

# Charlotte Assembly 2001

## Implementation Plan & Status Report

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Charlotte Assembly 2001  
Executive Summary

From February through June 2002 members from the Steering Committee of Charlotte Assembly 2001 reviewed the Policy Statement and developed the information into an implementation plan. The implementation plan delineates action taken and steps planned for each of the five areas of concern. The five sections of the plan are: customer service, education, human services, infrastructure, and natural resources.

- The Customer Service segment specifically deals with ways that County Government could improve customer service. Staff met with a representative from the Charlotte Assembly to create an action plan.

- The emphasis of the Education items were proposed to promote quality education. This section of the policy statement was forwarded to the new Superintendent of Charlotte County Public School District.

- The majority of the discussion points at Charlotte Assembly 2001 revolved around the topic of Human Services. The five areas of human services discussed in detail by the steering committee are:

1. child care
2. health care
3. housing
4. general recommendations
5. mental health

For each of these five topics the steering committee brought in the "experts" in Charlotte County to discuss in detail the recommendations of the Policy Statement. From these discussions came the action plan and "expert" agency to lead the action.

- Infrastructure included Parks & Recreation, Roads & Transportation, Fire/EMS, Economic Development, Design Standards, and Neighborhood Planning. Charlotte County staff updated the action plan applying the schedules developed for budget and the Board's goals.

- The Natural Resources portion of Charlotte Assembly 2001 recommended actions to protect, preserve and enhance the ecological character of the area. Again, Charlotte County staff updated the action plan applying the schedules developed for budget and the Board's goals.

This report provides an action plan to accomplish the Charlotte Assembly 2001 goals. Staff recommends revisiting this plan twice a year to update and evaluate the strategy.

Charlotte Assembly 2001  
Implementation Plan  
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# Charlotte Assembly 2001

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

### **CHARLOTTE ASSEMBLY 2001**

August 16-18, 2001

Sponsored by  
The Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners

Planned by  
The Charlotte Assembly 2001 Steering Committee

# POLICY STATEMENT

## CHARLOTTE ASSEMBLY 2001

At the close of their discussion, the participants of this assembly reviewed and adopted as a group the following statement. The statement represents general agreement. However, no one was asked to sign it. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to every recommendation.

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. With the support of the Charlotte County Board of Commissioners and the County Administration, many active citizens in Charlotte County have been working together for several years to forge a blueprint for the County's future and to put their ideas into action. This report is from the Charlotte Assembly 2001. Earlier Assemblies in 1996 and 1998 laid the foundation for the present discussion. The citizenry is committed to sustained involvement in County politics, planning, and action.
- B. The County's Assembly in 1996 had a major impact on Charlotte's comprehensive planning process, which is required under Florida's system of growth management. Shortly after the 1996 Assembly delivered its recommendations, the County's comprehensive plan was revised to reduce by half the size of the County's urban services area. This will help preserve the area's community character, protect the harbor, and promote compact, contiguous urban development. Also flowing from the Charlotte Assembly '96 were policies to, among other things, address the county's platted lands problem,

attract new businesses, and make growth pay its own way. In addition, the County expanded its communication programs in community outreach, an annual report, speakers bureau and government day at the mall.

- C. The 1998 Assembly brought forth some major new initiatives. The County obtained State dollars to purchase more than 15,000 lots to address the problem of the old General Development Corporation's developments that lacked sewer systems and included numerous uninhabited lots. The County made investments in drainage, mostly in the Three Lakes Area in Greater Port Charlotte, and Oyster Creek/Newgate Waterway in West County, began a \$35 million asphalt overlay program underway, building new regional parks in West County, Mid County and South County; spending \$13 million to provide sidewalks throughout the County, contributing \$750,000 for performing arts at Charlotte High School in Punta Gorda. Charlotte County is working to develop an inter-local agreement between the Airport Authority to jointly fund a common economic development program rather than having two overlapping programs and duplications. In March of 2001, the County and the City opened a joint fire/EMS station in Punta Gorda Isles, reducing emergency response times in a cost-effective manner. The County government has formed partnerships with other agencies, such as One Stop/Career Center and contracted out the Congregate Meal Program. The County government matches the contribution of the YMCA children's youth and family services in its contract with Department of Children and Family Services (old HRS) to provide subsidized child care (on a prorated basis based on income), began a Dial-a-Ride service in 2001 under a contract with a private provider, and supported three separate projects to expand affordable housing options.
- D. The Charlotte Assembly 2001 was held at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County on August 16-18, 2001. More than one hundred and thirty people participated. The Assembly was planned by a Steering Committee of 25 members with diverse backgrounds and interests. The Steering Committee selected participants to reflect many aspects of the community, including

geography, business, government, civic groups, faith-based organizations, non-profits, minorities, retirees, youth, sports, the environment, education, and others. The questions covered at the Assembly, which were developed by the Steering Committee, addressed the participants' vision for the County's future; community growth; government; human services; economic development; and infrastructure. As keynote speaker Ron Thomas, Director of Habitat for Humanity, said, "The commonality among all of you is your passion for this community. Each of you has a gleam in your eye.... You are a room full of 'gleamers.'"

## **II. VISION**

A vision statement was written during the 1996 Assembly and modified at the '98 Assembly to be more in tune with current issues of concern. Assembly participants said they wanted the statement to be updated again and authorized the Assembly 2001 Steering Committee to do so within the next thirty days.

## **III. Meeting Human Needs: Public, Corporate and Private Responses**

- A. Charlotte County should strive to provide all of its residents with accessible social services to include, but not limited to, affordable health care, mental health services, housing, and child care; and it should do so through education and forging partnerships among the State and County governments, the community, and the private sector. Addressing these issues will not only improve the quality of life for Charlotte County residents but will also encourage economic growth and development. However, Charlotte County should strike a balance with the economic reality of the community and the cost of goods that must be purchased.
- B. Health and human services and needs are interrelated. People who experience problems that affect their economic, physical, and mental health (such as loss of employment, illness, lack of child care, and homelessness) are in need of a

safety net. They have difficulty working, their health may suffer, and so on. We recognize that failing to help people early on, while perhaps seen as conserving scarce public resources for the most needy, may actually result in greater community costs. We urge greater financial support for these necessary services from both State and County governments, the community and the private sector. It is the attitude of the public, private and non-profit communities to offer residents a hand up, not a hand out.

- C. There is a tie between economic conditions in Charlotte County and the population's need for health and human services. Charlotte County residents who lack jobs with good wages are often unable to meet their own needs independently. The source of the problem is two-fold and tends to be self-perpetuating: many jobs in the area pay low wages, and yet the limited job skills of the labor force present a barrier to job growth in industries with higher wages. An important role for local governments and the community is to help unemployed persons and low-wage workers as they strive to better their lives and those of their families. They need education and occupational skills training, and low-cost transportation services to get to school, training sites, and places of employment. They would also benefit from incentives to encourage private enterprise to construct child care facilities. Such economic development efforts would decrease the burden on the County government to meet increasing service demands; they would also impact human service needs across the board.

D. The welfare-to-work initiative in Charlotte County is important for helping people become self-sufficient, but it has some gaps in both programs and outreach:

1. Programmatic Gaps. There appears to be a shortage of qualified people to carry out programs. Some Assembly participants believe that this shortage can be solved by encouraging volunteerism, but others argued that the shortage is in specialty areas that volunteers are unlikely to be able to handle. Another programmatic gap is the absence of a satellite office of "One Stop" in Englewood.
2. While human services providers have made a good effort to tell people about the various services and support system available to help people move from welfare to work, more needs to be done. In particular, more attention should be placed on communicating to "potential beneficiaries" and "influencers." More grassroots involvement is needed to reach people in the welfare-to-work program. In addition, we need to reach out to employers, educators, community and civic groups, faith-based organizations, homeowners' associations, volunteer organizations, etc., and inform them of the various ways they can promote, support or otherwise lend a hand.

E. The Assembly participants focused on four areas where the County 's human service activities should be enhanced. (These are not listed in any particular order.):

1. Affordable Housing. There are three types of housing needs: emergency, transitional, and affordable housing. There are still many people in the community who live in sub-standard or inadequate, affordable housing; and

a lack of such housing is directly related to other issues such as truancy, unemployment, poverty, an unstable workforce, and homelessness.

Housing is a basic necessity; without affordable housing people are often unable to obtain other basic necessities, such as child care and health care. Although affordable housing will help alleviate some housing concerns, it is not a complete cure. The County government should partner with the community and the private sector to alleviate homelessness and should work to remove roadblocks for organizations that provide housing assistance, thus facilitating quicker construction.

2. Child Care. The participants agree that affordable and quality child care is necessary for children, their families and the community. Presently there is a lack of affordable child care in Charlotte County.
3. Health Care Cost, Coverage and Funding. Many participants feel that adequate care is not available or affordable to those in need. Indeed, Florida Hospital Associates estimates that 21,000 Charlotte County residents, 15% of the County 's population, do not have medical insurance. Regional hospitals provide services to those without insurance and to the indigent population at deficits that cannot be sustained. Part of the problem, the participants noted, is that many small businesses in Charlotte County do not offer health insurance to their employees. Also, participants pointed out that gaps exist in services and in specialized areas of care.
4. Mental Health Care. Increased mental health care is needed in the County; the Charlotte Community Mental Health Services currently cannot provide

services to all who are in need. The need for mental health care will increase, given the closing of the G. Pierce Wood State Treatment Facility in Arcadia and of a private psychiatric hospital in Ft. Myers. In addition, there is a specific recognized need for services that help citizens handle domestic violence and drug use. Without adequate services, we will continue to inappropriately 'criminalize' some of the people addicted to drugs and/or alcohol and those with mental illness.

F. The community is responding to residents needs, but more can be done.

Specific actions were recommended in several areas:

1. Actions Needed in Housing:

- a. Continue to build interest within the affordable housing development community.
- b. Continue information and educational efforts in support of affordable housing and emergency shelters, and reduce or eliminate impact fees for not-for-profit organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, and builders who construct affordable housing.
- c. County government should subsidize sewer hook-up fees for affordable, transitional and emergency housing.
- d. County government should look for opportunities to retrofit vacant buildings and then make them available as affordable housing
- e. County government should partner with non-profit and other organizations to consider expanding rent subsidies.

- f. County government should partner with non-profit and other organizations to establish a shelter for the homeless.
- g. County government should make available appropriate vacant lots for not-for-profit affordable housing.
- h. Community should expand 'sweat equity' and service in-kind programs.
- i. County government should reassess government regulations that increase the cost of housing.
- j. County government should continue the annual affordable housing fair.

2. Actions Needed in Child Care:

- a. County government should continue to provide funding for subsidized child care.
- b. County government should encourage the construction of affordable housing projects that include provision of child care.
- c. County government should give incentives to private enterprises that can incorporate child care into their plans.
- d. County government should encourage businesses to provide or partner with existing child care facilities or organizations providing quality child care.
- e. County government should encourage new child care providers.
- f. County government should review the licensing requirements for child care providers; these workers need to be sufficiently trained and a thorough background check should be conducted.

- g. Child care should be affordable and should be available during more hours of the day.
- h. Specialized and affordable child care should be available for sick children.

3. Actions Needed in Health Care Cost, Coverage, and Funding:

- a. Organizations should combine their memberships and form partnerships to provide health insurance.
- b. Participation in programs where volunteer physicians and volunteer dentists provide services to those who cannot afford them should be encouraged.

4. Actions Needed in Mental Health:

- a. Expand and seek additional funding for Drug Court and explore establishing a Mental Health Court.
- b. County government should explore the creation of a crisis stabilization unit for children and should expand the adult crisis stabilization unit for intake and assessment for people with substance abuse problems or mental health problems.
- c. The County government should enhance support for non-profits that provide case management procedures for severely mentally ill persons.
- d. Increase law enforcement training so they have a greater understanding of substance abuse and mental illness.

5. General Human Services Recommendations:

- a. Extend the coverage of the resource hotline and provide additional resources to meet the demand.

- b. Expand the availability of rapid-response programs to assist those referred with immediate needs.
- c. Set up a resource directory on the County government's website.
- d. Redefine grants as "contracts for services".
- e. Assist agencies with grant writing.
- f. Revise the County government process for funding non-profit organizations by establishing an advisory review committee.
- g. Establish a central needs directory (a centralized "wish list") for human service agencies.
- h. Use a variety of means to reach people, including radio, television (including the local cable access channel), newspapers, electronic kiosks in shopping centers or other high traffic sites.
- i. Continue the agency fair held at the civic center.
- j. Businesses and the community should work together to create an "adopt a non-profit agency" program.

G. Networks to Strengthen Community. Most of us want the same things from our communities. We want them to be safe from violence and illness. We want neighborhoods that are alive and that work well. And we would all like to live in communities with neighbors, friends, and associates who care for us and whom we trust. How do we develop communities like that? A strong sense of community forms when people work together on things that matter to them—such as caring for the sick, educating the young, and protecting the weak.

