



**2026 Sales Tax Focus Group
Kick-Off Meeting – Room B-106
Charlotte County Administration Center,
18500 Murdock Circle, Port Charlotte, FL 33948
3:00-5:00 p.m.
August 19, 2025**

Members in Attendance: Gary Bayne, Gary Butler, Ray Laroche, Cindy Marsh-Tichy, Lynne Matthews, Sean McLaughlin, Kathi Obendorfer, Lucienne Pears, Richard Russell, Mark Vianello, Steve Vieira, Bob White, and Lawrence Yerger.

Absent: Donna Barrett and the Englewood Chamber of Commerce Representative.

Others in Attendance: Hector Flores, County Administrator, Janette Knowlton, County Attorney, Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator, Francine Lisby, Pam Kirchner and Denise Kolerski from Budget & Administrative Services.

Welcome and Introductions: Emily Lewis, Deputy County Administrator opened the meeting at 3 p.m. Introductions of staff members present were made to the Focus Group members. Hector Flores, County Administrator was in attendance and spoke to the group about how important their work in this Focus Group was to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) and thanked everyone for volunteering their time over the next 8 months. Mr. Flores encouraged the group to ask questions of the presenters as they fulfill their role in providing the voters with a balanced mix of projects that are good for Charlotte County. Ms. Lewis then asked each Focus Group Member to introduce themselves indicating what business entity or district they were representing. Ms. Lewis informed the group that this Focus Group representation covered the entire Charlotte County area. She provided information regarding the two members who were missing; Donna Barrett, Charlotte DeSoto Building Industry Association, had a prior engagement and the representative from the Englewood Chamber of Commerce resigned due to scheduling conflicts. The Englewood Chamber of Commerce replacement will be approved at the September 9th BCC Board meeting. Should anyone be unable to attend a meeting, please notify us in advance. You may still submit your scoring sheets for any missed

meeting and email us with any questions. All project information has been provided for your advance review.

Sunshine Law: County Attorney Janette Knowlton gave a presentation on the Sunshine Law and how it affects this Focus Group. There are two parts to the Sunshine Law. The first one concerns Open Meetings and the second part (which is handled by the County staff), concerns Public Records. All meetings are open to the Public, must be noticed with time and location, and minutes are to be taken. Every citizen can attend, make comments, even the Citizen Press who are also allowed to record the meeting. The Focus Group may set up their own rules for public input. This Focus Group is an Advisory Board under direction of the Board of County Commissioners and is thereby subject to the Sunshine Law. Information regarding the Sunshine Law may be found in the Florida Constitution and in Florida Statutes. Your responsibilities under the Sunshine Law began as soon as you were notified of your appointment. A Public meeting is defined as any meeting between two or more members of the same board to discuss some matter which will foreseeably come before this board for action or any non-in-person communication that discusses pending issues. It will be a violation of the Sunshine Law to communicate between Focus Group members via e-mail, phone calls, letters, Internet Forums/Blogs or Daisy-chaining or speaking together outside the confines of this meeting. Should the Sunshine Law be violated, it could result in penalties; a \$500 fine or 60 days in jail. There is a process to rectify a violation which is called a Cure meeting. In essence, the group would reconvene and repeat the meeting; notice the meeting, have a new discussion, take minutes, and record any actions.

Review Purpose of Committee: Emily Lewis provided background for the work of this Focus Group. The purpose of this group is to review potential Sales Tax County projects that are under consideration for funding by the Board of County Commissioners. The group will hear presentations by staff and then will score each project giving weights that will eventually lead to the final ranking at the last two meetings. For the 2026 project selection the Board of County Commissioners has provided guidance in that they have indicated they would like 50% of the project costs to reflect Infrastructure – roads and utilities. This Focus Group will still review a full range of projects pertaining to Quality of Life, Public Safety and Infrastructure.

Overview of Sales Tax Funding - Francine Lisby, Assistant Budget & Administrative Services Director gave a presentation that explained what the Sales Tax funding is and what it funds. The 1% extra sales tax is used to fund local infrastructure and capital improvement projects. The revenue is restricted to capital projects only and not for maintenance and collection and is limited to 1% of the first \$5,000 in purchases. Voters decide every 6 years via a referendum to renew the 1% extra sales tax. The Board of County Commissioners oversees the potential projects and how the funds are budgeted using citizen input and each county decides on its own projects. The funds are shared

with the City of Punta Gorda (9.17%) and Charlotte County (90.83%) which includes funding for our Constitutional Officers. The 2020 Sales Tax Funding is projected to bring in approximately \$238,641,679.

Conservatively, the 2026 extra 1% sales tax is projected to bring in revenue in annual collections of \$37.6 million with a six-year total of \$226 million. Ms. Lewis reported that the 2020 Sales Tax revenue was divided into Two Tiers and recommend that this group do the same. If funds exceed the projection, then, the Tier 2 projects can be funded. Tier One Projects would be reflected in the \$226 million and Tier Two would have projects in the range of \$75-76 million. Member Lynne Matthews raised two questions: 1) What if the Legislature deauthorizes this tax? Ms. Lewis indicated changes could come from the State Legislature, but we are planning as if status quo. 2) Can members add projects to be considered? Ms. Lewis replied that while the Board of County Commissioners allowed this to happen in the 2020 review process, they decided not to open this consideration for outside projects this time due to the need to focus on infrastructure and the lack of potential funding. Member Lucienne Pears asked for an explanation of "fund as you go". Ms. Lewis explained that as funds come in from sales tax the first amounts will go to fund school projects and then Project Management will take over scheduling approved projects as the money becomes available.

