

Charlotte Assembly

2001

**Discussion Questions
August 16, 17, and 18, 2001
Cultural Center of Charlotte County**

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



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VISION

Charlotte County is in transition. The county is becoming increasingly urbanized, and less centered on the lifestyles of retirement . We do not want to stop growth and change, but we do want to manage and influence them. We have a progressive vision for the County, where positive growth is promoted while the best of what we already have is preserved and nurtured. We also want fairness. Neither the burdens nor the benefits of progress should be concentrated on any single age group, economic sector, or geographic area.

Charlotte County is a wonderful place to live. But the whole region of Southwest Florida has been changing because of rapid population growth. Between 1970 and 2000, Charlotte County's population expanded from less than 30,000 residents to more than 141,627, which is more than a fourfold increase. This population growth is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Until recently, the county's population growth had been fueled predominately by senior citizens. Thousands of seniors, with modest pensions, came to Charlotte County in search of a pleasant and affordable retirement, and over the past quarter century they have dramatically changed the county's way of life. From politics and the arts to education and the economy, Charlotte County's retirees are leaving an indelible mark. Their influence on everything from where people live to how they make a living to the quality of health care is profound.

After seniors settled here in large numbers, young adults began to move here to fill the jobs that retirement spending generated. The percentage of the population that was 65 years old or older declined from almost 46 percent in 1970 to one-third in 1990. It is projected to decline further to 31.7 percent by 2010.

It is perceived that on top of these changes, the retirement population itself is changing in at least four ways. One is that the seniors who are moving here now are more affluent than they were in the past. Second, seniors are more active now, because people are healthier later in life than they used to be. Third, people are retiring at a younger age, because the economy has been so strong. And fourth, retirees appear to expect more cultural and recreational amenities than they did in the past. These seniors will have a profound impact on Charlotte County.

Diversity with Community Attachment. The diversity in Charlotte County is an asset. This diversity includes not only different age groups, economic activities, and lifestyles, but also neighborhoods and regions. Charlotte County is comprised of a variety of communities, the major ones are: West County/Englewood, Port Charlotte/Murdock, and Punta Gorda. Similarly, many residents are permanent while others are seasonal. The challenge is to balance divergent interests with a commitment to the health of the overall county.

Frugality with Responsibility. Citizens want local governments and the school board to spend tax dollars wisely and to show them they are good stewards of the public trust. At the same time, they point out that action must be taken now in a number of areas--platted lands, infrastructure, education, economic development--or Charlotte County could experience a decline in its economy and quality of life. Charlotte County needs to reach a timely agreement through public dialogue on what are wise investments for the future.

Education and Jobs. A prosperous future will require development of both human capital and business capital. Quality public education is vital in preparing youth to become economically independent in the future. We must also cultivate economic growth so our community has jobs and business opportunities. Some citizens are concerned that the youth will be forced to move to other parts of the state or country in search of employment and career opportunities. Charlotte County could lose the investment made in its children.

Economic Development and Environmental Protection. Charlotte Harbor, Lemon Bay, Peace River, and Myakka River are environmental jewels, national estuaries supporting wildlife, boating and fishing. Economic development is needed, but not at the expense of Charlotte County's natural environment. (Source: Charlotte County Assembly 1998.)

Session I and II: Meeting Human Needs: Public, Corporate and Private Responses

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Sessions I and II

Charlotte County is surprisingly homogenous; we do not have a large percentage of the very poor or the very wealthy. According to the University of Florida, Bureau of Economics and Business, we are 65th out of the 67 counties in percentage of poverty (only 9.7% of population compared to state average of 15.2%). However, poverty hits young families in Charlotte County harder and the rate of poverty for children under age 18 is 17.4%. The income for our typical non-farm business ranks 64th (\$11,400 compared to State average of \$18,900) and average earnings per job rank 54th (\$22,100 compared to State average of \$29,750.). The low earnings appear to be based upon the preponderance of jobs in retail and services (67%, or 7th highest in the State) compared to the average of 52%. Our median household income (which includes passive income such as retirement pensions, etc.) in 1995 was \$30,650, which places us 25th, about mid range for an urban county in Florida.

Needs

The '2000 Community Needs Assessment' by Florida Gulf Coast and 'Charlotte County Collective Survey-2001' identified housing, childcare, mental health and health care as the services low-income residents have the most difficulty obtaining.

Housing

Housing typically is considered affordable if the household pays less than 30% of its total income for all housing costs. Therefore, a household earning \$20,000 could be expected to pay \$500 per month for rent and utilities. A household earning \$15,000 could pay \$375. According to HUD, market rates for one bedroom in Charlotte County is \$474 and a two bedroom unit is \$631. According to the Homeless Coalition, last year they assisted 280 households (308 children, 198 women and 107 men) who were homeless or were threatened with loss of their apartment or home. The County has a program, using State and some federal funds, to assist with first, last and security deposits, renovations to existing homes, and with construction of new affordable housing. Last year the Board of County Commissioners approved assistance (support for tax exempt bonds) for 264 rental units in Murdock (for families under 60% of median income – rents: one bedroom \$416, two bedroom is \$497) and 336 units in Punta Gorda (51 units were earmarked for families earning less than 33% of median income, rents: one bedroom \$203, two \$241, and three \$274, the remainder or units were for families earning less than 60% of median, and rented for the same as Murdock apartments).

