

## **Charlotte County Improves Safety, Enables Self Reliance**

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Many new and renovated Charlotte County facilities enable individuals and organizations to be more self-reliant. At the same time, they enhance participation in leisure activities such as sports, programs and events. Often minor improvements also result in better safety, convenience and accessibility for those conducting business with Charlotte County. For example, the County is currently installing 21 improvements at 18 public locations throughout the County. These changes bring facilities into greater compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The ADA specifies design and construction standards for access to new public facilities. Many older facilities simply do not meet today's standard. This may be due to the original construction before current rules applied. Facilities may also have been added over time without adequate connections to existing facilities, or remodeled short of meeting standards.

Charlotte County takes seriously its obligation to provide full access to public services and recreation. We continually look for access deficiencies—and correct them. Sites being upgraded include parks, libraries and public buildings all across the County. Improvements fall into categories such as parking, walkways, and ramps, and often new retaining walls, handrails, paving, parking striping and signage are necessary. Designs are underway for fishing piers and boat ramps that must meet strict accessibility standards.

Other examples include paved, striped and signed accessible parking spaces. New paved walkways connect site amenities with other park features and parking spaces. Older walkways are being replaced to meet slope standards. Where ramps are needed, or do not meet slope and landing standards, they are added or replaced. These projects will not address every access deficiency at public facilities, but at many locations will enhance self-reliance for both young and old alike.

While many individuals benefit from ADA projects, other projects help youth organizations become more self-reliant. The County demolished two old, worn-out concession stands at Harold Avenue Park athletic fields. They were replaced with new buildings meeting all ADA access standards. In addition, they became Charlotte County government's latest "green" certified buildings. This means that they incorporate design, construction and operational practices that save energy and improve user comfort. Concession stands are also under construction at South County Regional Park soccer fields and Carmalita Park softball fields. For the concessions, sports leagues provide their own cooking, serving and storage equipment; Charlotte County provides only the space. By operating concession stands, leagues earn revenue that supports youth recreation.

User convenience, safety and accessibility are improved through other projects. One example includes a drive-through book drop-off location at Punta Gorda Public Library. Now patrons can stay in the driver's seat and use a drop-off lane to safely return books. A floating dock will soon be constructed at Port Charlotte Beach Park. Paddlers, including those with mobility concerns, will be able to launch watercraft more easily and safely by avoiding direct conflict with motorboat launching. In another project, new LED parking lot light fixtures will be installed at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County and the Port Charlotte Public Library. These will noticeably improve exterior lighting color, brightness and energy efficiency. Charlotte County will continue its concerted efforts to enable all users to enjoy safe access to its facilities and programs.