1. Networks are organizations that form partnerships or alliances with a wide range of organizations to work toward a common goal. These alliances encourage people to get together and make a difference. Because a broad-based partnership would bring people together from all parts of the County and all walks of life, it must have sufficient breadth and influence to be successful.
  - a. Important partners might come from the faith community, civic and community organizations, and the media. People from each of these areas will be able to promote health and human services in important, unique ways. By working together, they can build strong partnerships within the network.
  - b. Support and intermediary organizations can and will help a network build on "core competencies" that are necessary for working on countywide health issues. For example, a university research center might give advice on such topics as issue management, needs assessment, strategic planning, advocacy, leadership development, and evaluation.
  - c. Intermediary organizations can also help assess what the partnerships need and provide them with that support. For example, state and county health departments can assist community groups by developing health data systems that provide county-level data. They and other related support organizations can also offer other information useful for making decisions.

d. Also important in the countywide network envisioned by the Assembly participants are grant providers, donors, and governmental agencies. Foundations, industries, and governmental agencies can help create the conditions for networks to be successful. Grant providers would be needed to deliver the financial resources for non-profit agencies to do their work. Many groups rely strongly (if not completely) on funding from grant providers or the government to survive. However, this important contribution is only one way in which grant providers and governmental agencies can contribute to a collaborative partnership.

e. The County government can also foster community work in the following ways:

- By giving a group some funding, grant providers actually make additional funding more likely, because enhance the recipients' credibility.
- Grant providers can use requests for proposals as a way to bring groups together around a common purpose. In so doing, they can forge ties among different people working toward the same goals.
- Finally, grant providers and governmental agencies can also help make outcomes matter by awarding additional funding if groups attain their objectives.

2. A major focus of the Assembly participants was for Charlotte County government to create a human services coordinating council to promote a network dedicated to addressing the human services of the community.
  - a. Structure. The human services coordinating council could be comprised of community leaders and service providers.
  - b. Scope of Responsibility. The human services coordinating council could, among other things, coordinate human services needs assessments, human services planning, and delivery of services and benefits. It could also advise grant providers on funding decisions, conduct program evaluation and promote human services advocacy, public awareness and outreach.
  - c. Funding Options. At least two funding mechanisms warrant consideration.
    - Explore new funding sources.
    - Reconsider current funding options and the allocation of existing County government funds.

#### **IV. Promoting Quality Education**

- A. Of particular interest to the residents of Charlotte County is how to assist the school system in maintaining excellence and in providing lifelong learning opportunities. This issue is critical not only from the perspective of the parents and students but from that of the business community as well. Ensuring that all residents receive quality education, job training and other learning opportunities is central to the County's future economic vitality.

B. The Assembly participants agree that improving student performance in Charlotte County is extremely important, and that it should not be limited to improving test scores or receiving a higher “report card” grade. Though testing can be useful, too much emphasis is being placed on these ratings. There are many other factors affecting student performance that also need to be considered.

1. The first is school readiness. Too many children are entering school without the skills necessary to learn. The County government should strengthen the licensing requirements for child-care providers; these workers need to be sufficiently trained and a thorough background check should be conducted.
2. Improvement efforts should also address attitude, truancy rates, life skills, substance abuse, and parental involvement for current students.
3. The community should get more involved in looking at how capital funds are raised in comparison to operating funds.

C. The community should explore ways to influence factors affecting student performance.

1. The community should create a forum to educate the public on education issues and encourage local involvement.
2. The School Board should not only continue its support of proven educational programs, including vocational training, the mall work/study program, and mentoring initiatives, but should seek to expand them.

3. Businesses should be encouraged to become involved in education by teaching students about various trades and by offering internships or apprenticeships.
  4. The community should facilitate the teachers' ability to teach by increasing teacher pay, limiting class sizes, and providing additional resources to schools
  5. Additional pre-school programs, before and after-school care programs, and student activities outside of school should be developed. The New Operation Cooper Street After School program should serve as a model for other neighborhood after-school programs. The Police Athletic League, Boys' and Girls' Clubs and other youth programs as well as mentoring programs should be initiated or increased.
  6. Participants suggested that the community should pursue joint-use efforts, such as the Performing Arts Center in Punta Gorda or a library adjacent to an elementary school.
- D. All of the options presented require that long-term changes be made. Despite current limitations inherent in the state system, Charlotte County citizens must take an active role in improving its school system. At the state level, it is time to let the Legislature hear from the people. The community should take the initiative to develop a strategy to effect positive changes and shift more control of schools to the local level. Lobbying efforts should be conducted year-round and should include students.

- E. At the local level, more involvement from parents and the entire Charlotte County educational community should be encouraged. To better pinpoint problem areas underlying student performance and to enhance solutions to these problems, an Assembly or survey should be conducted to create a forum for parents, students, and teachers to work together.
- F. The existing year-around school program should be maintained.
- G. Raising taxes for schools is another option that could be considered, and one that might prove viable provided voters were sufficiently informed as to how the money would be spent. Some participants support a sales tax extension to help pay for a new high school. Others do not.

**V. Expanding Recreation Opportunities and Parks**

- A. There is agreement that the County government Parks department is proceeding in the right direction. Most Assembly participants are satisfied with the improvements that have been made over the past several years. In particular, the beach areas and the County's new and renovated parks are impressive. Some participants suggested the following improvements. (These are not in any particular order.):
  - 1. More boat ramps with parking areas are needed. The County government should charge for parking or charge user fees for access to the boat ramps to help pay for maintaining existing facilities and building new ones. Different rates could be charged for County residents and for non-residents. Tourist development dollars should be used to construct new facilities. Public/private

partnerships could also help offset the costs. The County government should adopt rules and regulations governing boat ramp use and parking in parks and on right-of-ways.

2. Bayshore Park should be developed.
  3. More fishing piers should be added.
  4. Some railroad trestles could be improved into piers.
  5. There are limited camping areas in Charlotte County. There is land on the Myakka River that could be developed for tent camping.
  6. More sports facilities, such as basketball courts, skateboard parks, and swimming pools with evening hours, are needed.
  7. County parks and recreation and school facilities should continue to be used for activities.
  8. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board occasionally should meet in the evenings.
  9. Funding options to develop and maintain facilities should be explored.
  10. Some do believe the County's Parks and Recreation Department should leave management of natural preservation areas to other entities such as the Charlotte Environmental Center.
- B. It is agreed that some use should be made of the stadium and that a decision should be reached fairly quickly, though there is some diversity of opinion on how the County government should proceed. Some propose that it be converted to a multi-use facility, which could host sporting events and concerts. Such a facility could be supported through tourism and sports. Some participants cautioned

against making a large monetary commitment without first conducting a comparative cost-benefit analysis (including a sports team or multiple users) of maintaining the facility, renovating it, and redirecting its use.

- C. There is general agreement that the County government is adequately meeting the needs of the community. However, more recreational opportunities for youth and more parks that meet the diversity of uses are needed, and the Charlotte County Cultural Center needs to move ahead. To meet current and future needs, the County government should implement its long-range planning strategy. This master planning should include appropriate stakeholders to promote eco-tourism (including the Environmental Lands Acquisition Committee). These stakeholders might include organizations such as private business and non-profit organizations. Such a strategy will help the County government address the changing needs of the community and will allow it to factor future land availability and rising costs into current plans.

## **VI. Building the Infrastructure (power, communication and transportation) for Strong, Diverse Local Economies**

- A. Charlotte County has difficulty keeping its roads, drainage, schools, and other public facilities abreast of population growth. This is largely due to the state's tax structure in combination with the limited high-value commercial and residential development in the County. Participants were asked to evaluate needs and suggest actions in several areas.

- B. Roads and Transportation. Participants identified a number of road problems and other transportation issues.
1. Most participants agreed that road improvements should be a priority, for reasons of safety and accessibility. There was general agreement on the roads that are most in need of attention. A number of fatalities have occurred on Burnt Store Road during the past year. Routes that would alleviate traffic on US 41 and SR 776 need to be developed. Problems on Midway, Veterans Boulevard, Winchester south of 776, Edgewater, Piper Road and Aqui Esta need to be addressed. Roads leading to the airport should be improved to attract economic development in that area. The cumulative impacts of lighting should be addressed.
  2. In addition to traffic congestion, participants noted that some roads were improperly constructed, lanes were too narrow, and drainage ditches were too close to the sides of the roads.
  3. West County's evacuation routes need to be expanded.
  4. West County's road network needs to be improved
  5. A few participants also noted that the County's transportation problems are not limited to road improvements. Programs such as Dial-a-Ride help alleviate public transportation problems. Public transportation is also an important element in helping new entrants into the labor force reach centers of employment and take advantage of educational and training opportunities.
  6. Beyond addressing the specific needs listed above, the County government should formulate a long-term transportation plan with the following elements:

- a. Attention to multiple modes of transportation, including roads, and public transportation.
- b. A strategy for developing alternative routes, including new collectors, for localized and countywide travel.
- c. Prioritize projects based on a cost-benefit analysis approach.
- d. Use new traffic lights and synchronized traffic signals to ease traffic flow problems.
- e. Proceed with new road designs that include sidewalks and pedestrian safety features. Retrofit existing sidewalks to be American Disabilities Act compliant.
- f. Some participants suggested that a referendum for a bond issue to finance unfunded projects should be brought before the voters. Others suggested using gas tax or sales tax revenues as a funding source.
- g. Some suggested that the County government's impact fee program should be evaluated.
- h. The concept of sustainability should be addressed for all new road network design.

C. Fire/EMS. Fire/Emergency Medical Service (EMS) was also deemed a priority issue.

1. Concerns. Two areas of concern to the participants were response times and funding levels. Many participants stated that response times need to be decreased and that planning for sites and equipment should be directed toward this end. Lack of equipment and station locations lengthen response

times. Some participants also expressed concern about high turnover among Fire/EMS staff.

2. Actions for Fire/EMS Improvements. Two actions were recommended. The County government should explore building a Fire/EMS station to serve northwest Charlotte County and explore ways to reduce emergency response time.

3. The County government must immediately find alternative funding to ensure that Fire/EMS and law enforcement staff salaries are competitive.

D. The Airport. Some participants agreed that the airport and the area surrounding it are integral to the County's economic development plans. The County government should consider extending incentives to include concessions on impact and connection fees. Two actions were suggested. The County government and the airport authority should continue to work together to develop marketing programs to encourage business in the area.

E. Convention Center/Hotel. Assembly participants were asked to consider the feasibility of a public-private partnership to develop a convention/conference center. More than a majority of the participants said that the County government should not pursue the conference center idea any further. However, many participants believed that there was a need for meeting rooms and suggested large vacant buildings in the County might serve that purpose.

F. Water. The participants agreed that the year-round availability of water is a priority, not only for Charlotte County but for the entire region, and that long-term strategic planning must be continued. The participants stated the County

government should support the regional water alliance and work to find alternative solutions, because there is an over-dependence on the Peace River. Many options are available, including desalination, reverse osmosis, aquifer storage and recovery (ASR), home cisterns, and wastewater reuse, but the County government should consider those that are cost-effective, environmentally sound, and provide reliability and availability. The following actions should be considered:

1. County government should pursue alternative water sources such as a regional desalination system.
2. Public education programs should be expanded.
3. Conservation methods should continue to be promoted.
4. More wastewater should be reclaimed for use.
5. Additional aquifer storage reservoirs should be put in place; and
6. The County government 's tiered rates-structure should be modified to increase the costs for high users.
7. Preserve and protect surface waters and surrounding land.

## **VII. Creating Partnerships for Urban Design and Community Development**

The quality of life in Charlotte County depends in part on the community's appearance, which can affect property values, economic conditions, and civic pride. The Assembly participants considered a number of strategies to maintain and enhance the County's image.

- A. Gateways into Charlotte County. Community gateways add aesthetic appeal, create a sense of place, and define a community.

1. There is strong support for improvements along the main traffic corridors in Charlotte County. Businesses should be encouraged to clean up and maintain their property, and existing codes should be enforced proactively. Immediate actions on community improvements include moving the numerous newspaper boxes to centralized locations or bus stops, maintaining canals and palm trees, planting trees along the median on county-owned property, and maintaining public and private property on US 41.
2. Participants support the idea of establishing gateways, and there is general agreement about where they should be. Gateway areas identified are all I-75 interchanges as well as US 41 and SR 776.
3. Charlotte County government should seek an additional gateway along I-75 between Toledo Blade and Kings Highway.
4. In conjunction with expanding Toledo Blade into four lanes, Charlotte County government should partner with the City of Northport to create a gateway into both communities.
5. Some suggested that trees displaced from road projects could be used to beautify other roadways.

B. Design Standards and Codes. Design codes are the tools used to create a visual theme, or themes, for landscaping, signage, and set-backs. These standards would apply to private development as well as to the County government 's management of its properties. Architectural requirements may be used.

1. Participants have different opinions about what kinds of design standards should be used and how they should be implemented. Opinions run the gamut from

wanting to keep the streets free of trash, to advocating a wide ranging combination of design standards and architectural controls to promote a special community appearance.

2. One group expressed concern for the plight of small businesses if faced with additional tax burdens and design regulations. Perhaps they could be grandfathered in under existing standards or granted extended time periods for compliance, with the new standards applying when there is a change in use.
3. Another proposal is that the County government should form a cooperative between the Chamber of Commerce, homeowners, business owners, and neighborhoods to develop a master plan design standards and landscape improvements.
4. A third view was that the County government should develop a master plan for community design and appearance. The plan should address segment themes and color codes, require underground utilities and storm water retention ponds, restrict future billboards, require lighting, etc. Suggested improvements include promoting the "Old Florida" look, street signs, street lighting, street furniture, creating a sustainable community, adding 'sweet spots' of flowers and natural plants, creating greenways, and modeling a design program after Punta Gorda's design standards.

