

Challenges and opportunities for Charlotte County in 2023

By Hector Flores

With the New Year almost upon us, we're looking ahead to 2023 as a year of challenges. As I wrote in last week's column, our approach will be to turn challenges into opportunities.

Ongoing recovery from Hurricane Ian will be among the county's biggest challenges in 2023. The county suffered significant damage to numerous facilities, some of which may need to be torn down and replaced, others that will require extensive repairs and be out of service for many months. The county will continue to work with state and federal agencies and local and regional non-profit partners to address the housing, nutrition and recovery needs of thousands of residents, especially the hundreds who have been displaced by Hurricane Ian. More than 120 families have already taken advantage of a code change by the County Commission to allow families to live in RVs or trailers on their property while they repair their homes.

In 2023, the County Commission will be looking at the best way to serve citizens who used the programs and services provided by the Cultural Center of Charlotte County. The county looks forward to the findings of a Charlotte Community Foundation study. With that input and the results of an assessment of the damage to the former Cultural Center property from Hurricane Ian, the board will provide staff direction on how to proceed in reimagining that site and the services it may provide to better meet the county's needs.

In 2023, the county will continue to make progress on sales tax projects, including the completion of design development on the Placida West Boat Ramp expansion, which will add approximately 158 boat trailer parking spaces and six launch lanes to the county's most popular boat ramp. Design work is ongoing on the Edgewater Corridor that will ultimately create an alternative route from South County to West County to relieve congestion on U.S. 41, while also serving the transportation needs of the neighborhoods along the corridor.

We will continue to build on the work done this to begin the county's water quality monitoring program to develop our One Charlotte, One Water plan with the goal of implementing it in 2023. The plan will identify water quality issues, expand testing, analyze results and develop programs to remediate impacted waterways.

The County Commission will also begin 2023 with a review of its strategic focus areas — infrastructure, economic and community development, public services and efficient and effective government — in the context of how four factors will impact the plan: accelerated population growth, an extended period of inflation, a potential recession and recovery from Hurricane Ian. They will then develop goals and direct staff to develop specific initiatives aimed at meeting those goals.

I wish you a happy, healthy and prosperous new year.

Readers may reach County Administrator Hector Flores at Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.