

Commission to discuss federal legislative agenda Feb. 11

By Hector Flores

At its Feb. 11 meeting, the Charlotte County Commission will discuss its federal legislative agenda and receive a presentation from its federal lobbyist.

Among the county's highest priorities are issues related to our ongoing recovery from the impacts of three hurricanes in the past three years. The board and our legislative affairs manager have been talking with our federal elected officials and agency staff to expedite Federal Emergency Management Agency funding.

While the county will be reimbursed for debris cleanup costs and facility repairs not covered by insurance, the process is cumbersome and time-consuming. The board support improvements to FEMA's operations to accelerate processing. A FEMA review council will begin meeting soon and making recommendations later this year and the county supports the timely release of federal funding.

What the county has not received for any of the recent hurricanes is funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, while our neighbors to the north and south received hundreds of millions of dollars in grants for disaster recovery and mitigation. The reason for being left out is the fact the county does not have what is known as entitlement status, which is based on population. Because we recently exceeded the 200,000-resident threshold, county staff are now working with HUD to be granted that status for any future emergency or non-emergency grant funding.

The county is also seeking funding for its septic-to-sewer plan through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The county is currently completing the fourth phase of the sewer master plan by borrowing from the state revolving fund program to be repaid by tax assessments on affected properties. A request for up to \$33 million in ACOE funding would significantly reduce the burden on property owners and enable the county to move more quickly to expand the replacement of septic systems with central sewer.

Another important issue we are pressing our lawmakers to address is red tide in the Gulf of Mexico, which has gotten significantly worse in the past two decades due to higher levels of nutrients flowing into the gulf from not only Florida waterways, but even the Mississippi River. The county supports additional research and monitoring programs to address red tide and funding to mitigate and respond to the impacts of harmful algal bloom outbreaks.

I look forward to hearing from our lobbyist on these and other issues of concern and providing the board with any additional information they need on the status of the projects related to these topics. You can read the entire legislative agenda by visiting www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/agendas and clicking on the link to the Feb. 11 commission meeting.

*Readers may reach County Administrator Hector Flores at
Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.*