

WEEKEND WAVE

04-15-16



Friday Economic Roundup

A graphic for the Charlotte County Economic Development Strategic Plan. It features a teal background with a white box containing the text "Charlotte County Economic Development Strategic Plan" and "Be a part of the Plan - Take the Online SURVEY". To the right is a collage of images showing a coastal road, a beach, and a bridge. The Charlotte County Economic Development logo is in the bottom right corner.

Charlotte County Economic Development Strategic Plan

Be a part of the Plan - Take the Online SURVEY

CHARLOTTE COUNTY
Economic Development

Economic Development Office Solicits Input on Strategic Plan

The Charlotte County Economic Development Office is conducting a survey on its strategic plan.

The 10-question survey seeks public input on the current state of economic development in Charlotte County and what strategies the county should pursue to create a climate for sustainable economic growth. The survey will be open April 4 through April 18.

"As the plan is developed, we would like your input to create the Charlotte County business community you would like to see in future years," Charlotte County Economic Development Director Lucienne Pears.

To take the survey, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/EDOstrategicplan>. The survey is also available on the EDO website, <http://floridasinnovationcoast.com/> or by clicking the survey banner at the top of the Charlotte County website, <https://www.charlottecountyfl.gov>.

For information, call 941.764.4941 or email FloridaEDO@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

Gulf Coast 500

Don't miss the opportunity to be included in the Business Observer's annual Gulf Coast 500 ranking. This year's list will rank the largest for-profit companies headquartered in Charlotte, Collier, Hillsborough, Lee, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk or Sarasota counties by 2015 revenues.

Companies with gross annual revenue of more than \$3 million are encouraged to participate.

Being included in this publication is great exposure for your company - and it's free!

Please contact Jean Gruss by email GC500@BusinessObserverFL.com for additional information or complete the [online form](#). Deadline is April 29, 2016.

Imports Up at Port Manatee

Port Manatee reports a 36-percent year-over-year increase in containerized cargo handled in the first half of its fiscal year. An increase in imports led the way with the number of imported 20-foot-equivalent container units (TEUs) up roughly 40 percent in the period from Oct. 1 through March 31.



Private sector pitches in to boost local economy

By GARY ROBERTS Staff Writer Charlotte Sun

MURDOCK - A consultant study is looking at economic development potential in Charlotte County, and how to get there.

Funded by the Enterprise Charlotte Economic Council, a private-sector group that supports economic growth, the preliminary report offers a strategic blueprint on how to capitalize on Charlotte's strengths while overcoming its weaknesses.

Included in the plan, developed by VisionFirst Advisors, are findings and recommendations aimed at transforming both the county's economic base and workforce. The results of the study will be used by the county Economic Development Office to update its own strategic plan.

"We have an enormous amount of opportunity in the county, but we really need to have a focus on what we plan to pursue," said Lucienne Pears, county economic development director.

Melissa Medley of VisionFirst emphasized that the study's goal is not only to make recommendations, but also to provide specific actions that will lead the county toward growth and a sustainable economy. Her group is comprised of economic development experts who possess a wealth of experience, perspective, and state- and federal-level connections.

"We are economic development practitioners," she said. "We want to offer something that is truly actionable, with a strategy that is visionary, but pragmatic."

The study's conclusion's will be presented to the County Commission on May 10.

Initial findings have identified several key economic factors, both pro and con. In Charlotte's favor are an untapped source of older workers, tourism opportunities and outstanding natural assets.

The list of negatives: the lack of a skilled and available workforce, a need to support innovation and entrepreneurship, and the absence of a strong image or brand.

These myriad drawbacks are somewhat unique to Charlotte County, prompting 27 percent of its workforce to commute to surrounding counties, Medley said.

"There aren't a lot of government entities that are like you in the U.S.," she said.

Attracting new businesses to the county is not achieved just by providing incentives, Medley said, but also requires overcoming market shortcomings, by providing adequate facilities and business-friendly regulations.