Over the last five years, the County, through its SHIP funding, has helped 303 families with down payment assistance, 419 families with housing rehab (mostly adding a/c and

new roofs to older single-family dwellings), 37 families with new home construction, 30 families with rehab of rental units and 336 families with new rental construction (Punta Gorda project).

Child care

The average costs of child care in Charlotte County for 1999/00 were \$75 to \$95 per week for infants and preschool children, and \$54 to \$58 per week for before and after school care. According to the YMCA Children's Services (who operated the only subsidized day care here with a sliding fee based on family income), 630 children received subsidized care in 2000, and another 280 were on the waiting list. The County Commission contributed \$90,000 to the Y to assist the program.

Mental Health

The Charlotte Community Mental Health Services, Inc., a private, non-profit corporation, receives an average of 35 calls per day. Due to staff and budget constraints, they are able to provide professional counseling to only five of these callers. The need for affordable mental health care will greatly increase with the closure of G. Pierce Wood State Treatment Facility in Arcadia and of a private psychiatric hospital in Ft Myers. The Mental Health annual budget is about \$6.5 million and in FY 2001, Charlotte County contributed \$518,000, which is just about half of the total it gives to non-profit organizations. The County participation leverages \$3.8 million from the State.

Health Care

The US Census Department estimated that about 16.3% of Americans don't have medical insurance. Florida Hospital Associates estimates that 15% or 21,000 in Charlotte County don't have medical insurance. Bon Secours/St Joseph accepts the bulk of the Medicaid patients and those without medical insurance. This results in an annual deficit of \$2.7 million, which will not be sustainable over the long term. Both Fawcett and Charlotte Regional hospitals also run deficits for indigent health, and Charlotte County contributes over \$1 million for mandated cost associated with medicaid and indigent care.

Partnerships

In Charlotte County, there are approximately 50 governmental, non-profit, faith-based and business organizations who provide a variety of human service to low income household. Coalitions such as: Our Charlotte Elderly Affairs Network, Emergency Assistance Clearing House, Englewood Interagency Council, Indigent Health Care Advisory Board, and the Charlotte County Collective link agencies and organizations promoting communication, cooperation, and coordination of services to low-income households in the community. The County's Department of Human Services Information and Referral Office maintains a data base of agencies and services providers. A new agency resource directory will be published this year. In addition to providing services, the County is doing more in contracting out, monitoring and coordinating.

Cost

In fiscal year 2001, the County's Department of Human Services has a budget of \$2,216,000 of which \$583,661 are state and federal grants. We are about 15% below the average of the nine comparable and neighboring counties. The Dial-a-Ride program cost \$1.2 million, which is entirely grant funded. The Transportation Disadvantaged program cost \$786,000: grants and fees cover 67% of the cost.

Non-Profits

The Commission also contributes \$1.08 million for non-profits:

Mental Health - \$518,000
Adventure Museum - \$95,000
Child care - \$90,000
Center for Rape and Abuse Emergency - \$81,950
Cooper Street - \$78,000
Council on Aging - \$54,000
Arts and Humanities - \$48,000
Special Training and Rehabilitation - \$27,000
Hearing Impaired - \$17,500
Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center - \$15,000
Visually Impaired Persons - \$13,197
Big Brothers/Big Sisters - \$10,000
Boys and Girls Club of Charlotte County - \$10,000
Domestic Abuse and Shelter Homes - \$7,000
Homeless Coalition - \$7,000
Volunteer Connections - \$4,000

When we compare our funding for non-profits with the nine similar and nearby coastal counties, we find that Charlotte County is neither high nor low. Some counties have a museum as a department. The Commission has suggested appointing a citizen's task force to look at the appropriateness of the County's funding. Some counties either dedicate a portion of their millage or have an independent taxing for indigent health need and/or children's needs.

QUESTIONS

Session I: Meeting Human Needs: Public, Corporate and Private Responses

1. Do you agree with the results of the needs assessments? What do you think should be the highest priorities. In your consideration, please include affordable housing, temporary living facilities, indigent health care, crises stabilization and other mental health services, affordable child care, and programs supporting 'aging in place.'
2. What is your perception of the community's response to these needs? Are we doing enough or should more be done? Is there a tie-in between economic development and these human services issues? Do you believe it is possible for someone to make the transition from welfare to workfare in Charlotte County and become self-sufficient, or are there significant gaps in programs/assistance?
3. Are we doing a good job in getting the word out about the availability of programs? What more should be done?

QUESTIONS

Session II: Meeting Human Needs: Public, Corporate and Private Responses

1. With over 50 separate programs, what can be done to improve overall coordination and to eliminate duplications and gaps? Would it make sense to create a formal overall coordinating council?
2. If you feel more could or should be done to help with these issues, what other means of government funding support may be available?
3. What is the role of the private sector? How can the private sector move from corporate citizenship through "sponsorships" to corporate citizenship through "partnerships?" Is there any tie in or linkage with economic development and some of the needs?
4. How important is it to recognize the efforts of Charlotte County's "Angels," those organizations and individuals that serve the homeless, mentally ill, spiritually needy, impoverished and neglected?
5. What steps can the County take to synchronize public and non-profit services so those in need receive the most benefit?
6. Are there actions that the community could take to demonstrate appreciation to those who serve the welfare of the community.

