

## **New Medical District Vision Becomes Citizen's Master Plan**

**By Jim Fendrick, Concurrency Manager**

In Sept. 2010, the Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved designating the area currently known as the Medical District area as a Community Revitalization Area. They also asked that Charlotte County citizens begin identifying their hopes and dreams for the district. Over 300 citizens and businesses participated in district planning activities, which included well-attended public meetings called charrettes, public surveys and personal interviews. The goal of these activities is the development of a Citizens' Master Plan for the district. The ideas of these visionary citizens are inspiring.

In the late 1950s, when the General Development Corporation (GDC) created Port Charlotte, it built the Medical District area to serve as the community's center of social culture, education, medicine and commerce, which was a success. The district now houses the county's two major hospitals, a large mall, about 800 other businesses, a thriving cultural center, and over 8,000 citizens in single and multi-family homes. The ages of district residents are split into groups of about one-third seniors, one-third younger adults and one-third children. All these elements will help this area regain its standing as one of the county's key centers and destinations.

In the past, it may have been your doctor's appointment or a trip to the mall that brought you to this area, but the citizens' vision is that the area become so attractive that you will want to spend the day. Citizens want to make the area "A great place to live, work and play."

The grand vision is to create an attractive, walkable public space with beautiful entry features, called gateways, on US 41 and Midway Boulevard, as well as expansive parks with entertainment opportunities such as a kid's splash feature, climbing wall, fishing, horseshoes and more. The grand vision also includes generous tree-lined greenways and trails throughout the area with bicycle/pedestrian bridges connecting neighborhoods to the cultural and commercial centers. A central park feature might include a covered stage for community concerts, plays, farmers markets and other fun activities. The area is also intended to become a "Smart Neighborhood," serving as a broadband hot spot, with a privately operated district website offering grocery delivery and other services to area residents and businesses. These improvements should result in the addition of new shops and restaurants to the area.

The planning process is already paying dividends. In response to neighborhood concerns, the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners already has approved the addition of a full-time Code Enforcement officer for the district to address property issues. In addition, the Charlotte County Sheriff's office has also offered to enhance its activities and services to the area.

The citizens have spoken, and now county staff is in the process of transforming citizen's ideas into an adoptable plan. Staff is working to bring this Master Plan back before the Board of County Commissioners in June or July of this year. Citizens are encouraged to continue to be involved through upcoming public meetings or by participating in Team Port Charlotte, which is a group of area citizens and businesses partnering with the county. For more information, please visit [www.CharlotteCountyFL.com](http://www.CharlotteCountyFL.com) or you may contact me directly at [jim.fendrick@charlottefl.com](mailto:jim.fendrick@charlottefl.com) or 941.764.4920.