



Economic Development Strategic Plan - RCM2342AS

Task 6 Report

prepared for:

**City of Cape Coral Office of Economic and
Business Development.**

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Table Of Contents

6.a – Business Retention Roundtables 2
 Meeting #1: Tuesday, April 2 – Northwest Regional Library 4
 Meeting # 2” Wednesday, April 3 – Cape Coral Public Library..... 6
6.b – Employer Survey 9
6.c – BR&E Online Webinar 11
6.d – Task 6 Progress Report/video conference..... 11



Task 6: Existing Business Development

6.a – Business Retention Roundtables

For some economic development organizations, Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) is the central role they play. Some years ago, DCG Corplan was retained to identify a new location for a medical services firm that was leaving Cape Coral. The company felt that entry workers were not adequately prepared for work and more seasoned workers had a poor work attitude. The company also noted the lack of higher educational or on-the-job training opportunities.

It is important that the OEED recognize that many businesses simply may be unaware of BR&E incentives or programs available. This is a common problem in communities across the US.

We scheduled two business meeting “roundtables” in different parts of the City oriented at bringing more awareness of available governmental assistance to the business community. While segmenting the meetings geographically might have made travel more convenient for local employers, we determined that dividing the business community into “Goods-Producing” and “Services-Producing” sectors would produce better results for the work. The meetings were scheduled for April 2 and April 3 to be held at the two Cape Coral libraries. The meetings were headed by John Dolan-Heitlinger of D-H & Associates Consulting, following the format described below. Summaries of the Target Industries Clusters were produced as handouts for each meeting. Refer to the Task 6 Appendices for further information.

Through coordination with the City, we obtained email addresses for **54** Goods-producing businesses, and **71** Services-producers. Realizing that this was too small a small an audience, we engaged a commercial service to (RocketReach) to provide us with about **2,500** additional contacts. We combined both lists and sent email invitations to the meetings to **1,007** Goods-producers and **1,290** Services-producers.

Agenda Introduction (5 minutes)

Facilitator Welcome: Welcome, everyone, and thank you for joining today’s focus group. Our objective is to gather insights from you, the business leaders of Cape Coral, to identify key development priorities for our city. Your expertise and perspectives are invaluable to shaping a prosperous future for Cape Coral.

Each table or group should select a chair to follow the agenda and encourage participation from each individual member.

Warm-Up Questions (10 minutes)

Background and Involvement: Could you briefly describe your business and your role within it? How long have you been operating in Cape Coral?

Initial Thoughts on Cape Coral’s Development: In a few words, how would you describe the current State of development in Cape Coral? What do you see as the most positive aspect of our city’s development so far?

Development Priorities (20 minutes)

Key Areas for Development: In your opinion, what are the critical areas for development in Cape Coral (e.g., infrastructure, technology, education, healthcare, tourism, and recreation)? Please explain why.

Challenges and Opportunities: What challenges do you think are hindering development in these areas? Conversely, what opportunities do you see for growth and improvement?

What are the economic factors such as the availability of labor and talent, workforce housing, office or industrial parks, commercial developments

Comparison with Other Cities: Are there any examples from other cities, either within Florida or outside, that you think Cape Coral could learn from in terms of development? What specifically about these examples stands out to you?

Business Environment and Support (20 minutes)

Business Environment: How would you rate the current business environment in Cape Coral? What changes would make it more conducive to growth and innovation?

Support and Resources: What types of support, resources, or policies do you believe would help businesses thrive in Cape Coral? How do you see the city’s role in providing this support?

How does the local and State government help or hinder the development of your business and other businesses that might support your business?

Future Vision and Action (15 minutes)

Vision for Cape Coral: Looking ahead, what is your vision for the future of Cape Coral in the next 5 to 10 years? What key achievements would you like to see?

Prioritization of Actions: Based on our discussion, what are the top three development priorities you believe should be addressed first? Why?

Personal Contribution: What role do you see yourself and your business playing in achieving these development priorities? How can you contribute to Cape Coral’s future growth?

Conclusion and Next Steps (5 minutes)

Thank you and Wrap-Up: Thank you for your insightful contributions. Your feedback is crucial for shaping Cape Coral’s comprehensive development strategy. We will compile the insights from today’s discussion into a report that will be part of the final report to the City of Cape Coral.

