



## West Orange Chamber of Commerce 2024 Legislative Position Paper

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### VISION AND PURPOSE

The West Orange Chamber of Commerce is a collective voice for business leadership and community partnerships that advances a positive eco-system for the West Orange Community, with a purpose of advancing community, collaboration and leadership. The business voice for West Orange County, the West Orange Chamber of Commerce represents over 1150 businesses and with hundreds of thousands of employees and their families.

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### APPROPRIATIONS

#### Town of Oakland

- **South Lake Apopka Initiative – Septic to Sewer (\$650,000)**

The Town has recently submitted an appropriations project request to the State of Florida for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 to fund a septic to sewer project that will help eliminate septic seepage into Lake Apopka and the surrounding ground water supplies. The project will extend the Town of Oakland's central sewer and eliminate septic systems for both residential, commercial, and municipal properties in the Town of Oakland. The Town of Oakland's yearly budget is significantly smaller than surrounding municipalities in Orange County, FL, therefore, without assistance from the State of Florida this project would be financially unattainable to the Town on its own.

#### City of Ocoee

- **Fire Training Facility, AED Programs for Parks & Northwest Sewer Program (\$420,000)**

##### **Fire Training Facility (\$400,000)**

The City of Ocoee is seeking matching funds to offset the cost of design and construction of a fire training tower and tactical facility. Once built, this facility will save the City of Ocoee between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year as using outside facilities at the academies and other local governments will no longer be necessary. Funding request: \$400,000; the City of Ocoee will match for a total cost of \$800,000.

##### **AED Programs for Parks (\$20,000)**

The City Commission has supported the non-profit organization, Saving Young Hearts by investing in automated external defibrillation devices (AED's) for several City parks. The City is seeking appropriation funding in the amount of \$20,000 to expand the program.

##### **Northwest Sewer Program**

The City of Ocoee is partnering with a developer to create a national level sports complex in the Northwest Area of the City bordering Apopka. While the City is not seeking an appropriation in this legislative cycle, it intends to work with the City of Apopka, Orange County, and the State of Florida in the next legislative session to address trails, road and water/sewer infrastructure needs.

#### Town of Windermere

- **Water Master Plan and Transportation Improvements (\$15,390,000)**

**Chase Rd and Main Street Intersection Improvements Total requested: \$3,250,000**

**6th Avenue/Main Street Intersection Improvements Total requested: \$3,500,000**

Continued growth to the southwest of Windermere has increased the cut-through traffic through Town. 75% of the cut-through traffic is generated by neighboring communities. Traffic congestion continues to increase along roads such as 6th Avenue, Main Street, and Chase Road. Congestion has become an unavoidable problem for drivers, particularly during peak hours. The goal of this project will be to reduce the cut-through traffic on local roads and ease the traffic congestion that currently exists. Additionally, the improvements will remediate the stormwater issues in that area.

## **Windermere Water Master Plan Total requested: \$8,640,000**

The drivers for this project are safety, environmental protection, and reliability. The Town of Windermere is nestled in between several Florida Outstanding Water Bodies. This request is for the construction of potable water lines to areas where there are none or the lines are undersized to provide adequate fire flows. The intent is to bring clean drinking water to those residents currently on wells and to add and adequately equip fire safety measures by adding more fire hydrants to the area. South Phase request: \$3,847,200 North Phase request: \$4,792,800

### **City of Winter Garden**

- **Tucker Ranch Holistic Health, Wellness, Teaching Farm & Family Activity Center (\$2.5 million)**

The city of Winter Garden, in partnership with Healthy West Orange and AdventHealth, is requesting \$2.5 million to build a state-of-the-art holistic health and wellness facility with a working and teaching farm at Tucker Ranch. The goal is to provide a certified health and nutrition curriculum with an emphasis on teaching participants to grow local Fresh from Florida products. The priority is to reduce serious health conditions that are affected by diet.

### **Foundation for a Healthier West Orange**

- **Maternal Health Communication Campaign – Strong Beautiful Future (\$300,000)**

The Foundation is seeking matching funds for Strong Beautiful Future, an already proven maternal health campaign designed to address low birthweight disparities. The primary activities will be engaging public health communication and marketing to share information designed to speak directly with Black women in west Orange County, Florida, a population under-represented in maternal health messaging and disproportionately experiencing poor birth outcomes. As a targeted health communication campaign, we're plan to reduce the disparities seen for women of color across the board, both through greater degrees of pregnancy related knowledge and stronger engagement with their healthcare providers. Long term, this should lead to overall improvements to maternal health outcomes across the board, for both mother and child. Success will be verified by a survey and program evaluation which will measure the campaign efficacy in reaching the target audience, and the target audience's attention to and retention of, the presented health information. The Foundation will match with \$200,000.

