
TO: Board of County Commissioners

FROM: George Glenn Jr, Ken Grudens, David Cox, Dan Lampson

DATE: February 10, 2020

RE: A Request to the Trust for Public Land for Technical Advice and Assistance

On behalf of the environmental community of Indian River County, it is requested that the Board of County Commissioners authorize the Chairman to write to the Trust for Public Land requesting technical advice and assistance pertaining to the potential issuance of a new bond to purchase environmentally significant lands in Indian River County.

DESCRIPTION

The environmental community, including the Indian River Land Trust, Indian River Neighborhood Association, Pelican Island Audubon Society, Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County, Friends of the St. Sebastian River, and the Pelican Island Preservation Society, have officially adopted policy positions supporting the issuance of a new bond authorized by referendum to provide a source of revenue to purchase permanent interests in environmentally significant lands throughout our County.

Members of the environmental community identified the November 2020 general election as an opportunity to put to the voters a renewal of environmentally significant land acquisition bonding because the 2004 environmental bonds will be satisfied in September 2021. If voters approve the issuance of bonds this year, those bonds would not be issued until the existing bonds are paid off next year; the goal being that property owners would not see an additional line item on their property tax bill. Rather, it would be a continuation of an existing tax line.

Environmentally significant lands exist in the County that have already been identified by local and state agencies for preservation. Those include lands identified on the Florida Forever conservation list, the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, the St. Johns River Water Management District priority list, and Indian River County's own priorities, such as protecting tracts along the St. Sebastian River Greenway.

Our population is growing, and development is occurring to handle the new residents moving to our wonderful County. Growth means jobs for which we are thankful. Growth, however, comes with negative impacts as well. Something that has made Indian River County special over the years was a recognition by it's elected officials and residents that as we develop and grow, we should also set aside some of our best areas to be conserved. That is the impetus of a potential new bond referendum.

To support of our efforts, we are requesting that the Trust for Public Land ("TPL") provide technical advice and assistance in the form of feasibility research, public opinion polling, and program recommendations. The public opinion poll is very important to the process. The professional polling will look at the *current situation* to find whether voters would support a new bond program.

If the polling does not demonstrate a certain level of support from the public to move forward, this effort will likely be suspended by the environmental organizations.

TPL provided support to Indian River County for its 2004 bond referendum. Their experience is second-to-none, and they pride themselves on a high success rate for projects that move forward after polling confirms support. TPL is not inexpensive, but the good news to Indian River County is that the \$51,000 price tag will be paid by a private grant and donations from the environmental organizations identified above.

However, a letter is required from the Chairman, authorized by the Board, requesting advice and assistance from TPL to trigger the availability of a grant that could provide up to \$30,000 towards the \$51,000 price tag. Indian River County will reap the benefit of TPL's work, but will not be responsible for the costs and nothing would oblige the County to move forward once it receives TPL's information.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Indian River County Conservation Finance Proposal
2. Draft letter from Indian River County to TPL