



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.
October 23, 2025

Members Present: Eric Axelson, Donna Barrett, Gary Bayne, Cindy Marsh-Tichy, Steve Vieira, Larry Yerger, Lynne Matthews, Kathi Obendorfer, Gary Butler, and Mark Vianello.

Members Excused: Ray Laroche, Lucienne Pears, Bob White, and Sean McLaughlin.

Others Present: Tommy Scott, Director of Community Services, Kim Phillips, Financial Analyst, Francine Lisby, Assistant Budget Director, Travis Perdue, Director of Facilities Management, and Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator.

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 informed the Focus Group that member Richard Russell had resigned from the Sales Tax Focus Group and the Board of County Commissioners have been advised of this action.

Approval of September 25, 2025 Minutes:

MOTION WAS MADE BY DONNA BARRETT, SECONDED BY GARY BAYNE TO APPROVE AS PRESENTED THE SEPTEMBER 25, 2025 MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED 10:0.

Public Comment: Ms. Lewis opened the floor for Public Comment on Agenda items only. No one present from the Public chose to comment.

Presentations: Sales Tax Projects: QUALITY OF LIFE

Mr. Tommy Scott, Director of Community Development was present to give an overview of the Quality of Life projects on today's Agenda. Mr. Scott gave an overview of the history of the Centennial Park Recreation Center development which was begun in 1998. This park was developed from the initial sales tax initiatives where our regional parks in south, west and east county were developed. It was originally called O'Donnell Regional Park, then North Charlotte Regional Park and now Centennial Park.

There have been additions to this park in every sales tax year except 2008 when the focus was on roads and infrastructure projects. The following are the projects working towards the conclusion of the Master Plan. In addition, (from the 2014 sales tax revenue) we purchased additional land and built sports fields, a pool and recreation center with a gym. The following proposals will match county standards for our parks for which Harold Avenue Park is an example of this standard.

Project: Centennial Park Recreation Center Renovation: Centennial Park Recreation Center additional amenities will meet the level of service identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Proposal: Add additional gymnasium, staffing work area, and an additional multi-purpose room.

Member Yerger mentioned that the access of one way in and out is an issue and has this concern been addressed? Mr. Scott replied that the developer of the community is building a bridge and new roadway that will connect from Flamingo Road along with the current entrance and exit at Centennial to help correct this issue. It is not part of our project, but it is coming to the community. Member Barrett asked for confirmation that this new facility would be open to the public for rental. Mr. Scott affirmed that all our recreation centers are open to both public and private use. Member Butler asked if the parks are self-funded? We are a general fund department, our funds come from ad valorem taxes, said Mr. Scott. We do have additional funding through a fee structure but that does not cover all costs. It does allow the public to contribute towards their usage of the facility. Member Butler asked if the recreation center is open to everyone in Charlotte County and Mr. Scott replied that there is no residency requirement to use the facilities so anyone can use the amenities. Because we see so many visitors and part-time residents, we do not want to restrict public access to any public amenity that might deter anyone from moving to Charlotte County. Member Yerger asked about usage of the exercise/equipment room and if it is well used? Mr. Scott replied that the facility is open seven days a week, 14 hours per day. It is well-used, but the usage times are staggered throughout the day, such as before and after work, and lunch time. Member Vieira asked what are the operating hours? Mr. Scott said, in general the operating hours are 8-8:00 p.m. Sometimes the facility will be open earlier or later depending on what activities are planned. When children's camps are running, the times may be more variable to assist parents dropping children off before work. Member Bayne inquired if the newer buildings are being used as Hurricane shelters? Not specifically, said Mr. Scott, as they are in the flood plain, but we have used them for a variety of temporary shelters for fire, tornados and other disasters. Harold Avenue Park is in a different flood zone and is used as a Hurricane shelter. Member Axelson commented on the need for better directional signage to the park such as on McCall Road and would the county consider this improvement? Additional signage is not a county option on state roads said Mr. Scott. Member Butler commented on the county calendar for the next three months as being very busy except for Sundays and some Saturdays. He asked if tourism events at our facilities helped to subsidize the costs. Mr. Scott replied yes, if they stay at a hotel, they contribute to our economic impact. Some sporting events (in cooperation with the Tourism division) at our facilities may capture that data through their programs. We know there is a day-to-day impact, but it is hard to measure. Member Yerger asked for an explanation of current and future parking needs. Mr. Scott explained that as each building phase was planned and implemented, parking needs were addressed at that time.

