

New year bring a new county budget process

By Hector Flores

With the arrival of the new year, we've already begun working on the 2025-26 budget with a pair of citizen input meetings this week. The board reviewed the budget process, which began with establishing strategic goals, developing approaches and a budget to achieve those goals and evaluating our performance and if any adjustments are needed.

We created a budget packet that included an employee survey, financial trends and projections and an organization and community plans. In February, the board will hold a budget workshop and conduct its strategic focus area review. Part of this process will be reviewing the National Citizen's Survey that was conducted last year.

March through June departments will finalize their proposed budgets, review goals and initiatives and review them with my administration team in preparation for July's presentation of the proposed budget to the board and the public. July also brings us to any required public hearings for changes to municipal service benefit unit budgets and rates. MSBUs are taxing districts that fund road and drainage maintenance, waterway dredging, beach renourishment, fire protection and sanitation service.

In September, the board will hold a pair of public hearings and adopt a budget before the beginning of the new fiscal year, Oct. 1, 2025.

Of course, we continue to face challenges dealing with the impacts of two historic hurricanes in 2024. Getting parks and beaches back open to the public and finishing a proposed shoreline stabilization project on Manasota Key are among our highest priorities. We plan to complete repairs to McGuire Park and the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center early this year. You may have noticed the security fencing around the Mid-County Regional Library in preparation for repairs to begin, with a reopening projected for spring 2026.

We have several local option sales tax projects that are underway that are projected to be completed this year, including the Charlotte County Sheriffs Office District 4 headquarters and training facility. Demolition of the Port Charlotte Beach Park recreation center and pool will take place in preparation for replacement next year. Two sales tax projects, the new sheriff's office headquarters and hardened 911 dispatch center and the supervisor or elections warehouse, are underway in Port Charlotte, with completion projected for next year.

We'll soon be kicking off the 18-month process of reviewing potential projects to be included for funding by an extension of the local option sales tax if voters approve it in November 2026. That process includes a review of potential projects by a citizen focus group, which will hold a series of meetings that will be open to the public and input will be welcome.

I'll close by wishing everyone a safe and prosperous new year and welcoming all to participate in your local government by attending meetings, watching them on CC-TV, volunteering for

advisory committees and providing input. Together we can create the kind of community we all strive for and deserve.

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