



**PUTTING  
CHILDREN  
FIRST**

Infrastructure Investment Initiative

# ANALYSIS & REPORT

OCTOBER 3, 2017





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In December of 2016, the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce launched the Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative, or i3. Because our children are our community's best asset, helping to ensure they learn in the best possible school facilities, travel on safe roadways and enjoy well-designed and executed recreational facilities is key to a thriving and sustainable way of life.

To understand the infrastructure needs of the community, from December 2016 through July 2017, the i3 Steering Committee, comprised of a diverse group of 10 community leaders, attended 18 meetings with public officials, held three public input meetings around Alachua county and hosted four community presentations.

These meetings made clear that the infrastructure needs in our community are great, and that:

- repairing our K-12 public schools,
- fixing our roads,
- ensuring our public safety officers can communicate,
- improving our parks and recreational facilities,
- providing for our birth-to-five children,
- upgrading our internet coverage,
- and expanding transit options

are top-of-mind needs to our residents.

Having evaluated the needs as presented and researched funding options available to pay for these needs, the i3 Steering Committee and the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce support a School Board of Alachua County sales-tax initiative in 2018 to fund infrastructure repairs to our K-12 schools.

The Gainesville Chamber intends to continue working with our public officials and community groups on ways to meet our other infrastructure needs.

The i3 initiative is a citizen-driven process designed to investigate the infrastructure needs in our community and options to fund those needs.

The 10-member i3 Steering Committee convened to conduct this investigation is comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders from the Gainesville Chamber, the African American Accountability Alliance, the Alachua County Chapter of the NAACP, the Builders Association of North Central Florida, Alachua County Public Schools and the Alachua Chamber of Commerce.

In January and February of 2017, steering committee members met with stakeholders— including the City of Gainesville and Alachua County commissioners and staff, Alachua County Sheriff Sadie Darnell and staff and Alachua County School Board members and staff—to gather information on issues and needs. These meetings were followed by four community presentations and three public input meetings.

Finally, research was conducted to determine available funding options to pay for the infrastructure needs identified and deemed the highest priority. The i3 Analysis and Report was developed in August of 2017 and presented to the community in October of 2017.

## **i3 Steering Committee Roster**

- Brian Scarborough, Chair, and Executive Vice President, HUB
- Khanh-Lien Banko, President, Alachua County Council of PTAs
- Judy Boles, Executive Director, The Education Foundation of Alachua County (ret.)
- Aaron Bosshardt, President, Bosshardt Realty and Property Management
- Scott Buchanan, Vice President, AMJ Inc. of Gainesville
- Dean Cheshire, Partner, Cheshire Companies
- Evelyn Foxx, President, Alachua County NAACP
- Joe Hancock, President, Alachua Chamber of Commerce
- Diyonne McGraw, Chair, African American Accountability Alliance
- Clay Sweger, Principal and Director of Planning, eda
- Ex officio: Jay Nordqvist, Principal Engineer, GSE
- Ex officio: Jonathan Mills, Realtor, Berkshire Hathaway Home Services--Trend Realty

# TIMELINE

The i3 Steering Committee commenced its efforts on December 14, 2016.

## 2016 meeting

- December 14: i3 Steering Committee

## 2017 meetings

- January 5: i3 Chair/Chamber staff with Alachua County Commission Chair Ken Cornell
- January 5: i3 Chair/Chamber Board of Directors Chair with Children's Services Council
- January 9: i3 Chair/Chamber staff with Gainesville Sun Editorial Board
- January 11: i3 Chair/Chamber staff with Gainesville Mayor Lauren Poe
- January 17: i3 Steering Committee with Director Steve Phillips and Assistant Director Michelle Park, City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs
- January 17: Chamber staff attends School Board of Alachua County (SBAC) Capital Outlay Workshop
- January 18: i3 Steering Committee with Assistant County Manager James Harriott and County Engineer Ramon Gavarrete
- January 18: i3 Chair/Chamber staff with SBAC Chair Rob Hyatt and Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS) Interim Superintendent Sandy Hollinger
- January 23: i3 Steering Committee
- January 27: i3 Chair/Chamber staff with Alachua County Sheriff Sadie Darnell and staff
- February 24: i3 Steering Committee with Sheriff Sadie Darnell and staff
- March 3: i3 Steering Committee and Alachua County Council of PTAs (ACCPTA) with Community Planning Director Vicki McGrath, ACPS
- March 27: i3 Steering Committee/Chamber staff with County Commissioner Mike Byerly
- March 29: i3 Public Input Meeting #1: Public Safety Radio System
- April 7: i3 Steering Committee and ACCPTA School Facilities Tour
- April 10: i3 Steering Committee/Chamber staff with County Commissioner Robert Hutchinson
- April 24: i3 Steering Committee/Chamber staff with County Commissioner Charles Chestnut
- April 27: i3 Steering Committee/Chamber staff with County Commissioner Lee Pinkoson

