2020 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.

APPROPRIATION REQUEST:

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

Background: The City of Stuart owns and operates a water treatment plant (WTP), utilizing a 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 FAS. The plan includes variability for capacity expansion well into the future, while providing the best modern water treatment technology for users.

The City of Stuart REQUESTS state assistance in the form of a $1 million, non-recurring appropriations for Phase II 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. LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Background: For more than 50 years, local governments in the State have been granted governmental, corporate, and proprietary powers expressly outlined in the Florida Constitution; enabling them to conduct municipal government, perform municipal functions, and render municipal services. Additionally, by law or resolution, each governing body has the Constitutional authority to transfer to or contract with another local government, any of its functions or powers as approved by its voters. These provisions were codified with the belief that the best government is the one closest to the people. In recent years, hundreds of bills were filed in the Legislature without regard or respect for the establishment of local self-government and the principle of "home rule." Among these measures were broad attempts to disassemble community redevelopment agencies and preempt local governing regulations over businesses and professions, including the levying of local business taxes.

The City of Stuart OPPOSES any effort to undermine voter-derived Constitutional authorities of local self-government. The City also OPPOSES any legislative effort to diminish local management of businesses and professions by preempting such policy at the state level.

5. REFORMING REVENUE SOURCES

Background: The Communication Services Tax (CST) currently accounts for more than $900k in annual revenue for the City of Stuart. And like many small municipalities, Stuart has few options to raise revenue. The City of Stuart supports tax reform, but in a manner that is fair and equitable across the state. One reform could include eliminating the local portion of the CST altogether. To compensate for the lost revenue the state could levy another half or full cent sales tax – with funds to be almost entirely distributed to local governments. By eliminating the local portion of the telecommunication-user tax (CST) and providing a statewide half or full-cent increase in sales tax with all funds earmarked for local governments, costs would be shifted from only residents, to tourists and residents alike. This change would allow for a more equitable and broad tax-base, benefitting all Florida residents.

The City of Stuart OPPOSES any legislation that erodes the CST without providing for an equal and fair funding source to match lost revenue. The City SUPPORTS tax reform by providing local governments with a more fair and equitable funding source via a statewide half or full-cent sales tax increase, with all funds from the additional tax, less administrative costs, to be earmarked for local governments.

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.