

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

**FEBRUARY 23, 2009**

A meeting was held at the Hibiscus Room at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center, Punta Gorda, Florida. The following members were present: Chairman Duffy, Commissioner Cummings, Commissioner Loftus, Commissioner Skidmore, Commissioner Starr, County Administrator Baltz, County Attorney Knowlton, and Deputy Clerk Manley. The following members were absent. None. The meeting was called to order at **6:05 PM**.

**Chairman Duffy** thanked the attendees; advised this is the third of three State of the County Town Hall meetings the Commissioners have had in an effort to stay in touch with the community; explained she would begin with a brief "State of the County" visual presentation; and that the citizens would then have an opportunity to ask questions.

**STATE OF THE COUNTY PRESENTATION: ATTACHED**

**CITIZEN INPUT - ANY SUBJECT**

Bill Boggner spoke on behalf of the Pirate Harbor Property Owners' Association; handed out copies of material regarding the Pirate Harbor Sewer Proposal of a low pressure sewer system by Charlotte County Utilities (CCU); commented on the estimated costs versus actual costs; questioned the large increase from the initial estimate; and stated he would like everyone to get together and work this out without the necessity of the Homeowner Association involving an attorney.

**Commissioner Loftus** commented on the audit and advised some time is needed to review the report more carefully before a decision can be made. **Commissioner Starr** stated he was not involved in the initial work with Pirate Harbor; that there was a plan to reduce the fees but the other CCU customer would have to pick those costs up; indicated he cannot give an answer why this happened; but that something like this will never happen again on his watch and that future numbers will remain the same.

Mr. Boggner said the Homeowner group agreed to the first price but not to the higher figures; that the Pirate Harbor residents

do not want to pay three times what they were quoted; questioned why CCU went with the larger bid; and indicated that the Homeowner group is looking to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for help or they must contact an attorney to assist with this.

**Commissioner Starr** stated he did not immediately know the answers; that usually there is a change order because of prices going up or down and that he must assume those change orders over time was approved; and indicated he wished there was something the BOCC could tell the Pirate Harbor residents over what has already been told them; but that the BOCC's hands are tied.

**Commissioner Loftus** explained that the first figure Mr. Boggner furnished was only a preliminary quote, not a bid. Mr. Boggner stated that CCU told them they always quote high and that it would probably not be as high as estimated. **Commissioner Loftus** stated it is a quote, not a bid; indicated that the BOCC has not yet had time to digest the report because it was just received; and advised there would be a full discussion after the BOCC has reviewed it more thoroughly.

Mr. Boggner advised he would pass this information on to the Pirate Harbor Property Owners' Association; opined out of town people should not have been brought in for this project; and offered the report, quotes, and other material the Association had available for review by the BOCC and staff.

Ed Schulty indicated he lives in a small community off Harbor Boulevard; that he is interested in what is going on in his neighborhood; and expressed concern with the many homes vacated because of tear-downs, homes listed for sale, and the many vacant lots. Mr. Schulty commented on the high property taxes and cost of living in the community; indicated more should be done to encourage people to build on the vacant land; and opined impact fees should be lowered and tax break incentives given. Mr. Schulty indicated there were so many power poles down Edgewater Drive; and that something should be done to dress up the community and make it more attractive to out-of-towners.

**Commissioner Starr** advised that many things Mr. Schulty mentioned have already been done; explained that impact fees had been reduced in order to stimulate growth; and that the Economic Development office offered incentives for those who want to build and streamlined the process as we want to facilitate that as quickly as possible. **Commissioner Starr** stated that the power lines are where they are because that is where they were platted; that new lines are placed underground; and pointed out we are trying to dress up the community and make it more attractive.

**Commissioner Loftus** said he appreciates the comments; commented on the number of foreclosures pending, homes on the market, and homes that were started and not finished; and said he also would like to see the empty lots developed.

**(Commissioner Skidmore was not present for the remainder of the meeting.)**

Dave Hackett commented on the echo of the speaker system throughout the room of the Event Center.

John Hitzel thanked the BOCC for having the town hall meetings; and inquired if someone could confirm there is \$32.5M in an account somewhere, perhaps a stabilization account, and what the restrictions were on its use.

**Commissioner Duffy** indicated this year the County is facing what could be up to a \$48M deficit and a \$69M budget; and indicated the Stabilization Fund could be used to supplement the anticipated \$48M deficit.

