



2026 Sales Tax Focus Group
Charlotte County Administration Center, Room B-106
18500 Murdock Circle, Port Charlotte, FL 33948
3:00 - 5:00 p.m.
January 15, 2026

Members Present: Eric Axelson, Donna Barrett, Gary Bayne, Lucienne Pears, Steve Vieira, Larry Yerger, Kathi Obendorfer, Gary Butler, Ray Laroche, and Mark Vianello.

Members Excused: Bob White, Cindy Marsh-Tichy, and Sean McLaughlin. Lynne Matthews resigned.

Others Present: Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator, Tommy Scott, Director of Community Services, Travis Perdue, Director of Facility Management, John Elias, Public Works Director, Kim Phillips, Financial Analyst, Francine Lisby, Assistant Budget Director, Denise Kolerski, Senior Financial Analyst, Denise Caruthers, Utilities Operations Supervisor, Bruce Bullert, Operations & Engineering Manager, and JoAnn Vernon, County Engineer.

Welcome: Emily Lewis, Deputy County Administrator opened the meeting at 3 p.m. Ms. Lewis welcomed all in attendance to the last Sales Tax Focus Group meeting where Sales Tax Projects will be presented. Ms. Lewis requested all outstanding scoring sheets be turned into our Fiscal Team today or next week at the latest. The next meeting will begin the ranking of projects, and the completed scoring is needed to begin this process. Ms. Lewis reported she will be having a discussion on January 27th with the Commissioners to reaffirm their direction for this group's ranking priorities, the project mix and number of years to plan for Sales Tax. At the next Focus Group meeting on February 19th, Ms. Lewis will have either re-affirmation or further guidance from the Board. Ms. Lewis reminded the Focus Group Members and Members of the Public to please sign their names on the Sign-In sheets.

Approval of January 8, 2026 Minutes:

MOTION WAS MADE BY LUCIENNE PEARS, SECONDED BY KATHI OBENDORFER TO APPROVE AS PRESENTED THE JANUARY 8, 2026 MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED 10:0.

Public Comment: Ms. Lewis opened the floor for Public Comment on Agenda items only. Citizen Jack VanderHeyden spoke and suggested that Public Comments should come after the presentations so that comments could be made on the information presented.

Presentations: Sales Tax Projects: John Elias, Public Works Director and his staff were present today to give an overview of the infrastructure projects on the Agenda. JoAnn Vernon, County Engineer presented the projects to the Focus Group.

Project: Edgewater/Flamingo Corridor Phase 5: Complete Edgewater/Flamingo improvements of increased number of lanes to complete the loop from U.S. 41 and S.R. 776. Improve safety and complete the traffic loop between U.S. 41 and S.R. 776 with a four-lane roadway.

Proposal: Widen roadway to four-lane divided roadway, add pedestrian, and bicycle facilities, and improve traffic operation issues.

Ms. Lewis informed the group that Edgewater Phase Three and Four were part of the 2020 Sales Tax initiative and this is a continuation. Member Vieira confirmed that this road is an evacuation route. Member Pears confirmed that this improvement would just be Phase 5 at 2.6 miles. Member Yerger asked if Phases 3 and 4 were contiguous with Phase 5? Ms. Vernon replied affirmatively and that Phase 3 was from Midway to Collingswood and Phase 4 was from Collingswood to Samantha. Member Pears asked if the road was two lanes, or divided four lanes? Ms. Vernon confirmed that the road will be a four-lane divided highway at the conclusion. Member Barrett asked for confirmation on the different phases. Ms. Vernon explained Phase 4 goes from Collingswood to Samatha and makes a new alignment. Ms. Lewis explained it has taken 5 Phases to go from the 41/ Edgewater intersection to 776 to create this by-pass. Member Bayne asked if this included utilities? Ms. Lewis replied that the utilities portion was a separate Sales Tax request under the infrastructure portion of the project. Member Yerger asked for clarification on whether it was continuous. Ms. Lewis explained it was a second phase but continuous. Member Vieira confirmed that without utilities, it is just construction, storm, lighting and medians. Member Yerger questioned whether it classified as "improvement of life"? Yes, agreed Ms. Vernon. Ms. Lewis reminded the group to look back at the November 6th Sales Tax presentations as a cross-reference to these utilities' projects. Member Butler commented that if the road needs to be completed simultaneously with utilities what happens if both projects are not approved? Ms. Lewis replied that road projects are not begun if utility expenses are not approved; therefore, if not approved for Sales Tax dollars, the funding comes from another source. The relocation of utilities is a requirement for the road project. Member Axelson asked if the two utility projects can be considered transportation under the 50% guidelines? Ms. Lewis replied yes; however, she will discuss the project mix with the BCC on January 27th to get confirmation on their directives. Those decisions were made months previously. Member Axelson confirmed this was a hurricane evacuation corridor. Yes, Ms. Lewis responded and added that Edgewater is essentially a 41 by-pass for West County.

