

## County embraces public input at commission meetings

By Hector Flores

A series of recent Charlotte County Commission meetings have featured impressive public turnout. I can assure you showing up does not go unnoticed. Not every outpouring of input results in the outcome sought, but the presence of residents is never unappreciated. Everyone who works for the county, from the commissioners to my colleagues throughout the organization, knows we are here to serve the community.

The turnout led the County Commission to schedule its September budget public hearings at the Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center to accommodate the expected attendance.

Two things stood out to me in recent weeks. First, residents asked for more information, specifically about municipal service benefit units and taxing units. We heard you and we are already working on ways to provide more information about how MSBU and MSTU advisory boards work and how to engage with board members who volunteer to serve on those boards.

We will also be adding more information about the work MSBUs and MSTUs have done and are currently doing within the boundaries of the units. The information will include links on the units' webpages to their annual reports, work plans and budgets. All the units with advisory boards already have links to meeting dates, minutes and agendas.

Another tool in the works is a Constant Contact mailing list we will be creating for each unit, so property owners in the units can sign up for email updates about unit activities. We will be putting out a news release and social media posts when we launch that initiative and put links on the unit webpages for property owners to sign-up with an email address.

Another way to engage with the units is to volunteer to serve on an advisory board. There are 15 positions currently available. To learn more about the vacancies, visit [CharlotteCountyFL.gov/news](http://CharlotteCountyFL.gov/news) and click on the vacancies news release.

The second thing that impressed me was the interaction of residents with the developer of a proposed new community in West County. As we have experienced historic growth in recent years, proposed developments get plenty of attention. In the case of the proposed development that drew numerous people to Tuesday's commission meeting, it was clear that both the developer and residents made an effort to gather to discuss concerns prior to the meeting at which the project was on the agenda. The developer's representative made several additional concessions and assurances in response to public input at the meeting. The agenda item was ultimately approved and the developer will move on to the next regulatory steps in the project's process.

Community engagement, both in person and online, has been an emphasis for us. At Tuesday's meeting, the board approved a new assistant social media manager position that will bolster our Communications Department's efforts to provide information on our social media platforms and

engage with users who post comments there. Our mindset is that people want to be heard and these platforms are a great way to share views with the county and the community. However, we also want to be in those comment sections to ensure information posted there is factual.

I always say local government is the best kind of government because of its proximity to the people it serves. Seeing that closeness manifest itself this week just further cements that conviction in my mind.

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