



**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.
September 15, 2025**

Members Present: Eric Axelson, Donna Barrett, Gary Bayne, Gary Butler, Ray Laroche, Sean McLaughlin, Lucienne Pears, Mark Vianello, Bob White, Cindy Marsh-Tichy, Kathi Obendorfer, Steve Vieira, and Larry Yerger.

Members Excused: Lynne Matthews and Richard Russell. Note: Member Sean McLaughlin arrived late at 3:19 and left early at 3:40 and was not available to vote on the one motion.

Others Present: Jason Fair, Director of Public Safety, Travis Perdue, Director of Facilities Management, Francine Lisby, Lindsay Johnson, Strategic Planning & Projects Manager, Assistant Budget Director, Hector Flores, County Administrator, 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.

Approval of August 28, 2025 Minutes:

MOTION WAS MADE BY LARRY YERGER, SECONDED BY BOB WHITE TO APPROVE AS PRESENTED THE AUGUST 28, 2025 MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED 12:0.

Public Comment: Ms. Lewis opened the floor for Public Comment on Agenda items only. Citizen Bob Howell asked, "Who manages the programs?" Ms. Lewis responded that the purpose of this committee was to make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners who will make the final project decisions for funding. The management of the projects, after approval, is the responsibility of County staff. Citizen Jack Vanderheyden mentioned several application inconsistencies for this Focus Group when reviewing application documentation and further asked; "How will you avoid the massive cost overruns of government buildings that are under the last recommendations?"

Presentations: Ms. Lewis introduced Travis Perdue, Director of Facilities Management who was present to facilitate discussion on the projects for today's presentations. Mr. Perdue introduced himself and his staff and their roles in the County.

Sales Tax Projects: INFRASTRUCTURE

Project: Fire/EMS Vehicle Maintenance Warehouse Expansion. Provide for a secure maintenance and storage facility for a growing inventory of emergency vehicles. Facility would provide additional maintenance bays, capabilities to support large and specialized equipment, expanded climate-controlled storage areas for medical supplies, medications, and climate-sensitive materials.

Proposal: Build a facility to meet current design standards, improve efficiency, and further support the health and welfare of Public Safety personnel by ensuring organizational readiness through a properly maintained fleet of emergency vehicles and apparatus.

Mr. Perdue explained the project parameters then opened the floor for questions. Member Bayne asked how big the expansion was and how many bays? Mr. Perdue replied it is undetermined at this time as there are limitations on how far the build-out can extend. Member Bayne also asked, is it going to be metal or block? Mr. Perdue responded that it will be a hybrid of the current structure and at the same time it will be brought up to code. Member Yerger asked if there is computer augmentation involved? Mr. Perdue replied only in the manner of added office staff and computer servers. Fire Chief Jason Fair interjected that the RFID scan capabilities will be increased. Member Butler asked what is the impact if the project is not funded? Mr. Perdue replied that previously the Sales Tax has heavily funded Public Safety projects and it is relied upon heavily. If these projects are not funded, then other strategies will be implemented, but it would be difficult to keep up with current needs. Member Barrett asked about the discrepancy in cost of the projects vs. the worksheets. Ms. Lewis interjected that the presentation shows current costs, and the project sheet shows projected future costs based on cost escalators when the project would be funded. Member Vieira asked if additional personnel are projected? Chief Fair responded that personnel is not projected at this time, but the additional space is to provide for the growing needs in emergency services. Member Tichy inquired if there were grant funds available? Mr. Perdue replied not at this time.

Project: Fire Station Number 4 was constructed in 1987 and has reached its end of life. The new station will align with current design standards and building codes with critical infrastructure design, resiliency standards and improved efficiency.

Proposal: Build a station to meet current design standards, improve efficiency, and further support the health and welfare of Public Safety personnel. Utilize prototype design for the replacement of existing Fire Station #4. Design and construct a new station near the current location, including a temporary station methodology to maintain service levels during construction.

Mr. Perdue indicated that this is the last of the older stations to be replaced. Stations 2 and 5 were recently replaced and received very little damage during recent hurricanes due to updated standards. This new building standard increases resiliency, efficiencies, and safety following this new prototype. We plan to keep the new fire station in the same region as the current station, however, there is increased need indicated for Marine support with a larger facility. The current station location is located off Marathon Blvd. Member Pears inquired if this current station would be demolished and rebuilt, or would the station be moved? Mr. Perdue indicated that it is undetermined at this time as the station needs to fit the growth of the community and where it is most needed for services at that time. Member Pears followed up with the term "replacement" and that it is not so much about replacing the building

