2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

THE FOLLOWING LEGISLATIVE MATTERS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED BY THE CITY OF STUART CITY COMMISSION AS THE MOST URGENT LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE CITY IN THE YEAR 2021.

WE THANK THE MARTIN COUNTY DELEGATION FOR THEIR CONSIDERATION.

APPROPRIATION REQUEST:

ALTERNATIVE WATER SUPPLY PROJECT – *PHASE III* - $1 MILLION

Background: The City of Stuart owns and operates a water treatment plant (WTP), utilizing a traditional lime-softening system with a permitted treatment capacity of 6 million gallons per day (mgd). The City currently treats raw water from the surficial aquifer system (SAS), which is threatened with pollution from various sources including local runoff, saltwater intrusion, and manmade synthetic and organic chemicals and compounds from historical industries. Much of this pollution is out of the scope of control of the City and would be impractical to mitigate directly. Due to these increasing threats to the existing water supply and potential for more stringent future drinking water regulations, the City needs to diversify its supply options by investing in the Floridian Aquifer System (FAS) as an alternate water supply (AWS).

The City's Public Works Department, in collaboration with its consultants, has created a plan for an AWS which includes a hybrid of Reverse Osmosis, Ion-Exchange, and utilization of the Floridan Aquifer. The plan includes variability for capacity expansion well into the future, while providing the best modern water treatment technology for existing and future users. Thanks to a combination of local investment and previous state funding assistance, the project is moving forward with construction in 2021. The project is occurring over multiple years, with multiple phases, and would ensure the City is able to meet potential future challenges presented by sea level rise, new science on human-made contaminations, and other externalities not currently known. The City is a proactive steward of the local environment and a responsible facilitator of the public trust in its potable water. Stuart officials have worked diligently to utilize past funding assistance to expedite this critical project and is hopeful the state will continue to support our substantial efforts.

The City of Stuart REQUESTS state assistance in the form of a $1 million, non-recurring appropriations for Phase III of its Alternative Water Supply Project.

POLICY PRIORITIES:

1. WATER QUALITY & WATER SUPPLY

Background: In order to curb the harmful impacts of freshwater discharges, state resources and funding is desperately needed for capital projects designed to retain and treat billions of gallons of freshwater, from wherever it may originate. These resources are also needed on an annual basis in order to incentivize septic users to convert to municipal sewer systems, mitigating any further local pollution impacts to the waterways. Additionally, as new science and discoveries open the way for more restrictive pollution standards, utilities like the City of Stuart will look to alternative water sources like the lower Floridan Aquifer. Funding for a new generation of water supply projects and programs will be required in order to manage these increasingly complex issues.

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS enhanced levels of State funding for water quality and supply related projects and programs, including appropriations for septic to sewer conversions and alternative water supply.

2. COASTAL RESILIENCY

Background: As Florida's coastal communities continue to grow, natural infrastructural improvements and systems will be needed to buffer shorelines, reduce wave action caused by tropical systems, and improve overall floodplain management. Although grants have traditionally been utilized as a means for communities to identify and discuss local challenges and areas for improvement, few resources have been committed towards capital infrastructure. These projects will be essential in achieving the goals and objectives identified in each community's coastal resiliency plan.

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS state-bolstered funding for coastal resiliency and flood mitigation projects that may limit the negative impacts of sea level rise and future storm damage.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Background: Natural resources are a precious commodity and are not in infinite supply. Efforts within the State should be made to invest in renewable sources of energy while addressing existing pollution sources. In addition, future land and growth management must prioritize considerations for long-term environmental impacts caused by human population growth and urban sprawl. Commercial industries will need both incentives for switching to sustainable alternatives coupled with the imposition of economic deterrents to disincentivize ongoing, environmentally devastating practices. Similarly, commercial businesses and other industries must switch to alternative materials for packaging products that are more environmentally friendly than plastic and polystyrene. Traditional plastics do not biodegrade at the molecular level and are therefore, enduring pollutants that cannot be easily removed once they fragment into smaller particles.

