

2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



MYMANATEE.ORG

MANATEE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



**Commissioner
Carol Ann Felts
District 1**



**Commissioner
Amanda Ballard
District 2**



**Commissioner
Tal Siddique
District 3**



**Commissioner
Mike Rahn
District 4**



**Commissioner
Dr. Bob McCann
District 5**



**Commissioner
Jason Bearden
District 6 - At Large**



**Commissioner
George Kruse, Chair
District 7 - At Large**

LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

Senate District 20: Senator Jim Boyd

Senate District 22: Senator Joe Gruters

House District 70: Representative Michael Owen

House District 71: Representative William Robinson

House District 72: Representative Bill Conerly

MEMBERSHIPS IN LEGISLATIVE ALLIANCES

Florida Association of Counties
National Association of Counties
Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan
Planning Association

Florida Department of Transportation
Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council
Florida Gulf Consortium
Manasota League of Cities

APPROPRIATION NO. 1:

Veterans Resource Hub & Memorial Park

(recently named Valor Commons)

Valor Commons is a 24-acre, north county property site being developed as a community asset where every veteran and their family will be welcomed home, supported in transition and empowered to thrive with dignity, purpose and connection. This regional project will set a standard for future veteran-supportive projects, integrating a veterans' community resource center as a one-stop location for many aspects of healing, reflection and community activities.

Current site work is focused on infrastructure and utilities and initiating provision of veteran-benefit services, peer and caregiver support and designing business incubator and entrepreneurship resources. Site work will be phased and feature community-driven memorials, armed forces installations, walking trails and serene spaces for reflection and remembrance. The completed site will include private event space and educational opportunities for public and civic engagement.

Initially launched as a Manatee County Government-led initiative, the project will transition to an independently managed and governed nonprofit entity, ensuring sustainability and growth. The County is requesting \$3 million in state funding toward the \$40 million total project cost. It was previously included as a 2025 legislative priority.

Department:	Government Relations
Total Project Cost:	\$40 million
Funding Request:	\$3 million
Purpose:	Centralized services and memorial space for veterans and families
Location:	5431 Buckeye Road, Palmetto



APPROPRIATION NO. 2:

Fresh Start, Phase 2

Department:	Manatee County Sheriff's Office
Total Project Cost:	\$10 million
Funding Request:	\$2.5 million
Purpose:	Renovation of facility to permanently house the Fresh Start services
Location:	1022 26th Ave E, Bradenton 34208

Fresh Start, Phase 2 is a critical initiative led by the Manatee County Sheriff's Office to establish a permanent facility for emergency shelter and wraparound services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Located at 1022 26th Ave E in Bradenton, the County is renovating an existing structure to house the Fresh Start program, which will serve approximately 100 men and women for up to 90 days. The facility will provide on-site access to substance abuse treatment, mental health care, employment support, and financial counseling, creating a comprehensive pathway to stability and self-sufficiency.

This project directly supports the County's response to House Bill 1365, which prohibits unsheltered homelessness in public spaces. Rather than relying on enforcement alone, Manatee County is investing in a compassionate, service-oriented alternative that prioritizes long-term outcomes.

With a total project cost of \$10 million, the County is requesting \$2.5 million in state funding to complete the renovation and ensure the facility is fully equipped to meet the needs of vulnerable residents. Fresh Start represents an innovative solution that aligns with public safety, public health, and community reintegration goals.



APPROPRIATION NO. 3:

51st Street W. Extension

(recently named Charlie Kirk Memorial Parkway)

Manatee County is seeking funding to support the design, land acquisition, and construction of a critical transportation corridor: the extension of 51st Street West from 53rd Avenue West to El Conquistador Parkway. The County is also in the initial stages of designating this stretch of roadway as the “Charlie Kirk Memorial Parkway.” This project will initially construct at least two lanes of a future four-lane roadway, incorporating essential infrastructure such as street lighting and bicycle/pedestrian facilities. The total estimated cost is \$35 million, and while the County has committed partial funding through its Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), additional state support is necessary to complete the project.

This extension will serve as a vital connector between key east-west corridors in the Southwest District of Manatee County, directly supporting the County's economic development and revitalization goals. By improving mobility and access, the project will enhance regional connectivity, reduce congestion, and promote multimodal transportation options.