- C. Neighborhood Planning and Design. Participants agree that strong neighborhoods are important to any community; when there is no collective interest, there is no community pride. Once a neighborhood is defined, it can describe its needs and help shape policy.

1. The first step toward creating defined and established neighborhoods is for the County government to devise neighborhood design plans that would address current and future wants and needs. Neighborhood planning should be incorporated into all aspects of planning, but building and establishing neighborhoods is also the responsibility of the citizens.
2. To improve neighborhoods, participants suggested that:
  - a. Neighborhood plans should include neighborhood parks, buffer zones, and sidewalks.
  - b. Neighborhoods should create a distinct identity; and
  - c. The County government should partner with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge to strengthen neighborhoods.
  - d. Develop neighborhood commercial nodes.
  - e. Use vacant lots to create new development patterns.
  - f. Consideration should be given to include community design standards in neighborhood plans.
3. Traffic is not perceived to be a primary problem at this time though some participants suggested the use of traffic calming mechanism.
4. Neighborhoods should be elder-ready.

D. Rehabilitating Old Structures: the Courthouse. A large number of the Assembly participants supported restoration of the Old Courthouse, but most felt that tax dollars should not be the sole source of funding. They suggested private/public and private/private partnerships be used to raise money to restore the Courthouse.

E. Future Uses of 'Old Platted Lots'. Charlotte County government has been remarkably successful in securing funds and acquiring platted lots, which, if developed as platted, would strain public services and facilities, pave over water-recharge areas, and create severe challenges for fire rescue and emergency management services. The issue now is what to do with these lots and those that may be added in the future. The Assembly participants had a wide range of opinions on the matter.

1. Some participants suggested that the County government enter into the real estate market to trade lots or sell them to the private sector. By trading lots, or by selling lots and using the revenues to purchase other lots, the County government could pursue a variety of objectives. For example, it could shift new construction away from platted lands that are particularly inappropriate for development, and it could assemble lots and re-plate them using modern planning approaches. In this regard, it was also suggested that the County government could partner with a non-profit corporation to trade lots and re-plate them, or to assist private developers in lot assembly and replatting.
2. Other participants thought that the County government should not be in the real estate business but should instead make some lots available for community purposes. Suggested re-use options included (in no particular order):
  - a. Building community recreational facilities.
  - b. Building Fire/EMS stations.
  - c. Mitigation for road development and improvement or to hold retention ponds.

- d. Green/open space.
- 3. A few participants suggested that the lots be combined and rezoned to one-unit per half acre to reduce density.

## **VIII. Protecting Our Natural Resources**

Rapid population growth has put pressure on the County's water supplies, wildlife, and wildlife habitats and has brought more air and water pollution. The Assembly participants recommended actions in a number of areas to protect the County's natural resources and preserve or enhance the area's ecological character.

A. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat. All Assembly participants placed great value on Charlotte County's natural resources, but they had different views about how much weight should be given to the environment when environmental protection conflicts with important human wants or needs.

- 1. Some said that wildlife and wildlife habitat should be sacrificed only under extraordinary circumstances. Others said that environmental considerations should always be balanced against people's needs for jobs, recreation, and transportation.
- 2. Despite these differences at a philosophical level, the Assembly participants were in general agreement on the following recommendations to preserve important habitat for wildlife:
  - a. Make sure that the County government's own land use activities are environmentally sensitive. This would include establishing County easements for habitat protection and removing 'exotic' species.

b. Designate environmentally sensitive areas, notify the public of these areas, post notices in these areas, and educate the public who may be harming the environment unintentionally. For example,

- Tell boaters about minimum wakes, the importance of sea grass, and the need to protect of manatees;
- Inform citizens that seawalls and dock runoff is harming sea beds, which are important as fish hatcheries;
- Place markers in environmentally sensitive areas
- Identify zones for electric motor or manual propulsion only;
- Establish and post boat speed limits; and
- Install a marked canoe and kayak trail.

c. Make it easier for individuals and developers to protect the environment. For example,

- Utilize some vacant lots to preserve land in perpetuity;
- Use mitigation banking;
- Allow land swaps;
- Promote eco-tourism;

d. Conduct studies to increase knowledge about environmental issues and to help set policies.

3. Other suggestions were made that may warrant consideration but were controversial. These included enacting an ordinance to require developers to leave some natural habitat and vegetation on their properties being developed.

4. Restrict the collection of live shells on the beach.

5. Participants agree that the County government should continue to expand efforts to support the Environmental Lands Acquisition Advisory Committee's efforts to identify parcels for future land acquisition and continue with additional land acquisition. Some participants favored the County government contracting out the management of preservation lands to nature-based non-profit organizations such as Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center.

6. The balance between manatees and boaters is a subject of contention. It is agreed that waterways should be shared by various users. However, while concern for manatees is appreciated, some feel the County government has sufficient speed limits on boaters. Others believe more restrictions are needed on water vehicle users and that additional efforts should be made to educate users about the environmental value of manatees and sea grass to our environment.

B. Promoting Partnerships to Prevent Pollution. The Assembly participants voiced concern that phosphate mining may contaminate or otherwise degrade the region's water supply resources. Further, they believe that current rules and regulations that protect water quality are not being properly enforced.

1. Participants agree that this is a very important issue, not only for Charlotte County but for neighboring counties as well. DeSoto and Hardee Counties view phosphate mining as an economic benefit, but Charlotte, Lee, and Sarasota Counties and the Peace River Water Supply Authority share concerns over the potentially disastrous impacts that mining could have on regional water quality and quantity.

2. Charlotte County government, in conjunction with these other entities, has requested that the state and federal governments prepare a cumulative impact study before issuing new mining permits. The participants feel that it is important to stand on principle and back the efforts of the Commission in this undertaking. They support paying the expense of defending Charlotte County's interests.
3. The County government should lobby the Governor to require an area-wide impact study; to set a build-out limit on mines; and strongly insist agencies enforce existing rules and regulations and require compliance with regard to mining; and negotiate with IMC to achieve positive outcomes for the County.

C. Charlotte County's Tree Ordinance. Some participants say the existing tree ordinance should be strengthened by increasing fines and implementing like-kind replacement, especially for commercial violators. They also support a mandate for the preservation of 'heritage' and native trees. Others think that the existing ordinance is balanced and fair, but needs to be enforced aggressively. Also, some participants thought that there should be a recalculation of the tree points allowing a smaller diameter. Three actions were recommended: the tree ordinance should be changed to a habitat ordinance; the County government should establish a nursery to recycle trees removed from roadways; and the biological clause in the ordinance should be eliminated.

## **IX. Customer Relations in County Government**

Some participants agreed that County government staff handles "everyday occurrences" well. Participants also praised County government activities ranging from

the geographic information system to the web page to the speakers' bureau. But it was widely agreed that much more could be done to improve the County government's customer-relations efforts. Participants agreed that the administration should continue the mindset that is responsive to the needs of its customers. Specific suggestions included:

A. Some agreed that increased staffing could improve customer services in the human services, building, and code enforcement departments and the Sheriff's office.

B. Some believed that training and experience are needed in the following areas:

1. The County Commissioners should gain a hands-on education of County government operations. A few participants suggested that the Commissioners spend a day working with non-profits.
2. Staff members should be trained in customer service. Staff members should also be kept up-to-date on new policy changes.

C. The County government has done a good job keeping pace with technology and should continue to do so. More information and services should be available on-line. Specifically, participants mentioned putting capital improvements projects and the County government budget on the web page.

D. Some participants recommended the following actions:

1. The County government should stagger office hours and offer more complete services during lunchtime, which will require cross-training.
2. Expand the human services emergency hotline to a 24-hour a day, 7 days a week service.
3. Publicize the outreach/action center group.

4. Decorate the lobby of the County administration building to make it less “institutional” looking.
5. Continue Government Day at the mall.
6. Put the “Welcome to Charlotte County” directory on the website and form a public/private partnership with the Chamber of Commerce to improve dissemination.
7. Occasionally hold Commission meetings in the evenings so more people can attend.
8. Expand services offered at the Englewood office.
9. Continue to put County government policies in writing and make available to customers upon request.
10. County government should examine staff levels and training and empower staff members to resolve customer service problems.
11. Distribute the Human Service Resource Guide free of charge to all human services agencies, e.g., Sheriff’s office, hospitals, and non-profits.
12. Implement a way to recognize citizens who serve the County.
13. Explore using an ombudsman in the County government for citizen advocacy.
14. Place Emergency Help pocket guide on the website.

## **X. Priorities and Funding Sources**

- A. Human services, public education, infrastructure, urban design, and environmental conservation were rated by participants as high priority areas, though the order of priority varied among the groups. The following items are in no order of priority:

- Human services priorities selected were affordable housing followed by affordable childcare, mental health care, assistance to non-profits, and coordination and oversight of services.
- Infrastructure priorities selected were water resource alternatives, including a regional desalination plant, followed by road improvements, and new fire stations.
- Environmental conservation priorities selected were protection of natural habitats, securing adequate protection for the Peace River through the permitting process for new phosphate mines, and purchasing environmentally sensitive lands.

B. Some participants felt that urban design and community development projects were a lower priority. Some felt that parks and recreation projects were a lower priority because they were being developed well in accordance with the master plan.

- One group did feel that design improvements were a priority, particularly along US 41 and SR 776. Another group selected neighborhood planning as a priority.
- Participants felt that the issue of too many platted lots and their effects on the environment and quality of services needs to be addressed.

C. Participants noted that there are various funding options in use or available for the services discussed. They include property taxes, gas taxes, impact fees, state transfers, grants, user chargers, and others.

## **XI. Disseminating the Policy Statement—Communications and Outreach**

Participants stated that the Steering Committee should continue meeting in order to oversee the implementation of the Assembly recommendations. There was also interest expressed by Assembly participants in receiving progress updates and reconvening to review the progress.

**Charlotte Assembly 2001**  
**CUSTOMER SERVICE**  
**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

**Customer Relations in County Government**

- A. That increased staffing could improve customer services in the human services, building, and code enforcement departments and the Sheriff's office.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Human Services and the Construction Services Division are currently reviewing their business plan and processes. (Business Plans are to be completed by September 30, 2002). Staffing is one of the issues that will be addressed.**

- B. That training and experience are needed in the following areas:

1. The County Commissioners should gain a hands-on education of County government operations. Participants suggested that the Commissioners spend a day working with non-profits.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Local service agencies have been contacted and arrangements can be made (at the convenience of the Commissioners) for work assignments.**
2. Staff members should be trained in customer service. Staff members should also be kept up-to-date on new policy changes.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Communication has increased between management and staff. The CCNews (employee newsletter) has been expanded to include articles informing employees on organizational change, strategic planning, and goals and objectives.**
- **A task force was formed to review the existing Administrative Policy Manual. Recommendations have been made regarding new policies and guidelines for distribution of any updates or additions to the Policy Manual. Once formally approved by the administrator, the Policy Manual will be distributed throughout the organization.**

C. More information and services should be available on-line. Specifically, participants mentioned putting capital improvements projects and the County government budget on the web page.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The website continues to expand both proactively and in response to citizen and staff requests. This year we have added a site for our advisory committees to post agendas, minutes, and other relevant information; expanded or revised the webpages for Human Services, Animal Control, Community Development and Mosquito Control. Added searchable features for park amenities, contractor licensing, mosquito spraying schedules, zoning and land use amendments and Commission Meeting official minutes.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **The 2002/2003 budget documents will be posted to the website as soon as they have been approved by the Board of County Commissioners.**

D. The following actions were recommended:

1. **The County government should stagger office hours and offer more complete services during lunchtime, which will require cross-training.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Staggered office hours are being addressed on a department-by-department basis. Human Resources will be implementing customer service training, as well as cross-training where appropriate, in the 2002/2003 fiscal year.**
2. **Publicize the outreach/action center group.**

**Actions Taken:**

- **The Communications & Marketing Department has widened the scope of their communication efforts. Continued communication with the media has resulted in numerous articles, newspaper columns and TV reports on the Board's programs and activities.**
- **The development of the Citizen's Academy and the Employee's Academy, in furtherance of the Board's goals and objectives, continues to involve the community in the operations of Charlotte County Government.**

- **Communications & Marketing staff members continue to speak to many community organizations and make presentations on programs and activities.**
3. Decorate the lobby of the County administration building to make it less “institutional” looking.
- Actions Planned:**
- **Recommendations have been made regarding the physical appearance of the lobby, and await funding.**
  - **To be welcomed and assisted in locating the correct services is perhaps more important than the facilities, themselves. This issue will also be addressed in Customer Service training sessions, to take place next fiscal year.**
4. Continue Government Day at the Mall.
- Actions Taken:**
- **“Government Day” will still take place, however, in order to expand the event, and allow the staff to showcase large equipment and vehicles, the location has been changed to the Memorial Auditorium. Event will take place this year on November 2, 2002, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.**
5. Put the “Welcome to Charlotte County” directory on the website and form a public/private partnership with the Chamber of Commerce to improve dissemination.
- Actions Taken:**
- **A \$5,000 grant was obtained from SWFMD to assist in printing and dissemination costs. The welcome booklet is available either through the County website, by mail, or may be picked up at one of our facilities.**
- Actions Planned:**
- **The Communications & Marketing Department will be requesting permission from Administration to solicit advertising from local businesses to cover the cost of printing.**

6. Occasionally hold Commission meetings in the evenings so more people can attend.

**Actions Planned:**

- **This request is forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners.**

7. Expand services offered at the Englewood office.

**Actions Planned:**

- **This is being considered through the office space study and partnerships with other organizations. Human Services is working to increase offerings through the Englewood office.**

8. Continue to put County government policies in writing and make available to customers upon request.

**Actions Taken:**

- **All government documents are available on request. In addition, a number of our rules and policies are available on our website and additional documents are being added all the time.**

9. County government should examine staff levels and training and empower staff members to resolve customer service problems.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Human Resources is in the process of reviewing staffing levels, job classifications and salary levels. Report should be presented to the Board of County Commissioners for action by October 1, 2002.**
- **Human Resources will be implementing a customer service training program in fiscal year 2002/2003. Employees will be empowered to resolve customer service problems at the departmental level through proper training and performance incentives.**

10. Distribute the Human Service Resource Guide free of charge to all human services agencies, e.g., Sheriff's office, hospitals, and non-profits.

