

WEEKEND WAVE

6-12-15



Friday Economic Roundup

FPL partners with FIU on new solar facility

MIAMI (AP) - Florida Power & Light Company and Florida International University are partnering on a new solar facility and research project.

The project will install more than 5,700 solar panels on canopy-like structures that will be built this summer in a university parking lot.

Engineering students will study the effects of the solar power generation on the electric grid.

The installation is expected to produce the equivalent of the amount of energy used by approximately 34,000 laptop computers over the course of the year.

FPL operates three solar power plants in Florida and recently announced plans to triple its solar generation by the end of 2016.

Property values on the rise

By BRENDA BARBOSA STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

CHARLOTTE COUNTY - Property values across the county rose for the third straight year in a row, as new construction continues to gain momentum.

According to new figures by the Property Appraiser's Office, Charlotte County reported \$13.1 billion in

countywide taxable value (including new construction), representing a 4.89 percent increase above last year.

Preliminary values must be submitted to the state by July 1.

"We've definitely seen a turnaround," said Charlotte County Property Appraiser Paul Polk.

After years of decline, the median sales prices for single-family homes - boosted in large part by shrinking inventory - have rebounded in most parts of the county over the last 12 to 18 months, adding to an upward push in property values, especially along the waterfront, Polk said.

New construction also contributed to a rise in values, with hundreds of newly built homes added to the tax rolls, Polk said. And so far, 2015 appears to be trending the same.

"We're seeing some positive things out there," Polk said. "New construction is a key driver in our community, and the sales are showing some pretty good increases in some areas."

County officials were happy with the news, saying it's a welcomed change from the free-fall in property values that occurred during the recession.

"From 2008 to 2013, property valuations went down by 50 percent," said County Administrator Ray Sandrock. "The fact that we're moving ahead slowly is a good thing."

After years of steep budget cuts, county officials now are focused on slow and steady growth. Sandrock said that while he received requests from department heads to increase staff, those requests have been shelved for the moment.

"Not this year. We're going to wait and see what happens," Sandrock said. "We don't want to get ourselves in a situation where we make a move like that only to have to make reductions."

In the meantime, the county walks a fine line between adding personnel and meeting the demands of a growing community.

"As you start to recover you start to get more demand for services, more demand for new services and demand for greater levels of service, which all equate to more money," he said.

In Punta Gorda, the city reported \$2.5 billion in gross taxable value, or a 4.5 percent increase from the year prior, according to the property appraiser.

But for homeowners whose properties are homesteaded, this year "the taxable value is only going up 0.8 percent," said City Manager Howard Kunik.

"The increase in taxable value has nothing to do with market value."

The Charlotte County School Board's taxable property values stood at \$14.6 billion, about a 4.7 percent increase from last year. The School Board's value is higher than the overall county rate because the 10 percent cap on the amount of the increase that can be assessed on homestead properties (along with the \$25,000 additional homestead exemption) doesn't apply.

Property values are the largest single source of revenue for local government operations. They include all residential properties, vacant land and commercial buildings.

The values now will be sent to each of the county's taxing authorities to set proposed millage rates. A mill equals \$1 in taxes per \$1,000 of a property's taxable value.

Once the millage rate is approved, Truth in Millage, or TRIM, notices will be mailed to homeowners in August.

Final 2014 valuations will be released by July 1.

Meanwhile, North Port property values jumped 9.36 percent over last year while unincorporated areas of Sarasota County are seeing a 7.21 percent bump, according to preliminary stats.

Property Values

By BRIAN GLEASON EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR CHARLOTTE SUN

Property values in Charlotte County are projected to have risen 4.89 percent in 2014, according to a preliminary estimate released this week by Charlotte County Property Appraiser Paul Polk.

Taxable values in Punta Gorda are seen rising 4.5 percent. Within the city's Community Redevelopment Area, values rose 2.5 percent.

In 2013, property values rose 3.77 percent. Final 2014 valuations will be released by July 1.

Harbor Walk project underway

By GARY ROBERTS STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

CHARLOTTE HARBOR - The transformation from neglected eyesore to eye-popping waterfront park has begun. Crews have been out clearing the site for the first phase of the Charlotte Harbor Gateway Harbor Walk, at the U.S. 41 North bridge. The goal of the Harbor Walk project is to enhance pedestrian and boater access to Charlotte Harbor. But the new Gateway Park will also reshape the image of Port Charlotte as motorists drive north over the bridge.

Since Hurricane Charley ravaged the area in 2004, the Florida Department of Transportation right of way has remained a wasteland of broken concrete and pavement, overgrown vegetation and crumbling

seawalls.

"It will look a lot better," said Debrah Forester, county redevelopment manager.

