

## Commission gets growth update from forecaster

By Hector Flores

Charlotte County's growth forecasting consultant presented its most recent market data to the County Commission during Tuesday's board meeting. The consultant reported that Charlotte County's population grew 5.5% from 212,424 residents in April 2024 to 224,147 in February 2025. Going back to June 2023, the county population has grown 11% through February 2025. Over the next five years, the consultant forecast the population to reach 256,891, up 31.1% or 61,002 from 195,889. The county's historic annual growth since 1990 has ranged from 1.3% to 2.8%.

Since June 2023, Charlotte County has added 10,994 new housing units. Between 2025 and 2030, there is a forecast increase of approximately 17,000 new housing units. The areas with the most growth are projected to be Babcock Ranch, which is expected to add about 4,100 new units and Mid-County, which is expected to add 4,400 units. Many of the Mid-County units will be in the area between U.S. 41 and State Road 776, including the new development of West Port in the Murdock Village Redevelopment Area. Since 2024, the West Port area and Babcock Ranch have accounted for 82% of all residential construction.

The consultant said the new residents will create strong demand for new commercial development, with up to three mixed-use shopping centers needed to serve the new arrivals. These centers, which could include big box retailers, grocery stores, restaurants and niche stores, would forestall congestion on major arteries in already developed areas, create jobs and increase per capita income. The growth also creates demand for recreational, public safety and government services facilities. In the same meeting, the board discussed the status of numerous projects that reflect that demand, including a new government annex in West Port on land provided by the developer, a replacement for the South County Annex in Punta Gorda and a "hub" of potential projects off Loveland Boulevard, where a new Utilities Department administration center will be located to replace the existing facility at the East Port Environmental Campus, which the board voted Tuesday to be demolished due to hurricane damage.

Industrial demand is forecast to increase based on the population growth, according to the report. By 2030, the county could support an additional 1.1 million square feet or 153 acres of industrial development. At its recent strategic focus areas workshop on economic and community development, the commission discussed ways to increase the amount of industrial-zoned land, especially along the interstate and close to the Punta Gorda Airport, which is already seeing sustained development on existing industrial-zoned land in the Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park.

The county has 30 square feet of industrial developments per capita, which is far lower than our regional neighbors, such as Lee, Sarasota and Manatee counties. Among the benefits of increased industrial development is the multiplier effect it has on job creation, meaning each industrial job added creates additional jobs in other sectors of the economy. Industrial

development such as warehousing, distribution, manufacturing and transportation generates tax revenue, but creates a lower demand for public services than residential or commercial development. Industrial development generates tax revenue, but creates a lower demand for public services than residential or commercial development.

The consultant recommended creating opportunities for multi-family housing in newly designated mixed-use properties that are currently exclusively commercial, including numerous vacant commercial buildings along U.S. 41. He noted the county already approved such a project at the Port Charlotte Town Center mall.

Growth creates opportunities and challenges. It requires far-sighted planning and careful consideration of potential impacts. Fortunately, between our existing comprehensive plan, 20-year capital projects planning and the board's economic and community development strategic focus area discussions, the county is strongly positioned to meet these challenges and continue to deliver exceptional services to the community.

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