



COMMUNITY LEADERS MEETING

July 10, 2024 | 2:30pm – 4:30pm (Eastern Time)

ATTENDEES:

Sara Kane – Sarasota County

Alia Garrett – Sarasota County

Amy Anderson – Sarasota County

Barbara Powell Harris - Orange Blossom
Community Garden

Lisa Merritt – Multicultural Health Institute

Omar Guevara-Soto - Barancik Foundation

Ann Hardy - League of Women Voters

Dave Gizzi - United Way Suncoast

Debra Mattar – Venice Area Chamber of
Commerce

Elizabeth Power – William G. and Marie Selby
Foundation

Laura Dykstra - Community Foundation of Sarasota
County

Nikesh Patel – City of Sarasota

Shad Renick – Community Assisted and Supported
Living (CASL)

Sharon Haynes - Children First

Sharon Roush – Sarasota Memorial Hospital-
Venice

Jack Merriam – Sarasota Bay Foundation

Joyce Fitzpatrick – League of Women Voters

Joey Hedrick, Step Up Suncoast Weatherization
Coordinator

Amy Anderson – Sarasota County Schools

Rob Brown – Suncoast Waterkeeper

Sarah Denison Williams - Conservation Foundation
of the Gulf Coast

Stefan Kalev – Natural Resources Division
Manager, City of North Port

Jennifer Shafer – Shafer Consulting

Brenda Downing – The Salvation Army of Sarasota
County

Melissa Ehrhardt – American Red Cross

Joey Hedrick – Step Up Suncoast

Philip Tavill – Children First

Stacy Aloisio – City of North Port

Brenda Downing, The Salvation Army of Sarasota
County

Catherine Prince - WSP

Daren Cheatham - WSP

Justin Ahn - WSP

Emma Daly – WSP

AGENDA:

- » Overview of Priority Climate Action Plan
- » Breakout Discussion
- » Report Out of Breakout Session
- » Next Steps



OVERVIEW OF THE PRIORITY CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

Project Introduction

Sarasota County introduced the population and region of Sarasota/Manatee, the March 2024 Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP), and the upcoming Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP) set for Fall 2025. Sarasota County highlighted the focus areas of transportation, energy, water reduction, and environment and emphasized the climate impacts and low-income disadvantaged communities.

WSP discussed air pollution and noted that communities of colored people are often closer to industrial pollution sources. WSP highlighted the importance of using an equity lens to strategize the reduction of climate pollution and emphasized that disproportionately affected communities face greater health risks and financial burdens, such as spending a higher percentage of their income on utilities.

BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is the most valuable investment in the community?

During the breakout session, the group discussed the most valuable investments in the community.

- » The group addressed the need to consider the realities of sea level rise in the region and make strategic investments accordingly.
- » The group suggested additional air quality monitoring since there are currently only four air quality monitors, and only two measurements are taken for ozone. Another stakeholder mentioned that there were several real-time air quality monitors around the airport.
- » The group stressed the importance of **education for the public and elected officials to overcome resistance to adopting climate action plans**. The group suggested education campaigns that focus on the value of reducing ozone and air pollution, and cost saving. The group highlighted the importance of investing in the community, particularly focusing on the youth emerging from the pandemic. The group mentioned the need for environmental education and leadership to reduce coal-burning emissions, which would yield significant returns on investment.

Transportation

- » The group discussed the significant impact of transportation, which accounts for 51% of emissions. They emphasized the importance of having measurable metrics for valuable investments in transportation.
- » The group highlighted the synergy between transportation and alternate energy/ electrification, noting the nitrogen pollution from gasoline fuel vehicles in Sarasota Bay. They discussed the urban **heat island effect and highlighted the importance of replanting and preserving trees**.
- » The group also pointed out the **need to raise community awareness about transportation issues, provide additional charging opportunities, especially in low-income communities, and install solar covers for charging stations**. They proposed making charging more affordable for



low-income neighborhoods, possibly by offering charging at low or no cost for those economically disadvantaged.

- » The group highlighted the importance of encouraging **community partners to collaborate with local governments** to implement sustainable opportunities, such as surplus lots for micro forests.

