



**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.**  
**February 19, 2026**

**Members Present:** Eric Axelson, Steve Vieira, Larry Yerger, Kathi Obendorfer, Gary Butler, Ray Laroche, Mark Vianello, and Sean McLaughlin (arrived at 3:16 p.m.).

**Members Excused:** Donna Barrett, Gary Bayne, Lucienne Pears, Bob White and Cindy Marsh-Tichy.

**Others Present:** Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator, Tommy Scott, Director of Community Services, Travis Perdue, Director of Facility Management, John Elias, Public Works Director, Pam Kirchner, Financial Manager, Kim Phillips, Financial Analyst, Francine Lisby, Assistant Budget Director, Denise Kolerski, Senior Financial Analyst, Patrick Fuller, Director of Emergency Management, Chief Matthew McElroy, and Deputy Chief Andrew Miller.

**Welcome:** Emily Lewis, Deputy County Administrator, opened the meeting at 3 p.m. Ms. Lewis welcomed all in attendance and reminded the Focus Group Members and Members of the Public to please sign their names on the Sign-In sheets. Ms. Lewis gave an update to the Focus Group of the Board of County Commissioner's (BCC) discussion after hearing an update from the work of this committee. Ms. Lewis conveyed that the BCC would like this committee to rank projects for not only a six-year term but to also rank projects for an eight-year term and a 10-year term. The BCC has not made any determination yet of the length of the term of the referendum and seeks the input and guidance of this committee's ranking of projects. The BCC did affirm they would like the projects to be infrastructure heavy for the community but are open to whatever this committee might recommend. The BCC did add one new project to the list, the Public Safety Training Academy which is to be presented today. Ms. Lewis informed the Focus Group that the Taylor Road project will qualify for Sales Tax Funding under 8- and 10-year terms. Members that did not score on the Taylor Road project previously were asked to score it now. Under a six-year term, the Taylor Road project did not meet the construction window but will do so in an eight- and 10-year project window. Member Eric Axelson asked if he could propose an additional project at this time? Ms. Lewis replied that the list of projects had been pre-approved by the BCC, and they have not opened this process for any new outside projects to be considered at this time.

**Public Comment:** Ms. Lewis opened the floor for Public Comment on Agenda items only. Eight citizens signed into the meeting. Citizen Jack Vanderheyden made several comments on the Public Safety Training Institute proposal, questioning costs and whether students can be sent to another training center with less expense. Richard Van Ackerman spoke against Myakka Park and funding any new

Member Vieira inquired what the \$10,000 covered. Chief McElroy said it covers everything required to complete the training before and afterwards. Member Butler asked if with the limited Sales Tax dollars can this proposal be scaled back? Chief McElroy replied that a request has been made to the State already for \$2 million dollars, so with those funds and a reduced footprint that would be the only way to scale back the project. Member Butler further asked if capital dollars from State or Federal grants have been applied for? Yes, said Chief McElroy, from the State. Federal grants are more difficult and the last 2 grants that were submitted were rejected. Member McLaughlin asked about the special needs' population, if the department was targeting "under income" homes or veterans? Chief McElroy said that through a new program called "Civilian to Certified", employees without additional funds, can get assistance paying for training and study and other employees might get their rental gear paid as they go to fire school. Also, by working with the Economic Development Department, we can assist others through different educational programs. Member Vianello stated this is a good investment in our community and workforce and has seen how successful a training facility can be in a community. Member Yerger stated this is called a regional training center, would we be reaching out to other counties that do not have training centers? Yes, Chief McElroy replied, as DeSoto, North Port, Henry, and Glades do not have one. We work cooperatively with other counties already, hosting some of the classes here in Charlotte County with reduced rates for our employees. Member Yerger further asked if those trained in our new facility would be acceptable anywhere across the state? Yes, Chief McElroy affirmed. Member Vieira asked for an explanation of Region 6. Chief explained that Florida was divided into regions and our area, Region 6 in Southwest Florida consisted of counties Sarasota to Lee to Collier and into Glades counties. Monthly meetings are held to discuss topics for the future such as staffing. Member Yerger asked who will teach the classes? Chief McElroy replied they will promote from within, bringing in other staff members for 5 total: a Division Chief running the program, 3 training officers, and one administrative specialist. Member Axelson asked how this training facility will compare to others already in the state. Chief explained that Orange County built one for \$40 million and \$50 million was spent in Sarasota. We are not looking to outprice something for Charlotte County, but we want it worthwhile for students to want to come here. Member Axelson asked whether you were willing to host competitions or offer other advanced training. Yes, that is the goal, said Chief McElroy. Member Butler asked if this is a joint venture with another entity? Yes, said the Chief, informally, we have the regional meetings and potential for more into the future. Member Laroche asked if other public safety entities such as police, CCSO, FDLE could also use the facilities? The Chief affirmed this and that this was already happening. Member Yerger asked if there was any national certification available for firefighting and is it accredited? The Chief explained there is a Pro Board with certain training courses having Pro Board standards. Only a few states have reciprocity. Challenging the state test is the only way to get the Florida certification. There is no National certification for minimum standards. The ARFF Class and some others hold National standings or certifications. Members scored the project then the Focus Group took a 10-minute break and resumed with the approval of January 15, 2026, minutes.

