

Charlotte County update for 2/24/21

Utility strategic plan funds critical water infrastructure

By Craig Rudy

Now in its 30th year, the Utilities Department provides potable water, wastewater treatment and disposal and reclaimed water for irrigation, serving more than 63,000 customers throughout unincorporated Charlotte County, including more than 41,000 sewer connections and more than 63,000 water connections.

In 2020, the utility distributed 4.2 billion gallons of water through 1,500 miles of pipeline. It operates and maintains 960 miles of sewer pipeline. Extensive removal and replacement efforts are underway on water and sewer system components nearing the end their lifespan as part of the utility's repair and replacement program in its strategic plan.

Also funded under the plan is a Cybersecurity, Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) project to ensure the safety of the utility system. Additionally, a \$1 million grant will fund a resiliency study to improve the utilities preparation for sea level rise and hurricanes.

April 1 begins the third and final year of a 7% rate increase for Charlotte County Utilities' customers. The increases will fund critical capital improvement projects, system replacement and rehabilitation of infrastructure, operating and maintenance expenses, and existing and future debt service payment requirements.

Since February 2019, when the rate increase was approved, capital improvement projects, including the expansion of the East Port Water Reclamation Facility and the replacement of the Burnt Store Water Reclamation Facility are quickly moving along. Both projects are in the final design phases. Construction is expected to begin at the end of this year. In the next few years, due to significant growth in West County, the utility plans to start the expansion at its West Port Water Reclamation Facility. The state requires these projects due to current and projected growth within these areas.

As a member of the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority the county is responsible for its portion of costs to ensure there is the necessary infrastructure to provide significant water supply to 90 percent of its water customers. Future water demand projections show more water storage will be needed to meet demands for years beyond 2030. To meet the requirement by 2030, a project is currently underway to increase storage by six billion gallons.

Extensive replacement and rehabilitation of our current infrastructure is also in progress. In central part of the county construction on Lift Station No. 2 has begun. Initially constructed in the 1960s, this lift station has reached its maximum life expectancy. In conjunction with the lift station project, the water and sewer mains along Conway Boulevard are also being replaced. Replacement of numerous existing wastewater and water mains throughout the county is underway. Work has also commenced in the Deep Creek neighborhood to replace the existing sewer force main. This project also includes upgrading the existing pumps and apparatuses at five lift stations within the project limits. The Ackerman water quality project includes replacing the current aging water lines and construction of a new water booster station. Lastly, both

physical and cyber security is extremely important to our operations. Over the next few years the utility is making significant security improvements to existing infrastructure.

Without the 7% increases, these vital projects would not be possible.

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