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS establishing measurable statewide objectives towards reducing the overall carbon footprint of industrial, agricultural, and consumer operations within the State as a means of addressing the growing threat of global climate change. The City of Stuart also SUPPORTS policies that will reduce or eliminate single-use plastics and polystyrene materials as a means of curbing the overall contribution of pollution into the environment.

4. ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE REGULATION FOR PFAS IN POTABLE WATER

Background: Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) were historically utilized in the manufacturing of many household products and modern firefighting technology including clothing, carpet cleaners, stain resistant chemicals, firefighting foam, and even in the production of Teflon. City's like Stuart may have unknown contaminations in areas of historic manufacturing or using these common products including perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS). These organic compounds have been linked to chronic illnesses (including cancer) over a lifetime of exposure. While the City of Stuart has achieved a long-term solution for its contamination in the construction of its $2.1 million state-of-the-art PFAS Pre-treatment System, other water utilities in the State of Florida may have contaminations that are currently unmitigated. The United States Environmental Protection Agency is working towards a federal Monitoring Contamination Rule (MCL); however, the State of Florida has within its powers the authority to set safe regulatory standards above and beyond those of the EPA and federal government.

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS a statewide regulatory standard for PFAS more stringent than the EPA and SUPPORTS critical funding resources from the State of Florida for utilities working proactively towards contamination remediation.

5. REFORMING REVENUE SOURCES WITH AN ONLINE SALES TAX

Background: The City of Stuart supports tax reform, but in a manner that is fair and equitable across the state. Bills filed during the 2020 Legislative Session would have required marketplace providers and out-of-state retailers with no physical presence in Florida, to collect Florida's sales tax on sales of taxable items delivered to purchasers in Florida if those providers made a substantial amount of sales in Florida. The State should pursue sensible tax reform that ensures remote retailers remit taxes on taxable items in a manner that is equitable with physical businesses doing business in the State. A percent of tax on remote sales could be earmarked for local governments that mirror distribution models of sales tax on businesses that are physically doing business in Florida.

The City SUPPORTS tax reform by requiring marketplace providers and out-of-state retailers with no physical presence in Florida remit sales tax on sales of taxable items that are delivered to purchasers in the State of Florida. The City also SUPPORTS providing local governments with a percent of the revenue generated from the collection of this tax in a manner consistent with the existing sales tax model for remittance.

6. RAILWAY SAFETY INFRASTRUCTURE

Background: With the introduction of new high-speed passenger trains and rail lines, local governments are requesting new safety considerations at existing railway crossings. Currently local taxpayers are obligated to fund both the maintenance and capital costs associated with these critically important safety improvements, which are necessary to mitigate impacts from commercial enterprise. And while the federal government maintains legal supremacy over the approval of new railway traffic and infrastructure, the State of Florida can save its citizens the burden of covering these unplanned public impacts incurred by private industry by shifting such costs away from taxpayers and back to the companies from which they originate.

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that would improve railway safety requirements while shifting all or a portion of those costs to the originating companies whose operations impacts the quality of life and safety of residents.

7. SHORT-TERM RENTALS

Background: The State of Florida has struggled to define the limitations of local government control over short-term (vacation) rentals for more than a decade and the problem has only been exacerbated by industry lobbying. The vacation rental industry is a non-traditional market designed in part to purposefully evade existing licensing and regulatory standards and practices tied to commercial business. Consequently, traditionally residentially zoned areas in many communities have experienced an increase in commercial-like activity. Single-family residential areas with history of quiet enjoyment also experience more frequent disturbances and quality-of-life hardships with little means of holding responsible parties accountable – vacationers who have neither stake in the community nor pay local taxes.

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that provides local governments with more regulatory powers over short-term rentals. The City also SUPPORTS any statewide policies that establish equitable commercial standards of licensing and accountability for non-traditional vacation rentals and the hotel and motel industry alike.