



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.
August 28, 2025

Members Present: Donna Barrett, Gary Bayne, Gary Butler, Ray Laroche, Lynne Matthews, Sean McLaughlin, Lucienne Pears, Richard Russell, Mark Vianello, Bob White, and Larry Yerger.

Members Excused: Cindy Marsh-Tichy, Kathi Obendorfer, Steve Vieira, and the Englewood Chamber of Commerce Representative.

Others Present: Dr. Michael Desjardins, Charlotte County Public Schools Assistant Superintendent for School Support Services, Dr. Brian Granstra, Charlotte County Public Schools Assistant Superintendent for Career, Technical Education and Career Readiness, Tommy Scott, Director of Community Services, Denise Kolerski, Senior Financial Analyst, Francine Lisby, Assistant Budget Director, Hector Flores, County Administrator, Claire Jubb, Assistant County Administrator, and Travis Perdue, Director of Facilities Management.

Welcome: Emily Lewis, Deputy County Administrator opened the meeting at 3 p.m.

Approval of August 19, 2025 Minutes:

MOTION WAS MADE BY LARRY YERGER, SECONDED BY BOB WHITE TO APPROVE AS PRESENTED THE AUGUST 19, 2025 MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED 11:0.

Public Comment: Citizens were present, but no citizen input was conveyed. Emily Lewis informed the citizen's present that should they have any questions, they will be addressed after the meeting.

Opening Statements: Ms. Lewis informed the Focus Group that updated Scoring Sheets were at their seats and to replace the old sheets in their Binders. The revised criteria for the Scoring Sheets voted on at the previous meeting will be used going forward. This afternoon the Focus Group will hear about projects concerning our public schools and the County's Community Services department. You may either score the projects as we move through the meeting or score them at the end of the meeting. Please write your name at the top and turn in your scoring sheets to Denise Kolerski for final tabulation for the ranking discussion of the projects.

Sales Tax Projects: QUALITY OF LIFE

Project: Charlotte County Public Schools – School Safety – Dr. Michael Desjardins, Charlotte County Public Schools Assistant Superintendent for School Support Services:

Proposal: Sales Tax Funding in Charlotte County Public Schools is needed to modernize the technological infrastructure to allow for the implementation of next generation technologies in the areas of: School Security, Career & Technical Education, daily student learning and teaching utilizing cutting edge technologies such as Artificial Intelligence. The project objectives are to upgrade the Intermediate Distribution Frame Rooms (IDF), Main Distribution Frame Rooms (MDF), bandwidth inside/between buildings, and video management servers.

Dr. Desjardins reported that the funds from the 2020 sales tax project request allowed the schools to install the one button lock down system while calling the police at the same time. Six years has now gone by and much of the technology that was installed is now outdated and needs upgrading. They are a school system that serves 16,500 students and 2,000 employees. They need to upgrade their server rooms for the next advancements in technologies. School Security had changed over the last 6 years. Florida is one of the leading states in the nation for school security. Six years ago, Artificial Intelligence was barely used in education and today it requires increased bandwidth and electricity. The back-up battery systems need to be upgraded for longer life in the server rooms. Member Larry Yerger asked for clarification on the term “universal power supply”, saying shouldn’t it be “uninterruptible” power supply? Dr. Desjardins replied that was a question for his technical staff but most likely yes. Also important is the internet highway coming into the schools. New cables need to be installed so that the 10 GB that come into the school is consistent throughout all the different buildings to meet their needs for learning. Member Lynne Matthews requested a further explanation of the abbreviations of IDF and MDF. Member Larry Yerger asked if there was a priority of implementation of proposed upgrades? Dr. Desjardins replied that all are implemented currently but they need to provide continued upgrades into the future. Member Richard Russell commented that school enrollment is down this year from 18,000 and asked how it compared to last year? Member Superintendent Mark Vianello replied that enrollment was down about 50 students from state projections, but since totals are reported in both October and February for funding purposes, they expect that number to increase and be on target. Further discussion continued regarding the exact number of current students and if home schools and charter schools were included in those numbers. Both Superintendent Dr. Mark Vianello and Dr. Desjardins were confident that the number of 16,500 students was close to accurate. Member Richard Russell commented that even with the population growth in the County, families with children are not moving into Charlotte County. Dr. Desjardins confirmed that yes, that is the dilemma as the growth number of students goes up and down all the time. Ten years from now student population could look very different. Member Mark Vianello reported that the total project cost for School Security is \$20 million however the Charlotte County school system is only requesting \$10 million from the Sales Tax initiative. The total project cost for the second project to modernize technological infrastructure is \$10 million however the school system is only requesting \$5 million from the Sales Tax initiative. Ms. Lewis confirmed that this number will be corrected for the ranking. Member Gary Bayne asked about future maintenance costs and if that would mean an increase to the project cost and what the estimated percentage cost would be? Ms. Lewis stated this resiliency question was not addressed in the school projects however will be addressed verbally in the County

