

OPINION

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Team Punta Gorda urges education on sales tax

Team Punta Gorda was founded in November 2004 by a group of citizens with a vision who saw an opportunity for change after the devastation of Hurricane Charley. When the outlook was bleak, these citizens embraced the possibilities, raised funds, gathered hundreds of willing citizens, hired a renowned urban planner, and produced the Citizens' Master Plan 2005. Outstanding results have been accomplished by citizens and government sharing one vision and collaborating to achieve the possibilities.

Similarly, 14 years ago, citizens and the government collaborated to define a group of projects to improve the quality of life in Charlotte County. The community embraced the vision and the possibilities of what could be and approved a one percent sales tax to fund these projects. The tax was extended twice, and 73 different projects have been completed or are in progress. Because of good manage-

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ment, additional projects not originally on the list were included; another benefit to citizens.

Today, groups of citizens are once again embracing the vision of our community's future. Through focus group meetings, Charlotte County began a process to learn what the citizens want if the one percent sales tax is extended. Charlotte County also conducted two surveys to further identify citizens' priorities.

The focus group and survey results overwhelmingly indicated road improvements are the main priority. The citizens identified road expansion projects on Burnt Store Road, Edgewa-

ter Boulevard, Midway Boulevard, and County Road 775/Placida Road that include sidewalks, bike paths, stormwater drainage, and an emphasis on improving hurricane evacuation routes. The second priority is sidewalk improvements including completing segments around schools, and connecting schools to recreation areas, neighborhoods and commercial centers.

The City of Punta Gorda also held focus group meetings with constituents from all over the city to learn what its citizens' priorities are. From these meetings came the projects including the public works/utilities complex reconstruction, parks, pedestrian and heritage tourism enhancements, and public safety vehicles and equipment.

Team Punta Gorda encourages Charlotte County voters to learn as much as possible about the one percent sales tax extension and make an informed decision on Aug. 26. Today,

the South Charlotte County Coalition (SCCC) is sponsoring a public forum at the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association at 2001 Shreve St. The meeting begins at 10 a.m. Charlotte County Administrator Roger Baltz and Punta Gorda City Manager Howard Kunik will be in attendance. Many organizations throughout the county are also holding meetings to inform citizens about this important ballot issue.

More information about the one percent sales tax extension is available at www.charlottecountyfl.com/salestax and click on the penny. There you will find a video, frequently asked questions, and project maps among the available materials.

If you would like to join Team as a member and/or volunteer, call us at 637-8326 or visit our website at www.teampuntagorda.org. This is your chance to personally have an impact on our community. Your contributions are also welcome.

