

List of Main Points from Fort Myers Beach, FL

1. Local and state laws should be reviewed and verified with local officials prior to instructions being issued to the general public.

Five months after the storm FEMA published a 50% property evaluation rules letter stating the property evaluations previously announced by the Lee County Property Assessor were wrong. Then, after FEMA staff had a clarifying discussion with the local property assessor, FEMA reversed its position on property valuation, agreeing with the assessor's original published calculation. This letter was published 20 weeks after Hurricane Ian and caused universal confusion, unneeded delays in issuing building permits and added further frustration for all property owners.

2. In some cases FEMA didn't even know its own statutes. The determination of eligibility and where temporary housing can be located was initially incorrectly decided by FEMA staff. FEMA went so far as to inspect, approve eligibility, deliver, and set up temporary housing. A later determination was made not to allow occupancy in the already placed housing. Leaving survivors without a viable housing option as disbelieving, displaced, and angry residents looked on as FEMA reversed its original temporary housing decision. Once again, a basic understanding of FEMA's own rules would have avoided giving false expectations to a group of desperate people and further creating unnecessary delays in obtaining a place to live out of the elements.

3. The process of getting displaced survivors into temporary housing needs to be expedited. The lack of housing options due to the island-wide structural devastation caused by Ian and the resulting sudden increase in rents in surrounding communities, unaffected by the storm, resulted in many of our residents relocating. This unwanted relocation is having a significant negative impact on the diversity and economic viability of our community.

4. A Town advocate should be appointed by FEMA to expedite movement of Public Assistance projects through the recovery process. Timely reports with accurate updates and pending issues need to be provided to the town for resolution.

The length of time for approving the rebuilding of public facilities has taken far too long. These include critical safety projects such as street lighting and road repairs as well as restoring facilities to deliver necessary community services in Town Hall, Bay Oaks and Bayside park. We have been unable to get accurate information on statuses throughout the approval process on every time sensitive project resulting in significant delays. If FEMA limits the town to six months to clean up debris, FEMA timelines for responses and action should align with that limitation.

5. The entire response process should be greatly simplified and decision making flattened.

FEMA's core mission of emergency and disaster response as administered doesn't meet the critical needs of displaced persons, unsafe facilities, and basic day to day survival needs- food fresh water and sanitary facilities. Conflicting and cumbersome bureaucratic forms and responses, and convoluted programs result in costly delays when communicated decisions don't provide timely help within existing communities for its residents, ultimately inflicting additional, compounding hardship upon them.

6. Community Assistance programs should be simple and quick.

FEMA's Community Assistance Recovery Support Function and other federal assistance programs have unclear objectives and outcomes. FEMA staff seem unable to articulate actual benefits to the community. Writing a check to cover the costs of assistance to the local government would be a much more efficient and expeditious process.

7. Improve documentation of decisions and actions taken by each individual FEMA staff member on each case. This would allow transition of staff without loss of previous transition actions.

FEMA staff cycles in and out with poor transition of previously supplied information and decisions made, resulting in the same questions and eligibility criteria being asked multiple times and often with conflicting determinations of assistance eligibility. Ultimately wasting valuable time for both FEMA staff and applicants' response and recovery time. Field staff should be authorized to make decisions. Decisions rendered should stick and be supported.

8. Information gathered throughout the process should be shared and transparent through a database and regularly scheduled reporting. FEMA staff are separated into various functional groups with seemingly no single point of contact or oversight to coordinate the information or recovery activities actions taken. We were told FEMA staff are actually instructed not to share information with other FEMA staff because of confidentiality and proprietary nature of FEMA's function.

9. Preestablished timelines need to reflect local conditions and Fema needs to empower the Town Advocate to make decisions regarding task completion dates, and resources needed to implement response and recovery. Preestablished timelines placed on debris removal, housing, and monetary assistance become arbitrary and impractical when they do not take into consideration "on the ground" circumstances. It seems a Category 1 storm declaration has the same guidelines and timelines as a Category 5.

10. Aid should not be left at the State or County level but equitably applied to municipalities. If municipalities do not have the qualified resources to manage the process and funds, FEMA should provide those resources. There seemed to be too much reliance on state and county authorities to enact FEMA aid with the state hesitant to provide any latitude in consideration of on the ground situations. In the case of Fort Myers Beach we were constantly receiving differing assistance and resources than the

county and limited to their timeline, prioritization and resources drawn down from the state and state from FEMA. Too often our requests for assistance had to be requested through the state or counties' requests and accept their conditions.