Manatee County is seeking \$3 million in state funding for this project. Previous funding includes \$3.5 million in 2024 Federal Community Project Funding and \$2.5 million in 2023 State legislative appropriations. A 2026 federal request of \$1.5 million is currently pending.

Department:	Public Works
Total Project Cost:	\$35 million
Funding Request:	\$3 million
Purpose:	Roadway ext. to support economic development in Southwest District
Location:	51 st Street W. Corridor
Additional Information:	Requesting reclassification of previously allocated funds from construction to design



APPROPRIATION NO. 4:

Singletary Road Bridge Replacement

Department:	Public Works
Total Project Cost:	\$3 million
Funding Request:	\$1.5 million
Purpose:	Replace aging bridge infrastructure
Location:	Singletary Road over Myakka River Branch

Manatee County is seeking funding to replace Bridge No. 134055 on Singletary Road, which spans a branch of the Myakka River. This project includes design, land acquisition (if necessary), and full construction of a new bridge to replace aging infrastructure that is nearing the end of its service life.

Replacing this bridge is part of a broader effort to maintain and modernize Manatee County's aging transportation infrastructure. By securing outside funding for this project, the County can reallocate local resources to address other high-priority bridge replacements, maximizing the impact of its overall bridge maintenance program. The Singletary Road Bridge is vital for rural connectivity and emergency access, and its replacement will ensure continued safe travel for residents, agricultural operations, and emergency services in eastern Manatee County.

The total estimated cost is \$3 million, and the County is requesting \$1.5 million in State funding support from State appropriations to advance this critical safety and mobility project.



APPROPRIATION NO. 5:

Fort Hamer Road/I-75 Interchange

Department:	Public Works
Total Project Cost:	\$5 million
Funding Request:	\$5 million
Purpose:	Design for interchange connecting I- 75 and Fort Hamer Road northern extension
Location:	Northern Manatee Co., near Hillsborough Co. border
Additional Information:	Will connect Ft. Hamer to I-75, bringing relief for local commuters and serving as an alt. evacuation route

Manatee County is requesting \$5 million in state or federal funding to complete the design of a new interchange connecting Interstate 75 with the northern extension of Fort Hamer Road. This strategic infrastructure project, located near the Hillsborough County line, will provide a critical new access point to I-75, improving regional mobility and reducing congestion on existing north-south corridors. The interchange is a key component of the County's long-range transportation plan and will support continued growth in northern Manatee County.

In addition to easing daily commuter traffic, the interchange will serve as a vital alternate evacuation route during hurricanes and other emergencies, enhancing public safety and resilience. As development continues to expand in the area, this project will ensure that infrastructure keeps pace with demand while improving access for residents, businesses and emergency services. The County is seeking full funding for the \$5 million design phase to advance this high-priority regional connector.



SUPPORT

SUPPORT legislative changes to preemptions within SB 180:

- Narrow the scope of the preemption of land use regulations to structures actually damaged by storms for which federal disaster declarations were made.
- Clarify whether the more restrictive and burdensome provision applies broadly to all ordinances or comp plan and land development regulations.
- Eliminate Section 2, which prohibits the county from enforcing Floodplain Management Regulations imposing a 5-year lookback period for substantial improvements.

