

What's ahead for Charlotte, Punta Gorda?

By **DANIEL SUTPHIN**

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PUNTA GORDA — Balancing charm and growth is the challenge for local officials when considering future development.

"This is the hardest part of our job," Charlotte County Economic Development Director Dave Gammon said. "Charlotte County is a very charming community and a very charming county and I have bosses that have me on the (balance) scale every Monday."

Gammon and Punta Gorda Manager Greg Murray broke down that balance during a TEAM Punta Gorda event Thursday at the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association in Punta Gorda.

"How do you balance charm with the growth?" Gammon said. "We're going to get growth anyway, we can't just shut it off. But we're trying to do it smart and bring in the businesses to work with us."

Murray echoed Gammon's sentiment.

Punta Gorda is "trying to continue to preserve our small town character. That balance between charm and development are certainly things we have to look at," Murray said.

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

At the meeting, Gammon outlined multiple projects throughout the county.

In Murdock Village, Gammon said developer Kolter Land Partners bought 450 acres to build about 2,000 residential units right now.



County Commissioners also recently approved a contract with Kolter for another 186 acres in Murdock Village to extend the West Port development.

"We also have a parcel on the east with a group called Arredondo Pointe to maybe do a new commercial entertainment center for Port Charlotte," he said.

Promenades Mall, 3280 Tamiami Trail, in Port Charlotte will be undergoing changes in the near future.

In 2020, Charlotte County commissioners approved a mixed-use zoning ordinance allowing a developer to increase density on a site and increase height.

"What we're trying to do is attract people to one site so they don't have to drive around our community," Gammon said. "The developer plans on spending \$100 million on our community."

It was called a "walkable, mixed-use development."

"On the top, those will be 1,100 apartments," Gammon said. "In the middle area will be offices and on the bottom is all walkable so these people won't be jumping on our roads like they would be under the general development."

The Port Charlotte Town Center mall is going to foreclosure sale Feb. 28.

"We have worked with a number of developers that love the mixed-use zoning ordinance," he said. "They can build up to almost 200 feet here if they meet all the requirements."

Gammon said the mall site will be a tremendous opportunity for new housing, office and new retail.

While there won't be any "for sale product" at Allegiant Air's Sunseeker Resort, Gammon said the development will be a \$600 million investment in the Charlotte County community.

"It will be a 510-room resort hotel and about 167 extended stay suites in two towers," he said.

There will also be 19 unique concept restaurants, cafes and bars, and a 55,000-square-foot conference center.

"Allegiant is a data company. They know where their customers are coming from and going," he said. "They believe they can capture them all here and I think it's a great success story for Charlotte County and Punta Gorda."

Gammon also highlighted other housing developments throughout the county, as well as new developments at the Charlotte County Airport Park which encompasses Punta Gorda Airport and other vacant property.

FedEx has broken ground on a new distribution center there. Other industrial developments are also in the works for the area.

PUNTA GORDA

City Manager Greg Murray said Punta Gorda's vision is "distinctly different" than the county's Economic Development.

"We have something very complementary (however and) we need both sides of that coin to make things work," he said.

He said there is no goal to have 200-foot buildings in Punta Gorda.

"We need that development to occur to actually support our businesses in Punta Gorda when we have those rooftops that are coming in to support our local and large businesses," Murray said.

Murray said developments that the city wants to see may not be just downtown or specifically large operations like Cheney Brothers.

"We do still need that in our periphery," he said. "We need jobs and we need rooftops that support those jobs and that whole economic climate is what drives our small businesses and allows them to thrive."

The city has a variety of commercial developments going, including two assisted living facilities and a new car wash, among others in the works.

"We know that over the next five years, looking at projects like the assisted living facility is going to help us increase our assessable tax base, so that we can recover the amount of monies that we need operationally... That way our expenses meet our revenues and we don't have to draw from our general fund reserves like we have in the past," he said.

The city's population continues to grow as larger communities like Punta Gorda Isles, Burnt Store Isles, and Burnt Store Meadows available properties fill up.

"The aggregate number of residential properties that we can develop in those areas right now is less than 1,000 homes," he said. "As we buildout, what we are really looking at is what do we do to support the periphery of the city where we are looking to build more of a commercial base, like in the Jones Loop Road area, where there will be some additional residential base of course, too." *Email: daniel.sutphin@yoursun.com*