

SALES TAX FOCUS GROUP MEETING MINUTES  
March 13, 2014 – 3:00 pm  
18500 Murdock Circle, Room B106, Port Charlotte, FL 33948

**In Attendance:**

Bill Abbatematteo, Donna Barrett, Ruth Bromberg, Rick Brunette, Tom Cavanaugh, Marcia Cullinan, John Dollinger, Judy Malbuisson, Julie Mathis, Tom Rice, Kevin Russell, Dr. Doug Whittaker, John Wright  
Charlotte County Government Staff: Hector Flores, David Milligan, Tommy Scott, Elaine Jones, Kelly Shoemaker, Jason Stoltfus.

**Opening Remarks:**

Kelly Shoemaker called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m. and asked for approval of the February 27 meeting minutes. Julie Mathis moved to approve them as distributed and John Dollinger seconded; motion passed unanimously. Kelly distributed copies of the March 6 meeting minutes for approval at the next meeting and reminded the Group that she would serve as Moderator in Brian Gleason's absence.

**Quality of Life Presentations:**

Cultural Center of Charlotte County Improvements – Presented by Jim Hageman, Executive Director, and Steven Carter, President of the Board of Directors.

- Replace 50-year old buildings with new 2-story building for more efficient operations over the next 50 years.
- Mission is to enhance the educational, recreational, mental, and physical well-being of County residents.
- Part of Parkside District Improvements.
- Used revenue from the 1998 Sales Tax to enhance and add some facilities that will withstand a Hurricane 3 storm; these improvements would be kept in place.

The Group questioned the presenters on current inefficiencies, library space and programs, square footage allocation, user fees, community benefits, construction phases, other funding sources, and operating expenses.

West County Cultural Center – Presented by Linda Harrison, Board of Directors, Cape Haze Cultural Guild

- Existing Cultural Center in Port Charlotte does not serve residents in the western side of Charlotte County.
- A Focus Group of 50 stakeholders developed a Community Action Document to envision the future of a community facility.
- No existing facility on Cape Haze Peninsula for regularly scheduled programming or activities.
- Survey conducted with help from Edison State College shows increasing population and statistics that support such a facility.
- Two options: New Building or two available existing buildings for renovations.
- Looking for public and private partnerships and coalitions.

Questions were asked about existing facilities, estimate of usage, other financial resources, operating budget, and user fees.

McGuire Park – Presented by David Milligan

- Neighborhood park in Parkside CRA and is included in adopted CRA Master Plan.
- Aging & deteriorating conditions – some built in 1961.
- Not structured to meet current community needs.
- Master Plan needed for new design – better community access, flexibility and updated mix of facilities to meet current needs and lifestyle.

The Group asked questions on land size, selection and schedule of phases.

Cattle Dock Boat Ramp – Presented by David Milligan

- Three party agreement on land owned by SWFWMD, managed by FDEP and leased by Charlotte County.
- Build boat ramps and parking area on 11 acres, connecting to trail system.
- Have site plan and all permits -- is “shovel-ready.”
- Remediate deficiencies in boating launches shown by recent study.
- No other major boat access in this area.

There were no questions.

Bunk House Rehabilitation – Presented by David Milligan

- First acquired in 2005, built in 1907 as bunkhouse for railroad workers but served other functions over the years.
- Moved to current location at the north end of the Cape Haze Pioneer Trail in 2007 due to road construction at original site.
- Designated as Historical Structure and listed on Florida Master Site File and County Historical List.
- Is part of County’s history and has architectural significance.
- \$30,000 designated 2 years ago for stabilization.

Questions were asked about connecting biking & hiking trails, specific rehabilitation needs, rehabilitation costs, operating costs, expected usage and combining with other historical structures.

Carmalita Stockade Rehabilitation – Presented by David Milligan

- In original location and built in 1941 to supplement jail space in County Courthouse.
- Has unique building features that provide a link to social norms and culture of time period, the 1940’s.
- Was used for other needs at short periods of time, including storage.
- Can be used by Equestrian Club that currently uses the horse arena.

Questions were asked about user fees/rent, added amenities, affect of usage on historical listing, and grants for other funding.