but replacing the service and the location which is to be determined. Yes, replied, Mr. Perdue, however, we have done both. Member Yerger asked if this building is in a flood zone? Mr. Perdue responded that we would build the structure above flood height and have several different models to choose from. Member Yerger followed up by asking if this current spot is a good location? Fire Chief Fair responded that this location is very good for the area services. The age and integrity of the structure plus growth in the area is pushing the rebuild. Originally, the station housed one fire truck and now a rescue vehicle has been added – it was not built to support 5 member teams. Member Axelson asked questions regarding the temporary structure and if the risk to fire fighters, (because of the need for ventilation) is serious? Chief Fair said that yes, a temporary stand-up station would be created until the new station was built. Member Pears asked if there was a report on the usable lifespan left in this station? Chief Fair said, yes, we do track that and have an optimization system to track the lifespan of the buildings. This building is truly at the end stage of usage. Member Butler asked how will you plan to stay on budget? Chief Fair replied that the 2020 Sales Tax supported the building of 3 fire stations. As a result, there is practical knowledge that helps the budgeting process. We hire an architect who must design on budget, we added a contractor during the design process which helps us keep on budget for current market costs and issues. We adjust along the way to keep the project as close to the original cost as possible. Member Butler followed up with more budget discussion. Mr. Perdue replied there are a lot of budget adjustments during a 6-year cycle. Different things will impact the budget, for example we were working off budgets approved in 2018-2019. Covid happened. As time went on there were changes in the building industry causing cost overruns which we defined and explained to the BCC when we went to them for approval. Ms. Lewis interjected that as we go through this process over time, we get better at looking at what those cost escalators need to be. We look holistically at the operating costs and think through items like the fire signal (that needs to be installed at 1 million dollars), if it needs to be moved. We try to ensure the project has all the holistic needs for the building. Mr. Perdue said a consultant is now hired to evaluate all the costs and factor the cost escalators so that Fiscal is comfortable with these budget costs for the future. This is something we did not do previously resulting in more confidence with the costs for the projects. Member Barrett commented that at the 2020 Sales Tax Focus Group meetings they were shown the region and how many people it affected. She continued with asking if this station is close to other fire stations? Chief Fair responded they look at the response times and Station 3 in the El JoBean area is the next closest station and station 2 is off Eisenhower.

Ms. Lewis continued with the history related to the next proposed new stations. In 2022 the county performed a scope of cover study throughout the county and received recommendations of where we need to serve the changing demographic of the county. The next project groupings are partly a result of that and partially due to the growth out at the Babcock Ranch area.

Project: Fire Station 18 (new) Edgewater Dr. Identified in the 2022 Community Risk Reduction and Standard of Cover Report. Will house (1) ALS Engine, (1) Rescue (ambulance) and (5) personnel per day.

Proposal: Following the recommendation from the Public Safety feasibility study, a new station is needed in the Edgewater area to support levels of service and improved emergency response and assistance to the community.

Mr. Perdue commented that this proposal is the standard prototype but a cost for an emergency signal was added to this project. This project will be a five bay station housing 5 members per day. Member Bayne asked what station is serving that area now, station 2? Chief Fair responded yes, but Station 2 moved leaving a gap and this new station will also support station 1. Member Barrett asked where this station is located on the map. Chief Fair responded Station 1 is on 41. Station 2 is on the other side of 776. Member Yerger asked what is an emergency signal? Mr. Perdue said there are various types; some don't turn on until they are needed by the engines, some are integrated into an existing signal. We have incorporated the signal cost into the land cost. Ms. Lewis commented that there are not many signal lights along Edgewater so a new light will most likely need to be installed. Member Pears remarked that she understood these new fire stations are driven by growth followed by how large an area they typically cover and/or population served. Chief Fair said the response area used to be by zones but now it is by response times and closest unit. Whatever unit is closer gets called out. Call volumes and call times are usually 6-8 minutes. Member Pears commented about not having an ER south of the river and asked if it impacted response times? Chief Fair responded that transport times do play a roll – longer transports affects longer call response times. Ms. Lewis interjected that we are trying to follow the Jimmy Johns model to be ridiculously fast for EMS Service. Member Tichy asked what is the population growth in that specific area? Ms. Lewis referred the group to the demographics in the binder showing the mid county region at 14% population growth in NW Port Charlotte. Member Axelson said we are looking at 4 new stations, what if only 2 get approved, what is the priority list? Is this a dire situation or just future planning? Chief Fair responded that part of adding new stations is to "catch up", to get us where we need to be currently while also preparing for what the studies are showing us for future needs. Is this dire? Yes, and we cannot push this off anymore. Stations 18 and 19 are also high on the priority list. The Babcock stations are also important as well and are part of our partnership agreement. Member Vieira asked if the county already owns any land that could be used for these projects? Mr. Perdue replied that traditionally the county does not have an inventory of vacant land scheduled for new fire stations. If the project is approved, the county will move forward assuming the need for land and determining exactly where that station is needed. The county would then go through modeling to make sure everything was still needed. If approved in 2026, the county is looking at staggered funding. We want to keep the funding in place so we can go out and purchase the land, but to purchase land at this time would not be the best approach. If the county owns any land, it would be looked at first. For Fire Station 3, we checked all the alternatives and decided the best location was the current one. We would run the same approach for these other stations as well.

Project: Fire Station 19 (new) – Gasparilla Rd. Identified in the 2022 Community Risk Reduction and Standard of Cover Report. Will house (1) ALS Engine, (1) Rescue (ambulance), (5) personnel per day and Supports Marine Operations.

