

County Commission completes its strategic focus area review

By Hector Flores

The Charlotte County Commission wrapped up a review and update of its strategic focus areas at a recent workshop. The board conducts this review every two years as part of its budget process. The four strategic focus areas are public services, economic and community development, infrastructure, and efficient and effective government. Within this framework, the commission sets bold goals, attainable targets it wants the organization to reach within the next five years.

In developing some new goals, the commissioners considered recent economic trends, significant events, emerging challenges and worthwhile opportunities to pursue. The county's recent tropical weather events, explosive growth, the uncertainty of federal funding and lingering cost pressures were among the topics the board weighed.

Emergency response and recovery weighed heavily on commissioners, which added two new goals in two focus areas to cope with past and future situations. In the public services focus area, they created a goal to strengthen the resiliency and recovery capacity of the community. In the efficient and effective government focus area they created a goal to strengthen the resiliency and recovery capacity of the organization. The county has already embarked on a new recovery and resiliency initiative that includes representatives from every department in the county to help accomplish both of these goals.

Two goals the board set are aimed at improving how we manage and communicate the complexities of the provision of public services and a changing organization. On the communication front, last year the board approved the conversation of the Public Information Office into a standalone Communications Department and approved two new positions to strengthen its internal and external communications abilities. Regarding management improvements, administration last year launched quarterly supervisor and managers meetings, which serve both as professional development sessions and team-building exercises. We just kicked off a new employee appraisal process that underscores the organization's mission, vision and values and gives my colleagues a more active role in their performance reviews.

In economic and community development, a pair of new goals are aimed at expanding industrial-zoned property and positioning the county as a hub for skilled professionals in high-wage jobs in target industries. The county saw one million square feet of industrial construction at the Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park last year and helped facilitate the creation of more than 100 high-wage jobs in those targeted industries, including aviation.

Regarding infrastructure, the board wants staff to focus on developing and implementing a local transportation plan. To ensure an appropriate level of service is maintained, traffic data is collected and analyzed. Based on that data, road projects will be planned through the capital needs assessment and capital improvement program processes. Emphasizing its desire to base policies, programs and services on data, the board also created a goal to ensure the county employs data-driven decision-making in the delivery of services to a changing community.

The board opted to continue pursuing nine other goals already in its strategic plan, addressing water quality, affordable housing, levels of service and maintenance, organizational health and culture, balancing operational and capital budgets and performing a 20-year capital needs assessment.

With all we've been through in recent years, between COVID-19, hurricanes and a surging population, the board's strategic planning process has enabled the county to adapt to these challenges, maintain financial stability and continue to build an organization committed to public service and improving our community for all its residents and stakeholders. I look forward to sharing future results from the initiatives we implement to achieve the board's goals.

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