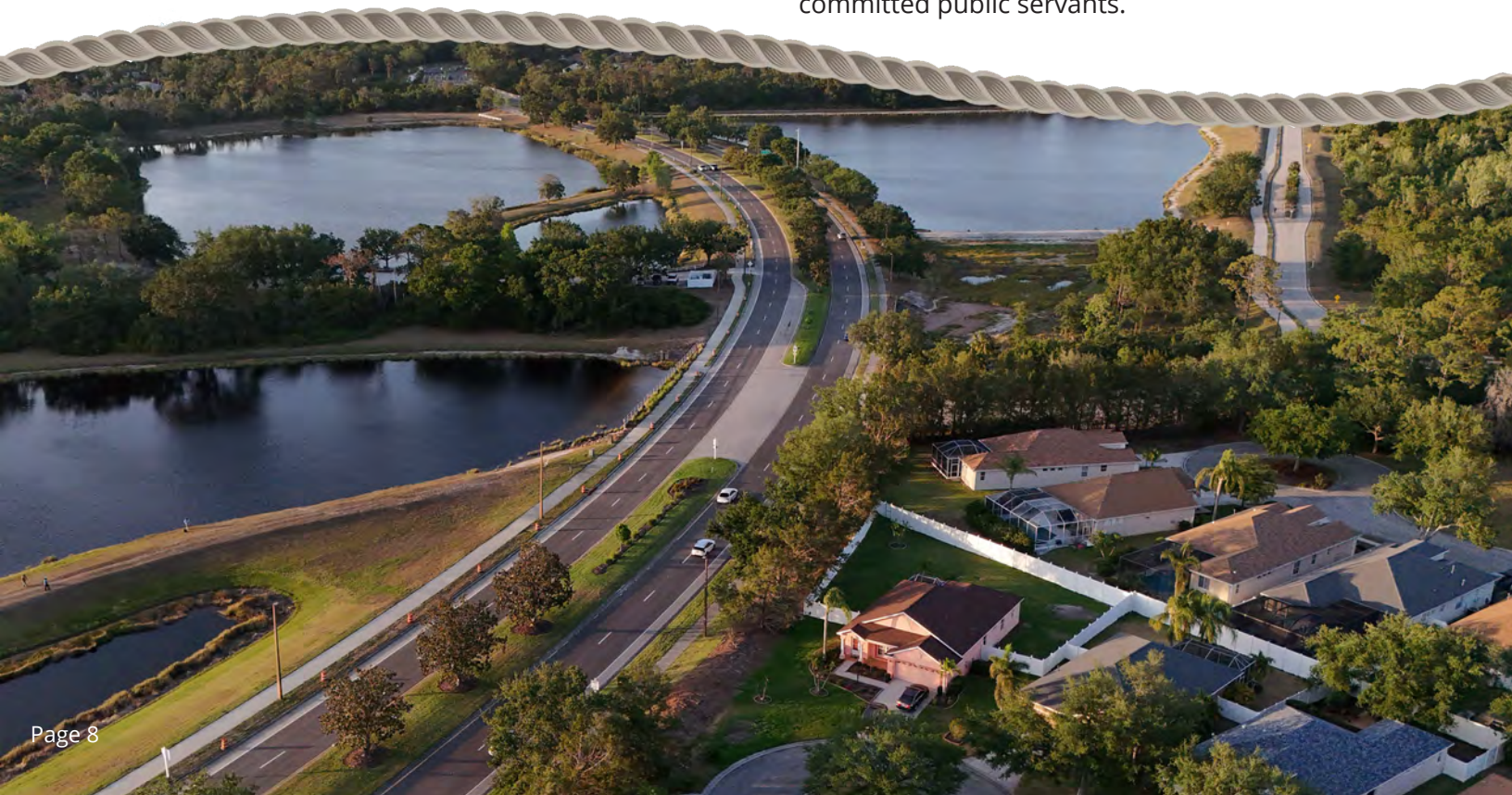
These changes are vital to preserve Manatee County's ability to manage land use and recovery efforts after federally declared disasters. Narrowing the scope ensures that only genuinely storm-damaged structures are exempt, per the original intentions of the Bill. Clarifying the applicability of burdensome provisions helps avoid unintended consequences on local planning tools. Eliminating the restriction on enforcing floodplain regulations protects the county's ability to mitigate future flood risks and maintain FEMA compliance.

SUPPORT full repeal of Laws of Florida Chapter 81-429 to allow for local ability to maintain the Manatee County Library Advisory Board.

Repealing this outdated special act restores local control over the structure and function of the Library Advisory Board, allowing Manatee County to better reflect its current population and community needs. Local governance ensures that board membership can be more inclusive, geographically representative, and responsive to evolving library services. This flexibility supports more effective public engagement and enhances the county's ability to deliver equitable and modern library programming.

SUPPORT legislative amendments to F.S. §112.0801 to require a minimum year of service with a specific local government employer before retirees qualify for employer-sponsored health insurance benefits.