7. How can the community work with the County to identify barriers to positive, public-private-non-profit partnerships? Are there existing cooperative activities that could be built upon?
8. How can the County become a more pro-active partner in solving human service issues?

Session III: Promoting Quality Public Education

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Over the last fifteen years, enrollment in our school system has grown 88%, slightly outpacing our rapid population growth. It is very difficult to evaluate schools. The State issued an Accountability Report on May 30, 2001, primarily based upon FCAT scores for writing and math. Using a report card format where "A" is a 4.0, our high schools rated an average of 2.7 compared to 3.0 in Sarasota and 2.25 in Lee County. Our middle schools averaged 3.5 compared to 3.1 in Sarasota and 2.7 in Lee. Our elementary schools averaged 3.1 compared to 2.95 in Sarasota and 2.8 in Lee. (It should be noted that these ratings changed considerable from last year for many schools.)

Our drop out rate of 3.2% is less than the State average of 4.8%. In 1999/00, our private school enrollment was about 5% of public school district. The State average is 10.8%, Sarasota has 12.2% going to private schools, and Lee has 9.9%.

Our cost for the average student is \$4,056. The State average \$4,247. Lee is at \$4,049 per student and Sarasota is at \$5,030. Our average elementary class size of 22.1 is less than the State average of 23.3, but greater than Sarasota's 21.5. Our high school class size ranges from 24.6 to 25.9, which is about the same as Sarasota, but less than the State (25.3 to 27.5) and Lee (27.7 to 28.4).

Interestingly, education is one area where the State preempts local communities. With the intent to achieve a level field Statewide, the State limits the ability of local school boards to raise operating millage.

The Charlotte Assembly Steering Committee was keenly interested in how to assist our school system in becoming a center of excellence and in providing lifelong learning opportunities. They believed this issue is critical both from the perspective of parents and for economic development.

Ensuring that all of our residents have quality education (particularly pre-school through high school), job training and lifelong learning opportunities. These benefits are central to the County's future economic vitality.

QUESTIONS

Session III: Promoting Quality Public Education

1. Do you believe the issue of improving student performance in Charlotte County is an important issue?
2. Given the limitations the State has placed on local funding, how can we move toward improving student performance? What can we do to make it better? What are some of the options? What needs to be changed?
3. Increasing the length of the school year is one option to improve student performance. Can this be achieved without State support and additional funds? What would you like to do?

Session IV – Expanding Recreational Opportunities and Parks

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Spending

When we look over the last seven years at spending per person for parks, we find that Charlotte County's park program received about 66% of what our four neighboring coastal counties spent, and about 85% of what our five comparable (similar size and demographics) counties spent. It is therefore not surprising that we have fewer facilities. For example, we have 16 ballfields per 100,000 population and Sarasota and Lee counties have 32 ballfields per 100,000.

One main source of capital funds for parks is impact fees, which brings in about \$480,000 per year. (We haven't raised our park impact fee in at least seven years.) The recent Sales Tax extension will bring in \$12 million for parks, the most important being \$2.5 million for each of the three regional parks with active ballfields, \$1 million+ for Englewood Beach, and \$850,000 for Franz Ross Park. We were also able to attract over \$3 million in State grants to help with land acquisition.

The projected additional operating costs for these sales tax projects will result in an increase of about \$4.30 for a \$75,000 home after eight years.

Future Projects

There are a number of new projects that may be worthy of some consideration.

- Development of Charlotte Harbor Waterfront Park, which combines the linear park along Bayshore with the 28 acre Dotzler property. The County has received a \$1.3 million grant from Florida Communities Trust to assist in land acquisition, and most of the land has been purchased. This is an unusual opportunity to have the water frontage more accessible to the community. Estimated cost - \$7 million.
- Development of Charlotte Stadium complex. As the Texas Rangers leave, the ballfield complex can be turned over to the public for softball, and, over time, tennis facilities, a swimming pool, and a gym could be added. The property connects to the trailhead for canoeing at Tippecanoe Environmental Park. This re-use plan would accommodate virtually all the Senior games activities at one location and would not preclude future major league use of the stadium for Spring training. Total cost is estimated at \$10 million. (By comparison, the cost estimated by the Rangers to renovate the existing stadium was \$12 million. The County had applied for \$7 million of improvements - \$3 million from the State, \$3 million from Tourist Development Tax, and \$1 million from the Rangers, when the \$30 million stadium issue was approved in Arizona.

- Boat ramps. Charlotte County is second only to Monroe County (the Keys) the number of boats per person. Our current boat ramps are becoming congested and our long term plan finds that we are significantly behind in the number of ramps and parking. Many of the older ramps need to be redone to accommodate the turning radii and clearances of newer and larger vehicles. We estimate it will take at least \$6 million since acquiring new waterfront property will be expensive. The County already owns 132 acres along the Myakka River that would be ideal for several boat ramps and picnic shelters. The development would cost about \$7 million.
- Fishing piers. Most of the five fishing piers in the County are in a deteriorated condition. It would take \$5 million to repair or renovate all ten and to remove all the old railroad trestles.
- Regional parks. The three new regional parks were purchased and ballfields are being developed. The master plans for each park contemplates more full use by eventually adding neighborhood amenities such as picnic shelters, basketball courts, playground equipment, more restrooms, etc. This would cost a total of \$8 million for all three parks.

