



2020 Legislative Priorities

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Citrus County Chamber of Commerce

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TRANSPORTATION / ROAD IMPROVEMENTS:

Suncoast Parkway Extension to US Hwy 19

- With the passage of SB 7068 in 2019 and the creation of the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) Program within the Florida Department of Transportation, the Chamber supports the continued extension of the Suncoast Parkway.
 - The Chamber has long been an advocate for the Suncoast Parkway not to dead end in the middle of Citrus County.
 - As M-CORES now looks to continue the extension to the north, the Chamber urges them to return to the original plan to US Hwy 19 that was widely accepted and vetted.
 - Beyond US Hwy 19, M-CORES will have multiple options for continuing the Suncoast corridor north toward Jefferson County.

Widening of US 41 from SR 44 to SR 200

- Urge the Legislature to continue to allocate construction funding for the widening of US 41 north from the Withlacoochee Trail Bridge to the town of Hernando in line with the Hernando/Citrus MPO's reprioritization of the project to #1 on the MPO list.
 - During the 2019 session, funding was approved for the widening from SR 44 to south of the Withlacoochee Trail Bridge. This section includes one of the most dangerous and congested sections of road in Citrus County incorporating the intersection with Middle School Road that serves Inverness Middle School. The Chamber is pleased and thankful for this funding.
 - The Chamber urges the Legislature to allocate funding to continue the widening from the Bridge to the town of Hernando.

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- As the Suncoast Parkway extension to SR 44 is completed, US 41 will be used more heavily as an arterial road to handle traffic to and from the Parkway. Widening US 41 the entire length between SR 44 and SR 200 becomes even more critical.
- This section of US 41 presently crosses over the Withlacoochee Rails to Trail pathway via a bridge. As the roadway is widened, due to the high usage of the pathway, the Chamber urges that the pathway either cross over the roadway, or under the roadway via a tunnel. It should not have an at-grade crossing at US 41.
- Acquisition of right-of-way property by FDOT is largely completed. The next step, according to the MPO, is to acquire construction funds.
At the Hernando/Citrus MPO meeting on June 18, 2019, the MPO adopted its FY 2019/2020 List of Priority Projects that has the continued US 41 widening to SR 200 as #1 on its list. The Chamber is in full concurrence with this ranking.

Multi-use path along Fort Island Trail

- Urge the Legislature to develop a 5-year plan to construct a 10 – 12-foot-wide multi-use path along Fort Island Trail, and allocate construction funding in the amount of \$9.8 million for Phase 1
 - West Fort Island Trail is a winding 9-mile 2-lane roadway that goes from US Hwy 19 westward along beautiful stretches of salt marsh lands, and over creeks and rivers, culminating at Fort Island Gulf Beach, Citrus County’s only public beach directly on the Gulf of Mexico. It is a popular road for bicyclists, but with only a narrow bike lane along the shoulder of the road, it is also a very dangerous ride, and is even more dangerous for walkers or runners.
 - The Citrus County Board of County Commissioners recently invested \$75,000 into a feasibility plan for the project. The entire cost for the trail is projected to be \$15 – 20 million. The study also which concluded that because of aging of the present bridges along Fort Island Trail and the sensitive environmental areas leading to the beach, the most feasible method for constructing a multi-use path is in a series of stages. This would allow for better coordination between a path and future road improvements.
 - The Chamber supports the County’s request for \$9.8 million for the first phase which is an easy initial step that does not also require road improvements. This first phase would also pass by and serve significant numbers of bicyclists and walkers from the highly popular Plantation on



Crystal River resort past the majority of residential neighborhoods along Fort Island Trail.

- The County and State are working to connect all the trails in the state (the SUN Trail Program). The County is working on a plan to connect the trail that presently ends at CR 486 and SR 44 to Three Sisters Springs Trail. The last section of 10 miles down Hwy 44 W / Fort Island Trail to the beach would truly make Citrus County a part of the coast-to-coast connector and would become a “legacy project” that will improve Citrus County’s tourism draw.

City of Crystal River “Riverwalk”

- Urge the Legislature to support funding toward completion of the City of Crystal River’s “Riverwalk”.
 - The City of Crystal River has completed the first phase of interconnecting the entire north side of Kings Bay with a landward and waterward “Riverwalk”. Once this walkway is completed, all the businesses and properties along the north side of the Bay and Downtown Crystal River will be interconnected with a pedestrian walkway both on and near the water.
 - The first phase was completed last year with City funds and the design and permitting of the second waterward phase is underway.
 - The Chamber is in support of the City’s request to the Legislature for a portion of the remaining project costs for the final leg of Riverwalk construction, parking, boat ramp relocations, and replacement of existing infrastructure.