**Approval of January 15, 2026, Minutes:** Minutes were approved after a quorum was reached.

**MOTION WAS MADE BY STEVE VIEIRA, SECONDED BY KATHI OBENDORFER TO APPROVE AS PRESENTED THE JANUARY 15, 2026, MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED 8:0.**

**Review of Focus Group Blind Scoring and Ranking of Projects:** Ms. Lewis reviewed the ranking of projects and how the spreadsheet prepared by the Fiscal Team was organized. The demographics were displayed in geographical areas so all portions of the county could receive some benefit from projects in their areas. The areas are:

an additional shelter if needed. Member Axelson asked if the 10 percent given to Punta is already taken out? Ms. Lewis replied yes that those funds go directly to Punta Gorda. Member Butler commented that this ranking is a forecast of what projects the county would like to accomplish. Ms. Lewis explained that she will take this committee's recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners where she will give a presentation showing them the results of this committee's work. They will also rank the projects. The BCC has several options; they could just accept the committee's recommendation and make that the final list, or they could prioritize the projects differently. Member Butler asked if the final list could be changed in any fiscal year? Ms. Lewis replied that the BCC tries to stick to the voter's intent. Projects may be added because of surplus funds or projects may be adjusted or projects swapped due to greater need. Member Vieira asked if there are any contributions from Babcock Ranch for their specific projects? Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator, replied that in the Master Development Order, there is land for the library but not the annex (however we may combine the two) and there is land for the fire station.

### **Focus Group Discussion and Ranking Recommendations: Six Years**

CCPS Safety and CCPS Career and Technical: Member Axelson proposed consideration of the School Board request for their two Projects for School Safety and Career and Technical at \$10 million and \$5 million. Both ranked high and are very important for our children and should be considered definite on the Tier One list. **Motion made by Eric Axelson and seconded by Steve Vieira.** Discussion followed. **Motion carried unanimously.**

Member Yerger asked Ms. Lewis to differentiate between Tier I and Tier 2. Ms. Lewis explained that Tier 1 has a certain expected revenue which is conservatively projected. In many instances more funds are collected than the original projected funds so the Tier 2 List of projects (pending a surplus of sales tax revenue) is a list that has been ranked and vetted by this group and the Board for projects next in line for project funding. In the past sales tax cycles, all Tier 2 projects have received Sales Tax funding.

CCU Edgewater, CCU Harborview, Harborview Road Widening and Edgewater/Flamingo Corridor Phase 5: Member Butler referring to the BCC instruction to focus on infrastructure and based upon the scores, recommended keeping the 4 infrastructure projects – Harborview and Edgewater and their utilities in Tier I for 6 years. **Motion made by Gary Butler and seconded by Steve Vieira.** Discussion continued regarding hurricane evacuation routes and asking the fiscal team to keep a running total of funds expended. **Motion carried unanimously.**

Public Safety Academy: Member Yerger recommended adding to Tier 1 the Public Safety Academy. **Motion made by Larry Yerger and seconded by Kathi Obendorfer.** No discussion. **Motion carried unanimously.**

Cultural Center Replacement: Member Steven Vieira recommended adding to Tier 1 the Cultural Center. Member Axelson reminded the committee members that projects ranked lower can be brought forward for discussion and for higher ranking. **Motion made by Steven Vieira and seconded by Larry Yerger.** Discussion followed. **Motion carried unanimously.**

SO Jail Admin. Renovation (with Kitchen & Laundry): Member Yerger recommended the Jail Administration Renovation to be considered next for Tier 1. **Motion made by Larry Yerger and seconded by Gary Butler.** No discussion. **Motion passed unanimously.**

