

# Sewer plan a milestone for Charlotte Harbor

Charlotte Harbor is a critical part of Charlotte County's economic health. The harbor's health impacts not only fishing, retail and travel industries, but also the real estate market and home values.

We initiated our Blue Water Strategy to ensure and sustain the quality of our water resources, protecting and providing a safe water supply, a recreational haven and an environmental resource. The Blue Water Strategy consists of four key components: wastewater, reclaimed water, stormwater and drinking water. On Nov. 21, the Charlotte County Commission approved a blueprint for replacing septic systems in the county with sewer service. The sewer plan is based on a detailed analysis of existing septic systems, with priority areas determined by proximity to surface water, density and age of systems and the quantity of nitrogen released. Areas that scored highest will be identified for septic- to-sewer conversion.

The board's adoption of the plan follows its implementation of a pilot septic-to-sewer program in the East and West Spring Lake area. Work is underway to connect about 2,300 properties to sewer. The first five-year phase of the Sewer Master Plan will include 14 neighborhoods with about 4,000 septic tanks. After the first phase is completed, annual septic system effluent nitrogen loadings should decrease by approximately 114,000 pounds.

The plan anticipates homeowners would pay \$11,500, which could be financed monthly over 20 years or paid off at once. That figure will be indexed for inflation over time. Vacant lots would not be charged until they are developed. Because that amount does not fully cover the cost of construction, a subsidy will be required.

As we move closer to launching the first phase more details will be finalized about the funding of the plan, but among the subsidy options are using a portion of a future sales tax referendum, Deep Water Horizon oil spill money, state grants and general fund revenues. Decisions on those options will come back to the board as will individual project proposals, agreements and contracts. We will continue to solicit and welcome public input along the way.

All of us have a responsibility to ensure the future health of Charlotte Harbor. Doing nothing and allowing pollutants to continue to degrade it is not an option. We have seen what can happen when decisions get put off. The Indian River Lagoon on Florida's East Coast grew so polluted from septic tank contaminants, stormwater runoff and other factors, it suffered widespread algae blooms, brown tide and fish kills. A recent rash of unexplained deaths of dolphins, manatees and pelicans ultimately led to a consensus to act. Communities around the lagoon and state are spending tens of millions of dollars on dozens of sewer and stormwater projects, muck dredging, de-nitrification plants and more.

Charlotte County is acting now rather than wait for a crisis. To learn more about the county's Blue Water Strategy and the sewer plan, visit [www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov](http://www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov) and click Utilities under Popular Links.

**Calendar honor**

The Florida Association of Counties selected a photo of Charlotte County's Stump Pass to appear in its 2018 FAC Calendar: Bodies of Water. Charlotte County Community Services Department Graphics Specialist Vitaliy Zhigulin's photo will be featured in August 2018.

All of Florida's 67 counties were asked to submit their best photos of the bodies of water in their county. More than 600 photos were submitted. Fifteen were selected for the 2018 FAC Calendar.

Charlotte County photographers have been featured in five of the past six FAC calendars. In 2016 and 2017, photos by Public Works Department Maintenance and Operations Manager John Elias were selected. In 2014, Community Services Department Program Coordinator Lisa Maretti's photo was chosen. Budget and Administrative Services Real Estate Specialist Patty Stefan's photos were included in the 2012 and 2013 calendars.

Congratulations to Vitaliy and all our past winners.

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