



## **2021 CITY OF VENICE STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

The City of Venice wishes to express its gratitude to the Florida State Legislature for its work to provide the best and highest quality of life for residents of the state and especially, residents of Venice. We are greatly thankful for previous support of road reconstruction, beach renourishment, and other actions for the benefit of our citizens. The following needs have been identified by Venice City Council. The City of Venice requests your help with these important projects:

### **COVID-19 Assistance**

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unforeseen and unanticipated public health and economic emergency worldwide. The City of Venice's priority is the health and welfare of our citizens above all other considerations, along with the health and welfare of the City's first responders (Fire, EMS and Police).

The City needs access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies for our first responders, and urge the State to support all small local municipalities in obtaining the needed supply. COVID-19 has had major economic impacts that will be felt for years to come. The City requests state assistance in helping small local municipalities by providing financial aid for economic recovery, so the City of Venice can continue to provide needed services for our citizens.

### **Water System Infrastructure – Booster Station Acquisition**

Venice owns and operates a municipal water system, providing potable water to customers within the City. A major feature of the water system infrastructure is a booster station located in a low-lying area proximate to a public park.

The population growth in the Venice area is rapid. Within City boundaries, 5,000 new residential properties are planned. The booster station is old and its capacity is challenged. The rapid development of residential and commercial properties, including a new hospital, will further tax the system's ability to deliver a safe level of water to its residential and commercial customers.

The City purchased 39 acres of land in anticipation of expanding demands on municipal services, and has committed 6 to 10 acres of that parcel for the construction of a new booster station. The acreage is located in the northeast section, the fastest-growing area of the City. Its location will perfectly suit the increasing growth and ensure a safe and reliable level of potable water to a new hospital and residential developments.

In addition to the benefits of upgrading the domestic water supply to citizens, the booster station project includes an important environmental feature – adequate land is being provided to install a solar array to power the plant. The alternative energy supply will reduce the carbon footprint and serve as a model for future municipal capital projects. Also, the new facility will incorporate an interconnect with the Sarasota County water system to provide an emergency failsafe source of water in case of a system outage.

Finally, consistent with the City's and County's proactive approach to disaster recovery, the booster station will be constructed to function as an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for utility services (water, wastewater, reclaimed water). In this capacity, the facility will complement the City's overall disaster management and recovery plan.

The system is projected to cost \$11,500,000, not counting the land acquired to support the project. The 10 acres of land is valued at \$250,000. The City of Venice requests legislative assistance of \$1,000,000 to support this multi-functional utility asset.

### **Public Safety – Emergency Operations Center**

The City of Venice bonded the construction of a modern public safety facility to house the Venice Police Department and to function as an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for the community in the event of natural or manmade disaster. The facility, including land acquisition, site preparation, engineering, design and construction was exclusively supported with local funding. The emergency operations component of the facility has programmed space within the facility, but due to budgetary considerations, was not provided requisite equipment and operating supplies.

As a Gulf Coast community, the City is vulnerable to storms, floods, hurricanes and associated weather risks. To properly equip the new EOC as a critically functioning emergency asset, the City requests state funding in the amount of \$250,000. These funds will support the purchase of tactical, electronic and communications equipment for the EOC and its designated leadership team.

## **Beach Renourishment**

Renourishing the beach serves to protect the safety and welfare of this Florida coastal community. Renourishment is important for storm protection, marine turtle nesting and as a tourism and economic driver. The City of Venice appreciates the funding that has been received to date, including annual physical monitoring that is currently funded under an active state grant agreement.

The City requests ongoing legislative support for the statewide beach renourishment and inlet management program, as this will provide funding availability as we move toward our next renourishment event in 2025. The City also continues to support the state as it seeks new methods to resolve erosion issues.

## **Affordable Housing**

Area businesses including critical service providers like the local hospital have conveyed to the City that they have difficulty in hiring and retaining employees due to a lack of affordable housing. Additionally, local land and construction costs preclude developers from creating residential units at affordable prices for low- and moderate-income workers. It should be possible for working families and our more vulnerable citizens to afford housing and still have enough money for basic expenses like groceries and gas. Further, it has been reported that more than \$2 billion has been diverted from the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund in the last 10 years alone – some on tax breaks, some on balancing the budget, some on pet projects. The City believes this money should be returned to the Trust and spent on affordable workforce housing.

The City of Venice respectfully requests state appropriations for programs that support acquisition of property and construction of housing units that are affordable to low- and middle-income residents (lower strata income workers). The City also requests an increase in funding for CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) and HOME partnership programs to assist in these endeavors.

## **Support Home Rule**

The City of Venice requests the support of legislation that provides for Home Rule authority for cities and counties to make decisions that reflect the unique needs of the community and the wishes of its citizens.

1. It is imperative that the state **not impose unfunded mandates or reduce the revenue of local governments** by reducing taxes, such as the Communication Services Tax and the Business Tax, or through the \$50,000 Homestead Exemption, that affect local government.

2. Provide further relief from the current requirements in funding 175 and 185 pension plans, which can only be used for enhancements to existing contracts.

3. Repeal of the state law that prohibits Home Rule in regard to new short-term rental ordinances or amending existing ordinances.

### **Increase Programs to Help Homeless, Mental Illness and Addiction, Especially for Veterans**

Because a lack of social services increases problems for society, especially for the homeless, those with mental illness, and those with alcohol and drug addictions, the Florida Legislature is encouraged to find means of helping these citizens – with a focus on veterans – in dire need of services. Having homelessness in a community undermines the welfare of all residents.

Developing jobs, reinstating state mental health treatment facilities, and increasing opportunities for veterans and others to receive help to be able to become independent and self-sufficient are examples of ways to improve society now and in the future.