

CHARLOTTE ASSEMBLY 2007

POLICY STATEMENT



**Sponsored by
The Charlotte County Board of Commissioners**

**Planned by
The Charlotte Assembly 2007 Steering Committee**

**Convened at
Cultural Center of Charlotte County
Port Charlotte, Florida
June 21-23, 2007**

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POLICY STATEMENT CHARLOTTE ASSEMBLY 2007

At the close of their discussion, the participants of this assembly reviewed and adopted as a group the following statement. The statement represents general agreement. However, no one was asked to sign it. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to every recommendation.

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. With the support of the Charlotte County Board of Commissioners and the County Administration, many active citizens in Charlotte County have been working together for over a decade to forge and refine a blueprint for the County's future and to put their ideas into action. This report is from the Charlotte Assembly 2007. Earlier Assemblies in 1996, 1998, and 2001 laid the foundation for the present discussion. Virtually all of the recommendations from these previous assemblies have been addressed. The citizenry is committed to sustained involvement in County politics, planning, and action.
- B. Each of the preceding Assemblies had major impacts on Charlotte County plans, policies, and public-service priorities. The County's Assembly in 1996 led to significant improvements in County policies for managing growth and protecting the natural environment. Shortly after the 1996 Assembly, the County's comprehensive plan was revised to reduce the size of the County's Urban Service Area. Also flowing from the Charlotte Assembly '96 were policies to, among other things, address the County's platted lands problem, attract new businesses, and make growth pay its own way. The 1998 Assembly brought

forth new initiatives to purchase platted lots, improve drainage, build new regional parks, extend sidewalks, support performing arts at Charlotte High School, and expand economic development activities. The Charlotte Assembly 2001 focused primarily, but not exclusively, on human services, especially childcare, healthcare, and housing. The Assembly resulted in many improvements in these programmatic areas and also many partnerships between government, business, civic groups, and philanthropists.



- C. A major challenge confronting Charlotte County is the very rapid population growth being experienced throughout Southwest Florida. As shown in Figure 1, the County's population increased five-fold between 1970 and 2005, rising from 27,559 at the beginning of the period to over 154,000 today. Growth is projected to continue at about this same pace through at least 2035, at which point the County is expected to have over 244,000 residents.

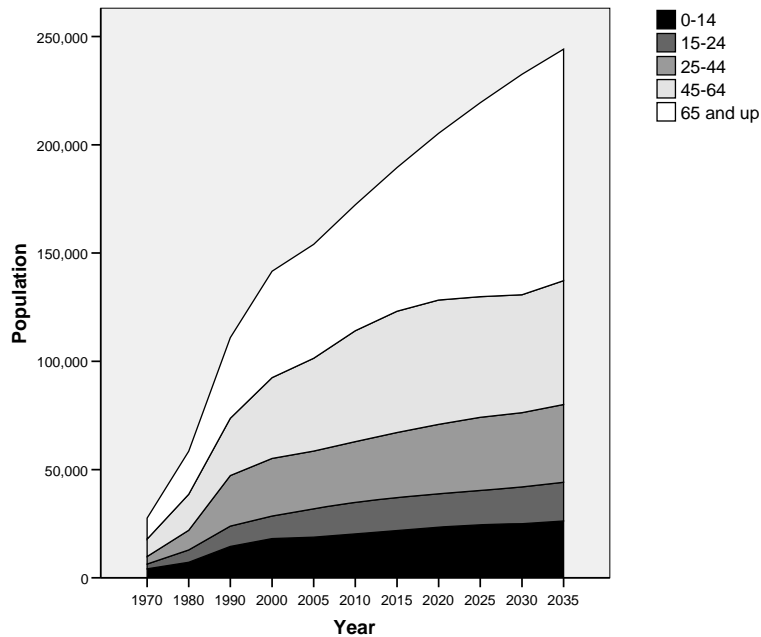


Figure 1: Population of Charlotte County, Actual and Projected, 1970-2035. Population data for 1970 to 2000 are from Census figures reported in the Florida Statistical Abstract of 1983 and 2003. Population estimates for 2005 and projections to 2030 come from Detailed Bulletin 145, Florida Population Studies 2006, Bureau of Economic and Business Research. Projections to 2035 were computed as a rolling average from preceding trends.

D. A significant part of Charlotte County's population is comprised of residents 65 years old or older. As shown in Figure 2, seniors account for about one-third of the County's population today. This figure declined slightly in the 1990s, but it is projected to increase significantly as the Baby Boomers enter retirement, reaching 44 percent by 2035.

