

NEFRC

LEGISLATIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

Meeting



September 7, 2023
Immediately following Board Meeting

Northeast Florida Regional
Hybrid Meeting
VIRTUAL & IN-PERSON



100 Festival Park Avenue
Jacksonville, FL 32202
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Serving the communities of Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns Counties

Bringing Communities Together

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

TO: NORTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

FROM: ELIZABETH PAYNE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER 

RE: NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING

The next Legislative Policy Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, **October 5, 2023 at 9:00 a.m. in St. Johns County, Health & Human Services Bldg., 200 San Sebastian View, Ste. 2300, St. Augustine, FL 32084.**

Northeast Florida Regional Council

LEGISLATIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

A G E N D A

Northeast Florida Regional Council
100 Festival Park Avenue
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://nefrc-org.zoom.us/j/87499770491>
Meeting ID: 874 9977 0491

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2023
Immediately Following Board Meeting

(ADDED OR MODIFIED ITEMS IN BOLD)
(*Denotes Action Required)

TAB

1. Call to Order, Welcome, Roll Call – Chair Harvey
2. Invitation to Speak – Chair Harvey

Members of the public are welcome and encouraged to speak on any item brought before the Council and will be recognized during public comments.

3. 2024 Draft Legislative Priorities Discussion – Ms. Payne1
4. Public Comment – LIMITED TO **3 MINUTES PER SPEAKER**

5. Next Meeting Date and Location: **9:00 am, OCTOBER 5, 2023**
St. Johns County
Health & Human Services
200 San Sebastian View, Ste. 2300
St. Augustine, FL 32084

6. Adjournment

***Denotes Action Item**

Agenda

Item

Tab 1

Tab 1

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Bringing Communities Together

MEMORANDUM

DATE: AUGUST 30, 2023

TO: NORTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

FROM: ELIZABETH PAYNE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER 

RE: 2024 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES DISCUSSION

As you know, the 2024 Legislative Session will begin on January 9, 2024. Therefore, in late July, the NEFRC emailed all counties and cities requesting their 2024 legislative priorities by September 15, 2023 for inclusion in its 2024 Regional Legislative Priorities publication.

This Committee will meet in September and October, with additional virtual meetings held if needed, to discuss and determine the Regions' top Priorities for 2024. The draft legislative priorities will be presented to the Board of Directors for approval at the October meeting.

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Baker County Legislative Priorities



2024 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

REOPENING OF BAKER CORRECTION INSTITUTE

Background: Baker C.I. was closed in the fall of 2021 due to statewide staffing shortages. The closure of this prison and the elimination of work squads has had a tremendous fiscal impact on local communities. Additionally, there are a loss of services and loss of revenue sharing related to this closure. Services provided previously by inmate work squads are now contracted to private companies at a significant cost to Baker County. Overall, prisons are a major economic driver in small counties and the service of prison work squads provide valuable labor services in Fiscally Constrained counties like Baker County.

Requested Action: Re-open Baker C.I. and allow staff to resume work in Baker County.

Effect: Baker County would see no loss in services and revert to the use of inmate work squads for programs currently being funded through general fund at an increased cost to the County. Additionally, Baker County would not see a loss of revenue through revenue sharing programs.

CONTINUE FUNDING SMALL COUNTY ROAD PROGRAMS

Background: The Small County Road Programs are critical to meeting Baker County's Transportation needs. The Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP), Small County Outreach Program (SCOP), Community Incentive Grant Program (CIGP) and the Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) provide necessary transportation funding for road Improvements.

Requested Action: Continued support and increase monies generated by statewide gas tax collections to the State Transportation Trust Fund to provide essential transportation programs such as (SCRAP), (SCOP), (CIGP) and (TRIP). Prohibit the creation of any legislation that would restrict these types of funds due to comprehensive plan amendments adopted by small counties.

Effect: Continuation of these vital programs will enable counties to make much needed road improvements, create jobs, correct environmental problems created by runoff, and stimulate the local economy.

