

Charlotte County Weekly Update for 11/14/08

By Roger Baltz, County Administrator

The County's 5-year Capital Projects plan (CIP) was approved by the Commission on Oct. 28. The CIP is one of the largest components of the County Budget. The CIP includes projects that are funded from a variety of sources. Examples of current projects funded by Ad Valorem (property taxes) include the Jail Expansion and the Events & Conference Center.

Our County Utilities and Environmental Services staffs have been working together to implement a new composting operation. Rather than hauling treated sludge to the Okeechobee landfill for disposal, Utilities now transports it to the County landfill where it is mixed with mulch and used for compost. In the past three months, Utilities has saved more than \$63,000 in transportation and disposal fees through this innovative partnership.

Enterprise Florida assisted the Charlotte Economic Development Office in organizing a visit with the German Consulate in Miami. German companies are very interested in doing business in Florida, specifically Southwest Florida. Business interests from Germany could include renewable energy, bio and specialty manufacturing.

Our Solid Waste Resource Division has documented 34,000 visitors this year to the County's Mini Transfer & Recycling facilities, a 34% increase over last year. Recycling has become very important to extending the life of our landfill, which can result in a considerable cost savings. The rise in visitors also indicates the increasing awareness of the public in protecting the environment and reducing waste.

The bridges over the Fordham Waterway, between Conway and Easy Streets, have re-opened to traffic. The north and south access roads have been closed for ten months while the bridges were replaced. The new bridges are wider and sidewalks have been installed for pedestrian safety.

FEMA declared the Stump Pass Beach Management program officially impacted by Tropical Storm Fay. The beach lost approximately 97,000 cubic yards of sand due to the storm. FEMA's declaration could provide Charlotte County with up to \$2 million in additional revenue for future beach re-nourishment projects.

Charlotte County Master Gardeners were recognized with an Award of Excellence for the best County Newsletter in the state at the 28th Annual Master Gardener Conference held in Coral Springs. In addition, several "Years of Service" awards were given out to our volunteers including a Master Gardener who has worked with us for 25 years! Our valued Master Gardener Program trains volunteers to assist consumers with research-based, unbiased information in all areas of home horticulture.

Employees of the Public Safety Department met with representatives of the Charlotte County Bird Owner's Club, to discuss plans and procedures to follow in emergencies. The club estimates that upwards of 5,000 birds, or more, are owned by local residents. These birds could require special evacuation in an approaching storm. It is critical to our emergency planning for the County to be aware of unique situations that may impact evacuations. If your organization or business has a special need that must be considered during any type of emergency, now is the time to contact our Emergency Management office, not as the storm approaches

The County receives numerous calls each month regarding homes with overgrown lawns and high grass. The County Commissioners have taken action by revising the lot maintenance ordinance to provide for a faster review process. The change will reduce the time complaints are heard from 45 days to 10 days by routing tall grass complaints to a hearing officer instead of the

Code Enforcement Board. If the owner cannot, or will not, take care of the complaint, the County will hire a contractor to cut the grass and place a lien on the property to cover the expense.

Charlotte County has received notification from the Florida Department of Community Affairs that the federal government has released the 2009 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) award amounts. Charlotte County's 2008 funding was \$159,019. We expect to receive \$554,576 for the 2009 Program, a significant increase over the previous year. The Program provides an annual payment to utility companies on behalf of eligible low income households to help offset home energy costs. Grant funds are expected to be available after the first of the year.