

The County Budget Process - 3/6/2009

By Ray Sandrock, Budget Director

Charlotte County is now bracing for revenue shortfalls in the \$50 million range for Fiscal Year FY09/10. The majority of the shortfall is due to the anticipated decline in property valuations resulting in less revenue to fund County operations. Property tax revenues fund important public safety functions such as our Emergency Management Services (EMS) and law enforcement. Property taxes also fund the following services; (1) Parks, Recreation and Library services; (2) Human Service programs; (3) Animal Control; (4) Mosquito Control and many other quality of life issues.

The difficulty in dealing with revenue shortfalls of this magnitude is balancing what services can be reduced or eliminated while ensuring that they are in alignment with the desires of the citizens. It is often the case that in poor economic times, the need for local government services increases especially in the areas of Human Services, Law Enforcement and leisure services such as Parks and Libraries. As folks have less financial resources, the library systems provide low cost alternative recreational opportunities as well as research centers for job opportunities. Public computer centers at the local libraries are being utilized for resume writing, job searches and filing for unemployment. This gives a flavor for the difficulty of reducing services to the public while balancing the needs of the Community. We will be enhancing our County website by adding a budget portal where citizens can provide input on how to address the budget challenges we face.

Charlotte County's annual budget process is now moving at a rapid pace with twenty (20) workshops scheduled with the Board of County Commissioner's during the months of March through May 2009.

A new approach, Performance Based Budgeting will be utilized by the Board of County Commissioner departments. The focus of this process is on what core services are being provided and examining the current level of service offered. Reduction Scenarios will be presented to the Board for consideration.

We are also looking at where we can consolidate functions to gain efficiency savings. Charlotte County has been partnering with other Counties across the state to identify innovative ideas that have been identified and implemented successfully.

Another element to the budget challenge will be to eliminate or delay some capital projects that have been planned for next fiscal year. The projects could be delayed into the future and re-direct the funds to pay for County Services.

On March 3, 2009 the Board of County Commissioners met with the Constitutional Officers (Sheriff, Tax Collector, Property Appraiser and the Clerk of the Court) to discuss joint participation in reducing expenditures across the County. A significant amount of County property taxes are used to fund Public Safety. Many Counties across the state are seeking reductions from Law Enforcement, Corrections and Ambulance Services (EMS).

Charlotte County Government is working hard to put into place a plan that will balance services provided with revenue levels. This plan will be formulated with the goal of producing the least impact to citizens, however, everyone needs to be cognizant of the fact that reductions of this magnitude are likely to come with impacts.

We welcome your input on helping the County prioritize County services. Please look for an upcoming survey on the County's website seeking such input.