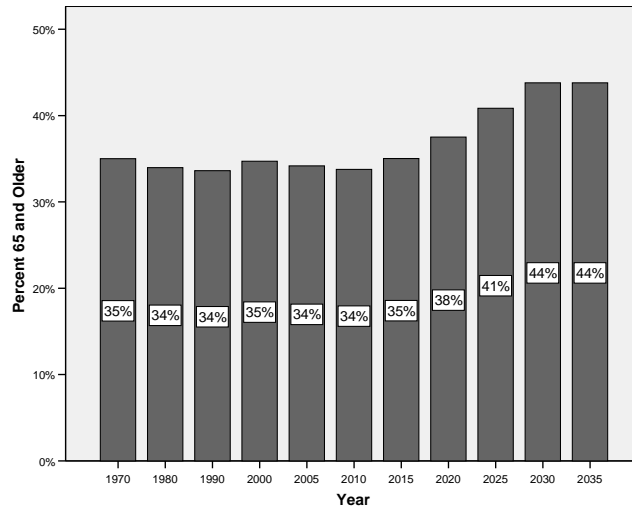


Figure 2: Charlotte County, Percent of Residents 65 Years Old and Older, 1970-2035. Population data for 1970 to 2000 are from Census figures reported in the Florida Statistical Abstract of 1983 and 2003. Population estimates for 2005 and projections to 2030 come from Detailed Bulletin 145, Florida Population Studies 2006, Bureau of Economic and Business Research. Projections to 2035 were computed as a rolling average from preceding trends.

E. The Charlotte Assembly 2007 was held at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County on June 21-23, 2007. More than 130 people participated. The Assembly was planned by a Steering Committee of 25 members (appointed by the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners) with diverse backgrounds and interests. The Steering Committee selected participants to reflect many aspects of the County, including geographic area, business, government, civic groups, religion, minorities, retirees, the environment, education, and others. The questions covered at the Assembly, which were also developed by the Steering Committee, addressed the participants' vision for the County's future: Environmental protection; growth management; health and human services; economic development; post-secondary education; and County government operations.

II. VISION

- A. Charlotte County is a wonderful place to live. A vibrant community with a small-town feel, Charlotte County has friendly people, diverse neighborhoods and lifestyles, Charlotte Harbor, beautiful rivers, wildlife, and wildlife habitats. As the County becomes more urban, participants in this Assembly want to preserve its natural beauty and tranquil character. Careful planning and sound land-use regulation are essential for keeping infrastructure on path with development, protecting wildlife habitats and ecosystems, and ensuring that new buildings are kept at a scale appropriate for surrounding development. The County must have the political courage to impose environmentally sensitive and economically viable restrictions.
- B. Charlotte County's quality of life depends not only on the County's friendly people, natural beauty, and small-town character, but also on economic diversity and prosperity. The County needs to promote its high-quality public schools, explore enhancing its public transportation system, expand its higher education programs, and attract employment opportunities for its well qualified labor force. Residents should be encouraged to "shop Charlotte," and policies should be supportive of small business as well as large.
- C. Another critical ingredient to Charlotte County's future is a strong tax base. The state framework for local taxes and fees is being reformed, but it is unclear if all of the proposed reforms will be adopted, or, even if they are, whether they will be beneficial for Charlotte County, given its predominance of residential properties, large number of seniors, and recent history of hurricane damage and recovery. In any event, Charlotte County needs to strengthen its tax base by encouraging a

balanced mix of residential, commercial, and industrial development. The County also needs to protect its interests more aggressively in Tallahassee and Washington, D.C.

D. Taxes and fees need to be fair and equitably distributed. Figure 3 and the survey tables in the Appendix summarize the Assembly participants' assessments of various sources of government revenues. A majority believes that the current level of all but one tax/fee is "about right." The exception is impact fees and other charges on development, which 38 percent think are at the right level, 29 percent consider too low, and 33 percent consider too high.

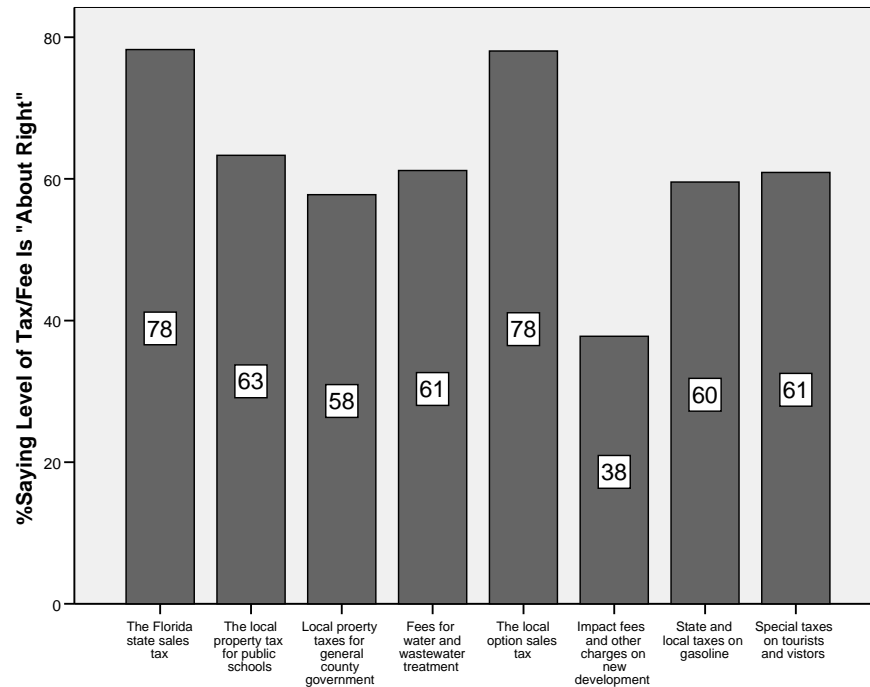


Figure 3: Percent of Assembly Participants Who Say Level of Taxes/Fees Is "About Right." Participants were asked to complete a written questionnaire on taxes and services. A copy of the questionnaire, along with a breakdown of responses, are included on the Appendix.

