

THE NORTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCIL

2009

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

BAKER ★ CLAY ★ DUVAL ★ FLAGLER ★ NASSAU ★ PUTNAM ★ ST. JOHNS



*“Bringing Communities Together
to Advance the Regional Agenda.”*



2009 Northeast Florida Regional Council Legislative Priorities



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Committee Purpose:

"Work collectively and promote regionally."

Committee Philosophy:

This committee is guided by the Home Rule Philosophy to develop and implement community-based solutions.

Committee Responsibilities:

To serve as the forum for the Northeast Florida Regional Council Board of Directors to collect its local governments' legislative priorities to promote a regional agenda.

*Florida Regional Councils Association Representative



The following priorities were determined by consensus of the Legislative Policy Committee and are listed below:

Protect Local Revenue



Oppose property tax legislation and initiatives that restricts local government's ability to collect sufficient revenue to provide needed facilities and services.

Transportation Funding



Support transportation funding legislation that provides a dedicated and recurring source of revenue, including local option fuel taxes, rental car surcharges, or other taxes or fees, to fund local government essential transportation projects and programs and the transportation regional incentive program.

Support transportation funding legislation that ensures evacuation routes are funded.

Support transportation funding legislation that improves economic development, quality of life and the Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP).

Water Supply



Address the need for water supply, conservation and re-use needs for Florida and the Northeast Florida region to meet the future needs of the state's growing population and the needs of the environment, agriculture, industry and mining.

Florida Forever Program



The Florida Communities Trust Florida Forever Program, along with other state grant programs, has helped local governments purchase land for parks, recreation, open space, and conservation.

Support for funding the Florida Communities Trust Florida Forever Program and support a successor program when Florida Forever expires in 2010.



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SMALL COUNTY ROAD PROGRAMS

Background: With over 400 miles of dirt roads the Small County Road Programs are essential to meeting Baker County's transportation needs. The Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP) and the Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) coupled with local efforts provide transportation funding for collector & arterial road improvements.

Requested Action: Support continuation and increased funding with supplements to the amounts generated by the statewide gas tax to the Transportation Trust Fund.

Effect: Continuation of these vital programs will enable counties to continue much needed road improvements, elimination of environmental degradation and quicker emergency services responses.



RETURN FULL FUNDING OF THE STATE HOUSING INITIATIVES PARTNERSHIP (SHIP) PROGRAM

Background: SHIP funds were redirected in 2004 and no supplemental funding was added. This violates the intent of the SHIP Act, and housing needs of low and moderate income persons has increased.

Requested Action: Restore full funding by discontinuing the misdirection of the funds.

Effect: Restoration of SHIP funding will allow the program to be self-sufficient and follow the intent of the SHIP Act.

COUNTY MEDICAID RESPONSIBILITIES

Background: Medicaid expenses continue to increase for counties statewide. Small counties are hit particularly hard due to low countywide taxable value and the high rate of Medicaid eligibility. With baby boomers reaching Medicaid eligibility age, there will be an ever-increasing Medicaid eligible population.

Requested Action: Oppose any legislation that will increase the counties share of Medicaid costs. Support legislation requiring the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to reimburse counties when AHCA recovers Medicaid cost from third parties.

Effect: Rural counties with a low tax base and substantial numbers of low and moderate income persons will be better able to meet the health care needs of the community.

REVENUE SOURCES

Background: Local governments are being required to assume a greater share of State fiscal responsibilities and at the same time are burdened with ever increasing cost to provide essential local services. Recent amendments to the State Constitution have exacerbated the situation. Potential statewide and local option funding sources are not being expanded to allow the state and local governments to meet community needs.

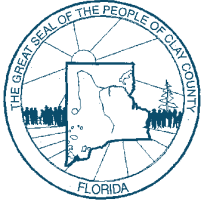
Requested Action: Eliminate nonessential items that are currently "sales tax exempt", and expand revenue source options for both the state and local governments.

Effect: Additional revenues will be available for both Tallahassee and the local governments. All local governments will be in a better position to respond and control locally relevant issues without interference from Tallahassee.

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Clay County 2009 Legislative Priorities



WATER CONSERVATION / QUALITY PROTECTION

Background: With increasing demands for withdrawal of water from the Floridian aquifer, state involvement with regional water management districts is essential. Recent issues concerning the permitting process of water withdrawals from both the St. John's River and the aquifer have created the opportunity for regional and statewide education on this topic.

Requested Action: Request that the State become involved in providing oversight, guidelines and policies that regional, county and municipal governments can effectively administer.

