July 31, 2026

TO: Barry Burton, Pinellas County Administrator

FROM: Harry Glenn, Vice President, Van Scoyoc Associates

RE: Recap of Pinellas County's federal agenda and accomplishments

Pinellas County Shore Protection Program

ACCOMPLISHMENT: Pinellas County and the Army Corps of Engineers memorialized a revised Project Cooperative Agreement in May 2026 to allow the County and Corps to resume the Sand Key, Treasure Island, and Upham Beach shore protection projects. The agreement followed on legislative language that was included in the 2024 Water Resources Development Act to provide for new authorities for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works related to construction easements and eligibility for federal Flood Control and Coastal Emergencies funding. With these authorities, the new Secretary directed his staff to engage with Pinellas County Commissioners and staff to identify state and local laws and ordinances to ensure public use of beaches and minimum requirements for access to private property that is immediately adjacent to the public beaches. This agreement allows Pinellas County and the Army Corps of Engineers to begin planning for the next construction cycle for each of the three project segments.

STRATEGY AND ENGAGEMENT: The signing of this revised Project Cooperative Agreement is the result of more than six years of intensive work and coordination of Pinellas County Commissioners, senior staff, and Van Scoyoc Associates (VSA). Over that time period, VSA coordinated Pinellas County's engagement on this issue with three Members of Congress from the 13th Congressional District, three Assistant Secretaries of the Army, senior staff at the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), the White House, the Chairmen and professional staff for the House and Senate Committees of jurisdiction over the ACOE, the Florida Congressional Delegation, the State of Florida's Washington office, the National and Florida Association of Counties, and the American and Florida Shore and Beach Preservation Associations.

VSA coordinated numerous trips to Washington for Pinellas County Commissioners and senior staff to meet with the White House, the Office of Management and Budget, the ACOE, key Committee members and staff, and the Florida Congressional delegation. These efforts resulted in statutory language in the 2024 Water Resources Development Act that provided the Assistant Secretary of the Army with new authorities that set the stage for the signing of the May 2026 agreement.

Senator Rick Scott and Congresswoman Anna Paulina Luna were particularly engaged throughout this 119th Congress with Adam Telle, the new Assistant Secretary of the Army. He directed his most senior staff to engage directly with Pinellas County Commissioners and staff to identify ways in which the ACOE can maintain the spirit of the law while providing flexibility to enable this critical public safety project to move forward. VSA maintained constant contact with Senator Scott and Congresswoman Luna, and their staff, to provide regular updates on negotiations between the ACOE and Pinellas County.

VSA organized a March 2025 visit to Washington by Commissioner Peters, County Administrator Burton, and Kelli Levi for meetings at the Pentagon with ACOE senior staff and with Senator Scott and Congresswoman Luna that charted a path for the drafting of the new cooperative agreement. Negotiations continued throughout the summer and fall of 2025 and led to a January 2026 visit to Pinellas County by two key members of the Assistant Secretary's staff which set in place the final framework for the new agreement.

VSA coordinated a February visit to Washington by Commissioners Scott and Scherer and Kelli Levy to meet with Assistant Secretary Telle and set the timeline to reach agreement on the new project documents by the beginning of the 2026 hurricane center. Commissioner Scott invited the Assistant Secretary to personally travel to Pinellas County to sign the document in May 2026. The February visit to Washington was timed perfectly as the Assistant Secretary was just announcing his "Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork" initiative that would provide new direction to Army Corps of Engineers staff across the country to find ways to reduce bureaucracy and build projects more quickly and cost-effectively.

Finally, VSA coordinated with Assistant Secretary Telle and his staff to schedule the May 29, 2026, signing of the new project cooperative agreement in North Redington Beach.

VSA is currently working with the Florida Congressional delegation and the committees of jurisdiction to develop a provision for the 2026 Water Resources Development Act that would embed in public law the primary tenants of the new Project Cooperative Agreement.

