



City of Stuart



2017
LEGISLATIVE
PRIORITIES



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GUY DAVIS BALL PARK

Request for Funding: \$4 Million

The City of Stuart has a unique opportunity to satisfy a local desire for an improved ball park while establishing a premier venue for recreational league and semi-professional championship series events in the State.

In the past decade, Stuart has become a hotbed of special event activity; permitting well over 300 events annually. Nationally recognized recreational leagues have also in the past, expressed an interest in using the City as a future location for major tournaments and championship games.

Currently however, the condition and design of Guy Davis ball fields do not meet specific standards required for these events. Adding to this challenge, baseball and softball leagues have varying needs for tournaments, which can only be accommodated with adaptable fields.

In order to adequately address each of these concerns, the City has prepared a master redesign of Guy Davis Ball Park including the use of artificial turf as a wholistic solution. The cost of doing so however, is overburdening to the limited resources of the City.

With consideration of the economic impact of these tournaments on local and regional businesses while providing a statewide benefit - the City of Stuart is requesting State funding in the amount of \$4,000,000 to build a premier ball park for all statewide residents and visitors to enjoy as a desired venue for travel leagues throughout the State.





INFRASTRUCTURE SALES SURTAX

Request for Support: Legislative Policy Priority #1

Chapter 212 of Florida Statutes provides the option for each county to levy either a 0.5 or 1 cent sales surtax in one or two of three categories; including infrastructure. This surtax, if approved by the voters of that county, establishes a funding pool for critical infrastructure projects that may otherwise fall by the wayside. While many counties in the State of Florida have chosen to levy this tax as a means of maintaining and improving their critical infrastructure, there are also several who have not.

Currently, Florida law does not provide any opportunity for municipal governments to levy an infrastructure surtax when the governing county authority has chosen not to levy. A proposed change to the Florida Statute would create the option for a municipal government to establish a ballot initiative and ask their residents to approve the surtax.

The proposed legislation does NOT fundamentally change the current tax process, rate limit, or conflict with the original legislative intent. It would however, provide municipal governments with the option to levy a tax where the county at large has not. This idea not only benefits those urban communities who would have a new revenue source from the optional levy, but also those rural, unincorporated counties who do not want the surtax and may otherwise be obligated by a ballot initiative in their county.

The City of Stuart fully SUPPORTS and endorses the Florida League of Cities legislative priority in providing a means for municipalities to levy the Local Government Infrastructure Sales Surtax, if approved by voters.





WATER QUALITY



Background:

During the Summer of 2013, an outbreak of algal blooms in the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon created what we now refer to as the “Lost Summer;” a significant ecological and economic crisis with statewide impacts. In the Summer of 2016, a more severe algal bloom struck the region; headlining national and international news cycles and garnering the attention of public officials throughout the State and the Nation. In response, a University of Florida Study commissioned by the Florida Senate in 2014 and completed in 2015, determined that any large-scale solution must include major land acquisitions around Lake Okeechobee for water retention and treatment. Additionally, water management challenges created by rising sea levels and local pollution from septic tanks have broadened the scale and scope of adequate response and recovery.

Issues:

Water Management

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that provides a recurring source of funding for local government programs and projects that protect water resources, improves water quality and quantity, mitigates pollution and stormwater runoff, and expands the use of alternative water resources. A majority of pollutants found in local waterways however, originates from localized agriculture and stormwater runoff. Stuart also SUPPORTS State initiatives to boost funding for flood mitigation and stormwater management programs at all local levels including funding for the St. Lucie River Issues Team, which has successfully implemented dozens of projects over the years. These projects aim to reduce pollutant loads and are focused on the regions Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP).

Sea Level Rise

Recognizing the impacts sustained by cities statewide related to sea-level rise, changing precipitation patterns and increasing storm severity, the City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that encourages vulnerability assessments, coordinates resources and supports the efforts of local governments to mitigate and adapt to these dynamic environmental conditions.

Septic to Sewer

There are still many residents and businesses in the City of Stuart and surrounding county which have not converted from septic to sewer and who may have old and failing septic systems. The City of Stuart SUPPORTS funding initiatives by the State to incentivize and assist residents with converting to sewer or any conversion program that will expand the rate at which septic users convert to sewer.



