

# APPENDIX A

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## FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

Focus groups were conducted in October, November, and December 2005, and January 2006 to gather community input for the Immokalee Master Plan update. At each meeting, an overview of the planning process was provided along with a summary of findings made during the inventory and analysis phase of this project. A list of focus group attendees and a brief summary of the comments provided by the participants for each episode is provided.

**OCTOBER 18, 2005**

**COLLIER COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

**ATTENDEES:**

- County Commissioners Halas, Coyle, Fiala, Henning, and Coletta
- County Manager Jim Mudd
- Kurt Easton, RMPK Group
- Robert Franke, RMPK Group
- Nicole Fernandez, County Staff
- Fred N. Thomas, Chairman, Immokalee Master Plan Committee

**STRENGTHS / ASSETS**

- People and diversity
- Strong desire to improve the community
- Local leadership
- Tradeport
- Lake Trafford
- Environment
- Sense of place
- Choice of housing types
- Casino
- Rural lands stewardship program

**WEAKNESSES**

- Poor community / high poverty rate
- Poor transportation network
- Economy is based on single industry (agriculture)
- Migrant workers have no community ties
- Lack of restaurants and other activities
- Distance from the coast
- Need more workforce housing
- Education / language
- First impressions
- Lack of a destination draw
- Many dilapidated housing units

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- Community input and buy-in
- Industrial parks
- Affordable housing
- Ave Maria
- Tradeport potential
- Undeveloped land
- Farmer's truck market

- Economic diversification
- Plenty of available land for industrial / commercial / retail
- Potential for retiree community

**THREATS**

- Cost of improvements and who will pay
- Lack of patience
- Haste to get results will short circuit the long term benefits
- Potential for resort development which isn't year-round
- Competition from similar communities
- Not enough community leaders
- Lack of retail uses

**NOVEMBER 30, 2005**

**BUSINESS GROUP**

**ATTENDEES:**

- Fred N. Thomas, Chairman, Immokalee Master Plan Committee
- Mike Taylor – Collin Enterprises
- Julio Estremera – FGCU/SBDC
- Raymond Holland – Florida Community Bank
- Stephen Price – Florida Community Bank
- Bernardo Barnhart – Florida Community Bank
- Bill Klohn – MDG Capital Corp
- Denise Blanton – UF/IFAS
- Nicole Fernandez – Collier County Staff
- Martha Adame -Seminole Tribe of Florida
- Tammie Nemecek - EDC
- Raymond Garza – Seminole Tribe of Florida
- Ernest Freeman – Freeman & Freeman

**ISSUES**

- Impacts of 1990 freeze
- Impacts of over-planting
- Impacts of NAFTA
- Bad press coverage
- Back-log of needed hanger space in County
- Creating work-force housing, jobs, training
- No County annex
- No CRA manager

**BARRIERS**

- Excessive impact fees
- Excessive non-value added cost; i.e. landscaping
- Timeliness of permits
- Timeliness of inspections
- In-fill lots are scarce
- Large tracts of land in single ownership
- Low density requirements
- Lack of facilities at tradeport

**COMMUNITY SERVICES REPRESENTATIVES**

**ATTENDEES:**

- Fred N. Thomas, Chairman, Immokalee Master Plan Committee
- Tari Harris – Front Porch Florida
- Arnie Nieto – RCMA
- Pastor J. Rincon – Bethel AG
- Pastor Selvandieu Joseph
- Jean C-Sainvilus
- John Hoffman – Kiwanis Club/Seniors Connchous
- Peggy Benson – First United Methodist
- Silvia Puente – Info. Collier Library
- Terrie Aviles – Weed and Seed

**ISSUES**

- Diversity of community; i.e. language
- High school seniors leave after graduation/college grads don't return
- Lack of jobs
- Lack of work-force housing
- Most social service resources are geared toward migrant farm workers
- Excessive rental prices
- Class distinctions – upper (on the coast) vs. lower in Immokalee

**BARRIERS**

- One size fits-all mentality
- Seasonal workers don't qualify for unemployment
- Lack of job opportunities other than farm work
- Language skills
- Lack of affordable office space
- Segment of population don't qualify for most assistance
- Farm worker housing is highly regulated

**HOUSING REPRESENTATIVES**

**ATTENDEES:**

- Warren Heltsley – Edison College
- Greg Kouloheras – Habitat for Humanity
- Susan Golden – Collier Co. Housing Grants
- Ana Salazar – EASF
- Wallace Chester – Chester Group
- Essie Serrata – CCHA
- Floyd Crews – Collier County Housing
- Barb Cacchione – EASF
- Dottie Cook - EASF

