

SARASOTA COUNTY
COMMISSION

2009
SARASOTA
COUNTY
LEGISLATIVE
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SARASOTA COUNTY AREAS OF FOCUS FOR
THE 2009 FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE SESSION



**ECONOMIC STIMULUS/
VITALITY**

Partner with local governments in investing in infrastructure, creating jobs and developing sustainable economic development.

**SUSTAINABILITY/
ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

Pursue aggressive energy policies to promote energy independence and sustainability.

**FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY/
SUSTAINABILITY**

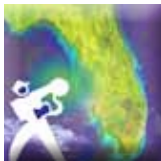
Avoid unintended consequences from budget cuts and assure a fair, efficient tax system.

**COMMUNITY BASED GOVERNANCE — Home Rule/
Unfunded Mandates**

Refrain from unfunded mandates, cost shifts or preemptions of local authority.

The Sarasota County Commission is monitoring numerous legislative issues important to our community. The four above issues are top priorities for the 2009 Legislative session.

As issues arise, Sarasota County will engage with state elected leaders to promote and protect the interests of the community. The state's welfare depends on the strength of its local communities. State and local governments must work together to assure the best future for our citizens.



ECONOMIC STIMULUS/ VITALITY

The national economic downturn, focused on the real estate and construction industries, is of particular concern in Sarasota County where these industries are a large part of our local economy. Our citizens and community are deeply impacted.

- Unemployment: Currently at 10 percent – up from 3.1 percent in 2006.
- Housing foreclosures: Sarasota County foreclosure rates are among the highest in the state, with 8,500 filings and 2,600 complete foreclosures in 2008.

Sarasota County has adopted policies that well position us to partner with state government in immediately investing dollars to kick-start the economy. Voters approved raising the debt limit on infrastructure projects to use surtax dollars to fast track projects that will boost the community's economy and create jobs. The county is borrowing up to \$300 million to fund capital construction projects. Sarasota County provides business assistance, including fast-track permitting for targeted industries, a business help line and a program of incentives.

Sarasota County has numerous “ready-to-build” projects that will create new jobs and serve public transportation/transit, energy efficiency, health, safety and other goals. The county urges the state to partner with local governments to leverage limited state funds by investing in infrastructure projects to create jobs, strengthen our economy and get our community back on the road to recovery.

Recommended actions:

Partner with local governments in investing in infrastructure, creating jobs, and developing sustainable economic development.

- Invest in infrastructure/leverage state dollars by funding locally matched, ready-to-go projects.
- Fund non-SIS state highways and arterial roads to stimulate capital investment, sustain jobs, and address backlogs impeding growth.
- Don't raid the State Transportation Trust Fund – fund the FDOT Work Plan, including the U.S. 41/Venice Bypass.
- Provide incentives to reward maximum use of local option transportation revenues.
- Invest funds in programs to create jobs in home repairs, hardening, retrofitting, and to lower home energy costs.
- Provide tools/incentives for local governments and communities to use to attract regional economic development and create jobs.



SUSTAINABILITY/ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Faced with the challenges of economic instability and demands on our finite resources, Sarasota County is holistically integrating environmental, societal and economic initiatives in building a sustainable community. Sarasota County Government is committed to lead by example, promote public participation and work in community partnership to improve our quality of life and protect natural systems that support life.

Sarasota County took the lead in adopting a 2050 plan and Roadmap to Sustainability, and has received national recognition for its numerous green and energy efficient practices. The county has set aside land and its voters have designated infrastructure surtax revenues for sustainable economic development. The county is engaging citizens as stakeholders in the complex conversations and visioning vital to developing and implementing sustainable solutions. Promoting energy and green economic development is a county priority.

Sarasota County supports state initiatives to help build sustainable communities and achieve sustainability goals. This can be accomplished through incentives as well as by allowing communities the flexibility to address issues such as fertilizer or wetland regulation in a manner most effective for their unique environmental characteristics.

Recommended actions:

Pursue aggressive energy policies to promote energy independence and sustainability.

- Establish resource center(s) for sustainable applied alternative energy and community/regional decision making.
- Promote and provide incentives for sustainable energy practices, alternative fuels, and carbon emissions reductions.
- Retain local government authority to regulate fertilizer use.
- Promote green and energy efficient building.
- Promote sustainable economic development.



FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY/ SUSTAINABILITY

This will be a difficult year for state and local governments and our citizens as decisions and adjustments are made to reflect revenue and budget realities. It's especially important that state and local elected officials work cooperatively to find solutions and help our citizens.

Sarasota County requests that the Legislature proceed cautiously as it makes budget reductions and consult with local governments to understand impacts on communities and citizens.

County revenue sources have declined significantly and we are already seriously fiscally challenged in meeting our responsibilities to provide services to our residents. Don't make it harder for us to do our job through shifting costs or passing on responsibilities that increase the local government fiscal burden. And importantly, do not cap our future ability to determine the revenue and expenditure needs for the community.

Any future property tax reforms should make the tax system fairer. Homestead exemptions and Save Our Homes value limitations have created property tax inequities that Amendment One exacerbated, reducing local revenues without offering property owners significant relief.

In Sarasota County, the School Board makes up 56 percent of the total local tax bill. Property tax reform must address this portion of the property tax bill.

Recommended actions:

Avoid unintended consequences from budget cuts and assure a fair, efficient tax structure.

- Retain local/community control – without new caps – for local revenues and budgets.
- Address state budget shortfalls without shifting costs to local governments.
- Reform the sales tax by expanding the general revenue base – reduce sales tax exemptions and collect sales taxes on internet sales.
- Ensure that any future property taxes reforms create a fairer tax system for all taxpayers and preserve a county's ability to provide services.
- Protect our most vulnerable citizens in making budget reductions.



COMMUNITY BASED GOVERNANCE - HOME RULE/Unfunded Mandates

State solutions for local problems too often fail to consider community needs. Solutions to local problems are best developed when citizens are part of the process.

Citizens have the greatest access and input at the local government level – the government closest to the people. Legislative actions can result in unfunded mandates, cost shifts or preemptions of local authority. Depriving local government of decision-making authority and funds for local projects erodes the county's ability to meet priorities established by the community. Citizens hold us accountable for our decisions at the polls.

Recommended actions:

Refrain from unfunded mandates, cost shifts or preemptions of local authority.

- Reduce county jail overcrowding by removing zero tolerance for felony probation violators, housing violation of parole offenders in state prisons and reducing mandatory sentencing guidelines.
- Fulfill state obligation to use state funds to fund the Regional Conflict Councils.
- Maintain county authority to regulate sustainable growth and protect natural resources.
- Do not expand Medicaid Pilot Program until identified deficiencies are addressed.