- May 17: i3 Steering Committee with Children’s Services Council (CSC) and Gainesville Citizens for Active Transportation (GCAT)
- May 23: i3 Public Input Meeting #2: Alachua County Public Schools Infrastructure
- June 5: i3 Steering Committee/Chamber staff with SBAC member Dr. Gunnar Paulson
- June 5: i3 Steering Committee/Chamber staff with SBAC member Dr. Leannetta McNealy
- June 7: i3 Steering Committee/Chamber staff with SBAC member Eileen Roy
- June 28: i3 Steering Committee with City Fire Chief Jeff Lane and City Police Chief Tony Jones and Connected Gainesville
- July 12: i3 Public Input Meeting #3: Alachua County Roads Infrastructure
- July 25: i3 Steering Committee Chair/Chamber staff with ACPS Superintendent Karen Clarke
- August 1-14: i3 Analysis and Report research
- August 28: i3 Analysis and Report Steering Committee draft
- August 30: i3 Steering Committee feedback deadline
- September 5: i3 Steering Committee approves draft report
- September 6-28: Gainesville Chamber Public Policy, Executive Committee and Board of Directors report review
- October 3: i3 Analysis and Report released

# ISSUE IDENTIFICATION: PRESENTATIONS

The i3 Steering Committee gathered information from public officials overseeing our community's infrastructure, including our public safety communications systems, our K-12 public schools, our roads and our parks and recreational facilities. Three public input meetings allowed community members to hear from public officials about our public safety communications system, our schools and our roads. The committee also heard from community organizations devoted to improving life in our region, including those dedicated to serving the needs of birth-to-five-aged children, to improving transit options and to upgrading internet connectivity throughout the county. Summaries of these presentations are included here, with links to the complete presentations included in the Appendix.

At the three public input meetings, the i3 Steering Committee hosted roundtable discussions, which allowed attendees to engage on this issue. Attendees were asked to assign priority to the infrastructure needs identified. A summary is included here, detailed roundtable notes included in the Appendix.

## ***Presentations***

- City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs
- Alachua County Sheriff Public Safety Radio System (TRS)
- Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS) Infrastructure
- Alachua County Roads Infrastructure
- Children's Services Council (CSC)
- Gainesville Citizens for Active Transportation (GCAT)
- Connected Gainesville

## ***Public Input Meetings***

- March 23, 2017: Alachua County TRS
- May 29, 2017: Alachua County Public Schools Infrastructure
- July 12, 2017: Alachua County Roads Infrastructure



## **CITY OF GAINESVILLE PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

The City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs (PRCA) mission is to “provide and maintain the natural, recreational and cultural places and programs that make Gainesville a great place to live, work and visit and help sustain the City economically, socially and environmentally.”

In November 2012, the City Commission approved the Vision 2020 Master Plan, which identifies gaps in service levels and amenities and needed renovations, and identifies action needed and their costs. In November 2016, 60.4% of voters approved the Wild Spaces Public Places (WSPP) half-cent infrastructure sales tax. WSPP is expected to generate \$46.5 million over eight years. As an infrastructure tax, however, the funds cannot be used to maintain facilities, only to build new facilities or make infrastructure improvements to existing ones.