During the discussion, the consulting team members should walk from group to group listening and, as appropriate, ask questions to stimulate discussion among focus group participants. Focus group participants should be encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions openly.

Meeting #1: Tuesday, April 2 – Northwest Regional Library

519 Chiquita Blvd N
Rm A (NW)
6:00PM – 7:15PM

Goods-Producing Industries:

- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Repair & Maintenance
- Real estate
- Warehousing & Storage
- Transportation

Summary

These summaries compile insights from two focus group sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, with business members from Cape Coral, facilitated by the DCG Consulting Group. The discussions engaged 8-10 speakers per table, exploring several key themes related to the community's economic development and infrastructural needs.

Commercial Real Estate and Development Challenges

Vacancy and Development Needs: Discussions highlighted the near-zero vacancy rates impeding new businesses from entering the market. Participants emphasized the urgent need for additional commercial and industrial spaces to accommodate demand and support local business growth.

Infrastructure and Permitting Delays: Multiple speakers pointed out the slow permitting process, which adversely affects development timelines. There is a strong consensus on the need for the city to streamline these processes to allow faster development and occupancy.

Economic Growth and Investment Opportunities

Community and Market Potential: Participants discussed Cape Coral's potential for economic growth, focusing on smart growth strategies that include incentives for developers and businesses. The city's large size and growing population are seen as major assets.

Business Support and Infrastructure: There was a call for enhanced support for businesses, especially small enterprises, including better infrastructure and training programs to foster local economic growth.

Workforce Development and Training

Remote Work and Workforce Mobilization: The impact of COVID-19 on work habits, particularly the rise of remote work, was a significant topic. Discussions explored how the city could capitalize on this trend by attracting businesses that offer remote work opportunities.

Training Programs: The need for local training programs, particularly those offering micro-credentials, was emphasized to quickly upskill the workforce to meet local industry demands.

Manufacturing and Industrial Development

Sector Needs: There was a focus on the necessity for a manufacturing extension program and the creation of industrial parks to support manufacturing and industrial sectors. Emphasis was placed on clean tech industries and environmentally friendly industrial development.

Community Planning and Participation

Engagement and Feedback: The importance of community input through surveys and feedback in shaping business development strategies was highlighted, stressing collaborative planning processes.

Government and Taxation

Tax Policies and Incentives: Taxation discussions centered on its impact on business operations, with an emphasis on the potential for tax incentives to attract and retain businesses and the bureaucratic challenges, particularly concerning property taxes.

Cultural and Social Factors

Cultural Impact on Business: The cultural environment of the business community and its impact on business operations and employee satisfaction and retention were explored.

Urban Development and Demographic Changes

Changing Demographics and Urban Planning: Discussions included the need for urban development that accommodates a younger, increasing population, addressing homelessness, and enhancing city planning to improve the quality of life.

Political Influence and Community Engagement

Political and Community Impact: The potential political influence of mobilizing Cape Coral’s population was discussed, along with the critical role of community engagement in ensuring development aligns with residents’ needs.

Meeting # 2” Wednesday, April 3 – Cape Coral Public Library

921 SW 39th Terrace

Meeting Room (CC)

6:00PM – 7:15PM

Services-Producing Industries:

- Professional/business/finance
- Retail
- Education
- Healthcare
- Food Services
- Hospitality
- Arts/Entertainment/Amusement

Summary

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Urban and Community Planning

The focus groups highlighted the necessity of strategic urban planning to address rapid population growth in Cape Coral. Discussions emphasized creating cohesive community networks rather than solely expanding the urban center. The pre-planned city layout by the Rosen brothers was noted as both a beneficial legacy and a present-day challenge. There was a consensus on the importance of integrating community services and maintaining economic vitality through balanced development of housing and business sectors.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Participants discussed significant challenges in expanding road infrastructure and managing traffic congestion. Proposals included the feasibility of adding more lanes, building flyovers, and introducing one-way traffic systems to enhance flow. The need for a comprehensive master transportation plan was evident, focusing on road expansions and speed limit adjustments.