**This is covered in the Human Services Section.**

11. Implement a way to recognize citizens who serve the County.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Staff is researching the possibility to do a reception for all advisory board members and volunteers.**

12. Explore using an ombudsman in the County government for citizen advocacy.

**Action Taken:**

- **The Communications & Marketing Department currently serves the ombudsman function and assists both citizens and departments in solving customer disputes. Complaints are passed on to Communications & Marketing if a resolution is not found at the departmental level.**

**Action Planned:**

- **Citizens will be given more opportunities to comment on the service they receive at County facilities. Comment cards, suggestion boxes and comment forms on the website will be available for customer feedback. In addition, customer surveys will become a regular part of our business practice.**

13. Place Emergency Help pocket guide on the website.

**Action Planned:**

- **We can expand the numbers on the Human Services website to include CARE, Homeless Coalition, etc.**

**Charlotte Assembly 2001**  
**HUMAN SERVICES ISSUES**  
**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

**Meeting Human Needs: Public, Corporate and Private Responses**

- A. Charlotte County should strive to provide all of its residents with accessible social services to include, but not limited to, affordable health care, mental health services, housing, and child care; and it should do so through education and forging partnerships among the State and County governments, the community, and the private sector. Charlotte County should strike a balance with the economic reality of the community and the cost of goods that must be purchased.
- B. We urge greater financial support for these necessary services from both State and County governments, the community and the private sector.
- C. An important role for local governments and the community is to help unemployed persons and low-wage workers as they strive to better their lives and those of their families. They need education and occupational skills training, and low-cost transportation services to get to school, training sites, and places of employment. They would also benefit from incentives to encourage private enterprise to construct child care facilities.
- D. The welfare-to-work initiative in Charlotte County:  
In particular, more attention should be placed on communicating to “potential beneficiaries” and “influencers.” More grassroots involvement is needed to reach people in the welfare-to-work program. In addition, we need to reach out to employers, educators, community and civic groups, faith-based organizations, homeowners’ associations, volunteer organizations, etc.
- E. The Assembly participants focused on four areas where the County’s human service activities should be enhanced. (These are not listed in any particular order.):
  - 1. Affordable Housing - The County government should partner with the community and the private sector to alleviate homelessness and should work to remove roadblocks for organizations that provide housing assistance, thus facilitating quicker construction.
  - 2. Child Care - Presently there is a lack of affordable child care in Charlotte County.

3. Health Care Cost, Coverage and Funding - Many participants feel that adequate care is not available or affordable to those in need. Also, participants pointed out that gaps exist in services and in specialized areas of care.
4. Mental Health Care - Increased mental health care is needed in the County. In addition, there is a specific recognized need for services that help citizens handle domestic violence and drug use.

F. 1. Actions Needed in Housing:

- a. Continue to build interest within the affordable housing development community.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County's Housing Coordinator serves as staff liaison with Punta Gorda Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, Homeless Coalition, Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, Housing Finance Authority, Housing Corporation, Continuum of Care, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge, local lending banks, and private developers.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Create a comprehensive affordable housing brochure that outlines the various programs available in Charlotte County. (lead agency - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge)**
  - **Create a distribution list for these brochures that would include non-profit agencies and other organizations that serve low-income families. (lead agency - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge)**
  - **Develop a media campaign that will highlight the positive stories of families living in affordable housing. (lead agency - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge)**
- b. Continue information and educational efforts in support of affordable housing and emergency shelters, and reduce or eliminate impact fees for not-for-profit organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, and builders who construct affordable housing.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The Home Buyers Club funded with State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) funds will be implemented in the summer of 2002.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Annually review the Economic Development Council's Impact Fee Abatement Program to see if it can be used to lower impact fees for nonprofit housing builders that serve low-income families. (lead agency - Habitat for Humanity)**
  - **Develop a draft waiver of impact fees for non-profit builders and for-profit builders and developers of affordable housing for the Board of County Commissioners to consider. (lead agency - Habitat for Humanity)**
- c. County government should subsidize sewer hook-up fees for affordable, transitional and emergency housing.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The county has provided subsidies through SHIP to the Domestic Abuse Shelter Home (DASH), Habitat for Humanity, and eligible homeowners.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Identify other sources of revenues for transitional and emergency housing. (lead agency – Continuum of Care (C3))**
- d. County government should look for opportunities to retrofit vacant buildings and then make them available as affordable housing.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The county has formed partnerships with the Punta Gorda Housing Authority, the Housing Finance Authority and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge to explore this opportunity.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Explore the purchase and other rehabilitation sources for single family residential structures using partnerships in the community. (lead agency - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge)**
- e. County government should partner with non-profit and other organizations to consider expanding rent subsidies.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Emergency Shelter initiatives and grants will help free up other non-profit funds for rent subsidies.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Explore additional funding sources such as the SHIP and Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Programs. (lead agency County Human Services)**

f. County government should partner with non-profit and other organizations to establish a shelter for the homeless.

**Actions Taken:**

- **County staff participate with the Continuum of Care, and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Safe Shelter Committee in applying for shelter grants.**
- **The County has identified some county-owned property that could be possible sites for a homeless shelter.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **The Homeless Coalition should publish and provide County government with documented numbers to demonstrate need in Charlotte County for a homeless shelter. (lead agency - Homeless Coalition)**

g. County government should make available appropriate vacant lots for not-for-profit affordable housing.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County has identified vacant lots through the county GIS.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **County government and other interested agencies develop a policy for the consideration of donating vacant county owned lots to not-for-profits to be used for affordable, emergency and transitional housing. (lead agencies - County Administration and Habitat for Humanity)**

h. Community should expand 'sweat equity' and service in-kind programs

**Actions Planned:**

- **Research "Paint your Heart Out" program as a possible service in-kind program. (lead agency - United Way)**

- **Develop a comprehensive list of non-profit organizations that accept community service workers and other community volunteers. (lead agency – Charlotte County Human Services)**

i. County government should reassess government regulations that increase the cost of housing.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Work with the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and Charlotte County Community Development Department to monitor regulations and costs that effect affordable housing. (lead agency – Charlotte County Human Services)**

j. County government should continue the annual affordable housing fair.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The next Housing Fair is scheduled for August 3, 2002. The county will continue to annually partner with agencies to provide for the Housing Fair. (lead agency - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge)**

2. Actions Needed in Child Care:

a. County government should continue to provide funding for subsidized child care.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County currently provides local match to the YMCA Children's Services of Sarasota for state subsidized child care programs.**
- **County staff participates on the School Readiness Coalition which provides oversight to subsidized childcare and school readiness programs.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Increase awareness in the business community of the need and benefits of childcare for their employees including participation in the Childcare Executive Partnership Program with provides State matching dollars. (lead agency - YMCA Children Services)**

b. County government should encourage the construction of affordable housing projects that include provision of child care.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Two multi-family complexes (The Pines and Murdock Circle) which opened in 2001 provide onsite after school child care activities for their residents.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **County government should encourage the awarding of additional points for onsite childcare in affordable housing projects that meet State licensing requirements, quality standards, and are age appropriate. (lead agency - Charlotte County Human Services)**

c. County government should give incentives to private enterprises that can incorporate childcare into their plans.

**Actions Planned:**

- **County government should work with the Economic Development Council to review its initiatives package to encourage new business to include childcare in their benefit packages. (lead agency – Charlotte County Economic Development)**

- **County should survey other counties to determine best practices and community childcare initiatives which can include vouchers and consortiums. (lead agency - YMCA Children Services)**

d. County government should encourage businesses to provide or partner with existing childcare facilities or organizations providing quality childcare.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Childcare Information and Referral services can be included in the Charlotte County's visitor's guide and distributed to the business market including realtors' offices. (lead agency - Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce)**

- **County should research providing dollars to ensure the licensing of quality childcare and goldseal programs. (lead agency - Charlotte County Human Services)**

e. County government should encourage new childcare providers.

**Actions Planned:**

- **County should consider exemptions to encourage childcare**

providers in existing neighborhoods. (lead agency - Charlotte County Community Development)

- **Property Appraiser's Office should consider allowing for certain business tax exemptions for childcare providers. (lead agency - Charlotte County Property Appraiser)**

f. County government should review the licensing requirements for childcare providers; these workers need to be sufficiently trained and a thorough background check should be conducted.

**Actions Planned:**

- **The County should work with the State licensing agency and support the recommendations of the Charlotte School Readiness Coalition to provide quality childcare to all children in the community in all childcare facilities. (lead agency - School Readiness Coalition)**

g. Child care should be affordable and should be available during more hours of the day.

**Actions Planned:**

- **County government should help facilitate the pursuit of grant funds to expand the hours of affordable childcare. (lead agency – School Readiness Coalition)**

- **Childcare partners and the community should be educated to the need of additional childcare coverage through documented numbers of children not receiving appropriate care or parents unable to maintain gainful employment. (lead agencies - School Readiness Coalition and YMCA Children Services)**

h. Specialized and affordable childcare should be available for sick children.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Innovative measures and cost analysis for providing specialized care should be explored in the community. Some considerations could include; a visiting nursing service, substitute childcare provider on call; and a volunteer pool. (lead agency - School Readiness Coalition and YMCA Children Services)**

3. Actions Needed in Health Care Cost, Coverage:

a. Organizations should combine their memberships and form partnerships to provide health insurance.

**Actions Taken:**

• Charlotte County's current healthcare market is limited by the availability of multiple carriers and participating physicians. Other problems associated with pool membership participation include benefit level consolidation, control of benefits, high-risk pools and acceptable premiums/deductibles. The cost of healthcare is a national, state and local concern. The following actions can be taken in the Charlotte community to address non-profit organizational memberships.

**Actions planned:**

• Conduct a survey of the non-profit agencies in Charlotte County to determine potential participation in a pool partnership. Questionnaire should include benefits, costs and willingness to pay. (lead agency - Habitat for Humanity)

b. Participation in programs where volunteer physicians and volunteer dentists provide services to those who cannot afford them should be encouraged.

**Actions Taken:**

• The Indigent Healthcare Advisory Board has encouraged the development of the volunteer physician and dental programs sponsored by the Medical Society and Dental Association. The Health Department and the Vo-Tech are also partners in the programs.

**Actions Planned:**

• Continue to work toward maximum participation of physicians and dentists including recruitment through other participating physicians and dentists. (lead agencies - Charlotte County Health Department and Medical Society)

• Seek funding and resources to expand dental program to provide preventative and restorative services in addition to acute dental care. (lead agency - Health Department)

• Expand outreach and information efforts on the programs to

other non-profit agencies. (lead agency – Indigent Healthcare Advisory Board)

- Provide appreciation and community recognition to volunteer physicians and dentists providing these services. (lead agency - Indigent Healthcare Advisory Board)

4. Actions Needed in Mental Health:

a. Expand and seek additional funding for Drug Court and explore establishing a Mental Health Court.

**Actions Taken:**

Drug Court is currently funded in Charlotte County from several different sources. Future funding may be in jeopardy.

**Actions Planned:**

- Work with mental health agencies, law enforcement and other community agencies in leveraging comprehensive grants, service fees and other funding sources for Drug Court. (lead agency - Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)
- Educate the community on the long term cost savings of preventative and pre-trial programs vs. prisoner incarceration. (lead agency - Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)
- Identify and expand resources in the community that can be utilized in reviewing the feasibility of a Mental Health Court. (lead agency - Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)

**Actions Taken:**

Mental Health Court has been established in other areas due to the paucity of funding for alcohol, drug abuse, and mental health services in these areas. If a Mental Health Court is to work in Charlotte County it would have to be started with new funds. Because the funding for these services is not adequate at the present time and services that should be in place are not.

**Actions Planned:**

- Identify and expand resources in the community that can be utilized in reviewing the feasibility of a Mental Health Court.