There is enough parking now, and we have planned future parking (by Code) to accommodate those needs. Member Yerger asked if the pool was heated, and Mr. Scott informed it was by a geothermal system.

Project: Centennial Park Phase 2: Continued implementation of Parks and Recreation Master Plan to renovate the Centennial Park to meet the standards outlined in the plan. Mr. Scott indicated there is a large, wooded section of land north of the recreation center going towards 776 which will be the site of this expansion. This addition is part of making this a Regional Park with the amenities associated with that type of park.

Proposal: Phase 2 includes master planning of the site; 14 lighted sport courts, one large, one medium and two small pavilions, parking, canoe and kayak launch for the Flamingo waterway, boardwalk over some wetlands, multi-purpose room, and two restrooms.

Member Barrett asked if specialized sports, (those we cannot accommodate at this time) like beach volleyball, will be taken into consideration during this planning phase? Mr. Scott explained that is why the sport courts item is left vague so it can be fleshed out to what the community needs and wants during the planning stage and further explained how this planning might look like. Member Vieira ask how staff go about engaging the community for comments. Mr. Scott said they partner with a team from Facilities Management, hold many community meetings asking the public for their assistance in providing wants, needs, and location. The group then works with our design team, comes back with maps and layouts asking for confirmation. Final adjustments and details are then added. Online options are also provided for those residents not here to submit suggestions. It is a priority to engage the public with every new build, asking for input so the space will meet the local community needs and desires. Member Butler ask if there are collaborations with other community groups? Mr. Scott replied yes, we have general stakeholders of our facilities. If it is a new facility, we will reach out to homeowner associations, schools, and civic groups. If it is an established building expansion, we reach out to the people who already use the facility to get them started. Then we reach out to the public – we do not want to exclude anyone who might be interested. Member Butler asked if every park must have every sports activity, or can some parks focus on a specialized activity like cricket? Mr. Scott agreed, saying when beach volleyball became state sponsored, courts were added in partnership with the schools who then run the programs. The same idea happened with swim team competitions. Member Yerger asked if there is hard data that having community parks increases home values? Mr. Scott replied yes, we have a valid statistical survey by a professional consultant that says within a quarter mile of a park, there is an increase in property values, if the park is properly maintained. Member Vieira asked about parks restricted to smaller land size. How do you peel down the amenities the public desires? Mr. Scott referred to G.C. Herring Park, (a community park – not regional park) and phase two additional amenities we discussed previously, that are scaled down from the larger parks. If we have smaller footprints, we just scale down the available amenities. Member Axelson asked about tracking attendance at these parks and if these projects are pre-vetted, (the cream of the crop projects) that the community wants and will use? He further stated that our goal is to prioritize the projects (that you have presented to us) if we do not have enough tax money to fund all. Mr. Scott agreed that this is

the charge of this committee. He further mentioned that cell phone data at the parks is gathered to track usage. Ms. Emily Lewis went over with the Focus Group how the Capital Needs process works. It is a 20 year look at our future capital needs, a planning process with the BCC highlighting all our infrastructure needs across the county. The projects that we review come up through that process, fall within that CIP timeframe of the sales tax, and have the biggest impact to the general public. That is how these projects get vetted to come before this committee. Member Barrett asked if these projects are already on the capital projects lists for the county, then these projects will get done either through our tax dollars or through the sales tax? Not necessarily replied, Ms. Lewis, we have much more capital infrastructure needs than revenue to deliver projects so they will be put into other phases, pushed out of the CIP or stay unfunded and not move into that window. Mr. Scott reiterated that the reality is not everything will get funded and other decisions will be made. Member Yerger asked, in your designs do you have a planned resiliency process? For example, if pickle ball falls out of favor and skateboarding comes back into popularity and you need to convert. Mr. Scott said yes, because usage drives us and referred to Bisset Park that has been underutilized for a while. We had shuffleboard courts there as an amenity that was not used. We took it out and have developed a skate park that is about to open. We review our amenities frequently; their life expectancies, maintenance, usage, and make decisions whether to repair, maintain or replace. Future change then is part of the actual design, commented Member Yerger. Absolutely replied, Mr. Scott. Member Axelson commented that the group should look at which of these projects we want to ensure get funded now. The process can begin so they have the biggest impact on the community. Member Matthews commented that social media has a movement to encourage the public to turn down the sales tax initiative this voting cycle. She is concerned that major projects like the Adm. Fire Station have gone through major cost overruns on budget. She asked about the 2020 Tier One and Tier Two projects and on average, how many Tier Two projects from the 2020 sales tax projects will not get funded because of that? Ms. Lewis replied that all but two projects have moved out of Tier Two. She continued explain that the county has done a couple of things differently in 2026 as opposed to 2020. In 2020 all the estimates being used were estimates created in 2017-2018 and we did not use professional estimators, we used in-house staff. Those estimates were based on historical construction projects not forward looking. It is tough to do estimates for a project you are building ten years later. During this 2026 process, we have hired a professional estimator to review all the projects and numbers, and we have used regular standard indexing, looking at the schedule when those projects would come online and what that index needs to be attached to that project. Some of the projects in the past were changed and we also focused on resiliency, (hardening our facilities due to the last four hurricanes since 2020) which also contributed to higher costs. Member Barrett reminded everyone that even though costs went up, our revenue is also higher. The last five years of construction costs is unprecedented. Ms. Lewis commented that the Sales Tax helps to keep our capital project millage rate low, we have cut it as a county over the last three years. Sales Tax money allows the full-time residents of Charlotte County to avoid bearing the cost burden alone and is shared with tourists in this county. Member Matthews encouraged the staff to get positive information out on social media now before the nay-sayers voice becomes too dominant. Ms. Lewis shared the county will do a full outreach program once the projects are chosen to educate the community. We will respond to inaccurate information on social media with factual information.

