

Charlotte County update for 5/12/21

Board workshop highlights levels of service, maintenance

By Hector Flores

The Charlotte County Commission on Thursday held its second strategic focus area workshop. Of the board's four strategic focus areas, this workshop highlighted levels of service and maintenance delivered by the county.

Staff presented data and program updates covering the broad range of services provided, including public safety and emergency response, recreation and cultural programs, water and wastewater, road and drainage, waste collection, public transportation, building permitting and inspections, mosquito control and more.

The board also reviewed progress on its goal of defining levels of service for all departments by next year. Levels of service determine everything from staffing to budgets to hours of operation and dozens of other factors in between. We looked at customer support center call volume, service requests, citizen reports via our cell phone and website app, funding comparisons by department and how we compared with similar-sized counties and our neighbors.

Some eye-popping data came out of the number-crunching. For example, our Community Development Department reviewed 17,993 plans last year, which represented a 72% increase over 2015. The number of followers of the county's Facebook page has risen 42% since January 2020. We think that's due in part to the volume of pandemic information posted to the page and the engagement we provided by hosting livestream interviews with the Health Department director ~~and~~ answering viewer questions in real time.

Another board goal was to build on department accreditations and professional certifications to ensure our departments and staff were using industry best practices to deliver programs and services. Our Community Services Department recently received accreditation from the National Recreation and Parks Association's Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies. Currently the Public Works Department is going through the American Public Works Association accreditation program.

As part of the focus area covering levels of maintenance, the board also received an update on the implementation of the county's new asset management system. The board has long held the view that we must take care of what we have, whether it's buildings, vehicles, pipelines, roads, parks, equipment, etc. The new system integrates all the data points available to staff — inspections, maintenance schedules, asset locations, service requests, citizen complaints, staffing levels and more — and allows us to identify how our investment in maintenance and asset management policies are paying off on behalf of taxpayers. For example, a vehicle may perform well for 10-12 years, but we can get more money for it at auction after seven years and spend less on maintenance costs over that extra three- to five-year period. We also get excellent resale values on our vehicles because of the detailed maintenance history we can demonstrate.

The final two focus areas the board will review later this summer are infrastructure and efficient and effective government. I look forward to those discussions and sharing updates with you.

Centennial Memories

Our Centennial observances continue today with “Centennial Memories ... This is OUR Charlotte!” which runs from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center, 75 Taylor St. in Punta Gorda. The free program will feature community members sharing experiences, photos, artifacts, stories, and memorabilia.

The event will include Port Charlotte High School ROTC Color Guard, exhibit booths, performances by local dance groups and musicians, the Royal Order of Ponce de Leon Conquistadors and their replica ship, and Centennial souvenirs. A film room will show video footage from the county’s past and a photo exhibit will show the county’s progress through the decades.

Swing by to see our history through the memories of your neighbors. For information about the county’s Centennial, visit www.CharlotteCounty100.com.

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