

Pinellas County



Minutes - Final

Thursday, February 20, 2020

1:00 P.M.

**Joint BCC/Federal Delegation Meeting
Clerk's Conference Room, 4th Floor**

Board of County Commissioners

Pat Gerard, Chair
Dave Eggers, Vice-Chair
Charlie Justice
Janet C. Long
Kathleen Peters
Karen Williams Seel
Kenneth T. Welch

ROLL CALL - 1:10 P.M.

Present:

Pat Gerard, Chair; Dave Eggers, Vice-Chair; Charlie Justice; Janet C. Long; Karen Williams Seel, and Kenneth T. Welch

Federal Legislative Delegation: Representative Gus Bilirakis, Representative Charlie Crist, Regional Director Taylor Sanchez representing Senator Marco Rubio, and Regional Director Luis Laracuente representing Senator Rick Scott

Absent: Kathleen Peters

Others Present: Barry A. Burton, County Administrator; Jewel White, County Attorney; Brian Lowack, Intergovernmental Liaison; Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller; Julie Marcus, Deputy Supervisor of Elections, representing Supervisor Deborah Clark; Chief Assistant Public Defender Sara Mollo representing Public Defender Bob Dillinger; Anthony Rondolino, Chief Judge, Sixth Judicial Circuit; other interested individuals; and Jenny Masinovsky, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk

1. Welcome

Chair Gerard opened the joint meeting of the BCC and the Pinellas County Federal Legislative Delegation and welcomed the attendees; whereupon, at her request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

2. Overview of County's Federal Legislative Program

- National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)
- Beach Nourishment
- Transportation/Infrastructure
- Offshore Oil Drilling

Mr. Lowack thanked the federal partners for their continuous support and cooperation; whereupon, he provided the following overview of the federal legislative priorities.

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)

Mr. Lowack discussed the need to reform and reauthorize the program long-term without pricing the current policyholders out of the market, the importance of maintaining the County's community-based rating system, and concerns relating to future implementation of the Risk Rating 2.0 system by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Beach Nourishment

Mr. Lowack indicated that the County has been working with Congressman Crist to lessen the current requirement of obtaining 100 percent of beachfront property easements in order to proceed with a nourishment project to obtaining easements only for those properties where sand has been placed since 1996, stating that the requirement is unfeasible; and that instead of perpetual authorization, the easements would last for the length of the project plus ten years.

Mr. Lowack related that the County is seeking a 50-year extension of authorization and funding for feasibility studies for the Treasure Island and Long Key beach segments, as current authorizations are set to expire in 2025 and 2030, respectively, and funding for Pass-A-Grille beach, which is due for nourishment in 2021.

Transportation/Infrastructure

Noting that the Surface Transportation Package proposed by the Federal Government is encouraging, Mr. Lowack remarked that as gas tax revenues continue to decline due to growth in electric vehicle sales, it is important to ensure funding for local transportation infrastructure projects. He discussed the need for more funding for Advanced Traffic Management Systems and for the return of bridge funding; whereupon, he related that a bridge in Dunedin is up for replacement.

Offshore Oil Drilling

Mr. Lowack indicated that the federal partners support the County in opposing offshore oil drilling in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico; that the House of Representatives passed a permanent extension to the oil drilling moratorium; and that there are plans to extend a five-year moratorium expiring in 2022 in the Senate; whereupon, he urged the delegation to keep the pressure on the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to ensure that no increase in oil exploration takes place in the region.

3. Updates from Congressional Delegation Members

The federal representatives discussed their involvement with various committees and the following priorities and achievements:

Mr. Sanchez for Senator Rubio:

- Advocating for priorities focal to Florida, including environmental matters associated with the Everglades and beach nourishment projects
- Developing a conservative movement to address problems associated with modern society and technology

- Advocating for foreign policy interests, including humanitarian rights and supporting democracy abroad
- Urging FEMA to provide information regarding the Risk Rating 2.0 implementation
- Reintroduced the SAND Act allowing the Army Corps of Engineers to import sand from abroad for faster and cheaper beach nourishment
- Supporting local grant requests for transportation infrastructure projects
- Supporting the five-year extension of the oil drilling moratorium

Mr. Laracuente for Senator Scott:

- Co-sponsored a bill regarding protecting national security by disallowing sale of technology information to foreign countries
- Focusing on education, transportation infrastructure, and veterans
- Co-sponsored the Medical License Verification Act to prevent fraud in the healthcare system relating to Medicare and Medicaid services

Representative Crist:

- Focusing on defense and national security
- Co-sponsoring a bill to permanently ban offshore drilling in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico
- Sponsored a bill for veterans treatment court
- Focusing on keeping flood insurance affordable

Representative Bilirakis:

- Sponsored a bill reauthorizing the Travel Promotion Act for Brand USA to continue advertising for tourism to Florida and increase the application fee paid by foreign tourists to enter the U.S. under the Visa Waiver program
- Sponsored a bill providing adaptive housing assistance to severely wounded veterans
- Supporting mental health through bills promoting Medicare and Medicaid coverage of telehealth services and ensuring compliance of insurance companies with existing mental health parity law
- Supporting a bill to cap the cost of prescription drugs

- Secured funds for Anclote River dredging
- Working on issues pertaining to transportation and flood insurance

During discussion, Commissioner Long stressed the need for transportation funding and requested that Senator Rubio communicate with the Federal Transit Administration regarding expediting a \$21.8-million funding request for the Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit project to avoid the risk of escalating cost due to delays, noting that local funds for the project have been committed and requirements completed.

Chair Gerard thanked Representative Crist for holding a Defense Contractor forum yesterday. Responding to query by Commissioner Justice, Representative Bilirakis briefly discussed the roadblocks to negotiating the cost of prescription drugs.

4. Open Discussion

Mr. Burke thanked the legislators for their support of the changes to a tax act relating to bond refinancing and their commitment to veterans; whereupon, he shared how the Clerk's Office in coordination with Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, the Judiciary, the Public Defender's Office, and the Sheriff's Office, has held Stand Down events for the last ten years to help veterans by waiving their fines and fees.

Chief Judge Rondolino thanked the legislators for supporting local court adjunct facilities providing veterans with treatment of mental health, drug addiction, and related conditions, and expressed hope that the funding will continue. Representative Bilirakis commended the judiciary on their innovative valuable treatment solutions, indicating that they are being replicated nationwide; and that the issue, as most others discussed today, involves a bipartisan effort; whereupon, Ms. Mollo also thanked the legislators for their continued support of veteran treatment programs, noting that transportation is important in getting the participants to treatment facilities.

Representative Bilirakis remarked that prison reform led by the President and promoted by the singer Kanye West became law; and that a new centrally located VA facility, North Pinellas Veterans Outpatient Clinic, is being built in Countryside.

Ms. Marcus thanked the Federal Government for the 2018 appropriation to Supervisor of Elections Offices for system upgrades and discussed the need for an annual dedicated source of funds for recurring technology costs and implementation of new systems, noting that if that is not feasible, it could consider appropriating funding in odd years in order for the election offices to have adequate time for its proper utilization; whereupon, she reminded everyone that election systems have been designated critical infrastructure by the Federal Government.

Discussion ensued regarding an update report on climate change and sea level rise, the current year's priorities, and the importance of working together to achieve reforms in the matters of infrastructure, climate change, and Social Security, and Representative Bilirakis indicated that the Government does not intend to make cuts in Social Security and Medicare at the present time.

5. Public Comment - None.

ADJOURNMENT - 2:12 P.M.