- **If feasible, funding should be pursued from the Florida Department of Children and Families with a county match. (lead agency – Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)**

b. County government should explore the creation of a crisis stabilization unit for children and should expand the adult crisis stabilization unit for intake and assessment for people with substance abuse problems or mental health problems.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Charlotte Community Mental Health Services is currently funding from its cash reserves the construction of additional space to the Crisis Stabilization Unit. Because of the tremendous demand, this space will be utilized for children and will be separate from the traditional Crisis Unit.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Identify ongoing additional need and availability of services for adults and children and provide continuous local match funding support—as specified in Florida Statue 394.76—for necessary mental health services as the Charlotte County community continues to grow. (lead agency - Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)**
- **Increase budgetary funding to meet the current needs for professional outpatient counseling and psychotherapy. (State programs only target the severely mentally ill.) An additional \$283, 610 is needed to handle the current caseload of citizens in need of service. (lead agency – Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)**

c. The County government should enhance support for non-profits that provide case management procedures for severely mentally ill persons.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Grant funding was recently awarded Charlotte County to provide a HUD alternative called Shelter Plus Care. This housing alternative provides rent subsidy for homeless mentally ill people with the stipulation that services, including case management, will be provided by the local community. Charlotte Community Mental Health Services has agreed to provide these services and will bill Medicaid and the Florida Department of Children and Families.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Continue to leverage local match funding to Charlotte Community Mental Health Services. (lead agency – Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)**
  - **Provide community education on public safety as they relate to mental health issues. (lead agency - Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)**
  - **Advocate and educate the community and government leaders of the need to provide and support outpatient counseling before mental health issues become crisis situations. (lead agency - Community Mental Health Services)**
- d. Increase law enforcement training so they have a greater understanding of substance abuse and mental illness.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Continue to provide matching funds to support the Charlotte County Community Mental Health Services Mobile Crisis Team which provides a licensed mental health professional who responds with law enforcement officers to “Baker Act” calls. (lead agency - Charlotte Community Mental Health Services)**

5. General Human Services Recommendations:

- a. Extend the coverage of the resource hotline and provide additional resources to meet the demand.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County has both a resource assistance helpline for under age 60 population and an elder helpline for the over age 60 population which operates from 8am – 5pm weekdays.**

- **The County has recently expanded its elder helpline to cover a seven county region. Software is expected to be purchased that will be compatible with the state and national Information and Referral standards for data base development and client tracking. Software comparability is being explored for the Resource Helpline, serving persons under 60 and which could possibly be compatible with the 211 initiative.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **The County government will coordinate its helplines and 211 efforts with the local United Way and other community agencies in the 211 implementation initiative. (lead agency - Charlotte County Human Services)**
  - b. Expand the availability of rapid-response programs to assist those referred with immediate needs.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Data will be collected from the community to determine unmet emergency respond needs. (lead agency – Continuum of Care)**
  - c. Set up a resource directory on the County government's website

**Actions Taken:**

- **The Human Services Department has updated its website to include many links to community resources. A website directory is being considered as part of the Information and Referral software purchase which will be compatible with state and national standards.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **The County will continue with outreach efforts in the community and coordinate with other agency outreach and resource tracking systems. (lead agency - Charlotte County Human Services).**
  - d. Redefine grants as "contracts for services"

**Action Taken:**

- **This was approved by the Board of County Commissioners in March 2002.**
  - e. Assist agencies with grant writing.

**Action Taken:**

- **The Human Services Housing Coordinator continues to assist agencies and coalitions with housing grants. The County's Grants Coordinator, in the budget office, also assists with the application and writing of grants for county projects.**
- **Non-profit symposium in June 2002 discussed grant writing needs of local non-profits and building grant writers within each non-profit agency.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **The County and other community partners can continue to assist non-profit agencies with information on locating grantors and availability of technical assistance for specific grants. (lead agency – Continuum of Care).**

f. Revise the County government process for funding non-profit organizations by establishing an advisory review committee.

**Actions Taken:**

- **In March 2002, the Board of County Commissioners approved a citizen advisory committee to establish criteria and to recommend the awarding of funding requests from non-profit agencies.**

g. Establish a central needs directory (a centralized "wish list") for human service agencies.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The Angel's Attic Program, a wish list for non-profits, was established by a number of people and the Leadership Charlotte Class of 2002. The Program is now available online through a website to all non-profits.**

**([www.angelattic.org](http://www.angelattic.org))**

h. Use a variety of means to reach people, including radio, television (including the local cable access channel), newspapers, electronic kiosks in shopping centers or other high traffic sites.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Use of expanded outreach efforts should be discussed within the nonprofit community. Options can be explored at the next non-profit**

symposium. (lead agency - Continuum of Care).

- Use of centralized kiosk locations as a means of outreach as currently in use in other communities should be reviewed for feasibility in the Charlotte community. (lead agency - Charlotte County Human Services)

i. Continue the agency fair held at the civic center.

**Actions Planned:**

- The next Job Fair is scheduled for October 2002. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Housing Fair is scheduled for August 2002. The next Government Day at the mall is scheduled for November 2002. (lead agencies – Charlotte County One Stop Partners; 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge Partners; Charlotte County Government)

j. Businesses and the community should work together to create an “adopt a non-profit agency” program.

**Actions Taken:**

- The Angel’s Attic Program can currently assist businesses, community and civic groups in identifying needs of non-profit agencies through its website.

**Actions Planned:**

- Clear standards and guidelines for business donations and non-profits requests should be established which should include recognition and thank you to the business community. (lead agencies - Habitat for Humanity and Continuum of Care)
- Partnerships can be formed to show how both businesses and non-profit agencies benefit in collaborating in community programs. (lead agency – Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce)

k. Distribute the Human Service Resource Guide free of charge to all human services agencies, e.g., Sheriff’s office, hospitals and non-profits.

**Actions Planned:**

- Human services agencies should work with the County to coordinate the publication and sponsorship of small scale directories. (lead agency – United Way of Charlotte County)

I. Expand the human services emergency hotline to a 24-hour a day, 7 days a week.

**Actions Taken:**

• **The Human Services Department currently works with the State Abuse Registry for reporting children and seniors that may be vulnerable to abuse, neglect or exploitation. The Department's information and referral unit and case management unit also work closely with the other local crisis lines including mental health and domestic abuse.**

**Actions Planned:**

• **Community social services agencies should gather statistics to determine the number unmet emergencies that occur outside routine office hours.**

**Data will be used to determine need and cost for staffing expanded hours.**

**(lead agency – Continuum of Care)**

G. Networks to Strengthen Community.

1. Networks are organizations that form partnerships or alliances with a wide range of organizations to work toward a common goal. **(Refer to list of current alliances, coalitions, and partnerships.)**
  - a. Important partners might come from the faith community, civic and community organizations, and the media.
  - b. Support and intermediary organizations can and will help a network build on "core competencies" that are countywide health issues.
  - c. Intermediary organizations can also help assess what the partnerships need and provide them with support.
  - d. Also important in the countywide network envisioned by the Assembly participants are grant providers, donors, and governmental agencies.
  - e. The County government can also foster community work in the following ways:
    - By giving a group some funding, grant providers actually make additional funding more likely, because enhance the recipients' credibility.
    - Grant providers can use requests for proposals as a way to bring groups together around a common purpose. In so doing, they can forge ties among different people working toward the same goals.

- Finally, grant providers and governmental agencies can also help make outcomes matter by awarding additional funding if groups attain their objectives.
2. A major focus of the Assembly participants was for Charlotte County Government to create a human services coordinating council to promote a network dedicated to addressing the human services of the community.
- **A coordinating council should include agencies, networks and councils already in existence to minimize duplication of yet another council. The council can be an umbrella council for human services. The council should be formulated by the end of calendar year 2002.**
- a. Structure. The human services coordinating council could be comprised of community leaders and service providers.
- b. Scope of Responsibility. The human services coordinating council could, among other things, coordinate human services needs assessments, human services planning, and delivery of services and benefits. It could also advise grant providers on funding decisions, conduct program evaluation and promote human services advocacy, public awareness and outreach.
- c. Funding Options At least two funding mechanisms warrant consideration.
- Explore new funding sources.
  - Reconsider current funding options and the allocation of existing County government funds. **This should include the Children's Services Council funding mechanism with the consideration of a future voter referendum. The referendum should not be considered in 2002 due to the timeframe and other special taxes being considered in 2002 including the gasoline tax and the sales tax extension.**
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# CHARLOTTE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES

## COALITIONS, PARTNERSHIPS and TASKFORCES

NAME	CONTACT PERSON	TELEPHONE NO.
21st Century Challenge	Rex Koch	(941) 637-0544
Affordable Housing Advisory Board Advisory Committee	Al Tousignant	(941) 627-3579
Alzheimer's Crisis Intervention Task Force	Corp. Kenn Watson	(941) 764-1533
Chamber of Commerce Senior Outreach	Kim Lovejoy	(941) 627-2222
Charlotte Alliance for a Safe Community	David Dignam	(941) 474-9511
Charlotte County AIDS Network (CHAN)	Samuel Woodham	(941) 625-2437
Charlotte County Better Jobs/Better Wages	Helena Sloane	(941) 613-1422
Charlotte County Career Service Center Leadership Team	Pat Fryer	(941) 613-1434
Charlotte County Collective (C3)	Paula Wilman	(941) 627-3539
Charlotte County Critical Incident Stress Management Team	Dr. Ross	(941) 639-8300
Charlotte County Diabetes Coalition	Lora Resignato	(941) 639-1181, ext. 235
Charlotte County Ministerial Association	Rev. Matthew Neumann	(941) 629-2633
Charlotte County Tobacco Coalition	Donna Triana	(941) 637-2396
Childcare Executive Partnership Task Force	Helena Sloan	(941) 613-1422
Children's Advocacy and Resource Council (CARC)	Bibi Ullah	(941) 629-2220
Community Action Agency Advisory Board	Vikki Porter	(941) 639-1561
Community Based Care Alliance	Nadereh Salim	(941) 338-1343
Community Development Advisory Task Force	Al Tousignant	(941) 627-3579
Emergency Assistance Clearing House (EACH)	Carla Bennett	(941) 613-2000
Engelwood Inter-Agency Council	Kathy Roach	(941) 474-5864
Habitat for Humanity	Ron Thomas	(941) 639-3162
Healthy Start	Bonnie Scates	(941) 764-9700
Homeless Coalition	Ana Romilla	(941) 629-8105
Housing Finance Authority	Otto Brunner	(941) 479-8379
Indigent Health Care Advisory Board	Pat Garriton	(941) 625-6229
Kid's Care	Nanci Richardson	(941) 637-2392
Our Charlotte Elder Affairs Network (OCEAN)	Kim Spencer	(941) 627-6762
Region 24 Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board	Joe Paterno	(941) 992-8000
School Readiness Coalition	Anna Brookbank	(941) 575-1991
Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (SALT)	Pat Garriton	(941) 625-6229
Southwest Florida Aids Network (SWAN)	David Waldron	(941) 330-1486
TRIAD (Sheriff, Seniors and Police)	Corp. Kenn Watson	(941) 764-1533
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## CHARLOTTE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES COALITIONS, PARTNERSHIPS and TASKFORCES

NAME	CONTACT PERSON	TELEPHONE NO.
<b>21st Century Challenge</b> Non profit organization dedicated to the eradication of substandard housing by the year 2020	Rex Koch	(941) 637-0544
<b>Affordable Housing Advisory Board Advisory Committee</b> Committee established pursuant to state statute to provide housing advice to the Board of County Commissioners	Al Tousignant	(941) 627-3579
<b>Alzheimer's Crisis Intervention Task Force</b> Community organizations and departments that responded to a need to find temporary emergency placement for Alzheimer individuals who are in crisis until their families can be contacted or APS can step in.	Corp. Kenn Watson	(941)764-1533
<b>Chamber of Commerce Senior Outreach</b> Chamber members representing various local businesses and non profit agencies who meet to share information, organize seminars and activities that will bridge the gap between senior needs and available resources without duplication of services.	Kim Lovejoy	(941) 627-2222
<b>Charlotte Alliance for a Safe Community</b> Comprised of concerned individuals to strengthen the communities resolve to eliminate substance abuse in persons of all ages in Charlotte County	David Dignam	(941) 474-9511
<b>Charlotte County AIDS Network (CHAN)</b> Non profit group that offers counseling, testing, information, referral and assistance to individuals with HIV/AIDS	Samuel Woodham	(941) 625-2437
<b>Charlotte County Better Jobs/Better Wages</b> Local task force comprised of agencies serving clients on cash assistance or low income families, with the focus of assisting these individuals with training for better jobs and the taskforce also	Helena Sloane	(941) 613-1422

<p><b>Charlotte County Career Service Center Leadership Team</b>  Formal group due to legislation, comprised of the directors or those responsible for the programs that are a part of the Charlotte County Career Service Center and/or the One Stop System. These members work together for a seamless delivery of services.</p>		<p>Pat Fryer (941) 613-1434</p>
<p><b>Charlotte County Collective (C3)</b> Informally organized group of 50+ government agencies, non profit organizations, churches and individuals that meet weekly to coordinate a seamless system of services for the homeless</p>		<p>Paula Wilman (941) 627-3539</p>
<p><b>Charlotte County Critical Incident Stress Management Team</b> Reacts to emergency service personnel after a critical incident has taken place and provides debriefing and defusing of the incident</p>		<p>Dr. Ross (941) 639-8300</p>
<p><b>Charlotte County Diabetes Coalition</b> A group of individuals within the community that support people in need of diabetic supplies and education</p>		<p>Lora Resignato (941) 639-1181, ext. 235</p>
<p><b>Charlotte County Ministerial Association</b> An association of religious leaders who meet for the purpose of fellowship, education and community action.</p>		<p>Rev. Matthew Neumann (941) 629-2633</p>
<p><b>Charlotte County Tobacco Coalition</b> A broad-based diverse group of interested individuals, adults and youth whose goal is to reduce the impact of tobacco use through advocacy and education, working toward the vision of a tobacco-free Florida</p>		<p>Donna Triana (941) 637-2396</p>
<p><b>Childcare Executive Partnership Task Force</b> Interested companies and organizations whose aim is to maximize business and community awareness of work/family child care needs and increase, invest and expand existing resources to achieve affordable, quality child care.</p>		<p>Helena Sloan (941) 613-1422</p>
<p><b>Children's Advocacy and Resource Council (CARC)</b>  Interested individuals, non profit and for profit agencies that have formed to provide a united voice advocating for children and families in the community</p>		<p>Bibi Ullah (941) 629-2220</p>

