



Jim Mudd

A Chat with your County Manager

By Jim Mudd

Welcome to our monthly chat. This month I would like to tell you about the good news Collier County received when at the end of 2007 President Bush signed the federal Omnibus spending package that included about \$3 million for six Collier County projects stretching from Immokalee to Naples to the Everglades area.

What is really exciting about this news is not only does it come at a time when the county is continually confronting the challenge of identifying new revenue sources, but it's also the first time in Collier County government history that the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) has realized federal funding opportunities through its federal legislative program.

Due to the joint diligence, commitment and tenacity of the county's Congressional Delegation, especially Congressmen Mario Diaz-Balart and Connie Mack, six of nine important community projects comprising the Board-approved Collier County Fiscal Year 2008 Federal Agenda received earmarks thanks to unified, strong support in the year-long appropriations process in Washington, D.C.

Those projects include:

- * Gordon Pass Dredging \$1.4 million
- * Physicians Led Access Network (PLAN) \$327,183
- * I-75/Everglades Boulevard PDE Study \$245,000
- * I-75/Collier Boulevard/ SR 84 Interchange \$490,000
- * Emergency Services Center Technology \$352,500
- * Immokalee Community Center \$147,000

I am so pleased to see these important projects receive the \$2,941,251 in federal dollars through this process. It was almost a year ago this month when I traveled to Washington with then BCC Chairman Jim Coletta, Commissioner Frank Halas, and Naples City Councilman Gary Price to present Collier County's list of projects to Congressmen Diaz-Balart and Mack, Sen. Bill Nelson and the legislative staff of Sen. Mel Martinez. Since that time, we have been monitoring the federal process through it machinations, been kept abreast of developments and in constant contact with the Congressional offices either directly or through our lobbyist, The Ferguson Group, which serves as our liaison.

I will now tell you some more about each project, and plans for how the county will use the funding, beginning with the award of \$1.4 million for Gordon Pass Dredging (Naples to Big Marco Pass), which was last dredged in 2002. The Gordon River Pass is in need of dredging this year because shoaling diminishes the water depth in the channel.

The Gordon River and Naples Bay flow into Gordon Pass, the most significant pass in the county, which supports commercial fishing, stone crab harvesting, sport fishing and tourism. In addition, this pass is used by residential and pleasure boaters throughout the county, which supports the community's marinas.

The pass has been dredged on average every four to five by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which will administer this award. This project has received a total of \$3.04 million in federal funds since it was first authorized. The total cost of this project is \$3.3 million.

The county received \$490,000 of the requested \$5 million to support improvements to the I-75/Collier Boulevard/SR 84 Interchange, which is experiencing a high level of congestion due to the convergence of Davis Boulevard and Collier Boulevard (951) at I-75, and dramatic growth experienced in the southern portion of the county.

This current interchange serves the East Naples area, Golden Gate City proper and Marco Island, and is the closest interchange from the east to the City of Naples. The ultimate interchange improvements are programmed for design by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and the county is seeking right of way for the ultimate improvements. This project includes separating the Collier Boulevard (951) traffic movements and the Davis Boulevard traffic movements entering and exiting I-75. More specifically, drivers who

want to go from I-75 to Collier Boulevard (951) will use improved ramps at the existing Collier Boulevard (951) interchange and drivers who want to go from I-75 to Davis Boulevard will use new ramps on and off the interstate at the end of Beck Boulevard, just south of the existing Collier Boulevard (951) on and off ramps. These improvements will resolve an ongoing congestion problem in this area and will benefit Marco Island, south and East Naples and Golden Gate City proper and Estates residents. The improvements will resolve a long-term congestion problem on Davis Boulevard and Collier Boulevard (951) with defined solutions in this interchange that will meet the existing and future needs on these corridors.

Funding made available will be used for buying right of way from willing sellers based on the Project Development and Environmental (PD&E) Study and the construction phase was scheduled for 2012. The total cost of this project is estimated at \$130 million.

The Emergency Services Center Technology award of

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\$352,500 was a project endorsed strongly by both Congressmen Diaz-Balart and Mack who have visited our existing Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on several different occasions and understand how important it is to our community to update and upgrade our facility.

Funds are needed to support the acquisition of public safety technology equipment for the Collier County Emergency Services Center (ESC), which is currently under construction on a 20-acre site on Lely Cultural Parkway, just south of Rattlesnake Hammock Road. The ESC is approximately 130,000 square feet, four stories and includes a communications tower. When complete about a year from now, the facility will house Emergency Management staff and the EOC, a Sheriff's Substation and 911 Call Center, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Operations, backup county Information Technology operations, and others.