The improvements will consist of seawall replacement, pedestrian promenade, small-boat launch, restrooms and parking for 60 vehicles. Already, a number of trees have been removed in anticipation of construction, which will continue until March of next year.

Then the second phase of the changeover will take place with 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. The existing fishing piers near the site are located on private property and not part of the Harbor Walk Gateway project.

Kelly Slaughter, project manager for the county, said more trees may have to be taken out as the land is graded in advance of construction. Then the initial task will be to replace the old, broken concrete seawall with a new pre-cast concrete sheet.

The project has taken a long time to come to fruition, she said, due to extended negotiations with the state to lease the land and acquire the necessary permitting. But now that work is underway, Slaughter hopes the improvements will spur activity for other adjacent properties that remain underutilized.

Bill Truex, County Commission chairman, agreed that these enhancements could attract more development as well.

"This project will create a new gateway into Charlotte County and act as a catalyst to encourage private investment into the Charlotte Harbor CRA, Truex said.

The initial phase will mostly be paid by FDOT and the Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Agency. The next phase of the gateway plan, now in the design stage, will be funded through the current extension of the local option sales tax.

Because the \$2.3 million construction contract for phase one exceeded budget estimates, the Charlotte Harbor CRA had to borrow from the county to make up the deficit. However, the funding shortfall is less than expected, Forester said.

Additional grant money from the West Coast Inland Navigation District and Charlotte County Marine Advisory Committee will leave about \$500,000 to be covered by county general fund reserves.

"We've been able to reduce that amount," she said.

During construction, the site will be off-limits to the public. In the interim, residents and tourists are encouraged to visit Bayshore Live Oak Park to fish and enjoy sunsets, officials said.

Florida AIA Recognizes Sweet Sparkman Architects

Sarasota, FL (June 10, 2015) Sarasota firm, Sweet Sparkman Architects, received significant recognition from the Florida/Caribbean Association of the American Institute of Architects for two projects this year. The firm received the Merit Award for an Object for the Siesta Key Beach Pavilion's "2 pole" picnic shelter at the beach park and the Honor Award of Merit for New Work for Fruitville Park's Play Ball Pavilion in Sarasota County.

The Siesta Key Picnic Shelter is an evolution of a "2-pole" picnic shelter. The Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Department has a standard wooden "2 pole" shade structure that has been used throughout the county park system, since the 1970s. Sarasota County requested a contemporary prototype for the "2 pole" picnic shelter: one that could withstand the harsh coastal beach environment, but also a design that would reflect the history and significance of the Sarasota School of Architecture, and the historically designated Siebert Beach Pavilion on the project site.

The design awards jury stated, "This object's ability to meet both the need to be unique as well as the need to be easily replicated is what makes it stand out." The shelters are one element of a substantial community project that includes two new large concessions buildings, a public safety building, three new covered pavilions, and rehabilitation of the historic Sarasota School of Architecture pavilion and restroom building, and extensive site work with new landscaping. "Whether we are designing a museum, a vacation home or a beach restroom, we seek to create distinctive architecture that belongs to its site and climate," said Jerry Sparkman, principal.

The design awards jury praised the Playball Pavilion for "its ability to transform such a pragmatic program into a public space. Although simple, this piece of infrastructure beautifully converts into the civic realm of the park."

Fruitville Park's 2,600 SF covered shelter and pavilion replaced several aging structures for this local community park that serves intramural sports. The covered picnic area provides a panoramic view of the ball field. A wall separates picnicking and game spectators, allowing families to see the game while enjoying the park facilities. Principal, Todd Sweet said, "It's refreshing to know that a simple covered shelter for intramural baseball and kickball leagues can be recognized as excellent architecture. Both of these awards need to be shared with Sarasota County, who continues to encourage innovative design solutions in their civic structures."

The 2015 design awards jury was based in Boston, Massachusetts. More than 300 projects were submitted to the Florida AIA Design Awards. Only 25 projects were selected for award.

About Sweet Sparkman Architects

Sweet Sparkman Architects is a multi-disciplinary architecture and planning firm, specializing in community oriented projects. Principals, Todd Sweet AIA, LEED and Jerry Sparkman, AIA NCARB bring a combined 40 years' experience in architecture and planning, including large mixed-use projects, corporate building projects, public sector work, civic and community projects. In 2014 Sweet Sparkman Architects were awarded three (3) Florida AIA Design Awards: the Award of Excellence for the Beach Pavilions in Sarasota County; the Merit Award of Excellence for Renovations was received for Strandhus -a residential project on Lido Key; and the Honor Award for Theoretical Research Designs, received for Sweet Sparkman's exhibit at the Venice Architectural Biennale in Italy entitled Origins. For more information visit www.sweetsparkman.com.