Project: Burnt Store Road Area East/West Connector: Increase capacity while providing a more orderly and consistent corridor in the Burnt Store Road area. Increase the roadway network within the Burnt Store area by making an additional connection from Burnt Store Road to U.S. 41 at Tucker's Grade. This new roadway will increase capacity and help maintain an adequate level of service for the roadway network.

Proposal: Build a two-lane roadway between Burnt Store Road and U.S. 41 and add pedestrian and bicycle facilities while reducing or eliminating traffic operation issues. The roadway will be designed for future expansion to four lanes with right of way acquisition and stormwater facilities included in this

phase. The project will be constructed in a manner where adding the additional future lanes can be done with minimal disruption.

Member Bayne asked why is the maintenance cost so low compared to the other Edgewater project, and what is the difference? Ms. Vernon replied that there is a lighting element and John Elias added besides the lighting component there are storm water ponds that have to be maintained. Member Bayne asked what was the purpose of not connecting to Notre Dame? Ms. Vernon said there is a lot of anticipated growth as well as new development in that corridor. We want new residents to connect to this roadway and at some point, Notre Dame will become a four-lane highway. John Elias continued the discussion concerning location and connections. Member Barrett asked if we owned the property in question, and was informed the County does. Member Yerger asked if any of this was new construction and Ms. Vernon confirmed yes. Is there a plan to signalize Notre Dame, as well, asked Mr. Bayne and was informed not at this moment. Member Axelson asked if both projects had bike lanes and sidewalks? Yes, replied Ms. Vernon. Member Pears asked if a utility project was anticipated with this project? Bruce Bullert, Engineering Manager, reported installing of certain utilities in this corridor – some sanitary sewer and some reclaimed water. Ms. Lewis added that this will be the general location for Fire Station 17 and a Utilities Water Tower is scheduled to be close to this site. Mr. Bullert continued saying that the water tower is located on the east end of the property south of Notre Dame and west of 41 (a two-million-gallon elevated water storage tank). Member Yerger asked if the bike lanes are on both sides of the road? Ms. Vernon replied yes, multi-use paths are being planned.

Project: Harborview Road Widening Phase 2: Increase capacity while providing a more orderly and consistent corridor via modification of lane widths, increased number of lanes, and an appropriate alignment. Increase capacity and improve safety and increase access points to existing businesses and residents along the corridor.

Proposal: Widen existing two-lane roadway to four-lane divided roadway with multiple access points to existing businesses and residents. Add pedestrian and bicycle facilities while reducing or eliminating traffic operation issues.

Ms. Vernon reported the County has received help from FDOT for a comprehensive PD & E Study, 2020 Sales Tax partial funding for design and "right of way" acquisition for Phase One from Melbourne to Date Street and partial funding for construction for Phase One. Currently there is no projected funding for Phase Two. Member Barrett asked what was Phase One? Ms. Vernon replied that work on Melbourne to Date Street, a four lane was begun, however it is not completed. Member Bayne asked if the developer Buc-ee's was assisting with any of the costs? Yes, replied Ms. Vernon, they will be performing improvements required by FDOT. Bayne asked if this is part of the \$52 million? Ms. Vernon replied yes and that we can't take it into account until they actually do it, we have to plan as if they will not. Member Yerger asked about roadway acquisition and was informed any acquisition was to gain land access for the roadbed. Member Vieira asked if this phase was from Melbourne to Date Street, and what is going to occur at Melbourne? Are there any road improvements planned there? Yes, replied Ms. Vernon, there is storm water and utilities planned. What happens at Date Street? Ms. Vernon explained Phase One is from Melbourne to Date Street and Phase Two is from Date Street to I-75. Member Pears questioned the cost of the utility portion of \$16.3 million. Member Vieira questioned if this is an unfunded mandate. Yes, replied Ms. Lewis, but relocation of utilities is however in our own system.