Budget Director Ray Sandrock clarified that the stabilization reserve last year generated \$25M plus excess fee returns from constitutional officers so that today the balance is a little over \$32M. Mr. Sandrock advised that we could take the strategy of using the \$32M to fund operations, but that would be a one-time only; that it can be used to help cushion over the years; but to solve on an ongoing basis you must keep funding constant or look at staff, service, or project reductions. Mr. Sandrock indicated we hope the new performance-based budgeting will help;

commented on other things that will be used; and stated we hope they all come together.

**Commissioner Starr** opined reducing size of government, which we have started doing as part of performance-based budgeting, will be key; and indicated we will have to say this is an adequate level of service or it is no longer needed. **Commissioner Starr** pointed out that Legislature passed a law that gives us no option but to scale back, which is what we are doing now; indicated a large part of the savings will be from efficiencies; opined once we get the County back to a stable level of about seven years ago the smart thing to do when the revenue stream starts coming in is to bank that money and reduce debt; and stated he is not interested in raising taxes.

**Commissioner Cummings** commented on one-time spending and the cap on ad valorem revenues implemented by the Legislature, which involves a growth plus inflation methodology; indicated if non-recurring assets are cut and made available to the shortfall then next year the expenses are that much more than revenues; and indicated every year the State pushes their losses down to counties and municipalities.

**Chairman Duffy** indicated there are many ways to cut costs and reduce expenses; pointed out the BOCC staff was cut by 50% and commended their efforts in stepping up to the challenge; and opined everyone must be more efficient. **Commissioner Cummings** stated he has had the same aid for fourteen years and agreed their staff does an extraordinary job; indicated since making the cuts he has had more errors on his schedule than before; and opined the cuts have made a difference.

Carol Worster inquired if the BOCC has acknowledged that Fire/EMS has made concessions and agreed to adjustments to a new contract; pointed out that we are in a dry season and there will be overtime; expressed concern the BOCC is still looking into privatization, which she does not believe works; and indicated she hopes the BOCC is listening to what the public wants.

**Commissioner Starr** commented on the contract discussions with Fire/EMS; indicated the average firefighter makes \$115,000 per year and Miami's starting pay is \$35,000; agreed that the paramedics and firefighters do an excellent job; but indicated

when times are touch and people are losing their homes something must be done; and that all he wants is to correct the discrepancy in what they were hired at versus what they are being paid. **Commissioner Starr** said he is interested in firefighters receiving a fair wage; but that right now he is not satisfied with what he is seeing yet. Ms. Worster said her son does not make \$115,000 per year, has gotten overtime only when he fills in for someone, and that the firefighters do a great job for Charlotte County. **Commissioner Starr** agreed the firefighters/paramedics do a great job; said he was elected by the Charlotte County to get a handle on expenses and he must take a look at the costs involved; indicated he just wants a fair value for the service they do; commented on costs being paid to Battalion Chiefs and adjustments made only after someone pointed the finger.

**Chairman Duffy** provided a brief history of the privatization discussion; pointed out the BOCC agreed to look at privatization for Fire/EMS, the jail, and Event Center if they could be run more efficiently; and indicated that putting it out for bid is what a private company would do. **Chairman Duffy** reported that last year the Administration advised the Unions that the County Employees would not receive raises and asked if the firefighters would do the same and they were told no; and commented on what the reductions being offered by the firefighters are. **Chairman Duffy** agreed Fire/EMS give a great service, which is expected of them, just as the citizens expect great service from the BOCC; and indicated that the BOCC's job is to find better efficiencies.

**Commissioner Loftus** explained that everyone needs to work as a team; indicated other employees did not take a raise last year; that the County Commissioners are mandated by the State; that he and **Chairman Duffy** had to receive that money but turned it back into the General Fund; and stated he hopes Fire/EMS would do the same. Ms. Worster stated Fire/EMS is making an effort and does not believe getting rid of their jobs would help the County. **Commissioner Loftus** said the citizens expect the BOCC to look at things in a more efficient manner and hopes Fire/EMS will join in working as a team.

**Commissioner Starr** explained that with most privatization contracts local firefighters would be re-hired making what the market requires; that if the firefighters had been more receptive and expenses where they should be we would not be here; that if it is privatized there probably would not be a union initially; that the point is not to put anyone out of a job; and opined the BOCC has been remise.

**Commissioner Cummings** said before we get too tied to the \$115,000 per year he would want to see some other numbers; indicated this is not the majority of salaries; that we need to know if that was actual; that we need also to take into account what the negotiation of the contract was before the other things happened, which was not in the same environment when they turned us down the first time. **Commissioner Cummings** agreed the firefighters are compensated generously; indicated that they have been here a long time and are top scale; that we have already made some changes he is anxious about; commented on some things going on regarding overtime; and indicated we had to change the way overtime is being paid. **Commissioner Cummings** opined privatization has been an effective lever to get assistance from our firefighters; that it may have been lever for getting cooperation; but that he is not certain it is the solution. **Commissioner Cummings** stated we were also looking at privatization for utilities; commented on difficulties that Lee County suffered when they did that; indicated there are some instances where privatization is good but you must be careful in doing that; and opined it is not normally good in the day-to-day operations.

