



2023 Legislative Priorities and Key Issues

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2023 Primary Chamber Priorities

INSURANCE REFORM

Project: 1	Appropriation Request:
Address critical property insurance issues to create a stable insurance market with affordable rates for homeowners and business owners	No appropriation request. The desire of the Chamber is for the legislature to focus on solutions to now solve consumer cost issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chamber supports the successes of the Legislature in the two Special Sessions in 2022 to help shore up property insurers by eliminating one-way attorneys’ fees and the practice of Assignment of Benefits, as well as providing stop-gap resources to assist insurers to obtain critical reinsurance to protect them against crisis situations. • However, the work is far from complete. Our hope is that you will continue reforms in property insurance, as well as vehicle insurance, to aid Florida consumers. 	

TRANSPORTATION / ROAD IMPROVEMENTS / INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

Project: 2	Appropriation Request:
Continue progress on widening of US 41 from SR 44 to SR 200	Request is for legislative support of the requests of the County and City of Inverness to make this project a high priority of the MPO and FDOT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chamber has aligned with the County and City of Inverness and supported the work of the Citrus/Hernando MPO to place the widening of US 41 from SR44 to SR 200 as its #1 priority. 	

- As part of this widening project, the Chamber supports the addition of a stub out / curb cut for a future entrance to Whispering Pines Park at the Inverness Regional Plaza traffic signal / intersection.
- We appreciate the Legislature’s support of the project. The section from SR44 to the Withlacoochee State Trail (WST) bridge is currently within the FDOT 5-year work plan and is underway. The Chamber supports future phases as follows: WST bridge north to Arlington Ave; Arlington Ave. to SR 200 in Hernando; and from SR 200 to the bridge at the Withlacoochee River (See Chamber Transportation Priority Project # 3.)

Project: 3	Appropriation Request:
Replacement of Withlacoochee Bridge on SR 200 at Citrus / Marion County Line	None at this time; request is for legislative recognition of future need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The bridge over the Withlacoochee River on SR 200 is old, narrow, and dangerous to traverse. ● As the road widening progresses along US 41 and is expected to eventually continue along SR 200 from US 41 to SW Hwy 484 in Marion County (see Chamber Transportation Priority Project # 2), the Chamber urges the Legislature to begin now to develop a plan to rebuild the bridge to the standards of a widened 200. ● The Chamber has been in direct communication with Senator Dennis Baxley and Marion County to partner on this replacement issue. Both have agreed on the importance of this project as part of the continued widening of SR 200 from the intersection at CR 491 in Citrus County to SW Hwy 484 in Marion County. Sen. Baxley has indicated he will make this a priority. 	

Project: 4	Appropriation Request:
Continuation of Suncoast Parkway north to US 19	None at this time (project fully funded); request is for route consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Chamber is pleased with the completion of the Suncoast Parkway to SR 44 and the extension to CR 486 that is currently in the beginning stages of construction. ● We were also pleased to learn in December 2022 that the continued extension to US 19 near Red Level has now been fully funded with completion targeted for 2028. However, we urge that the extension should avoid paths through any existing neighborhoods (i.e., Pine Ridge) so as not to adversely impact residents’ property values and rights to enjoy their properties. 	

Project: 5	Appropriation Request:
Continued widening of CR 491 from W Pine Ridge Blvd to SR 200	Support funding for this project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The 6.8 mile section of CR 491 from W Pine Ridge Blvd to SR 200 is another length that will need to be widened from 2 lanes to 4 lanes. As the Suncoast Parkway opens up more 	

of Citrus County to direct traffic from the Tampa area, CR 491 will become a logical connection to the rapidly growing Ocala region.

- Additionally, a 550-acre parcel at the corner of CR 491 and US 41 has been approved for mixed use industrial, commercial and a workforce housing development as the Holder Industrial Park. As this parcel develops, it will create increased truck, commercial and private traffic travelling to I-75 in Ocala or the Suncoast Parkway.