Recreation

Our recreation programs are expanding. For example, over the past two years our youth athletic programs increased by over 10% each year. Attendance at teen dances and roller skating increased from 12,721 in 1998 to 20,037 in 2000. With the new regional parks and athletic fields coming on line, we will be able to handle large future increases.

Eco-tourism

We have worked closely with Florida Communities Trust to identify and to purchase environmental lands. For example, the State contributed \$2.3 million for the \$2.6 million purchase of Oyster Creek and \$1.1 million for the \$1.2 million purchase of Sunrise Park. Grant dollars assisted with property acquisition at Englewood Beach, Amberjack, and West County Regional Parks. The County develops a management plan, removes exotic plants and installs walkways, canoe/kayak launches. Our Tourist Development Program highlights the park location in its "Pure Florida" marketing campaign.

QUESTIONS

Session IV: Expanding Recreation Opportunities and Parks

1. Are you satisfied with the direction the County Parks department is going? Do you believe additional or improved boat ramps, fishing piers, waterfront parks, etc. are important for our community or have we made sufficient improvements for now?
2. What are some reuses of the stadium that you could suggest? How important is it to move forward with a reuse plan?
3. Are we doing enough in providing recreational opportunities for families and youth? What about opportunities for seniors? How would you suggest the County could improve?
4. How would you suggest the County could tie together recreational opportunities and tourism, especially eco-tourism in Charlotte County?

Session V – Building the Infrastructure (power, communication, & transportation) for Strong, Diverse Local Economies

Session V-A: Is our Infrastructure Keeping Pace with Growth?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Roads

Initially, a platted lot community, on a lot and block grid system, has a great deal of traffic capacity because there are so many parallel routes, although they may be mostly residential streets. In the opinion of the County's engineers, what is missing in Charlotte County are alternative corridors to the limited number of major arterials, especially US 41, which cannot economically be further widened. Widening Edgewater Drive to four lanes and extending it to SR 776 will cost nearly \$40 million. Burnt Store Road will be a \$17 million project. Both of these projects are unfunded. Another major project is improving access to the Airport.

Over the next five years, our proposed Capital Plan includes \$14.4 million for widening Veterans Blvd, \$16.5 million for completion of the widening of CR 775 and Pine St. now underway, \$19.7 million for the new Winchester corridor, and \$8.3 million for widening Midway Blvd (all these projects add new capacity and are funded through gas tax, impact fees, and the recent sales tax extension).

Staff projects that in order to keep up with growth and adequately maintain the pavement on our major roads, we need \$25 million more in funding over the five years beyond what is in our Capital Plan and \$100 million more for the 20 years beyond that. Since Charlotte County now levies all the gas taxes permitted by the state, the source of these additional funds would be G.O. bond supported by property tax, or a sales tax extension for designated projects.

Why is there a deficit and are we over taxed now? The deficit is due to infrastructure improvements not keeping pace with growth. According to University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, the average property tax (without any exemptions) for all the county governments in Florida in 2000 was \$821.72. In Charlotte County, the average single family dwelling pays \$470.40 in property taxes for the County, or just about half of the State average. Looking at similar size coastal counties and neighboring coastal counties, our property taxes are about 64% of their average. For at least the last seven years, if not longer, this ratio of funding county government at 60% to 70% compared to similar and neighboring counties has existed, and as a result of the under funding, there has accumulated an infrastructure deficit.

Emergency Medical Service and Fire

The difficulty keeping up here is due to increases in call volumes (grew 10% last year) and increased congestion on the roadways, which delay response times. About 86% of the Fire/EMS calls are for emergency medical service, and our paramedics are trained and certified to provide advanced life support when they arrive on the scene. The County's Fire/EMS Department sees the need for three new stations:

Peachland/Harbor Blvd area. The growth of Section 15 has required the presence of a new station. Now, we receive about 2,500 calls per year from this area, and the primary response comes from Easy St and US 41, which is 7 to 8 minutes away. The new station will reduce the response time to four minutes.

We will need a second new station in Northwest Port Charlotte within the next two to three years. Call volume is approaching 425 calls per year and our response time takes 8 to 10 minutes. We had been receiving assistance from North Port, but their growth is now limiting this support.

The Washington Loop/US 17 area generates 300+ calls per year, and response has been nine minutes when equipment in Cleveland is not out on other calls. Increasingly, we are relying on back-up stations, and the response time drops to 12 to 15 minutes. Within the next four to five years, we will need to add a station here.

Each station costs about \$1 million for the facility, \$400,000 for the fire truck and ambulance, and twelve employees (for four men 24 hours a day, 365 days a year) at over \$500,000. Our current Fire/EMS expenditures are about 80% of the average of the nine comparable and neighboring counties.

Airport

The local airport is one of 131 public airports in the State (20 have commercial capability). The airport has three runways, two are considered in good condition. The third is not in as good of condition. The main runway is 6,580 feet by 150 feet. Last year there were 300 planes based at the airport (250 single engine) and 86,000 take off and landings. The State projects a 3.3% per year growth in activity over the next 20 years.