Project: Taylor Road: Taylor Road will fall below the adopted level of service in 2034. A widening project, including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, will increase capacity and provide for a safer travel route along the corridor. Provide a more orderly and consistent corridor while reducing congestion via increased number of travel lanes and pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Proposal: Widen existing two-lane roadway to a four-lane divided roadway with multiple access points to existing businesses and residents. Add pedestrian and bicycle facilities while reducing or eliminating traffic congestion and operation issues.

Ms. Vernon explained the Sales Tax request is for design funding only. Ms. Lewis stated that for Sales Tax Funding the project must move into right-of-way acquisition or construction to qualify. She further stated that unless there are construction costs, the project does not qualify for this funding source and the project must be pulled. Member Vieira asked for clarification. Ms. Lewis informed the group that the State Statute governs what Sales Tax monies can be expended on. The project must be a capital asset with a useful life of 5 years or more. This project must be removed for the same reason we removed the Grace Street project for not having construction costs or acquisition of land.

Project: Bicycle, Pedestrian Trails & Sidewalks: Provide safe routes for pedestrians and bicycles in Charlotte County. Continue the implementation of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan and Regional Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan approved by the Board of County Commissioners.

Proposal: Continue implementation of the Regional Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan and connect existing sidewalks to improve the walkability of the County.

Ms. Vernon explained that the County has used this funding request to build walkways, trails and bike paths throughout the County for many years. This funding initiative uses whatever the Focus Group designates as funding amounts and spreads it across the County to continue the Parks and Recreation Master Plan for sidewalks and trails. Member Vieira asked if they prioritize school zones? Yes said Ms. Vernon. Ms. Lewis added that it was an unfunded mandate as well – there is a State Law that requires the County to have a CIP for those hazardous walking conditions that have been identified by certain areas near a school. Member Vieira confirmed that the distance from the school is two miles. Ms. Lewis explained that this request comes up with every Sales Tax funding cycle. When it comes to ranking projects, this is a good filler for a project as it is flexible. It is a great project to fill funding gaps and creates many sidewalks across the County. Member Yerger questioned is this a joint project between the entities Public Works, Community Service and MPO? Is this all County? Does the County budget go towards this? Ms. Vernon stated the MPO is not technically County but is a good advocate in assisting in getting grant funding. Ms. Vernon stated there is coordination between the County departments and that the MPO is the long-range transportation planning arm for the region. This includes the City, Airport, FDOT and State. Member Vieira asked how do MSBU's fit into this plan? Ms. Vernon explained that at one-point MSBU's (as well as citizens in general), were asked where they wanted sidewalks. A map was developed of all these sidewalk requests and is now referred to as new sidewalks are prioritized. The MSBU does not bear the cost initially for sidewalks, but depending on what road it's on, they may see future maintenance costs. Member Yerger asked if all the sidewalks have curbs? Ms. Vernon indicated no.

Focus Group Member Project Scoring: Ms. Lewis requested the Focus Group to complete today's scoring sheets and turn them into the staff from Fiscal. Ms. Lewis thanked everyone for their time,

attention and questions in listening to all these projects. She reminded everyone to return any outstanding scoring sheets by the end of next week. When Ms. Lewis meets with the Board later this month, she will officially ask the Board to remove the Grace Street Annex and Taylor Road projects.

Meeting Adjournment: Meeting concluded by consensus at 3:37 p.m. Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Emily Lewis,
Charlotte County Deputy Administrator

Date Adopted: Feb. 19, 2026

Minutes recorded by Andrea Yerger,
2026 Sales Tax Focus Group Administrative Assistant