

# 13: PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT INITIATIVE ANALYSIS & REPORT



## NEWS COVERAGE



### ***Jonathan Mills and Jay Nordqvist: Infrastructure issues won't go away***

*By Jonathan Mills / and Jay Nordqvist / Special to The Sun*

*Posted Jul 7, 2017 at 2:00 PM*

*Updated Jul 7, 2017 at 3:09 PM*

*It's easy to be cynical in our current political climate. And even more so, it is easy to be complacent, especially when you enjoy the quality of life that we are afforded in Alachua County. However, if we want to maintain or improve this quality of life in Alachua County for all children and adults, we must find a way to come together to address several pressing issues. For example, did you know that:*

*— First responders do not have the infrastructural support they need serve us or protect themselves. The portable communication system used by police officers, firefighters, Gainesville Regional Utilities linemen and public works field staff is so outdated that radios don't work in certain buildings — including many public schools — or in some rural areas. When some of the towers need replacement parts, they are often purchased on eBay, because replacement parts are no longer being manufactured.*

*— The buildings where Alachua County K-12 students go to learn are in critical need of repairs and updates. Currently, it would take an estimated \$18.5 million for our School Board to catch up on deferred maintenance needs to roofs, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, painting and flooring. Funding for road resurfacing needs to be increased five-fold for timely maintenance and avoidance of increased costs. The price of delay eventually removes resurfacing as an option and the cost to reconstruct a failed road is three times that of resurfacing.*

*— We are making progress with parks and recreation, but still have much work to do. Despite \$40 million going toward parks and recreation via the Wild Spaces and Public Places surtax, approximately \$30 million of projects will remain unfunded.*

*All of these infrastructural issues have safety, cost and quality-of-life implications for everyone who lives in Alachua County. They will not go away. In fact, over time, these issues will only get worse, and their solutions will only become harder for us to afford.*



*In the fall of last year, we joined a committee spearheaded by the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, tasked with identifying the most pressing infrastructure needs in our community, and — importantly — identifying the best way to fund those needs. The Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative, or i3, is designed to help marshal the collective will of not only our 10-member Steering Committee, but also the citizens of Alachua County.*

*Since April, the first two of our i3 public meetings have engaged more than 140 people in explorative discussions on infrastructure needs for K-12 public school facilities as well as the communications system used by first responders including police officers, firefighters, GRU linemen and public works field staff. These topics, in addition to infrastructure for roads and parks and recreation are among those identified by the i3 Steering Committee as areas of infrastructural need. Collectively, the information gathered thus far validates that Alachua County's current infrastructure needs are significant and affect all citizens every day.*

*We hope you will join us on Wednesday, July 12, for our third i3 Public Meeting, from 6 to 8 pm, at North Florida Regional Medical Center's South Tower Conference Center. At this meeting, we will provide an overview of the i3 effort so far, and Deputy Manager for Public Works James Harriott and County Engineer Ramon Gavarrete will review our roadway repair and maintenance needs and the currently available funding sources.*

*A Q&A session and breakout sessions give you the opportunity to share your views on our infrastructure needs. We need to hear from you so that we can move beyond cynicism and complacency, and truly make Alachua County the home we all want it to be, for now and for our future.*

*— Joakim "Jay" Nordqvist is the CEO, co-owner and a principal engineer at GSE Engineering. Jonathan Mills is a Realtor with Berkshire Hathaway Home Services — Trend Realty. Both have been active participants in the i3 process since it began in fall 2016.*



## ***Not bright and shiny, but basic school repairs top group's list***

*By Douglas Ray*

*Posted May 23, 2017 at 10:15 PM*

*Updated May 24, 2017 at 7:53 AM*

*Chamber gathers insight as it considers a sales tax referendum.*

*One by one, 10 table captains reported back to the small crowd gathered Tuesday evening in a conference room at UF Health Shands Cancer Hospital, describing the small-group conversations they had just led on infrastructure priorities for Alachua County.*

*The focus wasn't on a new conference center, a downtown trolley system or an airport expansion. Brian Scarborough, committee chairman for the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, had warned them this was mundane stuff: asphalt, air conditioners, high school science labs and radio equipment. The overwhelming priority that evening, according to the table captains, was on fixing up Alachua County public schools, where the cost of delayed maintenance projects totals more than \$18 million, and it will cost more than \$6 million a year not to fall further behind.*

*The chamber formed the Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative — or i3 — last year to study the needs of children to ensure they can learn in the best school facilities, travel on safe roads and enjoy well-designed recreational facilities.*