project presentations since the Focus Group changed some of the voting criteria. Member Gary Butler commented that if the \$10 million is granted, then would the school system leverage that money in asking for grant funds? Dr. Desjardins replied affirmatively. Member Donna Barrett commented that with the total project being \$20 million, where would the other \$10 million come from? Dr. Desjardins stated it would come from capital and rearranging other projects to make it happen. Member Sean McLaughlin asked about environmental impact regarding the project. Dr. Desjardins indicated that there would be an increase in electrical power, but it would be marginal at best.

Project: Charlotte County Public Schools – Modernization of Technological Infrastructure – Dr. Brian Granstra, Charlotte County Public Schools Assistant Superintendent for Career, Technical Education and Career Readiness:

Proposal: The Modernization of key infrastructure allows for the ability to support the implementation of Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs by: Investing in a skilled workforce for our future, strategically using sales tax money for CTE expansion, and building a talent pipeline to power the local economy.

Dr. Granstra provided the committee with a new brochure containing all the educational opportunities provided to students. The goal is to make sure every student graduating is ready for enrollment or enlistment or employment. The secondary goal is to support our local businesses to provide them with a skilled workforce as well as attracting new industries to Charlotte County because of the many educational programs we provide. Total budget for the request is \$10 million but they are asking \$5 million from the Sales Tax initiative and will leverage those funds to request grants and other funding sources. Member Gary Butler asked how do you track students who take certain programs and then enter the work force? Dr. Granstra informed us that students ready to graduate take on-the-job training positions for real experience. Counselors also have access to job portals that can connect student with employers. Member Mark Vianello interjected that the school system has a Hiring Fair scheduled for April 20, 2026 where students ready to graduate are matched with employers and some will even walk out with a job offer. Member Lynne Matthews commented that many students cannot attend college for various reasons and asked if there is a known percentage of students who go into college versus going to a technical school or straight into the workforce? Dr. Granstra replied that based on a survey of students about 70% indicate their intent to go to college and 25% indicate going straight into employment but there is not a good tracking system for the 1,200 students who graduate each year. Member Donna Barrett indicated that she understood that nationwide 85% of students go to college but of that, 50% of those attending do not get a degree. Member Lynne Matthews asked how to reach students going to technical schools who would be eligible for local organizational scholarships that usually go to college bound students, (who sometimes get many scholarship funds)? Dr. Granstra replied that Career Counselors help in this area. Member Larry Yerger asked about trade programs in high school. Dr. Granstra indicated they do exist for students to enroll in, taking a bus for courses at the technical college. Member Donna Barrett interjected that students can be dually enrolled and graduate with both a high school diploma and with a certificate in those technical areas. Most of the trades like workshop come under the program "Building Construction Technology". Member Lucienne Pears asked how the funds would be divided for the specialize labs across the programs. Dr. Granstra replied that the equipment costs would be spread across middle school and up through technical colleges, trying to get the best equipment for the best possible cost by buying an instructional tool or

the real device. Member Donna Barrett asked again about the \$10 million costs versus the \$5 million request and if the school system has the funding? Dr. Granstra indicated they would seek funds from local sources, grants, incentive funding from the state, capital funds and donors. The costs for these programs keep increasing over time and certain outside funds will only become available if donors recognize an established successful program. Member Richard Russell asked if you receive these funds, how many more students can you absorb before you request more money? Dr. Granstra indicated that with multi-use space they can add more teachers, equipment and students.

Project: Placida Passive Park – Tommy Scott, Director of Community Services:

Proposal: Purchase the remaining 12.9 acres adjacent to previously acquired County land, develop a master plan, zoning and FLUM changes, implement master plan to include a kayak launch, playground, pavilions, restroom, and park furniture.

Mr. Scott gave the committee an overview of the history of Communities Services and the development of parks in Charlotte County before highlighting this current project. After a brief description of the proposal, Mr. Scott indicated that there are multiple opportunities to apply for grant funds for this project. He emphasized that if we obtain this property, there will be a large chunk of land that is environmentally protected by both the County and conservation efforts. The property will also provide a buffer for storm surge.

