

Charlotte County update for 2/26/20

Monthly report provides data for decision-making

By Ray Sandrock, Charlotte County administrator

In a previous column, I mentioned the changes the county has made to departmental reports, including making them more widely available to the general public via a Constant Contact email distribution list. The reports contain valuable information administration and the County Commission uses to gauge department performance, highlight development progress, track customer service performance and share key metrics such as transit ridership, recreation center and pools usage and social media traction.

Reviewing the January 2020 Monthly Report, I was struck by data in a number of categories. In the first four months of Fiscal Year 2019-20, our Community Development Department has issued more than 9,500 permits. We're on pace to surpass the number of permits issued last fiscal year and reach a two-year total of 56,000 permits. That's an incredible level of construction activity across all categories: single-family housing, roof work, window and door replacement, fence and pool installation and much more.

In the Community Services Department, attendance at two recreation centers – Harold Avenue and South County – exceeded 9,300 patrons in January. Tringali Park Recreation Center was not far behind, with nearly 7,700 patrons last month. Because we've been tracking these numbers and planning for population growth, all three were expanded recently and two new recreation centers – at Centennial Park and Ann & Chuck Dever Regional – opened in the past five months. The two new rec centers combined saw nearly 8,000 patrons in January. Dever attendance rose 23% from December 2019 and Centennial rose 39% as new programs were added and residents and visitors learned about the new facilities.

The three expansions and two new rec centers were funded by the 2014 1% local option sales tax approved by voters. You told us you wanted these facilities and you're embracing them.

Sometimes numbers don't pop out at you like a 39% increase in facility patrons. Ridership on Charlotte County Transit, which provides door-to-door bus transportation, is slightly down over comparable periods for the first four months of FY19-20. Looking at full-year figures, we may fall below 120,000 total rides for the second year straight. Since the overall population is rising, those figures need to be studied to determine what is behind the trend. Are residents growing less dependent on public transit? Is our customer base shrinking or are riders finding alternative means of visiting doctors and going shopping? Do we need to increase marketing to reach potential riders who are not aware of the service?

Some of the numbers in the reports reflect serious life and death issues, such as responses by Fire & EMS units. As our fire chief likes to say, there's no off-season for our first responders anymore. It gets busier during the winter months, but it's never slow. The numbers bear him out. In August 2019, engines and rescues made 4,500 runs. In January 2020, they made 5,400.

That 900-run difference poses management challenges regarding staffing levels, overtime budgeting, maintenance and training schedules and recruitment. Covering the months with 180 runs a day requires a certain level of staffing and equipment. For the months when we average 150 runs a day, how do we efficiently manage our resources while maintaining readiness?

The Monthly Reports can be viewed online. Visit CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click Monthly Reports under Hot Topics. To get the report emailed directly to you, send your name and email to PublicInformation@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

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