**ISSUES**

- Housing after Hurricane Wilma
- Availability of affordable platted lots
- No work-force housing
- Image problem
- People who work in Immokalee but live and spend their income elsewhere
- Low millage rate
- So many service providers make it hard to break the cycle of assistance
- Development on the coast gets bigger return on investment
- Older mobile home parks

**BARRIERS**

- Most available land owned by a few land owners
- High median income impacts receiving grant funds
- Most service providers leave at 5PM, leaving no time for workers to visit
- Aid income guidelines – limit services to many people
- Median housing value has sky rocketed

**DECEMBER 1, 2005**

**GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES' REPRESENTATIVES**

**ATTENDEES:**

- Fred N. Thomas, Chairman, Immokalee Master Plan Committee
- Bob Tweedie – Collier County Airport Authority
- Cristina Perez – Code Enforcement – Collier County
- Bob Soter – SF Workforce Development Bd.
- Essie Serrata – Collier County Housing Authority
- Joe Quilty – Collier Co. Transportation Planning

- Michelle Arnold – Collier County Code Enforcement Department
- Dick Rice – Rotary

**ISSUES**

- Only one bi-lingual code enforcement officer is assigned to Immokalee
- Only 2 minimum housing inspectors – in Naples
- Limited vocational training
- Outreach
- Much of County code information is still located in Naples
- Permitting by state and federal agencies
- Florida Tradeport offices are in Marco Island
- Prioritizing transportation needs; i.e. Golden Gate

**BARRIERS**

- Infrastructure construction is slow because of lack of workers
- One size fits all mentality
- Limited resources to complete all needed projects

**EDUCATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES**

**ATTENDEES:**

- Fred N. Thomas, Chairman, Immokalee Master Plan Committee
- Bob Soter – SW Workforce Development Board, Inc.
- Warren Heltsley – Edison College
- Barb Cacchione – EASF
- Floyd Crews
- Tari Harris – Front Porch Florida

**ISSUES**

- Migrant workers keep kids from continuing their education
- Adult education is limited
- Had/have vocational center at high school, but equipment was removed
- School Board ignores Immokalee
- Had a school-run farm but was closed
- High school is having trouble retaining teachers
- Lack of life skills courses
- Edison College can't find faculty to teach in Immokalee

**BARRIERS**

- Limited training opportunities to move from agriculture to other areas
- School Board has been slow to set up a vocational program in town
- School Board is only concerned about K-12
- School Board is a one-size-fits-all institution
- Many medical issues go unattended for fear of INS
- Night class attendance is limited because of students with second jobs
- Getting to adult ed/college is difficult for families with one or no car
- Students coming out of high school need remedial college courses

**RECREATION AND TOURISM REPRESENTATIVES**

**ATTENDEES:**

- Fred N. Thomas, Chairman, Immokalee Master Plan Committee
- Danny Gonzalez – Immokalee Seminoles (Pop Warner football)
- Nancy ---- Seminole Tribe of Florida
- April Goodnight – Immokalee Little League
- Tari Harris
- Murdo Smith – Collier County P&R
- Carol Chamberlain – Seminole Casino
- Brent Moore – Bonita Bay Group

**ISSUES**

- How to increase tourist draws; i.e., Casino, museums
- Lack of space for non-profits
- Lack of ball fields for little league and Pop Warner
- Public swimming pool always needs repairs
- No storage facilities at existing ball fields
- Youth sports leagues have to turn kids away because of lack of space
- Transportation
- School Board has lots of restrictions on use of fields
- County re-organization

**BARRIERS**

- Lack of funds
- In-attention by County
- Keeping all parties aware of available facilities
- Regulations by School Board
- Image of Immokalee as safe place to go to

- No transportation for those who want to participate in sports
- No soccer, softball, or basketball leagues
  
- Asked if, after they graduated college, would they come back to Immokalee; most said they would if:
  - There were jobs;
  - If there were more things to do; and
  
- Would love to raise a family here because of the small town feel, but limited work opportunities

Some ideas for changing the community's image:

- Internet site for Immokalee
- Study help for every student
- Radio station

**JANUARY 11, 2006**

**IMMOKALEE HIGH SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES**

**ATTENDEES:**

Six students representing Beta Club, Key Club, Student Executive Committee, WAVE Club, Marching Band, Volley Ball, Football, Track, Cross County, Cheerleader, and Softball attended a focus group on January 11, 2006.

**ISSUES**

- Bad Reputation
- Only bad news or sports news in media
- No "gap" recreation
- Price is too high for sports activities