

Administrator's Update for 1/30/09

By Roger Baltz

Commissioner Loftus, Commissioner Skidmore, Commissioner Starr, and I attended the Charlotte Harbor CRA ribbon cutting event this past week. The event highlighted and focused upon several improvements which have now been completed in the Charlotte Harbor area. Sewer line construction, the building of a linear waterfront park with walking paths, and a new entry sign near the Highway 41 bridge across the Peace River have now been completed in the area.

Our County Commissioners have approved a future land use amendment for the West County Town Center. This approval is the first project to utilize the new "Compact Growth Mixed Use" future land use classification adopted by the Board last year. The project, located east of intersection of CR 771 and 776, is 1,187 acres in size. When built out, the project will contain 1.5 million sq. ft. of commercial and office uses, 1800 - 4000 residential units, and significant interlinked preservation areas. The proposal is a significant departure from the traditional development pattern in Charlotte County. The Compact Growth Mixed Use designation was created to allow efficient, compact, mixed use communities so that citizens have the opportunity to live, work and play in a localized area.

The Peace River Water Authority has requested the Southwest Florida Water Management District authorize the use of the existing drinking water interconnect between Charlotte County and the Englewood Water District. This interconnect is capable of supplying drinking water to the bulk of our West County customers, reducing water demands on the Peace River Facility. It is anticipated that the interconnect will be used, as needed, throughout the spring. Our interconnects with neighboring communities and agencies are part of Charlotte County's overall water supply plan that insures a constant source of water to our residents during peak usage or periods of drought.

FEMA has approved seven mitigation grants for various County fire stations that will allow us to install impact screens on windows, greatly reducing possible damage from future storms. FEMA will pay for 75% of all costs associated with the projects.

Our Emergency Management Office has begun the 2009 review of the emergency plans for the County's healthcare facilities, ambulatory surgery centers, and hospitals. Each facility's plan is reviewed yearly to ensure that they are prepared to conduct a safe evacuation of their residents and patients during an emergency.

The City of Punta Gorda's Public Safety Building has been connected to the County's fiber optic network. This will allow the City to integrate their 911 phone and radio dispatch systems with the Charlotte Sheriff's Office 911 and radio dispatch system. Our fiber optic network was also expanded in Englewood to the new Oyster Creek Park. One of the benefits is that wireless internet connectivity is now available to the public in this location.

We have expanded the Conservation Charlotte information available on our website (CharlotteCountyFL.com). Conservation Charlotte is a voter approved initiative that provides funding for environmentally sensitive lands. Available on the website are photographs of property and wildlife at Thornton Key, Buck Creek, Deep Creek, Shell Creek and Prairie Creek preserves. You may also access descriptive information about each property, site maps and activities available at each location, as well as videos that provide an overview of the properties.

A representative of the Southeast Outdoor Press Association visited Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands last week to discuss the organization's 2009 annual conference to be held at the new Event Center. The conference is attended by approximately 175 outdoor communicators from the Southeastern United States, destination management organizations, and companies representing fishing tackle, firearms and outdoor gear. This event will increase the area's visibility as an outdoor, ecotourism destination. We also hosted outdoor writers from North Carolina who had an opportunity to experience a variety of activities such as fishing in Charlotte Harbor. These visitors write for a several large newspapers and this exposure will also increase interest in our area as a tourism destination.