11	**AGENDA ITEM** **ST. JOHNS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**
	Deadline for Submission - Wednesday 9 a.m. – Thirteen Days Prior to BCC Meeting

12/6/2022

BCC MEETING DATE

TO: **Hunter S. Conrad, County Administrator** **DATE:** **November 16, 2022**

FROM: **Adam Tecler, Grants & Legislative Development Manager** **PHONE:** **904 209-0545**

SUBJECT OR TITLE: **Consider the proposed 2023 St. Johns County Legislative Action Plan and Top Three Legislative Priorities**

AGENDA TYPE: **Business Item, Report**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The St. Johns County Legislative Action Plan is a focused list of priorities for which the County requests financial assistance and other support from our State and Federal representatives. County Administration presents a list of recommended items from County staff, constitutional officers, and other external partners for the Board to consider adopting as the 2023 Legislative Action Plan. The approved Legislative Action Plan is subsequently presented to the public and submitted to the County's Legislative Delegation for consideration prior to the next legislative session. In addition, the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) requests that all member counties adopt three top legislative priorities that most significantly represent the critical needs and concerns for incorporation in a regional legislative priority guide. The NEFRC Legislative Committee subsequently compiles the submitted issues and identifies regional priorities for the 2023 Legislative Session. The guide is then submitted to the region's State and Federal elected officials.

1. IS FUNDING REQUIRED? No **2. IF YES, INDICATE IF BUDGETED.** No

IF FUNDING IS REQUIRED, MANDATORY OMB REVIEW IS REQUIRED:

INDICATE FUNDING SOURCE:

SUGGESTED MOTION/RECOMMENDATION/ACTION:

Motion to adopt the 2023 St. Johns County Legislative Action Plan or as amended.

For Administration Use Only:
Legal: DM 11/28/2022 **OMB: JDD 11/28/2022** **Admin: Ashanti Austin 11/29/2022**

St. Johns County

2023 LEGISLATIVE ACTION PLAN

Legislative Highlights

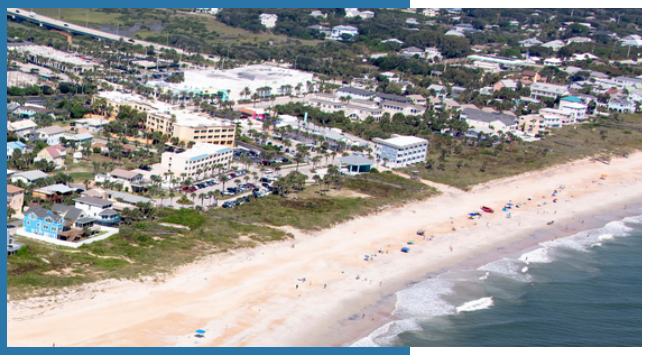
Transportation Infrastructure

Upgrade or extend primary corridors and road networks:

- **State Road 16, County Road 210, and CR 2209**
- **Arterials supporting the First Coast Expressway.**

Economic Resiliency

Develop initiatives to include leveraging State appropriations for Federal resources, to incentivize agriculture production, preserve farmland, and ensure food security.



Coastal Protection & Flood Mitigation

- **Support authorization for two Federal feasibility studies to assess critically eroded beaches in southern St. Johns County and the Summer Haven and River study area.**
- **Prioritize State and Federal appropriations for storm recovery programs focused on community resilience.**

Resilient Future for Children

- **Prioritize resiliency approach to address the comprehensive well-being of each child.**
- **Provide safe distances between vaping establishments and schools.**
- **Dedicate resources to ensure adequate parks and youth recreation facilities.**

2023 Action Plan

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Extensive population increase in St. Johns County has required planning and construction of new and upgraded East-West and North-South corridors, supporting road networks for the First Coast Expressway, and other transit enhancements. **State and Federal resources are requested to address $400 million in backlogged projects:**

- **East-West Corridors:** Upgrade existing facilities, including State Road 16, County Road 210, SR 208, SR 207, and SR 206 to provide traffic relief, improve connectivity, and mitigate safety hazards.

- **North-South Corridors:** Address overcapacity along US 1 and strengthen regional emergency response capacity by completing extensions and modifications of SR 313/312, CR 2209, SR A1A, and related connectors.

- **Mobility Enhancements:** Explore targeted workforce transportation programs and facilitate the safe and compatible movement of public transit vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.