*Its steering committee has been meeting with public officials and it is now engaged in a series of public meetings to gather more insight. The intent is to consider a ballot initiative for a sales tax hike to fund repairs to basic local infrastructure.*

*Scarborough, a Gainesville native who is helping his father run a family-owned insurance company, understands that selling the idea of increasing the local sales tax won't be easy. Alachua County voters just last year extended taxes for local schools and public lands. And two recent referendums for transportation have been rejected.*

*Still, he insists, there is a basic public responsibility for upkeep of infrastructure.*

*“You voted for programs. Now we're talking about building stuff,” he told the group of about 100 people — chamber members, public officials, community activists and regular citizens — who came to Tuesday's meeting.*

*It was the second in a series of three planned public meetings. The next one will be on road resurfacing.*

*Following Tuesday's meeting, Juan Rivera, 26, a software engineer at Mindtree, said he would be willing to vote for raising the sales tax if he was confident the money raised would be used as intended.*

*“I live here. I've been here for a while. I care about my community,” said Rivera, a graduate of Buchholz High School.*

*Jackie Johnson, communications director for Alachua County Public Schools, laid out the plight the system faces. She noted that enrollment is growing but facilities are aging. The state provided public schools with no money for maintenance or construction from 2011-14 and now divides that money, with half going to the 650 charter schools across Florida, and the other half going to the state's 3,600 traditional public schools.*

*The chamber's i3 steering committee recently joined a bus tour of local public schools. Scarborough described a band room at Santa Fe High School where the 20 people of the tour felt cramped, but where 80 band students regularly practice. He said the one science lab at Eastside High School has an eye-wash station that hasn't worked in years. All of the schools they visited had air conditioning problems.*



## ***Diyonne McGraw and Clay Sweger: Community has pressing infrastructure needs***

*By Diyonne McGraw / and Clay Sweger / Special to The Sun*

*Posted May 19, 2017 at 2:00 PM*

*Updated May 19, 2017 at 2:02 PM*

*In September of last year, we were approached to join a diverse group of citizens on a committee tasked with identifying the most pressing infrastructure needs in our community and — importantly — identifying the best way to fund those needs. With years of respective hard work to make Alachua County better for all residents, we were delighted to join the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce's Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative, or i3, to help marshal the collective will of not only our 10-member steering committee, but also the will of the citizens of Alachua County.*

*It is no accident that our initiative emphasizes children. Because our children are one of our best assets in our community, helping to ensure they learn in the best possible school facilities, travel on safe roadways, and enjoy well-designed and executed recreational facilities are all keys to a thriving and sustainable way of life. If we can all agree on this as a worthy goal, then it stands to reason that any taxpayer-funded infrastructure initiatives should make repairing/constructing K-12 public schools, fixing roads and improving parks and recreational facilities a priority. i3 offers our community the opportunity to engage on this issue.*

*Since we kicked off this effort last September, we have engaged with stakeholders throughout our community, meeting with School Board Chair Rob Hyatt, Alachua County Sheriff Sadie Darnell, Gainesville Mayor Lauren Poe, Alachua County Commission Chairman Ken Cornell and Alachua County Commissioner Robert Hutchinson, as well as with both the city of Gainesville's Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs and Alachua County's Department of Public Works.*

*And — no surprise — the information we have gathered shows that Alachua County's current infrastructure needs are great, affect citizens every day and exceed the resources available to address them. Our schools need upgrades and improvements. Our roads need repair. A host of worthy parks projects will remain unfunded even with the recently approved Wild Spaces & Public Places surtax.*

*But our research did not stop there. We've also learned that the Alachua County Sheriff's Office Combined Communication Center, which receives all 911 calls in our area, is dependent upon a county-wide public safety radio system operating on 1980s technology. This means that communication center dispatchers cannot always talk with our police officers/deputies, firefighters, emergency medical and school resource personnel at critical times. In fact, these first responders sometimes end up relying on their personal cell phones to communicate with the 911 center or each other.*

*Our outreach is continuing, and in the coming months, we will be working diligently to learn about needs and gaps in funding for early childhood education, public transportation, public safety and connectivity, and work collaboratively to support possible solutions.*

*In the last month or so, we have begun the process of sharing what we know. We held our first public meeting in March, and those in attendance heard firsthand from the Sheriff's Office about our critical communications needs. On Tuesday, May 23, we are hosting the second i3 public meeting, with our co-host UF Health, at the Shands Auxiliary Conference Center, from 6 to 8 p.m.*

*We will provide an overview of our process so far and the School Board of Alachua County will present an overview of the schools' infrastructure needs and current and potential funding sources to meet those needs. Breakout sessions will then give you the opportunity to help identify and prioritize the most pressing infrastructure needs in our county.*

