

Charlotte County update for 2/17/16

Babcock groundbreaking a county milestone

By Raymond Sandrock, Charlotte County Administrator

Last week's groundbreaking at Babcock Ranch represents a significant milestone in the future of Charlotte County. Not only will the new town eventually reach a projected population of 50,000 people, it is being designed as an energy self-sufficient community billed as the world's first solar city. Global marketing by the developer will bring attention and prospective homeowners not only to the new community, but to Charlotte County as a whole.

County planners have worked closely with Babcock Ranch developer Syd Kitson and his team throughout the permitting and design phase and our Economic Development Office was instrumental in facilitating a plan with FPL to build a 75-megawatt photovoltaic solar power plant on 440 acres in Babcock Ranch.

Zika virus

Charlotte County continues to take precautions against the potential spread of the mosquito-borne Zika virus. Mosquito Control staff sprayed more than 13,000 acres and responded to nearly 120 service requests between Feb. 3 and Feb. 9. Staff also conducted 15 landing rate tests to determine which areas needed to be sprayed and set traps specifically designed to catch the type of mosquitos known to carry the virus.

As of Tuesday, there have been 20 confirmed cases of the Zika virus in Florida, including one on the Lee County side of Gasparilla Island. All cases are travel-related, meaning there have been no locally-acquired cases of Zika in the state. Gov. Rick Scott has declared a public health emergency in eight counties. The Florida surgeon general has established a Zika virus hotline at 1-855-622-6735 to provide information, which also is available on the department's website, www.floridahealth.gov.

Transit ridership

Recent efforts to spread the word about Charlotte County Transit, which provides door-to-door public transportation, have begun paying off. In the past two weeks, ridership has been the highest since a policy change by Medicaid shifted its riders to a private-sector provider. Positive news coverage of the service, including a column by Commissioner Stephen R. Deutsch documenting his transit ride-along, has been very helpful.

Transit and communications staff are working on a proposed marketing plan to boost ridership numbers even higher, so we can optimize our transit budget by spreading fixed costs among as many riders as possible. In the works are a new function on the Charlotte County app that will allow users to reserve, change or cancel rides via their smartphones and a simplified price structure.

To learn more about Charlotte County Transit, go to www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click Public Transportation under Popular Links. To reserve a ride, call 941.575.4000.

Burnt Store Road

After nearly two years of construction, the 2.6-mile Burnt Store Road Phase III widening project is completed. Stretching from the Charlotte/Lee county line to just north of Zemel Road, this section is now four lanes with multiple turn lanes.

Some interesting numbers associated with this project:

- 22,623 tons of asphalt laid
- 15.8 miles of utility and drainage pipes installed
- 5.5 miles of six-foot sidewalks poured

The final 4.2-mile segment to be widened from north of Zemel Road to Notre Dame Boulevard will connect the two completed phases. It is currently under design. For information about both projects, go to www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click Project Status Updates under Popular Links.

Social media

Charlotte County has an active and growing presence on social media, including 11 departments or divisions that maintain Facebook pages to tell residents and visitors about current and upcoming events, programs and services.

The latest to join the social media world was the Public Works Department, whose page now features photos and a story about a visit to Neil Armstrong Elementary School for its Science Showcase Showdown Egg Drop. Students constructed vessels to keep a raw egg intact when it was dropped from a Public Works bucket truck.

Other departments or divisions with a Facebook presence include tourism, libraries, the historical center, parks and recreation, emergency management, economic development, animal control, human services, utilities and the extension service. Go to Facebook and “like” these pages to get timely updates in your news feed.

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