

Charlotte County Weekly Update for 8/22/2008
By Roger Baltz

I want to thank everyone who assisted with emergency operations during Tropical Storm Fay. Community organizations, County employees, local hospitals, law enforcement, and many other agencies, worked together to ensure the safety of Charlotte County residents. We are fortunate that the storm resulted in minimal impacts to Charlotte County.

Our County Commissioners have continued to take actions related to economic development strategic planning, with the establishment of a fund which will be used to provide economic incentives. The incentives will be offered to businesses that desire to relocate to our area, with the intent being to increase our tax base and to create well-paying jobs for our residents.

We are making steady progress in the rewriting of our County Comprehensive Plan. In July the County held a three day visioning session (Smart Charlotte 2050) in which we received significant public input. Staff members are now formalizing the data collected and will bring a draft "vision plan" to the Commission for comment and approval by the end of the year.

We are continuing to prepare our County budget and move forward with reductions associated with preparing for the coming fiscal year. We have eliminated 81 positions as part of our reductions scenario and layoffs have been occurring for the past two weeks. As a result of these actions, the County BOCC approved staffing levels will be slightly less than they were in 2004-05.

Commissioners approved the allocation of \$30 million to pay down the Murdock Village loan debt. This action reduces the principal from roughly \$83 million to \$53 million. Commissioners also allocated \$2,500,000 to be utilized for design improvements to the portion of Toledo Blade Blvd. which is a central corridor within Murdock Village. An additional \$3,500,000 was set aside to fund future infrastructure elements, such as utilities and roads.

Another portion of the Toledo Blade Blvd. road widening project (Hillsborough to US 41) has recently completed the permit process. This project is being accomplished via an interlocal agreement between the City of North Port and Charlotte County. We are working with the City to schedule a construction start date.

Our Aqui Esta Road Project has completed the permit process and is currently out to bid. At a recent pre-bid conference, where contractors gather to ask questions on the proposed project, we had 34 companies in attendance. This level of interest is great to see, and we hope it is an indication that we will receive competitive bids. Bids are due on September 10.

We have received notification that the County has been awarded a number of FEMA wind mitigation grants. These funds will allow us to purchase hurricane shutters for a number of fire stations and park buildings. This assistance will allow us to increase the number of facilities that have been storm hardened and will result in less liability to the County.

Our West County Mini-Transfer & Recycling Facility is officially open for business. I appreciate our resident's patience during the remodeling period, but I am sure you will appreciate the improved services that we are now able to provide at this location. The facility has undergone major renovations and has expanded to meet the needs of West County

The County Utilities Department received confirmation from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) that the consent order associated with the County's Burnt Store Water Reclamation Facility has been satisfied. This is a positive step for the Burnt Store corridor. The release of the consent order means the County can utilize the full .5 million gallons per day (MGD) treatment capacity for which the facility was designed. The consent was in place when the County purchased the facility in 2003. Since that time, the Utilities department has upgraded the treatment process and now produces reclaimed water for irrigation. This is an important component of our water conservation plan that reuses the treated water for irrigation in place of potable (drinking) water resources.

Over the last several weeks we have been sharing information regarding the local option sales tax extension, which is on the August 26 ballot. You can find information regarding the sales tax extension and the proposed projects by visiting our website at CharlotteCountyFL.com. Regardless of your viewpoint, I hope you take the time to vote on this important issue.