

May 28, 2020

(Via email)

The Honorable Susan Adams, Chairman
The Honorable Joseph Fleshcer, Vice-Chairman
The Honorable Peter O'Bryan
The Honorable Bob Solari
The Honorable Tim Zorc

1801 27th St.
Vero Beach, FL 32960

Re: Environmental Lands Bond Referendum

Dear Indian River County Commissioners,

Last year, environmentally minded organizations from around Indian River County agreed that the best way to continue to protect our land and waters was to purchase some of the remaining environmentally significant, yet unprotected lands in our county. A 2020 environmental bond referendum would ask voters to support a new bond issuance at a level that would have kept a tax-neutral line item on property owners' existing tax bill. The timing was right as the bonds from the 2004 voter-approved environmental land acquisition program were to be satisfied in 2021. However, the current pandemic has created complications that compel postponement.

We know the BCC acts prudently with taxpayer funds to ensure maximum return. Our environmental coalition believes that protecting environmentally significant lands provides a great return for our county, and that a majority of the BCC would likely agree. Nevertheless, with the economic uncertainty created by COVID-19, we have suspended our efforts to promote the local referendum. The environmental coalition will meet in 2021 and determine if the time seems right to restart a campaign to place the measure on the 2022 ballot.

Indian River County, like the rest of Florida, has experienced sharp growth over the last twenty years. In 2000, the County's population was nearly 110,000 residents. By 2010, that number had grown to 138,000, and today the County's population stands at approximately 160,000. We can no longer rely on growth management oversight from state and regional agencies to ensure that environmentally significant lands stay protected. The only way to protect land is to purchase the land or its development rights for conservation.

There are many privately owned, environmentally significant properties throughout the county. The State of Florida alone has identified, as part of their conservation programs, five ranches in the county in need of protection. The State has also identified properties along the Indian River Lagoon worthy of saving. In addition, there are properties along the St. Sebastian River and other areas east of Interstate 95 that could, and should, be protected for future generations.

Protecting our land is protecting our water. The single greatest action to protect our water quality and quantity is to preserve land before it is developed. Protected lands provide residents and visitors amenities for hiking, hunting, wildlife-watching and other passive recreational opportunities. Natural protected land also creates increased property values for nearby lands.

Indian River County used to be widely known for its citrus and the Dodgers, but with citrus under siege and the Dodgers gone, we are now best known as a county that “is not like South Florida.” We *are different* from the rest of South Florida because of our natural environment and our regulated growth; let’s permanently protect those qualities.

We look forward with working with you in the future to maintain and enhance our natural environment.

Very truly yours,

Indian River Land Trust

By: /s/ Ken Grudens
Ken Grudens

Indian River Neighborhood Association and Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County

By: /s/ Dan Lamson
Dan Lamson

Pelican Island Audubon Society and Pelican Island Conservation Society

By: /s/ David Cox
David Cox, Ph.D.

Pelican Island Audubon Society

By: /s/ George Glenn Jr.
George Glenn Jr.

cc. Jason Brown
Phil Matson