E. Charlotte County would benefit from having more young adults and young families in the community. Many young adults left the area after Hurricane Charley, and they need to be attracted back. To draw young adults to the area, Charlotte County needs more workforce housing, university programs, nightlife, cultural amenities, affordable youth activities, recreational facilities, quality childcare, and employment opportunities for professionals. In addition, the County should consider potential reductions to impact fees as well as other development fees to provide incentives to developers for construction of sustainable workforce housing.



F. Overall, Assembly participants want to promote positive, balanced growth while preserving and nurturing the best of what the community already has, including:

1. Diverse neighborhoods and types of communities. In addition to a mix of age groups, economic opportunities, and lifestyles, Charlotte County has diverse neighborhoods, and regions. The major communities are West

County/Englewood, Port Charlotte/Murdock, Charlotte Harbor, and Punta Gorda, but there are many others. Participants want to maintain this diversity while also encouraging cohesiveness and a sense of community for the County as a whole. Participants want Charlotte County to be the "county of choice."

2. Citizen involvement and participation. Charlotte County has developed a strong tradition of volunteer work, citizen involvement in government, and a culture of community. The Charlotte Assembly is an example of this tradition. One way to maintain this tradition is for local governments to strive for transparency, fiscal responsibility, and responsiveness in all areas.
3. Natural resources and wildlife habitats. Charlotte Harbor, Lemon Bay, the Peace and Myakka Rivers and their estuaries and tributaries are environmental jewels that support wildlife, boating and fishing. The County should strive to preserve them.

G. Charlotte County will strive to provide quality healthcare, public safety, recreational facilities, transit, utilities, educational opportunities, and growth-management services to promote a diversified economy with both traditional tourism and ecotourism, while preserving the culture and historic character of the community, protecting the Charlotte Harbor estuary, maintaining the Old Florida ambiance of eastern Charlotte County, and fostering new development and redevelopment around distinct urban and suburban centers. The County should also seek to become more influential in state and regional decision-making about growth, growth management, and the location and financing of public facilities.

III. Environmental Protection

- A. Rapid population growth has put pressure on the County's water supplies, wildlife, and wildlife habitats, and has brought more air and water pollution. The Assembly participants recommended actions in a number of areas to protect the County's natural resources, preserve or enhance the area's ecological character, and promote a culture of conservation.
- B. Water. Water supply and water quality are interrelated issues that will continue to be matters of serious concern in Charlotte County.
1. With respect to both supply and quality, the limiting factor is cost. There is plenty of water in the region, but much of the water is costly to treat and store. Surface water reservoirs for storing supplies during times of plenty are expensive to construct and maintain. Desalinating brackish groundwater is also expensive.
 2. There are no easy solutions to water supply and quality issues, but some solutions are better than others. In particular, water conservation and wastewater reuse are much less expensive and much more environmentally sensitive than developing new supplies through storage or desalination.
 - a. The County should follow a strategy of maximizing existing water supplies, developing new supplies, diversifying supply sources, reusing treated wastewater for irrigation, and increasing incentives for conservation and disincentives for overuse. Charlotte County should continue to work constructively with other counties in the region to protect its interests in regional water-supply decision making and develop a regional water-supply solution which may or may not include exclusivity.

- b. The County should develop additional community outreach and education materials. Some suggested topics include: Eco-home standards for remodeling and new construction; choosing appliances to reduce water consumption; drought-resistant plants; smaller or no lawns; drought resistant grass for lawns; water reclamation and reuse; and Florida-friendly landscaping.



- c. The County should consider regulatory approaches to increase conservation and wastewater reuse, including a water-use policy to enforce restrictions on use; requiring golf courses to install the infrastructure to irrigate with treated wastewater when available; enacting an ordinance and developing incentives to encourage or require use of drought-resistant native plants and landscape, such as xeriscape or Florida-friendly landscaping, in public places and private residences; and mandating or establishing incentives for people to “build

- green” by using "green building methods" and installing water-saving fixtures, using shell driveways, and requiring use of reclaimed water for new, large developments when available.
- d. Charlotte County Utilities (CCU) should consider expanding its community outreach and education program especially for seasonal residents and visitors, because the drought season coincides with the tourist season.
 - e. The County should consider basing its rates on the number of people in the household, rewarding those who take conservation measures, and making excessive use much more expensive.
 - f. Consideration should be given to imposing a surcharge on water and wastewater treatment to pay for expanding the County's water-recycling infrastructure.
3. Another factor affecting water quality is septic tanks. The number of septic tanks in the County affects groundwater quality, as well as water quality in Charlotte Harbor. The County should establish a plan with timeframes for extending sewer lines to infill areas within the Urban Service Area currently served by septic tanks.
4. The County needs to communicate and collaborate with regional permitting agencies, and encourage these agencies to work with one another, to ensure that local and regional environmental policies, including water management policies, are consistent across agencies and levels of government.
- C. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat. All Assembly participants place great value on Charlotte County’s natural resources, but they have different perspective on how much weight should be given to the environment when environmental protection

conflicts with other priorities. Some say that wildlife and wildlife habitat should be sacrificed only under extraordinary circumstances. Others say that environmental considerations should always be balanced against people's needs for jobs, recreation, and transportation. Despite these philosophical differences, however, the Assembly participants generally agree on the following:

