

To: Ken Grudens, Executive Director, Indian River Land Trust
From: Will Abberger, Vice President, Director, Conservation Finance and
Wendy Muzzy, Director, Feasibility Research
Date: February 5, 2020
Re: Indian River County Conservation Finance Proposal

Adequate funding is a challenge for all park and conservation-related activities. The Trust for Public Land's (TPL) Conservation Finance program helps communities and agencies identify and raise public funds for parks and land conservation from state and local sources. TPL provides professional, technical assistance services to local governments, special districts, and others that need to research and evaluate the feasibility of park and land conservation finance options. Since 1996, TPL has been involved in more 572 successful ballot measures that have created more than \$79 billion in new funding for parks and conservation. Voters have approved 82 percent of the ballot measures supported by TPL.

In Florida, The Trust for Public Land has worked on 32 successful bond, sales tax, or property tax campaigns to create new funding for parks and conservation to benefit Florida local governments. TPL also provided the campaign leadership for the 2014 citizens' initiative, Florida's Water and Land Conservation amendment to the state Constitutional ("Amendment 1"), to provide dedicated state funding for land and water conservation, and ecosystem management, and restoration. This effort passed with 75 percent voter approval on the 2014 ballot. In 2004, TPL worked with Indian River County and land conservation advocates in the community design and win voter approval for a \$50 million bond that has funded the county's successful land conservation program. The measure passed with 67 percent "Yes." Most recently, in November 2018, TPL was four for four, winning voter approval for all of bond referenda we supported: Sarasota County (\$65 million) and the Cities of Cape Coral (\$150 million), New Smyrna Beach (\$15 million), and Doral (\$60 million). The total new funding for conservation and parks in Florida that TPL has helped to generate well exceeds \$10 billion.

Conservation funding is a very tangible step communities can take to guide land use, manage growth, provide recreation amenities, and protect natural landscapes and critical ecosystems. Given the substantial investment of time and resources required to develop and implement a public funding strategy, TPL employs our tried and true conservation finance methodology of sound research

to understand conservation options and voter attitudes followed by strategic campaigns that effectively communicate key messages. TPL provides policy and fiscal analysis, public opinion research, technical assistance, strategic recommendations, and legislative drafting, often followed by legislative or ballot measure campaigns.

PHASE I

Feasibility Research

The hallmark of TPL's Conservation Finance work is feasibility research. Conservation finance feasibility studies identify and assess the potential for a range of funding strategies that are realistic and that would substantially increase public funding to address the community's conservation and restorations needs. Typical components of a comprehensive feasibility analysis include: an assessment of existing funding programs; identification of an array of strategies and funding mechanisms to complement existing programs; exploration of the legal and political processes for implementation; and evaluation of the feasibility of various alternatives by analyzing factors such as ballot measure history, constitutional and statutory limitations, and fiscal conditions and forecasts. The reports are based on original research by TPL, as well as a review of existing research and analysis. These reports serve as the foundation for discussions with key stakeholders, policy-makers, partners, and the general public.

TPL proposes to research and analyze a range of public finance options that the Indian River County may consider for conservation land acquisition and management. For each relevant local funding option, TPL will examine the revenue-raising capacity, the fiscal impact to government budgets and/or taxpayers, and how such options are implemented. TPL also proposes to provide examples of where and how these mechanisms have been used by other jurisdictions. While implementation procedures vary around the country, many broad-based tax and bond mechanisms require voter approval. As such, TPL also proposes to research election results to examine whether the electorate has supported or opposed spending public funds for parks and open space, or other priorities, in the past, as well as voter turnout trends. This analysis will require the assistance of Indian River County staff to provide financial documents, such as budgets, bond-offering statements, capital spending plans, tax assessment rolls, and relevant comprehensive or open space plans. The research will examine both the most likely funding options (broad-based tax and bond mechanisms capable of generating significant funding) as well as other possible alternative public finance options.

Specifically research will include:

- a review of county authority to generate revenue for land conservation including rates, limits, and pathways for implementation;
- revenue generation capacity estimates (i.e., how much money could be generated from a specific mechanism, who pays, and cost per household/taxpayer);
- analysis of procedures for enactment, including special legislation if needed;
- analysis of election requirements for placing a finance mechanism before county voters; and
- a summary of relevant funding programs implemented by other jurisdictions in the state.

TPL staff will make a presentation of key research findings to county staff and interested partners, as well as elected officials, as needed.

PHASE II

Public Opinion Survey

Typically, feasibility research is followed by a public opinion survey to determine voter attitudes towards finance mechanism identified in the feasibility research and inform decisions about ballot measure design, ballot language, and a possible ballot measure campaign.

By conducting a poll and analyzing the results, TPL helps determine when the time is right to seek voter support, how to design a measure, where to allocate communications resources, and whose support matters the most. While polls are not crystal balls, they can be a road map to success -- and one of the most important investments parks and open space advocates can make. TPL's has the largest database of voter attitudes towards parks and conservation in the country. Using results from successful surveys across the country, TPL has developed a unique parks and land conservation polling "library" that provides insight into voter concerns and allows us to test and fine-tune the most compelling conservation themes for each community's unique demographics. Our Conservation Finance staff are highly skilled at designing, directing, and interpreting polls, having worked on literally hundreds of surveys. As noted above, our feasibility research provides comprehensive demographic, political, and electoral research used to frame the most effective survey questions. We

work the country's leading Republican and Democratic polling firms to conduct our telephone surveys.

After completing the Feasibility Study, if the county and local partners agree that the local political environment is favorable to proceed, TPL will contract with a qualified public opinion survey firm to conduct a professionally administered, statistically valid public opinion survey, through telephone interviews of randomly selected voters in the county. Private funding of the poll provides TPL with the ability to keep results confidential if necessary.

The poll will be designed to test the following:

- specific ballot language and the level of voter support for a land conservation funding measure;
- alternative funding sources and amounts;
- purposes for the use of funds the voters find most compelling;
- timing, i.e., when is the best time to bring a measure to voters; and
- various accountability measures that may be incorporated into the measure.

TPL staff will make a presentation of key poll results to county staff and interested partners, as well as elected officials, as needed.

Program Recommendations

The feasibility research and public opinion survey will provide the knowledge base to inform deliberations about the most appropriate finance mechanism, the amount and duration of financing, expenditure priorities, and public accountability, as well as election timing and ballot language for mechanisms that would require a public vote.

TPL will provide recommendations for a public finance strategy to address the need to create reliable funding for parks, trails, and land conservation. If the county decides to move forward with a ballot measure, TPL will advise on the drafting the ballot language, including state and local requirements, examples of successful ballot questions, and consultation with legal counsel as necessary.

This proposal does not include the costs associated with the voter education effort that would be necessary if a measure is referred to the ballot.



Budget

Expenses

Feasibility Research	\$20,000
Public Opinion Survey	\$22,000
Program Recommendations	\$5,000
Travel & Presentations	<u>\$4,000</u>
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$51,000

Revenue

National foundation/TPL donors (anticipated)	
Feasibility Research and Program Rec'd	\$20,000
Public Opinion Survey	\$10,000
Local private contributions (to be raised)	<u>\$21,000</u>
TOTAL REVENUE	\$51,000