ECONOMIC AFFAIRS



Background:

Over the past decade, the City of Stuart has fostered a healthy environment for development and redevelopment within Martin County. For every resident leaving the City each day for work outside city limits, there are at least five nonresidents visiting the City. In addition, Stuart permits over 300 special events every year, further promoting tourism and contributing to yearlong success of local business owners; particularly in the downtown historic district. In order to better facilitate this healthy growth, the City has begun developing a strategic economic development plan with State and community partners. Any future State programs should boost redevelopment funding, bolster public-private partnerships, and increase investment in higher education as a renewed focus on the right economic factors that are equally important in strengthening economic vitality in every community.

Issues:

Impact Fees

The City of Stuart OPPOSES legislation that restricts a municipality’s home rule authority to set impact fees or transportation concurrency. Stuart believes that any formula used to determine the assessment of an impact fee or distribution model thereafter should be determined at the local level in order to provide an equitable return in every county and for every residency.

Public-Private Partnerships

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that provides municipalities with increased flexibility to enter into public-private partnership agreements pursuant to state law or by home rule authority.

Community Redevelopment Agencies

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation to improve municipalities’ use and funding of community redevelopment agencies to effectively carry out redevelopment and community revitalization in accordance with home rule.

Higher Education Funding

Recognizing the role higher education plays in local economies, the City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that would greatly increase funding and improve the quality of higher education throughout the State. State institutions and universities need adequate resources to recruit and retain the best faculty. Increased funding for higher education will accomplish this goal and provide much needed relief to universities with aged infrastructure.



ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT



Background:

While renewable energy sources, particularly solar energy, have proven to have large public support, legislative challenges remain. The City of Stuart stands **OPPOSED** to any threat to the local environment, quality of life, or life safety. The City **SUPPORTS** increased investment in renewable energy sources. Stuart also supports the Florida League of Cities legislative priority to create a statewide ban on fracking as the risks involved in the process outweigh any economic benefit. Similarly, the expansion of oil and gas exploration off the coast of Florida threatens the future of tourism and quality of life for all residents in the City and the State. For a State economy that is founded in tourism, even one environmental disaster could be catastrophic for all local economies; and while the protection of home rule is a chief priority for Stuart, the safety and welfare of all is paramount.

Issues:

Renewable Energy

The City of Stuart **SUPPORTS** legislation that will provide incentives and benefits for the expansion of renewable energy sources, including solar energy. The City **OPPOSES** any legislation that would limit or preempt municipal regulation or deter residents from use.

“Fracking”

Hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” is a well stimulation method used by energy companies to re-fracture rock formations thousands of feet below the surface as a means of more efficiently extracting natural gas. The highly controversial method has been linked to localized water pollution during critical failures of encased well boreheads and even anthropogenic (human-linked) induced seismicity (earthquakes). The City of Stuart fully **SUPPORTS** a statewide ban on fracking. Although this preempts local governments, the impacts of fracking have statewide consequences.

Offshore Energy Production

Exploration for oil and energy sources off the coast of Florida is a highly controversial issue due to significant ecological and environmental impacts. The City of Stuart **OPPOSES** the expansion of offshore energy exploration and production, which would erode tourism and growing agritourism industries over time; effectively killing local and state economies. The Deepwater Horizon incident of 2010 has already cost Florida billions of dollars in economic and environmental damages.



INFRASTRUCTURE



Background:

One of the greatest concerns to local government is aging infrastructure and limited funding sources for their maintenance and improvement. Like many other local governments, the current water treatment and delivery system utilized by the City of Stuart will one day be insufficient to meet growth needs. As new state legislation continues to place more of the financial burden on local tax and rate payers for the operation of these services, local governments will have fewer options for financing large capital improvements. If local communities cannot fund these vital projects, the health of critical infrastructure will continue to deteriorate. The City fully SUPPORTS budget reforms at the State level to address funding inadequacies for infrastructure statewide, including increased funding for water projects, transportation, and urban infrastructure.