Effect: Both the short term and long term effects of sustaining, conserving and protecting Northeast Florida's water supply will have a major impact on the quality of life and economic viability of the county.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Background: Rapid growth in Florida continues to result in increasing traffic congestion, affecting the quality of life of residents and dampening economic development prospects.

Requested Action: Support replenishment of the Transportation Trust Fund from state revenues for transportation projects only.

Enhance financial resources for local transportation improvements including public transit initiatives.

Effect: In the face of spiraling construction costs and reduced transportation funding for counties, replenishment of the Transportation Trust Fund will reduce traffic congestion and increase the quality of life throughout the state.

COUNTY MEDICAID RESPONSIBILITIES

Background: The Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) is proposing a number of changes that would shift additional costs to county government in the delivery of health and human services to a county's population. These potential policy changes which affect the most vulnerable populations including the disabled and elderly leave counties vulnerable to potential cost shifts when there is a state budget deficit or shortfall.

Requested Action: Oppose legislation affecting the Coordinated Transportation System. Many residents in Clay County depend on Medicaid-funded non-emergency transportation to reach medical appointments and critical healthcare services such as chemotherapy and dialysis. Federal and State cuts in Medicaid funding will have a direct impact on the county's ability to continue providing non-emergency transportation services.

Support the state's efforts in opposing changes to the funding formula for the Medicaid program between the federal and state government that would reduce the federal share to Florida.

Effect: Decreasing the County's fiscal share of Medicaid cost will reduce the disproportionate impact which has become overly burdensome.

STATE HOUSING INITIATIVES PARTNERSHIP (SHIP) FUNDING

Background: County SHIP funds were reduced in 2004 resulting in the wait-listing and subsequent cessation of application acceptance for this affordable housing initiative.

Requested Action: Restore full funding of each county's SHIP allowance as projected prior to state level reductions.

Support legislation to improve affordable housing initiatives.

Effect: Restoration of maximum SHIP fund amounts will immediately increase the number of individuals receiving housing assistance and reduce the current waiting list.



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TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Background: Declining sales tax revenues have impacted the city's ability to begin construction by 2010 on state roads that were originally programmed into the Better Jacksonville Plan (BJP). These roads will be placed back on the State Partnership Program for funding and completion.

Requested Action: Duval County requests state funding for improvements to state roads that were once contemplated as part of the BJP and that are on the State Partnership Program.

Effect: Much-needed road and intersection improvements on state roads will be completed.



TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Background: Florida continues to see a high growth rate throughout the state, including Northeast Florida. As a result, there is increased traffic congestion and increased travel time for commuters. The need for public transportation is approaching and with it, development that is oriented around transportation hubs to help encourage use of the transportation system.

Requested Action: Duval County requests support efforts from the State to assist local government in encouraging and creating Transit Oriented Development (TOD). Support efforts and funding are also needed for a major transportation system in Duval County, such as a light rail, that will connect residential centers, business centers and the airport.

Effect: A major public transportation system and transit oriented development will help relieve traffic congestion as well as cut commuting time and pollution as a result from less cars on the roadways. A transportation system and the TOD will help accommodate for future growth.

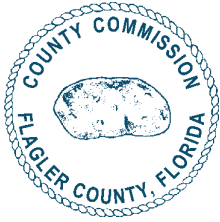
RIVER RESTORATION AND WATER ACCESS

Background: While efforts in recent years to clean up our waterways, specifically the St. Johns River, have produced improvements, much is still needed to be done. The St. Johns River and its tributaries at times have high bacteria levels as a result of failing sewer lines and septic tanks as well as other pollutants. Additionally, increased desire for waterfront property and development has limited public access to the water.

Requested Action: Duval County requests State funding to help continue to clean the St. Johns River and restore its health. Additionally, assistance is requested to help local government preserve waterfront land for public access.

Effect: Assistance with this request will result in improved water quality as well as increased waterfront accessibility for the public.

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STATE TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Background: As northeast Florida continues to grow, FDOT remains a key element in keeping county infrastructure abreast of the continued growth. Therefore, planning and oversight to coordinate the funding and the time schedule for projects is essential to ensure orderly growth and proper expenditure of state funding.

Requested Action: Restore funding from the state gas tax and other sources for all aspects of transportation and have FDOT to continue to provide 2.5% matching funds for FAA airport projects.

Effect: Coordinated funding efforts will ensure the best use of state tax dollars to optimize regional transportation initiatives.