- **Trails and Greenways**: Pursue opportunities to implement St. Johns County Greenway, Blueway & Trails Master Plan, including identifying additional trails and evacuation opportunities.

- **Commuter Rail:** The County supports the completion of a feasibility study for a transit line to connect the City of Jacksonville with the City of St. Augustine.

2023 Action Plan

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

Appropriations Request: $325,000 in State appropriations to study the feasibility and procedural steps of establishing an institute of higher education in the County.

Policy Request: Develop a statewide economic security initiative, including State resources as leverage for Federal appropriations, to incentivize agriculture production, preserve farmland, and ensure food sufficiency.

Policy Request: Revise Sections 286.0113 and 288.075, Florida Statutes relating to public record and open meeting exemptions. Amending 286.0113 under this proposal would allow Board of County Commissioners to deliberate in private regarding an economic development proposal.

Currently, an economic development proposal remains confidential only while it is before an economic development agency. This change may spur additional economic development from entities that may otherwise not be amenable to discussing economic development activities due to the lack of confidentiality.

The proposed revisions to Section 288.075 would allow confidential information in the possession of an economic development agency to be provided to a member of the Board of County Commissioners without the possibility of such communication being considered a disclosure.

Policy Request: Restore the Qualified Target Industry (QTI) Tax Refund Program. In concert with County economic development incentives, the QTI Program will allow for more attractive incentive packages.

2023 Action Plan

COASTAL PROTECTION & FLOOD MITIGATION

Appropriations Request: Authorize two feasibility studies requested through the Coastal Storm Risk Management (CSRM) program within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, including at minimum, federal funds totaling 50% of the cost share. The geographic areas for this request are St. Augustine Beach to the Flagler County line and a study area encompassing Summer Haven, the Summer Haven River, and the Matanzas Inlet. The CSRM Feasibility Study evaluates federal interests and resiliency alternatives to protect vulnerable sections of coastline.

The County strongly supports modifying the CSRM program to eliminate the non-federal match for any feasibility study conducted by a Hurricane Ian and Hurricane Nichole impacted local governing entity.

Appropriations Request: $3 million in matching funds through the Beach Management Funding Assistance Program for the North Beach and Dune Restoration Project at Ponte Vedra Beach. This nourishment project maintains and protects a 9-mile stretch of St. Johns County's shoreline, which has suffered damage from waves, erosion and inundation caused by coastal storms.

Appropriations Request: Prioritize State and Federal appropriations for flood mitigation and countywide drainage improvements, especially storm recovery programs focused on community resilience.

2023 Action Plan

RESILIENT FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN

Appropriations Request: $500,000 in State funds to leverage resources and identify best practices for children's resiliency programs, such as substance abuse treatment and mental health support services.

Appropriations Request: $5 million in State appropriations to expand youth recreation and sports facilities in St. Johns County.

Policy Request: Vaping Products – Repeal Section 569.315, F.S., which prevents local governments from enacting ordinances that establish minimum distances between schools and commercial nicotine activities.

2023 Action Plan

WATER QUALITY

Support effective implementation of Senate Bill 64 (SB 64). Local governments need additional resources to remove or reduce the surface water discharges from existing water reclamation facilities.

State and Federal resources are requested to expand reclaimed water treatment, transmission, storage, and distribution networks, including:

- $15 million for reclaimed water source projects and to enhance the County's ability to provide reclaimed water.

- $20 million for the construction of the Southwest Water Reclamation Facility improvements to reduce concentration of nutrients to the Matanzas River. The estimated budget for the project is $145 million and the County has a financial plan to fund up to $125 million.

- $400,000 for Countywide Septic to Sewer Planning.

Policy Request: Oppose legislation that would require local governments to fund the relocation of utilities infrastructure for private and public utilities.

Policy Request: Modify current law to provide that available alternative water sources must be used first. The Florida Legislature should also limit the issuing of Consumptive Use Permits to emergency use only.

2023 Action Plan

PUBLIC SAFETY

Appropriations Request: $4 million for land acquisition, site development, and new equipment for regional fire safety training facility. Upon completion, this facility will provide a higher level of training for St. Johns County Fire Rescue, the St. Augustine Fire Department, and regional public safety partners.