<p><b>Community Action Agency Advisory Board</b> Elected public officials, representatives of local indigent population and members of business, industry or other groups within the community for the purpose of advising county staff on administration of the CSBG grant which has the mission of stabilizing indigent households in the county</p>	Vikki Porter	(941) 639-1561
<p><b>Community Based Care Alliance</b> Formal group created by State Statute as part of the legislative plan to privatize certain functions of the Department of Children and Families. Reviews and recommends actions toward the implementation and evaluation of the privatization of the State funded Foster Care program in Charlotte County</p>	Nadereh Salim	(941) 338-1343
<p><b>Community Development Advisory Task Force</b> A sub-responsibility of the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, it advises the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners on matters relevant to the Community Development Block Grant</p>	Al Tousignant	(941) 627-3579
<p><b>Emergency Assistance Clearing House (EACH)</b> Area businesses, churches, civic clubs and social service agencies whose purpose is to pool resources and assist the needy households in Charlotte County during the holiday season, eliminating duplication of services</p>	Carla Bennett	(941) 613-2000
<p><b>Engelwood Inter-Agency Council</b> Not for profit agencies which service the Englewood area whose goal is to promote cooperation amongst agencies, along with the understanding of the function and policies of participating agencies, improving services to Englewood residents in both Sarasota and Charlotte Counties</p>	Kathy Roach	(941) 474-5864
<p><b>Habitat for Humanity</b> Non profit organization dedicated to providing homeownership opportunities for low income households</p>	Ron Thomas	(941) 639-3162
<p><b>Healthy Start</b> Provides services and goods for at-risk prenatal women, mothers and infants, enabling positive pregnancy outcome, stable home environments and optimal child growth and development</p>	Bonnie Scates	(941) 764-9700
<p><b>Homeless Coalition</b> Non profit organization that provides services to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless</p>	Ana Romilla	(941) 629-8105

<b>Housing Finance Authority</b> Component unit of local government organized to provide financing for housing	Otto Brunner	(941) 479-8379
<b>Indigent Health Care Advisory Board</b> Physicians and allied health services within the community providing access to quality health care for the indigent population	Pat Garriton	(941) 625-6229
<b>Kid's Care</b> Programs to improve the health of Florida's children. Provides free or low cost health insurance to low income uninsured children, a variety of health insurance options, includes coverage for medical, hospital, prescriptions, lab work, vision, hearing and dental	Nanci Richardson	(941) 637-2392
<b>Our Charlotte Elder Affairs Network (OCEAN)</b> A coalition of profit and non-profit businesses, individuals, public agencies, and representatives of health care, human resources, legal and social service sectors of the community concerned with the elder population and elder issues	Kim Spencer	(941) 627-6762
<b>Region 24 Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board</b> A partnership between business, labor, education, community and government services to develop effective strategies and initiate collaborative efforts furthering the evolution of the Southwest Florida workforce.	Joe Paterno	(941) 992-8000
<b>School Readiness Coalition</b> Formal group authorized through State Statute and oversees the implementation of early school and childcare programs to ensure that all children have access to quality early care and education to promote success in school.	Anna Brookbank	(941)575-1991
<b>Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (SALT)</b> Local community representatives and law enforcement committed to create and develop a strong link between our seniors and local law enforcement to identify concerns affecting our elder population and to help to provide solutions that will result in an enhanced quality of life in Charlotte County	Pat Garriton	(941) 625-6229
<b>Southwest Florida Aids Network (SWAN)</b> Community organizations, non profits and individuals who comprise the planning body for HIV/AIDS services for the seven county area of Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, Collier, Glades, Hendry and Desoto	David Waldron	(941) 330-1486

<b>TRIAD (Sheriff, Seniors and Police)</b> 3-way effort of Sheriff's office, the AARP and the Police department who work together to reduce both criminal victimization and the unwarranted fear of crime which often plague the elderly, as well as to provide an opportunity to enhance the delivery of law enforcement services to older citizens		Corp. Kenn Watson (941) 764-1533
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(Rev. 01/25/02)





**Charlotte Assembly 2001**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES**  
**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

**I. Expanding Recreation Opportunities and Parks**

A. Participants suggested the following improvements. (These are not in any particular order.):

1. More boat ramps with parking areas are needed. The County government should charge for parking or charge user fees for access to the boat ramps to help pay for maintaining existing facilities and building new ones. Tourist development dollars should be used to construct new facilities. Public/private partnerships could also help offset the costs. The County government should adopt rules and regulations governing boat ramp use and parking in parks and on right-of-ways.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Public workshops were held with the Marine Advisory Committee and Parks & Recreation Advisory Board.**
- **A proposal to the Board of County Commissioners included land needs and revenue ideas.**
- **Right-of-way parking ordinance prohibiting parking on certain sections of County Roads 771 and 775 was adopted by the BCC on June 25, 2002.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **A resolution is forthcoming. Rules & regulations governing boat ramps will be implemented.**
- **Land acquisition for future boat ramps has been submitted as a possible sales tax extension project.**

2. Bayshore Park should be developed.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Land acquisition is almost complete. The master plan has been approved by the BCC and design work is currently being negotiated.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Staff has submitted the development of Bayshore Live Oaks Park to be funded through the extension of the sales tax.**

3. More fishing piers should be added.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Currently there are eight fishing piers available to the public in Charlotte County. In the approved master plan for Bayshore Live Oaks Park there is an additional fishing pier.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Funding is in place to add a fishing pier on the bay side at Englewood Beach Park.**

4. Some railroad trestles could be improved into piers.

**Actions Taken:**

- **At every opportunity attempts are made to utilize railroad trestles for piers. Currently, four of our eight fishing piers are on railroad trestles.**

5. There are limited camping areas in Charlotte County. There is land on the Myakka River that could be developed for tent camping.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Currently the BCC has adopted master plans for environmental parks. In several of these master plans tent camping for groups has been included and construction on these areas will begin in January 2003.**

6. More sports facilities, such as basketball courts, skateboard parks, and swimming pools with evening hours, are needed.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The three regional parks will address the needs for more sport facilities. Basketball courts are proposed at each of the regional parks (Mid-County, West County and South County). Skateboard functions are proposed for Mid-County Regional Park and West County Regional Park and a swimming pool is proposed at South County Regional Park and the Charlotte Sports Park (Stadium).**

**Actions Planned:**

- **One possibility for funding for the additional phases (beyond phase I) is the sales tax extension.**

7. County parks and recreation and school facilities should continue to be used for activities.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The Parks & Recreation Department is committed to joint usage of facilities. Sharing of facilities has continued to increase annually.**

8. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board occasionally should meet in the evenings.

**Actions Planned:**

- **The Parks & Recreation Director will proposed evening meetings as the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board begins their new calendar year with new officers.**

9. Funding options to develop and maintain facilities should be explored.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Review of funding options for development of new facilities and maintenance is an ongoing and daily issue for the Parks & Recreation Department. Grants are aggressively pursued and there has been significant success (\$7.186 million of grant funds leveraged with the current sales tax projects).**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Staff has proposed multiple projects to be considered for funding by the sales tax extension.**

B. It is agreed that some use should be made of the stadium and that a decision should be reached fairly quickly.

**Actions Taken:**

- **On June 25, 2002 the BCC approved a Master Plan for the stadium and also approved a strategic plan for the first year of operations and programming.**
- **Staff has been hired, and program planning has begun.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Infrastructure improvements have been proposed for funding by the sales tax extension.**

C. More recreational opportunities for youth and more parks that meet the diversity of uses are needed, and the Charlotte County Cultural Center needs to move ahead. To meet current and future needs, the County government should implement its long-range planning strategy. This master planning should include appropriate stakeholders to promote eco-tourism.

**Actions Taken:**

- **There is a strategic plan in place to guide the County through the year 2010 to meet current and future needs. When this plan was established, public meetings were held. The County has aggressively pursued land acquisition of environmental park land and currently the sales tax is funding the amenities to allow the public to interface with these environmental opportunities. The regional parks along with Charlotte Sports Park will provide a significant number of increased recreational opportunities for all segments of the population.**

**II. Building the Infrastructure (power, communication and transportation) for Strong, Diverse Local Economies**

A. Roads and Transportation:

1. Most participants agreed that road improvements should be a priority, for reasons of safety and accessibility. There was general agreement on the roads that are most in need of attention. A number of fatalities have occurred on Burnt Store Road during the past year. Routes that would alleviate traffic on US 41 and SR 776 need to be developed. Problems on Midway, Veterans Boulevard, Winchester south of 776, Edgewater, Piper Road and Aqui Esta need to be addressed. Roads leading to the airport should be improved to attract economic development in that area. The cumulative impacts of lighting should be addressed.

**Actions Taken:**

**The County's CIP addresses the transportation priorities over the next 5 years which includes widening &/or up grading of Veterans**

Blvd., Midway, Winchester South, Edgewater/Flamingo, Piper Rd., and Aqui Esta to cover the specific corridors mentioned at the Assembly. These and other County roads are planned for improvements to provide additional capacity as well as parallel capacity to compliment US 41 & SR-776.

To improve access to the Charlotte County Airport for economic development, the County has prepared a preliminary master plan for the roadway network to serve the area (with Piper Rd. being the primary focus of the initial efforts). The County has been successful in obtaining more than \$1 million in matching funds for the design & construction of improvements in this corridor.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Burnt Store Rd. has programmed shoulder improvements from Notre Dame Blvd. to Zemel Rd. with the possibility of expanding the work south to the County line. The state has provided financial assistance in the amount of \$500,000 towards the enhancement of the corridor.**

2. In addition to traffic congestion, participants noted that some roads were improperly constructed, lanes were too narrow, and drainage ditches were too close to the sides of the roads.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Streets and highways are designed and constructed using the latest standards from FDOT. Of course, these standards change over time. Unfortunately, many of our streets that pass through the developed areas of the County were designed and built to a minimum standard when the areas were sparsely populated. The roadway design and construction that is currently underway complies with the FDOT standards in place today. For all new projects, the County acquires adequate right-of-way to meet the standards and to provide the necessary amenities.**

3. West County's evacuation routes need to be expanded.

**Actions Taken:**

- Winchester Blvd. has been completed & is open to traffic between SR-776 & So. River Rd. in Sarasota County.

**Actions Planned:**

- The next phase of this hurricane evacuation route, Winchester South, is scheduled for construction in the CIP. This section of the highway will connect Placida Rd. to SR-776.
- The County is an active participant in the on going corridor study of an Englewood Interstate Connector which would link Winchester Blvd. at So. River Rd. directly to I-75.

4. West County's road network needs to be improved

**Actions Taken:**

- There has been significant roadway construction activity in West County. The last phase of the SR-776 will be completed in the fall of 2002 as will the improvements to Placida Rd. (CR-775)/Pine St.
- In 2001, the County completed extensive improvements to the Placida Rd./Boca Grande Causeway intersection and the roadway leading to the toll plaza.

**Actions Planned:**

- Construction is expected to begin early next year on the replacement of the Coral Creek Bridge at Placida.

5. A few participants also noted that the County's transportation problems are not limited to road improvements. Programs such as Dial-a-Ride help alleviate public transportation problems. Public transportation is also an important element in helping new entrants into the labor force reach centers of employment and take advantage of educational and training opportunities.

**Actions Taken:**

- The existing Dial-a-Ride has been successful in meeting many of our needs; however, it has limited capacity & availability.

**Actions Planned:**

- The next increment of transit service to be considered will be some form of fixed &/or variable route system that travels the US 41 corridor

as the "backbone", connecting South County with the Murdock area. Other links will follow as demand for service increase.

6. Beyond addressing the specific needs listed above, the County government should formulate a long-term transportation plan with the following elements:
  - a. Attention to multiple modes of transportation, including roads, and public transportation.

**Actions Taken:**

- All jurisdictions in Florida are required to prepare and up date a Comprehensive Plan which includes a transportation element. This element is generally managed and up dated by the Metropolitan Planning Organization and projects the transportation needs of some 20 years in the future. It addresses the needs in a multi-modal approach, including highways, sidewalks, bikeways, and transit. The analysis depends heavily on the results of the transportation model which gives decision makers the ability to evaluate various alternative land uses as well as highway options which can result in new arterials and collectors, serving County-wide and local trips. When considering various alternatives, the costs and benefits are evaluated.

- b. A strategy for developing alternative routes, including new collectors, for localized and countywide travel.
- c. Prioritize projects based on a cost-benefit analysis approach.
- d. Use new traffic lights and synchronized traffic signals to ease traffic flow problems.

