

Charlotte County Weekly Update for 7/25/2008

By Roger Baltz

Charlotte County has received an additional \$1.3 million from FEMA to enhance the beach re-nourishment at Stump Pass Beach. Originally, we had authorization from FEMA to restore the Pass to pre-Hurricane Charley conditions. By instituting cost savings and bringing the original project scope in under budget, FEMA was willing to increase the scope of work to include additional sand and the planting of sea oats. This was a win for the County, our residents and the environment.

Draft land management plans for the Shell Creek property and the Buck Creek property have now been completed. The plans will be used as an adaptive management tool to provide public access and to restore the properties once funds become available. The draft plans will now go through an intensive peer review with state and federal agencies. Both properties were purchased through our Conservation Charlotte Land Acquisition Program.

Last week I had an opportunity to meet with the Commission to discuss both short-term and long-term goals for our County. In light of the continuing budget challenges, we discussed managing expectations and developing a long-term strategic plan. Over the coming months we will be sharing more details on the goals and our plans to accomplish them. Seven specific County Commission goals were identified. The goals are:

1. Develop near and long term strategic financial plan for our County.
2. Re-write the County Comprehensive Plan.
3. Continue and strengthen comprehensive water supply and conservation for our County.
4. Analyze the County MSBU's system.
5. Resolve the phosphate situation.
6. Improve internal and external communications of the County.
7. Aggressively continue the promotion of Economic Development in Charlotte County.

As we continue to restructure our organization and down-size, we will be relocating employees and releasing rental offices. In August our County Animal Control operations will be relocating to the Public Safety Building and the MPO will move to the Environmental Campus.

We have begun conducting a series of public workshops to ask our citizens their thoughts and ideas for the future of Charlotte County. This update to our Comprehensive Plan, called Smart Charlotte 2050 will be a year-long process of community involvement. To track our progress and to learn about upcoming public engagement opportunities please visit our website CharlotteCountyFL.com and click on the Smart Charlotte link.

The County is very pleased that our most recent property and casualty insurance renewal resulted in a 20% reduction in premiums. This was a savings of \$600,000.

A large-scale improvement project is currently underway in the Carmalita Street area. The roadway and drainage improvement project has just reached the 50% stage. The project includes a major widening, full signalization and turn-lanes at the intersection of Florida Street and Carmalita. This will also improve the drainage near Charlotte High School and Punta Gorda Middle School. The project should be completed in March 2009. We ask our residents to drive cautiously around this construction zone.

The Department of Community Affairs published notice of its intent to approve amendments to Charlotte County's Comprehensive Plan related to future water supply. The County's Utilities and Growth Management departments worked cooperatively on these amendments with input from other local water supply utilities. The amendments include a new Water Supply section of the Infrastructure Element and amendments to the Capital Improvements and Intergovernmental Coordination Elements.

Permit activity on single family homes saw a very slight increase in June with a total of 33 issued. After watching building permits sharply decline over the last year, this is encouraging but it would be pre-mature to draw any conclusions as yet.

The County hosted another program in the Ask the Building Department series. Homeowner, condo and landlord associations had an opportunity to learn more about zoning, code enforcement and growth management concepts that were specific to their members. This series has become very popular and we plan to continue it on a regular basis.