Policy Request: Amend Florida Statute 316.212 (7) – Raising the minimum age of anyone operating a golf cart on public roads or streets to fifteen (15) and require the driver to hold a valid learner's permit.

Policy Request: Amend Florida Statute 316.2045 – Clarifying a violation as an arrestable offense, which will discourage panhandlers from harassing citizens and obstructing traffic. This will also provide law enforcement with the discretion and authority to arrest an individual that repeatedly violates the amended statute.

Policy Request: Victim's Restitution from FRS Forfeitures – Amend Section 121.091, F.S. to provide victim restitution. Such amendment should be remedial in nature and apply to FRS pension forfeitures dating from January 1, 2017.

2023 Action Plan

QUALITY OF LIFE

Appropriations Request: Additional State and Federal resources to encourage continued development of free library services, including:

- $23 million in State appropriations to restore FY 2017 funding level.
- $9 million to support Public Library Construction Grants.
- $2 million in recurring funds to the Library Cooperative Grant Program.
- $750,000 for workforce development through the Smart Horizons Career Online High School Program.

Policy Request: Short-term and Vacation Rental Regulations – Amend Section 509.032(7)(b), F.S., to remove State preemption related to the frequency and duration limitations on short-term and vacation rentals.

St. Johns County

FLORIDA

2023 LEGISLATIVE ACTION PLAN

St. Johns County

2023 EXTERNAL PARTNER REQUESTS

1000 Friends of Florida - 2023 Legislative Priorities

Subject: Restoration of a free-flowing Ocklawaha River

1. PURPOSE: Sponsorship and passage of an Act creating s. 253.7812 F. S., directing the Department of Environmental Protection, the St. Johns River Water Management District and any other relevant state agencies to proceed to breach the Rodman Dam to restore the free-flowing Ocklawaha River between the Silver River State Park and the entry into the St. Johns River, to specify a date by which this task is to be completed, to direct the Department to amend existing management plans to include management of the restored portion of the river and formerly submerged lands abutting it, to consult with the Board of County Commissioners of Putnam and Marion counties, the City Commissions of the cities of Palatka and Ocala, the United States Forest Service, and other affected federal and local governmental agencies pertaining to restoration proposals that would enhance environmental, recreational, tourism, and economic benefits for their communities, to appropriate funds to accomplish these tasks.

2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:
Background: Certain lands under and abutting the Ocklawaha River between Silver River inflow and the outflow into the St. Johns River were acquired by the state and federal governments for construction and operation of a Cross Florida Barge Canal. Work was commenced upon the Cross Florida Barge Canal project including constructing Rodman Dam and impounding the Rodman Reservoir. Unfortunately, the Cross Florida Barge Canal was an environmental misadventure and of negative economic value, and in 1971 President Richard Nixon issued an executive order to halt construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal. This was followed in 1979 by the Legislature enacting a law signed by Governor Bob Graham to call for deauthorization of the Cross Florida Barge Canal, and in 1991 the United States Congress deauthorized the Cross Florida Barge Canal.
In 1992 the Legislature enacted legislation to require a management plan for disposition of the water control structures, and the following year, the Legislature adopted a management plan requiring certain studies before restoring the Ocklawaha River. In 1995 the Department of Enviornmental

Protection completed the required studies. Numerous scientific assessments including two environmental impact statements and all federal, regional and state agency recommendations have supported restoration of the free-flowing Ocklawaha River. Numerous environmental studies have determined that restoring the free-flowing Ocklawaha River would improve the quality of the Silver River, the Ocklawaha River and the St. Johns River. Restoring the free-flowing Ocklawaha River will provide new opportunities for employment of local people in recreational and ecologically based tourism industries, and will eliminate unnecessary expenditures of money to maintain the aged and deteriorated lock system in the Rodman Dam. Restoring the free-flowing Ocklawaha River would restore 7500 acres of flooded riverine forest and 20 drowned "lost" springs for appropriate ecological, recreational and scientific purposes.
The economies of Putnam County and east Marion County have suffered because of declining fish productivity in the Ocklawaha River watershed and failure to make the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway an international visitor destination. Restoring the free-flowing Ocklawaha River has been identified as essential to restoring the health of Silver Springs and the Silver River in the Silver Springs Basin Plan. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund have established a policy to restore the free-flowing Ocklawaha River by breaching Rodman Dam with the department as the lead agency yet twenty-four years have lapsed since the United States Forest Service leased certain lands and dam structures to the state with the agreement that the department would restore the portion of the Ocklawaha River blocked by Rodman Dam. The St. Johns River Water Management District has determined that restoration of the free-flowing Ocklawaha River is permittable, and in 1996 the Attorney General determined that existing legislation permitted the restoration of the Ocklawaha River without further legislation. However, state agencies and the St. Johns Water Management District have yet to implement a plan to breach the Rodman Dam and restore the free-flowing Ocklawaha River.

3. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION:

Sponsor and pass legislation that completes the job of completing and executing an Ocklawaha River restoration plan by directing the Department of Environmental Protection to complete and execute a plan to breach the Rodman dam at a place it finds to be environmentally, physically and economically appropriate to restore the free-flowing Ocklawaha River between the Silver River and the entry into the St. Johns River.

St. Johns County Legislative Action Plan
Recommendations from Florida Wildlife Federation
Sarah Gledhill, Vice President
Submitted August 18, 2022

Florida Wildlife Federation
Since 1936

Subject: Ocklawaha River Restoration

1. Purpose: Restore the freshwater flow to the St. Johns River and support resiliency efforts.

2. Discussion/Facts:

a. Restoring the natural flow of the Ocklawaha would provide at least 150 million gallons of additional freshwater to the St. Johns River each day. This would occur primarily by restoring natural flow of the 20 springs submerged below the massive pool of water behind the Rodman dam and by reducing the amount of evaporation.

b. The additional freshwater will help offset ongoing saltwater intrusion up the St. Johns River. Additional freshwater would also reduce the frequency of algal blooms and improve growing conditions for submerged grasses.

c. Restoration will reduce the impacts to the lower Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers from periodic drawdowns that occur every three to four years. Drawdowns negatively impact the lower Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers by 1) repeated discharge of concentrated nitrogen and phosphorus downstream and by 2) altering the estuary salinity balance.

d. Restoration will help maintain the balance of salt and freshwater in the lower St. Johns River estuary, ensuring healthy fisheries and sport fishing, commercial fishing and shellfish industries.

e. Restoration would also eliminate the possibility of an estimated $57 million in downstream flood damage to over 500 properties from a dam failure.

3. Conclusion/Recommendation: Support Governor DeSantis and the Legislature passing legislation to support the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the St. Johns River Water Management District to complete the partial restoration of the Ocklawaha River.

Subject: Land Conservation Funding

1. Purpose: Request increased, recurring funding for the state land conservation programs that support preservation via fee acquisition and permanent conservation easements.

2. Discussion/Facts:

a. Providing conservation and recreation land is important to the quality of life for residents and visitors in St. Johns County.

b. Natural lands provide needed water to out aquifers.

c. Agriculture has historically been a main driver for St. Johns County's economy. Retaining agriculture will support a diversified economy and foster more sustainable, resilient growth over time.

d. In order to preserve agricultural land, producers need access to state funds to place agricultural easements on their working lands.

3. Conclusion/Recommendation: Request increased, recurring funding for the state land conservation programs that support full fee and less-than-fee preservation.

St. Johns County Legislative Action Plan Recommendations from Matanzas Riverkeeper

Subject: Water Quality Regulations

1. PURPOSE: Currently, taxpayers are forced to shoulder the financial burden associated with restoration and remediation projects to improve declining water quality. Strengthening regulations to proactively protect water quality would stop pollution at its source, thereby reducing the costs associated with cleanup and shifting the financial burden away from residents and onto the industries that are responsible.

2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:

a. Water quality is declining statewide with waterbodies becoming polluted faster than they are being restored.

b. St. Johns County has 22 WBIDs (Water Body Identification number) on the 2022 Verified Impaired List, most of which are failing to meet water quality standards for nutrients.

c. Many additional waterbodies are failing to meet water quality standards, but have not been verified as impaired due to lack of monitoring data from state agencies.

d. Once a waterbody is verified as impaired, the state will develop Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) and Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) to try to restore the waterway. Much of the responsibility for meetings the TMDL goals and implementing the BMAPs falls on the municipality in which the waterbody is located.

e. Strengthening water quality protection regulations (for things like stormwater systems, septic systems, wetland destruction, etc.) at the state level will prioritize less costly pollution prevention over expensive clean-up projects and will ensure that the cost of protecting and improving water quality is borne by the industries that are profiting from these projects rather than by local governments and taxpaying residents.

3. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION: The state should direct the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to increase protections that aim to keep pollution out of waterways rather than focus on costly restoration and remediation projects and increase funding to FDEP and Water Management Districts for monitoring and enforcement.

MATANZAS RIVERKEEPER®

Subject: Water Quality Funding

1. PURPOSE: To encourage the delegation to support funding availability for water quality infrastructure projects, particularly septic-to-sewer conversion and updates to wastewater treatment facilities.

2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:

a. Sanitary sewer overflows are releases of untreated sewage into the environment. These releases degrade water quality and expose humans to viruses and other pathogens that can cause serious illness.

b. Old or failing septic systems can release fecal bacteria and nutrient pollution into nearby waterways.

c. There are almost 3,000 septic systems in the City of St. Augustine's Water/ Wastewater Service Area and many more in St. Augustine Beach and unincorporated St. Johns County that have yet to be quantified. Many of these are susceptible to inundation from sea level rise.

3. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION: The state should increase annual funding for targeted septic-to-sewer conversion projects, updates to wastewater treatment facilities, and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund.

MATANZAS RIVERKEEPER®

Subject: Land Conservation/ Florida Forever Program

1.PURPOSE: Request increased, recurring funding of at least $300 million annually for the Florida Forever Program.

2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:

a. Providing conservation and recreation land is important to the quality of life for residents and visitors in St. Johns County.

b. In June of 2021, St. Johns County restarted its Land Acquisition and Management Program with $500,000 of funding annually.

c. There are thousands of acres of land in St. Johns County that have already been identified as priorities for acquisition through the Florida Forever program but have not been acquired due to insufficient funding.

d. The Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) estimates that acquiring the conservation lands identified in State priority lists (including the Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands Protection Program priority lists) would require just over $25 billion, of which roughly 86 percent would be a state responsibility. At the current rate of annual state conservation land acquisition expenditures, it would take about 370 years to generate the state's share.

e. Because the Florida Forever program has been underfunded for the past decade, the funding process has become very competitive.

f. Projects that have local matching funds are consistently more likely to receive funds from the Florida Forever program.

g. Restoring the Florida Forever program to at least its historic funding level of $300 million annually would increase St. Johns County's ability to access and leverage state funds for land conservation.

3. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION: Request recurring annual funding from the state of at least $300 million for the Florida Forever Program.

MATANZAS RIVERKEEPER®

Subject: Land Conservation/ Rural and Family Lands Protection Program

1. PURPOSE: More funding is needed for the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program in order to preserve agricultural land in St. Johns County.

2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:
   a. Agriculture has historically been a main driver for St. Johns County's economy. Having a diversified economy helps to reduce the impact of external events and foster more robust, resilient growth over time.

   b. St. Johns County is consistently one of the fastest growing counties in Florida.

   c. As more people move to St. Johns County, increased demand for housing has caused agricultural land to be converted into residential housing.

   d. The Rural and Family Lands Protection Program is an agricultural land preservation program designed to protect important agricultural lands through the acquisition of permanent agricultural land conservation easements.

   e. With the exception of the last legislative session, the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program has received little or no funding, creating a backlog of unfunded projects.

   f. In order to preserve agricultural land, producers need access to state funds to place agricultural easements on their working lands.

3. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION: The state should allocate a recurring, fixed amount of funding to the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program each year.

MATANZAS RIVERKEEPER®

Subject: State Preemption of Local Control

1.PURPOSE: State preemption of local authority undermines the Home Rule power of local governments and hinders the ability of municipalities to address issues that they are in the best position to deal with.

2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:

a.In the past few years, the state legislature has considered and passed an increasing number of bills that preempt local governments from controlling issues including, among other things, environmental issues, vacation rentals, and development regulations.

b. Florida is a diverse state and a “one-size-fits-all” approach is seldom appropriate when it comes to local issues.

3. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION: The state should defer to the expertise and experience of municipal leaders when it comes to local issues by discontinuing the passage of, and repealing existing laws that take control away from cities, counties, and towns.

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ST. JOHNS COUNTY CIVIC ROUNDTABLE
2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Florida Forever and Florida Wildlife Corridor

Florida has a long history and tradition of land conservation dating back to the mid-1800's. Over seven years ago, 75% of Floridians voted to Constitutionally mandate one-third of the real estate stamp revenue to be allocated for land conservation. We urge the legislature to fully fund Florida Forever and the Florida Wildlife Corridor at its mandated levels to protect our fragile natural resources which will ultimately save taxpayers money.

