

Charlotte County update for 9/9/20

County budget begins with strategic planning, public input

By Hector Flores, Charlotte County Administrator

On Tuesday, the Charlotte County Commission held its first budget hearing. The final budget hearing is set for 5:01 p.m., Sept. 22.

Those two hearings are the culmination of years of work by the board and county staff, with input from advisory boards, stakeholders and the community. The budget process starts with strategic planning, needs assessments and revenue projections more than two years before the final budget is approved each September. A critical element throughout the process is public input, which runs right through the final hearing just before the board adopts its budget.

In the coming weeks, we will be soliciting input on two aspects of the budget process. One is the biennial National Citizens Survey, an independent survey that uses statistically valid methodology, questions and sample sizes. The survey asks respondents about a range of conditions residents see and impressions they have, from public health and safety to the economy and quality of life in Charlotte County.

This survey is conducted every two years, giving us the ability to compare our results across time and with other governments across both the state of Florida and nationally. This survey is sent to a random sample of the population, but all citizens are invited to take the same survey online when it goes live next month.

The second opportunity for input will be about how Charlotte County moves forward in the post-COVID-19 world we all hope comes sooner rather than later. Even when the pandemic is behind us, there will still be challenges ahead of us, some known, like the repercussions from the virus, some unknown, such as geopolitics, economic uncertainty, technological innovation and more.

The county will be exploring those potential challenges as part of a visioning exercise to help us think strategically about how we can adapt to changing conditions. You'll be able to participate online. I will have more information when we launch this "futuring" exercise, but please start thinking about the things you think we will be facing in the future and how we'll have to respond.

Sales tax

A referendum is on the ballot this fall regarding extending the 1% local option sales tax for six years. This is not a new tax, it has been approved by voters in Charlotte County for 26 years. If voters choose to extend it, the 1% local option sales tax will fund a variety of projects throughout Charlotte County.

For information, visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/salestax. To schedule a presentation for your organization, call Brian Gleason at 941-743-1944. Early voting starts Oct. 19 and Election Day is Nov. 3.

Awards

Charlotte County earned a Digital Counties Survey award from the Center for Digital Government and the National Association of Counties. The survey, conducted by CDG in partnership with NACo, identifies the best technology practices among U.S. counties, including initiatives that streamline delivery of government services, encourage open data, collaboration and shared services, enhance cybersecurity and contribute to disaster response and recovery efforts.

In communicating with our citizens and stakeholders, our mindset is to reach people where and how they want to be reached, whether it's through monthly report emails, social media, traditional media, in-person outreach meetings, online surveys and more. Increasingly, and especially since the pandemic began, digital communications has become a vital tool for keeping people informed, prepared and safe. Congratulations to our staff for being so responsive to changing times and delivering exceptional service digitally and in every way possible.

Hector Flores is the Charlotte County administrator. Readers may reach him at Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.