"You've got to remove all the risks," she said.

Much of the discussion at a County Commission/ ECEC meeting late Thursday centered on a declining workforce that is unable to satisfy the needs of high-tech, manufacturing and other desirable industries. But with the trend of preparing high school students for college, even skilled tradesmen are scarce, despite a strong demand in the workplace.

"Our workforce is lacking, I think we all generally know this," said ECEC President Rob Humpel of Florida Premier Contractors. "But are we leaving a large segment of the workforce underserved by pushing everyone to go to college?"

Even ECEC board member Denis Wright of Florida SouthWestern State College acknowledged that vocational training can yield wellpaid jobs while satisfying an individual's own aptitude for hands-on work.

"These are good careers," Wright said.

County Commissioner Chris Constance agreed, saying more educational options are necessary.

"We need to do a better job of exposing kids to what opportunities are out there," he said. Getting local schools involved is critical to providing vocational career paths to students and young people, Medley said. And Western Michigan University's entry into the local business community, which she termed a "game-changer," is yet another job creator and trainer.

"It may seem daunting, but it is doable," she said. "Lean on your colleges."

A public relations campaign targeting pre-retirement individuals could help attract a qualified workforce to the area, the report said. In addition, enhanced marketing efforts could address another major economic driver.

Drawing more people to local beaches and activities would help take full advantage of tourism's potential.

"Make no mistake about it, tourism is a kind of economic development," Medley said.

A brief community survey also may provide some answers. Although currently at a small sample size, with 65 responses, some basic information has been gleaned, including about the survey participants themselves.

For example, 40 percent of respondents are between the ages of 55 and 64, and 61 percent of survey takers have a college or graduate school degree.

"We have to reach out to our young people and get them involved," County Commissioner Tricia Duffy said. "They're the future of our community."

Gateway Harbor Walk soon to finish long trek

By GARY ROBERTS Staff Writer Charlotte Sun

CHARLOTTE HARBOR - As the initial phase of the Gateway Harbor Walk project nears completion, replacing an unusable expanse of broken concrete with a waterfront park, officials are taking a closer look at cost overruns.

Officials have discussed a proposed 26 percent cost increase in the contract that would add \$65,257 and a 90-day extension to the original \$247,509 agreement with CDM Smith Inc. The contractor requested the change due to construction delays caused by rain days and waiting for Florida Power & Light to move guy wires.

Specifically, the construction manager is seeking payment for additional inspection services. Charlotte officials are balking at these extra costs, however, questioning why inspections would be conducted when rain washed out the day's work.

"If there are rain delays, they're not doing inspections," Commission Chairman Bill Truex said.

"That, to me, makes no sense whatsoever."

Commissioner Stephen R. Deutsch agreed that the county may not be liable for the additional expense, saying the construction delays were caused by FPL.

"It took a long time for FPL to move the guy wires and, basically, that's what held us up," Deutsch said.

Chuck Koons, county project engineer, explained that the FPL guy wires had to be relocated because they were in the way of reconstructing the seawall. As a result, construction was delayed to allow FPL to move the wires, extending the length of the project, he said.

The first phase of the Gateway Harbor Walk, located on the Charlotte Harbor side at the base of the northbound bridge, includes a new seawall, pedestrian promenade, small-boat launch, restrooms and parking for 60 vehicles.

But it has taken five years for the project's first phase to advance from design to completion, with costs escalating along the way.



A much-improved seawall, constructed with sheet metal and rip-rap, is just one aspect of the Gateway Harbor Walk, which eventually will connect the east side of the northbound U.S. 41 bridge to Bayshore Live Oak Park.

The next step of the Gateway Harbor Walk, known as Phase 1B, will include the addition of a fishing pier and water taxi dock facility, along with a raised boardwalk crossing underneath the bridge to connect the Harbor Walk to the west side of U.S. 41 and Bayshore Live Oak Park. The total estimated construction cost for the first two phases now stands at \$2.3 million, or roughly \$600,000 above the original projection. The Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Area, through tax increment financing, will be paying for the improvements, along with Florida Department of Transportation grant money.