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## **LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS**

### **Education**

- Support increase to base salary allocations and easing the impact of salary compression and inflation to meet industry market rates. Amend existing law to allow school districts more flexibility to recruit and retain teachers.
- Support direct funding for PreK to Market public education to ensure students have the skills to be workforce ready and prepared for careers.
- Create a CTE Workforce Diploma pathway. A CTE Workforce Diploma would provide a positive viable education pathway for students that want to pursue additional workforce education. Expand the use of available concordant scores for students to show they have demonstrated the required knowledge to successfully pass the 10th Grade ELA state standardized test and the Algebra 1 End of Course Exam (SAT, ACT, PSAT, CASAS, CLT). All validated options should be available to the students.

### **Health**

- Preserve Medicaid hospital reimbursements at their current levels for inpatient and outpatient care.
- Expand access to and continue funding LINE and PIPELINE programs, which train Florida's next frontline health care professionals.
- Fund effective programs that seek to solve Florida's behavioral health and substance abuse crises.

### **Environment**

- **Clean Waterways Act Stormwater Rules**

Environmental Protection; Requiring the Department of Environmental Protection and water management districts to conduct a holistic review of certain permitting processes and programs; revising the required components of a local government comprehensive plan capital improvements element and general sanitary sewer, solid waste, drainage, potable water, and natural groundwater aquifer recharge element; requiring the Department of

Agriculture and Consumer Services to submit an updated priority list for the acquisition of certain agricultural lands to the Acquisition and Restoration Council by a specified date; revising requirements for onsite sewage treatment and disposal system remediation plans for springs; prohibiting the installation of new onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems within specified areas under certain circumstances; increasing the estimated value threshold for the appraisal of specified conservation easement acquisitions, etc.

AIF is taking the lead on this issue in the State. If passed, this rule would require all in the development business to take on double or more of the stormwater they currently hold if new projects are started. There would be no grandfathering if last year's bills were filed precisely the same.

## **Tourism**

- Tourist Development Tax (TDT). Support the non-expansion of usage for TDT funds to use specifically for the tourism industry.

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## **ISSUES WEST CHAMBER IS CURRENTLY MONITORING**

- **Full and Public Disclosure of Financial Interests Form 6**

Bill has already passed and is being implemented by the Florida Commission on Ethics. WOCC should monitor to see if statute should be amended. Current law requires elected mayors/members of municipality to file a full disclosure of financial interest. This is a change from the simple financial disclosures (Form 1). Form 6 does the following:

- Discloses net worth
- ALL property (intangible, tangible, real property) as opposed to just income producing or intangible over \$10,000
- Assets over \$1,000 and descriptions/value as opposed to \$10,000 and types
- Liabilities over \$1,000 as opposed to \$10,000

Projected Impact: Municipalities with elected officials that are on a volunteer or minimal compensation position may step down or not run for candidacy.

- **Association Health Plans or Multiple Employer Welfare Arrangement (MEWA)'s**

to allow for organizations (such as chambers) to pool their resources to offer alternatives in the hopes of bringing down insurance rates for businesses specifically with 2-50 employees. Health insurance rates significantly impact our small businesses' ability to recruit and retain a qualified workforce. MEWA's are currently referenced in Florida Statutes at: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2012/624.437> and would cover Sole Proprietors or 1099 filers. Another alternative could be Professional Employer Organization Partnerships (PEO's) currently under the direction of the USDA.

- **Homestead Exemption Changes Regarding School Funding**

House Joint Resolution 69 and House Bill 71 are very specific to the Homestead Tax Exemption for district school levies. Basically, schools are exempt from the exemption. These bills would add the exemption to the school levies which is a further attack on public school funding. The base of school funding allocation comes from property taxes. These bills would cause a reduction in allocations for schools. Currently, the exemption is prohibited. There is no Senate bill to match the House. If this moves forward, it could be implemented in January 2025.

- **Disclosure of Employment Contracts to Employees Proposed Mandate**

Florida Senator Linda Stewart's proposed bill, Senate Bill 40, introduces a significant change for employers in the state. It stipulates that employers must provide copies of employment contracts upon an employee's request. While the bill doesn't define the term "employer," it's crucial for businesses with ten or more employees to take note. If SB 40 becomes law, starting July 1, 2024, these larger employers may be legally obligated to fulfill this new requirement.