**Actions Taken:**

- The state currently has a comprehensive system up grade underway that primarily effects the US 41 corridor. It is phase 1 of a multi-phased program to provide better synchronization on all the thoroughfares in the County. The goal is to increase the carrying capacity of the major roads without adding lanes.

- e. Proceed with new road designs that include sidewalks and pedestrian safety features. Retrofit existing sidewalks to be American Disabilities Act compliant.

**Actions Taken:**

- **All new roadways include the standard FDOT pedestrian facilities which are in conformance with the ADA conditions.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **There is an on going program to retrofit existing pedestrian facilities to meet ADA standards as part of the proposed Sales Tax Extension program.**

- f. Some participants suggested that a referendum for a bond issue to finance unfunded projects should be brought before the voters. Others suggested using gas tax or sales tax revenues as a funding source.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Financing of major transportation improvements is an on going challenge. The proposed CIP for the up coming year will have a \$31 million shortfall if all projects go forward as indicated.**
- **While bonding or borrowing could fill this gap, the approach is to offset the shortfall through an extension of the Sales Tax program.**

- g. Some suggested that the County government 's impact fee program should be evaluated.

**Actions Planned:**

- **It has been suggested that the County's impact fees be reevaluated to determine their appropriateness and adequacy.**

- h. The concept of sustainability should be addressed for all new road network design.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The concept of sustainability for our transportation network is always considered. Generally, the public has high demands such as new or widened roads, new sidewalks or bike trails, or expanded**

public transit; however, we need to consider the costs beyond the initial capital outlay.

B. Fire/EMS. Fire/Emergency Medical Service (EMS) was also deemed a priority issue.

1. Concerns. Two areas of concern to the participants were response times and funding levels. Many participants stated that response times need to be decreased and that planning for sites and equipment should be directed toward this end.

**Actions Taken:**

- In 2002 the Fire/EMS Department added two new additional rescue units to Fire Station 3 in El Jobean and at Fire Station 6 located at US 17 and Cleveland. This decreased response times and covered the increase in calls to these areas.

**Actions Planned:**

- The Fire/EMS Department has developed in the Capital Improvement Program a five year plan to improve the response times to the mid-county, northwest and east areas of the county. This plan includes three new fire stations at the locations of Harbor/Veterans in FY 02/03, Cornelius/Chamberlain in FY 03 /04, and at Washington Loop/ US 17 in FY 05/06. The new station locations will reduce response times from 12-15 minutes to a 4-6 minute range.

2. Actions for Fire/EMS Improvements. County government should explore building a Fire/EMS station to serve northwest Charlotte County and explore ways to reduce emergency response time.

**Answered above**

3. County government must immediately find alternative funding to ensure that Fire/EMS and law enforcement staff salaries are competitive.

**Actions Taken:**

- The County has contracted with a vendor to prepare a classification and compensation study.

- C. The Airport. County government should consider extending incentives to include concessions on impact and connection fees. County government and the airport authority should continue to work together to develop marketing programs to encourage business in the area.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Inter-local Agreement is drafted with the Airport Authority for marketing funding.**
- **Partner advertising with Enterprise Florida occurring – first ad printed May 2002.**

### **III. Creating Partnerships for Urban Design and Community Development**

The quality of life in Charlotte County depends in part on the community's appearance, which can affect property values, economic conditions, and civic pride. The Assembly participants considered a number of strategies to maintain and enhance the County's image.

- A. Gateways into Charlotte County. Community gateways add aesthetic appeal, create a sense of place, and define a community.

1. There is strong support for improvements along the main traffic corridors in Charlotte County. Businesses should be encouraged to clean up and maintain their property, and existing codes should be enforced proactively. Immediate actions on community improvements include moving the numerous newspaper boxes to centralized locations or bus stops, maintaining canals and palm trees, planting trees along the median on county-owned property, and maintaining public and private property on US 41.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County has contracted for the S.R. 776 Corridor Study and is in the process of requesting study proposals for the U.S. 41 Corridor. Both studies emphasize the need for an integrated approach to design, sign and landscape standards for the corridor and a plan for the on-going maintenance of public spaces. The studies will also look at traffic circulation and ways of improving circulation along these corridors.**

- **Recently adopted ordinances concerning dumpster placement and screening, restriction of billboards, prohibition of utility work vehicles in residential areas and political sign are part of an on-going effort to improve the aesthetics and livability of the community.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **The County continues to review, revise and create ordinances that enhance the visual appearance of the community both from its major roadways and in the community itself.**

2. Participants support the idea of establishing gateways, and there is general agreement about where they should be. Gateway areas identified are all I-75 interchanges as well as US 41 and SR 776.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Both the U.S. 41 and S.R. 776 Corridor studies will look at creating gateways at key points along the corridors. The study will not only define entrances into the County, but also define entrances to different community areas (e.g. Charlotte Harbor, Port Charlotte, El Jobean, etc.).**
- **The Placida community in conjunction with the Tourism Bureau developed a gateway to Placida along S.R. 775.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Further coordinated efforts with the Bureau will place specifically designed entrances to other areas.**

3. Charlotte County government should seek an additional gateway along I-75 between Toledo Blade and Kings Highway.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County, at this time does not have a specific program or process for establishing gateway standards, locations or a source for funding their development. It is expected that the development of the U.S. 41 and S.R. 776 corridor studies will provide the gateway standards and potential sources of funds for their development.**

4. In conjunction with expanding Toledo Blade into four lanes, Charlotte County government should partner with the City of North Port to create a gateway into both communities.

**Actions Planned:**

- **The future widening of Toledo Blade will provide the opportunity for partnering with the City of North Port to develop a joint community gateway.**

5. Some suggested that trees displaced from road projects could be used to beautify other roadways.

B. Design Standards and Codes. Design codes are the tools used to create a visual theme, or themes, for landscaping, signage, and set-backs. These standards would apply to private development as well as to the County government 's management of its properties.

1. Participants have different opinions about what kinds of design standards should be used and how they should be implemented. Options run the gamut from wanting to keep the streets free of trash, to advocating a wide ranging combination of design standards and architectural controls to promote a special community appearance.

**Actions Taken:**

- **To address community appearance the County has drafted several ordinances that will significantly affect the visual appearance of the community.**
- **The County has prepared a countywide commercial design standard that addresses building design, materials, landscaping and signage.**
- **The County has also adopted ordinances affecting dumpster location and screening, parking of commercial and multi-axle vehicles in residential areas and the restriction of billboards and political signs.**
- **The County is also addressing the appearance of new development within the County through the application of 'overlay district', which place specific design standards on specific land areas. Two new areas were this application will apply are the Airport Commerce Park and the**

**Murdock West Commercial Center. Each area will be developed following very specific guidelines for land use types, and building and development standards (color, materials, height, roadway and landscaping, signage, etc.)**

2. Another proposal is that the County government should form a cooperative between the Chamber of Commerce, homeowners, business owners, and neighborhoods to develop a master plan design standards and landscape improvements.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Through its 'Beautification Program' the County currently partners with citizen groups to develop landscaping plans for County roads within their community. The program is funded through the Native Tree Fund and purchases trees to be used in landscaping projects.**
- **The County has worked with Rotonda West Association to landscape Rotonda Boulevards North, South, East and West. Other organizations the County has worked with include the Burnt Store Lakes Property, Gulf Cove, Deep Creek and Edgewater Associations.**

3. A third view was that the County government should develop a master plan for community design and appearance.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County's application of countywide regulations of design and appearance has been limited in scope. Rather than create homogeneous standards the County has concentrated on working with specific groups in specific areas to develop specific plans and regulations for design and appearance. These areas are the proposed Airport Commerce Park and Murdock West Commercial Center Overlay Districts, the Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Area and the U.S. 41 and S.R. 776 Corridor areas. While the County will continue to work on specific area plans to create separate identities there will be an overall consistency in the level of standards applied to these separate projects.**

C. Neighborhood Planning and Design. Participants agree that strong neighborhoods are important to any community; when there is no collective interest, there is no community pride. Once a neighborhood is defined, it can describe its needs and help shape policy.

1. The first step toward creating defined and established neighborhoods is for the County government to devise neighborhood design plans that would address current and future wants and needs. Neighborhood planning should be incorporated into all aspects of planning, but building and establishing neighborhoods is also the responsibility of the citizens.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County has developed a model neighborhood/community plan template that has been used as the basis for the preparation of the draft Placida and South Gulf Cove Community Plans. These plans will be presented for adoption during the third quarter of 2002.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **The start of the planning for the Harbour Heights community plan will begin in the fourth quarter of 2002. The County will meet with all interested citizen groups to evaluate and schedule the preparation of a community/neighborhood plan for their area.**

2. To improve neighborhoods, participants suggested that:

- a. Neighborhood plans should include neighborhood parks, buffer zones, and sidewalks.
- b. Neighborhoods should create a distinct identity; and
- c. The County government should partner with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge to strengthen neighborhoods.
- d. Develop neighborhood commercial nodes.
- e. Use vacant lots to create new development patterns.
- f. Consideration should be given to include community design standards in neighborhood plans.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The preparation of the community/neighborhood plan covers many different areas (e.g. parks, infrastructure, public services and facilities, land**

use and design). In the development of each community/neighborhood plan all these elements are considered and incorporated, when appropriate, in the plan. Each neighborhood/community is different therefore the emphasis or deletion of elements is tailored to the individual community/neighborhood.

3. Traffic is not perceived to be a primary problem at this time though some participants suggested the use of traffic calming mechanism.

4. Neighborhoods should be elder-ready.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The community/neighborhood plan would take into consideration the residents of the area and their special needs.**

D. Rehabilitating Old Structures - the Courthouse. A large number of the Assembly participants supported restoration of the Old Courthouse, but most felt that tax dollars should not be the sole source of funding.

E. Future Uses of 'Old Platted Lots'. The Assembly participants had a wide range of opinions on the matter.

1. Some participants suggested that the County government enter into the real estate market to trade lots or sell them to the private sector. By trading lots, or by selling lots and using the revenues to purchase other lots, the County government could pursue a variety of objectives. In this regard, it was also suggested that the County government could partner with a non-profit corporation to trade lots and re-plat them, or to assist private developers in lot assembly and replatting.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The Comprehensive Plan outlines a number of solutions including but not limited to: the direct purchase of a set number of platted lots annually; the acquisition of targeted lands; direct purchase in partnership with the state; and tax deed acquisition.**

2. Other participants thought that the County government should not be in the real estate business but should instead make some lots available for community purposes. Suggested re-use options included (in no particular order):

- a. Building community recreational facilities.
- b. Building Fire/EMS stations.

c. Mitigation for road development and improvement or to hold retention ponds.

d. Green/open space.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The County will continue with its active property management program, acquiring properties that meet a specific County need and selling those properties deemed surplus.**
- **Through the above methods the County has acquired a significant number of lots and has adopted a procedure for managing ‘surplus lands.’ The active management of County owned property’s is done in concert with other County uses of these properties, such as use for parks, infrastructure requirements, environmental mitigation and conservation, property trades, sale of transfer of development rights (TDRs) and actual property sales.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Develop a specific policy to direct future land management activities.**

3. A few participants suggested that the lots be combined and rezoned to one-unit per half acre to reduce density.

**Charlotte Assembly 2001**  
**NATURAL RESOURCES ISSUES**  
**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

**Protecting Our Natural Resources**

The Assembly participants recommended actions in a number of areas to protect the County's natural resources and preserve or enhance the ecological character of the area.

- A. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat. All Assembly participants placed great value on Charlotte County's natural resources, but they had different views about how much weight should be given to the environment when environmental protection conflicts with important human wants or needs.
1. The Assembly participants were in general agreement on the following recommendations to preserve important habitat for wildlife:
    - a. Make sure that the County government's own land use activities are environmentally sensitive.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Charlotte County coordinates its review of any development activities - including County projects - which may impact threatened or endangered wildlife or their habitats with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission which are, respectively, the lead Federal and State agencies charged with the protection of wildlife. Charlotte County will not grant local approval for any project which might cause such impacts until such time as these agencies' permits are obtained. Similarly, Charlotte County works with other agencies such as the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Southwest Florida Water Management District to ensure that its capital projects meet or exceed such agencies' requirements in regard to protecting surface- and ground-water quality. Protection of surface and groundwater in turn protects natural systems, such as the Charlotte Harbor estuary, which provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife.**

- In addition to the application of Federal and State regulations to its own land use activities, Charlotte County has also acquired environmentally sensitive lands such as xeric scrub communities and wetlands, often with the assistance of the Florida Communities Trust program, with the specific purpose of protecting them from future development. Such properties are utilized primarily for passive recreation, and the County is developing the management ability needed to maintain (and where necessary restore) their natural functions.

- b. Designate environmentally sensitive areas, notify the public of these areas, post notices in these areas, and educate the public who may be harming the environment unintentionally.

**Actions Taken:**

- Where environmental sensitivity coincides with County ownership, Charlotte County has posted informational signs and other notices to help educate the public regarding the uniqueness of such lands. However, Charlotte County's ability to designate and post environmentally sensitive lands in private ownership is limited by a number of legal (Harris Act, property rights) and practical (limited financial and personnel resources) concerns.

**Actions Planned:**

- The County's existing efforts could be supplemented by making an environmental awareness a consistent theme in all its projects and outreach efforts.