### **Issues Identified, Vision 2020**

99 projects that will:

- Improve ADA access and add amenities to 80 existing facilities
- Develop eight new neighborhood parks
- Add shade to recreational facilities
- Expand youth programming
- Renovate pools
- Increase connectivity of multi-use trails and improve facilities at trailheads

### **PRCA Needs**

\$81.6 million in projects - \$4.5 million in County/City funds - \$46.5 million in WSPP = Vision 2020 is underfunded by \$31 million

## **ALACHUA COUNTY SHERIFF PUBLIC SAFETY RADIO SYSTEM**

Operated by GRUcom, the Public Safety Radio System (TRS) is managed by the Radio Management Board (RMB), which was established in 1999 as an interlocal agreement (the current agreement expires in 2020). TRS is funded by subscriber fees on the radios used as well as through debt repayment of the GRUcom bond.

Various efforts have been undertaken to solidify a technology upgrade path and identify its costs. Most recently, in a joint meeting of the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners and the Gainesville City Commission, the commissioners approved developing a request for proposals (RFP) to authorize the RMB to: hire a consultant to examine the problem; propose solutions; and to direct their staffs to work directly with GRU to resolve immediate-term needs.

## ***Issues Identified***

- TRS infrastructure is at the end of its life, using 1980s technology
- Current system cannot penetrate new buildings/high-rise, i.e. first responders could not communicate during a shooting incident at a big-box retailer
- Current system leaves communications gaps around the county, a school resource officer could not communicate with dispatch during disturbance at Eastside High School

## ***TRS Projected Needs***

Depending on consultant findings—expand, upgrade, replace—estimated cost: \$25 million

## ***ALACHUA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS INFRASTRUCTURE***

The Alachua County Public Schools (ACPS) educate 27,000 Kindergarten to 12th grade students at 41 schools and centers and employ 4,000 teachers and support staff. ACPS maintains five million square feet of interior space, and the average age of the school buildings around the county is 34 years. 1,700 additional students have flooded the system in the last three years, and 3,400 students are taught in portable classrooms. Renovations to provide classrooms suitable for the 21st century—new technology, updated science labs, career tech facilities—are sorely needed. More critical, perhaps, is the need to catch-up on basic building maintenance, which has often been deferred due to lack of funds.

ACPS, like school districts across the state, has seen a steady reduction in funding over the last six years. The state reduced the 2 mill ad valorem property tax rate from 1.5 mill in 2008. Funds from the Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO—the primary funding source for state public schools, colleges and universities, generated from tax revenue) were eliminated from 2011 through 2014. This year, PECO funds provided \$1.28 million to ACPS, but next year the funding will be only \$800,000. The Education Bill signed into law earlier this year by Governor Rick Scott awards \$600,000 to the county's 13 charter schools.

Local funding is also being reduced. Less revenue is being generated from property taxes, and the recently approved GRU/GREC purchase will further reduce property tax revenue by \$450,000 per year.

## ***Issues Identified***

- Catch-up renovations to roofs, HVAC, paint and flooring: \$18.8 million
- Yearly maintenance: \$6.5 million annually

## ***ACPS Needs***

- Critical need: \$18.8 million
- Study of full list of needs underway

## ***ALACHUA COUNTY ROADS INFRASTRUCTURE***

The foundation policy for the Alachua County roads team is “to provide a pavement design of adequate structure to meet the needs of the community that is affordable for its lifespan.” In doing so, staff considers reconstruction (retrofit) and resurfacing. Reconstruction improves the roadway to a current standard (for example, widening for bicycle lanes) and adds or improves facilities. Resurfacing, on the other hand, maintains the status quo while addressing immediate hazards and deficiencies. The difference is cost: reconstruction can be 3x the cost of resurfacing.

The roads team classifies Alachua County roads by color:

- Green = acceptable, the roadway is less than 15 years old
- Yellow = poor, the roadway is between 15 and 20 years old
- Red = problematic/critical, the roadway is more than 20 years old

In Alachua County, we have 700 centerline miles of paved roads, and 60% to 65% of the roadways are labeled yellow or red. Moving “red” to “green” requires reconstruction and resurfacing. Moving “yellow” to “green” requires sealing and rejuvenation. The goal is to resurface 35 to 49 centerline miles every year. Last year, the county was able to resurface only four centerline miles. When resurfacing is delayed too long, and the damage is too great, that option disappears and reconstruction - a far more costly option - is required.

