



2021 State Legislative Program

Guiding Principles



1. *Maintain the integrity of home rule power which allows the development and implementation of community-based solutions to local problems, including the priorities of our partner organizations and agencies.*
2. *Oppose unfunded mandates that impact local government's ability to control its budget.*
3. *Support adequate state funding for constitutional officers required to perform duties on behalf of the state.*
4. *Support fully funding the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund.*
5. *Support a dedicated recurring source of funding for beach nourishment.*
6. *Support the development of a Statewide Climate Resiliency Plan and a funding source to assist local communities who have implemented plans to combat sea level rise.*
7. *Support the continuation of policies that protect Florida's natural resources and scenic beauty, including the prohibition of any and all oil drilling or exploration efforts in state waters.*
8. *Support maintaining the integrity of Tampa Bay Water as the regional water supplier.*
9. *Support state funding for the Arts and cultural institutions.*
10. *Support the prioritization of state funding to assist with local and regional infrastructure improvements, including transportation, septic to sewer conversion, damaged sanitary sewer laterals, and wastewater systems.*

Priorities

Local State of Emergency Extension

SUPPORT legislation to amend F.S. 252.38(3)(a)5 to increase the duration of time local governments are authorized to declare a local state of emergency, from seven (7) days to thirty (30) days.

Adding Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) Residential Properties into the Calamity Provision

SPONSOR legislation to amend the Calamity Provision in F.S. 193.155(4)b and F.S. 193.155(6)b to allow for residential properties within the Special Flood Hazard Area (with lowest living floor elevation below Base Flood Elevation) to qualify for the same assessed value treatment as calamities via elevation or reconstruction.

9-1-1 Fee

SUPPORT legislation to amendment to F.S. 365.172(8)(a)4(f) that increases the maximum rate of the fee to a rate higher than the current \$.40 and expands the allowable uses of funds.

Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons

SUPPORT the continued use of RRFBs at pedestrian crossings to ensure the safe crossing of pedestrians on our roadways.

Surface Water Discharges

SUPPORT legislation that continues to allow water utilities to responsibly and safely utilize surface water discharges.

Transportation Work Program

SUPPORT keeping funding in place for critical regional transportation investments including the Westshore I-275/SR 60 interchange, TBNext I-275 Section 2 modernization and lane continuity improvements to downtown St. Petersburg, and US 19 North capacity and safety improvements from SR 580 to the Pasco County line.

Local State of Emergency Extension

Issue:

State Statute provides local governments the authority to declare a state of local emergency for a duration of seven (7) days. The declaration may be extended, as necessary, in seven (7) day increments.

Among other things, the declaration provides local governments the power and authority to waive the procedures and formalities otherwise required by law pertaining to:

- Performance of public work and taking whatever prudent action is necessary to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the community
- Entering into contracts
- Incurring obligations
- Employment of permanent and temporary workers
- Utilization of volunteer workers
- Rental of equipment
- Acquisition and distribution, with or without compensation, of supplies, materials, and facilities
- Appropriation and expenditure of public funds.

Recommendation:

SUPPORT legislation to amend F.S. 252.38(3)(a)5 to increase the duration of time local governments are authorized to declare a local state of emergency, from seven (7) days to thirty (30) days.

Additional Support:

Florida Association of Counties

Bill Sponsor(s): TBD

Adding Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) Residential Properties into the Calamity Provision

Issue:

The coastal areas of Florida have a significant percentage of their single-family housing stock located at grade and below Base Flood Elevation (BFE) as determined by FEMA. FEMA, flood plain managers and building departments constantly struggle with non-compliance issues relating to substantial improvement of properties within the Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA's), which are A & V flood zones. In Pinellas County, over 50% of the taxable value of the area's real estate is located within SFHA's. Insurance premiums in these areas for homes are high and expected only to increase in the near future.