Specific Flagler County Projects:

- Public Transportation Study for future fixed route service
- Matanzas Woods I-95 Interchange Design
- Bridge Replacement and Widening on County Road 305
- Flagler County Airport General Aviation Terminal construction and associated land acquisition

FUNDING FOR THE WATER SUSTAINABILITY TRUST FUND

Background: The Water Sustainability Trust Fund allows local governments to successfully partner with the water management districts and the State in seeking alternative water supplies. Historic droughts and continued growth have combined to increase water demands. As governments are encouraged to explore alternative options for water supply such as desalination, funding is more critical than ever.

Requested Action: Restore funding for the state's Water Sustainability Trust Fund to assist the Coquina Coast Desalination Project as a means of providing a safe and adequate water supply for the region in the future.

Effect: Provides a sustainable future source of potable drinking water for the region without minimizing the use of scarce surface water resources, including the St. Johns River system.

STATE FUNDING FOR MEDICAID

Background: State Medicaid funding is essential to the continued operation of local health departments. County Health Departments are the backbone of a system of medical assistance to the poor, working poor and low income residents in each county. Keeping Medicaid funding at a consistent level is imperative to provide basic health needs to children and adults across the state. Medicaid funding also supports emergency and non-emergency ambulance transportation.

Requested Action: Oppose legislation that would further decrease Medicaid funding for County Health Departments or local emergency service providers.

Effect: Maintains an optimum regional County Health Department network that is able to handle the flow of patients in need of medical attention as well as local emergency response providers.

STATE HOUSING INITIATIVES PROGRAM (SHIP) FUNDING

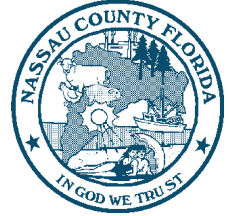
Background: The State Housing Initiative Program (SHIP) is in jeopardy due to the downturn in the economy. Mortgage foreclosures and unemployment rates have risen to record numbers across the state. Likewise, a reduction in home sales has resulted in less revenue from document stamps (on home sales) that funds the SHIP program. Additionally, the state legislature has placed a cap on the amount of funds that can be used for housing programs.

Requested Action: Remove the cap on SHIP funding to allow revenue collected for the program to be used for their intended purpose and not as a funding source for other state programs.

Effect: Restoration of SHIP fund amounts will provide assistance to more individuals receiving housing assistance and meet the intended purpose for which the money was collected.



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GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Background: In recent years, Nassau County has been a regional leader in implementing the statutory requirements of Senate Bill 360, promoting visioning and sound planning, and cooperating with other governmental units in the Region to achieve sustainable development practices. With the mandates of Senate Bill 360, significant funding was supposed to be set aside to aid local governments to meet State mandates, but the long term funding of these activities never materialized.

Requested Action: Continue to oppose the addition of any new unfunded mandates and oppose property tax legislation and initiatives that restricts local government's ability to collect sufficient revenue to provide needed facilities and services.

- **Impact fees.** Support maintaining home rule authority over administration of the County's existing impact fee program consistent with applicable case law.
- **Transportation.**
 - Streamline the requirements for local governments to establish long term concurrency management systems.
 - Encourage FDOT to enter into proportionate fair share agreements for the long term improvement of backlogged state roads.
- **Workforce housing.**
 - Support removal of the cap on Sadowski Housing Trust Funds.
 - Permit local density incentives for residential developments providing a minimum of 20% affordable units for a minimum of five years.

Effect: Recognize the fundamental principle of county home rule power, which enables counties to develop local solutions to local problems.

TRANSPORTATION

Background: Transportation Funding - Local governments have been tasked with enforcing concurrency and when required entering into proportional fair share agreements. Funds from the proportional fair share agreements are only a small portion of the costs for transportation improvements. Nassau County continues to struggle to address infrastructure backlog created by rapid growth, legislative mandates, and tax cuts. The Small County Road Programs (SCOP), Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP) and Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) are critical to Nassau County future growth. Nassau County is dependent on State Highway System (SHS) and Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) as the primary corridors for commercial, commuter, and recreation vehicular traffic.

Requested Action: Continue to support State programs for road construction such as TRIP, SCOP, and SCRAP.

- FDOT reimburse local governments for the construction they advance not in the FDOT five (5) year work plan.
- Pass additional funding for constructing roads that are failing concurrency Level of Service (LOS).
- Fund FDOT widening of SR 200 / A1A to six (6) lanes.

Effect: Improve the level of service in all county roads, ensure adequate evacuation roads and promote emergency preparedness.

REVENUE SOURCES

Background: The new fiscal reality for state, regional and local government require focus on effective funding and the reform of unfunded local mandates.