HUD/CDBG-DR

ISSUE: In response to the unprecedented damage caused by Hurricanes Helene and Milton, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in January 2025 allocated Pinellas County $813,783,000 in Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding to help rebuild homes, develop affordable housing, assist impacted small businesses, repair damaged and destroyed public infrastructure, and increase the resilience of public facilities. Soon after HUD approved the County's Action Plan for the use of these funds in December 2025, HUD notified the County of an error the Department made in the calculation used to determine the allocation and that the County would need to come up with a plan to revise its Action Plan for the use of these funds. Research showed that the 2024 emergency appropriations bill that provided these funds prohibits HUD from reducing an allocation for a designated entity. Pinellas County and the City of St. Petersburg continue to work with HUD on a plan to utilize these funds with the least possible disruption to impacted homeowners and small business owners.

STRATEGY AND ENGAGEMENT: County staff in March 2026 brought to VSA's attention the issue regarding a miscalculation by HUD in the CDBG-DR allocation for Pinellas County and asked VSA to schedule virtual briefings on the situation with the offices of Senators Scott and Moody and Representatives Luna and Castor. Following the calls, each of the offices engaged with HUD and reported back to VSA with the messages they received. These offices have continued to request updates from HUD over the past four months. VSA also engaged with the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, which also inquired with HUD about the situation and has continued to maintain a dialogue with HUD and VSA.

VSA has briefed the professional staff of the House Appropriations Subcommittee that funds HUD and which appropriated the emergency CDBG-DR funding in December 2024 and included the legislative language that prohibits the reduction in any allocation. The committee staff continues to request updates from HUD about ongoing efforts to resolve the problem and VSA regularly updates the staff with reports from county staff. Committee staff will flag any requests from HUD about statutory or funding changes to the allocation or program.

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)

ISSUE: Congress has enacted 35 short-term extensions of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) since the last multi-year reauthorization of the program expired at the end of Fiscal Year 2017. The latest temporary extension was signed into law on February 3, 2026, and is set to expire on September 30, 2026. Pinellas County has advocated for Congress to enact a long-term authorization of NFIP to eliminate uncertainly and disruptions to homeowners and new buyers of homes caused by the temporary shutdown or threat of shutdown to the NFIP program.

Pinellas County also continues to express its support for maintenance of the NFIP Community Rating System (CRS). The County's participation in this program provides enhanced public safety, reduced damage to property and public infrastructure, avoidance of economic disruption and loss, and supports a resilient Pinellas. Because Pinellas County and most of its municipalities participate in the NFIP CRS, residents and businesses may receive up to a 35% discount on their flood insurance premiums. The savings add up to almost $8,000,000 per year for unincorporated property owners and more than $25,000,000 per year countywide. Unincorporated Pinellas County moved from a rating of CRS Class 3 to CRS Class 2 in April 2024, which resulted in up to a 40% discount on NFIP flood insurance premiums. As part of pending FEMA reform discussions in Washington, there have been proposals suggested to eliminate the CRS program to increase NFIP revenue.

ENGAGEMENT: VSA continues to engage with the Florida Congressional Delegation about the importance of not allowing the NFIP to lapse and to monitor the delegation's interest and support for long-term modifications to the program. VSA also engages with the White House and FEMA to discuss potential Executive Orders that could impact the program.

VSA has flagged for the House Financial Services and Senate Banking Committees, and the Florida Congressional Delegation, the negative impact the elimination or roll back of the CRS program would have on Pinellas County homeowners.

FEMA Reform

ISSUE: The Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act was approved by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in September 2025 by a 57-3 vote and continues to await consideration by the full House. The bill would shift FEMA Public Assistance payments to communities from reimbursements to grants; create a new universal disaster assistance application to cut duplicative paperwork; reimburse interest on disaster-related loans so communities are not penalized for acting too quickly in response to natural disasters; and extend procurement parity to counties, treating them the same as states for federal contracting purposes.

