



2022 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:

Water Quality Treatment – Stormwater Management

A Stormwater Outfall Monitoring and Water Quality Treatment Project was initiated in the City of Venice in Fiscal Year 2020. Phase 2 of this multi-year project involves a systematic sampling of outfalls within the City by employing equipment that measures the discharge flow rate and subsequent water quality analysis. The project includes sampling during rain events at the top 5 priority outfalls in Venice. This project phase also includes the preliminary design of construction projects to provide water quality treatment prior to discharge.

This specific project phase is the continuation of a seven-year program to implement water quality improvement projects to reduce pollutant loading from nutrients and bacteria discharge into the Gulf of Mexico as a mitigation to red tide and “no swim” notices at local beaches. This multi-year project is dedicated to improving critical water resources and protecting the beaches as the No. 1 economic driver of Venice and surrounding areas.

Request: The City’s next step (phase 3 of this project) is a priority water quality initiative for Venice. The City respectfully requests the state’s continued support as we move into this phase of the project to improve water quality and the overall ecology in our shoreline community.

Critical Evacuation Route Protection

Florida Senate Bill 1954, approved by Gov. DeSantis in May 2021, established the Resilient Florida Grant Program. This new grant, administered by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), provides funding to counties and municipalities to perform vulnerability assessments, community resilience planning, and projects to adapt critical assets to the effects of flooding and sea level rise.

The City is grateful for the Resilient Florida Grant Program and state grant funding previously provided to complete Phase 1 of the Coastal Resiliency Plan. In phase 2, the initial project for design and construction of the Tarpon Center Seawall/Road Rehabilitation Project will seek to upgrade aged infrastructure and provide buffering and protection from storm surge and sea level rise along a critical evacuation route. Water quality, bicycle/pedestrian access, roadway, utility and stormwater

improvements will be incorporated into the project to maximize the impacts of grant funds. For FY22-23, the state has \$20 million available for planning grants, which include vulnerability assessments and adaptation/resilience plans, with no cost share required. \$500 million from the American Rescue Plan Act is available via the Resilient Florida Grant Program for implementation/adaptation grants to fund projects that mitigate the risks of flooding or sea level rise.

Request: The City requests continued support for the Phase 2 Resiliency Plan and completion of local implementation projects.

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.

Request: The booster station 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, innovative, state-of-the-art utility asset.

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.

Request: The City of Venice 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.

Support Home Rule – Regulate Open Burning

Home Rule is a cornerstone of local government. It is included in Florida’s Constitution and was implemented by the Florida State Legislature in 1973. The City of Venice recognizes the critical value of this legislative concept and supports initiatives to properly and judiciously protect and apply its principles. In support of the principles of Home Rule, the City of Venice requests legislative approval of local authority to better regulate open burning as described below:

The process of clearing land and removal of vegetative debris is regulated by the State of Florida, Division of Forestry, which issues burn permits subject to inspection. Land developers utilize this process as an efficient means of disposing of felled trees and cleared underbrush. Depending on the density of the land being cleared, debris burning can operate for weeks or even months. In locations where existing residential developments abut site burning, the smoke and pollutants emanating from the opening burning can have a pronounced debilitating effect. In Venice, where annexation of forested and highly vegetative land areas is occurring at rapid rate, residential neighborhoods proximate to these development sites are experiencing the negative effects of open burning. Elected officials and staff members are routinely confronted by angry citizens pleading for relief of the air-polluting open burning.

Venice is an attractive community for home ownership and accordingly, developers are working with the City to expand its geographic boundaries and convert undeveloped lands into refined residential neighborhoods. Although often vigorously debated, the City recognizes the inherent benefit of smartly managed growth. City leaders also appreciate the rights and privileges of property owners. These comments are not intended to alter the right of property owners to develop their lands. However, when the quality of life and health and safety benefits of abutting properties are measurably impacted in land clearing, then opportunities for compromise should be explored.

In a recent residential development project, the contractor agreed to chip and remove vegetative debris instead of burning on site in deference to neighbors’ request. The conversion of process added a modest cost to the development project; however, the spirit of compromise led to a successful and well-received new neighborhood.

Request: Without interfering with the right of the state to inspect open burn permits for safety and proper procedure, the City of Venice requests legislative approval of a provision for the municipality to first review, and if appropriate, deny a request for open burning when conditions suggest impairment of the health and quality of life conditions of its citizenry. Such authority and determination would be exercised in the local site and development process where planners and developers would work together and coordinate alternative land clearing processes. It is the City’s position that the intent of Home Rule suggests the exercise of such local prerogatives is proper when the health and safety of its residents are impacted.

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. The City asks that the State Legislature direct the appropriate use of the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund toward achievement of this goal.

Request: The City of Venice 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.

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.

Request: To properly equip the new EOC as a critically functioning emergency asset, the City of Venice 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.

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.

Request: The City of Venice requests support for 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.