INCREASE MINIMUM S.H.I.P. ALLOCATION

Background: Due to population, Baker County receives the minimum State allocation for the State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) of \$350,000 annually. These funds are used to help Baker County citizens with much needed home repair or replacement. Due to the increased cost of construction in recent years Baker County has seen a decrease in the amount of services we can provide to our citizens. While historic level funding has been made by the State into the SHIP fund, minimum allocation increases to Counties have not been considered.

Requested Action: Increase the minimum allocation to Small/Rural Counties.

Effect: Increase number of residents who are assisted with much needed home repair/replacement.

FUNDING FOR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS SHELTER

Background: Baker County has utilized two local elementary schools as general population storm shelters and Ed Fraser Memorial Hospital as a special needs shelter for many years. With a population of 29,000 and growing, plus being a recipient County from Duval and other coastal communities, these arrangements are no longer sufficient. Baker County wishes to construct a new storm shelter that could house both general and special needs citizens in one location. This would also allow schools to resume normal activities much quicker after a disaster if they were not utilized as a shelter in the future. Funding assistance from the State would allow the construction of a facility that will meet local and regional needs.

Requested Action: Support funding for a newly constructed shelter.

Effect: Will provide shelter for evacuees, both general and special needs, for local and regional residents in the event of a major disaster.

APPROVE LEGISLATION FOR A LOCALLY IMPOSED SALES TAX

Background: Ad valorem taxes have been insufficient and an inequitable source of revenue for small counties. Counties need to have the flexibility to levy additional sales tax at their discretion.

Requested Action: Allow counties the option to levy an additional sales tax.

Effect: The additional sales tax will create additional revenue for local governments that will affect the community as a whole and not limit the burden solely to property owners.

Flagler County Legislative Priorities

Legislative Priorities

Town of Beverly Beach

**TOWN OF BEVERLY BEACH
LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES
FISCAL YEAR 2024**

1. RESILIENCY AND VULNERABILITY STUDY

BACKGROUND

The Town of Beverly Beach has partnered with the City of Flagler Beach to commission a Coastal Resiliency and Vulnerability study through a grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The engineering firm, Mead and Hunt, is managing the data. The town has had several sites that have been vulnerable to storms in the past seven (7) years, including town infrastructure. Massive erosion from wave action has also occurred.

REQUESTED ACTION

The town needs to listen to the interpretation of the study data, and add its own processes to implement the findings. Any recommendations that need financial backing can be budgeted by the town.

EFFECT

If the study can identify even one element that the town is not aware of, the study will be well-worth the time and effort. The town has advocated lifting the moratorium on seawalls on residential properties on the oceanfront – as a matter of desperation. A second action, taken by the State, is to buttress the shoreline with dredged sand. The dredging will occur in 2025.

2. PARKING WITHIN THE TOWN

BACKGROUND

The town has been overwhelmed by the growth that has come to Flagler County in the past few years. With that growth has come heavy traffic – especially at public attractions like the beach. The town has never developed the infrastructure to deal with this overflow, mostly because: 1) It has not needed to; 2) Much of the traffic is from adjoining towns and not from Beverly Beach.

REQUESTED ACTION

With limited land to create parking lots, the town must inventory its facilities and develop solutions within its capacity. Land that is close to the beach is invariably expensive, the purchase of which would seem extravagant to its citizens. One of the options is to create reserved parking for the town's citizens. However, much of the town's available land is on a state-owned easement that cannot be reserved. Enforcing a "reserved parking" facility might also require increased code enforcement.

EFFECT

Creating an innovative solution at this level is not only a logistics problem, but a financial one. The town has limited resources and reserving unused space for citizens is a difficult task. Better service for tax-paying citizens is the immediate outcome.

