

Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2024



Chamber Background:

The Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce is a 501 (c) (6) not for profit organization serving the business community and residents of Hobe Sound and the surrounding area with an emphasis on economic, civic, commercial, cultural, industrial and education interests of the area. With nearly 500 members who privately invest in Chamber membership each year, we know that more than 90% are small businesses, many with five or fewer employees. The Chamber understands the different challenges small business owners face. The Chamber offers programs and partners with multiple organizations to help address the growing needs of the entire membership.

Community Affairs Committee Mission:

The Hobe Sound Chamber's Community Affairs Committee (CAC) was organized in 2017 to educate members on local and state legislative issues while creating a mechanism for the Chamber to advocate for the interests of business in government. The goal is to connect elected officials to the committee and encourage the business community to take an active role in understanding Government and how they may participate in the legislative process. Local and state governmental influences are largely affected by the input of the community they serve. This committee serves as a conduit to exchange ideas and priorities between the community we serve and those who represent us in the policy and decision-making process.

Guiding Principles:

The Hobe Sound Chamber works with other Martin County business partners and agencies to advocate for projects of regional economic interest and supports legislation that reduces government burden that restricts the operation of private business. The Hobe Sound Chamber supports policies that focus on economic stability, diversification, and innovation, especially those that emphasize developing a ready workforce through advanced training and educational opportunities, including apprenticeships.

The Chamber understands that two of Martin County's primary industries, Tourism, and Marine Industries, relies on a healthy, clean and sustainable water supply as well as a healthy Indian River Lagoon, Everglades and South Florida ecosystem which supports thousands of jobs and returns billions of dollars to our economy. The Hobe Sound Chamber advocates for the advancement of diverse, state-wide water quality projects. The Hobe Sound Chamber believes "All Projects Count."



Priorities:

The Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce has identified a slate of issues important to our local community and specifically we have identified three (3) priorities for the 2024 Legislative Session:

- 1) Support reoccurring annual septic to sewer funding including conversion of commercial and industrial properties to sewer. While excessive discharges from Lake Okeechobee, along with local stormwater runoff, are both threats to the health of our waterways, septic systems are also part of the problem. Leaching of septic tank effluent into the groundwater from septic systems, especially in high density residential neighborhoods and those close to the water, is another contributing factor. The reduction and elimination of septic systems is one way we can proactively improve the health of our local waterways, including the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon.
- 2) Support Career and Technical Education. Support Summer Youth Employment Programs to assist youth in obtaining on-the-job experiences to better prepare them for full employment. Support for funding and matching funds for apprenticeships.
- 3) Support Finishing current projects and expedite additional ones outlined in Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) for Lake Okeechobee such as water storage including north and south and incorporating all options including public/private partnerships.

We believe these three items collectively reflect opportunities for sustaining our small business climate through protecting our vital environmental resources and the health of our community, developing and nurturing apprenticeship programs and through regional trade and industry partnerships and applied learning in collaboration with Indian River State College, CareerSource Research Coast, and Industry partners. Maintaining the “All Projects Count” attitude for water quality projects will lead to a better quality of life for our residents and visitors that small businesses depend on for recreational and occupational activities on our waterways. These positions are reflected in the following pages along with more detailed outlines of our areas of concern as a community.



Support

1. Water



- Support the Martin County BOCC Bio-solids request for establishing a statewide pilot program for funding new, state of the art wastewater technologies to improve recovery and afford more efficient use of human wastewater biosolids.
- Support Public/ Private Partnerships as these projects can be accomplished quickly and keep properties on the tax roll.
- Support Finishing current projects and expedite additional ones outlined in Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) for Lake Okeechobee such as water storage including north and south, repairing of the dike all around the Lake, which will minimize harmful discharges to the east and west; Legacy Florida in Amendment 1 incorporating all options including public/private partnerships.
- Support the completion of the Everglades Agricultural Area Southern Storage Reservoir.
- Support researching the viability of deep injection wells for water storage.
- Support continued Federal funding of the Water Resources Development Act

(WRDA).

- Strongly encourage septic-to-sewer conversion for communities located adjacent to impaired water bodies, and support State grant 50/50 matching program funding with priority given to communities within the Lake Okeechobee Watershed and Indian River Lagoon Estuary, the St. Lucie watershed and Loxahatchee River watershed.
- Support funding for research and corrective measures for Red Tide.
- Utilize 2014 Amendment 1 monies for reef management and restoration, Legacy Florida in Amendment 1.
- Support funding to eliminate outfalls from Dade and Broward Counties.