Capital Needs Assessment and Project Selection: Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator explained how the Charlotte County develops capital projects for voter consideration. The Focus Group is an important part of the process, and their input is considered very carefully before the BCC presents the projects for voter approval. All potential projects go through the budget process and are refined many times over many years. Studies such as population growth and future needs assessments are completed, and the financial costs are refined until they are brought forward to this 6-year window projection to be voted upon. We look at master space plans for new potential services such as Fire Station needs into the future as the County grows. We look at what this project will cost today, and escalators are calculated for future costs once the funding is available. You will be given many projects to review; more than you can approve to move forward. As you consider each project you need to decide what makes the most sense for our community growth. Remember that these projects have been thoroughly vetted before you hear the various presentations. They will focus on meeting current and future community needs. Ms. Lewis added that while the presentations you hear will show today's costs that were used in planning the scope of the project, you will also be given the future costs once the project is funded; the Focus Group will use these future escalated costs as we evaluate and rank the projects. Charlotte County has had the extra sales tax projects since 1994 and the staff have gotten more experienced over time in projecting long term future costs.

Review 2026 Sales Tax Focus Group process: Emily Lewis went through and explained the Binder which contains all the materials for the future meetings. She encouraged those members who like to read ahead and plan to do so, to come with prepared questions for the presenters. She pointed out the current and future demographics of Charlotte County for the group to review for projected growth. Ms. Lewis reminded the Focus Group to keep in mind the entire County – West, East and Mid County when looking at the projects to ensure that no one portion of the county is getting more sales tax project improvements than another. The Capital Needs Assessment information section shows all the sales tax projects coming forward over the next several years.

Criteria for weighting and ranking process: Emily Lewis invited the group to review the form "Criteria and Group Weights for Scoring Proposed Sales Tax Projects and make changes as they felt might better reflect what citizens consider important today. Ms. Lewis led the group through a review of each item criteria and weight. The group brought forward several items for further discussion, revising several and adjusting some of the weights. After a spirited discussion the following changes were voted upon for use in this year's scoring.

#9 – New language criteria added. "This project fosters community resilience and increases capacity to sustain critical services post-disaster." Weight to be 2.8. {# old 9 moved to #8 and new language inserted for #9.}

MOTION WAS MADE BY LUCIENNE PEARS AND SECONDED BY KATHI OBENDORFER TO CREATE NEW LANGUAGE INCORPORATING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO SUSTAIN CRITICAL SERVICES POST-DISASTER. MOTION CARRIED: 13:0

MOTION WAS MADE BY GARY BAYNE AND SECONDED BY LARRY YERGER TO WEIGH THE NEW LANGUAGE AT 2.8. MOTION CARRIED: 13:0

#6 – Increase weight #6 from 1.4 to 2.3. "Is this a joint project with another entity?" And decrease # 9 "Will the project impact environmental quality of the County?" (new #8) weight from 2.3 to 1.4.

MOTION WAS MADE BY GARY BUTLER AND SECONDED BY GARY BAYNE TO INCREASE WEIGHT OF #6 TO 2.3. AND DECREASE #8 WEIGHT TO 1.4. MOTION CARRIED 12:1 WITH YERGER DISSENTING.

#8 – Delete language – "Is the project included in the 20-year Capital Needs Assessment, a Master Plan and/or Comprehensive Plan?"

MOTION WAS MADE BY SEAN MCLAUGHLIN AND SECONDED BY RAY LAROCHE TO STRIKE # 8 FROM CRITERIA AND MOVE OLD #9 TO #8. MOTION CARRIED 12:1 WITH BAYNE DISSENTING.

#10 – Decrease weight from 2.8 to 2.2. “Will the project improve quality of life in Charlotte County?”

MOTION WAS MADE BY LUCIENNE PEARS AND SECONDED BY BOB WHITE TO DECREASE THE WEIGHT FROM 2.8 TO 2.2. MOTION CARRIED 7:6 WITH VIANELLO, OBENDORFER, RUSSELL, MATTHEWS, VIEIRA AND YERGER DISSENTING.

#11 – Decreased weight from 1.8 to 1.0. “Is the project state or federally mandated?”

MOTION WAS MADE BY BOB WHITE AND SECONDED BY STEVE VIEIRA TO REDUCE WEIGHT FROM 1.8 TO 1.0. MOTION CARRIED: 13:0

Ms. Lewis continued with the review of the Binder, highlighting previous sales tax projects and today’s presentation by Francine Lisby. Next meeting’s presentations are from Charlotte County Schools and Community Services Director Tommy Scott. All the scoring sheets will be revised based upon today’s discussion and provided for you next week. The original project sheets were based on the 2020 sales tax criteria. The presenters going forward will be informed to add the new criteria to their presentations. Member Lucienne Pears asked about the scoring process. Ms. Lewis informed the group that the scoring sheets will be handed in at each meeting to Denise Kolerski, Budget & Administrative Services for tallying, but the group will not be informed of the totals until the final meeting when the ranking is discussed. All the scoring sheets will be part of the Public Record for the 2026 Sales Tax Initiative. Ms. Lewis thanked everyone for their participation today and through the next 8 months helping to assess the projects. The final decisions remain with the Board of County Commissioners who will be kept apprised of our process. Please do not hesitate to contact our office with any questions.

Public Comment: No Citizens were in attendance.

Meeting Adjournment: Meeting concluded by consensus at 4:29 p.m. Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 28, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Lewis,
Charlotte County Deputy Administrator

Date Adopted: _____



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

