

Charlotte County update for 1/6/16

County seeking input for projects

By David Milligan, Charlotte County director of facilities, construction and maintenance

County facilities you use every day are conceived, budgeted, designed and constructed through a long process. Do you ever ask yourself, “What were they thinking when they came up with this?” The design process for a new project is filled with many steps, including formation of a concept, preliminary plans, and finally, construction documents. Along the way, there are usually many opportunities for anyone to have input on the project — its character, design, details and other factors. County staff and consultants are eager to hear your ideas to improve project designs in ways that better meet your needs. After all, you are the customer.

There are many ways your ideas and input can be expressed. As an example, look at the public input on Bay Heights Boat Ramp, a project now under construction. From land acquisition to approval of the construction contract there were at least 11 opportunities for public input regarding the design of the project. These included citizen input during County Commission meetings, advertised public input workshops and comment periods during the permitting process. In another example, the recently completed Parks and Recreation Master Plan offered extensive opportunities for public input including more than 22 public workshops, surveys and focus groups.

The county’s project design and decision-making process is transparent. Input is encouraged and may take several forms. The nature of public input opportunities will vary with the stage of the design process. Workshops are usually open-ended opportunities for diverse viewpoints. Early input through workshops is encouraged when project ideas are in the formative stage. Informal “voting” on design options may occur at workshops. Discussion may be as a group or round-robin in multiple stations. Ideas are harder to incorporate later when detailed plans are underway. There can be hands-on dialogue with project designers and county staff. Informational meetings may allow for fewer changes, but input is still encouraged. In either setting, consensus-building is helpful to provide direction for future design.

Your ideas and feedback do matter. County staff welcomes calls and emails with questions and input regarding projects. The county’s website, www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov, is a good place to gather information. Stakeholders are encouraged to contact county staff at 941.743.1200. These contacts often lead to ongoing relationships that enhance trust and understanding. By engaging in dialogue, the county may learn of factors surrounding the project that may not have been evident; the stakeholder may more clearly understand project objectives. Rumors and misinformation can be resolved through communication.

The public input process is meaningful only when you participate. A recent guest editorial in the newspaper put it well — get involved and stay informed. It was through public input — a citizen advisory committee and voter referendum — that Charlotte County is now on the brink of developing new projects funded by a 1 percent local option sales tax. There will be many ways to provide input that will shape the outcome of those projects. Public meetings are scheduled for two of these projects:

- South County Community Library: 4 p.m., Jan. 14 at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center.
- McGuire Park: 4 p.m., Jan. 21 at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County.

More public workshops and informational meetings will be held in 2016 for other projects, including new recreation centers at North Charlotte Regional Park and Ann Dever Memorial Regional Park; renovations at Harold Avenue Recreation Center, South County Regional Park, and Tringali Recreation Center; multi-use trails; replacement of the West County Annex; Parkside design guidelines; and sewer expansion. There will be publicity in a variety of media prior to each workshop and public meeting. Commit now to make your views heard.

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