Issues:

Capital Projects

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that would dramatically improve funding for water projects throughout the State. Every year, more than \$1 billion in funding requests are submitted to the Florida Legislature for consideration and typically less than \$50 million will ever see funding; a portion of which will be vetoed by the Governor. Utility systems have key components with an average lifespan of 30 years and for many, these systems are past their life expectancy. Funding for capital infrastructure should be the highest priority moving forward.

Transportation Funding

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that provides municipalities with increased flexibility to enter into public-private partnership agreements pursuant to state law or by home rule authority. The City OPPOSES legislation that would divert funds away from the State Transportation Trust Fund for non-transportation uses.

Utility Relocation

The Florida Legislature adopted new language in 2016 that provides for certain conditions in which a local government must bear the cost of utility relocation in a public right of way. The City of Stuart OPPOSES any future legislation that would build on this new policy and further shift the burden of costs away from utilities and onto local governments and taxpayers.

Anchoring and Mooring Fields

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recently advised the State to preempt authority of anchoring and mooring fields. However, the report failed to address some key concerns by boaters and homeowners, which could be more readily addressed at the local level. The City SUPPORTS home rule at the municipal or county level.



FINANCE & TAXATION



Background:

Local governments in Florida continue to suffer from strangled revenue sources as a consequence of legislative initiatives at the State level. In recent years, these initiatives have reduced the Communication Services Tax (CST) and Local Business Tax rates, effectively cutting large portions of local government project funding. For municipalities, other revenue streams like the Tourism Development Tax and Sales Surtax are predetermined at state and county levels where distribution modeling provides allocations in a manner based entirely on population. This may be unfair to some communities and unlike county governments, municipal governments lack the legal authority to levy a sales surtax, which may benefit their communities growth and development without obligating other communities to do the same. Reforming these tax laws will greatly benefit every community in the State.

Issues:

Local Communication Services Tax

The City of Stuart OPPOSES legislation that would diminish or deplete this critical funding source. These revenues are essential to providing municipal services such as public safety, construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure, and providing public parks and public access.

Local Business Tax

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that protects general revenues collected from local business tax and preserves the local authority to levy the tax.

Tourism Development Tax

Under current law, the distribution model for tourism development taxes does not provide for an equitable return for municipalities that are a driving force of commercial development in their respective counties. The City of Stuart SUPPORTS any legislation that would reform this distribution model so that municipalities have their fair share returned to their respective communities.

Sales Surtax

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS any legislation that would reform calculation and distribution models of sales surtax to ensure a more fair and equitable return on investment for municipalities with large commercial infrastructure and development.



URBAN ADMINISTRATION



Background:

With changing times and technology, new challenges for government officials have threatened home rule authority by enticing the State to preempt policy making at higher levels. Broad public records laws have opened the doors for litigation-mills which file extensive records requests simultaneously as a means of entrapping local governments in future lawsuits. Similar technical loopholes provide avenues for bad actors to strain limited resources at local levels while genuine requests experience longer turnover periods. Additionally, a new voter-approved Constitutional Amendment legalizing medicinal marijuana has provided the need to regulate its sale and prescription. Only 'home rule' can adequately and appropriately address these unique challenges and the City of Stuart wholly SUPPORTS legislative initiatives that will strengthen local authority in meeting these concerns.

Issues:

Public Records

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that will reform public records law to provide protections for local governments from technical loopholes and frivolous records requests.

Medical Marijuana

With over 70 percent of Florida voters approving Amendment 2 and the legalization of medicinal marijuana, the City of Stuart SUPPORTS maintaining home rule with regard to zoning and regulatory standards for cultivation, processing, and distribution.

Vacation Rentals

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS amending legislation that will return home rule over short-term (vacation) rentals entirely back to municipalities, particularly including the ability to limit the duration of rentals. Currently in law, there is a prohibition of local ordinances that regulate such duration of stay, but new proposed legislation in 2017 seeks to return home rule authority back to local governments.

Drones

The City of Stuart SUPPORTS legislation that allows first responders to use drone technology to save lives and protect people and property. Such legislation should allow municipalities to continue to apply generally applicable law to regulate drone technology to ensure public safety and retain quality of life.

WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT



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