

Charlotte County update for 1/22/20

## County communication goes both ways

By Ray Sandrock, Charlotte County administrator

While Charlotte County provides a range of functions, from public safety, road and utility infrastructure, parks and recreation, human services, economic development and growth management, at the core of each is public service. The most integral element of that is citizen engagement – what do people want?

Commissioners hear from residents at twice-monthly commission meetings at the Administration Center, 18500 Murdock Circle in Port Charlotte, and the annual series of budget hearings. Public input on agenda items takes place soon after the start of the 9 a.m. board meetings. During the second monthly commission meetings, public input on any topic is welcome, beginning at 1 p.m. Of course, commissioners can be reached any time via phone (941-743-1300) or email ([assistant@charlottecountyfl.gov](mailto:assistant@charlottecountyfl.gov)). Direct email addresses are on the county website, [CharlotteCountyFL.gov](http://CharlotteCountyFL.gov).

Between those direct expressions of the public will, the county uses many tools and strategies to get input on specific projects and policies. Advisory committees for neighborhood taxing units and other topics (parks and recreation, beaches and shores, natural resources, etc.), allow residents to provide review and input directly to the county commission. There are 28 advisory committees in the county. Currently, there are 22 vacancies on 17 of those committees. If you would like to serve on one, visit the website and click Committee Vacancies at the bottom of any page.

We also solicit input at public meetings for issues like signs, growth management and flood management. Right now, a citizen focus group selected by the board is reviewing projects for inclusion on a prospective sales tax referendum. Last month, the county hosted a series of meetings about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's new flood maps, which drew hundreds of property owners to learn about any changes and give feedback.

The county also provides ways for residents to communicate about topics on their computer, tablet or smart phone. On the website, which generated more than 5 million pageviews last year, click Contact Us in the menu on the left side of the page. You can choose a specific department to report potholes, overgrown brush, dangerous conditions, broken equipment and more. If you have a general question or comment, there's an option for that. You can even submit photos of the condition you are reporting.

People can file reports and comments via their smart phone or tablet on the county's app, which is available free for Apple and Android devices. Since the service was launched in 2015, more than 13,000 submissions have been received. Nearly 97 percent have been logged as completed.

Every two years, the county commissions a survey from the National Research Center. The survey is mailed to 1,600 random residents and covers safety, mobility, natural environment, built environment, economy, recreation and wellness, education and enrichment and community engagement. In 2018, we added an online survey open to anyone and another 278 people

responded. The next survey will be done this November. Check your mail and if you do not receive a survey, watch out for announcements about the online version.

Many people are on social media, which are great interactive platforms. Charlotte County has more than two dozen social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Next Door, that cover department or division news and events, such as parks, libraries, human services, public safety and transit. Visit the county website and click Social Media at the top to see the list of pages. Please like and/or follow them, so we can keep you up to date on all the goings-on in the county.

Personal contact is another way we connect with our customers. County staff attend community events, such as the air show, concerts, festivals and homeowners group meeting. Departments also schedule tours of facilities and whole days of demonstrations, such as the annual Public Works Day. In the past four years, CC-TV collected more than 2,000 surveys at more than two dozen events. For the past 10 years, we organized citizen academies for people to learn about county government. They are open to anyone and since 2010, more than 275 people have graduated from the academies. County staff also serve on business- and community-focused committees, such as the chambers of commerce, Economic Development Council, Together Charlotte and United Way, where they interact with hundreds of residents and stakeholders.

We practice continuous improvement in the county, so we can always get better at engaging residents. If you have any ideas, I'd love to hear them. Contact me at the email address below.

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