

Administrator's Update 10/10/2008
By Roger Baltz

On September 25, 2008 the Board of County Commissioners held their last budget public hearing and approved the County budget for the fiscal year which began October 1, 2008, completing a process that began in January. The Adopted Budget includes addressing approximately \$32.5 Million in revenue shortfalls through budget cuts, staff reductions, and one-time revenue re-direction. With additional shortfalls possible over the next several years we will continue to look at ways to economize while providing our core government services to our residents.

This past week we held the groundbreaking for the Coral Creek Bridge replacement project. The new construction will replace the existing bridge that was built in 1951. The new alignment will remove the extreme curve at CR 771 and Coral Creek, will provide for future traffic volume, and provide for enhanced emergency access. Construction is expected to take two years.

The Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Agency and the Punta Gorda Community Redevelopment Agency met to discuss projects underway in both redevelopment areas. As you may have noted, beautification improvements have been made at the north end of the bridges crossing the Peace River. The two groups will be hosting a community event on January 24 that is intended to bring both sides of Charlotte Harbor closer together. More information will be available next month.

Our new automated once-a-week garbage pickup has begun. This improved service lowered the garbage rates and locked in the price for two years. Other benefits are reduced fuel costs and the reduced wear and tear on roads that taxpayers must maintain. If you have any questions on this new program, please call our garbage cart hotline at 941.883.3533.

The State of Florida recently passed the Florida Energy Bill which establishes a statewide goal of 75% recycling by the year 2020. Charlotte County has begun meeting with state representatives to learn more about the impact of this bill. Accomplishing this goal will require significant changes in the way our community manages solid waste materials. Charlotte County currently has voluntary recycling with a goal of 30% which, we know from experience, is not going to be easy to reach. The new plan also includes a goal to recycle up to 10% of organic materials into compost. Charlotte County has already begun a composting project using our Utilities domestic waste water sludge combined with our landfill's yard waste and landscape debris.

Charlotte County has taken part in a FEMA pilot program to increase efficiency in the post storm collection of hurricane debris. As many of you may remember, debris removal was one of the biggest challenges, and expenses, after Hurricane

Charley. Part of the FEMA program encourages communities to produce a comprehensive plan that outlines debris management after storm events, which Charlotte County just completed. The incentive for producing the plan is an additional 5% in reimbursement from FEMA for debris removal costs.

Renovation of the Port Charlotte Boat Ramp docks is now complete. Several deteriorated pilings have been replaced, all substructure and decking have been rebuilt. Decking material used was composite wood made up of recycled plastics and wood fibers.

At the direction of our County Commissioners, we have evaluated the fees we charge for fencing permits. Upon review, it was determined that the permitting process could be modified to shorten the time for plan review and lower the fees, as well. On October 1, 2008 the cost for a fence permit dropped from \$400 to \$75.

We have seen a slight up turn in numbers of residential housing permit applications. The September single family residential permits issued totaled 29, which is a slight increase over the previous month.

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