



Legislative Agenda

2024



Lee County
Southwest Florida

Lee Board of County Commissioners
2115 Second Street | Fort Myers, Florida 33901



2024 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA INTRODUCTION

This document represents the 2024 Florida Legislative Session Agenda of the Lee County Board of County Commissioners. While these priorities guide the County's advocacy efforts in Tallahassee, they are not exhaustive and new issues may arise or evolve that will require Board attention.

Issues are not ranked in order of priority. Commissioners, staff, and contract lobbyists will pursue all legislative policies approved by the Board and place appropriate priority on the issues according to opportunities that arise during the legislative process. As usual, Lee County Commissioners emphasize maintaining home rule authority and opposing cost shifts or unfunded mandates.

The state legislative session will begin January 9, 2024 and conclude March 8, 2024.

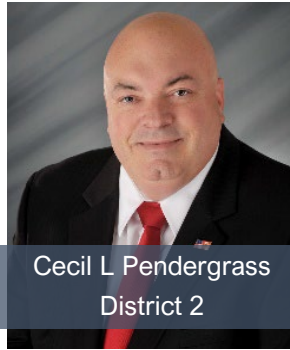
CONTENTS

- SUMMARY OF LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES
- SUPPORT AND TRACKING ISSUES
- BACKUP MATERIAL

Lee Board of County Commissioners



Kevin Ruane
District 1



Cecil L. Pendergrass
District 2



Ray Sandelli
District 3



Brian Hamman
District 4



Mike Greenwell
District 5



2024 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

PRIORITIES

1) Hurricane Ian Recovery and Resilience –

- a. **SUPPORT** modifying the terms of Florida Department of Commerce’s Local Government Emergency Bridge Loans made to jurisdictions impacted by Hurricanes Ian and Nicole. Currently, Lee County’s \$25 million emergency loan must be fully repaid within two (2) years or incur interest at ten percent (10%) annually. The County is seeking a ten (10) year, interest free repayment term.
- b. **SUPPORT** appropriating \$15 million for Lee County Utilities Fort Myers Beach Water Reclamation Facility restoration and capacity enhancement project. The estimated cost to provide a resilient facility for uninterrupted treatment of domestic wastewater to a coastal community is \$209 million.
- c. **SUPPORT** appropriating \$5 million for construction of public safety radio towers. These towers will support continuity of operations during an emergency and prevent wide-spread communications outages in the wake of a natural disaster.
- d. **SUPPORT** appropriating \$3 million for permanent repairs of traffic signals. Hurricane Ian caused nearly \$17 million worth of damage to Lee County’s traffic signal system.
- e. **SUPPORT** appropriating \$10 million for hardening traffic signals to mitigate against future harm. Approximately 400 of 447 traffic signals in Lee County were damaged by Hurricane Ian.

2) SUPPORT Appropriations for Lee County Local Support Projects –

- a. **Septic Conversion in Billy Creek and Orange River Impaired Water Area – \$2.5 million**
Convert 98 parcels within the Caloosahatchee BMAP to central sewer in order to reduce the volume of harmful nutrients that leach into natural waterways. (\$2 million local match)
- b. **WTE Fly Ash Separation – \$3.35 million**
Reconfigure and modernize the ash collection and processing systems of the County’s existing Waste-to-Energy (WTE) Facility in order to enhance recycling efforts and diminish the amount of material deposited in landfills. (\$3.35 million local match)
- c. **Public Access and Amenities for Nature Preserves and Parks – \$1,525,000**
 - i) Design and permit trails and related amenities for Oak Hammock Preserve, Four Mile Cove Preserve, Pine Lake Preserve and West Marsh Preserve; and ii) Design and construct a boardwalk at Bonita Beach Dog Park. (\$750,000 local match)
- d. **Estero Blvd (Fort Myers Beach) Crosswalk Lighting – \$3,669,710**
Lighting of 42 cross walks along Estero Boulevard from Crescent Street to Big Carlos Pass Bridge using FDOT Wildlife Lighting fixtures. This final phase of the reconstruction is being coordinated with the Town’s roadway lighting project that just received State grant funding.

2024 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The Lee County Board of Commissioners advocates for the preservation of local home rule and opposes any legislation, policies or regulations that would impose unfunded responsibilities upon the County.

SUPPORT ISSUES

911 Systems – **SUPPORT** maintaining oversight of 911 systems and networks at the County level, including approval of expenditures. **SUPPORT** legislation and funding to further regionalize Next Generation 911 systems to improve redundancy and resiliency in the face of disasters.

Affordable Housing – **SUPPORT** using all Sadowski Housing Trust Funds for Florida’s SHIP and SAIL program.

