

The County Budget – 2012 Forecast by Ray Sandroek, County Administrator

Budget season is here again and the county will continue to use performance-based budgeting practices to examine the budget. We are forecasting revenues to be more stable for the upcoming year which is very good news. As always, we will look to increase efficiencies and closely monitor spending. The hard work from the previous three year's budget processes has aligned us well in the short-term.

Over the past 3 years general revenues has been reduced by 85 million dollars. This was the result of property devaluations as well as reductions in other revenues such as sales tax and communication taxes. The reductions are reflective of the poor economic conditions we have been dealing with

The budget woes of the past have been addressed in several ways, including reductions in personnel and operating expenses, consolidation of county departments from 17 to 10, and delaying or eliminating capital projects funded by taxes and other general revenues. In addition, we have focused on our services and processes to ensure that we are doing so in the most efficient ways possible; and concentrated on maintaining our fiscal stabilization reserves.

While we are anticipating our revenues to stabilize we will still need to monitor impacts that may occur at the state level. The potential actions being discussed could push expenses currently at the state level down to the county. We refer to these as unfunded mandates.

As we begin another budget process we will focus our attention on several areas, including maintaining the precious resources that the county already owns, such as buildings, parks/libraries, and equipment. We will also continue to provide efficient services to the community, continue to examine the county's organization structure, and further explore grant opportunities and reach out to those that are willing to volunteer. We will also be focusing on partnering with other counties and municipalities for efficiencies and implementing a 2-year budget process with more emphasis on strategic planning.

I am thankful for and proud of the employees of Charlotte County. They are our greatest asset and I look forward to their input into this year's budget.

A successful budget process must have input from the community. We will be reaching out in several ways to accomplish this. In the near future, two workshops will be held to gather input. The first will be on Jan. 31, 2011 at 6 p.m. in the Murdock Administration Center (Board Meeting Room 119). The second will be at an Englewood-area location in early Feb. We would very much like to have your input and involvement.

In every budget process, the hard decisions are made by the Board of County Commissioners. Our goal is to provide them with the best information for informed decision making.

We look forward to framing a budget that will continue to focus on maintaining the services and infrastructure for Charlotte County.