Rural and Family Lands Protection Program

St. Johns County has a long and storied history in agricultural production but has been rapidly losing farming and ranching land to residential and commercial developments. The economic contributions of all agricultural related sectors in the county has been considerable. In 2018 the economic output was $118 million and created an estimate 30,511 jobs. We urge the legislature to fund this program to protect the family farm and protect the state's second-largest industry.

Reduce Septic Tank, Sewer and Nutrients Pollution to Protect Florida Waterways

St. Johns County is blessed with access to the Atlantic Ocean, St. Johns River, Intracoastal Waterway and numerous rivers and streams. Yet, leaking septic tanks, nutrient runoffs and aging sewer systems are polluting our waters and causing unnecessary harm. We urge the legislative delegation to support increased funding for septic-to-sewer conversions and updating other systems which are the source of nutrient water pollution. There are under utilized technologies like vacuum sewer systems, among others, which transport sewage in partial vacuum piping to a vacuum collection station, thus reducing the potential for leaks.

Sea Level Rise and Infrastructure Funding

Rising sea levels are being experienced in St. Johns County. We commend the legislature and governor for funding a board range of mitigation and resiliency projects. We strongly encourage state leaders to build upon these measures and to keep the focus on this critical need. Florida can either be a leader in state resiliency efforts or it can be the country's number one victim to sea level rise.

Funds for Expansion of St. Johns County Public Transit System

Support legislation that will increase funds to the Transportation Fund and oppose efforts to divert funds from the trust fund. The county's growing population dictates expanding public transportation to employment areas and collaborate on more regional routes.

A1A Vilano Multi-use Trail

Supports funding for the completion the A1A Vilano Multi-use Trail along the Scenic Highway from the City of St. Augustine to the Vilano Town Center to Ponte Vedra Beach.

Protection of Local Government Revenues and Statutes

Oppose any legislation which would further erode local governments from capturing revenue in the form of ad valorem values, impact fees, concurrency compensation and user fees. This revenue is critical to provide necessary programs and services for residents and to meet unfunded mandates.

Short-term and Vacation Rentals and Plastics Regulations

Oppose any legislation which preempts local governments from regulating short-term and vacation rentals because local governing bodies know what is best for their communities. Local control is best when it comes to the ability to enact local zoning provisions to ensure quality of life for its citizens, including the use of plastics.

State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) Funding

Supports the county's request for the full amount of funds collected from the St. Johns County Document Stamp Taxes that are paid into the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund which are allocated back to the county's SHIP fund. These funds are critical to meet the need for more affordable housing and should not be redirected to other programs.

Open Meeting Exemption for Economic Development Purposes

Opposes efforts to broadly amend the Florida Government in the Sunshine statute to allow local governments to meet and deliberate in private on economic development issues. These amendments as currently proposed could allow almost any non-residential development proposals to be negotiated in private without public disclosure and input. This exemption should be more narrowly cast to apply only to those rare instances where confidentiality is adequately justified by findings and theses findings are publicly disclosed prior to any official action on the subject matter being taken.

Veterans Council of St. Johns County

Homelessness among veterans is a big problem in Florida

St. Johns County is one of the most veteran friendly counties in the state of Florida. The relationship between our County Commissioners and the veterans in this county is unmatched. The BCC has supported our veterans in such ways as assisting with our Veterans Treatment Court, pursuit of a health care facility by aggressive negotiations with the VA for a permanent home for a Community Based Outpatient Clinic, reserved parking at all County Administration locations, attendance by our elected officials at Veterans ceremonies such as Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Wreaths Across America just to name a few. The veterans of St. Johns County are fortunate to have such an outpouring of patriotism from our elected officials.

However, our County has a pressing need for our veterans that has not been addressed and continues to perpetuate. Our veteran homeless population is reaching a disturbing level as more and more veterans and their families are being cast into a homeless situation. Without a place to house these veterans, the Veterans Council is having to resort to the use of local motels as a temporary solution.

According to the U.S. Council on Homelessness there is new data released (May 2022) shows Florida has the third-largest homeless population in the country at 27,487 and counting.