Proposal: Following the recommendation from the Public Safety feasibility study, a new station is needed in the Gasparilla area to support levels of service and improved emergency response and assistance to the community.

Member Laroche asked other than water what do you need to support a marine unit? Chief Fair responded we need to reduce calls from 7-10 minutes to four and a location that gets the EMS unit closer to the barrier islands. We have tracked over 22% increases in calls and with 40,000 calls in a

year that is a significant increase. Member Yerger commented that purchasing land near water may have an increased cost and is that considered in the proposal? Chief Fair responded yes, but that this station is not only a marine unit but a full fire and EMS unit as well, it is not just designated as a marine unit. The staff are trained to service fire calls, EMS as well as marine and barrier island calls. The highest call volume is for EMS. This station personnel are the only EMS unit for the barrier islands. Mr. Perdue interjected that if this was just a marine unit the county would plan for higher land costs, but that is not the case here. The primary driver is fire and EMS, and the marine unit is a bonus. Member Pears asked if the projected land costs covered just acquisition or acquisition and development? Mr. Perdue replied that it only covered land acquisition.

Project: Fire Station 20 (new) – Babcock Site 2. Following the Master Development Order agreement with Babcock, fulfills the second station needed of the three required stations in the Babcock area to support service demands in a rapidly growing portion of Charlotte County. A new station is needed in the Babcock area to support levels of service and improved emergency response and assistance to the community.

Proposal: Design and construct an additional station to meet current design standards, improve efficiency, and further support the community's health and welfare. The station will house (1) ALS Engine, (1) Rescue (ambulance) and (5) personnel per day.

Mr. Perdue informed that the county has an agreement to provide fire and EMS services to Babcock Ranch. Station 20 is the second station to be built in that area. MDO identifies this partnership agreement based upon population growth to be planned, designed and delivered in a certain amount of time. Three required stations are to be established in this area. The county will use the same prototype of building as the other new stations. We have incorporated some different design elements to fit the Babcock area aesthetics. Member Yerger asked where do the funds come to furnish the stations and purchase the fire truck and ambulance? Mr. Perdue responded that the furnishing are part of the total project budget. Chief Fair interjected the purchase costs for fire engines and ambulances are funded separately. Ms. Lewis explained that there is a special taxing unit for the fire department from which equipment is purchased. Member Axelson noted 3 different project numbers for costs on the slides, proposal and worksheet. Ms. Lewis replied the slides have today's dollars; the proposal has the escalators factored in. If there is cost sharing the cost is reduced. Ms. Lewis also informed that Babcock's responsibility is in providing the land not the building. Mr. Perdue added we are obligated to provide these services to the citizens of that area. Member Butler asked how does this station work with the station in Lee County? Chief Fair responded that the calls still go to the closest available unit (crossing county lines) and other units will continue to provide services to cover.

Project: Fire Station 21 (new) – Babcock Site 3. Following the Master Development Order agreement with Babcock, fulfills the third station needed of the three required stations in the Babcock area to support service demands in a rapidly growing portion of Charlotte County. A new station is needed in the Babcock area to support levels of service and improved emergency response and assistance to the community.

Proposal: Design and construct an additional station to meet current design standards, improve efficiency, and further support the community's health and welfare. The station will house (1) ALS Engine, (1) Rescue (ambulance) and (5) personnel per day.

Mr. Perdue informed that this station is the 3rd of three sites agreed upon for the Babcock area. Member Pears asked if they were designed and set up for urban and rural services? Chief Fair indicated that rural lands can be assessed by ATV vehicles at that location. Member Butler commented that with 5,000 homes, what ratio determines the metro forecasting? The response time? How do you plan for future growth? Chief Fair replied we look at the next 6 years and project that we need one and probably two more stations. The MDO is connected to the growth. Ms. Lewis commented that by the year 2030 the projected growth at Babcock Ranch will increase to 162%. Member Barrett inquired about the resiliency of the stations built with 2020 sales tax dollars and would the county build the same stations today? Mr. Perdue commented that the BCC has indicated the need for resiliency and investing money for good use. We do not overdesign, using basic box buildings. Hurricane Ian tested the resiliency of our newer fire station buildings indicating a strong structure. Ms. Lewis informed that the county began looking at building strong, resilient structures after Hurricane Charley as the county does not want to evacuate our emergency personnel during a storm. We want our emergency responders to respond as soon as the roads are safe for them to travel. Mr. Perdue emphasized that the county staff focuses on resiliency, strength, public safety, and personnel safety in developing these fire station projects.

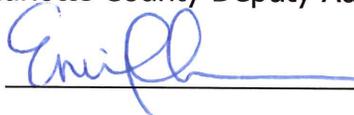
Focus Group Member Project Scoring: Ms. Lewis asked the Focus Group members to score today's projects and turn in their sheets to Ms. Francine Lisby. Ms. Lewis also introduced new Focus Group member Eric Axleson, who was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to fill the spot left vacant by the Englewood Chamber of Commerce. Member Axleson was chosen from the list of Member-at-large applications and is representing West Charlotte County.

Meeting Adjournment: Meeting concluded by consensus at 4:02 p.m. Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 25, 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