

Public Works at Your Service
by Robert T. Halfhill, Public Works Director

Earlier this week I received one of the best compliments of my public works career. A Charlotte County resident commented that when living in New England the local government would not take the time to speak with residents about service problems. He commented that the conversation we were having about a service problem would not have taken place in New Jersey.

I have thought about that conversation a great deal. How can a public works organization survive without communicating with the residents? The very existence of the Charlotte County Public Works Department is based on providing service to the public. Whether that is provided through the construction of a bridge, mowing of a right of way or the repair of a pothole, our goal is to provide service to the public and respond to requests from the citizens. We are open for business and working to provide effective service to the residents of Charlotte County.

Responding to service requests depends greatly on communicating. The need for service has to be communicated in order to begin the process of receiving service. That communication takes a multitude of forms.

Service request can be made by telephone to the Public Works Department by calling (941) 575-3600. Your call will be transformed into a customer service request which will be investigated to determine the validity of the request and scope of work required. The request will then be assigned to a work crew and scheduled. Materials or parts will be purchased or drawn from warehouse stock and the end result will be a crew showing up on site to make the repair or perform the work. Your call can be made 24 hours a day. During our 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. working hours you will speak to a customer service representative. After hours a message will be taken and you will be contacted by a customer service representative.

For those of us that are computer minded a service request can be made through the Charlotte County website at www.CharlotteCountyFL.com. Select "Public Works Service Request" from the list of popular links. You will be provided with a variety of service request categories to select from. Select the category you feel appropriate to your request and complete the service request form. A submit button is located at the bottom of the form. Your request will be retrieved by a customer service representative and you will be contacted to discuss the nature of your request.

I am frequently approached with service requests at meetings, presentations and other events. I generally take quickly scribbled notes and follow-up later with the customer service representatives or I give the resident my business card and ask that they call the department rather than depend on my note taking ability.

If you are more comfortable communicating your need for service through your County Commissioner, I encourage you to do so. The request will be communicated to Public Works from the Commissioner's office and the process of investigating and scheduling will begin.

Regardless of the method used to communicate the service request, Public Works strives to follow through and be responsive. However, we do operate under some restrictions.

- Generally, we are not allowed to work on private property. In some situations we do work on private property with the owner's permission to correct situations which affect other public areas. This is handled on a case by case basis.
- We are not allowed to violate permit restrictions. Drainage work is normally regulated by permits from agencies such as the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Often we have to obtain permission from the agency involved to perform the required work.
- We are not allowed to maintain or perform work on privately owned roads that have not been accepted by the County for maintenance. Generally, these roads have not been built to County standards and must meet these standards prior to the County accepting them for maintenance.
- We are not allowed to perform maintenance or repairs to state highways. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is responsible for maintaining those roads and highways. However, we will help coordinate with FDOT any work requested.

These are some of the major restrictions. The total is too numerous to discuss in this article. Whatever the restriction Public Works will make every effort to help resolve problems. However, sometimes the resolution is the responsibility of the property owner.

I am confident that it is the intention of every member of the Public Works Department to be customer friendly. It is our goal to be responsive, efficient and timely. With the exception of that occasional day where nothing goes the way we planned, we meet that goal. If you require service, please communicate that need to us in the manner you are comfortable with and let us strive to exceed your expectations.