2015 Florida Super Lawyers Recognizes Seven Farr Law Firm

PUNTA GORDA - June 11, 2015 - Farr Law Firm is pleased to announce that seven attorneys have been included in the 2015 edition of Florida Super Lawyers magazine. Super Lawyers, a Thomson Reuters business, is a rating service of outstanding lawyers from more than 70 practice areas who have attained a high-degree of peer recognition and professional achievement.

"I am pleased to see this well-deserved recognition for so many of our attorneys," stated President David A. Holmes. "This is further evidence of the high quality of service our firm provides to its clients across a broad range of service areas."

Farr Law Firm attorneys named to the 2015 Florida Super Lawyers and Rising Stars lists:

Florida Super Lawyers

- Guy S. Emerich, Estate Planning & Probate
- Jack O. Hackett II, Real Estate
- Charles T. Boyle, Family Law
- David A. Holmes, Business Litigation

Florida Rising Stars

- Roger H. Miller III, Real Estate
- Natalie C. Lashway, Family Law
- George T. Williamson, Class Action/Mass Torts

Each year, Florida Super Lawyers lists no more than 5 percent of lawyers in the state as Super Lawyers and no more than 2.5 percent as Rising Stars. The selection process is multi-phased and includes independent research, peer nominations and peer evaluations. To be eligible for inclusion in Rising Stars, a candidate must be either 40 years old or younger or in practice for 10 years or less.

About Farr Law Firm

For over 90 years the Farr Law Firm has served Southwest Florida. Our firm is the oldest and largest law firm in Charlotte County. We are prepared to tackle complex legal problems while rooted in the same small town principles you value. Our multi-practice law firm addresses a variety of needs and challenges both individuals and businesses confront including civil, commercial and complex litigation, personal injury & wrongful death, marital & family law, trusts & estates, corporate & business law, real estate & title insurance, elder law, guardianship and asset protection. For more information, please visit www.farr.com.

Punta Gorda Airport begins to gather data on passengers

By BRENDA BARBOSA STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

PUNTA GORDA - Travelers using the Punta Gorda Airport will be asked to answer a brief, two-question survey as part of a new campaign to quantify the airport's economic impact.

For years, airport officials have touted its economic benefits to Charlotte County, but little, if any, empirical data exists to quantify the claims. So last month, Charlotte County Airport Authority commissioners agreed to have a "digital survey kiosk" installed at the Bailey terminal to start collecting demographic information from departing passengers over a six-month period.

At an authority meeting Thursday, research consultant David Byers of Melbourne, Fla.-based Quadrex Aviation demonstrated how the kiosk works and gave a sampling of the questions passengers will be asked.

The anonymous survey is based on a similar one Quadrex Aviation used at the Daytona Beach International Airport, Byers said.

The first question asks participants for their ZIP code, which helps to determine how many people are from Charlotte County, and how many are from cities outside the area, he said.

After entering their ZIP code, respondents are asked a second question that pertains to the first; the follow-up questions will be different for every participant, Byers said.

"It takes about five seconds to complete," he said. "But it starts to give you a good idea of what's really going on with the people that go through your terminal."

Airport officials then can use the information for marketing, as well as to recruit airlines that offer service to locations the data supports.

"That's the beauty of collecting the data. You're going to have a much better understanding of who your typical passengers are," Byers said.

In other news, commissioners approved a \$155,000 contract with engineering firm URS for the first phase of design of a proposed parking lot that will add up to 600 new parking spaces at the airport. The first phase (about 150 parking spaces) will be funded by a grant from the Florida Department of Transportation, officials said.

FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

- Fortune 500 rankings: Ten things to know about U.S., Florida companies ([Tampa Bay Times](#))
- Wawa at U.S. 301 and Myrtle Street to be first in Sarasota ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Economist says future bodes well for real estate in the Sunshine State ([Inside Real Estate](#))
- Florida's 'Greater Recession' receding ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Florida's biggest brands ([Florida Trend](#))
- Florida adds 19,000 jobs in May ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Publix just 1 spot short of Fortune 100 ([Halifax Media Group](#))
- Florida's economic growth beats U.S. average ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Publix may be considering smaller stores ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))

US ECONOMIC NEWS

- It's Panama or bust for US business owners ([CNBC](#))
- Advertised jobs hit 15-year high ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- US retail sales jump in May as jobs boost spending ([AP](#))

ENTREPRENEUR NEWS

- Economist Sean Snaith on why we're Charlie Browns ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- 4 Things Successful Small-Business Owners Do Every Morning ([Huffington Post](#))

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