Requested Action: Continue to oppose the addition of any new unfunded mandates. Continue to support existing grant programs such as Small County Consolidated Grant, which is used for our recycling program and the Emergency Preparedness Grant, which supports Emergency Management operations

Effect: A reduction in unfunded mandates will give local governments the control and ability to provide necessary programs and services to taxpayers and operate within their adopted yearly budgets without having the need to adjust for unexpected funding reductions.

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Putnam County 2009 Legislative Priorities



PROPERTY TAX REFORM OFFSET FUNDING FOR FISCALLY CONSTRAINED COUNTIES

Background: The passage of Amendment 1 is causing dire consequences for Florida's 29 small, fiscally constrained counties, where property tax revenues are already inadequate to pay for essential services. Doubling the homestead exemption to \$50,000 is having an especially dramatic impact in small counties and exacerbates their situation.

There is still great concern about how we, as a fiscally constrained county, will be adequately protected because the legislation fails to define a source and amount of funding for these counties defined as fiscally constrained.

Senate Bill 4D, Section 9 states that the Florida Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by the 29 fiscally constrained counties. The appropriation funded by the 2008 Legislature only provided a portion of the revenue needed by fiscally constrained counties to hold them harmless from the effects of Amendment 1.

Requested Action: The Legislature is requested to provide an appropriation that would restore the funding level in fiscally constrained counties to that which existed prior to the passage of Amendment 1.

Effect: With a dedicated recurring resource appropriation to offset the loss of revenues for the fiscally constrained counties, Putnam County will be in a more tenable position to provide a moderate level of services to our citizens.

POTABLE WATER SYSTEMS AND WASTEWATER FACILITIES FUNDING

Background: Counties and local governments have increasingly become involved in providing the public with potable water and effective wastewater treatment facilities.

Requested Action: Increase the amount available funding for wastewater and potable water supply systems.

Effect: Enable counties to expand or establish systems that will result in improved drinking water and reduce environmental pollution from ineffective and inefficient wastewater systems.

SMALL COUNTY ROAD PROGRAMS

Background: The Small County Road Programs are critical to Putnam County's transportation issues. The Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP) and the Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) have provided necessary transportation funding for continued road improvements.

Requested Action: Support continuation of monies generated by statewide gas tax collections to the State Transportation Trust Fund to ensure essential transportation programs such as the Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP) and the Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) are fully funded.

Effect: Continuation of these vital programs will enable counties to resume much needed road improvements.

COUNTY MEDICAID RESPONSIBILITIES

Background: Medicaid costs continue to mount for counties, and small counties are hit particularly hard due to serious consequences when low countywide taxable value is coupled with a high rate of Medicaid eligibility of the county's population. This ever-increasing percentage of the County's Medicaid eligible population is due to influx from neighboring counties where the cost of living is greater.

Requested Action: Oppose legislation or regulatory action to increase the financial burden on counties for Medicaid costs.

Support legislation requiring the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to reimburse counties the amount of mandated contributions when AHCA recovers Medicaid costs from liable third parties.

Support legislation recognizing the disproportionate impacts at the county level due to Medicaid case loads and county's limited revenue capacity.

Support legislation that allows counties to redirect their Medicaid match to fund local healthcare services or community-based care programs for the elderly.

Effect: Decreasing the County's fiscal share of Medicaid cost will reduce the disproportionate impact which has become overly burdensome on small counties.



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TRANSPORTATION

Background:

The construction of SR 9B from CR 2209 to I-95 offers the best and safest connection from northern St. Johns County to I-95, SR 9A, and the Jacksonville Port. Designation of SR 9B as a Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) Facility will make this critical roadway eligible for the greatest possible range of State, Federal and regional funding.

I-95 is the only interstate connection between St. Johns County and the greater Jacksonville area. The I-95 interchange with CR 210 is the only one serving the north portion of St. Johns County and experiences severe congestion and significant safety concerns. State and federal funding is needed to make long-term improvements.

The SR 313 Bypass will create a half-loop around St. Augustine to relieve excessive stagnation along US 1 and provide a preferred non-local travel route. The secondary effect is the improvement of local traffic flow within St. Augustine.

Requested Action:

Make the critical SR 9B roadway eligible for the greatest possible range of funding resources by designating it as a Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) Facility. Include in the FDOT Work Program adequate funds to move this critical project, particularly those sections between CR 2209 and I-95, toward construction at the earliest possible date.

St. Johns County requests \$50 to \$100 million in State funds for long-term improvements to the I-95 interchange with CR 210 as specified by the forthcoming Interchange Modification Report.