Housing and Real Estate

Affordable housing emerged as a critical concern, with discussions centered on the need to support a diverse economic demographic amidst rising property values and gentrification. The group talked about the impact of these trends on community character and the necessity for workforce housing to accommodate the city's growth.

Economic Development and Business Growth

There was a strong focus on nurturing local businesses, leveraging them for economic growth, and using incentives to retain and expand these enterprises. The challenges of attracting large businesses and technology campuses, due to the city's distance from major highways, were also discussed.

Environmental Concerns and Recreational Planning

Environmental issues were a significant concern, particularly the maintenance of water quality and the potential use of canals for tourism. The groups discussed the need for substantial park spaces and a regional destination park, suggesting that clean waterways are vital for community health and tourist appeal.

Community Services and Amenities

The need for more local services and amenities to enhance residents' quality of life was emphasized. This includes more community-centered spaces like parks and recreational areas, as well as the necessity of improved public services.

Educational Facilities and Opportunities

The desire for more educational institutions, such as colleges or specialized campuses, was highlighted to support economic growth by providing local training and skill development.

Tourism and Marketing

The role of tourism was acknowledged, with discussions on leveraging natural resources to boost tourism, including implementing water taxi services and enhancing marketing strategies to attract visitors.

Political Influence and Community Engagement

The discussions underscored the potential political influence of Cape Coral's growing population and the importance of community involvement in planning and development to ensure growth aligns with residents' needs.

6.b – Employer Survey

Obtaining business input is vital for economic development plans, so an Employer Survey was designed to engage Cape Coral businesses. SurveyMonkey.com was retained to host the online survey, with a series of brief questions devised. Ten questions were posed; nine were multiple-choice, the tenth was an essay-type.

Email invitations were sent to over **6,800** addresses plus the City provided social media support. The survey was opened on April 15, 2024 and closed on May 3, 2024. Altogether, **162** responses were generated, or about a **2.4%** return rate. A summary of the questions and answers are as follows (for detailed information on the Public Survey, refer to the Task 6 Report Appendices):

Q1: How long has your business been operating in Cape Coral?

Leading response: **Ten Years**

Q2: What is the primary industry of your business?

Leading responses: **Other Services, Professional/business, Construction**

Q3: How many employees do you currently have?

Leading response: **1 to 10**

Q4: Are the majority of job applicants ready for work, or do they require training?

Leading response: **Minor job training needed**

Q5: What are the most sought after job aspects new applicants have when seeking employment?
(Please select up to three)

Leading responses: **Steady job/employment security, Earn a lot of money, Good benefits**

Q6: Would you be interested in government-sponsored training programs to enhance the skills of your workforce?

Leading response: **No (But combined Yes and Maybe was a larger total)**

Q7: What are the top three challenges your business is currently facing? (Please select up to three)

Leading responses: **Hiring skilled employees, High operational costs, Marketing and customer acquisition**

Q8: Which of the following government incentives would be most beneficial for your business? (Please select up to three)

Leading responses: **Tax breaks or credits, Reduced bureaucracy and faster permit processes, Grants for small businesses**

Q9: How valuable would partnerships between your business and local educational institutions (e.g., colleges, trade schools) be for your workforce development needs?

Leading response: **Somewhat valuable**

Q10: What specific government actions or policies would assist your business in achieving greater success?

94 written comments were received and the major themes were as follows:

- Affordable workforce housing
- Better waterway access
- Code enforcement
- Easier access to capital
- Government contracting opportunities
- Government transparency
- Incentivizing flex warehouse development
- Incentivizing manufacturing
- Low interest loans for start-ups
- Lower business taxes
- Partnerships with city processes
- Permit expediting
- Property and flood insurance premium assistance
- Reduction of licensing fees
- Regulatory reduction
- Small business development grants
- Street beautification
- Supply chain improvements
- Upgraded infrastructure
- Vocational training silos for the trades

6.c – BR&E Online Webinar

The On-Line Webinar will be postponed until after the draft final report is presented. We feel that input from the Cape Coral City Council on the findings of this report and discussions of the strategic recommendations therein will be needed before introducing employer guidance via the online webinar.

6.d – Task 6 Progress Report/video conference

We conducted a video conference with the Project Review Committee on May 15, 2024. Work product to date was discussed and the materials covered were previously uploaded to the website.