

Charlotte County Weekly Update for 9/19/08

By Roger Baltz

The Commissioners held the first public hearing on the proposed budget for fiscal year 2008/2009. The budget process has been quite lengthy, involving over 16 separate workshops to examine County expenditures. While we have made significant reductions, more work will be required to assure that the County operations remain financially sound. Additional recommendations will be brought forward in the coming months for the Commissioners' consideration. The final public hearing on the budget will be on Sept. 25, 5:01 p.m. at the Murdock Administrative Center.

This month the County held two public meetings to solicit input on the vision for the U.S. 17 Corridor. This Corridor Planning Study project is a land use study of the approximately eight-mile stretch of U.S. 17 corridor leading from the DeSoto County/Charlotte County boundary to the City of Punta Gorda. The study will examine existing development trends and the potential for development and redevelopment. The meetings included a presentation and a period for public comment. The goal of the study is to propose strategies to minimize or avoid any associated negative effects of development along this portion of U.S. 17.

September is Library Card Sign Up Month, a time when the American Library Association and libraries remind parents that a library card is the most important school supply. For the third year, King Fisher Fleet at Fisherman's Village is offering a free sunset cruise to anyone signing up for a library card this month. The Board of County Commissioners proclaimed this month as Library Card sign Up Month in Charlotte County at its September 9 meeting.

On Sept. 9 our Growth Management staff presented 25 Large Scale Comprehensive Plan Amendments to the Board of County Commissioners during their Land Use meeting. Florida State Statutes allows Large Scale Comprehensive Plan Amendments to be adopted only twice a year. Highlights of the items approved by the Commissioners included a Mining and Resource Extraction future land use classification that gives the County more discretion in locating commercial mining activities; three new future land use categories that will allow the creation of functional mixed use developments in the county, and a future land use amendment for a 300+ acre high intensity industrial development in the northwest corner of the Tuckers Grade/I75 interchange.

Our County Commissioners authorized County staff to proceed into negotiations with Boston Culinary Group for the Food & Beverage Concession at the new Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center. Local caterers appeared at the meeting to express concerns about limited access for Punta Gorda vendors. It is our intention to attempt to address as many of the issues as possible during the negotiation process.

One of our contractor license investigators recently worked with a homeowner who had hired an unlicensed contractor. Through negotiations, the County was able to arrange for the homeowner to receive nearly \$15,000 in restitution from the contractor.

Over the last year and a half our Geographic Information System (GIS) and Land Information System (LIS) departments have been working to update the county addressing system. The main goal was to improve the data's accuracy as well as to

provide a method of editing that maintains a level of high accuracy. The system was recently put to the test when we were requested to match our data to the 911 data provided by the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office. Of the over 110,000 records that were provided, our system was able to match all but 80 records or 99.93%. This presents a milestone in achieving the highest level of accuracy for use throughout the County Enterprise and for public use of the data.

The Regional Planning Councils of Florida recently completed a study of the Statewide Regional Evacuation Program. Many of the questions asked in the survey were meant to gauge how effective public officials are in the dissemination of preparedness information and how well residents are prepared for emergencies. Charlotte County residents lead Southwest Florida in many of the categories surveyed. Most notably, nearly 80% of Charlotte County residents are prepared to care for themselves for a minimum of three days without electricity and water. The ability of residents to remain independent under those circumstances is the key to an effective emergency response. Our Emergency Management staff continues to expand their efforts in preparing residents and visitors for any eventuality. The most recent effort is through the use of Charlotte Alert, a mass notification system. Messages are distributed via email and anyone with an email account can subscribe to Charlotte Alert and receive important public safety information. If you would like to receive bulletins from our Emergency Management office visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.com and subscribe to Charlotte Alert.