The cost to elevate an existing structure or reconstruct a home is high. Grants to elevate only cover a portion of the actual cost and are difficult to obtain. For these reasons homeowners typically choose to reinvest in improving at grade properties and pay higher insurance rather than elevate or redevelop with new construction due to increases in real estate taxes following reassessment. These renovated at grade homes typically receive effective age reductions but stay below the assessed value cap as long as square footage is not increased.

Substantial improvement of at grade properties does not mitigate flood risks. Flood premiums will continue to rise, and reconstruction is taxed as new construction, with no credit received for the prior improvement.

Recommendation:

SPONSOR legislation to amend Calamity provision in F.S. 193.155(4)b and F.S. 193.1554(6)b to allow residential properties within the SFHA (with lowest living floor elevation below BFE) to qualify for the same Assessed Value treatment as calamities via elevation or reconstruction. This takes a proactive rather than reactive approach to the issue at hand.

Property owners would be able to rebuild up to 110% of total square footage without a change in Assessed Value. The assessed value would reset to just/market value upon sale/transfer.

This would provide the following benefits:

- An incentive for property owners to invest private capital to elevate or reconstruct.
- Aid in sea level rise resiliency.
- Aid in stabilizing the vulnerable portion of the tax base over time.
- Would improve Community Rating System (CRS) Class ratings and insurance risk ratings by reducing the number of at-risk properties.
- Most importantly, it would lift more citizens and housing out of harm's way from flooding events.

Additional Support:

Florida Floodplain Managers Association
Property Appraisers' Association of Florida
Florida Association of Property Appraisers

Bill Sponsor(s): TBD

9-1-1 Fee

Issue:

The 9-1-1 fee was enacted over 25 years ago in the amount of \$.50 per month to fund among other items, 9-1-1 operator salaries, 9-1-1 operator training and certifications, and 9-1-1 telephone systems and maintenance. The fee was reduced in 2015 to \$.40.

A FY 2018 E911 Board report showed that statewide only 39% of 9-1-1 service needs were met with the 9-1-1 fee. Local governments have had to fill the shortfall with general revenue dollars and investment in emerging technologies has been limited. In Pinellas County, the General Fund has supplemented these expenses at an average of \$3.7M each of the last three fiscal years.

In addition, 41 other states allow for the fee to fund computer aided dispatch and 30 other states allow for the fee to fund building and facilities. Florida currently does not allow for this. Pinellas County Public Safety agencies are currently consolidating multiple legacy CAD platforms into a singular platform which will require multiple millions (estimates \$11-15 million) for acquisition and \$1-2 million annual ongoing support which currently are not eligible to obtain support from this fee. CAD systems have become an integrated part of the call taking/telecommunications infrastructure that are no longer stand alone “Dispatching Computers”. They now serve as caller location devices, mapping systems, signal processing devices (audio, visual and other) translation devices and an entire spectrum of telecommunication tools which are necessary to the call taking function.

Florida’s \$.40 9-1-1 fee is among the lowest in the county, with other southern states (Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi) having rates between \$1.00 and \$1.75.

Recommendation:

SUPPORT legislation to amend F.S. 365.172(8)(a)4(f) that increases the maximum rate of the fee to a rate higher than the current \$.40 and expands the allowable uses of funds.

Additional Support:

Florida Association of Counties
Florida 9-1-1 Coordinators Association
Marion County

Bill Sponsor(s): TBD

Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons

Issue:

During the 2020 Session legislation was introduced to remove Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) at certain pedestrian crosswalks at certain pedestrian crossings. The use of RRFBs would have been limited to crosswalks on roads with no more than two lanes and a speed limit of 35 mph or less. All RRFBs currently in use at pedestrian crosswalks on roads with speed limits above 35 mph or more than two lanes would be required to be removed.

There are currently over 400 RRFBs within Pinellas County, 90 of which are within the County's jurisdiction. RRFBs are widely used along Gulf Blvd and have played a key role in increasing pedestrian safety along the County's beaches, which are heavily traveled by residents and visitors alike. RRFBs are also widely used at Trail crossings throughout Pinellas County.