St. Johns County requests State funds for the design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction of the SR 313 Bypass from SR 207 to SR 16, as well as the Design, Right-of-way Acquisition, and Construction from SR 16 north to US 1.

Effect:

The funding and construction of these major roadways and transportation improvements are crucial to the economic development and quality of life in St. Johns County.

WATER CONSERVATION QUALITY

Background:

Florida water management districts have identified areas where existing and planned water supply sources will not be able to meet all future needs without resulting in unacceptable impacts to water resources and related natural systems. St. Johns County opposes water transfers and water withdrawals from the St. Johns River. Current Florida water policy will allow these transfers after all local options, including re-use, conservation, and desalination, are exhausted.

Requested Action:

St. Johns County requests support of the St. Johns River Alliance, which promotes water quality and access funding, and also asks the Legislature to oppose water transfers and water withdrawals from the St. Johns River.

Effect:

St. Johns County believes that the regional approach to water supply regulation is the most successful, with a focus on conservation, re-use, and desalination.

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

Background:

The Florida Communities Trust Florida Forever Program, along with other state grant programs, has helped local governments purchase land for parks, recreation, open space, and conservation.

Requested Action:

Request continued support for funding the Florida Communities Trust Florida Forever Program and support a successor program when Florida Forever expires in 2010.

Effect:

The recent growth rate experienced by both St. Johns County and Northeast Florida in recent years demonstrates the continuing need to secure lands for parks, recreation, open space, and conservation for future generations.

2009 Northeast Florida Regional Council Legislative Priorities



The Legislative Policy Committee of the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) was created to address critical concerns within the member counties which comprise the region. It is composed of one delegate from each county (Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns); which includes the current President of the NEFRC.

This Committee is guided by the *Home Rule Philosophy* to develop and implement community-based solutions.

The legislative priorities of each county within the Northeast Florida Regional Council's membership and other regional stakeholders were collected. Each entity was requested to determine at least three priorities which most significantly represented the critical needs and concerns of their communities and constituents. The cumulative list totaled **50** priorities.

Through the gathering and analysis of all priorities submitted by each county individually, the Legislative Policy Committee collectively determined the top four (4) "Regional priorities" which represented the most critical concerns of the Northeast Florida Region.

All priorities were reviewed to include background, requested action and effect.

Additional information regarding all legislative priorities for the counties is available upon request.



Michael H. Boyle
President, Northeast Florida Regional Council
Nassau County Commissioner
Legislative Policy Committee Chair

"I believe in the power of cooperation and that we are never stronger than when we pool our resources for the betterment of our Regional community.

Serving as Chairman for this committee has allowed me to see first hand, that although we come from different counties with unique perspectives, we embrace many of the same critical issues that affect the quality of life in our communities.

The resources and expertise of the Northeast Florida Regional Council affords us a greater opportunity to work collectively and promote Regionally."





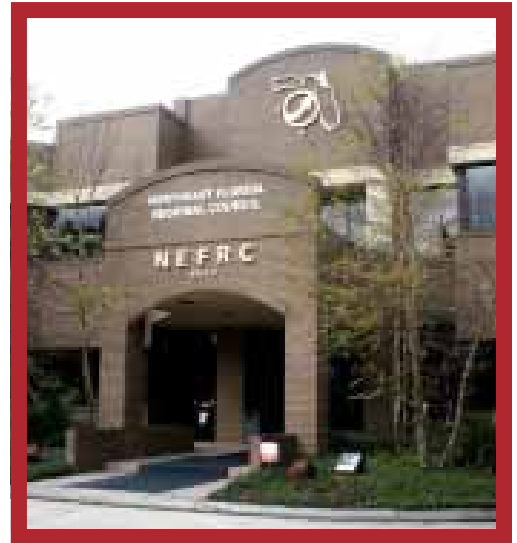
About the Northeast Florida Regional Council

The Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) is a regional government agency serving seven counties—Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns—and their 27 municipalities. Formed in 1977 by an interlocal agreement pursuant to Florida Statutes, Chapter 163, it is one of 11 regional planning councils statewide.

The NEFRC is governed by a 35-member Board, two-thirds elected officials and one-third gubernatorial appointees.

It provides a wide scope of services and programs including strategic planning, Development of Regional Impact reviews, economic development, regional transportation, natural resources, affordable housing, emergency preparedness, and technical assistance.

The Northeast Florida Regional Council is committed to continuing its regional initiatives in support of shared visions, values and goals.



Our Mission

Our Mission is to provide visionary leadership and coordination between counties and governmental agencies to preserve and enhance the quality of Northeast Florida's natural, man-made, economic and social environment.