Recreation Center at North Charlotte Regional Park – Presented by Tommy Scott

- Located between U.S. Hwy. 41 and State Road 776.
- 10 acres – part of master plan in 1998, completed in 2008
- Add fitness and recreation facilities for mid-county residents, including pool and community garden.
- Pool can be used by Port Charlotte High School and potential northern collegiate swim meets.
- Preserve wetlands on property when building.

Questions were asked about size of the pool, condition of PCHS pool, partnership with schools, competition with existing YMCA program at Franz Ross, phasing, and level of usage.

Recreation Center at Ann Dever Memorial Regional Park – Presented by Tommy Scott

- Located in west county off State Road 776 and San Casa
- Close proximity to existing environmental parks.
- Add needed fitness and recreation facilities for west-county residents, including community garden.
- Existing park already includes pool.

Questions were asked about outdoor exercise equipment and partnering with Cultural Guild.

Multi-Use Trails and On-Road Bicycle Lanes – Presented by Tommy Scott

- Right of way & design costs for ten miles of trails.
- Master Plan provides trails and sidewalks within community
- Was also in last sales tax referendum.
- Connectors between material streets, connectors to schools and parks.

Questions were asked about interconnection of trails, safety of bike path on Gilchrist Bridge, and rumble strips on bike paths.

Environmental Park Trailheads – Presented by Tommy Scott

- Peace River Preserve purchased in 2007.
- Access/trailhead from Sandhill Blvd. and parking.
- Interpretative signs and kiosks.

There were no questions.

Tommy was asked for his priorities from the Quality of Life Projects he presented. He ranked his top three as follows:

1. South County Library and Archives
2. Recreational Center in North Charlotte Regional Park
3. Recreation Centers

Some phasing could be done as follows:

- South County Library -- land donation would decrease total cost by \$600,000, could also hold off on building Archive part of project \$400,000 estimate.
- Recreation Center in North Charlotte Regional Park -- eliminate aquatic center (\$4.4 million).
- Recreation Centers – (1) Harold Avenue (\$2.4), (2) Tringali (\$600,000), (3) South County Regional Park. (\$500,000)

**Public Comment:**

Joe Blais, resident in West County, congratulated the Focus Group on their efforts to consider all the projects that have been proposed and he expressed his support for the Cultural Center in the Cape Haze peninsula. He also supports the historical projects and collaboration with any county agency and/or community group. He promised to be at the April 22 Board of County Commissioners meeting to learn of the final outcome.

Ken Schultz, homeowner in Riverwood and volunteer and financial planner at Charlotte County Cultural Center, reported that he sees how much this facility means to the surrounding residents – both young and old.

Amanda Segur commented on her experiences at the Charlotte County Cultural Center as a child growing up in Charlotte County and how much she enjoys working there now as an adult. She commented further that she has acquired many new skills from those experiences.

Dolly Dessart, as a long-time resident who has seen the changes over the past fifty years, supports the Cultural Center project and sees it as a “game changer” and hopes to see it expanded in the next fifty years. She observed over the years how the Center has contributed to the public health in the Port Charlotte community, that it is similar to the Plymouth Rock for the pilgrims.

Joan Fischer stated that she attends many events at the Cultural Center but from a financial perspective does not support the proposed project. She objects to the reduced space for the library and bookstore and feels that the Cultural Center has changed and no longer meets the needs of the neighboring residents. She read revenue numbers and expressed her opinion that the Center should use some of its own money for this project.

Jim Kelly is a member of Team Parkside and believes that the McGuire Park project is important to the overall Parkside renewal efforts and to community values.

**Closing Remarks:**

Kelly directed the Group to complete the scoring for today's presentations. She will be sending a comprehensive email in response to questions and a list of outstanding questions. Staff is working on phasing information for twelve identified projects and hopes to have it confirmed next week.

The group and Kelly discussed ways to proceed with ranking the projects and how to expedite the process on Friday, March 21. The meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. instead of at 3:00 p.m.

Kelly distributed sets of maps which show locations of the projects.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 20, 2014 at 3:00 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Bonnie Leroy.