

## **The Road to Recovery from Hurricane Ian**

By Travis Perdue

The two-year anniversary of Hurricane Ian is upon us. I'd like to take this opportunity to outline the progress that has been made in our recovery. Navigating the unknowns of internal and external influences was one of the biggest challenges in determining the path forward early in the response phase. Data gathering and a collaborative effort with all stakeholders was critical to a defined plan.

Charlotte County staff identified multiple methods to repair all infrastructure types. Two of the biggest challenges to overcome were navigating the insurance claims and FEMA reimbursement. Both have unique processes and rules that required building a roadmap to follow the reimbursement programs within each. Facilities Management started with a list of 443 damaged assets covered under insurance and another 525 damaged assets for which we applied for FEMA reimbursement.

For insured assets, we used a path we normally follow by contracting with a construction manager at risk to evaluate, estimate and make repairs. The first project was the Charlotte Sports Park with the goal of making all repairs prior to January of 2024 in time for the Tampa Bay Rays spring training season. That effort was supported by the County Commission, administration and several departments, alongside contracted vendors. We were successful in opening for the 2024 spring training season.

From there we used the same methods to establish three additional contracts to make the remaining insured asset repairs. As of today, we are approximately 75% complete in various stages across the county. Status updates on projects can be found on the county website, [www.charlottecountyfl.gov/projects](http://www.charlottecountyfl.gov/projects). Scroll down to Hurricane Ian Projects and click Facilities Repairs. The contract completion timelines for many of the damaged assets is February 2025, with a few larger projects extending into the Fall 2025.

FEMA projects follow an entirely different path, which include several agency reviews prior to commencement of work. This process, much like the insurance process, is countywide and applies to all uninsured assets that in large part includes open property like parks, fences, signage, lighting, and many others. The application process and deadlines for submittal was the first challenge to overcome. Led by the Fiscal Services team, with support from vendors, consultants, and other department staff, this effort was achieved with great success. Unlike the insurance process, FEMA guidelines require an extensive review and approval plan prior to any award of funding. The FEMA process also has several layers of funding methods that each have their own qualifiers and specific rules to navigate for approvals. Currently many projects are still in the FEMA review process with an undetermined timeline for construction.

As we look ahead, we still have a long road to full recovery. We have lessons learned that improve our preparedness for the years to come. We have great examples of resiliency in current methodologies while improving on others. We have a team poised and ready to respond better than ever before. We have a community that stands together and support each other when in need.

Stay safe, stay prepared and stay resilient.

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