

## **Citizen survey guides county policies and decisions**

By Hector Flores

I want to thank everyone who participated in the recent National Community Survey. The survey was designed to provide a baseline of how the county government is serving residents, to gauge perceptions of the county, and to make comparisons with peer counties.

The National Community Survey was developed and is administered by the National Research Center at Polco of Middleton, Wisc. The survey included questions about quality of life in the community, local policies, demographics, ratings of local government services and resident use of services.

The county has been surveying residents every two years since 2017 (excluding 2022, when it was not conducted due to Hurricane Ian). The length and breadth of the data collected allows us to not only compare how we are performing compared to other communities, but also how we've progressed (or in some cases regressed) over time.

The survey data also plays an important role in the development of the County Commission's strategic plan, which is revised every two years using information gleaned from the survey results and other factors. The strategic plan revision timing also coincides with the beginning of a new two-year budget cycle, allowing to make funding decisions based on community wants and needs.

The strategic plan organizes a range of government policies, programs, infrastructure and services into four broad categories or focus areas: public services, economic and community development, infrastructure and efficient and effective government.

The board establishes bold goals aimed at making progress in the focus areas they've identified. Staff then proposes strategic initiatives aimed at achieving results toward meeting the bold goals.

In past strategic plans, the board set goals to identify levels of desired service in our community and levels of optimum maintenance of infrastructure and facilities. It directed staff to create a 20-year capital needs assessment to enable the board to allocate limited resources effectively, prioritize needs and manage projects efficiently.

Another bold goal was to create conditions and allocate resources to increase the availability of affordable housing. In the 2020 National Community Survey, four in 10 respondents identified the need for more affordable housing options. That percentage has increased more than 20% since the first survey was conducted in 2007.

Another bold goal was to increase the resiliency of county facilities, our employees and the community. We've made progress on that front that was borne out by how quickly we have been

able to resume operations after two historic hurricanes. We've also taken the opportunity to survey employees after Hurricane Ian and hurricanes Helen and Milton to gauge their needs and how the county was providing needed support. Armed with that information, we've implemented more, and more accessible, mental health services and adopted an emergency duty policy that spreads post-disaster responsibilities to more staff, alleviating the strains we've experienced in past storms.

To read more about the strategic plan, visit [www.charlottecountyfl.gov/commission-office](http://www.charlottecountyfl.gov/commission-office) and click Strategic Plan in the menu.

*Readers may reach County Administrator Hector Flores at [Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov](mailto:Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov).*