Requiring a minimum year of service before retirees qualify for employer-sponsored health insurance helps Manatee County manage long-term financial liabilities. It ensures that benefits are reserved for employees with a meaningful tenure, promoting fairness and sustainability. This change supports responsible fiscal stewardship of taxpayer dollars while maintaining competitive benefits for committed public servants.



SUPPORT

SUPPORT legislative changes to F.S. §316.183 and §316.189 regarding reduced residential speed limits.

- Revise the F.S. Section 316.183 as follows (new underlined):
 - (2)"...with respect to a residence district, a county or municipality may set a maximum speed limit of 15, 20 or 25 miles per hour on local streets and highways..."
- Revise the F.S. Section 316.189 as follows (new underlined):
 - (2)(a) "In any business or residence district, ...provided that with respect to residence districts a county may set a maximum speed limit of 15, 20, or 25 miles per hour after an investigation determines..."

Allowing counties to set lower speed limits in residential areas enhances safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and children in neighborhoods across Manatee County. The flexibility to reduce speeds to 15 or 20 mph empowers local governments to respond to community concerns and traffic patterns.

SUPPORT legislative changes to the Live Local Act (LLA), requiring current projects that are currently at 120% AMI to be reduced to 100% AMI.

Reducing the Area Median Income (AMI) threshold from 120% to 100% ensures that affordable housing projects in Manatee County truly serve low- and moderate-income residents. This adjustment aligns with the county's housing affordability goals and helps address the growing need for workforce housing. It also ensures that state incentives are used effectively to meet the needs of the most housing-burdened populations.

SUPPORT revised requirements for the release schedule of credits in mitigation banks, basing these redivisions on the language used in SB 492.

Revising the credit release schedule, as proposed in SB 492, would improve the predictability and availability of environmental mitigation credits in Manatee County. This change supports timely infrastructure development while maintaining environmental protections. It also helps balance growth with conservation, a key concern in a rapidly developing region like Manatee.



FAC & NACo POLICIES

SUPPORT Florida Association of Counties (FAC) Statewide Legislative Priorities, with particular interest in:

- Legislative changes to SB 180
- Property tax legislation or ballot initiative
- Retaining home rule
- Support for existing federal policies
- Fuel tax indexing
- Beach Renourishment and Shoreline Protection
- Public Safety Equipment

SUPPORT Florida Association of Counties (FAC) Federal Legislative Priorities, with particular interest in:

- National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) reform
- Water Resources Development Act
- Off-Shore Oil Drilling
- Low Income Housing Tax Credit
- Public Safety Officer Benefit
- ARPA Funding Recoupment

SUPPORT National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Priorities, with particular interest in:

- Reauthorization of surface transportation programs, ensuring robust funding for roads, bridges, safety programs, rail and transit systems
 - With use of direct formula funds to county
- Reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) with local control and flexibility
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Reform
- Reforms to FEMA's Public Assistance Program to ensure expedited reimbursement
- Funding of critical federal grant programs
- Increased federal collaboration and direct federal funding to counties for election security measures



Key Efficiencies

Manatee County is leading the way in government efficiency through innovation, collaboration and responsible stewardship of public resources. In partnership with the Governor's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the County is launching a groundbreaking AI pilot program to modernize operations and improve service delivery.

Key efficiency initiatives include:

Looking Inside Out: Established the Government Efficiency Liaison Committee, made up of county residents, with the goal of increasing operational efficiency and fiscal responsibility.

Millage Rate Reductions: Lowered the millage rate in four of the last five years, reflecting a strong commitment to fiscal responsibility.

Transparency in Investments: Established an Investment Advisory Committee to provide greater transparency into how taxpayer dollars are invested.

Operational Streamlining: Conducted a centralization and efficiency study of the Information Technology and Financial Management Departments to improve internal operations.

Data-Driven Disaster Response: Pioneered the use of GIS and Peregrine's data platform to enhance preparedness, response, and recovery from natural disasters.

These efforts demonstrate Manatee County's dedication to efficient, transparent, and resilient governance, setting a model for counties across Florida.



MANATEE COUNTY 2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

MYMANATEE.ORG



1112 Manatee Avenue West
Bradenton, Florida 34205