

Forecast predicts continued population growth

By Hector Flores

The County Commission on Tuesday received a population review and forecast presentation from its consultant Metro Forecasting. The consultant told the board the county's population has grown from 224,147 residents in February 2025 to 235,255 in October 2025. That's more than 11,000 new residents in the past eight months.

From June 2023 when Metro Forecasting began working with the county on forecasting for planning purposes, the county has added 16.9% more residents, or nearly 40 people. The consultant forecast there will be an additional 17,000 housing units built by 2030, adding 33,000 new residents. By 2035, we'll reach nearly 300,000 people.

Metro Forecasting divides the county into six sectors: Babcock Ranch, Burnt Store Road, East County, Mid-County, Punta Gorda and West County. The review found growth in all sectors, not just the big developments at Babcock Ranch and West Port. In 2025, subdivision projects in West County have driven up new home numbers higher than those in Babcock Ranch and West Port. Infill, where builders erect homes on empty platted lots in developed areas, has been occurring throughout Mid-County.

Development has numerous impacts on the county, including raising 1% local option sales tax revenue, which funds many of the county facilities growth requires to maintain the level of service residents demand, such as parks, recreation centers, fire stations and libraries. It also creates demand for skilled workers in the building trades, service sector and health care, where staffing shortages are already occurring.

Another impact will be to bring in more federal dollars in the form of grants through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The county population growth surpassed the threshold for what's known as an entitlement community. These grants will help the county to better achieve the County Commission's affordable housing goals in its Strategic Focus Areas. Community Development Block Grants are directly allocated to recipient local government organizations to address housing challenges faced by middle- and lower-income families.

Growth does present challenges. But in many ways, past planning by the county has foreseen these challenges and projects are underway to alleviate them. For example, the next three phases of the Edgewater Corridor will complete a four-lane road between U.S. 41 and State Road 776 just east of the Charlotte Sports Park. Those phases are being funded by the voter-approved 2020 local option sales tax extension, which also is funding three new fire stations.

We will be using these forecasts to help us navigate future decisions for delivering exceptional services to our current and residents and the new ones on the way.

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