

Commission supports Cultural Center needs assessment

By Hector Flores

Commissioners on Dec, 14 expressed support for a Charlotte Community Foundation offer to conduct an independent study of community needs and whether a repurposed facility could meet those needs. They directed staff to support the foundation's study and expect recommendations next year. The board also approved a short-term lease with Freedom Bible Church for the use of the theater and some office space for its services and programs.

At the meeting, staff presented the board with a preliminary assessment of the condition of the building and found it will cost about \$130,000 a year plus utility expenses to maintain its current condition, with or without tenants. The county has received numerous inquiries about renting parts of the center for churches, catering companies and other purposes.

Staff also reviewed existing Community Services programs available to seniors at county libraries and recreation centers. In addition to the base library and recreation services, senior-friendly programs and amenities the county offers include arts and crafts, books clubs, discussion groups, pickleball, aquatics, exercise programs, nature park tours, walking and jogging pathways. Visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click Calendar for program dates and times.

Wind storm

Tuesday's wind storm was a reminder of why we preach continuous readiness for severe weather in Charlotte County. Hurricane season ended Nov. 30, but even an unnamed weather system like the one we experienced can deliver hurricane force winds.

Fortunately, there were no tornadoes in Charlotte County, according to the National Weather Service. Lee County was impacted by a tornado. Nonetheless, the wind we did receive packed a punch, knocking out power to tens of thousands of residents, downing trees and limbs, closing the U.S. 41 bridges, outing traffic signals and even damaging homes in many areas.

Many thanks to our Office of Emergency Management and Public Works Department for identifying hazards and responded to fix lights, clears roads and pushing our messaging to keep our residents safe and informed. Those departments and others, including our Facilities, Utilities, Community Development and Community Services departments, continued performing damage assessments in the following days and made the necessary repairs as soon as possible.

Merry Christmas

On behalf of myself and my colleagues, I hope all of you enjoyed a Merry Christmas and wish you a happy, healthy New Year. We're pleased and privileged to deliver exceptional service to the people of Charlotte County.

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