1. The County's policies for environmental protection need to be clear, transparent, predictable, well publicized, and proactive rather than reactive. They should be based on sound science, implemented pragmatically, and leave room for public input and incremental adjustment.
2. There is widespread support for protecting the environment. Approximately 38 percent of Charlotte County's land area is already in public ownership for parks and environmental preservation. Charlotte County extended its commitment to environmental protection with the passage of Conservation Charlotte, through which additional environmentally sensitive lands will be purchased.
3. The County recognizes the importance of aquatic preserves. It should consider "no motor zones" in designated areas of Charlotte Harbor, the Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserve, and the Peace and Myakka Rivers to protect sea grass and fish habitat.
4. Habitat mitigation programs can be effective, but they need to be implemented flexibly, so that adjustments can be made to correct problems as they arise. The County should encourage cluster development that sets aside land for open space and protected-species habitat.
5. Continued enforcement is needed for regulations regarding lighting along the beach during sea turtle nesting season and protection of nesting beach habitat.

6. The County should take special care to ensure that its own land use activities are environmentally sensitive. This includes establishing County easements for habitat protection; removing "exotic" species from public lands; and preserving habitat when land is developed, roads are constructed, and parks are built.



D. Phosphate Mining. Phosphate mining poses ecosystem and water quality, quantity, and timing risks to the Peace River. The main threat is from phosphate-laden water runoff that can pollute the Peace River and other surface waters. We encourage the County to take a regional approach on this issue, and to negotiate or use any means possible, including litigation if necessary, to protect the interests of the citizens of Charlotte County and the ecological future of Charlotte Harbor. Team up with counties bordering the Peace River, including but not limited to Sarasota, Lee, and Manatee Counties; solicit assistance from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency; and identify additional steps that can be taken by the industry to mitigate the industry's impact. A comprehensive watershed study is needed to determine the industry's future cumulative, region-wide impact.

E. Development. The water needs of new development can be reduced in several ways:

1. Promote and established incentives for Florida-friendly landscaping that uses drought-resistant plants and grasses and addresses the use of fertilizer, and treatment and reuse of runoff water for irrigation.
2. Encourage residents and developers to visit the Environmental Campuses which showcase native plants and are home to Florida-friendly yards.
3. Designate areas where water is or will become available for new construction.

F. Agriculture. Regulate or offer incentives to: reduce the amount and types of fertilizer used; avoid excessive or wasteful water use; control water runoff; and increase water reclamation and reuse.

G. Pumping Levels. Some Assembly participants are concerned about pumping levels in the Peace River and their long-term impact on the environment. As water is withdrawn from the Peace River, the amount of fresh water entering Charlotte Harbor is reduced, which increases the harbor's salinity and endangers sea life. The County should urge the Southwest Florida Water Management District to set and enforce firm minimal flow levels. Environmental research for this purpose should be utilized to develop appropriate action.

IV. Growth Management

A. Urban Form, Zoning, and Infrastructure. The Assembly does not want to stop growth and change, but does want growth influenced and managed so that Charlotte County retains its tranquil character and small-town feel.

1. The Assembly participants' goals for planning, zoning, and infrastructure are:
 - a. To foster a mosaic of distinct and diverse communities that offer many options for work, recreation, and community characteristics, while also encouraging a cohesive identity for the County;
 - b. To encourage compact, contiguous, orderly development and redevelopment around established urban centers;
 - c. To keep roads, drainage, and other infrastructure consistent with population growth;
 - d. To assign the costs of public services and facilities appropriately across affected properties; and
 - e. To explore broad-based funding options, including a local option real estate transfer fee.
2. To achieve these goals, the County will have to overcome a number of challenges, including:
 - a. Accommodating population growth. For the next 30 years, the population of Charlotte County is projected to experience a net increase of 8 persons every day. This means that another person will be added to the County every 3 hours, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

- b. Large numbers of undeveloped platted lots in subdivisions. Extensive development of the County's platted lands would strain public services and facilities, impact water-recharge areas, and create severe challenges for fire/rescue and emergency management services.
- c. A modest tax base. Charlotte County's ability to generate the revenues to pay for the services and facilities required by new growth is constrained by the relatively small amount of high-value commercial, industrial, and residential development.



- d. Finite and undependable supplies of low-cost, potable water. Charlotte County is at the end of the Peace River, which is being tapped upstream to provide water, not only to Charlotte, but to other parts of the region as well. Withdrawals from the Peace River are also limited by environmental

considerations. Developing new supplies will be expensive and will involve lengthy permitting processes and complex legal arrangements with other entities.

