



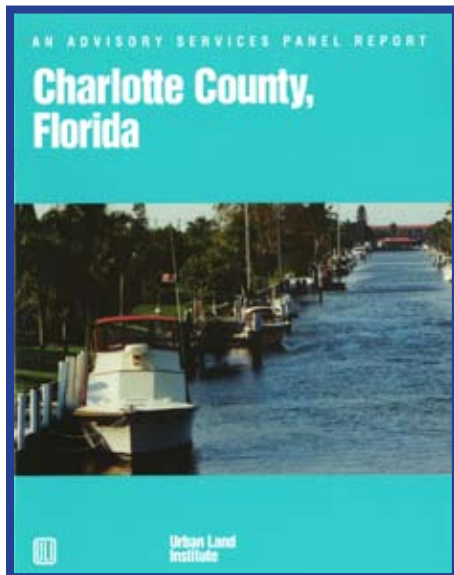
# Charlotte County 2007 Annual Report

*Back to the Future*

Charlotte County is pleased to be able to share with you the 2007 annual report. The County has worked diligently to bring our projects in on-time and within the available budget while continuing to provide quality services to the residents of Charlotte County. Provided in this annual report is a look at activities of 2007 in the context of past years events. Many of the projects that have been completed in 2007 are the result of years of careful planning. We continue to move forward and ensure that the quality of life in Charlotte County is the best that it can be through the efforts of your county government.

There are currently more than 150,000 people who call Charlotte County home. Most of this growth has occurred in just the past 15 years and is projected to continue at about this same pace through at least 2035, when the County is expected to have over 244,000 residents.

In 2002, the [Board of County Commissioners](#) recognized that the infrastructure needed to support this growth had not kept pace, and the result was aging roads, facilities and amenities. The Commission also recognized that the citizens of Charlotte County would bear the burden of updating the infrastructure. They sought a way to diversify the tax base so that the residential property owners were not the sole funding source, as they had been in the past.



The Commission brought in the [Urban Land Institute](#) to help them sort out their options. The ULI is an education and research organization created over 60 years ago to provide responsible leadership in the use of land. The ULI review process included questionnaires, interviews with citizens, and interviews with commissioners and staff. The panel presented their results and recommendations to the Commission in May of 2002.

The solution was to create more commercial nodes and expand the amount of property available for non-residential development. After much discussion the Commission chose to create two geographically strategic areas for commercial development. These became the [Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park](#) and [Murdock Village](#).

The zoning in these areas was changed, Community Redevelopment Areas were created and the work began to make these areas attractive and available to commercial business interests. Enterprise Charlotte, the advisory board on economic development issues, really began to hit its stride. The County was moving forward to expand the tax base and lift the property tax burden from residential property owners.

Then, the hurricane season of 2004 impacted Charlotte County like nothing ever had before. The next two years, 2005 and 2006, were spent dealing with the hurricane

aftermath. Cleaning up, repairing, and rebuilding took an extraordinary amount of effort. Much of our activity focused on hurricane recovery during these years.

Likewise, a lot of staff resources went to documentation and research in order to receive the best possible reimbursement from FEMA and our insurance providers.

So now we come to 2007. Many of the construction and rebuilding projects are completed, and we are back to where we left off before the hurricane — back to the future of Charlotte County.



One advantage of the hurricane was the opportunity to clean up and improve existing neighborhoods and commercial areas which had been severely damaged in the storm. Many, many homes were damaged beyond repair and as residents began to rebuild, neighbors came together to help make their neighborhoods a better place.

A former church was purchased by the County in September of 2005 for the purpose of housing non-profit organizations who deliver needed services in the area. Remodeled and reopened in 2007, that building is now known as the [Family Services Center](#). It has become the hub for one neighborhood's rebuilding efforts.



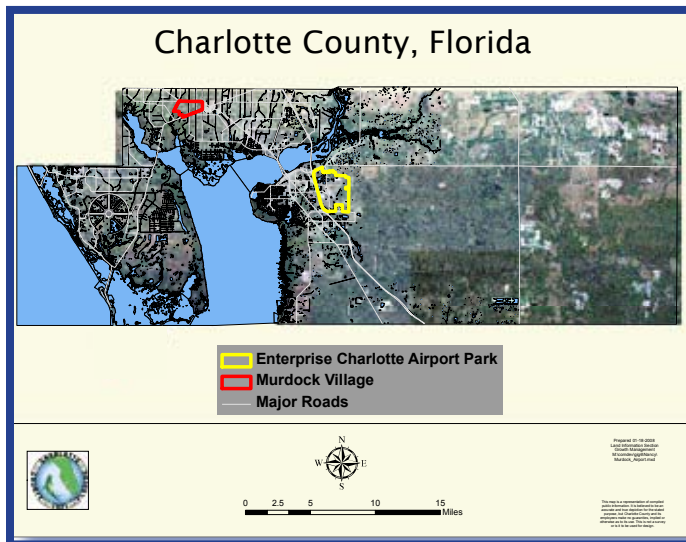
During this past year, our [Neighborhood Redevelopment Specialist](#) and the staff of the Family Services Center have been working together with various groups to identify and address many needs of the area, such as organizing landlords. 2007 saw two events that illustrate the successful results of these efforts. Paint Your Heart Out Charlotte County! is a program whereby houses were painted and yards landscaped for residents who couldn't afford to do the work or weren't able to do the work themselves. Operation Renew Neighborhood Expo is a gathering of neighbors who learned how they can work together to improve their community. Both of these events were only possible because of the assistance and support of numerous volunteers and local businesses.