- c. Make it easier for individuals and developers to protect the environment. For example,

- Utilize some vacant lots to preserve land in perpetuity;

**Actions Taken:**

- Utilizing vacant lots is the primary strategy employed in the development of the Tippecanoe Scrub Phase II Florida Communities Trust program. Located in the vicinity of the County Stadium, the Tippecanoe II project

encompasses 214.5 acres of threatened scrub-jay habitat and is made up of 454 vacant lots, primarily in individual ownership. Acquisition of these properties will not only preserve scrub habitat, it will provide proactive mitigation for impacts to scrub-jay habitat, which will occur when the County widens and extends Edgewater Drive. The Tippecanoe II project is a key element in a larger, County-wide scrub-jay habitat conservation plan which will, when implemented, not only prevent the need for scrub-jay permits for County projects, but for private developments as well.

- Use mitigation banking;

**Actions Taken:**

- **Mitigation banking - that is, proactively restoring and managing natural communities and listed species' habitats for the specific purpose of offsetting future, inevitable impacts to such resources - holds considerable promise for Charlotte County which still retains some of the finest examples of natural communities in Florida. Mitigation banking also presents an opportunity for the County to recover some of the costs it must incur in preserving and managing native habitats in the form of "mitigation credits" which are sold on the open market to anyone (private developers as well as government entities) needing to provide mitigation to obtain development permits.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Charlotte County is discussing the possibility of establishing a mitigation bank with two private, not-for-profit organizations.**
  - Allow land swaps;

**Actions Taken:**

- **Charlotte County is pursuing land swaps as part of its strategy for acquiring properties included within the boundaries of the Tippecanoe II project.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Depending on the success of this initial effort, this approach could be expanded to other projects involving platted lots. More than 20 property**

owners have expressed their willingness to trade their lots for lots already owned by the County in other, less environmentally sensitive areas.

Promote eco-tourism;

**Actions Taken:**

- **The Tourist Development Department is promoting ecotourism as one of the County's major assets. This is doubly beneficial as it not only provides a clean source of income, it helps perpetuate an appreciation for natural resources that will result in a better environmental stewardship ethic among the general public.**

d. Conduct studies to increase knowledge about environmental issues and to help set policies.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Charlotte County participates in the National Estuary Program and the Charlotte Harbor Surface Water Improvement and Management Program, both of which have conducted, and continue to conduct, numerous studies intended to increase our understanding of the Charlotte Harbor Estuary system, and how human activities impact this vital resource.**

- **Charlotte County has also undertaken a comprehensive, County-wide study of all of its scrub-jay habitats with the intention of completing a County-wide conservation plan for this species.**

2. Participants agree that the County government should continue to expand efforts to support the Environmental Lands Acquisition Advisory Committee's efforts to identify parcels for future land acquisition and continue with additional and acquisition.

**Actions Taken:**

- **The Environmental Lands Acquisition Advisory Council has recently completed its county-wide map of environmentally sensitive lands suitable for long term preservation through acquisition and management. This map served as the basis of the proposal to the "1 cent sales tax committee" which requested approximately \$30 million from the potential sales tax revenues. This request was reduced to \$3 million, which, though less than**

**requested, will still enable the acquisition of at least some of the County's most endangered native communities and wildlife species.**

3. The balance between manatees and boaters is a subject of contention. It is agreed that various users should share waterways.

**Actions Taken:**

**• The Board of Commissioners established two special committees to study the issues associated with multiple uses of the County's waterways. These committees' efforts culminated in the Board's acceptance of a series of recommended protective measures aimed at helping prevent impacts to this species due to boating and other water-related activities. However, litigation at both State and Federal levels between environmental organizations and the regulatory agencies has resulted in a settlement agreement which renders these efforts largely moot as Manatee protection zones have been ordered by the courts.**

B. Promoting Partnerships to Prevent Pollution. The Assembly participants voiced concern that phosphate mining may contaminate or otherwise degrade the region's water supply resources phosphate mining as an economic benefit, but Charlotte, Lee, and Sarasota Counties and the Peace River Water Supply Authority share concerns over the potentially disastrous impacts that mining could have on regional water quality and quantity.

2. The County government should lobby the Governor to require an area-wide impact study; to set a build-out limit on mines; and strongly insist agencies enforce existing rules and regulations and require compliance with regard to mining; and negotiate with IMC to achieve positive outcomes for the County.

**Actions Taken:**

**• Charlotte County is pursuing action on all fronts, including legislative changes to tighten permitting requirements, investigation of additional regulatory protections which have not yet been applied, continued insistence on a cumulative analysis of the impacts of phosphate mining, and has encumbered funds within the FY 2002-2003 budget for additional litigation, if necessary. In the hope of avoiding additional litigation, Charlotte County has entered into tentative negotiations to determine**

**whether it is possible to provide the protections necessary for the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor without further legal action.**

C. Charlotte County's Tree Ordinance: Three actions were recommended: the tree ordinance should be changed to a habitat ordinance; the County government should establish a nursery to recycle trees removed from roadways; and the biological clause in the ordinance should be eliminated.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Trees on developed properties should not be equated to ecologically meaningful habitats for the very reasons discussed in A.1.c., above. While trees provide many environmental benefits (reduction of urban heat islands, production of oxygen, lowering of local temperatures, softening the built landscape, conservation of water, and even some value to generalist bird species), habitat protection cannot rely on landscaping in parking lots or even on residual tree stands preserved through “open space” requirements of the County Code.**
- **Due to set up costs, the County decided against the establishment of a County nursery several years ago. While there is considerable sense to such a move, it appears unlikely that it will be a priority given the County's other pressing financial needs.**
- **Removing the biological clause creates an artificial separation between development (and other human activities) and the natural environment.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **The County should consider and implement a separate habitat protection or protected species ordinance, not attempt to cobble habitat protection into existing code requirements which deal with separate issues.**

D. Water. The participants agreed that the year-round availability of water is a priority, not only for Charlotte County but also for the entire region, and that long-term strategic planning must be continued. The participants stated the County government should support the regional water alliance and work to find alternative solutions, because

there is an over-dependence on the Peace River. The following actions should be considered:

1. County government should pursue alternative water sources such as a regional desalination system.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Charlotte County Utilities has retained the services of a professional consultant to research possible water alternatives.**

2. Public education programs should be expanded.
3. Conservation methods should continue to be promoted

**Actions Taken:**

- **Charlotte County has enacted “conservation rate” strategy for its billing whereby customers who use an excessive amount of water are penalized through higher rates above a certain number of gallons.**
- **Charlotte County enforces the State-wide plumbing code through its building permit program which requires the use of water conserving toilets and other fixtures in all structures.**
- **Charlotte County Utilities regularly advises its customers to conserve water through a variety of means.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **Charlotte County is amending its landscape and buffer ordinances to provide better standards for irrigation of landscaped areas.**
4. More wastewater should be reclaimed for use.

**Actions Planned:**

- **Charlotte County Utilities is investigating where and how re-use lines could be most effectively run, and to whom they could be run for maximum benefit. Obstacles include a lack of large users who could take significant amounts of reclaimed water, permitting considerations, and the costs associated with installing the lines and requiring their use.**
5. Additional aquifer storage reservoirs should be put in place;

**Actions Planned:**

- **This is under investigation by both Charlotte County Utilities as well as the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority.**

6. The County government's tiered rates-structure should be modified to increase the costs for high users.

7. Preserve and protect surface waters and surrounding land.

**Actions Taken:**

- **Land acquisition is the most effective method of preserving land. For this reason, the county has emphasized properties near or abutting water in its acquisition program (Tippecanoe Scrub flowing into Tippecanoe Bay, Amberjack Slough flowing into Coral Creek, Cedar Point in Lemon Bay, etc) with the specific intention of removing the potential for development-related impacts. In addition to acquisition, the County has adopted a septic tank ordinance with standards more stringent than the State's regarding the type and location of drainfields.**

**Actions Planned:**

- **County might consider strengthening its Code to provide greater protection to all creeks and rivers which flow into its aquatic preserves (Charlotte Harbor and Lemon Bay).**
- **County might consider the establishment of a "special surface water protection overlay district" (such as protects Shell and Prairie creeks) around Alligator Creek, Ainger Creek, Gottfried Creek, Oyster Creek, Buck Creek, and Coral Creek to limit the location and type of development relative to these waterbodies.**

(C)  
file-ANRAC

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
(ANRAC)

MEMORANDUM

➔ **TO:** Board of County Commissioners

**FROM:** Alton L. Cheatham, Chair *ALC*

**DATE:** March 21, 2002

**SUBJECT:** Charlotte Assembly 2001

Attached, please find a commentary on the 2001 Charlotte Assembly Draft Policy Statement. This commentary was approved by the Agriculture and Natural Resources Advisory Committee on March 21, 2002.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

ALC

Attachment

02 MAR 27 PM 3:45  
COUNTY COMMISSION OFFICE

## **Introduction**

In general the report generated by the 2001 Charlotte Assembly contains important statements of opinion as well as numerous positive recommendations for addressing many issues facing Charlotte County.

We note with dismay that despite the fact that while about one-half of the land area of Charlotte County receives an Agricultural classification for appraisal purposes and further that the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners has seen fit to adopt an ordinance establishing an Agriculture and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (ANRAC), that committee was not invited to send representative(s) to the Charlotte Assembly 2001.

A significant failure of any effort to address critical community issues is to not include all appropriate interest groups. In the case of the 2001 Assembly this was a problem. Apparently there was an assumption that since a preponderance of the issues to be discussed would deal with "human and social service" needs in the County, it would not be necessary to invite certain "representative groups" found in our County.

Individuals who represent the agricultural community in Charlotte County have, for a number of years, been perceived as not caring or having little interest in many of the issues facing the County. In addition to the area of "human service" which was the apparent emphasis, there were numerous issues discussed and recommendations developed that directly impact the agricultural community as a whole as well as individually.

It is with this in mind that the members of ANRAC felt it important to provide a response to the Assembly document.

## **Comments on selected areas**

### Transportation

Transportation has been discussed in the past and is a growing problem for the agricultural community. Transport of commodities and general safety are critical issues facing those who live in the distant areas of the County. Improvement of roads and intersections in the rural sections of our County are crucial.

### Community Development

Agricultural land owners certainly have a vested interest in the design and planning of the growth of the County. Trends today seem to indicate with an ever-increasing population, pricing issues relative to sale of commodities, a faster movement of land from agriculture to development. Most land-owners would prefer to maintain the ownership and use of their land for agricultural purposes, but times are changing. Therefore it seems critical that these people be included in future design and planning.

The above area moves directly into the issue of land-acquisition. Agricultural lands, even to the row-crops and citrus have a more positive impact on the environment than development. Land-owners and agriculturalists in Charlotte County should have been included in these discussions. There are many methods of protecting and maintaining land in its current use. It is not economically and environmentally feasible for government to buy and own all preservation or conservation lands. Less than fee, sale of conservation easements are methods that must be explored. The County should pursue approaches that permit agriculturalist and larger land owners to continue to operate their business. Charlotte County should look to cutting edge incentives which encourage land owners to "hold on to" their land and manage it in such a way that preservation benefits are continuously realized.

Under section VIII 2.4.c. we recommend adding:

- Endorse State and Federal programs or enact county ordinances that provide for habitat protection via temporary or permanent conservation easements.

Under section VIII A.3. we strongly recommend

- that no consideration whatsoever be given to enacting ordinances to require developers to leave some natural habitat and vegetation on their properties under development, but rather develop incentives to do so. Frequently land owners will convert native habitats to other uses such as cattle pasture, while the proposed ordinance(s) are being considered, even though they had no prior plans to do so.

Under section VIII A.5. we recommend

- that the Environmental Lands Acquisition Advisory Committee be required to include in their decision matrix an assessment of opportunities offered for land management by for-profit as well as non-profit organizations. Lands which are more appropriate for education and passive recreation may be more appropriately managed by non-profits. Examples of for-profit organizations are those that may be involved with eco-tourism, hunting or range cattle leases.

Hunting is utilized by the State as an effective management tool. Range cattle grazing leases are also utilized by State and Federal agencies. These lessee's assist in management of lands through prescribed fire, reduction of exotics and fence maintenance and at the same time provide a revenue source.

Proper *management of lands* whether agricultural or government owned preserve lands is of paramount importance. There is case after case of lands being acquired by government that are not managed efficiently or in some cases not at all. However it is fenced and protected....usually from the very public who helped to buy it!

In addition, providing adequate "public or conservation easement" buffers between agricultural operations and urban development is crucial.

#### Customer Relations

We do not necessarily agree that the problem of customer relations should be addressed by increased staffing but we strongly support an aggressive training policy for staff.

#### Priorities and Funding Sources

Under section X.A. we would recommend changing the last phrase in the third bullet to the following:

"and protect environmentally sensitive lands via fee simple purchase or purchases of temporary or permanent conservation easements."

#### Conclusion

In general, the Assembly document cannot be faulted for what it includes in the way of issue identification or recommendation actions, but it must be faulted for what it doesn't include. There is more to a community than the "urban center". Even though their numbers be small in population the land-owners / agriculturalists of Charlotte County and Florida for that matter own a tremendous amount of land and manage it effectively year in and year out. It should be a group of people and an industry which ranks at the top of the lists for a "Community-Wide" planning and strategy sessions. Further, to assume that residents of the county who happen to reside in or near agricultural areas do not have concerns or input is inappropriate.