

Public Works Department plays vital role in recovery

By John Elias

As we surpass five months since what will most likely go down as one of the worst storms in Charlotte County's history, I would like to detail some of the recovery efforts that have occurred and that are still underway.

On the debris front, we have essentially removed all of the hurricane-related debris from the roadways that we maintain. The total amount has exceeded early estimates and is 4.7 million cubic yards. We are serving as a liaison for Florida's Division of Emergency Management, which has taken on the role of removing debris from all private property, commercial property, roads we do not maintain, and even gated communities. There is a portal where citizens can sign up to take part in this program. Visit <https://lanDebrisCleanup.com>.

Continuing on the topic of debris, a more long-term project is waterway debris removal. Again, the Division of Emergency Management has taken on this program and is currently focusing on navigable waterways. These removal efforts are far more complex as they are typically barge-based. The debris has to be conveyed to land then to debris management sites where it can be reduced, and then transported to its final location.

Public Works has been working on 145 storm-related projects. Some of these will be or have been completed by our own staff while many are being outsourced to private firms. The process can seem slow, but to ensure maximum reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, meticulous records must be kept and processes followed.

Charlotte County is a paradise that draws visitors from many from other locations. That becomes apparent while driving on the roadways throughout our area. This year, traffic-related delays are exacerbated by the damage our signalized intersections sustained. We responded quickly with every resource available to get the signals operational. In your travels, you might notice missing components. These components have been ordered and will be installed as we receive them. Supply chain interruptions have impacted these times.

One component of any signalized intersection that plays a crucial role is vehicle detection. Until vehicle detection systems are completely restored, it is impossible to provide any sort of signalized intersection timing coordination. Many signals throughout the county are on a time-based system rather than detection, which can result in congestion. We ask for everyone's patience as we work to get these systems back online.

Another element of vehicular travel that was severely impacted was our street sign inventory. Charlotte County is very large and has the eighth largest road network of all Florida counties. We had more than 72,000 signs damaged or destroyed. To date we have fixed just

under 64,000 signs. Our primary focus was stop signs and regulatory signs but as materials arrive, we will finish the remaining directional and other signage.

The final piece of the recovery effort I would like to detail is the solid waste component. We stood up several citizen drop-off areas that were very heavily used. They were closed on Feb. 11. On Feb. 14, our Mini-Transfer & Recycling Facilities were reopened for normal operations. In conjunction with these services, Waste Management has resumed its regularly scheduled residential curbside services. We ask citizens to be sure to follow the guidelines, which can be found at www.charlottecountyfl.gov/solidwaste and click Residential Curbside Service.

The Public Works team is comprised of dedicated professionals who endeavor to deliver exceptional service. I'm proud of my colleagues' tireless efforts to help our community recover from Hurricane Ian and we're doing our best to get everything back to normal.

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