

**Charlotte County zoning division is here to help
by Shaun Cullinan, Zoning Official**

I would like to take this opportunity to formally introduce myself as the new zoning official for Charlotte County. My name is Shaun Cullinan and I came to Charlotte County by way of the city of North Port, where I was a planner for five years, and before that I was a contract administrator for a cell phone tower investment trust out of Sarasota. My background is in the field of law—I am an attorney licensed to practice in the state of Massachusetts where I formerly resided and was educated. I hope to bring a new set of skills, eyes, and understanding to the position.

Zoning staff reviews just about every type of permit for development that happens in Charlotte County, reviewing for consistency with the zoning code and comprehensive plan. For residential projects, including single family home, things such as setbacks, lot coverage, placement of accessory structures, and the like are reviewed by our division. For the commercial projects we do the site plan review process and all of the facets pertaining to it. We also address variances, special exceptions, and commercial name changes, just to name a few other tasks. The staff I have working with me are top-notch professionals with decade's worth of experience in Charlotte County and other parts of the country, and even the world.

In my new position I am working closely with county staff and various stakeholder groups in a comprehensive re-writing of the codes and ordinances of Charlotte County that pertain to land development and zoning. We hope to have a draft document available to the general public for review by the fall, if not sooner. The reason for this comprehensive overhaul is two-fold: to bring codes and ordinances into alignment with the recently adopted Smart Charlotte 2050 Plan (the comprehensive plan) as required by state statute; and also to bring a much needed update to codes that were last updated in the 1980s. Many things have changed since then, and the new code needs to reflect the new "way of the world" as it is.

On an interim basis, staff is working diligently on a more case-by-case type of review based on the current code, but taking into account unique circumstances that may require deviation from the strictest interpretation to a more flexible interpretation while still meeting the intent of the regulations. We work very closely with the customer to achieve the end result that they are looking for, but that is not to be confused with "rubber stamping" a project. Though we may not be able to come to a full agreement we will clearly explain the reasoning and offer various options to try and achieve something that will meet the code and also satisfy the customer's needs. We want people to make the zoning division their first stop for questions, and to know that we will work with them if issues arise. Contact the zoning division anytime with questions, concerns, or comments—we love to hear from people, as much of the time there is misinformation floating about and we are happy to clarify and explain the correct information. We can be reached at 941.743.1964.