

**STUART/  
MARTIN COUNTY**



**CHAMBER OF  
COMMERCE**

# **STUART/MARTIN COUNTY**

## **Chamber of Commerce**

[www.stuartmartinchamber.org](http://www.stuartmartinchamber.org)

### **2021 State Legislative Issues**

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## **Stuart/Martin County Chamber of Commerce**

### **2021 State Government Platform**

The Chamber commends Governor DeSantis and his team for the focused, transparent leadership that was evident in pandemic response.

We know that 2021 will be a very difficult budget year. We encourage the Legislature to exercise empathetic frugality as they review all programs.

The Chamber supports improvements to the Florida Reemployment System to correct some of the flaws exposed during the recent pandemic.

The Legislature needs to review and reform the procurement system to safeguard against the inefficient and substandard results that were experienced in the Reemployment Assistance system response to pandemic issues in 2020.

The Chamber supports legislative efforts to provide liability protections related to Covid-19 for businesses.

The Chamber supports legislative efforts to require internet sellers to collect and remit Florida Sales Tax. We need to level the playing field for main street sellers and collect the appropriate revenues applicable to internet sales.

The Chamber is encouraged by the early attention and emphasis, of Governor DeSantis, on our water issues. We encourage the Legislature to work with the Governor to bring lasting solutions to these disastrous discharges.

We encourage our legislators to vote with their conscience and with the knowledge they bring of the needs and desires of their constituents.

We require sincere leadership from the highest levels of state government if Florida is to earn its place as the economic, social and political force our citizens deserve. We strongly encourage the legislative leadership to return to the true spirit of representative government with open conversation and debate. Do it for Florida, not for yourself.

## I. Government

Scrutinize all government operations for fiscal feasibility and economic stimulus value.

The Chamber supports Governor DeSantis' efforts to reduce the size and cost of State government.

The Chamber commends Governor DeSantis and his team for the focused, transparent leadership that was evident in pandemic response.

We know that 2021 will be a very difficult budget year. We encourage the Legislature to exercise empathetic frugality as they review all programs.

### A. Operations

1. Legislative Oversight and Mandates – State mandates must be accompanied by state funding for local governments and school boards.

2. Preferences for Local Businesses – The Chamber supports preferences for local businesses to supply goods and services on state projects. Local businessmen living in the community are more conscientious in delivering a quality product. The Legislature must work to eliminate the corrupt environment of Tallahassee based companies formed for the sole purpose of controlling state contracts for services they don't provide and extorting up to twenty percent from qualified local companies.

The Legislature needs to review and reform the procurement system to safeguard against the inefficient and substandard results that were experienced in the Reemployment Assistance system response to pandemic issues in 2020.

3. Local Government – The Chamber opposes any legislative initiative that hinders the rights of local communities to govern themselves.

4. The Legislature must take a greater role in the protection of neighborhoods from the onslaught of money mill sober homes.

### B. Reduction and Elimination of Unnecessary Government Rules

The Chamber supports efforts to reduce and eliminate unnecessary government rules which increase the cost of business and products to consumers. Compliance with government regulations should be at the lowest possible cost to business. Businesses should have economical and expeditious avenues for appealing erroneous determinations.

### C. Identity Theft/Privacy

Empower law enforcement to prosecute identity theft and fraud while preserving the right of business to exchange personal information for legitimate commercial or governmental purposes; and to access public records as a source of unique personal identifying information.

### D. Constitutional Amendments

Constitutional amendments should be reserved for governmental structure and fundamental freedoms. Voters elect senators and representatives to study issues faced by Florida's government. When or if a citizens' group is dissatisfied with legislative results, there must be restrictions on accomplishing constitutionally that which was a legislative failure.

Constitutional amendments should apply to a single subject. The recent batch of amendments proposed by the Constitutional Revision Commission were at best confusing and misleading. This waste of effort and taxpayer dollars should be discontinued.

### E. Appropriations

Measure all government initiatives and legislation for fiscal feasibility and economic stimulus value. Government must utilize best every tax dollar spent.

## II. Legal Reform

The Chamber favors reform in the legal system. Our legal system must be reengineered to serve society, the cause of justice, and not the competition of lawyers.

The Legislature must address the legal abuse problem in Florida. A national survey, released in 2019, shows Florida's lawsuit climate remaining at its worst level – ranking at an all-time low 46 out of 50 states, or in the bottom 5. That is bad news for Florida business owners and seriously impacts recruiting new business to our state. Eighty-five percent of companies surveyed say a state's lawsuit environment is likely to impact important business decisions at their company, such as where to locate or expand.

