

Charlotte County update for 9/23/20

County seeks public input on strategic plan

By Gordon Burger, Charlotte County Budget Director

Although Charlotte County government will begin its 2020/21 Fiscal Year on Oct. 1, we are already starting to work on next year's budget. For local governments the budget is far more than just a list of line items of what is going to be spent. The budget is how strategic direction, policy and priorities are set. It is a long-range financial plan and an operations guide. As important as the budget is, the process is just as important. The budget process helps decision-makers make informed choices about the provision of services and capital assets and promotes stakeholder participation in the process.

Charlotte County operates a two-year budget process, meaning we plan on a two-year cycle but the Board adopts two one-year budgets. This process begins with the County Commission updating its strategic plan. Starting with the board's strategic goals helps ensure we are keeping a long-range perspective and allocating resources based on what we are trying to accomplish rather than just repeating what we have done in the past.

One of the primary focuses going into this planning process will be considering what a post-COVID-19 world, specifically Charlotte County, will look like and how we best adapt. Like all organizations, Charlotte County government has faced multiple challenges over the past several months of this pandemic. How do we best serve and protect our citizens? How do we best protect our workforce? How do we balance a budget with increased costs and reduced revenues? These are issues we have already addressed but no one really knows what lies ahead. Not since 9/11 have we faced something that changed our world and the way we operate so dramatically.

To be as prepared as possible, we are incorporating a futuring exercise into the strategic planning process. Although no one knows exactly what a post-COVID-19 world looks like, we can imagine multiple scenarios. The process involves five broad steps:

Identify trends —What are the assumptions, drivers, and uncertainties involved.

Fast forward - Imagine plausible, but dramatically different, futures.

Inhabit those futures - Work backward to develop stories about how those worlds came to pass.

Develop strategies - What can we do now to remediate or enhance each future.

Implement strategies - Are there specific things we can do that would impact multiple future scenarios.

An exercise of this nature requires a lot of participation from a wide range of experiences and insights. In addition to the expertise within our organization, we want to take advantage of the vast range of experience and knowledge that exists within our community.

We would like all of you to participate in the first step of identifying trends by taking a survey. Visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/cc-future. In the survey, you will see a list of uncertainties we face, ranging from very global, such as "movement toward remote workforce," to very localized, such as "status of local development" (Sunseeker Resort, Babcock Ranch, etc.). You can

participate in two ways. First, tell us what you think are the top three items most likely to impact us. Second, tell us if we missed something.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this process. This is our community. It is a great community with great people and together we can make sure the future is bright for the next generation.

Gordon Burger is the Charlotte County budget director. Readers may reach him at Gordon.Burger@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.