

Charlotte County update for 1/20/16

Utility transformation will save millions

By Raymond Sandrock, Charlotte County Administrator

Representatives from the consulting firm KPMG presented an overview of their work with Charlotte County Utilities staff to the Board of County Commissioners at its Jan. 12 meeting. KPMG conducted an organizational and operational audit of the utility last year, making 45 recommendations regarding capital project governance, customer service and billing, human capital management, information technology and reporting and accountability.

Throughout 2015, teams of utilities staff worked with KPMG consultants to implement a range of changes across the organization, especially customer service improvements, communications and long-range capital projects planning. Among the achievements already completed is a customer service knowledge base that enables utilities staff to quickly and accurately answer customer questions about their water and sewer service, bills and more.

Staff has completed a utility-wide strategic plan and specific strategic plans for information technology and utilities organization. Staff also established key performance indicators and created virtual “Just In Time” training tools for new and existing operations staff. The presentation noted that 22 of 45 recommendations have been fully implemented, 31 will be implemented by March 31 and all 45 will be implemented by Feb. 28, 2018.

KPMG identified \$2.5 million in annual savings to be achieved from the transformation. Savings will come from eliminating manual processes and duplicative efforts, allowing the department to reallocate labor costs.

I echo commissioners’ comments in praise of Utility Director Gary Hubbard and his team for their hard work and dedication to continuously improving their department in service of its customers and as stewards of the county’s environment and natural resources.

Within days of the KPMG presentation, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection selected the utility department for its 2015 Plant Operations Excellence Award in recognition of outstanding treatment plant operation, maintenance and compliance. Appropriately, the award will be presented at a March 8 ceremony at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center during a seminar called Focus on Change.

Library workshop

More than 200 people attended the Jan. 14 public workshop at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center to discuss the South County Library and Archive. Attendees provided input about the library’s potential programs, appearance and amenities. If you were not able to attend the workshop, there are still multiple opportunities to provide your input. To fill out a survey, go to www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click “Survey-South County Library” in the Hot Topics list. The next public workshop is scheduled for 4 p.m., March 17 at the event center.

Severe weather

Sunday morning's severe weather was a stark reminder of the potential for damaging and potentially life-threatening conditions that can impact our area. Public Works staff responded quickly on Sunday morning to hazardous road conditions across the county, More than 28 incidents were cleared by late afternoon, in addition to repairs to the South Gulf Cove lock.

Preparedness information is always available on the Emergency Management page of our website, timely information is provided on the department's Facebook page and Twitter feed (@CCOEM). We also send out warnings via your smartphone through the Wireless Emergency Alert system. Check with your service provider to find out if your phone is WEA-capable.

Emergency Management will be holding a SKYWARN severe weather training session at 2 p.m., Jan. 28 at the Emergency Operation Center, 26571 Airport Road east of Punta Gorda. This one-hour class will be conducted by Tampa Bay National Weather Service Warning and Coordination Meteorologist Dan Noah. Participants will receive a weather spotter's guidebook and become part of a nationwide network of citizen monitors. Space is limited to 50 participants. To reserve a spot, call 941.833.4000.

Kids Fest

The annual Charlotte Harbor Kids Fest for youngsters in 8th grade and below is scheduled for 10 a.m., Jan. 30 at Port Charlotte Beach Park. This popular free event will feature games and crafts, safety classes, character meet-and-greets, prizes and giveaways. Fire/EMS will have a fire truck on hand for kids to explore.

Ray Sandrock is the Charlotte County administrator. Readers may reach him at raymond.sandrock@charlottecountyfl.gov.