Project: 6	Appropriation Request:
Halls River Road Multi-Use Path (MUP)	Appropriate \$8,300,000 (County request) to FDOT for the project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Old Homosassa has completed their multipurpose path in Old Homosassa. This request is to extend the path 3.2 miles along Halls River Road from the community of Riverhaven, to US 19 which will connect with the Old Homosassa path and continue to the newly constructed path along US 19. ○ The Halls River MUP stemmed from a petition by residents and businesses along the road. The County currently has \$1 million to contribute towards the project. ○ The Chamber supports the County’s request for \$8.2 million allocated to FDOT to manage and implement the project. 	

Project: 7	Appropriation Request:
Inverness Airport Taxiway Completion (Phase 2) / Hangar Project	\$9,000,000 (County request) for taxiway and infrastructure improvements; support for construction of a new hangar
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Inverness Airport has extended their runway to 5,000 feet and is now in need of the taxiway going into the existing business park. The new FBO has recently secured a national and international contract and can expand and create dozens of jobs if a taxiway and hangar are built. ○ The Chamber supports the County’s request for a grant of \$9,000,000 to fund the development of the taxiway into the business park, along with a pre-cast screening wall, and other critical infrastructure. ○ Additionally, the Chamber supports legislative consideration for the construction of a hangar to allow for the continued economic expansion of the airport. 	

WATER QUALITY

Project: 8	Appropriation Request:
Local Water Quality Projects	Request is for legislative support for direct appropriations or of the Florida DEP budget, the FWC budget and any other agencies that may provide funding for these local projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Septic -to-Sewer Conversion, Water Quality, Water Supply and Storm Water Structures 	

- The Chamber supports the continued conversion of septic to sewer throughout Citrus County and the expansion of central wastewater collection systems in areas within the first order magnitude spring sheds, including storm water management and construction of infrastructure.
- The Chamber urges the Legislature to continue financial support for the completion of the Blue Water Forest/Spring Grove Road Sewer Project in Homosassa. The Legislature already approved some funding in 2021 and we urge its completion.
- **Kings Bay Restoration Project**
 - Continue to fund restoration and maintenance as required to finish and maintain the project.
- **Homosassa River Restoration Project**
 - Following the success of Save Crystal River in cleaning Kings Bay, the Homosassa River Alliance has adopted a similar model to clean up and restore the Homosassa River. The Chamber will align itself with a request of the Homosassa River Alliance for \$4 million appropriations for this project for the 2023/2024 budget year.
- **Southwest Regional Water Reclamation Facility at Sugarmill Woods**
 - This County priority project will reduce withdrawals from Floridan Aquifer by over 0.25 MG per day and eliminate the local golf course's need to draw from their three permitted production wells tapping from the Floridan Aquifer to provide irrigation water. The project is located within the priority focus area of the Chassahowitzka/Homosassa BMAP.
 - Total cost of the project is \$10.5 million. The County share is \$3,435,000 and a Cooperative Funding Initiative is \$2,084,000. The County's legislative request is \$3,981,000.
- **FWC Aquatic Plant Control**
 - The Chamber supports the continued funding of the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission to manage aquatic plants throughout the waterways of Citrus County. These critical funds allow not only for the management of invasive plants like water hyacinths and hydrilla, but also to remove "tussocks" through the Tsala Apopka Chain of Lakes. Tussocks can drift around the lake, block navigational and recreational access, and impede proper flow which can lead to flooding. Locally, TOO FAR Water and Natural Resources Foundation proposes to
 - Remove floating tussocks from a portion (approx. 80 acres) of Todd Lake in the Hernando pool of the Tsala Apopka Chain of Lakes, and
 - To remove floating tussocks from an area (approx. 30 acres) adjacent to the outflow canal on the North side of Lake Tsala Apopka in the Inverness pool.
 - Total cost of the TOO FAR projects is \$1,430,000.
 - The Chamber encourages the Legislature to fund this program in its entirety.