Prior to 2016, funding for pavement projects was very limited. Alachua County increased the roads budget (taken from the general fund) by 27% from 2016 to 2017 and by 40% from 2016 to 2018. By removing some Comprehensive Plan requirements, removing the RTS allocation from the gas tax revenue and changing surface types on some rural roads, the roads team has funding in place for a number of projects scheduled for work over the next five years. The backlog of needed road work, however, remains great. Other funding sources—gas tax, federal and state grants, MSTU revenue and service charges and fleet management—do not provide the extra funds needed to address the backlog.

## ***Issues Identified***

- \$10 to \$17 million for yearly resurfacing (maintain the status quo of the roadways, fix deficiencies)
- Estimated \$340 million over five years to completely resurface or reconstruct identified county-wide roads

## ***Alachua County Roads Needs***

\$10 to \$17 million per year, which will provide needed funds to stay on top of annual maintenance requirements

## ***ALACHUA COUNTY CHILDREN'S SERVICES COUNCIL***

Research shows that to succeed in school, children must be ready to attend Kindergarten at age five and must read on grade level by 4th grade. In Alachua County, we have an achievement gap between our students that is significantly wider than the state average: 87% of our white students score at a level 3 or higher on standardized tests, while just 43% of our African-American students do, resulting in an achievement gap of 44%. The state gap is 28%. In the 2014-2015 school year, 1,278 students were not promoted to the next grade or did not graduate.

To better prepare our students, the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners established the Children's Services Advisory Board to identify the barriers to success for children between birth and five years. The Advisory Board discovered the cost of childcare, the lack of quality childcare options, the lack of knowledge by families of available services and difficulties with transportation present significant obstacles to Alachua County families.

Better support services will result in better-prepared children. The Children's Services Advisory Board wants to upgrade from its current role as a dependent council (that receives money from general funds that must be approved each year) to an independent Children's Services Council. An independent Council must be approved by the voters on the ballot and is funded by a half-mill residential property tax. It also must serve children of all ages.

Other Florida counties with successful Children's Services Councils include: Broward, Lake, Palm Beach, Miami-Dade, St. Lucie, Jacksonville, Martin and Hillsborough.

## **Goals Identified**

- Ensure every baby is a healthy baby
- Ensure all parents have resources needed to prevent child abuse and neglect
- Ensure all families have access to affordable and developmentally appropriate childcare
- Ensure all children enter Kindergarten ready to learn and succeed
- Provide summer, afterschool, literacy, mentoring, special needs, enrichment programs and counseling services to children of all ages

## **CSC Needs**

Support half-mill voter referendum on November 2018 ballot

Delay any proposed ballot initiatives, so as not to compete with CSC initiative

## **GAINESVILLE CITIZENS FOR ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION (GCAT)**

Active transportation—by bicycle, pedestrian and public means—provides several important benefits to the community at large.

The yearly expense of owning an automobile, averaging about \$8,000 per year, puts this mode of transportation out of reach for many. In the City of Gainesville, 56% of households have no or one vehicle and in Alachua County, 48% of households have no or one. Not surprisingly, support for modes of active transportation has increased while driving has decreased. In our county, in 2000 8.4% of residents used a mode other than car to get around, while 87.5% of residents drove. By 2013, 10.7% were using active transportation, while 83.6% were driving.

Though fewer of us may be driving, a significant number of accidents occur each year. From 2012 to 2014, there were 17,000 car crashes in Alachua County, with 6,000 of those causing injuries or loss of life.

Despite the measurable benefits to active transportation, currently 0.9% of transportation funding goes to its support.

## **Issues Identified**

- Classify texting as a primary offense
- Lower speed limits in the urban cluster
- Invest in best practices for bike and pedestrian facilities
- Create walkable/bikeable networks to all schools

## **GCAT Needs**

Support policy reforms

## **CONNECTED GAINESVILLE**

Connected Gainesville formed early in 2017 to “fight for better rates and reliability” with the City of Gainesville’s internet system. According to FCC data, 15% of Alachua County lacks access to a broadband internet connection, which is more than double the statewide average. That’s down from 2015, where data showed the percentage at 22%. The yearly cost of broadband internet is also higher in Gainesville than it is in most other Florida cities: the average yearly cost here is \$1,055, higher than the \$983 paid by users in Jacksonville, the \$923 paid in Tallahassee or the \$923 paid in Miami. It’s significantly higher than the \$779 paid in Orlando and Tampa, and the \$599 paid in St. Petersburg.