The 2019 count reported 2,472 homeless veterans in NE FL. Source: 2020 Florida Council on Homelessness Annual Report.

DUVAL COUNTY

The City of Jacksonville, Military Affairs and Veterans Department (MAVD) houses the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP),

To receive services, veterans must be:

1. homeless
2. living in temporary shelter
3. living temporarily at the residence of another due to economic hardship or in
4. imminent loss of housing through eviction or foreclosure to apply for the program

Veterans Council of St. Johns County

The City of Jacksonville MAVD, Clara White Mission, CareerSource, the Emergency Services Homeless Coalition, Goodwill of North Florida and I.M. Sulzbacher Center all work together.

Additionally, collaborative relationships exist with the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Departments of Veterans' Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services.

In Clay County, Operation Barnabas provides shelter for Homeless Veterans.

OPERATION BARNABAS INC. (a 501 C3), attacks VETERAN SUICIDE and HOMELESSNESS in Northeast Florida.

HOW OPERATION BARNABAS INC. attacks VETERAN SUICIDE and

HOMELESSNESS
in Northeast Florida: FAITH, ACTION and ENCOURAGEMENT!

1. Provide homeless veterans and families an immediate living location.

2. Assign a mentor

3. Triage needs and set meaningful, manageable, and measurable goals.

4. Contact partners (Stay Suites of America Orange Park, Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Centerstone, Florida, Changing Homelessness, Mercy Auto Charitable Foundation Inc.).

5. Deliver food and necessities as needed.

6. Assist veterans to secure transportation, employment, and stable housing.

Clay County does not have a county supported or funded Homeless Veterans facility.

May 5, 2022, Volusia County Council approves $1 million dollar contract for shelter to serve as a Homeless Shelter.

A vital program to support a group of vulnerable residents — homeless veterans – earned a $1 million contract on Tuesday, May 3, 2022 from the Volusia County

Council. The finances approved in the contract to support the project are coming from budgeted revenue freed up in the county's general fund as a result of COVID relief money the county received from the federal government.

On May 22, 2022, the Council finalized a funding agreement for one of the projects — $1 million to Halifax Urban Ministries to help pay for renovations to create a facility to provide temporary shelter and social services for homeless veterans. HUM already operates a homeless shelter for veterans in Daytona Beach. But it's moving the facility about 3 miles away to the new site at 962 Derbyshire Road. The County Council rezoned the new, 2.35-acre site in April to pave the way for the homeless facility. Currently, there's a fellowship hall, a single-family home, a church sanctuary and a community garden at the site. The plan is to renovate the fellowship hall and home on the property to create 20 private shelter residences.

In St. Johns County

St. Johns has nothing in the way of such a shelter and St. Francis House is not a viable option since a request for nightly shelter must be made in person by 11 am each day and it is usually always full. This leaves the Veterans Council no option except to place the homeless veteran in a motel to provide them with a safe and secure bed and provide them with gift cards for food.

The Veterans Council has provided some data that is pertinent to our veteran homeless situation that exists in St. Johns County.

What the Council has done:
The Veterans Council of St. Johns County supports the following Veterans events/activities with leadership, manpower and monetary support.

1) The Veterans Treatment Court:The VTC is dedicated to helping veterans address the underlying problems which led to their involvement in the criminal justice system.
   a) The Veterans Council provides mentors to each participant, "Battle Buddies", who are available 24/7 to assist with any issues that arise.

b) Veterans' Courts make the community safer and the Council assists by providing room, board, transportation and may pay bills for the veteran until he/she are able to become a contributing member of society.
c) The National recidivism rate is over 30%, while the recidivism rate for the Veterans Treatment Court graduates is less than 2%. The VTC Works!
d) The Veterans Treatment Court: The VTC is dedicated to helping veterans address the underlying problems which led to their involvement in the criminal justice system.
e) Currently we have 31 participants.
f) Veterans entered with crimes that arose from substance use and mental health conditions. Charges include DUI, Possession (of various illegal drugs, including Meth), Assault, Battery on Law Enforcement Officer, Grand Theft Auto, and Burglary.
g) Types of substance abuse included alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, meth, and opioids.
h) Mental health conditions include PTSD, depression, bipolar disorder, OCD, anxiety, and conditions on the schizoid spectrum.
i) 100% of participants receive treatment, which includes outpatient, intensive outpatient, and inpatient substance abuse treatment, anger management, and treatment for mental health conditions, including PTSD.
j) The Veterans Council provides mentors to each participant, "Battle Buddies", who are available 24/7 to assist with any issues that arise.
k) Veterans' Courts make the community safer and the Council assists by providing room, board, transportation and may pay bills for the veteran until he/she are able to become a contributing member of society.
l) As of this date we have pled in 79 participants, 39 of whom have graduated. But, as pointed out, we very soon will graduate #40 and #41. By my count, we currently have 31 in flow.