Plaintiff lawsuit abuse is a drain on the business climate hurting small businesses.

The Chamber supports legislative efforts to provide liability protections related to Covid-19 for businesses.

The Chamber opposes efforts that require defendants with financial resources to pay more than their fair share.

### III. Taxing and Spending

Reduce tax burdens to provide a direct economic stimulus at the most local level.

Reduce local government spending and tax rates. The Chamber opposes any new taxes or tax increases.

The Governor and Legislature must lead by example. Spending and taxing limitations imposed on local governments must be applied to the State budget.

We support efforts to reduce tax rates and fees in every level of government.

The Chamber supports legislative efforts to require internet sellers to collect and remit Florida Sales Tax. We need to level the playing field for main street sellers and collect the appropriate revenues applicable to internet sales.

### IV. Insurance

#### A. Insurance Reform

The Chamber supports legislation that promotes affordable insurance premiums for business general liability, workman's compensation, and professional liability insurance.

The Chamber supports efforts to limit the unsustainable burden of Medicaid.

The Chamber supports the development of a fair, sustainable health insurance system in Florida.

#### B. Windstorm Insurance

The Chamber urges the Florida Executive and Legislative branches of government to develop a fair, affordable and sustainable insurance program. The Legislature should set a timeline for the State of Florida to extricate itself from the insurance business.

#### C. Worker's Compensation

The Chamber supports continued reform and opposes any increases to premium costs for employers. After the business community enjoyed stable rates for several years, the Supreme Court reinstated the feeding trough for trial lawyers. The Legislature must address this issue to ensure workers' comp rates remain fair and not inflated by trial lawyer tactics and other unnecessary costs.

#### D. Reemployment Tax

The Chamber recommends measured and motivated reemployment job search efforts; and believes employees should participate in the tax; and work-for-benefits programs.

The Chamber supports improvements to the Florida Reemployment System to correct some of the flaws exposed during the recent pandemic.

## V. Environment

A healthy environment is essential to the economic success of Florida and Martin County.

The Chamber encourages the Legislature to work with the Governor to restore and protect the environment that makes Florida unique. Make it possible for our children to play in our local waters again. Help us to enjoy fish, clams and oysters from our rivers. Help us to protect our coral reefs and off shore fisheries.

The State should measure all current and proposed environmental initiatives and legislation for fiscal feasibility, economic stimulus value and sound scientific approach.

### A. Water

#### 1. Amendment 1

The Legislature must act to insure Amendment 1 dollars are allocated wisely. Rules based on sound scientific principles must be established to ensure these tax dollars are employed for the greatest effect including public-private partnerships.

The environmental and economic impact on downstream communities must be required as a measurable criterion in every project.

#### 2. Water Quality Policy

The water quality in area rivers has a major impact on business in Martin County and the Treasure Coast. Water issues are linked throughout the State and the Executive and Legislative branches of Florida government must lead the conversation to include all affected parties.

The Chamber strongly supports enhanced monitoring of water flowing into rivers, streams and canals north of Lake Okeechobee. We need to address problems at all sources that feed into the watershed.

The Chamber supports the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP) and allocation of state funds sufficient to secure matching federal funds to implement CERP.

The Chamber strongly supports increased inclusion of the business community in the solution of state water problems. Private enterprise has a higher sense of urgency and the proven ability to produce measureable results in a much shorter time frame than governmental agencies. We owe it to the environment and future generations to use all the talent available to fix these problems.

The Chamber supports managing the level of Lake Okeechobee with public safety and the health of the St Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon as higher priorities. The Chamber supports the Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery (LOER) Plan to fast track projects that restore the ecological health of the estuaries.

The Department of Environmental Protection should require all structures that discharge water into the St Lucie River to have discharge permits that require water quality to be monitored such that permit holders must comply with the Federal Clean Water Act.

The Chamber opposes the EPA's unfunded mandate that forces criteria onto local governments without substantiation. The Chamber recommends state organizations, including the DEP, take a scientific approach and basis for positions on water quality.

### 3. Stormwater Quantity

The Legislature should give priority to all stormwater options that eliminate the destructive releases to the St. Lucie River. Releases to the St. Lucie River should be a last resort not the first option of an inadequate stormwater management system.