3. FRAGMENTED STORMWATER SYSTEM

BACKGROUND

In one of the town's major subdivisions, the Osprey Point District, the developer left the town and the State of Florida, holding the proverbial "bag." No homeowners association had been formed, and the state has the Environmental Resources permit, while the town controls the three roads in the district. However, the stormwater infrastructure is in the hands of the private property owners, including the two large retention ponds. With sea-level rise has come more flooding and ponds that are filled to capacity. While the town receives Local Gas Option Tax Funds to care for the roads, the amount is not large enough to take corrective action on the infrastructure, nor can the town do so on its own volition – given the political fallout of spending tax-payer funds for the benefit of a few private land owners. The town attempted to apply for a REDI grant from St Johns River Water Management District and was told that the grant cannot be used for private property.

REQUESTED ACTION

The town has taken a variety of approaches to this issue. Even a public/private partnership to treat the ponds for algae has been retracted. There is no incentive for private owners to provide a public benefit. Consequently, actions that need to be done, such as the dredging of the ponds, do not get done. While a court order can encourage corrective action, it is a last resort for homeowners, and the town does not want to be forced into eminent domain-type seizures. As of this date, there have been no proposed alternatives. The subdivision cannot be forced to form an HOA and a Special Taxing District is administratively burdensome.

EFFECT

St Johns River Water Management District has declared that the stormwater system is functional. The town wants it to remain functional, despite the proclivity of 100 year storms, and wants to alleviate flooding concerns in the future.

St. Johns County Legislative Priorities

Legislative Priorities

City of St. Augustine

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

SUBJECT: Support for Home Rule

1. PURPOSE: Support Home Rule for Local Governments

2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:

- a) Home Rule powers ensure that cities are effectively and efficiently providing for the needs and wishes of their residents.
- b) Home Rule ensures that cities can address the unique needs of its residents with local solutions.
- c) As State legislation is passed that limits the Home Rule powers of cities, local needs may no longer be able to be met by local government.

3. CONCLUSION /RECOMMENDATION:

The City of St. Augustine supports the repeal of any legislation that limits Home Rule powers for local government.

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

SUBJECT: Legislative-Appropriation-for-Construction of Museum Exhibit Displays in the City of St. Augustine's Visitor Information Center

- 1. PURPOSE:** Appropriate \$800,000 for construction of museum exhibit display cases in the Visitor Information Center in support of the City and State of Florida's commitment to maintain Cultural Heritage ties to Spain.
- 2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:**
 - a) The City of St. Augustine is committed to an underwater archaeological exchange with the State of Florida, Department of State and Spain.
 - b) This will include a museum exhibit and interpretive video and materials being produced by the Minister of Culture in Spain and archaeological artifacts being loaned by the State of Florida, Department of State.
 - c) These archaeological artifacts and museum exhibits will be located in the City of St. Augustine's Visitor Information Center.
 - d) The Visitor Information Center is host to millions of visitors to St. Augustine and the State of Florida every year, making this an ideal venue to showcase our commitment to underwater archaeology and cultural ties to Spain.
- 3. CONCLLUSION / RECOMMENDATION:**

A legislative appropriation of \$800,000 would expedite the construction of a modern, museum quality exhibitions space for a cultural exchange between the City, the State of Florida and Spain.

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

SUBJECT: Legislative Appropriation for Conservation Land Acquisition

1. **PURPOSE:** Purchase of environmentally sensitive lands for conservation and flood mitigation purposes.
2. **DISCUSSION/FACTS:**
 - a) There are privately owned wetlands and forested uplands that have the potential for being developed.
 - b) Development of these sensitive lands has a negative impact on the environment and can put adjacent homes and businesses at risk for flooding and storm surge by eliminating natural drainage patterns in the community.
 - c) These sensitive lands have never been developed because of the expense and complexity of wetland mitigation and tree removal.
 - d) The value of land in St. Augustine has dramatically increased, making the filling of wetlands and clearing of natural areas for development financially feasible.
 - e) The loss of these few remaining conservation areas will permanently alter the local ecology and eliminate any appreciation for the environment for future generations.
3. **CONCLUSIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS:**
 - a) The City requests a legislative appropriation of \$1,000,000 as start-up funding for a Conservation Land Acquisition Fund to purchase undeveloped, environmentally sensitive lands.