Environment

- » The group pointed out the need for environmental organizations to work together and the importance of considering the cost to the end user. Lastly, the group suggested that a four-day work week could help reduce emissions.
- » The group used an analogy of airbags in cars; initially resisted by car companies, airbags are now an essential safety feature. In the same context, offering **incentives to customers, such as free car charging, could progress adoption of greener practices**. The group also highlighted the critical role of land conservation in sustaining ecosystems, protecting and restoring nature, adding more nature to the built environment, and preventing urban sprawl. The group mentioned how planting micro forests and connecting community members to environmental groups can help maintain momentum from discussion to action.
- » The group coined the idea of utilizing underutilized spaces and properties for **conservation and repurposing and maximizing green spaces throughout the region**. Current efforts include creation an environmental incubator where organizations rent and share office spaces, facilitating interaction and collaboration. The group highlighted the lack of benches and the issues of homelessness.

Buildings

- » Those living in fragile economic states are disproportionately affected, particularly children with asthma and other health issues. Renters often pay a disproportionate amount of their income towards energy costs due to inefficient Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning (HVAC), water, and sewage.

Solid Waste

- » The group made a particular concern regarding excessive garbage on expressways and freeway exits. The group pointed out that much of this waste is generated by trucks hauling materials to landfills and called for stricter regulations on securing loads. The group noted that it is not just on highways but also at bus stops where overflowing trash bins are a common problem.

2. What are the best ways for the strategies to be implemented?

- » The group highlighted Florida's significant growth and the dramatic loss of land to housing developments. The group emphasized the need to educate individuals on making their homes and properties greener and ensuring **new developments include green practices and spaces**. The group suggested that a blend of incentives and possible policy changes might be necessary to mandate a certain amount of green space and trees in new developments.
- » The group mentioned that working with families and children always **starts with education**. Conducting community assessments is crucial as each community has different needs. The group proposed that after providing education, a blend of various strategies will likely be needed to address the specific needs of each community.
- » The group pointed out the low literacy rates in Newtown, Florida; indicating that **tailored educational approaches** might be necessary to effectively implement strategies in the community.



3. What are the projects or gaps in the community for each of the topic areas? Are there specific energy reduction or air-quality projects for which you want to identify funding?

Transportation

- » The group discussed how the upcoming generation is less interested in driving and has positive attitudes towards alternative fueled vehicles such as electric vehicles (EVs). However, there is a lack of EV infrastructure. Hence, creating a community around EVs through competitions, groups, and social activities can help reshape the social norm and attitudes. The group also noted issues with scheduling and accessibility in transportation, highlighting the need for improvement in the needed areas.

Buildings

- » The group emphasized that the roadblock to micro forests is the insurance for the space.
- » The group mentioned that solar panels on school district builds are a good idea, but the costs, maintenance, and lack of knowledge are the main challenges. The group also highlighted the necessity of addressing skyrocketing rent and holding landlords accountable for failing to provide essential services such as electricity and water, despite tenants paying rent.

Solid waste

- » The group discussed on composting and recycling at schools, addressing textile waste from fast fashion, reconstructing textiles into fabric, and creating products from recycled materials. The group acknowledged that solid waste management is generally well-placed but pointed out that the most vulnerable communities are disproportionately affected by poor air quality. The group also identified septic tanks as a significant source of pollution, affecting both air and water quality.

Environment

- » The group suggested improving degraded habitats, planting trees with proper irrigation, proving free trees to homeowners, and supporting tree establishment practices. The group also coined the idea of schools growing their own food, which could be distributed to disadvantaged communities, educating students on energy education, growing food, and using alternative transportation modes like buses and bikes.

4. Feedback and Improvement

- » The group's preferred communication methods were discussed, with the group agreeing that quarterly newsletters, Zoom meetings, and social media would be effective in reaching a broad audience. To improve the meetings, suggestions included making them shorter, providing meeting materials beforehand to allow for better preparation, and enhancing air quality monitoring to address community concerns more effectively.

5. Final Thoughts

- » The meeting concluded with expressions of appreciation for the community's involvement and input throughout the process. The group reassured their commitment to creating an equitable and effective climate action plan, highlighting the importance of continued collaboration and communication with all stakeholders.



NEXT STEPS

There will be several pop-up events from June to August 2024. The first public meeting (virtual) will be held on October 2nd, 2024 from 5pm to 7pm in eastern time. The second public meeting (in-person) will be held on March 6th, 2025 from 5pm to 7pm in eastern time at USF Selby Auditorium, 8350 N Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL 34243. The links will be updated on the project website <https://scmc-pollutionreduction.com/>

The group agreed continuous feedback and communication with community members will be prioritized to keep everyone informed and involved.