Kayak Launch in Crystal River

- Urge the Legislature to support funding to improve an existing kayak launch at Kings Bay
 - Over the past decade, Kings Bay has become a popular destination for kayakers, both local and from out of town. The popularity has increased exponentially over the past year due mostly to the recent reduction in the number of allowable kayaks being launched at the headsprings of the Weeki Wachee River as part of the carrying capacity study on that river. Crystal River has become an “overflow” for Weeki Wachee.
 - This has created an issue for the City as the only viable launch site is Hunters Spring Park, a City park and the only public access beach to the river. The conflicts between the kayakers and swimmers continue to increase and is becoming unmanageable.



- Kings Bay is a good alternative for a kayak launch that would reduce the pressure on Hunter Springs Park. The launch would go directly into State waters.
- The Chamber supports the City's request for \$500,000 in Legislative assistance is requested to improve the existing kayak launch at Kings Bay park.

Inverness Airport Business-Industrial Park

- Urge the Legislature to support the request of Citrus County's Economic Development efforts to enhance public infrastructure for the Inverness Airport Business-Industrial Park.
 - Due to its location and accessibility to I-75, the Inverness Airport has been determined to be a prime location for a Business-Industrial Park that will generate good paying jobs for local citizens, and revenue to the County and Inverness Airport. The Chamber stands in support of the County's request for \$6.8 million to develop transportation and water quality infrastructure at the industrial park property adjacent to the Inverness Airport. The vision is for the business park to hold over 650,000 square feet of permit ready space that can assist the County's economic development efforts to result in a more diverse and vibrant economy for its citizens.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION / RESTORATION:

Water quality

- Support the budgets of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and any other agencies that may provide funding for the following:
 - The Crystal River / Kings Bay Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Plan developed by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and continue springs funding through SWFWMD and through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to convert septic to sewer.
 - The continued cleanup and restoration of King's Bay by Save Crystal River (SCR). The initial four years of SCR's work within designated canals in the King's Bay area has demonstrated sustainable success. Their success has since become a model for other communities seeking to clean their waters. Continued funding of SCR will permit its work to progress throughout King's Bay and restore the habitat and water quality to become self-renewing.
 - Restore funding for tussock removal and restoration of the Tsala Apopka Lakes region



- Continued funding for water quality projects on a local level, such as the extension of sewer throughout the Old Homosassa area.
- Expansion of central wastewater collection systems in areas within the first order magnitude spring sheds that are served by reclaimed water treatment facilities
- Cleanup of the Homosassa River

HEALTHCARE:

Support the Establishment of a Mental Health Crisis Stabilization Unit and Residential Unit

- The Citrus County Chamber recognizes the tremendous negative impact that mental health and illness issues play within our community and our workforce.
- We thank the Legislature for its appropriation of \$600,000 in 2019 in non-recurring funds to establish a Baker Act Central Receiving Facility in Citrus County. We also thank the Legislature for its appropriation of \$920,000 for Project SHINE under the Citrus County School System.
- However, while the need for a global approach to treating and healing mental health concerns that integrates family support, schools, public health, community awareness, housing stability, worker training and job options remains the ultimate goal, the immediate need for a local Mental Health Crisis Stabilization and Residential Unit remains and we support the request of LifeStream to help Citrus County establish a 10-bed crisis stabilization unit. Many leaders in our community are part of a public/private partnership that are working together to assist in this effort.

OTHER:

Historic Old Hernando Elementary School

- Restore \$396,400 in funding for completion of renovations to the historic Old Hernando Elementary School located at the intersection of US 41 and CR 486
 - The Old Hernando Elementary School is a historic site located at 2435 North Florida Avenue in Hernando, FL. A school has been located at the site since the late 1800s.
 - The Old Hernando Elementary School is a Colonial Revival style building that was designed by noted architect Henry L. Taylor whose Florida design credits include several notable buildings in St. Petersburg constructed during the land boom of the 1920's, including the Vinoy Park Hotel and the Florida Theater. When the Great Depression hit Florida, Taylor found work as designer for buildings funded through the federal relief programs of the Roosevelt administration, such as the



WPA and the PWA. The Hernando Elementary School, designed in 1940, was one of Taylor's last Florida designs.

- Around 2001, the school board planned to demolish the school. It was saved by the grass-roots efforts of a group of citizens, who eventually formed the Hernando Heritage Council of the Citrus County Historical Society. The council persuaded the school board to donate the school and the grounds to the county, keeping it in public ownership. On May 4, 2001, it was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, NRIS #00001129. The council is continuing to restore the historic school, which includes a community center and will also include a museum when it is complete.
- Restoration efforts have been ongoing since 2001 and significant funds have already been spent on this project in a depressed area of county. During the previous two years, the state legislature appropriated \$396,400 toward the efforts, but it was vetoed as part of the final budget. Completing the restoration will create positive return in the area of economic development and the potential for increased jobs.