**Proposed 2026 Sales Tax Project list**

as of 2.19.26

36,000,000 year collection		
# of years	Total collection T1	Tier 2
6	216,000,000	36,000,000
8	288,000,000	72,000,000
10	360,000,000	108,000,000

Project	Location	\$ Request	Score	(cummulative)	(cummulative)	(cummulative)
				6yr Total	8yr Total	10yr Total
Public Safety Academy	South County	\$ 11,850,000	54.70	\$ 11,850,000	\$ 11,850,000	\$ 11,850,000
CCU Edgewater	Mid County	\$ 10,000,000	51.73	\$ 21,850,000	\$ 21,850,000	\$ 21,850,000
CCU Harborview	Mid County	\$ 16,300,000	51.61	\$ 38,150,000	\$ 38,150,000	\$ 38,150,000
CCPS Safety	County Wide	\$ 10,000,000	51.36	\$ 48,150,000	\$ 48,150,000	\$ 48,150,000
Harborview Road Widening	Mid County	\$ 52,452,000	50.42	\$ 100,602,000	\$ 100,602,000	\$ 100,602,000
Edgewater/Flamingo Corridor Phase 5	Mid County	\$ 41,040,000	48.74	\$ 141,642,000	\$ 141,642,000	\$ 141,642,000
CCPS Career and Technical	County Wide	\$ 5,000,000	48.55	\$ 146,642,000	\$ 146,642,000	\$ 146,642,000
Babcock Ranch Community Library and Annex	Babcock Ranch	\$ 27,197,805	48.19	\$ 173,839,805	\$ 173,839,805	\$ 173,839,805
Cultural Center Replacement	Mid County	\$ 60,498,000	48.11	\$ 234,337,805	\$ 234,337,805	\$ 234,337,805
Bissett Park Phase 3	South County	\$ 35,100,000	48.09	\$ 269,437,805	\$ 269,437,805	\$ 269,437,805
Fire Station 18 New (Edgewater Dr.)	Mid County	\$ 9,597,000	47.99	\$ 279,034,805	\$ 279,034,805	\$ 279,034,805
Fire Station 21 New (Babcock Site 3)	Babcock Ranch	\$ 9,597,000	47.97	\$ 288,631,805	\$ 288,631,805	\$ 288,631,805
Fire Station 20 New (Babcock Site 2)	Babcock Ranch	\$ 9,597,000	47.70	\$ 298,228,805	\$ 298,228,805	\$ 298,228,805
Fire Station 19 New (Gasparilla Rd.)	West County	\$ 9,597,000	47.64	\$ 307,825,805	\$ 307,825,805	\$ 307,825,805
Fire Station 4 Replacement	West County	\$ 8,387,000	46.84	\$ 316,212,805	\$ 316,212,805	\$ 316,212,805
Mid County Operations Facility	Mid County	\$ 27,060,000	46.10	\$ 343,272,805	\$ 343,272,805	\$ 343,272,805
William R. Gaines Veterans Memorial Park (Phase 3)	Mid County	\$ 3,300,000	45.63	\$ 346,572,805	\$ 346,572,805	\$ 346,572,805
Centennial Park Phase 2	Mid County	\$ 6,800,000	45.11	\$ 353,372,805	\$ 353,372,805	\$ 353,372,805
Charlotte Sports Park Parking Improvements	Mid County	\$ 3,773,000	45.11	\$ 357,145,805	\$ 357,145,805	\$ 357,145,805
Tringali Community Center Replacement	West County	\$ 5,600,000	44.41	\$ 362,745,805	\$ 362,745,805	\$ 362,745,805
Bissett Park Phase 2	South County	\$ 4,500,000	44.31	\$ 367,245,805	\$ 367,245,805	\$ 367,245,805
South Murdock Community Park	Mid County	\$ 12,800,000	44.27	\$ 380,045,805	\$ 380,045,805	\$ 380,045,805
G.C. Herring Park Phase 2	West County	\$ 3,850,000	43.49	\$ 383,895,805	\$ 383,895,805	\$ 383,895,805
Fire/EMS Vehicle Maintenance Warehouse Expansior	South County	\$ 2,750,000	43.38	\$ 386,645,805	\$ 386,645,805	\$ 386,645,805
Myakka River Park Phase 2	West County	\$ 8,100,000	42.78	\$ 394,745,805	\$ 394,745,805	\$ 394,745,805
Centennial Park Recreation Center Renovation	Mid County	\$ 7,300,000	42.74	\$ 402,045,805	\$ 402,045,805	\$ 402,045,805
Placida Passive Park	West County	\$ 14,000,000	42.67	\$ 416,045,805	\$ 416,045,805	\$ 416,045,805
Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center Parking	Punta Gorda	\$ 7,400,000	42.59	\$ 423,445,805	\$ 423,445,805	\$ 423,445,805
Burnt Store Road Area East/West Connector	Burnt Store	\$ 46,176,000	42.48	\$ 469,621,805	\$ 469,621,805	\$ 469,621,805
Maracaibo Kidspage Park	Mid County	\$ 8,800,000	41.71	\$ 478,421,805	\$ 478,421,805	\$ 478,421,805
South County Regional Park Recreation Center Renov	South County	\$ 10,800,000	41.66	\$ 489,221,805	\$ 489,221,805	\$ 489,221,805
Centennial Park Phase 3	Mid County	\$ 11,600,000	41.56	\$ 500,821,805	\$ 500,821,805	\$ 500,821,805
Park Renovations	County Wide	\$ 7,300,000	41.28	\$ 508,121,805	\$ 508,121,805	\$ 508,121,805
Taylor Road Widening	South County	\$ 11,296,000	40.41	\$ 519,417,805	\$ 519,417,805	\$ 519,417,805
Mid County Annex	Mid County	\$ 42,080,000	39.89	\$ 561,497,805	\$ 561,497,805	\$ 561,497,805
Care Expansion / Grace Street Annex	South County	\$ 3,000,000	39.48	\$ 564,497,805	\$ 564,497,805	\$ 564,497,805
SO Warehouse Loveland	Mid County	\$ 6,524,000	39.36	\$ 571,021,805	\$ 571,021,805	\$ 571,021,805
SO Jail Admin. Renovation (with Kitchen & Laundry)	South County	\$ 6,234,000	37.88	\$ 577,255,805	\$ 577,255,805	\$ 577,255,805
Fleet Management Building	Mid County	\$ 22,675,000	36.36	\$ 599,930,805	\$ 599,930,805	\$ 599,930,805
Clerk Records Warehouse Replacement	Mid County	\$ 9,108,000	33.58	\$ 609,038,805	\$ 609,038,805	\$ 609,038,805