Charlotte County is finishing up the first phase of the Gateway Harbor Walk project, creating a pedestrian promenade and other amenities that will open up the waterfront at the base of the northbound bridge.

Although the contract amendment is on the agenda for today's County Commission meeting, commissioners may postpone taking action on the item to delve deeper into the matter before making a decision.

"We're ready, willing and able to sit down at the table with this consultant and see what we can do to reduce those costs," said Public Works Director Danny Quick.

Meanwhile, Phase 1A is expected to be substantially finished before the end of the month, said Debrah Forester, county redevelopment manager.

"This project has been one of our priorities for years in Charlotte Harbor," Forester said.

New sidewalks decorative lighting, the seawall, landscaping and bike racks are already installed. While oak trees have been planted, large royal palms will be added at the end of the project.

Still to come this week are new bathrooms, benches and the paved pedestrian promenade, a focal point of the project.

"We're getting close to the finish," said Kelly Slaughter, project manager for the county.

"It's been a long time coming."

The County Commission meeting starts at 9 a.m. today, in the Commission Chambers at the County Administration Center, 18500 Murdock Circle, in Murdock.

Harriet Street residence, McDonald's at Promenades receive Parkside Beautification Awards

Special to the Charlotte Sun

Both winners of the most recent Parkside Beautification Awards had the community in mind when they made their property improvements.

"We were trying to make our street and the neighborhood look better," said Frank Lane, who with his wife, Corrine, owns the Harriet Avenue home selected as Residential Beautification Award winner.

"We wanted to kick off the revitalization of the Parkside community," said McDonald's area supervisor Terry Swick, whose restaurants include the Business Beautification Award winner. Sponsored by Charlotte State Bank & Trust, the awards are presented quarterly by TEAM Parkside to a local resident and business in recognition of their commitment and improvement to their Parkside properties. A certificate plaque and a yard sign acknowledging the awards were presented to both winners by Jacqueline Benjamin, treasurer of TEAM Parkside and manager of the bank's Parkside office.

The Lanes' house was a "repo" home the couple acquired three years ago. Inside, Frank made plumbing and other repairs, updated the bathroom and kitchen, and painted. Outside, Corrine selected an array of plants, trees, shrubs and flowers.

Frank, meanwhile, tore up the entire yard and started from scratch.

"I basically did all the grunt work," he joked.

The Lanes also own a house and other property in Nashville, Tenn., but Frank said they spend nine months a year at their renovated Parkside home.

Items and ideas brought from Tennessee include the use of Bermuda grass, with which Frank was familiar.

"I know they use it on golf courses and things like that up there," he said. He didn't know at the time that Bermuda is also a popular choice at Southwest Florida golf courses.

"It wears good, likes hot weather and doesn't turn as brown or die out like other grasses here," he noted.

The lush lawn, colorful hibiscus and other plants, window boxes and other attractive trappings make the Lane home a showplace. Frank and Corrine take pride in knowing they are an integral part of the "new" Parkside.

"The neighborhood has really come along during the time we've been here," Frank said.

Terry Swick feels similarly about the McDonald's in the Parkside Promenades Mall, where a major upgrade is ongoing. The McDonald's remodeling project began in November 2014

and included the entire interior and exterior of the building. It was part of a \$1 billion-plus undertaking for the vast majority of America's 14,000 McDonald's.

The makeover is designed to give the restaurant a more adult, cafe-style appearance, with muted tones of orange, yellow and greens, leather seats and wooden tables.

"It definitely gave us a more modern look," Terry said of the two-month project.

As area supervisor, Terry oversees seven McDonald's franchises from North Port to Punta Gorda for Ryland and Richard Lovett, who have been local McDonald's owners for 22 years. The Peachland restaurant was remodeled six months after the Parkside cafe.

"We were originally concerned about the changes to the interior and how our loyal clientele would accept it," Terry recalled.