The Chamber believes the Legislature should include performance requirements for reducing high-rate discharges to the estuaries in conjunction with SFWMD funding. We encourage the development of a proactive emergency response plan for major stormwater events that protect the estuaries from damaging releases by maintaining Lake Okeechobee at a lower level. Proactive stormwater disbursement and storage options north of Lake Okeechobee are essential to mitigate the rise in Lake Okeechobee to dangerous levels. An additional outlet south of the lake could provide capacity in extreme events to protect against dike failure and enough regular capacity to treat and supply clean water to the Everglades and Florida Bay.

The Chamber supports utilizing all opportunities to store and clean stormwater especially partnerships with private landowners.

### 4. State Water Resource Policy

The Chamber opposes regulation of the state's water resources by commissions or authorities not accountable to the Legislature. State water policy regulations must be subject to legislative review to ensure that promulgated rules are consistent with legislative intent.

The Legislature should require local, state and regional agencies charged with surface water management to account for the economic value and plan for recapture of this resource.

The water policy conversation requires a long-term vision that must include all affected parties.

### B. Energy Solutions

The Chamber supports a comprehensive strategy that balances affordable, sustainable and environmentally responsible energy solutions. The State should adopt a long-range reliable and sustainable energy policy that balances cost to consumers with environmental impact while addressing carbon emissions.

### C. Environmental Clean-Up

The Chamber supports measures that promote voluntary self-audits by businesses to identify problems without undue punitive use of information developed in the audit by state agencies and/or third parties.

## VI. Transportation

The Chamber supports funding of transportation systems that enable the workforce to travel to and from their jobs.

Use the Transportation Trust Fund only for Florida's transportation infrastructure. The Chamber opposes using these funds for any purpose other than transportation infrastructure.

We encourage the Legislature to measure transportation projects, including high-speed rail, for impacts on the health, safety and welfare of citizens. A good transportation plan should pay for itself and not impose a burden on the local governments to maintain a reasonable level of safety. Wherever possible the Legislature should encourage consideration of alternative rail corridors.

## VII. Economic Development

Measure all current and proposed economic development initiatives for fiscal feasibility and economic stimulus value.

Taxpayer-funded economic development initiatives must equitably include small communities in addition to the large urban centers.

The Chamber supports the use of incentives that attract new businesses and retains existing businesses in Florida. Incentive programs must be accountable to quantifiable results.

The Chamber supports the reduction of impact fees for small business.

## VIII. Education

### A. Workforce Development

The Chamber supports funding of education and training programs that attracts and retains businesses; provides learning opportunities for Florida's citizens; and supports funding for additional post-secondary education that prepares a high skill/high wage workforce to meet the economic development and employment demands of Martin County. Programs must be accountable to quantifiable results.

### B. Increased Graduation Rates

The Chamber supports efforts to increase graduation rates for students with the goal of increased quality of the workforce.

### C. Career / Technical Education

The Chamber supports increased emphasis on educational and technical job skills programs; and increased participation by the business community in the educational system.

### D. Post-Secondary Education

The Chamber supports continued expansion and increased funding for postsecondary education and training programs that provide professional advancement opportunities for Floridians, assist local communities with business recruitment and retention, and most importantly, prepare a high skill/high wage workforce to meet the economic development and employment demands within Martin County.

The Chamber supports expanding the availability of four-year degree programs at local colleges. These degree options provide the opportunity for our current workforce to participate in higher education and improve their career advancement. Small businesses then receive the benefit of dedicated, home-grown management candidates.

### G. Local Autonomy

The Chamber supports increased decision-making (local control) at the school board level and a reduction in state administrative mandates. State mandates must be accompanied by state funds.

### H. Taxes

“No New Taxes” and “No Tax Increases”.

Balance the budget in Tallahassee with State tax dollars or return authority to school boards to determine the local tax rate.

## IX. Growth Management

The Chamber supports streamlining policies and procedures that will allow and create responsible economic growth. Included in this should be measurement of all current and proposed growth management initiatives for fiscal feasibility and economic stimulus value.

### A. Permitting

The Chamber recommends a revised and consolidated permitting process that avoids unnecessary, time-consuming and expensive duplication; and avoids conflicts between state agencies, and between state and local agencies. Unnecessary additive state regulations are duplicative to federal regulations and must be eliminated. Permitting policies and rules of an agency should be acted on and enforced consistently across geographic boundaries within the agency.

### B. Concurrency

The Chamber believes that local governments need to address infrastructure needs concurrent with planned development as allowed by the Comprehensive Plan. The “stacked” bureaucratic expense of state oversight on local comprehensive planning should be eliminated.

### C. Return to Local Control

The Chamber supports less involvement of State agencies in land use decisions and increased local government final decision authority in land use and zoning matters.