The community saw the damage from Mother Nature and the ongoing construction boom and wanted to make sure that our natural habitat was protected for future generations. In 2006, Charlotte County citizens voted to tax themselves to fund the purchase of environmentally sensitive lands. The effort is called [Conservation Charlotte](#), and the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Oversight Committee was formed by the Commission

and immediately began seeking environmentally sensitive lands for purchase and preservation.

In 2007, the committee recommended purchasing the first piece of property, 80 acres at Buck Creek, to be preserved for all time. Their second recommendation for purchase was the Shell Creek Preserve, 370 acres of pristine habitat that includes over 5 miles of creek frontage.

There were many other steps taken by the County to protect our natural surroundings. Through the Natural Resources division and the Extension office, mangrove propagation and restoration took place. Tree canopy lost in the hurricane was replaced through tree give-a-ways. Residents were encouraged to plant the free trees in their yards and were provided with instructions on how to keep their new trees healthy.



Coastal areas continued to be monitored for shorebirds in accordance with the permit issued by Florida's Department of Environmental Protection for the Stump Pass Dredging project. Monitoring continues with staff and volunteers in accordance with the County's Sea Turtle Ordinance. Plus, Habitat Conservation Plans were created and are moving through the approval process at the state and federal levels.

Several of the building projects over the last few years have had their existing infrastructure upgraded. We are now ready to address roads, water and wastewater needs in anticipation of future growth. When we talk about infrastructure we also have to talk about paying for these projects. The projects are generally listed in the [County's Capital Improvement Project](#) list – frequently referred to as the CIP. These CIP projects have many funding sources including various taxes, like the gas tax or sales tax, and assessments like Municipal Service Benefit Units or MSBU's.

As mentioned earlier, based on the ULI recommendations, the [Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park](#) was created to attract businesses in order to diversify the County's tax base. The

Board of County Commissioners did not want residential property owners to have to shoulder the entire burden of paying for infrastructure improvements.

Infrastructure work was started on the project in anticipation of future growth. Piper Road, a main transportation artery near the airport, is being widened as one of the amenities to attract new businesses. The [zoning](#) was changed, utility lines were run to the area, and road work is currently underway. Businesses are much more attracted to moving to our region if the infrastructure is already in place, thereby reducing their initial investment.

The [Economic Development Office](#) has been instrumental in seeking out businesses to relocate to this area. A few of their recent successes are the UPS relocation in Port Charlotte, Federal Express' new building in Punta Gorda and Publix's commitment for a distribution center at the Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park.

The County's Project Management staff oversaw the completion of other capital projects this past year such as [Oyster Creek Regional Park](#) in West County, a diving well and locker rooms added to [South County Regional Park](#) in Punta Gorda, and [Bayshore Live Oak Park](#) in Charlotte Harbor. All three of these projects were partially funded with sales tax dollars.

Four [new fire stations](#) were brought on line, funded thru the county's sales tax program, fire assessments and impact fees. This construction greatly reduced the response times for fire/EMS crews.



One of the most difficult projects completed in 2007 was the new Public Safety and Vehicle Maintenance Buildings at the new [Public Safety Complex](#). This campus includes a state of the art emergency operations center, fire administration offices, maintenance facilities for our emergency fleet and our [2-1-1 call center](#).



Work continues on other capital projects like the Historic Courthouse in downtown Punta Gorda and the [Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center](#), which replaces the old auditorium, destroyed in Hurricane Charley. [Stormwater](#) drainage has been improved in many areas and 80 miles of roadways were paved.

Water has been and continues to be a very important issue to our residents and is being addressed through water expansion projects. Some of these projects were funded through [MSBUs](#) and others were

funded through Sales Tax revenues, and a variety of other funding sources. The [Reverse Osmosis](#) plant expansion in the Burnt Store area, as well as in Rotonda, will help address the need in those communities to provide safe, quality drinking water.