3. To work through these issues and challenges, the County must take the following steps with respect to planning, zoning, and infrastructure:
 - a. The Comprehensive Plan needs to be revised. County planners and officials should remain open to innovation. They should look for creative techniques to encourage mixed use development, sector zoning, rezoning for commercial development in deed-restricted areas, high-density zones in urban centers, and establish oversight boards to monitor implementation of development agreements. Some believe that transfers of development rights should be reevaluated because they have been used as a way to avoid zoning restrictions.



- b. The County should inventory existing commercial and industrial zones and rezone for industrial use where appropriate.
- c. Some participants said zoning must channel new development up rather than out. Others argued that multistory and multifamily construction should be encouraged over single-family detached housing in appropriate areas. The County should allow multistory commercial development in downtown areas, although some believe that height restrictions should remain along the waterfront. Schools should also be multistory to require less land. Education is needed on the greater infrastructure cost of single family development. In coastal high hazard areas, consider allowing heights up to 60 feet with design or performance standards to provide aesthetics that result in articulated structures with visual access to avoid the "box" look, and require "green spaces" to break up solid structures and provide access.
- d. The Urban Service Area must be strictly enforced. New development outside the Urban Service Area should be limited to master-planned, mixed-used communities that are more or less self-contained. Tiered incentives and fee structures should also be established for landowners who combine platted lots, with corresponding penalties for those who do not.
- e. Existing neighborhoods should be encouraged to develop neighborhood plans that create a distinct identity and include neighborhood parks, buffer zones, sidewalks, and other urban amenities.
- f. Taxes on and fees charged to undeveloped platted lots should be increased to more accurately reflect the true costs they place on the County. For example,

undeveloped platted lands with unkempt vegetation are a serious fire hazard.

The County should consider creating "firebreak taxing districts" to provide fire fighting and prevention services in platted lands.

- g. Platted lands could be rezoned to allow high density commercial development with mixed-use residential development. Murdock Village is a good example. Incentives should be established to encourage people who own two or three contiguous lots to combine them for development and reduce density. Another idea is for the County to work with developers to form a non-profit corporation or community trust that would encourage lot owners to donate or sell their lots for a low price. Establish an advisory group to review the inventory of owned and donated lots to recommend to the Board of County Commissioners suggested uses and disposition.
- h. Safe roads with sidewalks are a critical component to quality of life in the County and are a consideration by businesses that are contemplating a move to Charlotte County. The challenge is to expand the road system without fostering urban sprawl. Some road expansions are in progress, including: Aqui Esta, Midway, Burnt Store, Kings Highway, Veterans intersection, Edgewater, Piper Road, and Winchester. Other expansion projects should be considered, such as widening Harborview, Peachland, and Placida. However, paying for additional road construction will be difficult. Some Assembly participants favor extending the sales tax for this purpose. Others say it would be better to use a flat tax.
- i. Public transportation is inadequate and needs to be expanded, but this will be impractical until the County is able to achieve a pattern of development with

high-density urban nodes. One possibility would be to consider a pilot transit program on major roads, and encourage other public-private partnerships.

4. The County Commission should make sure that the County's planning and zoning policies are consistent with the County's long-term growth-management goals and priorities.

V. Economic Development

A. The County should consider expanding funding for its economic development program. The County should:

1. Continue to support the public-private partnership presence in Enterprise Charlotte;
2. Maintain, update, and refine the economic development strategic plan identifying:
 - a. Available sites (airport, industrial park, areas close to I-75) for business locations;
 - b. Types of business/industries that could thrive in the region;
 - c. Markets each type of business/industry could serve;
 - d. Opportunities for intermodal connections (such as links between seaports, airports, and rail corridors);
 - e. Available incentives (state and local) to attract new business;
 - f. The strengths Charlotte County offers to each type of business, its employees and their families;
 - g. Opportunities and resources for workforce development; and
 - h. Strategies to retain and nurture existing businesses.
3. Continue and enhance collaboration with the Chambers of Commerce, Airport Authority, Visitors Bureau and tourism, Florida Gulf Coast University, Enterprise Florida's regional office, post-secondary education institutions, neighboring communities and key businesses (hospitals and health care facilities, FedEx Corp., and Publix) to develop an aggressive marketing campaign.

4. Continue to work with developers and builders on the need for and construction of workforce housing.
 5. Task County planners to:
 - a. Evaluate the Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park and determine if it is too restrictive, has nonessential requirements, or contains other features that make it a barrier to business relocations.
 - b. Consider whether the County should create a “flex-space” zoning category which would allow businesses that are economic-development target industries.
- B. An important milestone was reached when the County created the Charlotte County Industrial Development Authority (CCIDA) to foster industrial and business development and use Industrial Development Revenue Bonds to finance business relocation. These tax-exempt bonds allow certain types of business to finance construction and related costs at an interest rate typically two or three percentage points below conventional financing.
- C. Other steps the County could take to attract business and industry include:
1. Grow a local approach to workforce development which focuses education and training programs on targeted industries;
 2. Publish economic development and business recruiting materials;
 3. Continue posting business facts and information to the County’s website, providing basic data on the area economy, workforce, cost of living, business relocation incentives, and quality of life.