Bacteria TMDLs - **SUPPORT** a thorough and methodical approach to bacteria Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) development for individual waterbodies based on adequate data regarding source identification, as opposed to the general consolidated statewide approach.

Beach Nourishment – **SUPPORT** full funding of the program for annual ranking of beach projects for state cost-sharing and continued use of the current ranking criteria.

Biosolids – **SUPPORT** exploratory state programs for funding new state-of-the-art wastewater technologies while maintaining ability to use properly treated biosolids as a fertilizer supplement or soil amendment, subject to regulatory requirements that have been established to protect public health and the environment. Lee County has invested more than \$15 million to create Class AA infrastructure—the state’s highest quality specifications—to better manage human wastewater.

Bob Janes Empowerment Center – **SUPPORT** reestablishing funding for the Criminal Justice, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Local Matching Grant Program; and **SUPPORT** an allocation from the CJMHSAs to support Empowerment Center operations.

Caloosahatchee River and Estuary Protection – **SUPPORT** continued, dedicated state funding for:

- The C-43 Reservoir Construction Project, which is critical to the health of the Caloosahatchee Estuary and continued funding by the State is imperative until construction is completed;
- Completion of the water quality component of the C-43 Reservoir Project;
- Implementation of the “Boma” water quality pilot project on property purchased jointly by Lee County and the South Florida Water Management District; and
- South Florida Water Management District to continue progress with Lake Hicpochee Phase II.

Elected County Executive – **OPPOSE** preemption of the Lee County Charter’s appointed County Manager form of government. **OPPOSE** any legislation pertaining to an elected county executive (administrator, manager or mayor).

Emergency Management – **SUPPORT** additional funding for statewide emergency management systems and initiatives, including emergency notification systems, coordination platforms, and communications infrastructure.

EMS Balance Billing – **OPPOSE** limitations on the ability of county EMS providers to seek reimbursement for out-of-network transports. **SUPPORT** requirements for private insurers to pay local governments for the actual cost of emergency service delivery based on audits of expenditures by the Agency for Health Care Administration.

EMS Regulation – **SUPPORT** maintaining a countywide regulatory system for EMS transport through the current Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) process.

Harmful Algal Blooms – **SUPPORT** state initiatives that address the proliferation of harmful algal blooms such as blue-green algae and red tide.

Library Programs

- *Library Cooperative Grant* – **SUPPORT** robust funding. Lee County, which is part of the Southwest Florida Library Network cooperative, benefits from staff training programs, courier services, and interlibrary loan privileges that allow patrons to borrow materials from other library systems at no cost.
- *State Aid to Libraries Grant* – **SUPPORT** continued funding. Since FY 12/13, Lee County has received more than \$7 million, and the estimated award for FY 23/24 is \$472,870.
- *Public Library Construction Grants* – **SUPPORT** continued funding.
- *Smart Horizons Career Online High School Funding* – **SUPPORT** a recurring appropriation that allows adult students to complete a private, accredited high school diploma and career certificate through participating public library systems in order to prepare them for success in the workforce.

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) – **SUPPORT** clarification of legislative intent of the PACE statute and a county’s authority to regulate a section 163.01(7) entity’s activity within its jurisdiction; **SUPPORT** legislative affirmation of a local government’s home rule authority to regulate the PACE entities operating within its boundaries under section 163.08.

Regional Planning Councils – **SUPPORT** legislation to allow counties to opt out of mandatory membership.

Resiliency/Flood Mitigation – **SUPPORT** state and federal resiliency efforts to identify and address vulnerabilities to public infrastructure and public safety through continued funding of planning and capital improvements.

State Transportation Trust Fund (STTF) – **SUPPORT** increased funding, greater flexibility, and predictable funding for transit projects for STTF and the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund (TDTF) grant funds.

VISIT FLORIDA – **SUPPORT** continued funding for Visit Florida, which is committed to supporting the areas of the state that were most severely impacted by Hurricane Ian.

Water Management Basin Boundaries – **SUPPORT** updating boundaries of water basin districts according to hydrological conditions to ensure that taxpayers are contributing to the sub-district that best serves them and that water management districts are providing equitable service to all basins. **SUPPORT** implementing the study commissioned by the legislature to scientifically determine the boundaries of Big Cypress Basin.

Waste-to-Energy Program – **SUPPORT** funding the Municipal Solid Waste-to-Energy Program to provide financial assistance grants and incentive grants to counties that operate municipal solid waste-to-energy facilities. Created in 2022, the \$100 million/year program has not yet been funded.

Water Well and Septic-to-Sewer Conversion – **SUPPORT** recurring funding for conversion programs designed to move private wells to potable drinking water and private septic tanks to public wastewater collection systems. **SUPPORT** greater flexibility for programs that address the costs incurred by residents connecting to sewer and the proper abandonment of septic systems.