The Airport and it's environs should be the hub for new job growth. The City of Punta Gorda installed water and sewer lines throughout the airport area last year. The County is working with the State on improving road access.

Telecommunications

Florida Power & Light is in the process of installing a major fiber optic line (256 count) throughout the State. It was installed in Charlotte County about three years ago. Due to the presence of Sprint (Digital Subscription Line) and Comcast (cable line), most of the community can access high-speed telecommunications (both lines have 256 MB/sec capacity).

Power

Florida Power & Light says there is ample electric power available. Several large utility companies outside of Florida have expressed interest in locating merchant plants in Florida and selling to the open market. The extensions of natural gas pipelines throughout the State have made the merchant plants more viable.

QUESTIONS

Session V – A: Is our Infrastructure Keeping Pace with Growth?

1. How important do you believe the needs are for improvements in roads, Fire/EMS, and aviation? Which items would be your top priorities?
2. How would you propose funding the priority projects? Can the community afford the costs? Are there costs associated with not funding the improvements?

Session V – B: Cultural Arts Facility and Conference Center/Hotel.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Charlotte County's bed tax revenue (\$1.3 million or \$9.60 per 1,000 population) is low for Southwest Florida. Tourism in Collier County brings in \$36.50 per 1,000; Lee County receives \$24 and Sarasota receives \$16.3. Like Charlotte, Manatee only brings in \$9. This is probably because of the lack of drawing power and the lack of a destination facility. For example, Charlotte has 9.6 motel/hotel rooms per 1,000 population, Collier has 28, Lee has 20 and Sarasota has 14. The employee payroll in lodging business in Charlotte County is \$2.83 per 1,000 population. In Collier it's \$35, \$18 in Lee, and \$10 in Sarasota.

A public-private partnership for a Conference Center associated with a major hotel may provide a destination facility. The County Civic Center at 16,604 square feet is too small for a conference center and by its open design does not allow for meeting room space.

Okaloosa County (population 180,000) has plans for a \$15.9 million, 88,000 square foot conference center. There would be 27,000 square feet of multi-purpose space and 19,000 square feet for meeting rooms. The facility is expected to host 319 events per year with 290,000 attendees. The net operating loss is estimated at \$632,000 per year and the annual debt service for the new construction is \$1 million, which will be funded by one-third of their bed taxes. Since we are using all of our Tourist Tax revenue for the next five years for marketing and for capital projects (Englewood Beach restoration, Bayshore Linear Park), we would need a smaller facility, and another revenue source for both the capital costs and the projected operating deficit. The Impact Study from Okaloosa County projects that the Conference Center should increase total tourism, which should increase visitor taxes, sales and gas taxes to just offset the \$1.63 million additional annual costs for the center.

QUESTIONS

Session V – B: Cultural Arts Facility and Conference Center/Hotel.

1. Would a new Cultural Arts Facility and Conference Center/Hotel make sense for Charlotte County? What are the major assets Charlotte County has that would enhance (or be enhanced by) this type of complex? Are there advantages, disadvantages? How would such a complex alter our community?
2. How do we begin to explore public support for this type of initiative? Who should be involved? How could the public portion of the public-private partnership be funded?

Session V- C: Balancing Water Supply with Water Demand

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Charlotte County residents have about the lowest water use per household in the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Charlotte County Utility serves approximately 70% of the residents in the County and the utility receives 93% of its water from the Peace River. Our allocation from the Peace River Water Authority is 10.75 million gallons per day (mgd). We use about 8.6 mgd. The current expansion of the water plant will allow our capacity allocation to increase by an additional 2 mgd. At our present 2.2% annual growth rate, this will last until 2019. However, if growth increases to 5%, then the allocation would be used by 2012.

The Peace River water costs about \$2.00 per 1,000 gallons to treat. However, it is subject to drought, accidental contamination, and mechanical or structural failures. USGS has tracked streamflow over the last 70 years. Five of these years, average daily streamflow at the Arcadia gauge has exceeded 2,000 cubic feet per second. In eight of these years average daily streamflow has been less than 500 cubic feet per second. (We are not allowed to withdraw water during those periods when flows drop below 130 cfs.) The Water Authority's expansion will allow us to take out and store more water in underground reservoirs (ASRs) during periods of high flows.

The County is studying options for new water sources. The Intermediate aquifer runs through the County and 3 mgd could be tapped in the Rotonda area and another 5 mgd in Mid-County. Treatment cost averages \$2.10 to \$2.80 per 1,000 gallons with a capital cost for a reverse osmosis plant of \$26 to \$32 million. Several drainage basins offer a potential for potable water. Alligator Creek/Zemel Canal could produce 2 mgd and treated by a reverse osmosis plant. Since Alligator Creek once was the water source for the City and Zemel canal carries overflow drainage from the Webb, there should not be insurmountable environmental issues.

1.4 mgd of re-use of treated effluent is used by golf courses. An interconnect with West County could result in another 1.3 mgd of demand of our 4.25 mgd production. This would relieve pressure on ground water and surface water pumping.

