

# Time to define how we want others to perceive us

It's a trite saying but so true: "perception is reality." We can choose to ignore this axiom and say we don't care how others perceive Charlotte County. On the other hand, the contemporary economic challenges we face make us realize that we must diversify our local economy. What sources were previously viable are no longer sources of employment and career opportunities. Attracting new industry and investment is important to our long-term economic health.

According to Charlotte County Economic Development, prospective industry is looking for ways to narrow their short list of potential communities in which to invest. Decision criteria include appearance, whether it's a place to which people are willing to relocate, and if it's a place where they would want to work, live and play. Our goal should be to keep ourselves in the game by giving ourselves the best opportunity to win!

How do people access Charlotte County? What modes of transportation bring visitors to experience Charlotte County? What message are we conveying about Charlotte County? At the Sept. 11 joint Board of County Commission and Punta Gorda City Council meeting, these topics were discussed

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as county-wide issues and received much interest.

In 2005, Team Punta Gorda facilitated the development of the Citizens' Master Plan, a regional plan for the area south of Charlotte Harbor that includes greater Punta Gorda.

The goal was and remains to define what we want our community to become. Also in 2005, Charlotte County established a U.S. 41 overlay district that stretches from the northern county border to Charlotte Harbor to establish land development regulations for future development. Team Punta Gorda commends the county for taking these steps to enhance our community. Addressing existing development is a challenge to forward-looking thinking.

For the unfamiliar, overlay zoning districts are placed over an existing base zone, which identifies special regulations, standards, or procedures in addition to those in the underlying base zone. In the City of Punta Gorda there are four overlay zoning districts: special residential, historic, medical and waterfront.

Team Punta Gorda

supports the creation of overlay districts as gateways into Charlotte County to ensure that development is complementary and optimizes the potential to attract industry, higher education, future jobs and future residents.

We encourage enhancing the gateways to our entire community from interstates, the Charlotte County Airport, and U.S. 41; by train, car or boat. Team Punta Gorda does not want to create a hardship on current business and landowners. We believe we'll collectively create more value to these landowners than if nothing had been done.

Team Punta Gorda is working in collaboration with the Growth Management organizations of both Charlotte County and the City of Punta Gorda on these concepts. We thank the County Commission and City Council for their support of this initiative. Under the name of "South County Gateway Project," we'll be examining the entrances into Charlotte County on Burnt Store Road, U.S. 41, Taylor Road, Jones

Loop Road, U.S. 17 and Tucker's Grade. We'll be holding meetings to gather input from landowners and citizens in the process. It's a beginning, and we're glad to be taking an active role in partnership with the county and city in helping to shape our community's future.

I previously referenced the Citizens'

Master Plan 2005. Its chief architect and renowned urban planner Jaime Correa will be the keynote speaker at Team Punta Gorda's annual meeting at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center on Nov. 10. The meeting begins at 7 p.m., and the general public is invited. It's sure to be an inspiring evening.

Team Punta Gorda is honored to have been selected as the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce 2009 Non-Profit Business of the Year. If you'd like to join Team Punta Gorda in this process contact us at team@teampuntagorda.org or 941-637-TEAM. Find more information about Team at www.teampuntagorda.org.