Project: Centennial Park Phase 3: Continue Phase 3 of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan to renovate Centennial Park to meet the standards outlined in the plan. This is an Olympic size pool built from 2014 sales tax. We want to finish the pool with items we needed to pull from the initial phase because of cost.

Proposal: Phase 3 includes an integrated water-based lay feature (w/lazy river), four lap lanes, shade, retractable bleachers, and required infrastructure.

Member Yerger asked about the size of the footprint, but Mr. Scott said it still needed to be designed. Member Axelson asked about how our pool playground will look? It will be cool, said Mr. Scott. Member Barrett commented that we do not have any of these features in our other pools. Mr. Scott added that the closest thing to fun we have are splash pads at Ann & Chuck Dever Park, McGuire and South County Parks but nothing fun here for kids to do. Member Axelson asked if the county has plenty of liability insurance and how you can mitigate potential liability. We follow the highest industry standards for parks, equipment and staff said Mr. Scott.

Project: Park Renovations: Replace variety of large park amenities that have reached their end of useful life. Mr. Scott reported we have a Capital Replacement program to repair and replace structures like restrooms (Port Charlotte Beach and Englewood East) and pavilions (Bissett Park and Franz Ross Park). We package some of the older structures together so they can become sales tax projects. We have standards now for our restrooms based on the size of parks and number of people who use the facilities. We have also standardized our pavilions for ease of construction and design.

Proposal: Replace restroom at Port Charlotte Beach Park and Englewood East, replace large group pavilions at Bissett Park and Franz Ross Park.

Member Axelson asked what is the ramification if we let them age? Mr. Scott replied that they are in our life cycle replacement schedule. Their age means they need to be replaced. By construction standards, everything you build has a life cycle, these items have reached that stage. The downside of not funding them is we would have to close them and close amenities that are required to have a restroom. By code, playgrounds, sport courts, and gathering areas require restrooms. Ms. Lewis added that we would then need to bring in porta potties until there are adequate capital funds to replace the restroom. Member Yerger asked how a restroom becomes outdated? Mr. Scott replied that they have met or exceeded their life expectancy, over time everything fails. The pavilions are made of wood and in this climate that deteriorates and fails. Our new ones are all metal. Member Tichy asked if they need modification or were up to ADA standards? Mr. Scott confirmed they meet standards now and that is not the issue, just the age of the structure. Member Butler commented that we have heard about a lot of park projects. At the end, will there be documentation that segregates the projects, looking at total costs for each sector compared to what we can spend for us to review? Ms. Lewis replied that information will come at our last two meetings and what we are doing now is scoring projects to guide that conversation. At those meetings, the Focus Group will weigh the projects and then factor in what the BCC is asking, that 50 percent of projects be transportation related. When we get to that point some tough decisions will need to be made. We will look at them by categories and

geographical location to balance the decisions, so the entire county is served and not just one location disproportionately.

Focus Group Member Project Scoring: Ms. Lewis requested the Focus Group complete today's scoring sheets and turn them into the staff from Fiscal.

Meeting Adjournment: Meeting concluded by consensus at 4:05 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 30, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Emily Lewis,
Charlotte County Deputy Administrator

Date Adopted: October 30, 2025

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