Desalination has enormous potential. The plant production typically needs to be at 20 mgd for economies of scale. Treatment cost currently ranges from \$3.50 to \$4.00 per 1,000 gallons. However, capital cost would be about \$85 million. SWFWMD is providing 90% of the funding for a new desalination plant in Tampa. They have suggested similar financial support for a plant in Southwest Florida. Preliminarily, a site near Venice meets more of the requirements for such a facility. This approach would require regional cooperation. Diversifying the sources of water supply reduces the vulnerability to drought, contamination or system failure. A regional approach coupled with grant funding would reduce the capital costs for County water customers.

QUESTIONS

Session V – C: Balancing Water Supply with Water Demand

1. In your opinion, how serious is the issue of future water availability?
2. Which approach would you prefer to address this issue?

Session VI - Creating Partnerships for Urban Design and Community Development

Session VI – A: Creating Gateways into Port Charlotte – Trees, Signage, and Set Backs along US 41 and SR 776.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The purpose of a gateway is to help create a sense of place and to put one on notice that the community being entered is special and distinguishable from the rest of the area. One major challenge is the prevailing sprawl pattern of development in Southwest Florida, in which communities blend rather homogeneously into each other. Charlotte County's two 'main streets', US 41 and SR776, provide visitors and residents a window into our community. Many communities have adopted strong design codes to ensure that the major commercial streets present an attractive appearance.

The Planning staff met with well over one hundred residents and merchants, and ask them to grade alternative streetscapes. Nearly everyone preferred higher design standards compared to what is used now. Segment by segment themes could be created by standards for landscaping, signage (smaller monument or similarly styled signs incorporated into landscaping), and set backs and would apply to private development as well as to the County's management of publicly owned rights-of-ways. By involving the business owners and homeowner associations, the relationship between these aspects of our community could be reinforced. The addition of architectural elements (such as used in North Port, Venice, Collier County and many other communities) would further enhance each segment's identity. Finally, consideration of pedestrian access into the commercial areas from the neighborhood behind the strips could benefit both the commercial and the neighborhoods.

This task would be a major undertaking for the County and the businesses. The County could assist with seed money and in creating a special district to allow the owners to spread the costs over several years. Ultimately, the goal is not just to dramatically upgrade the appearance, but also to create a desirable location for businesses to stay and thrive.

QUESTIONS

Session VI – A: Creating Gateways into Port Charlotte – Trees, Signage, and Set backs along US 41 and SR 776.

1. Please consider: Do we want US 41 and SR 776 to serve as the 'gateways' to our community? What impression does the current appearance of US 41 give to newcomers? How would a program to improve the appearance of our major corridors affect our economic development efforts?
2. Are there other gateways into our community? Should we expand the corridor beautification to these streets after we have addressed SR 776 and US 41?
3. What do we think about design standards used by other communities?
4. Where is the proper balance between government regulations for design and private property rights?
5. Design standards affect new construction. What can we do about the existing businesses? Some cities trigger the new requirements with a change in use or improvements valued over 50% of the existing improvements. What about street trees and median landscaping?
6. Who should pay for these improvements? Is there a responsibility for local government to financially participate? What is the proper percentage of cost sharing between the public (local government) and private business?

Session VI – B: Neighborhood Planning & Design to Promote Safety and with Decreased Traffic and Enhance Livability with Neighborhood Gateways-Trees, Signage, Open Space and Parks

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Since we are a platted lot community, most of our development pattern is the block grid system dating from the 60s and early 70s. This pattern allows local streets to be used as minor collectors for through traffic. By redirecting traffic from residential streets to key designated collector roads, adding neighborhood parks and street trees, we could enhance quality of life and therefore the livability of our neighborhoods. The downside? It would force more traffic on the very few real arterials, leading to more congestion on those streets.

The vitality of a community is created by the synergy of neighborhoods coming together. Most people identify more with neighborhoods than with larger areas. Often neighborhoods are defined by an elementary school within walking distance, a recognizable similarity among the housing stock (age, style, size, etc.), narrow tree lined streets that slow traffic and create a good environment for pedestrians and bicyclists, possibly a small park, as well as other features.

QUESTIONS

Session VI – B: Neighborhood Planning & Design to Promote Safety and with Decreased Traffic and Enhance Livability with Neighborhood Gateways-Trees, Signage, Open Space and Parks

1. Many communities emphasize neighborhood planning. Can neighborhoods be defined here, and should we try to develop stronger neighborhood identities? How can we consciously strive to develop neighborhood identity with distinct street trees, re-rerouting traffic, neighborhood parks, etc.?
2. Should we consider traffic calming measures on local residential streets and re-orient through traffic to designated collectors (even though these streets will, most likely, have homes fronting on them)?

Session VI –C: Rehabilitating Old Structures: the Courthouse

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Of all of Charlotte County, only the older part of Punta Gorda seems to have a unique appearance based upon its early development. The largest building in the town is the original 1928 County Courthouse. A number of Florida communities (Lee in 1986, DeSoto, Polk in 1992, Volusia in 2001 and Sarasota in 2000) have restored similar aged courthouses.

Rowe Architects of Tampa conducted a feasibility study and determined the original 16,000 square feet core could be restored. The cost is estimated at \$4.5 million, and grants could be available for about \$600,000. State grants would restrict the reuse to a public building.

