



COUNTY RESILIENCY



The last few years have been tumultuous for our county: COVID-19, shutdowns and shortages, social unrest, rising crime, inflation, federal deficit spending, polarized political views and locally, Hurricane Ian. All of these factors can be incredibly destabilizing, but Charlotte County government has taken them in stride and remained resilient throughout. From my perspective there are three major factors instrumental to that resilience: great leadership, great organization, and great planning. I have been in local government for 35 years and the leadership in this organization is the best I've seen; commissioners, county administration, emergency management and department directors all address the key issues and lead by example.

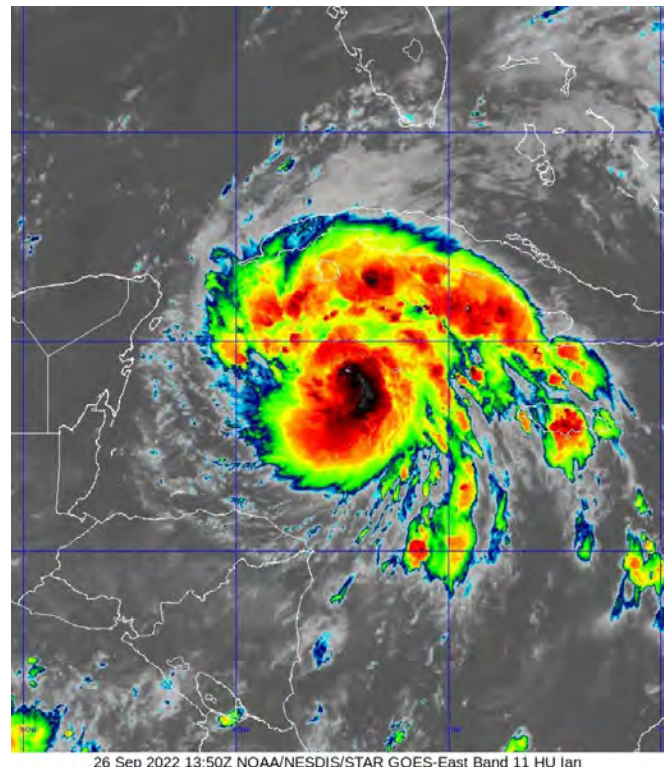


County staff are dedicated employees that take pride in what they do and in the fact that they are contributing to their community. But the factor I want to focus on is the planning that underlies everything we do.

This planning takes place across all aspects of operations and is exemplified by our budget process. Our current budget year began October 1 while the process for developing took nearly a year. We began that process by developing four different scenarios by which we would evaluate all requests and develop alternative financial projections. Those scenarios were: what if we continue to see rapid population growth; what if inflation continues for the next two years; what if we see a recession; and what are the long-range implications of hurricane recovery. Population growth: Over the past decade our population grew by 16%. That growth is projected to be more than 26% over this decade. If the current rate of growth continues, we will have added 50,000 citizens to the county by 2029. This will require a significant expansion of service delivery and not just in volume but in the geographic areas in which growth occurs.

Inflation: The rate of inflation has begun to decline but that decline is not uniform across the board. An area where we continue to see alarming increases is in construction. This is critical since over half of our budget is capital in nature. Recently, we went out for bid on a wastewater plant expansion. The engineer's estimate was \$56 million; however, the low bid was \$106 million. That's an 89% increase in less than a year

Recession: Economists grow more optimistic that the economy will make a "soft" landing but that certainly isn't guaranteed. How would a national recession translate to our local economy and how will it impact the services we provide?



Hurricane recovery: The last issue is not so much a scenario as a reality. On Sept. 28, 2022 we were struck by one of the largest hurricanes to ever make landfall. The clean-up alone after Ian cost the county over \$100 million. Eventually we will be reimbursed for that cost by FEMA, but it is a long, arduous process. A year later we have only been reimbursed \$22 million and the rest could take three to five years. Out of 800 insured assets, over half of them were damaged by the storm. We are working with our insurer to repair everything as quickly as possible, but the sheer magnitude of the damages will take at least another two years to complete.

These are all major issues, but we have a process in place to make sure they are addressed in a planned and comprehensive manner. This County Commission has made long-range fiscal stability a high priority over the past several years and the County is in very good financial position to deal with the ambiguities we face. We are in this position primarily because of three practices we have adopted. First, we provide the board with long-range financial projections so they can see the implication of their decisions. Secondly, we have developed 20-year capital improvement and capital maintenance plans and thirdly, we have maintained a strong reserve policy. It is this long-range planning that enables us to insure this remains a great community no matter what we face.

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See video of Hurricane Ian and the aftermath of the storm in Charlotte County [HERE](#)



HECTOR FLORES

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR



Dear Commissioners and Citizens of Charlotte County,

I am pleased to present the Adopted Fiscal Year 2024 Charlotte County budget. This budget represents months of work by a dedicated leadership team and staff across all levels of the organization in alignment with the County's strategic plan. As is the case each year, we implement a fiscally sound approach to budgeting, with our responsibility to be financial stewards of County resources as its core. For local governments, the budget is far more than just a list of line items of what is going to be spent. The budget is how strategic direction, policy and priorities are set. It's a long-range financial plan and an operations guide.

Like all organizations, Charlotte County government has faced multiple challenges over the past several years which have put our resources and staff to the test. However, Charlotte County's financial soundness has demonstrated that wise financial decisions have been made.

During the Fiscal Year 2024 and Fiscal Year 2025 budget process, staff worked hard to launch initiatives to continue implementing the Board's vision and strategic focus areas. Our strategic, forward-looking budget addresses growth demands and expectations, remains focused on recovery and resiliency, right-sizing our staffing levels, and maintaining the assets we have.

On September 28, 2022, Charlotte County was hit with a Category 4 major hurricane. Hurricane Ian caused catastrophic damages to our communication and local government assets, including signage,

lighting, roads, bridges, parks and buildings. Debris removal after Ian cost the County more than \$100 million. We anticipate reimbursement from FEMA for the cost; however, the public assistance program is a lengthy process and often takes several years to complete. To date, even with an approved expedited project, we have only been reimbursed \$22 million. The rest could take numerous years to validate and receive.

In addition to working with federal and state agencies, County staff has been communicating with our insurance provider to assess the damage of more than 400 insured assets and begin repairs. Due to the volume of repairs, this process will also take several years to complete. This financial burden has been absorbed from county reserves for the time being, which is another example of conservative financial planning the organization has implemented to provide resiliency and stability to the taxpayers.

In conclusion, we have worked to overcome all obstacles encountered and continue to provide excellent customer service. This speaks highly of the dedication and drive of our dynamic workforce. The financial decisions made by the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners have positioned the County to remain financially flexible with healthy reserves. We will continue to remain vigilant, monitoring and responding as needs arise. Citizens, elected officials and employees of Charlotte County should be proud of their efforts to date as we continue the implementation of the board's strategic plan. We are prepared for the new fiscal year full of opportunities to serve the community.

SIGNED,

HECTOR FLORES

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CHARLOTTE COUNTY
FLORIDA