Increasingly, access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet is seen as critical to community success, particularly to meet the needs of business and students.

### ***Issues Identified***

Lack of competition is the major factor in both the higher prices and lack of service improvements faced by our community

### ***CG Needs***

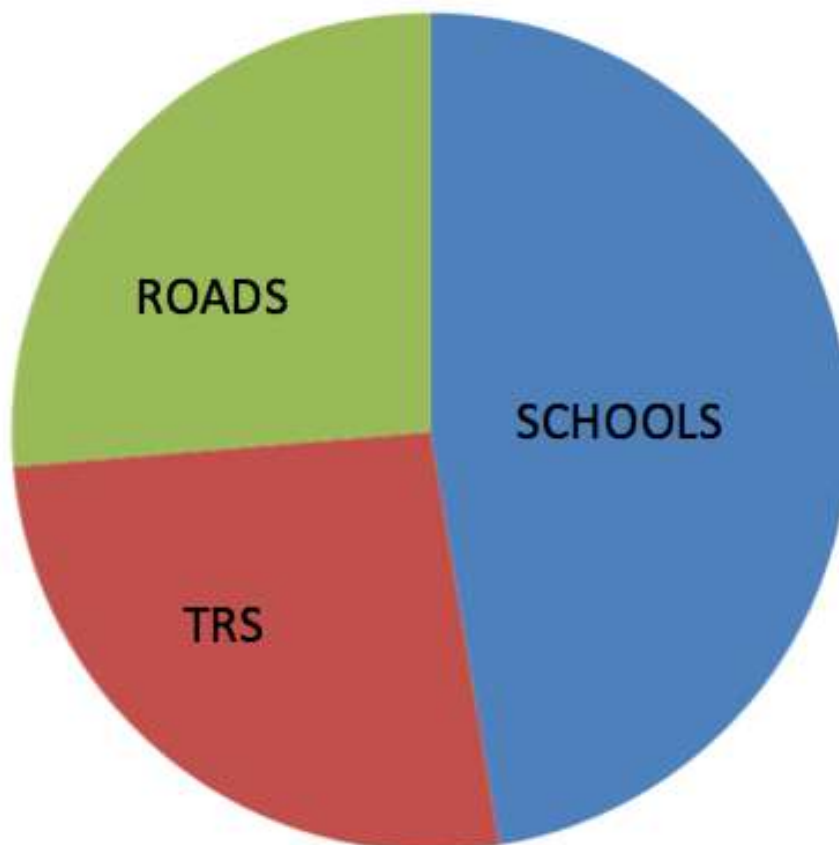
Support Connected Gainesville as it studies and raises awareness of this issue

# ISSUE IDENTIFICATION: PUBLIC MEETINGS

## *Public Input Meetings*

The i3 Steering Committee hosted three Public Input Meetings around Alachua County in 2017, on March 29th at the Alachua County Senior Recreation Center, on May 23rd at the Shands Auxiliary Conference Center and on July 12th at North Florida Regional Medical Center South Tower Conference Center. Following presentations by our public officials, attendees broke into roundtable discussion groups. Attendees were asked to identify and assign priority to our infrastructure needs. From the 19 total roundtable discussion groups, schools, roads and public safety communications (TRS) were identified as the top three needs, and school improvements was a clear priority for those in attendance.

## *Schools are Our Top Priority*





# i3 IN PICTURES

Throughout the course of the i3 effort, more than 200 people participated in the process, be it attending a public meeting, giving a presentation to the i3 steering committee or requesting information. Below are a selection of photos from the public meetings.





# FUNDING SOURCES

## Local Discretionary Sales Taxes

The base sales tax rate in Florida is 6%. The state allows municipalities to add to that 6% (up to a total of 8%) with nine different surtaxes to provide additional funds for local needs. Surtaxes are decided by voters during their local elections.

