

Charlotte County update for 10/5/16

Kia, Murdock Village and economic development

By Raymond Sandrock, Charlotte County administrator

Two events, two big steps forward on economic development.

Saturday's grand opening of the new Fuccillo Kia of Port Charlotte generated a huge amount of excitement. Charlotte County is now home to the largest of Billy Fuccillo's four Florida Kia dealerships. The 70-acre site off U.S. 41 just south of the county line features a 50,000-square-foot showroom, administrative center and service bays. Mr. Fuccillo expects to create up to 250 jobs at the dealership.

Charlotte County's Community Development, Utilities and Public Works departments and the Economic Development Office worked closely with the Fuccillo Automotive Group on the project's permitting, utilities and infrastructure. With its aggressive marketing campaigns, we expect the dealership to bring thousands of people to Charlotte County, many of whom may never have been here and will bring plenty of business to other county stores and restaurants.

Earlier in the week, the County Commission accepted a letter of intent from Private Equity Group, which has a plan for a 452-acre, mixed-use development in our Murdock Village Community Redevelopment Area. The action opens a 30-day window for other proposals after which the county can proceed with negotiations on the sale of the property.

PEG's proposal calls for a variety of market-priced homes: single-family, townhomes, villas, condos and rental apartments.

"In addition to 2,400 residential units located within picturesque neighborhoods surrounding lakes and connecting to trails and amenities, the mixed-use community plan includes 200,000 square feet of village-style retail and commercial uses and a 150-key hotel," according to a fact sheet produced by the company.

PEG is based in Fort Myers, where it has invested and developed land, operated businesses and built commercial properties and residential communities for more than 30 years, according to the company. PEG has helped develop more than 14,000 acres in Florida. The company has built more than 8,000 homes and 16 shopping centers with more than one million square feet of leasing space.

If the county closes on the purchase, it will immediately return \$15 million worth of property to the tax rolls. According to the company's fact sheet, the project would generate \$92 million in annual economic impacts from jobs, wages and economic activity. Over 20 years of development, the present value of the project's economic activity is projected to be \$1 billion.

This proposal is in the earliest of stages and there is much work to be done, but as we have shown with the Cheney Brothers distribution center, Babcock Ranch, Western Michigan University and the Fuccillo Kia dealership, businesses are finding Charlotte County to be a welcoming, proactive and cooperative partner.

For an article we submitted to the Florida City and County Management Association last month, Babcock Ranch President Rick Severance said, "In my career, I have yet to interact with a

county as positive and accommodating as Charlotte County has been with respect to the building approval process. They have been proactive in their communication and training with each of our home builders, they have been forward thinking in terms of their use of technology and have been a true pleasure to work with.”

That’s a wonderful vote of confidence in our approach to economic development. And we’re just getting started. Word is getting out about doing business in Charlotte County and we still have a number of irons in the fire. Stay tuned.

RESTORE Act

The U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Gulf Coast Restoration on Thursday announced a \$117,466.35 grant to Charlotte County for its Charlotte Harbor Water Quality Initiative septic-to-sewer conversion program. Charlotte joins Pinellas County as the only two Florida counties to be approved for RESTORE Act project funding so far.

The sewer-to-septic project is one of four included in Charlotte County’s multi-year plan accepted by the Treasury Department in March. The award represents about 14 percent of Charlotte County’s \$844,771.39 allocation of fines paid under the Federal Water Pollution Control Act as a result of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Veterans seminar

Veteran Services held its inaugural Veteran Services Officer Seminar on Sept. 23. The conference was attended by representatives from local veteran organizations and staff from Rep. Tom Rooney’s office and the VA Vet Center. Subjects covered included VA compensation, pension, appeals, eBenefits, health-care access, burial benefits, records requests and presumptive disability. The goal of the seminar was to provide up-to-date Veteran Administration information and to enhance continued dialogue among the county service officers and veteran services organizations. Additional informational seminars are planned for the future.

Certification

Community Development Department Code Compliance Officer Gloria Walberg last week achieved her landscape inspector certification from the Landscape Inspector’s Association of Florida. She is the first county employee to receive this certification, which requires recipients to meet eligibility criteria, pass a rigorous, comprehensive written exam, and satisfy continuing education standards on a regular basis. The examination is designed to evaluate applicants’ knowledge and training in five subject areas.

Congratulations to Gloria on her achievement. We encourage employees to pursue certifications and professional development as one of our strategic focus areas to provide efficient and effective government and to exceed expectations in the delivery of public services.

Ray Sandrock is the Charlotte County administrator. Readers may reach him at Raymond.Sandrock@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.