Removing existing RRFBs at these locations would have a severe negative impact on pedestrian and bicyclist safety with Pinellas County. Additionally, the removal of these devices would have a significant negative fiscal impact to Pinellas.

Recommendation:

SUPPORT the continued use of RRFBs at pedestrian crossings to ensure the safe crossing of pedestrians on our roadways.

Additional Support:

Florida Association of Counties

Forward Pinellas

Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council

Surface Water Discharges

Issue:

During the 2020 Session, legislation was filed that would include a moratorium on most surface water discharges five years after the bill's effective date. The legislation would have required the discontinuation of surface water discharges of effluent and reclaimed water.

Currently Pinellas County Utilities utilizes surface water discharge at South Cross Bayou Advanced Water Reclamation Facility (SCBAWRF). A 2020 study of Joe's Creek determined that the discharge from SCBAWRF is not negatively affecting Joe's creek.

The Reclaimed Water Augmentation Study (Feb. 1995, Parsons) determined that South Cross Bayou could not eliminate its surface water discharge completely. The only alternative option at South Cross would be to construct aquifer recharge wells. According to the 2018 Reclaimed Water Master Plan, total cost for construction is estimated at \$96,000,000, with an annual operating cost of \$500,000.

Recommendation:

SUPPORT legislation that continues to allow water utilities to responsibly and safely utilize surface water discharges.

Additional Support:

Florida Water Environment Association Utility Council

Transportation Work Program

Issue:

The Florida Department of Transportation has informed us of planned changes to its work program to balance the budget due to COVID-19 revenue impacts. The changes made by the Central Office in Tallahassee are in the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), the largest category of state Transportation Trust Fund expenditures that covers major projects for ports, interstate highways and other key roadways:

- **Westshore Interchange:** The Westshore Interchange at I-275 and State Road 60 in Tampa construction funding will be deferred from 2024 to 2026. This \$1.4 billion project is the Tampa Bay region's #1 priority. While we are thankful it is still in the work program, this means a worsening bottleneck for six years after the completion of the new Howard Frankland Bridge adds more lanes to this notorious congestion choke point. Its delay will affect Tampa International Airport and regional traffic merging from three counties and beyond.
- **I-275 in Pinellas:** A regional priority, the I-275 safety and mobility improvements from the Gateway Expressway to I-375 in downtown St. Petersburg are moving out of the 5-year work program from 2025 to 2031 (last year of the 10-year SIS work program). This project includes a continuation of managed toll lanes from the Howard Frankland Bridge south to downtown, along with operational and safety fixes, and creates an envelope for the Regional Rapid Transit project being designed by TBARTA to link Pinellas, Hillsborough and Pasco Counties. Continued rapid growth in Manatee County, downtown St. Pete and Hillsborough County will overwhelm this roadway without significant capacity improvements.
- **US 19 North:** Design and related funding for the US 19 planned interchanges and overpasses north of Curlew Road to the Pasco County line will be moved out of the work program entirely. We are continuing to work with FDOT District 7 on the most cost-effective improvements for this part of US 19, but losing funding in the work program means it will take much longer to get the right projects funded for construction. The Tampa Road intersection is the 2nd deadliest location in Pinellas County after Curlew. Without funded improvements, the interchanges to the south will move the congestion hot spots further north.

The employers of our region, particularly in Pinellas, depend on a workforce that lives across the region. Housing supply and affordability mean many of the employees in Pinellas commute from Pasco, Hillsborough and Manatee Counties. The Gateway and Westshore Districts together account for the 2nd largest office and manufacturing employment base south of Atlanta. These transportation projects are critical to sustaining our vibrant economy.

Recommendation:

SUPPORT keeping funding in place for critical regional transportation investments including the Westshore I-275/SR 60 interchange, TBNext I-275 Section 2 modernization and lane continuity improvements to downtown St. Petersburg, and US 19 North capacity and safety improvements from SR 580 to the Pasco County line.

Additional Support:

Forward Pinellas
Tampa Bay Transportation Management Area Leadership Group
West Central Florida MPOs Chairs Coordinating Committee