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

SUBJECT: Transportation Infrastructure

1. PURPOSE: Support for the continued construction of State Road 313.

2. DISCUSSION/FACTS:

- a) The State Road 313 Bypass will create a half-loop around St. Augustine to relieve excessive congestion along U.S. 1 and provide an improved non-local travel route that bypasses the core City.
- b) Rerouting the non-local traffic will assist in easing the congestion issues presently experienced along U.S. 1.
- c) The North Florida Transportation Planning Organization fully supports this project and has included it in their Transportation Improvement Program.
- d) The Florida Department of Transportation, in Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021, will continue working on right-of-way acquisition for State Road 313 from State Road 207 to State Road 16.
- e) Funding was provided in Fiscal Year 2020 for improvements at the U.S. 1 and State Road 313 interchange.
- f) The Florida Department of Transportation has been working on preliminary engineering to extend State Road 313 from State Road 207 to Holmes Blvd. to be let for construction in future years.

3. CONCLUSIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) The City of St. Augustine requests the State provide necessary funding to complete the initial phase of connecting State Road 207 with State Road 16.
- b) The City of St. Augustine requests the State provide necessary funding to continue the State Road 313 extension from State Road 16 to U.S. 1 North.

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

SUBJECT: Commuter Rail Between Jacksonville and St. Augustine

1. **PURPOSE:** Legislative appropriation to the FOOT for commuter rail design and construction.
2. **DISCUSSION/FACTS:**
 - a) The Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) has proposed and provided conceptual design to construct a commuter rail service between downtown Jacksonville to downtown St. Augustine.
 - b) The rail would reduce trips on 1-95 which is about to begin a capacity expansion plan and construction.
 - c) The 1-95 construction will exacerbate travel times on 1-95.
 - d) The commuter rail will provide an alternative and predictable alternative to 1-95 thereby relieving the amount of congestion.
 - e) The commuter rail will result in transportation capacity which will benefit the economic health of Northeast Florida.
 - f) The City of St. Augustine will invest in construction of a parking garage at the St. Augustine commuter train stop.
3. **CONCLUSIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS:**
 - a) The -legislature appropriation phased funding to the FOOT in a financing plan recommended by the JTA.
 - b) Create legislation that requires the expediting of comprehensive planning requests for approval of transit-oriented development zoning to encourage development around train stops.

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

SUBJECT: Tree Pruning, Trimming, or Removal on Residential Property

1. **PURPOSE:** Support the repeal of the 2019 statute regarding tree pruning, trimming, or removal on residential property.
2. **DISCUSSION/FACTS:**
 - a) The City of St. Augustine tree canopy is held in high regards by residents.
 - b) Statute 163.045, passed in 2019, is detrimental to the City's tree canopy.
 - c) The statute does not allow local government to require any notice, application, approval permit or mitigation for tree removal if an arborist or licensed landscape architect provides the property owner with documentation stating that the tree presents a danger to persons or property.
 - d) The statute does not allow local government to require a replanting if a tree is removed in this manner.
 - e) This bill is an erosion of Home Rule.

3. CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATION:

The City of St. Augustine supports the repeal of the 2019 statute regarding tree pruning, trimming, or removal on residential property.

Legislative Priorities

City of St. Augustine Beach

The St. Augustine Beach City Commission discussed your request at their meeting last night and directed me to send to you the following as their legislative priorities for 2024:

- Continue financial allocations by the state for beach restoration projects
- Provide state financial support for barrier island cities to develop resiliency projects to meet the threat of sea level rise
- Legislative action either to allow cities to directly collect bed tax dollars to pay for services related to tourism, or to require counties to provide a percentage of bed tax dollars to cities to fund law enforcement services and infrastructure projects that benefit tourists
- Develop alternative modes of transportation and implement the River-to-Sea Loop in Putnam, St. Johns and Flagler counties
- Provide legislation to develop a regional plan for affordable housing
- Adopt legislation that will protect and strengthen the authority of cities and counties to regulate vacation rentals