*From our research and the input we receive from you at our public meetings, we will produce a report in September of 2017 that documents our needs and priorities and potentially a draft ballot initiative to address them. We urge you to be part of this process beginning this Tuesday. Let's work together and find the common ground needed to improve our community, for ourselves and, more importantly, for our children.*

*— Diyonne McGraw is the chair of the African American Accountability Alliance (4As) political action committee. Clay Sweger is a principal and director of planning with EDA Engineers-Surveyors-Planners Inc. Both serve as steering committee members for the chamber's i3 initiative.*



# Gainesville.com

## **Chamber weighs needs of schools, roads, emergency communications**

*By Deborah Strange*

*Posted Mar 29, 2017 at 10:27 PM*

*Updated Mar 30, 2017 at 9:53 AM*

*The Infrastructure Investment Initiative steering committee say the community's infrastructure in schools and roads is in need of serious rehabilitation, and the communication system connecting emergency responders, hospitals, the school board and other organizations is crumbling.*

*During a gang-related brawl at Eastside High School last year, an Alachua County Sheriff's Office deputy radioed to dispatchers requesting backup.*

*The dispatch office heard a long string of garbled words.*

*“You’re unreadable,” the dispatcher replied. “Did you advise you have a fight?”*

*For minutes, the deputy and dispatcher went back and forth, unable to properly communicate, until the deputy used her cellphone.*

*The sheriff’s office has been “one lightning strike away from catastrophe” for years, Chief Deputy Col. David Huckstep said at a meeting hosted by the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday. The radio towers are becoming blocked by a heightening landscape, and radios themselves are becoming antiquated, with equipment pieces no longer in production.*

*Within many schools, deputies are unable to speak to each other using their radios, and getting reception in Newberry, Waldo and Archer is difficult. Bringing attention to the issue has been a challenge, Sheriff Sadie Darnell said.*

*“We’re getting some momentum, but it’s taking too long,” she said.*

*The chamber established the Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative, or i3, in September to examine the community’s infrastructure needs.*

*It was created in opposition to the Wild Spaces Public Places surtax on the November 2016 ballot, which ultimately passed by a 20-point margin to fund park facilities and land conservation.*

*Now, it’s focusing on the needs of schools, roadways and communication centers.*

*“There’s a lot of headwinds, and at the heart of it is I’m going to come to you and ask for money, so I’d better have a compelling case,” said Brian Scarborough, chairman of the initiative’s steering committee.*

*So far, the steering committee has found that the community’s infrastructure in schools and roads is in need of serious rehabilitation, and the communication system connecting emergency responders, hospitals, the school board and other organizations is crumbling.*

*It would take hundreds of millions of dollars to get everything in shape, he said — not including any new school construction or radio tower replacements.*

*But the initiative wants to break up the projects’ finances to avoid scaring off taxpayers with a mountain of money that seems too much to feasibly pay.*

*“You define it in little bits,” Scarborough said. “Tell me what the delta is annually and then you’ve got a fighting chance.”*

*“How do you eat an elephant?” he continued. “In bite-sized amounts.”*

*Instead of looking at the total roadwork maintenance and repair cost of \$300 million to \$500 million, he said, spending \$12.5 million each year seems possible.*

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*At the meeting, participants gathered in small groups to discuss what they saw as pressing needs in their immediate residential and work areas. Jay Nordqvist, principal engineer of GSE Engineering and Consulting, said emergency vehicles have had difficulty accelerating on the county road he lives on, possibly delaying aid by minutes.*

*But it's challenging, he said, to narrow priorities down.*

*"It's hard to nail it down to just one," he told his group. And it's an issue too big for one organization to tackle, he added.*

*"You can't just sit here in a vacuum," Nordqvist said. "You've got to get everybody engaged in the community."*

*The steering committee plans to hold other meetings to further discuss road and school infrastructure issues. The sheriff's office has hired a consultant to study cost-effective ways of improving communication equipment and logistics, and the office expects a report this summer.*

*And in September, Scarborough said, he hopes the initiative will have possible ballot language to fund the different needs in the 2018 election.*

*"It's infrastructure; there's nothing sexy about this," he said. "There's no fun sparkly piece to this. Sorry, we need to adult now."*



