TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

To: Council Members

From: Staff

Date: June 20, 2014 Council Meeting

Subject: Legislative Priorities 2015

Introduction

At its February 21, 2014 meeting, Council established a preliminary process for developing a regional legislative agenda intended to support local governments throughout the region and taking issues of regional importance to our legislative delegation. A Gubernatorial Committee was formed made up of the Governor’s appointments to the Council. They were to gather information about legislative issues and projects that have an impact on the region as a whole. Special focus was to be placed on identifying those issues/projects where a regional consensus for them could be achieved. This information would then be used by the Gubernatorial Committee during the summer months to formulate a legislative priorities and projects list for consideration by our legislative delegation for the next session. The Committee would work with the Governor’s office to determine what their priorities are for the coming year and how Council can assist with achieving those goals. At the same time, this Committee would provide the Governor with Council’s legislative priorities for the region.

It was agreed the full Council would have to approve any legislative priorities resulting from this process. It was suggested that regional issues of importance agreed upon by Council not be in conflict with the priorities of the Florida League of Cities and the Florida Association of Counties. It was further suggested that Council work with the Florida Regional League of Cities and the Treasure Coast Council of Local Governments in developing the legislative priorities.

Background

Over the last three months, the Gubernatorial Committee organized and met to: 1) monitor several bills affecting the region related to growth management, home rule, Indian River Lagoon cleanup and state funding of the regional planning councils; and 2) discuss how the committee should prepare a legislative priorities and project list for the 2015 legislative session. At its last meeting, the committee asked staff to prepare a preliminary list for discussion by the Council. Staff was asked to identify some important regional issues/projects that every local government and legislative delegate within the region might support as a block. The following list includes some subject areas Council should consider in establishing its legislative priorities for the
Region. The list also includes examples of items that would be covered under these broader subject areas. In other words, legislation, projects, or programs designed to:

- **Enhance the ability of emergency management officials and emergency service to improve the public’s safety**
  - improve evacuation times and routes
  - update regional and local evacuation plans
  - improve building codes
  - improve public sheltering options

- **Enhance the Region’s ability to improve water quality and economic productivity of the Region’s lakes, streams, canals, rivers, estuaries and near shore waters**
  - facilitate water quality improvement projects
  - facilitate public access improvement projects
  - facilitate septic tank conversions
  - implement Basin Management Action Plans locally

- **Improve the Region’s mobility options for people, goods, and services consistent with improving the Region’s economy, communities, and quality of life**
  - facilitate construction of roadway, public transit and greenway and trails improvements being advanced by local MPO/TPOs
  - fund roadway corridor retrofits to improve economic development potential
  - fund sidewalks, bike lanes, and other public safety improvements

- **Enhance local governments’ ability to improve property values, public safety and quality of life**
  - aid local beach restoration efforts
  - facilitate infrastructure retrofits due to saltwater intrusion and sea level rise
  - facilitate inlet and navigable waterway maintenance and improvement
  - encourage flood insurance reform

- **Enhance the Region’s ability to reduce its unemployment rate and to retain, attract, and grow the Region’s job base in existing and emerging industry clusters**
  - revamp the enterprise zone program
  - improve the public education system
  - improve the climate for existing and emerging industry clusters, business retention and job growth
• Enhance the Region’s ability to have an adequate and reliable water supply to meet the needs of its growing population, the environment, agriculture, and industry
  - facilitate water conservation measures
  - facilitate water reuse programs
  - increase water storage
  - improve and develop public water and sewer facilities

• Eliminate state cost shifting which negatively impacts local governments’ budgets or restricts local governments’ ability to collect sufficient revenue to provide needed facilities and services
  - restore regional planning council funding
  - eliminate unfunded mandates related to Medicaid assistance, state court costs, juvenile detention and other policy areas

• Improve the state budgeting process by tying budgetary decisions to a state plan that outlines its priorities and policies related to resources and projects of statewide significance
  - preparation of a long-range state plan outlining its priorities and resources and projects of statewide significance

• Improve local access to safe and affordable housing opportunities
  - restore full funding of each county’s State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) allowance
  - increase local downtown redevelopment and infill efforts
  - increase home ownership opportunities

• Improve local governments’ ability to do local planning, zoning, and other operations with less interference from state government
  - further reform state growth management rules and regulations that shift greater decision-making authority to the local level
  - fund local community development and redevelopment programs

• Improve the Region’s energy independence from foreign oil and fossil fuels
  - create a comprehensive state energy policy
  - fund energy conservation programs for homes and businesses
  - revise public service commission regulations to improve the financial feasibility of energy conservation for power companies
  - insure against energy supply interruptions

Three other regional planning councils successfully prepare legislative priorities documents: Tampa Bay, Northeast Florida, and Southwest Florida regional planning councils. There are some lessons learned from their efforts and experiences that Council should consider putting into
practice. First, focus on a limited number of broad regional priorities that clearly bind this region together. Second, with very few exceptions, active involvement by Council in supporting or opposing specific legislation should be limited. Third, adding or changing priorities during the legislative session should be limited and only approved by majority vote of the Council.

Conclusion

It is Council’s mission to provide visionary leadership and advocacy on behalf of local government to preserve the quality of the Region’s economic, natural, built, and social environment. It is Council’s responsibility to: 1) provide an efficient mechanism for addressing problems that can only be addressed by collaborative effort and cooperation between local governments; and 2) help assure that state goals and objectives (the top down part of planning) are achieved in a manner that is appropriate given local and regional needs and conditions (the bottom up part of planning). Council’s mission and its ability to carry out its “bottom-up” planning and advocacy responsibilities are furthered by the development of a legislative priorities issue and project list for the Region.

Recommendation

Council should discuss its legislative priorities for the region and: 1) request the Chairman appoint elected officials to the Gubernatorial Committee; and 2) authorize the Gubernatorial Committee to work over the next few months to develop a draft priorities list for Council consideration.