This legislation is in response to a 2025 Presidential Executive Order for FEMA to recommend changes in the way it responds to and pays for natural disasters. The Executive Order called for the establishment of a FEMA Review Council to issue recommendations to the President and Congress before the end of 2025. The Council delayed its response until May 7, 2026, and in it recommended:

1. ***Replacing Public Assistance payments with a parametric block grant (RAPID).*** The current reimbursement model would be replaced by a direct-funding mechanism that

would send funding to states within 30 days of a presidential disaster declaration based on pre-defined event criteria, such as wind speed or flood depth, rather than individual damage assessments. States would distribute and manage funds locally.

2. ***Streamlining Individual Assistance payments into a single direct payment (FAIR).*** The current 15-category system would be replaced with a single payment – up to $150,000 for homeowners and up to six months of rent at HUD Fair Market Rate for renters. Emergency sheltering responsibility would transfer from FEMA to states.

3. ***Replacing the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) with a two-phase structure (R3P).*** HMGP would be eliminated and replaced with a rapid mitigation advance payment within 30 days of a natural disaster declaration and a strategic mitigation allocation within six months, both managed by the state. Counties would access funds through states rather than directly through FEMA.

4. ***Raising federal disaster declaration thresholds.*** The Council estimates that updated per capita indicators and new minimum state expenditure requirements before a federal declaration can be requested could result in as many as 16 fewer major disaster declarations per year.

5. ***Reforming NFIP.*** The Council recommends gradually shifting NFIP toward the private market through updated risk-based pricing, modernized flood maps and a voluntary policy transfer program.

ENGAGEMNT: VSA has engaged with FEMA and the FEMA Review Council to track deliberations about administrative changes to FEMA's management of natural disaster response and recovery programs. VSA also has monitored the Florida Congressional Delegation's response to these proposals and legislative proposals before the House Transportation and Infrastructure and Senate Homeland Security Committees that would provide for FEMA reforms.

VSA also regularly engages with National Association of Counties to ensure that NACO positions on this issue are aligned with Pinellas County.

<u>Gulf of America Drilling Moratorium</u>

ISSUE: The Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) of 2026, which banned oil and gas leasing within 125 miles off the Florida coastline in the Eastern Planning Area, expired in 2022. Members of the Florida Congressional Delegation have introduced the Florida Coastal Protection Act to permanently restore the 2026 ban on oil and gas leasing with 125 miles of the Florida coastline. The Secretary of Interior in November 2025 released a Draft Proposed Program for the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program to expand offshore drilling across large parts of the Eastern Gulf of America, within 125 miles of Florida's west coast. The Florida Delegation continues to oppose leasing activities within these areas.

ENGAGEMENT: VSA has engaged with the Florida Congressional Delegation on this issue to ensure that they understand the County's interest and support for legislation that has been introduced in the House and Senate to reestablish the oil exploration moratorium that expired in 2022.

Housing Affordability

ISSUE: The 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act became public law in July 2026 to address national housing affordability issues and access to federal disaster recovery funding. Key provisions of the Act include:

1. ***Streamlining access to disaster recovery funding.*** The bill authorizes the CDBG-DR program for three years, providing timelier access to disaster recovery funding. Under current law, CDBG-DR does not have standing authorization or an annual budget and is, instead, appropriated on a case-by-case supplemental basis following qualifying disaster events. This often results in funding delays of a year or more, as Congress evaluates impacts and negotiates funding levels.

2. ***Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) program.*** The bill formally reauthorizes the HOME program and raises income thresholds from 80 percent of area median income (AMI) to 100 percent. Similarly, homeownership activities under HOME may now be put toward homes valued at up to 110 percent of the average area purchasing price (up from 95 percent). These changes are meant to help communities better address gaps in "workforce level" housing.

3. ***Creates new local federal grant programs***. Counties will be able to apply for several new grant programs, including an innovation fund for jurisdictions that meet certain housing criteria, as well as regional planning grants and a program to restore abandoned homes. While authorized by this legislation, Congress still needs to appropriate funding for these new programs before they are implemented.

