

Administrator's Update for 10/9/09
by Roger Baltz

Our Charlotte County budget for 2010 has now been approved by the county commissioners. This is one of the most important tasks we undertake each year. The budget totals roughly \$780 million total combined funds. The general fund, which is primarily funded by property taxes, is just over \$150 million.

County governments in Florida must produce a balanced budget in which expenditures do not exceed revenues. We budget using 95 percent of the estimated revenues expected as an added factor of fiscal prudence.

The budget process we used can be described as performance-based budgeting with a targeted result. The targeted result clearly stated at the beginning of our process was that the millage rate would not increase regardless of declines in property tax revenues and other revenue sources. Many governmental entities around the state did not take this approach in light of the decline in revenues created by falling property values and the overall economic slowdown. Our budget approach, however, focused upon decreasing expenditures in producing our budget.

A summation of some of the significant steps which we utilized in preparing our budget were:

Each area of operations under BOCC authority was reviewed and services were identified as mandatory, crucial or discretionary. County departments prepared reduction scenarios of 10 percent, 20 percent and 30 percent. Administration offered recommended reductions, which were reviewed and either accepted or changed by our commissioners. Our goal with this area of our budget was to find \$10 million in reductions. The final result was a reduction of roughly \$16 million.

In working to meet our budget challenges, more than 20 public budget workshops were held, surveys to solicit both public and employee input were utilized, a hiring freeze with limited exceptions was put in place, and staffing levels have been reduced to what they were five years ago. More than 50 positions were eliminated throughout the organization. County staff also monitored spending levels throughout this past fiscal year to limit expenditures when possible.

Our commissioners also reviewed and delayed or eliminated several capital projects which depended upon ad valorem (property tax) funding while continuing with many others projects which will be funded by other sources (impact fees, penny sales tax, gas taxes,...). Just over \$52 million in total reductions were approved in our budget.

Our constitutional officers reduced their budgets at the request of our commissioners. The amounts of these reductions combined totaled more than \$4 million and I appreciate their cooperation and assistance.

Looking ahead, we plan to monitor all revenue sources and tightly control spending in all areas of our operations. While we will continue to hope for the best, we must also plan for the worst. As always, we will strive to provide the services and programs desired by our citizens while living within our budget means.

Our public works staff has been moving forward with several projects. Our lighting section inspected and tested new traffic signals and fiber optic networks being installed as part of the U.S. 41 sidewalk project from Monaco Drive to Aqui Esta Drive. Signalization at the intersection of Toledo Blade Boulevard and Hillsborough Boulevard was also tested and inspected as part of the Toledo Blade widening project.

Our engineering division staff and Florida Department of Transportation officials reviewed comments on the North Jones Loop Road and U.S. 17 intersections at Piper Road. Plans are awaiting final departmental approval before bidding. It is anticipated construction on this project will begin in January 2010. Our pouring of concrete for the Coral Creek Bridge decking is ongoing as well. Roadway lighting conduit has been installed and tested. Twenty-four linear feet of gravity wall has been installed.

Last week, Jie Shao and Steven Ellis from our growth management staff attended a meeting of the South Charlotte County Coalition at the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association office. Also attending was Urban Design Manager David Hilston from the city, as well as members of Team Punta Gorda. Topics for discussion included the proposed city/county overlay as part of the south county gateway project. The city and county have considered the idea of compatible land development regulations along common borders for several years. The Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center/Harbor Walk has received a design category award for outstanding new construction project. The award is from the Florida Main Street 2009 Secretary of State awards. Submissions for this award were prepared by the Main Street Punta Gorda design committee.