Homeless Veterans Standdown: held yearly at the St. Augustine Elks Lodge 829

1. Homeless Veterans are given showers, counseling, haircuts, clothes, military surplus gear/clothing; toiletries; access to Legal Counseling; Medical and Mental Health Services; Housing Vouchers, Job Employment, Comfort and First Aid kits, and dental exams.

2. The Veterans Council has hosted this event for 10 years and helps about 40 Homeless veterans at each Standdown but does not turn away any homeless individual, veteran or not.

The names of needy veterans are often given to the Council by the St. Johns Housing Partnership.

Use of Funds for Homeless Veterans, where VA does not pay

1. To purchase tents, socks, boots, battery operated lights, food at Stand Down

2. The Veterans Council pays for everything that is not donated to ensure everyone is helped.

Veterans Council Helps All Veterans in Need:

The Veterans Council pays for lodging, food, transportation, gas, rent, phone, whatever is needed to assist veterans in need. These veterans' names are given to the Council by the county Veterans Service Officers.

Financially challenged participants receive loans for rent, and gifts of grocery store and gas cards, and monetary gifts through the Veterans Council.

The Veterans Council also helps disabled veterans or their spouses, spouses of deceased veterans &/or their spouses with handicap ramps, leaky roof repairs, transportation to hospitals and doctors, repairing &/or replacing HVAC systems.

It is hard to predict emergency needs of Veterans. From past expenditures we expect to need the following monies to stay current with this year's VTC outlays.

Transportation: The Veterans Council has helped participants with transportation costs:

1. Vehicle repair. Most recently, Veterans Council paid for $600 repair for veteran participant's vehicle. Veterans is a single father who is rebuilding his life by starting his own business.

2. Vehicle donation: Van donated to financially challenged participant so she could get to work.

3. Gas: gas cards donated to participants who have difficulty affording transport to program commitments.

4. Uber/taxi fare.

Housing:

1. Payment of rent and sober living residence costs for financially challenged participants.

2. Payment of motel/hotel costs to temporarily house homeless veterans.

3. Payment of emergency utility costs.

4. Phone & payment plans for Homeless veterans who could not otherwise afford them.

The Veterans Council is the only organization in St. Johns County that provides total support for Homeless Veterans EXCEPT being able to provide needy Homeless Veterans with a safe, clean place to stay until they are able to leave, become self-sufficient and a contributing member of society.

What is needed in our County is a transitional shelter to provide housing for these veterans until more permanent affordable housing can be provided. St. Johns County does not have such an accommodation for our homeless veterans. For a county that is fortunate to be the wealthiest in the state of Florida, this is not an acceptable situation for those who have paid the price of assuring our freedom and prosperity.

St. Johns County
2023 Legislative Action Plan

St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners
December 6, 2022

The Legislative Action Plan

- **The Legislative Action Plan is a list of priorities for which the County requests assistance from State and Federal elected officials.**
  - Compiled by the Board, staff, and constitutional officers.
  - Coordinated with County's State and Federal lobbyists.
  - Chair presents final LAP to Legislative Delegation at annual meeting.

2023 Significant Updates

- Strategically focused on current year needs.
- New design facilitates interest and engagement.
- Reduced content from 98 pages to 10 pages.
- Legislative priority categories reduced from 13 to 7.
- External partner requests included as addendum.

Top Legislative Priorities

- **2023 LAP Legislative Categories**
  - Transportation Infrastructure
  - Economic Resiliency
  - Coastal Protection & Flood Mitigation
  - Resilient Future for Children
  - Water Quality
  - Public Safety
  - Quality of Life

Motions

- **Adopt 2023 St. Johns County Legislative Action Plan.**
  - Presentation at upcoming Legislative Delegation meeting (Dec.19th).

ST. JOHNS COUNTY
FLORIDA