



West Orange Chamber of Commerce 2026 Legislative Priorities Position Paper

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 1175 businesses and with hundreds of thousands of employees and their families.

TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES UPDATES AS OF FEBRUARY 19, 2026

SUPPORT Responsible Property Tax Reforms with Suitable Revenue Replacements

Multiple legislative proposals have been submitted and are currently progressing through the formal review process in anticipation of the upcoming legislative session. These initiatives are under consideration by relevant committees and are expected to undergo further analysis and debate before potential enactment.

Position: Efforts to reduce residential property taxes should not result in disproportionate increases in commercial property taxes. Shifting the tax burden onto businesses can raise the cost of doing business, which often leads to higher prices for consumers and reduced competitiveness for Florida Companies. The Chamber supports a balanced and sustainable property tax structure that keeps Florida affordable for families while supporting a strong, stable business climate. The Chamber further urges the State of Florida to fully offset the revenue shortfall for counties, municipalities and other local governmental entities that are directly attributable to the implementation of such reductions.

Current Status:

While we wait for possible Senate proposed committee bills, there is still ambiguity surrounding property taxes. The Chamber is currently monitoring the following proposed House bills:

- CS/CS/HJR 203: Phased Out Elimination of Non-school Property Taxes for Homesteads, by Miller.
Passed by House; Heading to the Senate. If passed, measure would be placed on the ballot for voters. The repeal would cover everything except funding for schools.
- CS/CS/HJR 209: Property Insurance Relief Homestead Exemption Non-School Property Tax, by Busatta.
Passed out of committee-ready for a vote on the House floor.
- CS/CS/HJR 213: Modification of Limitations on Property Assessment Increases, by Griffiths.
Passed out of committee-ready for a vote on the House floor.

OPPOSE Tourist Development Tax Reforms

Oppose the modification, increment, or expansion of the use of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue beyond its intended statutory purpose, and sunset provisions and proposals that require periodic re-adoption of TDT allocations through referendums. Oppose reducing the 40% threshold and/or creating an annual dollar cap on local tourism promotion before counties would have the option to expand uses on broader infrastructure projects. Oppose the dissolution of county Tourist Development Councils and using TDT revenues to offset local residential property tax relief.

Position: Any changes or reforms to the Tourist Development Tax would be extremely harmful to Florida's tourism industry making it nearly impossible to complete projects, and promote Florida's tourism industry. TDT funds should be sustained and also allocated to support Visit Orlando which is instrumental in promoting and supporting Central Florida's robust tourism industry.

Current Status:

Multiple bills have been introduced in both the Senate and House that if passed will adversely affect the Tourist Development Tax by allowing funds to be used. The Chamber is currently monitoring the following proposed bills:

- SB 454 / HB 6007: Tourist Development Tax, by Senator Smith / Representative Eskamani.
Passed out of committee-ready for a vote on the House floor.
- SB456/458/976 Senator Smith filed three additional bills; however, no action was taken by the Senate.
- House & Senate released first round of Transportation & Economic Development budget proposal which includes \$80 million for Visit Florida.

SUPPORT Removal of Regulatory Barriers That Decrease Efficiency

Support legislation that eliminates unnecessary regulations to enhance efficiency and flexibility for businesses, municipalities, and public school district operations.

Position: The Chamber supports avoiding and/or removing unnecessary regulatory barriers that slow growth, limit innovation, and create inefficiencies for businesses, municipalities, and schools. Outdated or duplicative regulations often stand in the way of practical solutions and timely action. We advocate for a balanced approach that maintains essential safeguards while allowing greater flexibility and responsiveness to community needs. By streamlining processes, modernizing rules, and reducing red tape, we can foster an environment where employers grow, communities thrive, and schools focus on student success.

Current Status:

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

Chamber Status: Monitor

Education

-  **SUPPORT** investments in K-12 Education that increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA) at a level in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to cover rising school district operating costs, including salaries, benefits, mandatory employer contributions to the Florida Retirement System (FRS), and other obligated costs.
-  **SUPPORT** an increase in funding to the Safe Schools Allocation which would support school districts efforts to enhance safety and security measures in a manner that upholds security and allows school districts to implement statutory changes.
-  **SUPPORT** direct funding for workforce education and career pathways for K-12 and post- secondary students.
-  **SUPPORT** increased per-student funding at Valencia College. Currently, Valencia College has the lowest per student funding in the state. Therefore, we support the Florida College System Council of Presidents allocation request of significant, new, recurring funding, distributed through the formula agreed to by the Florida College System.
-  **SUPPORT** Valencia College's request for funding to expand the Lake Nona Campus in response to Valencia's record enrollment growth.

Healthcare

-  **SUPPORT** transparency and accountability for Medicaid Managed Care plans to ensure taxpayer dollars are directed to enrollee health, not corporate profits.
-  **SUPPORT** level funding for Medicaid provider reimbursements and a targeted increase for complex adult treatment.
-  **SUPPORT** broad, fair caps on punitive damages, preventing excessive litigation that raise the cost of care for all.

Insurance

-  **SUPPORT** recent Property Insurance Reforms to ensure reforms are not reversed.

Municipalities

Town of Oakland

-  **SUPPORT** NW Wastewater Extension (\$1,500,000)

The Town of Oakland is requesting \$1,500,000 for the next phase of design and construction of the North Pollard St. Wastewater Extension Project. This phase will include abandonment of approximately 40 existing septic systems in a lower income area of town, provide some relief from wastewater impact fees, and allow connection to the central sewer. It will also utilize an existing lift station and extensive developer-provided infrastructure in the effort to minimize costs. Future extensions are also being planned.