QUESTIONS

Session VI-C: Rehabilitating Old Structures: the Courthouse

1. Would this project enhance the unique character of Charlotte County? Is it an important project?
2. Several re-use options are being discussed (a museum, a combined veterans/County museum, and a private retail/restaurant). What would you prefer, and why?

Session VI – D: Future Uses of ‘Old Platted Lots’ Acquired by the County

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

With some \$30 million in State funding, Charlotte County has removed 15,000 lots from the County records and have acquired additional lots through tax deeds and other means. The County can use these lots to:

- permanently take some lots off the market to reduce the County’s ultimate build-out population
- redirect new growth to areas with public sewer and public water
- offer some lots to a developer for a new type of product not available here (major Planned Unit Development or Traditional Neighborhood Development)
- increase affordable housing units by offering some lots to affordable housing groups such as Habitat for Humanity
- other options

QUESTIONS

Session VI - D: Future Uses of 'Old Platted Lots' Acquired by the County

1. What can Charlotte County do to “think outside of the box” when considering possible reuse options of properties?
2. What would you like to see: all of the above, or some of the above, none of the above or other options?
3. Can the reuse of platted lots be incorporated into neighborhood planning?

Session VII - Conserving a Healthy Environment for Healthy Communities

Session VII – A: Protecting Our Natural Resources – Striking a Balance Between the Rights of People and Protecting Wildlife/Habitat

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The unique desirability of Florida's temperate and subtropical climates has brought population pressures on habitats and species seldom encountered elsewhere in this nation. Florida, as a result, has more endangered species than any State except Hawaii. The tools available to governments to meet this challenge are regulation, proactive planning, land acquisition, and habitat conservation planning.

Regulations are often inadequate because they are typically applied in a reactive manner to properties actually undergoing development while the species they tend to protect range over a far wider area, and – usually – no single development site can accommodate the life requirements of a species. Administration and enforcement too often results in a protracted and adversarial process.

Proactive planning attempts to direct growth away from environmentally sensitive areas. However, planning often can be controversial because assignment of a low intensity land use limits the rights of a property owner.

The passage of Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever recognizes that the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands is the best way to maintain environmental quality on scale that benefits wildlife species and avoids taking land without compensation. However, it is widely recognized that the State funds were not sufficient, nor would it be realistic to acquire all the lands necessary to preserve the major functional components of the natural landscape. The County, using State funds, has already purchased over 18,000 acres and thereby removed over 15,000 platted lots.

Habitat Conservation Planning consists of identifying the desired species for protection, defining the habitat area, and purchasing or negotiating conservation easements, or transfers of densities to protect the habitat area.

Session VII –B: Manatees and Seagrass

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The County has struggled to balance the rights of boaters and protection of manatee and seagrass. The key issue is really public awareness. Many of the originally proposed speed zones were considered by many boaters as excess and would be an enforcement problem. The Marine Advisory Committee, which predominately consists

of boaters, recommended speed limits for very specific areas on Lemon Bay, Peace River and Turtle Bay, coupled with signage, and expanded public information.

QUESTIONS

Session VII – A: Protecting Our Natural Resources-Striking a Balance Between the Rights of People and Protecting Wildlife/Habitat

Session VII – B: Manatees and Seagrass

1. Should the protection of the County's habitat be a priority?
2. What steps need to be taken to preserve important habitat for wildlife?
3. In Charlotte County, we are responding to State and Federal agencies, which, when applied on a project-by-project basis, allow the 'incidental taking' of gopher tortoises on individual lots in exchange for cash payments but also require purchasing of \$750,000 of land to mitigate scrub jay habitat in road building. What do you think is the proper balance between an individual's property rights and the protection of wildlife and habitat? How would you balance the value of conserving habitat with rights or interests of new development?
4. Do you believe it is important for the County to continue to expand its efforts in environmental land acquisition with State funding? If you would like the County to expand its effort, how would you propose this be funded? (Some counties, most recently, Sarasota, have used bond issues, while others, such as Lee County, use a property tax assessment to generate funds for land acquisition.)
5. How would you strike the balance between protecting manatees and seagrass versus the rights of boaters? Would you support some speed limits on boaters in sensitive areas to protect manatees?

Session VII – C: Promoting Partnerships to Prevent Pollution-Public Concern about Proposed Expansion of Phosphate Mining in Hardee and DeSoto Counties and the Potential Impact on Charlotte Harbor

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Bureau of Mining and Reclamation estimates that the phosphate industry has control over 400,000 acres or 625 square miles within the Peace River basin. Approximately 150,000 acres have already been mined. There are new applications pending on 64,000 acres, mostly in the western portions of Hardee and DeSoto counties, leaving about 186,000 acres of potential mining in the future. This mining activity has the potential to adversely impact the hydrology of the entire region, especially Horse Creek, the largest tributary of the Peace River. Freshwaters from these streams are the lifeblood of Charlotte Harbor, the second largest and most productive estuary in Florida. In our opinion, although required to do so by state and federal regulations, the permitting agencies have done little research to understand the secondary and cumulative impacts of past, existing, and proposed mines on our public water supplies, ecology, health and economy. As these agencies prepare to issue permits for new mines, Charlotte County remains unconvinced that the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor will be protected from these impacts and believes that many concerns have not yet been adequately addressed. In fact, on July 6, 2001, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) agreed with Charlotte County's position that they have not been following their own adopted rules in the review of phosphate mines. They have been improperly allowing a 15% reduction in storm water run-off from phosphate properties.