COMMUNICATIONS

Project: 9	Appropriation Request:
Expansion of Broadband Services in Citrus County	Request is for legislative support of the Florida DEO budget to extend broadband services small, rural and underserved communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been recognized for many years that Citrus County has wide areas within the County where internet and/or cell phone service are non-existent, spotty or unreliable. This gap was made increasingly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic when the schools were closed and many students were unable to access the internet to participate in the virtual learning classes conducted by the school system. • Additionally, unreliable methods for communication pose significant concerns from an emergency standpoint when 911 services may be needed. • Internet Service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity received funds last year to conduct a statewide Florida Broadband Internet Speed Test. Although testing is ongoing, results show significant pockets in the northwest and southeast portions of the County that lack decent internet. <p>Florida is expected to receive \$82.5 million through the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund administered by the FCC to allow qualified ISPs to further advance broadband to rural areas across the state. Spectrum has applied for \$5 million to expand broadcast access in Citrus County. The Chamber requests support of the DEO budget for this program.</p>	

SUPPORT FOR HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF CITRUS COUNTY PROJECT

Project: 10	Appropriation Request:
Support Citrus County Habitat for Humanity Project	Consider changes to HOP and SHIP programs provide avenues for Moderate Income families to qualify for financing assistance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chamber is increasingly alarmed at the lack of attainable workforce housing in Florida. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation as people flock to Florida from higher-priced locations to buy here, creating a quickly rising seller's market. Thousands of families are being shut out of the American dream of home ownership and our workforce is finding it increasingly difficult to find decent and safe housing. • The Citrus County Chamber has determined that working with and supporting Habitat for Humanity is one of the best ways to combat this problem. • The current system is working reasonably well for Very Low Income families to qualify for subordinate funding to allow them to afford a Habitat home. The one area Habitat has not found a source of funds is subordinate financing assistance for moderate income families, defined by HUD as families that earn between 81% and 120% of Area Medium Income. This keeps moderate earners out of the system. 	

- A potential solution could be a law change that would authorize both the Florida Housing Finance Corp Home Ownership Program (HOP) and the State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) to include a percentage of applicants that are Medium Income to qualify and help them buy down their required investment and put them in new affordable housing. Citrus County is not unique when it comes to this issue; and it would be a huge help Statewide to providers of income qualified home ownership.

Chamber Support for Local Partner Projects & Priorities

Citrus County

- **Funding State Aid to Public Libraries:** Public libraries are critical to the State's economy, essential to the social infrastructure of our communities, and provide a foundation for success at all levels. The State Aid to Libraries program enables public libraries to provide important services and assistance essential for creating opportunities, ensuring access, and driving innovation. This makes our communities more competitive economically and gives residents the educational tools they need to succeed. The Chamber supports the continuation of this state grant.
- **Sadowski Housing Trust Fund:** SHIP funding under the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund allows local governments to help assist in providing safe, decent, and affordable housing for Florida's at-risk population. It is crucial to Citrus County that funds remain in the Sadowski Fund so that we can continue to assist our most vulnerable population.

City of Crystal River

- **New City Hall Building:** The present City Hall is below the current FEMA base flood elevation and will be as much as 5 feet below flood base elevation when the 2018 FEMA maps go into effect. The Chamber would support the City's request for \$1,500,000 for design and permitting in line with the City's Civic Master Plan
- **Academy of Environmental Science (AES) building repairs:** AES is a top-rated unique Citrus County Charter School for 9th and 10th graders. Although the Academy is a partnership between the State of Florida, Citrus County School Board, the City of Crystal River and AES, the City owns the buildings through a Florida Community Trust Grant and leases it free of charge to AES. Recent engineering reports have revealed that urgent and costly repairs are needed to maintain the safety of the buildings and keep the school open. The Chamber would support a request of the City and AES for urgent repair funds.

City of Inverness

- **Multi-modal Transportation and Bicycle Connectivity:** The City requests support to secure funding for the West Inverness Trail Project to connect other multi-modal resources of the State and major local parks/recreation facilities along the trail. The Chamber would support this request.

Inverness Extension of Citrus YMCA

- Citrus County has a thriving YMCA that opened its doors in 2015. Since that time, its membership levels exceeded all projections; hence, the Y has continued to expand to service the needs of members and Citrus residents alike. An extension of YMCA programs has previously been established on the west side of the county in Crystal River.
 - There is now a need for an extension of YMCA programs on the east side of the county in Inverness. The project would consist of a 10,000 square foot building with the potential to be located on the campus of HCA Florida Citrus Hospital. This is a central location in the Inverness area while providing a convenient YMCA facility for after-school childcare as well as for use by hospital personnel. The cost of the facility is estimated at \$3M. The Chamber supports this project as a recognized need for our community.