Where there is drinking water, there is also [wastewater](#) and the Utilities staff continues to work toward solutions in dealing with the wastewater in an efficient and ecological way. Reclamation of the wastewater is an activity that also saw a lot of progress. The more reclaimed water that can be used for non-drinking uses, such as lawn watering, the more drinking water we will have.

However, to provide adequate reclamation opportunities, a significant investment needs to be made in order to lay the new pipes necessary to connect the system. To that end, the County began the process by running a line from Eastport Wastewater Reclamation Facility to Riverwood. This project will have a significant impact on water conservation in the Murdock Village area.

The [Murdock Village](#) project reached a major milestone in October with the signing of an Agreement by the Board of County Commissioners and the selected developer, Kitson and Partners. This agreement sets forth both the financial package the County will receive and identifies the components of the new mixed-use community.

The Commissioners depend heavily on the input and participation of our residents in determining the future of Charlotte County. In 2007 the [Charlotte Assembly](#), which has met several times over the past 10 years, was reconvened. The Assembly is a gathering of more than 130 residents from many walks of life who came together to explore the current and future needs and desires of the community.



Their roundtable discussions covered the six major topics:

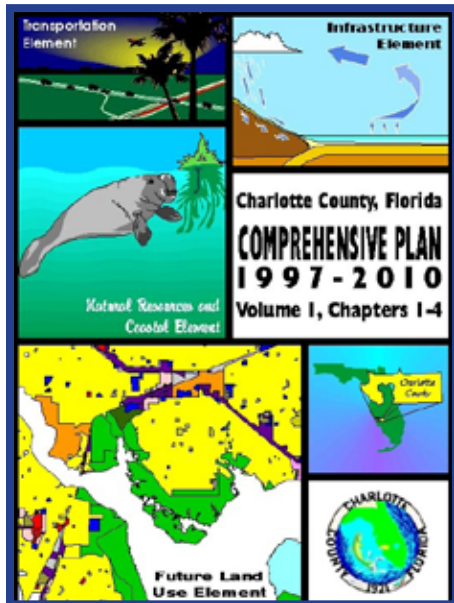
- Environmental Protection
- Growth Management
- Health & Human Services
- Economic Development
- Post-Secondary Education
- County Government Operations

At the conclusion of three days of discussion, they issued a Policy Statement which will be used to guide the Commission in decision-making. This Assembly's participants were very concerned about the quality of life in Charlotte County. They expressed concern

that growth management needed to be handled in such a way as to preserve our natural habitats while embracing growth for the purpose of tax base diversification.

Along those same lines, the Community Development department of the County transitioned to the [Growth Management](#) department to more appropriately reflect the work they were doing.

In 2007 County staff began rewriting the Land Development Regulations. This process will change the Zoning Code for growth management and encourage future developers to be good stewards of the environment and protect resources while managing growth.



The [Comprehensive Plan](#) is the Land Use guide for the county, and an important guide in Growth Management. Efforts have also been progressing in the Comprehensive Plan Review & Rewrite. This document will specify how we will use the land within a new set of rules and regulations. The [Comprehensive Plan](#) is developed through extensive interaction with the community stakeholders and is approved by the Board of County Commissioners. It will then go to the state level to be approved by the Department of Community Affairs.

Comprehensive Plans remain in place for 10 years. Adjustments can be made to the plan only after commission approval and further review by the state.

The County's new Comprehensive Plan is due in Tallahassee to the Department of Community Affairs for approval in 2010.

Another topic that made more headlines this past year than any other issue was property tax reform and its impact on local government budgets. With the state legislature committed to [Property Tax Reform](#) the County spent considerable time responding to the various plans being suggested. In the end, local governments were mandated to reduce their budgets to match expected reductions in revenue. As a result, the [Commissioners](#) reduced the fiscal year 2007/2008 expenditures by over 13 million dollars. Over half of the reductions came from reducing the [Contingency Reserve funds](#). These funds are used to cover unexpected events such as natural disasters or unanticipated repairs. Other savings were the result of reductions in travel and educational expenses, utility efficiencies, contract savings and personnel reductions.

This is the first step in the state's property tax reform. Over the next five years further budget reductions will occur and all local governments are being challenged to do more with less.

2007 was the year we wrapped up hurricane recovery and began to refocus on our future by continuing our work on: The environment, growth management, upgrading aging infrastructure, addressing budget issues, facilities, and focusing attention on water issues by conserving what supplies we have, as well as seeking new water sources.

Through all this, Charlotte County is committed to providing quality services through exceeding expectations in the delivery of public services.

Charlotte County's future is bright!