Filler Project						
Bicycle, Pedestrian Trails and Sidewalks	County Wide	\$ 7,500,000	47.53	\$ 616,538,805	\$ 616,538,805	\$ 616,538,805

**ATTACHMENT A**

**NOTE:** All the information on **Attachment A** are raw numbers and scores and are only to be used for discussion purposes in the ranking of potential Sales Tax Projects. This is a work document only and is not Final.

**Proposed 2026 Sales Tax Project List  
With Rankings for 6 year Extension**  
as of 2.19.26

36,000,000 annual collection			
# of years	Tier 1	Tier 2	Total
6	216,000,000	36,000,000	252,000,000

Project	Location	\$ Request	Score	(cumulative)		
				6yr Total		
CCPS Safety	County Wide	\$ 10,000,000	51.36	\$ 10,000,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
CCPS Career and Technical	County Wide	\$ 5,000,000	48.55	\$ 15,000,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
CCU Edgewater	Mid County	\$ 10,000,000	51.73	\$ 25,000,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
CCU Harborview	Mid County	\$ 16,300,000	51.61	\$ 41,300,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
Harborview Road Widening	Mid County	\$ 52,452,000	50.42	\$ 93,752,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
Edgewater/Flamingo Corridor Phase 5	Mid County	\$ 41,040,000	48.74	\$ 134,792,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
Public Safety Academy	South County	\$ 11,850,000	54.70	\$ 146,642,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
Cultural Center Replacement	Mid County	\$ 60,498,000	48.11	\$ 207,140,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
SO Jail Admin. Renovation (with Kitchen & Laundry)	South County	\$ 6,234,000	37.88	\$ 213,374,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
Fire/EMS Vehicle Maintenance Warehouse Expansion	South County	\$ 2,750,000	43.38	\$ 216,124,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 1	
SO Warehouse Loveland	Mid County	\$ 6,524,000	39.36	\$ 222,648,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 2	
Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center Parking	Punta Gorda	\$ 3,700,000	42.39	\$ 226,348,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 2 at 50%	
Babcock Ranch Community Library and Annex	Babcock Ranch	\$ 25,652,000	48.19	\$ 252,000,000	board motioned and approved for Tier 2 with remaining available funds	

**ATTACHMENT B**

**NOTE:** This is Focus Group draft work document and is not Final.