

Cool Communities Case Study

A: Cover Sheet Information:

Title: We Did It! The Lacoochee-Trilby Community Center

Case Study Category: Community Partnership

Jurisdiction Name: Pasco County, Florida

County Manager Name: John J. Gallagher, County Administrator

Application Consideration: Rapid Fire Session

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B. Synopsis:

The topic of discussion is the Lacoochee-Trilby community, a 2.5-square-mile area, consisting of three neighborhoods: Lacoochee, Trilby, and Trilacoochee. From 1922 to 1959, the Lacoochee-Trilby area was a thriving industrial area in Pasco County with a major cypress saw mill. With the closing of the saw mill, the Lacoochee-Trilby area has witnessed a gradual decline in its economic and physical environment. This area is one of the most distressed areas in the entire Tampa Bay region and is now the focus of public and private partnerships to bring improvements to its neighborhoods. Although Pasco County is considered an urban County, the Lacoochee-Trilby neighborhood is located in the rural, northeastern portion of the County, with a total population of 1,993 people.

The Lacoochee-Trilby neighborhood has been identified by the Pasco County Board of County Commissioners as a target area, and has been selected by HUD/EPA as a *Designated Signature Community*. During the course of four years, there has been a planning phase which is based on public involvement, with the intent of transforming the Lacoochee-Trilby neighborhood, and to discuss the wishes and goals of the community members on how they wanted the transformation to take place. The County staff has worked with a diverse group of participants including residents, community stakeholders, civic organizations, business owners, elected officials, and state and federal government representatives to create a realistic plan reflective of the community and stakeholder interests and aspirations. Community participants at the workshops included those from all demographic groups: including young and old, Hispanic, African-American, white, rural landowners, businessmen, and residents living in the public and USDA housing complexes in Lacoochee.

Key Players:

Senator Bill Nelson
Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative (WREC)
Lewis Abraham Boys and Girls Club
Lacoochee/Trilby/Trilacoochee Steering Committee
Multiple Private Donors and Public Support
US Department of Housing and Urban Development
Pasco County, Florida
State of Florida

The citizen participation program was built around public workshops, and extensive communication through mail, electronic mail, telephone, and articles in local newsletters. To reach out to the community, the County partnered with two grassroots community organizations – the Greater Trilby Community Association and the Lacoochee Community Area Task Force (CAT) – to get the word out to the members. Stories about the public workshops appeared in the Northeast Pasco Newsletter, and multiple email updates were sent to the recipients of the electronic version of the newsletter regarding the workshop dates. In addition, the County coordinated with the CAT and held the first public workshop with the community at the Lacoochee Elementary School. By doing so, this allowed the County to piggyback off an existing group's regular meeting schedule and attendees, and also gave the County the opportunity to attract residents that would not otherwise attend a County-initiated event. The Lacoochee Elementary School played a key role in attracting the residents to the public workshops. Through the use of ConnectEd, the school sent out automated messages to the phone numbers of the parents and guardians at the school, providing them information about public workshops. The Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative, the Anchor Institution of the community, also served as a partner in attracting private businesses to attend the workshops.

They coordinated with private consulting firms such as King Engineering, Spring Engineering and Coastal Engineering to submit preliminary plans for planning boundaries and infrastructure recommendations to establish a baseline from which to grow and develop recommendations for the area. Lastly, information on the workshops was provided in both English and Spanish, reaching out to the bilingual population in the Lacoochee and Trilby areas.

During the workshops, County staff introduced the planning process to the public and community members. Approximately 100 people attended the first meeting and broke out into ten groups to highlight their comments on the current status of the community on aerial maps. The members sat in mixed groups at each of the tables, exchanging information and recognizing that they had more similarities than differences in their hopes for the community. In total, more than 200 residents attended the public workshops held in July and September 2009, providing comments on the current status of the area, and giving feedback on plan concepts and recommendations. Comments were recorded from the verbal presentations, identified on the maps and were catalogued.

Since then, numerous workshops and meetings have been held within the community. The primary objective was getting everyone (community members, key partners and leaders) on the same page and willing to set aside other projects to focus on one common goal. During the initial phase of the partnership meetings, a lot of time was spent over several meetings going over goals, budgets and responsibilities of the members. (12-18 months) It was decided that the first goal for the community was to build a community center in the heart of Lacoochee. This community center was a mutual priority by the local government, primary employer WREC, the school district and the community members. Through the strengths of each segment of the population we were able to target multiple funding sources and expedite the design and construction of the center.