In particular, we are most concerned about the potential loss of water resource (through spills that may contaminate the river and from loss of recharge areas from the 80 square miles of past and future impermeable clay pits). This resource is intended to provide drinking water for 150,000 people. Accordingly, Charlotte County, together with Lee and Sarasota counties, and the Peace River Water Authority have asked the State and Federal governments to prepare a cumulative impact study to determine whether or not these new projects should proceed, and if they do, how to properly condition their approval to mitigate any negative impacts. It may take legal action to secure the cumulative study.

QUESTIONS

Session VII – C: Promoting Partnerships to Prevent Pollution-Public Concern about Proposed Expansion of Phosphate Mining in Hardee and DeSoto Counties and the Potential Impact on Charlotte Harbor

1. How important of an issue is this to you? How far should the County go in order to become convinced that our water supply and the estuary is properly protected? The County is prepared to spend \$750,000 to defend what it believes to be the communities' interest. This amounts to one-time costs of an additional \$12 per household. Do you support this possible expense?

Session VII – D: Charlotte County’s Tree Ordinance-More Teeth for Shade

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In 1992, after the removal of many stately oaks in order to build a K-mart on Toledo Blade and US 41, the County adopted a tree ordinance. The adoption was controversial at the time. The intent was to establish a minimum post-development tree requirement, provide protection standards, and to allow a payment for removal of trees. Recently, the ordinance has come under criticism for being too weak. For example, in reviewing plans, County staff can only recommend site plan changes in an effort to preserve trees, but they cannot require them.

Questions

Session VII – D: Charlotte County’s Tree Ordinance-More Teeth for Shade

1. The County’s tree ordinance has been criticized for not being strict enough. Should we strengthen this ordinance? And, if so, how?

Session VIII – Expanding Customer Relations in County Government

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The County has high expectations for its staff in customer services as evidenced by our mission statement 'Exceed Expectations in the Delivery of Public Services.' We try to listen closely to our residents and use biannual random telephone surveys, as well as hiring a private firm for 'Mystery Shoppers' in selected departments. Although we provide regular training in customer service, there is room for improvement. A major difficult issue, especially for regulatory agencies enforcing what can be unpopular codes or requirements, is who is the customer?

It has been suggested that the County should do more to assist non-profit agencies (in recognition of the help they provide to the County) by removing red tape, expediting permits, reducing fees, etc. From the processing of our own sales tax projects, we have seen a different perspective of our permitting system, and we have applied these lessons to all permits. We believe the Internet holds great promise for adding more customer convenience, and we intend to place much of the permitting process as well as other departmental issues (e.g., registration for recreation programs) on the web.

QUESTIONS

Session VIII: Expanding Customer Relations in County Government

1. What actions should the County take to build on its existing public information and communications program? Are there ways in which the County could enhance its responsiveness to requests for information or residents' problems and become more service oriented?

Session IX: Dissemination the Policy Statement – Communications and Outreach

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The ultimate success of this process, and all public processes, is directly dependent upon the continued active involvement of the participants. The last two American Assemblies held follow-up meetings by the Steering Committees to monitor implementation with reports to all participants.

Also critical to successful implementation is prioritization. If, after your discussion of the past two days, you may have found certain issues or improvements to be important, and, since some of these issues will require funding, the total costs may exceed the cost the community is willing to bear. At some time, every community must grapple with the very difficult issue of what type of community they would like to have in the future and how much they are willing to pay to attain that community.

QUESTIONS

Session IX: Dissemination the Policy Statement – Communications and Outreach

1. Please review the issues considered and determine which issues stand out as being the highest priorities, which issues are secondary priorities, and which issue can be deferred. Please also consider possible funding sources.

For your convenience, we have summarized all the topics covered

A. Human Services

- Housing (transitional, rental assistance, rehab of existing stock, new single-family, affordable rental)
- Affordable Childcare
- Mental Health
- Health Care
- Others
- Assistance to non-profits
- Coordination and oversight

B. Public Education

C. Recreation and Parks

- Charlotte Harbor Waterfront park
- Charlotte Stadium complex
- Boat ramps and fishing piers
- Compete development of new regional parks

D. Infrastructure

- Roads (Edgewater Corridor, Burnt Store Rd, and Airport)
- New fire stations
- Airport
- Cultural Arts Facility and Conference Center
- Water resource alternatives including a regional desalination plant

E. Urban Design and Community Development

- US 41 and SR 776 beautification (stronger sign codes, landscaping requirements, etc.)
- Neighborhood planning
- Historic restoration of the original 1928 Courthouse

F. Conserving a Healthy Environment

- Protection of natural habitat
- Protection of manatees and seagrass
- Securing adequate protection for the Peace River through the permitting process for new phosphate mines
- Strengthening the County's tree ordinance
- Purchasing environmentally sensitive lands

2. Please consider possible sources of funding.

3. Should the Steering Committee continue to meet to oversee the implementation of recommendations and would the Assembly like to receive progress updates and possibly reconvene to review progress?

-END-