

County Commission meets with City Council

By Hector Flores

Charlotte County commissioners held a productive meeting with their Punta Gorda City Council counterparts Tuesday at the Charlotte County Administration Center. Topics included economic and tourism development, road, facility and utility infrastructure, annexation and marine projects.

Economic Development Director Dave Gammons delivered an upbeat presentation on attracting businesses and jobs to the county with the theme of possibilities. He reported companies were making optimistic investments in warehousing, distribution and manufacturing, especially in the bustling Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park. He highlighted the nearly \$1 billion investment Allegiant Airlines is making on its Sunseeker Charlotte Harbor resort. He touted the successful partnership between the county, Charlotte Technical College, the state of Florida and Punta Gorda Airport to develop the Aviation Maintenance Technician School.

Sales/Sports Business Development Director Sean Walter of the Punta Gorda/Englewood Visitor and Convention Bureau outlined Hurricane Ian recovery efforts by the hospitality industry. He talked about an ongoing marketing partnership with Visit Florida to reach potential visitors. In his area of sports tourism development, he spoke about successful events held recently, including a national pickleball tournament that drew more than 800 athletes. He shared data on the economic impact tourism has, supporting more than 13,000 jobs and generating more than \$330 million in wages and salaries.

The city's Finance Director Kristine Simeone discussed investments made in the Punta Gorda Community Redevelopment Area, including improvements at Laishley Park and the construction of the Herald Court Parking Garage. She noted the taxable value in the CRA has increased every year since 2015 and that agency's debt could be retired as early as 2024.

City Manager Greg Murray talked about the city's pre-annexation agreements with customers of Punta Gorda Utilities. He showed maps outlining property already annexed and areas where annexation will occur as the utility's service area grows.

Charlotte County Water Quality Manager Brandon Moody presented an update on the county's One Charlotte, One Water program, including current monitoring efforts and the development of a water quality master plan. His presentation included maps of sampling locations, impaired waters and city and county watershed flows. The city's Urban Design Director Joan Lebeau added information about city water quality efforts, such as green space preservation, stormwater system improvements and future septic-to-sewer conversion investments.

Public Works Director John Elias covered road and drainage infrastructure projects and traffic volume and management concerns in the Burnt Store Road area. He discussed a study

underway regarding the potential widening of Burnt Store Road and the associated constraints and costs.

Commissioners and council members engaged in useful discussions about a new parking garage at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center, future development in the city's downtown, road maintenance and an investment in the installation of day docks. Even as the city and county are still recovering from Hurricane Ian, it was heartening to be part of a forward-looking discussion about our shared future.

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