

Commission receives 2020 sales tax update

By Hector Flores

Charlotte County staff on Tuesday provided the County Commission with an extensive update on the status of projects funded by the voter-approved 2020 local option sales tax. The projects fall into four categories: public infrastructure and utilities; quality of life; public safety; and schools.

First approved by voters in 1994, the sales tax has been extended by referendum five times and has generated more than a half-billion dollars to fund more than 150 projects in the county and City of Punta Gorda. The 2020 extension will fund 20 Tier 1 projects and, if money is available, six Tier 2 projects.

Of the 20 projects on the 2020 list, the airport rescue and fire fighting training facility has already been completed and is operational on the Public Safety Campus on Airport Road east of Punta Gorda. The county school district will complete the school security projects funded by the tax this summer. The remaining projects are in various stages of site search, design, contract negotiation and construction.

Construction on Phase 2 of the Family Services Center on Loveland Boulevard in Port Charlotte is ahead of schedule and will be completed later this year. The \$10.9 million, 18,500-sq.-ft. building will house youth services programs, non-profit community partners and Human Services Department staff. The project includes an outdoor play space, community gardens, and a courtyard connected with a covered walkway to the existing Family Services Center.

The board had an extensive discussion about the design of the new Port Charlotte Beach Park recreation center, a \$10 million, 19,035-sq.-ft. facility overlooking Alligator Bay. The board weighed in on the elevation, interior design and functionality, parking and exterior deck configuration. A related \$4.5 million project will replace the existing pool at the park. Both are slated to begin construction in 2025.

Design on a new administration center and 911 dispatch facility will be completed this fall and construction is slated to begin next winter. The hardened facility will replace the existing sheriff's office headquarters it has been leasing for decades near the Punta Gorda Airport. Design on the sheriff's office's District 4 building is completed and the board will be voting on a guaranteed maximum price agreement at its first meeting in September. The facility will also house the CCSO's training center.

Three fire stations will be funded by the sales tax, including replacements for stations 3 and 6, in El Jobean and east of Punta Gorda, respectively, and a new facility in South County that will become Station 17. Site selection is underway.

Ongoing work on the Edgewater Corridor connecting U.S. 41 and State Road 776 will be funded by the sales tax, including the design of phases 3 through 5 and the construction of Phase 4. These phases will complete the four-laning of the Edgewater Corridor from Midway Boulevard to S.R. 776, including a rerouting of the corridor away from Edgewater Boulevard at the Collingswood Boulevard intersection to where it connects with Flamingo Boulevard.

The project list has 20 items, but understates the actual number of projects because two categories, water quality infrastructure and regional pedestrian and bicycle trails are comprised

of more than 20 separate projects. The Utilities Department is or will be installing seven sewer force mains and one lift station in Port Charlotte and on the Cape Haze peninsula as part of the county's septic-to-sewer program. If money is available for Tier 2 projects, two vacuum stations will be constructed in Port Charlotte. Public Works is or will be constructing 13 sidewalks, crosswalks and pathways in South, Mid- and West County.

For information on these and other projects, visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/salestax.

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