4. Modify County impact fees, taxes, and other charges to provide exemptions or reductions for new businesses coming into the County and remaining for a specified time.
5. Continue as an active participant in regional economic-development and other planning organizations.

VI. Health and Human Services

- A. The Assembly participants urge the County to reconsider the idea of creating a medical overlay district. They also recommend that the County seek additional state funding for outpatient care. Most of the services provided by the Charlotte County Health Department are funded by federal or state programs. The outpatient services that are needed include: outreach for mental health, professional volunteer services coordination, after-hours primary care for uninsured residents, and a detoxification center/program.
- B. The Family Services Center and Children's Services Council have identified needs including affordable childcare, counseling, substance abuse prevention and intervention, workforce housing, medical and dental care, crime prevention, prevention and treatment of domestic violence and abuse, and affordable recreational programs. The County should explore additional funding sources such as the Children's Services Council ad valorem funding by referendum.
- C. North Port residents are putting a significant strain on our health care system. The County Health Department is treating them, but does not receive reimbursement. Charlotte County should explore an interlocal agreement to address this problem.
- D. Some believe that the funding system for non-profit health and human services should be a more collaborative effort between the federal, state, and local governments and private entities. As an example, the County should explore public-private partnerships to provide after-hours primary care for the uninsured. The County should continue to provide funding to non-profit entities that assist low-income families with children.

- E. Public transportation can be very costly. The County should consider developing public-private partnerships and County partnerships with cities and other counties.
- F. The County should consider placing additional emphasis on crime prevention. Some suggestions include: relevant public education, additional school resource officers, programs for kids/tweens/teens, a judicial diversion program, accessible/affordable teen activities, free or reduced admission to parks, jobs and/or volunteer activities for teens, free substance-abuse counseling and prevention programs, and educating seniors about the causes and need for these services.
- G. The County should offer developers good tenant-selection and property-management processes and incentives to build workforce housing or mixed-use housing. Possible incentives include but are not limited to: bonus density units; impact fee credits; reduced connection fees; and infrastructure to revitalize areas. The County might also consider selling developers County-owned land (such as rezoned platted lots) at low prices in return for building workforce housing.
- H. The County should create a public-private partnership to develop options for affordable accessible quality childcare, consider the need for transportation to and from childcare, program availability and cost, and a community awareness program.

VII. Post Secondary Education

- A. The Charlotte Technical Center should expand marketing for its programs, which include Health Sciences, Construction, Business and Office Technology, Automotive Electronics, Cosmetology, Early Childhood Education, and a partnership with Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. The Charlotte Technical Center should continue to seek articulation agreements with other post-secondary institutions as well as partnerships with local businesses.
- B. Charlotte County wants very much for Florida Gulf Coast University to establish a center in this area. The County should build a marketing team to sell Charlotte County as the center's location.
- C. Edison College Charlotte Campus should provide certificate, associate, and limited bachelor's degree programs in support of local workforce needs. Existing partnerships with Charlotte County Public Schools and Florida Gulf Coast University should be expanded to increase local access to public higher education.

VIII. County Government Operations

A. The Assembly participants want a lean, competent County government capable of dealing effectively with the challenges of population growth, environmental protection, infrastructure finance and construction, economic development, education, and health and human services. At this critical juncture in its development, when Charlotte County is competing on an expanded regional basis for business, water supplies, state and federal grants, and other assets, it would be a tragic mistake for the County to pursue short-term savings at the expense of its long-term prosperity and quality of life. The Assembly participants see some potential for increasing the efficiency of County government, but they are leery of cost-cutting measures that would significantly reduce services or undermine the County's capabilities in planning, economic development, and other high-priority areas. Suggestions for increasing efficiency are offered with this caveat: Do not diminish the County government's core competencies or services. Some savings might be achieved by the following actions:

1. Consolidate units to reduce overhead and administration;
2. Adopt labor-saving technologies when savings over no more than a few years exceed upfront costs.

B. Given the revenue limitation being imposed by the state--and a proposed Constitutional amendment that would cut revenues much more deeply--Assembly participants were asked to complete a written questionnaire that called for them to evaluate current spending levels for various programs and services, and to indicate whether spending for each program should be increased, reduced, or left at the

current level as the County responds to state-mandated budget cuts. The survey findings are not definitive indications of the participants' views, because the survey did not probe all of the many different ways County government might be viewed. For example, respondents were not asked how much savings they thought the County could achieve simply by eliminating waste. However, the survey did provide a reasonable estimate of the relative importance attached to different services, and a rough indication of where the Assembly participants think cuts can be absorbed.

- C. A large majority of Assembly participants think that the current level of spending for all of the services covered in the survey is either too low or about right (see Figure 4.) A majority view spending for roads and water-supply development as too low (see Figure 5.)