The total cost of technology acquisition for the center will be about \$10 million. The county is already committed to funding construction of the \$60 million ESC. To support construction, the State of Florida has provided \$3.15 million in grants.

The project named Physicians Led Access Network (PLAN) – which is actually more commonly known as a health care access network for uninsured/underinsured – was awarded an earmark of \$327,183. The project connects individuals who require health care to free services donated by health care providers.

Collier County identified more than 35,000 residents who lack quality health care. Currently, the county is experiencing overuse of its emergency health facilities. And the numbers of uninsured/underinsured will continue to grow as job growth in the area has been strongest among low-paying jobs, which typically do not offer health insurance. This project seeks to expand, organize, and develop a full-access program with a full continuum of services for those residents needing health care.

An initial phase of this project would be adopting a shared information database between the portals of medical care entry for the poor into the system which would be established at multiple locations in Collier County. Future phases of the project include marketing and full penetration of the population of uninsured/underinsured individuals. This project will have a significant economic impact, as lack of access to health care leads to diminished physical and economic distress on individuals and communities.

The total cost of this project is \$5 million. Local health care providers contribute about \$1 million annually in services.

One of the county's top priorities is the I-75/Everglades Boulevard Project Development and

Environmental (PD&E) Study which received an earmark of \$245,000. The county requested \$2 million to improve access to I-75 for an area that covers more than 100 square miles.

Much of Collier County's current growth is occurring in an area known as Golden Gate Estates, one of the largest platted subdivisions of its kind in the world, where hundreds of new homes are being built annually. The only east-west routes between the eastern Estates and Naples area activity/employment centers are Golden Gate Boulevard and Immokalee Road, while the western portion of the Estates and Golden Gate City proper have access to interchanges at Immokalee Road, Pine Ridge Road, Collier Boulevard (951) and the new interchange at Golden Gate Parkway, residents of the eastern portion of the Estates have no access to Interstate 75.

The lack of access to the Estates also creates safety problems, particularly in the event that residents must be evacuated during hurricane or wildfire season. In this regard, the interchange is critically needed to provide access to a route for safe evacuations from storms and fires as significant growth continues in eastern Collier County. As Collier County's population expands from the 330,000 residents today to a projected 597,000 by 2030, this situation will worsen.

Collier County would like to request interim access, given that ramps already exist, as studies progress to determine implementation of the new interchange.

The requested PD&E Study will evaluate the amount of traffic that would use a new interchange at Everglades Boulevard and the impacts that it will have on adjacent interchanges and the interstate's mainline operations. The total cost of the study is \$2 million. The BCC funded a portion of the first step in developing an interchange at this location with the programming of \$750,000 for an Interchange Justification Report (IJR). The total cost of the PD&E Study, design, right of way and construction is estimated at \$75 million. The interchange is located in a tolled section of Alligator Alley, so toll funding may be available to help pay for right of way and construction if approvals are achieved for the IJR and PD&E Study.

The South Immokalee Park Community Center received \$147,000, which will go toward design and construction of a 3,000-square-foot community center building at the facility, which is located in South Immokalee, an underprivileged area that is also designated as a Front Porch Community and a Weed and Seed area. The two structures currently used for community meetings and drop-in programs are in very poor condition. Estimates to bring one of them up to current code far exceeded the value of the structure.

Federal funds will support the effort to design, permit and construct the new community center in the open play area of the park. The site is approximately five acres and is used as a neighborhood park with basketball courts, a playground, an open play field, and the "structures" used for community meetings and drop-in programs. These efforts are supported by the Immokalee Civic Association, Victory in Jesus Church and the Immokalee Master Plan Committee.

In addition to the six projects I named above that were included in the Omnibus legislation, with passage of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) which was the result of Congress successfully overriding the President's veto, Collier County received an authorization of \$5 million for Gordon River water infrastructure to improve water quality, and \$20 million was authorized jointly for Collier, Charlotte and Lee counties for water supply interconnectivity infrastructure. Also, money was authorized for studies for Collier County beaches and Vanderbilt Beach Lagoon. The WRDA authorization of monies is the first step. In upcoming years we will seek the actual federal dollars to accomplish these projects.

At a time when local revenues are in jeopardy, alternate sources of funding are needed to continue to provide Collier County with roads, water, public health and safety, and other required services and facilities that make Collier County a special place to live.

Until next month, drive careful. The roads are busy as we are now in peak season. Please be especially mindful of construction zones.