Currently, 25 of Florida's 67 counties levy the Local Government Infrastructure (LGI) Surtax (seven counties voted for a surtax for 2017, including Alachua County's Wild Spaces Public Places), with the majority of the revenues collected used to fund infrastructure, economic development, public service and school projects. Seventeen counties levy the School Capital Outlay Surtax (.5 cent) and nine have both the LGI and the school surtax.

## Local Government Infrastructure (LGI) Surtax

This surtax can vary between 0.5 and 1.0%, as approved by voters in the applicable county. The revenue generated by this surtax can only be used to fund the specified projects listed on the ballot.

| County       | LGI Surtax | Project Types   |
|--------------|------------|---|
| Alachua      | .5 cent    | Parks and recreation, land acquisition                                    |
| Bay          | .5 cent    | Roads   |
| Brevard      | .5 cent    | Recreation (Indian River Lagoon)  |
| Charlotte    | 1 cent     | Infrastructure, fire/safety, water/stormwater, schools                    |
| Clay         | 1 cent     | Transportation infrastructure, debt service                               |
| Duval        | .5 cent    | Infrastructure, recreation, libraries, fire/safety, beach restoration     |
| Escambia     | 1 cent     | Economic development, infrastructure, community services                  |
| Glades       | 1 cent     | Infrastructure, landfills, lands for conservation/protection              |
| Highlands    | 1 cent     | Public safety equipment (fire trucks/patrol cars), EMS stations, parks    |
| Hillsborough | .5 cent    | Infrastructure (shared w/ School District and Tampa Sports Authority)     |
| Indian River | 1 cent     | Road repair/restoration, fire/safety, parks, stormwater, land acquisition |
| Lake         | 1 cent     | Public safety (ambulances, fire trucks, patrol cars), schools             |
| Leon         | 1 cent     | Economic development, parks and recreation, land for greenway             |
| Manatee      | .5 cent    | Transportation infrastructure, public safety, parks                       |
| Marion       | 1 cent     | Public safety, transportation infrastructure                              |
| Monroe       | 1 cent     | Roads, wastewater, parks, bike paths, acquisition for conservation        |
| Osceola      | 1 cent     | Infrastructure  |
| Palm Beach   | 1 cent     | Transportation infrastructure, schools                                    |
| Pasco        | 1 cent     | Economic development, schools, 20% for acquiring sensitive land           |
| Pinellas     | 1 cent     | Capital projects (roads, bridges, beaches), debt service                  |
| Putnam       | 1 cent     | Roads, parks and recreation, public services (library, senior center)     |
| Santa Rosa   | .5 cent    | Roads, public safety  |
| Sarasota     | 1 cent     | Infrastructure, economic development, schools, acquire lands              |
| Seminole     | 1 cent     | Roads, trails, sewers, sidewalks  |
| Wakulla      | 1 cent     | Infrastructure, public safety, public services, parks and recreation      |

## School Capital Outlay Surtax

The revenue from this surtax, of .5%, can only be used to fund school capital projects. The specific projects must be included on the ballot and conform with state requirements.

| School Surtax (.5 cent) by County | LGI Surtax? |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Bay                               | yes         |
| Brevard                           | yes         |
| Calhoun                           |             |
| Escambia                          | yes         |
| Flagler                           |             |
| Hernando                          |             |
| Highlands                         | yes         |
| Leon                              | yes         |
| Liberty                           |             |
| Manatee                           | yes         |
| Monroe                            | yes         |
| Orange                            |             |
| Osceola                           | yes         |
| Polk                              |             |
| St. John's                        |             |
| St. Lucie                         |             |
| Santa Rosa                        | yes         |

The Infrastructure Surtax and the School Capital Outlay Surtax are two of the nine different types of local discretionary sales surtaxes (also called local option county sales taxes) allowed by law as potential revenue sources for county and municipal governments and school districts. Discretionary sales surtaxes apply to all transactions subject to the state sales and communications services taxes. In Alachua County, a .05 cent surtax is estimated to generate \$16 million per year.