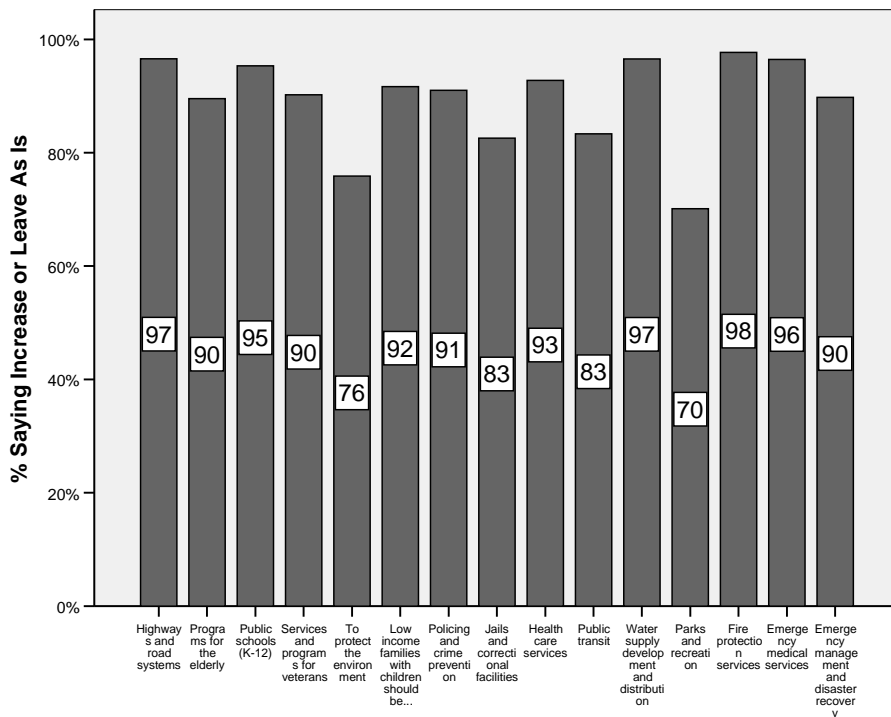


Figure 4: Evaluation of Current Spending Levels for Various Programs Services

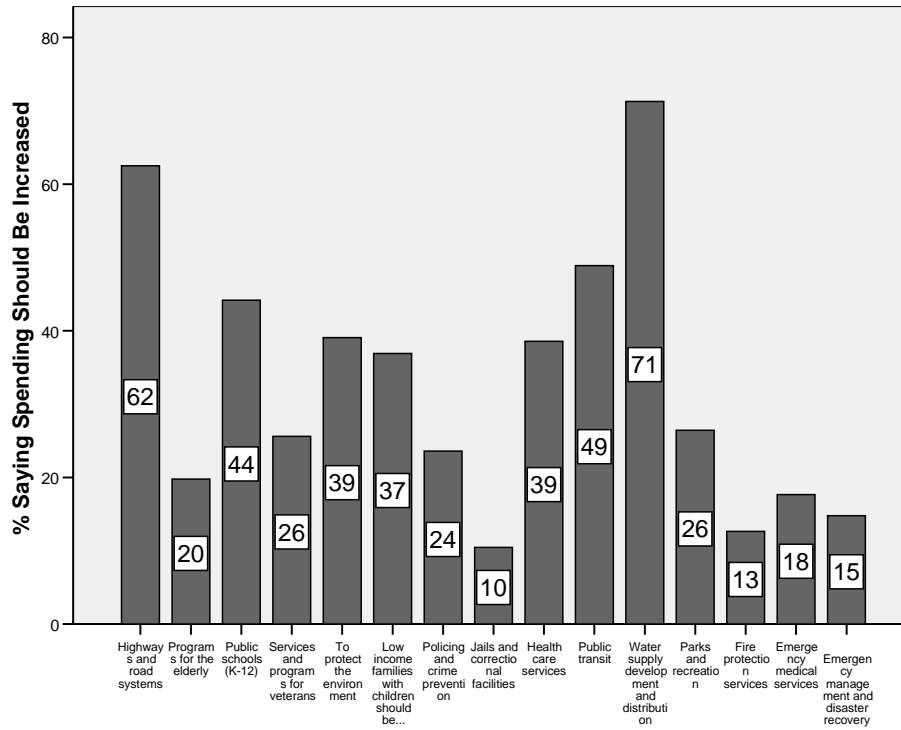


Figure 5: Percent Saying Current Spending Levels Should Be Increased

D. A majority of the Assembly participants also oppose spending-reductions for most services when implementing state-mandated tax reductions (see Figure 6). The only services for which a majority did not oppose reductions were jails and corrections, and parks and recreation.