Steve Fabian suggested the BOCC get a copy of Reinventing Government, which talks about whether or not to privatize, ways to privatize and areas where it works; and agreed the BOCC will have a tough time budgeting this year.

Dianne Bettmann stated she is a Sunshine bus advocate; indicated this is a specialized field and it takes a long time to train drivers; and asked that the Commissioners ride with some of the drivers before considering privatization in this area. **Commissioner Cummings** said he does not see a reason to privatize Sunshine; and that he does not anticipate a change there. Ms. Bettman pointed out that Dial-A-Ride was in trouble also.

**Commissioner Cummings** explained what was done to help Dial-A-Ride.

Rich Thompson opined the Sunshine Law is commendable; advised he lives near the West Tarpon and Port Charlotte Boulevard sales tax project; commented on the bidding of jobs and time involved; and asked how that area was picked and the contract selected.

**Commissioner Loftus** advised that proposed projects were listed on the 2002 referendum and voted on, which included the beautification project; that the installation of gravity sewer in the area caused some delay; that all qualified persons bid on the job; and explained all bids go through a committed process for selection. Chairman Duffy stated she was amazed how quickly that happened and how smoothly the project ran.

**Chairman Duffy** introduced Property Appraiser Frank Desguin, County Administrator Baltz, County Attorney Knowlton, and Budget Director Sandrock.

Donald Taub advised he is a Punta Gorda resident new to the area; and inquired if there was any effort being made to bring basic industry, such as manufacturing, into Charlotte County.

**Commissioner Cummings** said when reference is made to Economic Development that is what we mean; indicated incentives are being created to bring businesses into the Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park (ECAP) area but we are being selective about it; and that the biggest attraction we have is that the Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) want to live here. **Commissioner Cummings** explained we want to protect quality of life and everyone is looking for clean light industry; that we are a strong competitor; that much is not public record and we cannot yet talk about it; and that we have had several small successes but not the large one yet that gets everyone's attention. Mr. Taub said he would have been happy to bring his business here and does not know why that has been a problem in Florida because we are in the people business.

**Chairman Duffy** pointed out there are many CEOs that live in Charlotte County; that one of Charlotte County's big projects is the Event Center; and indicated we want our residents who have

connections up north to help us out with bringing those companies here.

**Commissioner Starr** stated that Florida and Charlotte County are losing to Georgia because we have more regulations; opined we must learn to diversify our base; and indicated we have always said light clean industry was needed here and now we know why. **Commissioner Starr** said we need to be open for business; that he would like to see a dedicated team for that group, indicated we still have areas available; pointed out that Public purchased property here but were not ready to settle here just yet; and indicated we must diversify to get through times like this.

Louis Henyecz thanked the BOCC for the time devoted to the jail; and indicated he would pass the comments made at this meeting on to the jail personnel.

**Chairman Duffy** thanked the audience for attending and reminded them that the Commissioners and staff are always open for communication.

**ADJOURNED: 8:00 PM**

Signature on file in Commission Minutes  
Chairman

**ATTEST:**

**BARBARA T. SCOTT, CLERK  
OF THE CIRCUIT COURT AND  
EX-OFFICIO TO THE BOARD  
OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

By: Signature on file in Commission Minutes  
Deputy Clerk

gm

*State of the County  
January 2009  
Charlotte County, Florida*

- Population: 152,814
- Area: 694 sq. miles or 444,160 acres
- 142,981 acres of preserved land
- 2,947 acres of park lands
- 12.5 miles of beaches
- 165 miles of canals
  
- ✓ Highlights of 2008
- ✓ Major Issues of 2008
- ✓ Prospects for 2009

*Highlights of 2008*

- Construction Projects
- Local Preference
- Open for Business

*Goals for 2008*

- Develop near and long term strategic financial plan
- Re-write the Comprehensive plan
- Continue and strengthen comprehensive water supply and conservation
- Analyze the County MSBU system
- Resolve the phosphate situation
- Improve internal and external communication
- Aggressively continue the promotion of Economic Development
- Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of government

*2002 Sales Tax Projects*

- Genesis Safe House
- Bayshore Live Oak Park
- Mobile Command Unit

*Charlotte Sports Park*

- **Cost: \$27,300,00**
- **Funded by a state grant, tourist taxes, and the Tampa Bay Rays**

*Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center*

- **Cost: \$19,650,000**
- **Funded by sales tax, ad valorem tax, and a \$1.95 million contribution from Punta Gorda**

*Historic Courthouse Renovation*

*Fire/EMS Facilities*

- **Fire Station 11 in Harbor Heights – Final Hurricane Recovery Project**
- **Cost: \$2,024,000**
- **Funding included insurance and FEMA reimbursements.**
- **Englewood Area Fire Control Station 75**  
**Cost: \$1,800,000**

*County Parks*

- **Bayshore Live Oak Park**
- **Conservation Charlotte**
- **Prairie Creek Preserve**
- **Shell Creek Preserve**

*West Charlotte Mini-Transfer Recycling Facility*

*Local Preference*

- **Desire for local companies to receive preference in government contracts**
- **Updated the scoring process to recognize local bidders**
- **Incentives for maintaining local offices; hiring local subcontractors and hiring Charlotte County residents**

*Major Issues of 2008*

- **Budget & Spending**
- **Economic Development**
- **Growth Management**

*How much and what did we cut? CUT: \$32.5 Million*

- Millage re-direction (part of .6 mill) \$3,600,000
- Savings from this years budget \$4,000,000
- Capital project re-direction \$11,000,000
- Growth Management Fees \$1,000,000
- Department Reductions \$10,500,000
- Property Appraiser \$7,000
- Clerk of the Court \$427,000
- Sheriff \$424,000
- Supervisor of Elections \$1,768,000

*Unfunded State Mandates*

Unfunded State Mandates \$8,499,322 in FY 2008

- Div of Juvenile Justice \$412,625
- Justice Center Facility & Security \$2,113,328
- Criminal Justice Info System \$73,795
- Drug Court, Pre-Trial, Law Library \$410,335
- Public Defender \$1,177,488
- Healthcare Responsibility Act \$6,406
- Medicaid – Hosp & Nursing Care \$974,710
- Medical Services \$15,000
- Pauper Burials \$6,080
- Additional Programs:
- Mental Health \$1,278,752
- Substance Abuse \$627,334
- Health Department \$1,403,469

**Distribution of Ad Valorem Taxes for FY2008/09**

*Ad Valorem Used by Constitutional Officers*

- Supervisor of Elections, 2,062,640, 1%
- Clerk of the Courts, 3,344,577, 2%
- Sheriff, 59,777,827, 41%
- BCC, 69,459,440, 48%
- Property Appraiser, 4,964,461, 3%
- Tax Collector, 6,496,994, 5%

*Ad Valorem used by BCC Departments*

- Mosquito Control & Aquatic, 113,037, 0.16%
- Facilities Management, 441,765, 0.64%
- Grants Organizations, 166,560, 0.24%
- Sheriff Related, 377,206, 0.54%
- Capital Projects Fund, 23,921,056, 34.44%
- Health Department, 1,714,587, 2.47%
- MSTU's, 5,454,720, 7.85%
- Community Development, 3,712,658, 5.35%
- Conservation Charlotte, 3,780,790, 5.44%
- Community Redevelopment Agencies, 2,010,413, 2.89%
- Fiscal Stabilization Reserve, 25,063,148, 36.08%
- Parks, Rec. & Cultural Resources, 1,089,064, 1.57%
- Animal Control, 55,393, 0.08%
- Human Services, 275,567, 0.40%
- Information Tech & GIS, 426,987, 0.61%
- EMS, 721,651, 1.04%
- Court Related, 134,838, 0.19%

*A Typical Tax Bill*

- Average tax bill is \$1,611
- Assuming a \$1,600 bill
- 35.6% goes to Charlotte Co Ad valorem or \$571
- 50% of that goes to Constitutional officers
- What's left is \$285.50 to the county budget
- Rest goes to School Board, SWFWMD, Peace River Basin, etc.

