



Charlotte County Government

"To exceed expectations in the delivery of public services."

www.CharlotteCountyFL.com

April 12, 2024

Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Administrator Criswell,

As you know, in September 2022, Hurricane Ian made landfall as a large and destructive Category 4 Atlantic hurricane, the deadliest to strike Florida since 1935 while causing more than an estimated \$50 billion in damage, including \$350 million in Charlotte County for clean-up and repair alone. While much of our community appears "back to normal," in reality, we are still digging through recovery and restoration.

Unfortunately, much of our current challenge is due to our inability to engage with FEMA quickly and efficiently on reimbursement and individual projects. While our frustrations are many, we will highlight two examples that describe some of our challenges.

First, as you know, FEMA offers "expedited" funding for Emergency Work Projects (Category A or B), allocating 50 percent of the Federal share of the estimated project cost. The applicant provides a detailed breakdown of work, including descriptions, locations, and, for debris, quantities with supporting documentation. After all the required documentation for expedited projects is submitted and reviewed, the Federal share of 50 percent should be provided.

Unfortunately, since before November 2023, Charlotte County has faced challenges in uploading documentation to comply with Requests for Information from FEMA. The County has been asked to upload over 17,000 Disaster Daily Logs, totaling more than 12.6 TB of data into the FEMA Grants Portal. As of February, we have over 15.7 TB of total data relating to Hurricane Ian. The portal's 100MB limitation hinders timely uploads, necessitating thousands of hours of staff time and needlessly wasting precious taxpayer funds, despite FEMA's practice of reviewing only 10 percent of the submissions.

Almost eighteen months after Ian made landfall, we have only received 60 percent funding for one expedited project.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

18500 Murdock Circle, Suite 536 | Port Charlotte, FL 33948-1068
Phone: 941.743.1300 | Fax: 941.743.1310

Another example of an issue which remains frustrating is the Rotonda Bridge Project (PW 014113). In short, our engineers believe the bridge must be replaced, yet FEMA personnel have suggested the bridge can be repaired. FEMA personnel presented a couple of repair options, but these options have been deemed unfeasible. One option risked leaving the bridge susceptible to future damage by using a spread footing retaining wall shallower than the damaged seawalls they would be replacing. The other option would have resulted in additional permitting requirements and unnecessary costs. Moreover, both options provided by the FEMA CI team included unrealistic cost estimates.

In contrast, a Feasibility Report from our consultant explored two repair alternatives and two replacement alternatives. This report recommends replacing the bridge entirely with a new three-span structure. Despite this recommendation, the CI team reiterated their focus on restoring the bridge to its pre-storm conditions. It is worth noting that any repair would surpass the 50% rule due to the necessary removal and replacement of parts of the superstructure.

We have recently uploaded a revised Damage Description and Dimensions (DDD) Report for Rotonda Bridge into the FEMA portal and are awaiting review by the Consolidated Resource Center (CRC). While our professional opinion on this has not changed, the amount of time it takes to address the bridge deficiency is unacceptable. The detour created by the bridge closure is approximately five miles long. This roadway is a designated school bus route, transit route, and emergency vehicle route. We fear it could take years to receive a final determination, leaving residents vulnerable, particularly as we enter a new storm season this year.

We appreciate the enormity of FEMA's responsibilities. We know how challenging your mission is and we recognize it has expanded over the years, while also being more difficult because of the challenges of hiring and retaining staff members

However, we also plead with you to continue to do all you can to help communities like Charlotte County respond to catastrophic disasters like Hurricane Ian. We are fortunate that we have a catastrophic reserve fund, but Hurricane Ian and the cumbersome reimbursement process have significantly impacted this fund. Entering another hurricane season with severely depleted reserves is very concerning.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns and for all you do on behalf of communities nationwide recovering from disasters.

Sincerely,



William G. Truex, Chairman
Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners

cc: Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners
Senator Marco Rubio
Senator Rick Scott
Representative Greg Steube