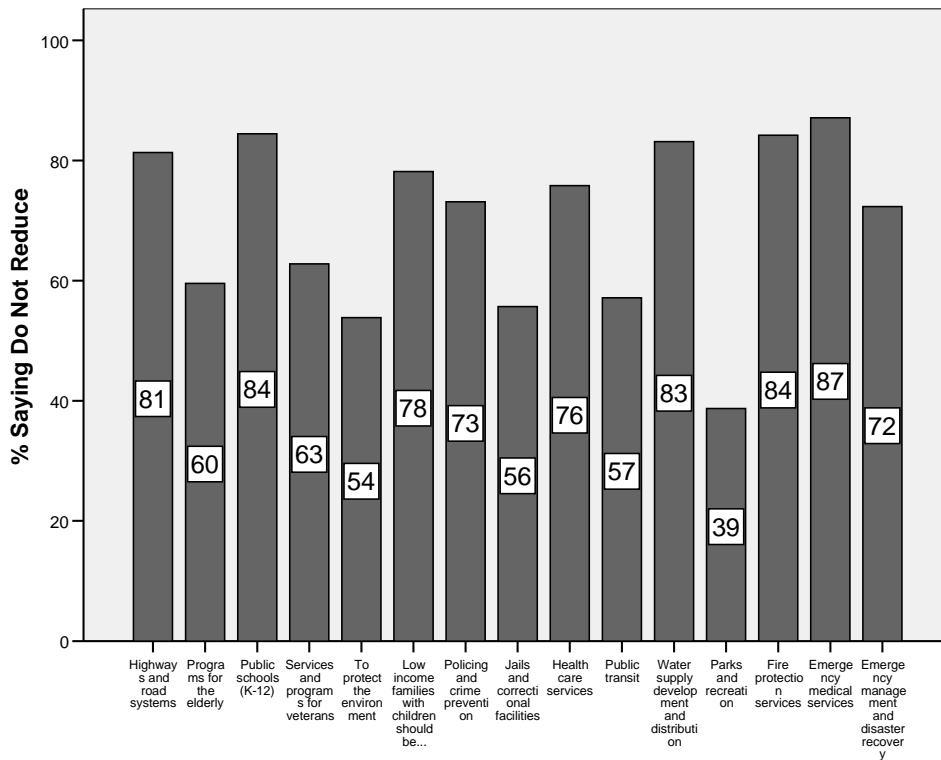


Figure 6: Assessments of Spending Cuts for Various Services

E. Consistent with the Assembly's support for maintaining or increasing spending for most programs and services, participants widely endorse extending the local option sales tax. The Assembly recommends that the County Commission place the sales tax question on the ballot, and it urges Charlotte County voters to endorse the sales tax extension at the polls. The sales tax extension does not raise taxes, it merely extends a tax already being levied. Moreover, roughly a third of the sales tax receipts will come from tourists and seasonal residents. As before, the County should prepare an inventory of projects that the sales tax would fund.

Appendix

Note that percentages have been inserted into the table cells. Percentages add across rows. For example, in response to the first question, which is about "highways and road systems," 63 percent of the respondents said that spending should be increased, 34 percent said that spending should be kept as is, and 3 percent said that spending should be decreased.

Survey of Charlotte Assembly Participants

June 21, 2007

The following set of questions asks about government spending for various programs and services. For each program or service, please indicate whether you think the amount now being spent in Charlotte County by all units and levels of government combined should be increased, kept at the present level, or decreased.

PLACE A CHECK IN ONE OF THE BOXES IN EACH ROW.				
	Increase (%)	Keep as is (%)	Decrease (%)	Not Sure (%)
Highways and road systems	63	34	3	.0
Programs for the elderly	20	70	10	.0
Public schools (K-12)	44	51	5	.0
Services and programs for veterans	26	65	10	.0
Environmental protection	39	37	24	.0
Programs for low income families with children	37	55	8	.0
Policing and crime prevention	24	67	9	.0
Jails and correctional facilities	10	72	17	.0
Healthcare services	39	54	7	.0
Public transit	49	34	17	.0
Water supply development and distribution	71	25	3	.0
Parks and recreation	26	44	30	.0
Fire protection services	13	85	2	.0
Emergency medical services	18	79	2	1.2
Emergency management and disaster recovery	15	75	10	.0

The next set of questions is about the taxes and fees paid for government services in Charlotte County. For each tax or fee listed listed, please indicate whether you personally feel the tax or fee is too high, about right, or too low.

PLACE A CHECK IN ONE OF THE BOXES IN EACH ROW.

	Too High (%)	About right (%)	Too Low (%)	Not Sure (%)
The state sales tax	12	78	10	.0
The local property tax for public schools	13	63	23	.0
The local property tax for general county government	3	58	39	.0
Fees for water and wastewater treatment	9	61	29	.0
The local option sales tax	11	78	11	.0
Impact fees and other charges on new development	33	38	29	.0
State and local taxes on gasoline	11	60	10	.0
Special taxes on tourists and visitors	32	78	23	.0

The last set of questions is about which services to cut if necessary to comply with state-mandated restrictions on local taxes. For each service listed, please indicate whether the service should be reduced significantly, reduced somewhat, or not reduced at all.

PLACE A CHECK IN ONE OF THE BOXES IN EACH ROW.

	Reduce significantly (%)	Reduce Somewhat (%)	Do not reduce (%)	Not Sure (%)
Highways and road systems	1	18	81	.0
Programs for the elderly	4	36	60	.0
Public schools (K-12)	0	16	84	.0
Services and programs for veterans	1	36	63	.0
Environmental protection	11	35	54	.0
Programs for low income families with children	2	20	78	.0
Policing and crime prevention	2	25	73	.0
Jails and correctional facilities	8	36	56	.0
Healthcare services	1	23	76	.0
Public transit	11	32	57	.0
Water supply development and distribution	2	15	83	.0
Parks and recreation	12	49	39	.0
Fire protection services	0	16	84	.0
Emergency medical services	0	13	87	.0
Emergency management and disaster recovery	0	27	72	1.1