*Property Assessments Dropped in 2008*

- 2000-01 7,662,906,568
- 2001-02 8,471,308,164
- 2002-03 9,483,025,806
- 2003-04 11,025,783,488
- 2004-05 12,993,261,715
- 2005-06 16,124,765,813
- 2006-07 24,280,088,571
- 2007-08 23,370,729,141
- 2008-09 18,850,841,938

*Economic Development*

*Major Changes in 2008*

- **BCC transferred authority to manage business incentive programs to the Industrial Development Authority (IDA)**
- **Prospectus and monthly scorecard created**
- **“Ready Real Estate”**
- **Provided Infrastructure Grant for the development at the Airport Commerce Center Park**
- **Economic and Fiscal Impact Module**
- **Charlotte County Competitive Analysis**
- **SW Florida Regional Technology Partnership, Incubator study and angel funding programs**

*New companies brought over 400 jobs:*

- **ADT**
- **A Plus Laundry**
- **Arcadia Aerospace**
- **Green Scapes**
- **Sherwin Williams**
- **South Eastern Freight**

*Growth Management*

- **Preparing and implementing the County’s comprehensive plan**
- **Smart Charlotte 2050, a community-based planning process to get everyone involved in the Comprehensive Plan revisions**
- **Land development regulations**
- **U.S. 17 Corridor study**

*Planned for 2009*

- **Increased Communication**
- **Budget and Organizational Realignment**
- **Open for Business**
- **Economic Development**
- **Growth Management**
- **Sales Tax Projects**

**BCC Draft Goals for 2009**

***Strategic Focus Area: Public Safety***

**Maintain a safe and healthy community in which to live.**

***Strategic Focus Area: Growth Management***

**Maintain growth and change consistent with the County's comprehensive plan to maximize quality of life with an emphasis on efficient processes that support positive business, protect our environmental assets, and neighborhood communities.**

***Strategic Focus Area: Water Resources***

**Ensure quality and quantity of water resources when and where they are needed and provide a safe and reliable water supply.**

***Strategic Focus Area: Fiscal/Financial Planning***

**Continue to increase the effectiveness of local government and maintain a strong fiscal link.**

***Strategic Focus Area: Economic Development***

**Create a business climate that promotes a diversified, growing economy consistent with established growth management plans and enhanced quality of life.**

***Strategic Focus Area: Human Services***

**Pursue available funding sources to facilitate providing services to meet community needs.**

***Strategic Focus Area: Quality of Life***

**Enhance community life by clean air and water, unfettered open spaces and body of water, conservation of wildlife and natural resources, and provide community amenities.**

***Strategic Focus Area: Efficient and Effective Government***

**Facilitate the organization's capacity to govern and manage effectively in the rapidly changing and challenging environment.**

***Expanding Public Interaction***

- **Increasing Internal and External Communication**
- **Reaching out to the Community**
- **More Town Hall Meetings**
- **Evening BCC Meeting**

*Budgeting 2009*

- Performance-Based Budgeting
- Focuses on results
- Sets objectives and performance targets
- Has a long term perspective – a continuous process
- Driven by Strategic Goals set by BCC

*2009 Sales Tax Projects*

- Burnt Store Road
  - a valuable hurricane evacuation route
- Edgewater Drive
  - a critical corridor to relieve traffic congestion on US 41
- Midway Boulevard
  - needed to accommodate current traffic volume and improve safety
- County Road 775/Placida Road
  - to accommodate traffic growth, and a hurricane evacuation route
- Sidewalks
  - connecting schools to recreation areas and neighborhoods

*Capital Improvement Projects*

- Burnt Store Reverse Osmosis Plant
- Reclaimed Water Expansion
- Rehabilitating water mains and lift stations that are 30 years old
- County Facility Energy Efficiency Upgrades
- Coral Creek Bridge Replacement

*More CIP 2009 Projects*

- Aqui Esta road-widening project
- Toledo Blade road-widening project
- Piper Road Widening (South)
- Winchester Boulevard South (2002 Sales Tax Project)
- Drainage work in preparation of Midway Boulevard Widening

*Economic Development*

*Enterprise Charlotte Economic Council*

- Formed this year from the Enterprise Charlotte Foundation.

- Funds economic development work and studies through investments made by our business community partners.
- Focus:
  - ✓ expand economic development
  - ✓ bring in site selectors
  - ✓ work with local, regional and state counterparts to advance measures that will encourage business growth

*Enterprise Airport Commerce Park (ECAP)*

- Charlotte County's Industrial Hub
- Special mixed-use designation
- 4,300 acres
- Arcadia Aerospace Industries, Direct Air, and Blue Bell Creameries opened in 2008

*Open For Business Initial Improvements*

- Developed a DRC User guide aimed at instructing the new user of the DRC process
- Staff completed a revision to the DRC code that:
  - ✓ Creates a faster administrative approval process. Projects can now be approved once all departments recommend approval.
  - ✓ Extends the maximum timeline for DRC approval to 5 years from 3
  - ✓ Creates certainty in the preliminary approval process by requiring all applicable comments be made at the preliminary review and prohibiting new comments at final if the proposed development has not changed.

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- Watch CCTV-20
  - ✓ Comcast channel 20 or streams live on our website
  - ✓ BCC meetings & other programming