

County making progress on strategic focus area goals

By Hector Flores

Last week, I wrote about the progress Charlotte County has made on the County Commission's strategic focus area goals involving affordable housing, water quality and workforce development. This week I want to cover what's been happening with infrastructure and level of maintenance and service.

Two of the goals the board set for its infrastructure strategy were the funding and completion of a capital needs assessment through 2029 and defining and maintaining a balance between operating and capital budgets. County staff have completed an updated the 20-year CNA as part of the fiscal years 2024 and 2025 two-year budget process. The capital and operational budgets balance and the county has stable reserves.

One new strategic initiative was to commission a population growth model that looks into the near future but also decades ahead. The company that conducted the study explores population growth at the granular level by regions and even neighborhoods. The data will help drive budgetary, program, facility and services decisions far into the future. The data will be factored into the fiscal years 2026 and 2027 budget process.

The board also stressed the importance of delivering on projects funded by the 1% local option sales tax voters approved in 2020. Planning, design and construction is currently in progress on approved sales tax projects. Of the 24 projects on the list, three have already been completed, two are under construction, one is in permitting and three are in the design phase. Through February 2024 the sales tax has generated \$124 million. To keep the board and the public abreast of the progress on projects, staff provide a quarterly public update.

In the public services focus area, the board's goal was to develop levels of maintenance for all facilities with a focus on preservation of assets and consider the balance between quality, timeliness and cost. To help manage the thousands of assets the county has, we've begun implementing an asset management system. We also have created and are putting in place a countywide strategic asset management plan that determines assets' values, manages lifecycles and sustainability, performs risk assessments and manages performance.

The Public Works and Utilities departments went live with the asset management software in 2022 and 2023 respectively and will be joined by the Facilities Department in July. Phase 2 of the project will incorporate the Community Services and Public Safety departments and the Mosquito and Aquatic Weed Control Division.

Another public services focus area was levels of service. Staff was directed to identify positions and funding sources required to meet levels of service, and present recommendations to the County Commission during budget workshops. We also needed to align staffing and budget to meet needs and implement board policies and goals. With the extraordinary growth we've

experienced in recent years, it is more important than ever to keep an eye on how we are meeting expectations for public safety, services, programs and infrastructure.

I will report on the efficient and effective focus area and bold goals in my column next week. Visit www.charlottecountyfl.gov/agendas and click the May 21 Strategic Focus Area Updates link to see more details in the PowerPoint presentation.

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