

Charlotte County update for 4/21/21

## **County Commission updating its strategic plan**

By Hector Flores

Earlier this week, the County Commission held the first of a series of workshops to update its strategic plan as part of the two-year budget process. In 2020, the board streamlined its strategic plan by reducing the number of focus areas to four from nine. All county operations covered by the strategic plan fall under these four focus areas: Public Services, Economic and Community Development, Infrastructure and Efficient and Effective Government.

County administration created three interdepartmental task forces — affordable housing, water quality and workforce development — to create and implement short-term initiatives to meet a number of bold goals set by the commission.

At this week's workshop, the board refined some of its economic and community development goals based on fluid circumstances and accomplished tasks and set new goals. The new goals are

- Average 200 new affordable housing units added to the community inventory per year, 1000 total units added in five years
- Develop and implement the One Charlotte, One Water integrated water resource management plan before the end of Fiscal Year 2023
- Increase dual enrollment in vocation centers and local colleges by 3%
- Increase the number of college internships to 15 students (five students per semester) for FY2022 and 20 students for FY2023

We have taken significant steps to increase affordable housing opportunities, including the creation of the Charlotte HOME program that awards density, subsidizes fees, waives impact fees and removes barriers to affordable housing development. Earlier this month, the board directed staff to begin negotiations on the sale of a county-owned parcel on Bachmann Boulevard to a developer that would deliver 600 affordable house units. The board also increased its investment in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund by \$640,000 to bring the balance to \$1 million. Another 15 initiatives, ranging from expanding the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee to revising the housing section of the county's comprehensive plan, are underway.

On water quality, progress has also been steady. The rebranding of the county's strategy to One Charlotte, One Water is underway and a new water quality manager was hired to lead the effort. The water quality task force held an assembly of private and public sector experts and advocates last year and their recommendations will be folded into the comprehensive plan under development. Septic-to-sewer conversion in El Jobean began last year and the next phase of conversions in the Ackerman Avenue area just north of the Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserve launched earlier this month.

We are also working with local and regional government and educational partners conducting programs aimed at water quality monitoring, sea grass restoration, stormwater management, fertilizer reduction and public outreach.

In July 2020, Charlotte County joined the Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact designed to collaboratively identify, prepare for, adapt to, and mitigate climate change impacts. Among those impacts are sea-level rise, flooding and harmful algal blooms.

Workforce development initiatives include outreach to students at school assemblies and job fairs, providing internship opportunities in county departments and support for the Charlotte Technical College airframe and powerplant program that will produce qualified airplane mechanics for the growing aviation industry.

Over the past three years, the county has hired 47 interns from local high schools and colleges, in addition to the six currently employed. Fifteen percent were later hired for full- or part-time by county departments.

In May, the board will hold another workshop to review its goals and progress on infrastructure, with workshops on public services and efficient and effective government to follow later this year. I look forward to sharing with you the results of those discussions in future articles.

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