- **Innovation fund grants** will provide flexible funding for urban counties that have demonstrated an increase in housing supply growth. Program funds would be for any eligible use under CDBG, as well as any other use that furthers the development of attainable housing.

- **New regional planning grants** will be available to urban counties and regional planning agencies to plan and implement regional housing strategies.

- **The Revitalizing Empty Structures into Desirable Environments (RESIDE) Act** will provide funding for local governments to redevelop abandoned or dilapidated properties.

4. ***CDBG allocations.*** The bill ties CDBG formula funding to local housing growth. Higher-performing grantees will be eligible for prorated bonus payments, funded directly from a 10 percent penalty to lower-performing grantees.

5. ***Model zoning.*** The bill directs HUD to develop a series of best practices for states and local governments to promote housing growth. While these guidelines would not have the force of law, they may present a blueprint for state-level preemption.

ENGAGEMENT: VSA provided regular updates to County staff about the development and passage of this legislation and the new programs that may become available to support the development of new affordable housing in Pinellas County.

<u>Surface Transportation</u>

ISSUE: Every five years, Congress must reauthorize a wide array of federal surface transportation programs that are primarily funded through federal gas tax receipts. The current authorization expires on September 30, 2026. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved a new five-year authorization bill in May, but the legislation has yet to be considered by the full House. The Building Unrivaled Infrastructure and Long-term Development for America's 250th (BUILD America 250) Act would reauthorize federal surface transportation programs for fiscal years 2027 – 2031. It would authorize $580 billion in spending over five years from the Highway Trust Fund and the General Fund for investments in America's highways, roads, bridges, transit systems, and rail networks. The country has applied in the past and received funding from many of the programs. The county also has received funding from federal formula funding authorized in the bill that flows through the states.

ENGAGEMENT: VSA continues to monitor the development of legislation to reauthorize federal highway and transportation programs for the next five years and to ensure that the various federal funding opportunities remain available for the County to compete for federal funding to improve transportation safety, accessibility, and infrastructure development to include bridge repair and replacement and the deployment of new technology.

VSA also has been monitoring a proposal supported by the National Association of Counties that would protect access to local bridge and infrastructure funding. The Bridges and Safety

Infrastructure for Community Success (BASICS) Act increases local access to federal highway and bridge formula funding, rather than have all federal funding pass through the states based on distribution formulas. The BASICS Act was not included in the House passed legislation, but the bill's sponsors continue to advocate for portions of the bill to be included in the final 5-year authorization legislation.

National Association of Counties

VSA engages on a regular basis with NACO to ensure that the association's viewpoints accurately reflect those of Pinellas County. VSA also shares with NACO staff federal issues that are of particular interest to Pinellas County.

Communication

VSA is in constant communication with Pinellas County's Intergovernmental Liaison, and other staff as needed, to share in real time federal legislative, funding, and regulatory updates. VSA provides timely updates on issues that are flagged by County staff and continues to monitor those issues. VSA provides a weekly federal update on issues that are of particular interest to Pinellas County and other municipal leadership.

VSA has coordinated with Pinellas County's Intergovernmental Liaison to draft and obtain letters of support for a variety of Pinellas County grant submissions and to advocate for legislation and legislative provisions that are under consideration by the House and Senate.

Congressional Funding for Pinellas County Projects

A chart detailing Congressionally Directed Spending for Pinellas County is attached. There were no projects in Fiscal Year 2025 due to the full-year Congressional Funding Resolution. Since 2022, Congress has approved almost $14,000,000 for the county.

VSA works with the County Administrator and Intergovernmental Liaison to develop the annual list of eligible projects, the project narratives and budgets, the submission of these requests to the Congressional offices, the generation of letters of support, and the tracking of these projects through the legislative process.

VSA also works with County staff to ensure that federal funding for these projects efficiently flows from the federal agencies to the county.