

Utilities Department moving forward on planning, resiliency

By Dave Watson

2022 was a challenging year for Charlotte County. The nation was recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic and then Hurricane Ian hit at the end of September. Life for many of us changed with these new realities. But with change, comes both hope and opportunity.

Our county was hit hard by Ian, and our Utilities team worked together to get our services back up and running as quickly as possible. The storm severely damaged the Utilities administration building at the East Port Environmental Campus, forcing our staff to relocate immediately to an alternate facility. We followed our continuity of operations plan and made this move quickly and efficiently, working with other county departments to ensure a quick transition. We will take the lessons we learned to improve our response actions so we can better serve the community during these severe weather events.

As we move forward into 2023, we are planning for the future. One Charlotte, One Water is a key philosophy resonating throughout the county. At the Utilities Department, this approach to water quality is at the core of our planning.

Our planning documents provide both the foundation for our utility and the roadmap into the future. To date, we have completed planning documents for water distribution, reclaimed water, supervisory control and data acquisition. We are now moving forward with the sewer master plan update. The department is also beginning work on planning documents that will improve resiliency and compliance.

The county's new asset management software (Cityworks) will allow staff to link our assets to improve maintenance, integration of developer expansion, and our customer service experience. This initiative will provide direction specific to our assets on levels of service, risk and resiliency, life-cycle costs, contingency planning, change management, asset performance monitoring, gap identification and line of sight.

The Utilities Department will be using this guiding document to create the department's asset management plan to address specific departmental needs. Hurricanes have repeatedly shown us hardening our infrastructure is needed to ensure drinking water and sanitary sewer services with minimal interruption. Elevating our electrical control panels above the 500-year flood elevation and installing generators at our lift stations are just examples of utilities hardening to ensure system operations after a major storm event.

Our staff is committed to our mission to provide safe, reliable drinking water, reclaimed water and wastewater service for the enrichment of the community. We continue to work towards improving our services through consistency, transparency, and public outreach, working together with our partners to better serve our community.

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