She asks how much of the monies from projects that are not completed, carry over from previous sales tax monies. Ms. Fischer would like to know why there will be no public input at each meeting and that the public input is allowed at this introductory meeting only. She wraps up by stating she feels there should be more public input allowed during this process and that the public would possibly have projects that should be looked at.

Joe Blais states that there are other needs in West Charlotte. He reiterates there are issues that need to be resolved. Mr. Blais states information does not get out to the public very well. He states that it takes a while for people to find out things. Joe said we expect people to change their habits in thirty (30) days, but that does not happen. Mr. Blais states that the current commission deals with looking at the future a lot, but people like us are trying to survive today. Mr. Blais explains we are still dealing with old problems and please be aware of the public because we are just trying to survive.

Scott Andrichak speaks about the unfairness that the public only have one (1) chance to speak throughout this process. Mr. Andrichak states Charlotte County is one of the highest taxes within the state. He states that if we are trying to create/grow jobs in this county then we need to be cutting taxes. Mr. Andrichak states that we need to be more small business friendly as they are the ones who drive the economy and create ninety (90) percent of the jobs, yet you want to raise taxes on these people. He states that we will drive people out of this community and they will go where taxes are lower. Mr. Andrichak brings up lawsuits that are pending together with raising taxes which constitutes to about half a billion dollars of taxes being raised within a six (6) month to a year timeframe. This is an enormous tax burden on this community and what we are doing is putting that burden on our children and grandchildren who won't be able to pay it because they will leave this county. Mr. Andrichak asks how the administration picks these forty (40) topics. He reiterates that there should have been a more open process on how the potential projects were selected. Mr. Andrichak then asks how many people that are voting for this tax will be on the benefiting end of this tax implementation.

Joe Tiseo states that he is glad that the taxpayers of Charlotte County have an opportunity to vote for this tax. He thinks that the Board of County Commissioners should be able to get a clear picture of what the Charlotte County tax payers want. He states that he would like to have public input at all the meetings to allow for input on each of the projects. Mr. Tiseo suggests that the group look at the landscaping project on the March 20th meeting. Mr. Tiseo states that it is important to the revitalization of Charlotte County, our economy, and be a player to our surrounding communities as consumers have choices, and we want them to choose to come here. He states we want curb appeal. He reiterates the importance of the landscaping initiative and he hopes that this group will support the Landscaping & Palm Trees along US 41 during the Quality of Life March 20th meeting.

8. GROUP DISCUSSION:

The group discusses the potential of public comment section at each meeting or only permitting the public comment at the end or one of the last few meetings. Several group members gave their input on allowing public comment at each meeting and others brought forth their opinion to limit the comments to the designated agenda items on that particular day. The group has come to a consensus to allow for public input at each of the following meetings after the presentation portion of the meeting and before the ranking process by this group and the public input must only pertain to that particular day's agenda.

The group discussed absenteeism of the scheduled meetings. The group agrees that if someone misses a meeting that person must take it upon themselves to get the information that was missed and they will not be allowed to rank those items that were discussed and ranked on the day they were absent.

The group discusses ranking/weighting either weekly or at the end. Dr. Whittaker requests that this group score the projects each week and then at the end do an overall ranking and can make adjustments accordingly before it goes to the Board of County Commissioners. The group has come to a consensus that scoring the projects on a weekly basis and then do an overall ranking as Dr. Whittaker suggested is how they would like to continue for future meetings.

The group discussed utilizing Robert's Rules or a more informal way to vote on items weekly. The group came to the consensus that they will utilize Robert's Rules voting on the final recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners and utilize a more informal consensus during the weekly meeting agenda items.

9. ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 4:27pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jessica R. Ralston