Additionally, this is a continuation of a project currently underway that will help protect Lake Apopka and will not adversely impact the work St. Johns River Water Management District has done to improve the water quality of the lake. It will also provide critical protection for our three drinking water wells.

The benefits are:

- Reduces nutrient load in Lake Apopka and Johns Lake basins.
- Protects the Gourd Neck Spring Watershed.
- Increases property values.
- Allows higher sales tax revenues
- Enables the creation of jobs.
- Is supported by the community

Current Status:

Project is currently in the House Budget for \$750,000 and in the Senate Budget at \$650,00.

City of Ocoee

SUPPORT Ocoee Alternative Water Supply Project - Design for Backup Supply

The City of Ocoee is requesting \$375,000 for the design of plans for a backup reclaimed water supply facility. Year 1 funding is for final engineering design, permitting, and bidding associated with a new Floridan aquifer well and reclaim transmission main to complete the north service area loop. Preliminary design of the well is currently underway. The goal of this project is to allow the City to continue to provide and expand reclaimed water to offset withdrawals from the Floridan aquifer. The City purchases approximately 3 MGD of reclaimed water from Orange County. Orange County unexpectedly changed the wholesale agreement and increased rates by 150%. The new imposed rate hinders the City's conservation efforts and expansion of the reclaimed water system.

Reclaim backup feasibility study is completed and a rate study are underway. The City anticipates absorbing approximately \$1 million per year due to the higher rate while completing preliminary design, rate study, engineering/permit/construction. Paying the higher reclaim rate severely hinders the City's ability to move forward with Orange County's backup requirements for lower rate.

SUPPORT Bluford Avenue New Streetscape Power Underground

The City of Ocoee is requesting \$1,785,000 million to underground power on Bluford Ave. Bluford Avenue is one of Ocoee's three primary north-south arterials, a designated evacuation route, and the corridor that serves the City's Emergency Operations Center, City Hall, and Ocoee Middle School, an emergency shelter during storm events. To date, the City has self-funded \$9 million in improvements to over the half mile of Bluford Avenue. Final design to complete the remaining 1.3 miles of Bluford Ave improvements is nearing 100%. Before the project can be started, existing above ground power needs to be moved underground as part of ongoing resiliency initiatives for the City to serve this critical area and evacuation route.

The benefits of undergrounding power lines allows the City to move forward with the rest of the Bluford Project, which provides the following benefits:

- The requested funds will leverage prior and future planned and identified public investments, delivering long-term reliability and reduced lifecycle repair costs.
- Improved pedestrian facilities will increase safety for students and residents and provide continuous, accessible routes to schools and community facilities.
- Improved roadways increase automobile and cyclist safety and promotes economic growth.

- Expanding reclaimed water access supports the SJRWMD and Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI) water caution area missions to reduce groundwater withdrawals.
- Expanding central sewer reduces nutrient loads in the Wekiwa and Rock Springs Basin Action Management Plan (BMAP) and Starke Lake, a “Fab 5” lake.

Town of Windermere

SUPPORT Roadway Improvements:

Upgrade Roundabout 6th Avenue and Main Street (\$784,000)

Chase Road and Main Street Improvements (\$678,000)

The Town of Windermere has become a major thoroughfare as the town is squeezed by the ever-growing development and population of West Orange County. Its unique geographic location makes the two intersections the only options for commuters to move west to east and back. These projects will improve traffic capacity, reduce congestion, support stormwater management and enhance overall safety while also maintaining the town’s commitment to safe and efficient transportation infrastructure. The projects not only benefit Town of Windermere residents but the businesses, residents, and visitors of West Orange County.

City of Winter Garden

Support Crest Avenue Wastewater Treatment Facility Capacity Expansion and Process Optimization (\$1,750,000)

This project is for capacity expansion and process optimization of the City's Wastewater Plant to improve effluent water quality to meet FDEP advanced wastewater treatment (AWT) limits and increase reclaimed water production. The goal is to provide increased water quality benefits to Lake Apopka by reducing key nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus as well as lessening the need of potable water from the Floridian Aquifer for irrigation and providing source water protections.

The proposed design will expand the current capacity from 4.75 to 7.5 million gallons per day treatment capacity and modifies the existing treatment standards to achieve Advance Wastewater Treatment (AWT) standards by using Membrane Bioreactors (MBR).

Organizations

Friends of Lake Apopka (FOLA)

Support Lake Apopka Shoreline Restoration Project (\$1,900,000)

More than \$300M has been invested by the State of Florida over the past 30 years to restore Central Florida’s 31,000-acre crown jewel. As the headwaters of the Ocklawaha Basin, Lake Apopka’s water quality affects waterways all the way up the St Johns River to Jacksonville. St Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) has done a phenomenal job of reducing phosphorus in Lake Apopka over the past 30 years (280 ppb to 55 ppb). That work must continue.

Fifty years of dead vegetation lies at the bottom of our shallow lake (average depth of 5.5 feet), and every time a strong wind blows, portions of that muck are churned up into the water column, turning the lake brownish-green. Turbidity inhibits native aquatic vegetation growth, hinders navigation, and reduces recreational use in Lake Apopka.

In 2025, Friends of Lake Apopka (FOLA) received \$600K from the State Legislature via the Florida DEP to begin Pre-construction activities to dredge a 60-acre channel at Newton Park in Winter Garden. FOLA is requesting an additional \$1.9M for the project in 2026. Cost-sharing

funding has been appropriated by the Federal government and the City of Winter Garden. Orange County is also expected to contribute.