Member Donna Barrett asked how long can the owners wait until we have the funds to purchase the property? Mr. Scott replied that the property came on the market 4 years ago. Commissioner Truex knows the owner and has championed the project and has continued to work with the seller. Even though the County feels comfortable with verbal confirmation, we are also pursuing other revenue streams. Member Richard Russell asked if we need to sign a Letter of Intent to Purchase? Mr. Scott indicated that the action is premature until we have a funding source. Member Larry Yerger asked about the additional staff position created – would they be full time? Mr. Scott replied that it would be part-time. All park maintenance is performed on a route basis. This person would be there a portion of their workday performing duties that are based on established maintenance standards before moving to duties at another park. Member Yerger also asked for explanation of the Community Obligation being “unknown”. Mr. Scott replied that we are working through that, but we know it will provide storm surge protection and other benefits. Until we go through the design process we cannot commit to things like paved paths versus natural pathways. However, all public facilities are publicly accessible. Ms. Lewis called the committee member’s attention to the cost estimates on the cover sheets in the committee’s binder. The CIP sheets have the future projection costs for each project. When the member scores each project, the scoring is based on the future projected costs.

Project: South County Regional Park Recreation Center Renovation - Tommy Scott, Director of Community Services:

Proposal: Needed additional amenities to meet the level of service standards identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The project includes an additional gymnasium, staffing work area, two additional multi-purpose rooms, a new community garden, and an enlarged fitness room.

This project is based on a new standard (based on Harold Avenue Park) that where there is a Recreation Center we need to add a second gym to provide additional opportunities for sports, etc.

There are many needs, especially for pickle ball courts and time requests have grown over the last few years. These community centers become a hub for the local community, not for only sports but community and county meetings, renting it for birthday parties and other celebrations.

Member Lynne Matthews asked about space for Pickle Ball. Will the gym be multi-functional – the floor lined for all indoor sports? Mr. Scott replied that we have more requests than space, so the additional gym is needed and yes, the lining will be multi-functional. Member Matthews asked about current scheduling conflicts with a certain pickle ball group. Mr. Scott replied that they do have scheduled times and less conflict now because we lined the tennis courts with pickle ball lines. Some people will only play inside and some only outside – this addition will provide more playing time for both options. Member Gary Butler asked about services for those with disabilities, especially children and how these parks reach out to them. Mr. Scott replied that as part of our certification and master plan we reach out to the community through service providers and clubs to identify needs and where gaps might be in services. The department is in the recruiting process for an Adaptive Recreation Specialist position to liaison with the community, both young and old, to improve facilities and programs. Member Sean McLaughlin mentioned Special Olympics. Many different types of adaptive programs for issues like cognitively impaired are being implemented said Mr. Scott.

Project: South Murdock Community Park - Tommy Scott, Director of Community Services:

Proposal: To acquire land, master plan and develop a new community park in the South Murdock area. The project includes land acquisition, a playground, walking paths, three lighted sport courts, a lighted multi-purpose field, one large, one medium and two small pavilions, a 1,000-sq.-ft. community center building, and a park restroom.

This project will be developed for a new park in the NW Port Charlotte area. This new park was identified as a future need from our 2017 master plan. The 2024 new update from Metro Forecasting – projected the park (based on population growth) to be needed by 2030. A community park needs to be 25-50 acres, so we are looking for land currently. We are not pre-defining what type of park it will be – we ask the community what they want in their park through public meetings. We add what they need or want and then we design, and build based on their needs. New parks are now based on growth models and future population projections. Member Larry Yerger asked what is in a Community Park? Requirements include amenities such as 2 playgrounds, walking paths, lighted multi-purpose field, pavilions of various sizes, a community building and restroom. Member Yerger asked if these requirements are the County's definition and requirements? Yes, replied Mr. Scott, who went on to explained about all types of various parks – community, regional, pocket park, all based on space and community needs.

Focus Group Member Project Scoring: Scoring of the project took place after the conclusion of each presentation. Ms. Lewis informed the group that they could hold back their scoring sheets until the next meeting if they needed more time. In addition, the scoring sheets could be emailed back to our office as well as submitting any questions in advance of the meeting. She reminded the group that should a member know in advance they will miss a meeting; they could still submit questions for answering at that meeting and submit their scores when they returned to the next meeting. The project topics for the next meeting will concern Public Safety. Ms. Lewis thanked the Focus Group for their time and attention today.

Meeting Adjournment:

MOTION WAS MADE BY LARRY YERGER, SECONDED BY DONNA BARRETT TO CONCLUDE THE MEETING AT 4:37 P.M. MOTION CARRIED 11:0.

Next meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 15, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Emily Lewis,
Charlotte County Deputy Administrator

Date Adopted: Sept. 15, 2025

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