2. Economic Development



Business Rent Tax-

- Support continuing to incrementally lower the sales tax charged on commercial leases. It is currently at **4.5%** and we support legislation to continue to reduce it.
- Workforce Quality - Support projects that address talent gaps in the state, support trades and advanced manufacturing training, internships, pre-apprenticeships, and vocational training in high schools. We believe this is more important to statewide business development than traditional incentives. We support match funding for programs implemented on behalf of vocational and career development, and apprenticeships.

- Community Redevelopment Areas- Support existing statutes which create a mechanism for counties and cities to establish, operate and fund Community Redevelopment Agencies.
- The Chamber would oppose legislation aimed at reducing funding for, limiting the creation of new and/or dismantling existing CRA's.
- Stop the expansion uses of Tourist Development Taxes and support full funding for VISIT Florida.
- Support continuing budget allocations to fund EFI at the current rate.

Insurance and Retirement Co-Operatives-

- Support legislation that would allow for insurance co-ops and 401k programs for small businesses through a network of participating employers.

Minimum Wage

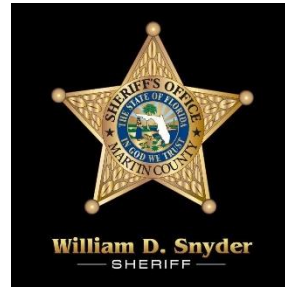
- Support the longstanding autonomy of employers and employees to set and negotiate their respective salary rates—including for entry-level hires—free from any additional, undue government mandates.
- Support efforts to recover lost fuel tax revenue resulting from increased numbers of electric and hybrid vehicles using less fuel and less fuel tax to support road maintenance.

Workforce Housing

- Supports initiatives that reduce the burden of workforce housing affordability in Martin County.
- Support residential housing projects that will serve as a vehicle to assist local labor residents to reside closer to where they work.



3. Education, Social Services and Emergency Services



- Two-Generational Strategies for children and families - Develop more effective policies for families with young children in poverty by aligning targeted social services that support children’s development with workforce development services to increase family economicself-sufficiency.
- Support Career and Technical Education. Support Summer Youth Employment Programs to assist youth in obtaining on-the-job experiences to better prepare them for full employment.
- Support Pre-apprenticeships at the High School level.
- Early Learning Programs - Support increased investments in Florida’s Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Education Program for four-year-old children to evaluate and improve the benchmarks for successful kindergarten readiness and later school success.
- Support a shift in the educational direction, less testing/assessment more teaching. Allowance for flexible institutional grading to recognize the value of vocational education.

Indian River State College (IRSC)

- The Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce fundamentally supports enhancements to the IRSC outreach programs that benefit all residents through higher learning and education.

Emergency Management

- Strengthen emphasis on local and state emergency management officials to assure business continuity in the event of a natural or man-made emergency through Florida Statute 252.
- Support expedited permit reviews and resources to assess damages in non-residential buildings to promote recovery and assist impacted areas with power restoration.

4. Powers of Local Government



- Support citizen driven municipal home rule. Maintaining county and municipal home-rule power, both administrative and fiscal, keeps government close to the citizens so they can play an active role in developing community-based solutions to local problems.
- Support the Martin County Board of County Commissioners 2024 approved and published Appropriations requests, specifically:
 - SUPPORT state funding for PalMar land acquisition and Florida Forever funding for state land acquisition.
 - SUPPORT continued dedicated funding for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP)
 - SUPPORT long-term funding commitments to finance the completion of the projects on the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS), with priority given to the Indian River Lagoon-South (IRL-S) Project including funding for the C-23/24 and C-25 reservoirs and stormwater treatment areas (STA).
 - SUPPORT the land acquisition of the Natural Lands Component of IRL-S, which includes 90,000 acres of wetland restoration.
- Conservation Land Acquisition
 - CERP identified thousands of acres for acquisition to provide natural area water storage and treatment. These areas also contribute to wildlife habitat and large open areas for passive recreation.
 - The Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Conservation Initiative project would provide a wildlife and recreation corridor between Halpatiokee Regional Park, Atlantic Ridge State Park, and Jonathan Dickinson State Park that would create a "super park" which would serve as a destination for people and wildlife.

- The Martin County Blue Ways program provides conservation lands for local basin water quality projects and recreational access to the rivers, lagoon, and ocean.
- These programs align with several state and federal programs for land acquisition assistance and the County supports active engagement with our state and federal delegation to advance these efforts.

The Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce Opposes:

1. Limiting powers of local governments.
2. Continued allowance of 3rd party (Public Adjusters) response to assess needs prior to insurance carrier response.

The Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce Community Affairs Committee will assist the Board of Directors and the membership by monitoring and reporting the effects of:

1. Government initiatives that increase the cost of doing business.
2. Legislation involving duplication of permitting processes.
3. Legislation raising workers' compensation rates.
4. Developments of Significance affecting public service requirements and how it affects the operation of existing businesses.