The nine types of local discretionary sales surtaxes are:

- Charter County and Regional Transportation System
- County Public Hospital
- Emergency Fire Rescue Services and Facilities
- Indigent Care and Trauma Center
- Local Government Infrastructure
- Pension Liability
- School Capital Outlay
- Small County
- Voter-approved Indigent Care

As shown, discretionary sales surtax rates vary from county to county, and are set by the local government within the limits set by Florida Statutes. The Department administers, collects, and enforces discretionary sales surtaxes. The Department transfers the proceeds of each county's collections to the Discretionary Sales Surtax Clearing Trust Fund. Each county has a separate account in the fund.

## *Passing a Sales Surtax*

It is not easy to pass a local sales surtax. Broward County, for example, placed a one-cent surtax initiative on the ballot in 2016. The tax would have provided funds for county transportation improvements and for city infrastructure. Though voters were in support of efforts to ease the county's traffic woes with improved bus service, sidewalks and light-rail, they voted against the combined tax. In Alachua County, transportation surtaxes have been rejected three times in Alachua County: in 2004, in 2012 and in 2014. Lake, Marion and Manatee Counties have successfully passed local surtaxes to fund infrastructure projects. Elements identified as key to these successes are:

- A broad coalition of support
- A well-defined project list
- Public road shows
- Educational websites
- An oversight board

## **Lake County**

The Infrastructure Sales Tax was first established in Lake County in 1988 for a term of 15 years.

It was renewed by the voters during a special election on November 6, 2001, and is set to expire on December 31, 2017. The Lake County Board of County Commissioners voted on May 5, 2015 to advertise an ordinance for the re-authorization of the Infrastructure Sales Tax.

The Lake County Chamber Alliance (a non-profit coalition of the cities' Chambers of Commerce) issued a white paper urging voters to reject the one-cent sales tax referendum to support a range of infrastructure projects, primarily because the stated goals did not reflect the "real priorities" of county residents: schools, roads and utilities.

Conversely, the county government used a dedicated website as its educational tool, providing information about the tax vehicle itself, a photographic history of past projects funded by the surtax, a list of proposed projects and details on its oversight board. It also walked site visitors through the voter registration and voting process, and highlighted important dates.

Voters overwhelmingly approved the surtax extension: 71% for, 29% against.

## Marion County

Unlike Alachua County, where voters have three times defeated roads initiatives, Marion County last year successfully passed a one-cent surtax for roads and public safety that will sunset in four years. Though not an overwhelming victory, 55% of the generally conservative voters in the county approved the tax.

Chamber of Commerce support was integral to the success of the initiative. The Star-Banner reported that a committee formed by the Ocala/Marion County Chamber & Economic Partnership (CEP) raised more than \$55,000 to convince voters to support the tax. And that in the two months or so leading up to the election, the committee — Citizens Encouraging Progress — sent 40,000 mailers and advertised on a dozen county billboards. The committee president also spoke to numerous homeowners and community groups, reaching an audience estimated to be about 5,000.

As in Lake County, a website was used to inform voters, providing a pictorial of projects and details about the tax and how it is managed.

## Manatee County

The Bradenton Herald lent its editorial support to Manatee County's effort to pass a half-cent, 15-year surtax. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the revenue is slated for transportation infrastructure improvements, with the remaining split about evenly between public safety and law enforcement and parks and community amenities. County officials took an interesting tack in addressing the trust issue:

- The county established a Manatee County Citizens Financial Advisory Board to study the issue of revenue streams and propose options. That board spent four months combing through more than 150 county sub budgets. After that deep review, the panel recommended the surtax as the best avenue for saving the county from falling into further disrepair. They did the hard work analyzing county spending and found no fat.
- The Manatee County Commission and School Board did talk about combining their efforts into a joint sales tax referendum, as the School Board's half-cent sales tax is set to expire this year. Ultimately it was decided to pursue separate initiatives to be "more fair" to voters and to be "very clear" on how the money is to be spent.

As such, the School Board issued its own resolution for an extension of its half-cent tax, so both the new infrastructure sales tax and the extension of the existing school tax were on the November 2016 ballot. The School Board tax included a new provision for an oversight board.

Voters approved both taxes. The infrastructure tax was approved by 57% of the voters, while the school tax extension was approved by 59%.