Once the decision was made to build a community center in 2010, the primary objective was funding. Although everyone recognized the need for the center, the area has been historically underserved and is primarily low income. The partnerships among the key players were integral to identifying alternative funding sources and cost savings to see the building come into fruition. Identifying real non-profit relationships was key; there have been a lot of failed attempts at bringing health care and employment opportunities to the community due to its rural location. Through the networking of multiple resources, the community was able to identify ways to utilize the community center not only for its primary purpose, housed by the Boys and Girls Club, but also as a centralized location for essential social services.

During 2011, the funding goal was realized by the donation of park land (Stanley Park) by Pasco County, \$1 million from the State of Florida, \$300,000 from Pasco County's Community Development Block Grant fund, and approximately \$550,000 from private efforts spearheaded by Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative. Also, the design of the community center was completed pro bono by Spring Engineering, so the design phase cost zero dollars. This was a considerable savings to the project and jumped started the process of actually building a community center.

The Lacoochee-Trilby community partnership designed a fully functional, multi purpose community center, which will be located at Stanley Park, (across the street from Lacoochee Elementary School) and will serve as a hub for the Lacoochee-Trilby neighborhood. Ground breaking is anticipated towards the end of 2012. The community center will consist of 12,800 square feet and will bring access to employment opportunities, social services, recreation, after school and summer programs, at risk youth intervention and medical services to an area that

has been historically underserved. The center will house an indoor basketball court, a stage for school plays and events, retractable bleachers, kitchen, dining area, concession stand, computer lab and a Pasco County Sheriff's sub-station that will house the Officer Friendly Program. More importantly the center solidified the common goal of increasing community identity and strengthening partnerships amongst multiple entities that shared common goals but different approaches.

The Boys & Girls Club Youth Services Program will be dedicated to improving the lives of at-risk and underserved youth, as well as their families through safe, age and developmentally appropriate programs and activities. Core activities within the Youth Services Program will include comprehensive academic and literacy programs, character and leadership development activities, sports, fitness and recreation activities, gang prevention initiatives, as well as health and life skills programs. The Boys & Girls Club proposes to serve approximately 500 youth annually, with an average attendance of 125 youth daily.

The job of Officer Friendly will be to serve as a liaison between the community and law enforcement. The Officer Friendly serves as a resource that the residents can trust and confide in, providing a myriad of services to the community such as education and prevention in the schools, organizing community events, and assisting in providing food and health services to residents as well as assisting in the prevention of crime. The Officer Friendly frequently serves as a mentor to students in the area by serving as a law enforcement officer, Boy Scout leader, and community advocate. Officer Friendly teaches the G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training) program to elementary students, many of whom live in the targeted area. This is a proven, evidence-based program to educate young people about making positive choices and helps serve as a deterrent to joining and associating with gangs.

In July 2012, Premier Community Healthcare Group Inc. announced it will operate a primary and pediatric health care clinic in the center. Access to health care is essential in improving the quality of life for Lacoochee residents, who currently have to travel to Premier's clinic in Dade City, which is more than eight miles away. Premier, a nonprofit organization, accepts Medicaid as well as Medicare, the uninsured and private insurance plans. Their presence will make it convenient for over 100 children who are part of the Boys & Girls Club that will occupy the community center, as well as their families and community residents.

An aggressive public involvement campaign has continued in this neighborhood, with the creation of the Lacoochee-Trilby-Trilacoochee Steering Committee being at the forefront. This committee, meeting monthly, has established a centralized community forum for residents to remain engaged in the transformation process. In addition, this forum has allowed for residents to discuss grassroots opportunities for grant funding and other methods of maintaining community identity.

The important thing to recognize is that there is more to community than similarity of circumstances. Community involves understanding of one another and sharing concerns. Partnerships like these can be developed within any city or county. The key element is identifying a common purpose and willingness to set aside personal aspirations and work together towards a common goal.

Take-Aways:

After listening to the presentation, the attendees will gain the following insight:

- Methods on how to develop community partnerships
- Methods on how to prioritize community needs
- Overcoming obstacles to implement community based projects
- Maintaining trust during the implementation process

C. Presentation Style:

- The case study will be presented by a PowerPoint presentation.
- A mock community meeting will be held during the session. The community meeting shall include aerial maps with examples of the strategic planning vision that the residents and community stakeholders identified during the planning process. This will allow the participants to see the types of information that were requested during the planning meetings and learn different types of styles to retrieve information from residents.