"At first, some didn't like many of the changes that we had made, but after spending more time in their new surroundings, they have taken to the cafe as their new home."

Terry believes the McDonald's improvements are a reflection of things to come in Parkside. "We are looking forward to all of the new changes coming to Parkside," he said, "and are proud to be an anchor of the community."

Events celebrate Parkside revitalization



Jorge Diaz, 11, of Neil Armstrong Elementary School, which is near the Parkside neighborhood in Port Charlotte, enjoyed the bungee jumping trampoline at the "Fun Day Sunday" Celebration of the revitalization of Parkside. The event was held this week outside of the shopping area of the Promenades at Parkside. "This community celebration is the kickoff for the mall's new direction. The property will undergo a metamorphosis creating Charlotte County's premier adult and family destination for dining shopping and entertainment," said Jeff Morr, manager of JLI PC, LLC, the new owner of the Promenades Mall. "A peaceful welcoming atmosphere, featuring walking streets lined with cafes and specialty shops, will form a quality lifestyle experience."

The Suncoast Youth Theatre, a nonprofit performing arts group for youth ages 8-18 in Charlotte County, performed.

National Art Honor Society students at Port Charlotte High School did chalk art for a coffee shop sign at the Promenades at Parkside event.

Kids enjoyed activities like face painting, getting balloon animals, and treats like Italian ice at the celebration.

- Could Sarasota airport become home of Hurricane Hunters? ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Collier County rejects Atlanta Braves proposal ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Florida-Cuba ferry could start as early as June ([AP](#))
- Florida Power & Light christens natural gas-fueled plant ([AP](#))
- Switch thrown on Mickey Mouse-shaped solar array near Disney's Epcot Center ([Tampa Bay Times](#))
- Gov. Scott planning trade trip to United Kingdom ([AP](#))
- Lakewood Ranch set to expand southward ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Florida convenience store sales hit record ([Florida Times-Union](#))

US ECONOMIC NEWS

- US consumer prices rise modestly in March ([AP](#))

ENTREPRENEUR NEWS

- Small businesses can build a legacy ([Pensacola News-Journal](#))
- A key way to grow business is to encourage customer loyalty ([Jerry Osteryoung](#))
- Tips for avoiding ransomware ([AP](#))
- 6 minutes to pitch your idea, over coffee ([Gainesville Sun](#))



WANT TO BE YOUR OWN BOSS?





Classes Starting in Port Charlotte on
Monday, April 25, 2016

Monday & Thursday evenings from
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Class runs six weeks for \$80

Develop a solid plan to guide your start up with the assistance of an experienced business owner who serves as your coach. Hear from subject matter experts in areas of accounting, legal, marketing, insurance and funding. After completion of the class, participants can apply for a microloan collateral guarantee from Goodwill.

This class can be taken for FREE if you meet low to moderate income guidelines.

More information and to register go to: www.goodwillswfl.org/microenterprise or call (239) 985-2106, Ext. 2219

Goodwill SWFL MicroEnterprise Institute Program Funders:
Richard M. Schulze Foundation

American Endowment Foundation BankUnited Central Bank City of Cape Coral City of North Port Comerica Bank Community Foundation of Collier County Enterprise Charlotte Foundation Fifth Third Bank FirstMark Bank First Florida Integrity Bank	Florida Community Bank IBERIABANK Lee County MICROGRANTS Mutual of Omaha Bank Regions Bank THRODFEDERAL Savings & Loan UPS Foundation United State Department of Housing and Urban Development United Way of Lee, Charlotte, and Collier Counties Urban Development Weimart
---	--

Class location:
Charlotte Technical Center
18150 Murdock Circle
Port Charlotte, FL 33948





Join Our Mailing List!

Charlotte County Economic Development Office
18501 Murdock Circle | Suite 302
Port Charlotte, FL 33948 | 941-764-4941
FloridaEDO@CharlotteCountyFL.com
<http://www.FloridasInnovationCoast.com>