## **Brian Scarborough: Work together to fix infrastructure problem**

*By Brian Scarborough / Special to The Sun  
Posted Mar 26, 2017 at 2:01 AM*

*In September of last year, the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce launched the Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative, or i3, with the purpose of identifying and prioritizing the significant infrastructure needs facing our community. I was asked to chair the i3 Steering Committee and thankfully have been joined by nine extremely bright, generous and talented committee members from diverse backgrounds representing the Gainesville Chamber, the African American Accountability Alliance, the Alachua County chapter of the NAACP, the Builders Association of North Central Florida, the Alachua County Council of PTAs, the Education Foundation of Alachua County, the Gainesville-Alachua County Association of Realtors and the Alachua Chamber of Commerce.*

*Since forming, our top priority has been gathering information on the infrastructure needs and maintenance backlogs of four specific sectors: public schools, roadways, public safety and parks and recreation. Thus far, we have engaged with stakeholders throughout our community, meeting with School Board Chairman Rob Hyatt and Interim Superintendent Sandy Hollinger, Alachua County Sheriff Sadie Darnell, Gainesville Mayor Lauren Poe and Alachua County Commission Chairman Ken Cornell, as well as with both the city of Gainesville's Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs and Alachua County's Department of Public Works. I want to publicly thank all of the elected officials and professional staff members who have made time to educate our committee on the current state of our local infrastructure in those sectors. We are truly blessed to have this group of public servants.*

*Based on those meetings, we can confidently state that our current infrastructure needs are great, the maintenance backlog is extensive and present funding sources are inadequate. Our schools would have to find an estimated \$18.5 million to catch up with deferred maintenance needs to roofs; heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems; painting and flooring, to say nothing of the need to build new schools or update existing facilities. Meanwhile, Tallahassee is talking about further reducing funding for school districts.*

*The county has increased funding for road resurfacing, but the roughly \$3 million in annual funding needs to be increased five-fold to get us onto a proper resurfacing schedule. The price of delay eventually removes resurfacing as an option and the cost to reconstruct a failed road is three times that of resurfacing.*



*We've also discovered that the portable radio communication system utilized by police officers, firefighters, Gainesville Regional Utilities linemen and public works field staff is so outdated that replacement parts for the underwhelming number of towers must be located on eBay. More frightening, those radios don't work in many buildings, including many public schools, or in rural areas and the first responders are left hoping that their personal cell phones work instead.*

*And lastly, in spite of over \$40 million going toward parks and recreation through the Wild Spaces and Public Spaces surtax, approximately \$30 million of worthy parks and recreation projects will remain unfunded.*

*The information we've collected is important, and now is the time we want the public to know what we have discovered. We are hosting the first i3 public meeting on Wednesday, March 29, at the Alachua County Senior Recreation Center, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. We will provide an overview of our process so far, and will have breakout sessions for you to help identify and prioritize the most pressing infrastructure needs in our County. From our research and the input we receive from you at this, and at two additional public meetings, we will produce a report in September that documents our needs and priorities and a draft ballot ordinance to address them.*

*Please, consider joining us at this or a future public meeting. The conversation we need to have has nothing to do with assigning blame, but rather coming together to agree that we have an infrastructure problem and then deciding how to raise funds and prioritizing how to allocate those funds to fix the problem. Let's work together and find the common ground needed to provide a better future for our children. Thanks in advance for joining us.*

*— Brian Scarborough is a third-generation resident of Alachua County and principal at Scarborough Insurance, an independent insurance agency that has been serving the community since 1961.*



### **Brian Scarborough: Work together to fix infrastructure problem**

Feb. 2017

Brian Scarborough

***"When you find yourself in a hole, the first thing you need to do is stop digging."* —WILL ROGERS**

*I don't know where or when I first heard this old line, but it's a goodie. I've thought about it a lot recently after accepting the role as chair of the Steering Committee for the Gainesville Chamber's Infrastructure Investment Initiative, or i3 for short. The goal of the initiative is to study our community's infrastructure challenges and then draft a citizen-led ballot proposal to fund infrastructure improvements in local schools, roads, and any other priorities we uncover. Our Steering Committee has just 10 volunteer members, but we plan on conducting multiple meetings with local governments and stakeholder groups as well as holding community forums to solicit input from all citizens. We have just begun, but we hope to have a finished product by early September 2017.*

*We've obviously found ourselves in a hole as a community when it comes to infrastructure, but this initiative is not about assigning blame but rather identifying solutions. Our school facilities are aging, and there is a need for new ones. This past November, voters overwhelmingly approved the renewal of the One Mill for Schools initiative. This provides funds for technology and programming in schools including art and music teachers, guidance counselors, nurses and librarians, without which the programming in our schools would suffer greatly. It does not, however, provide any additional funding for infrastructure or maintenance. Florida remains ranked 48 out of 50 states when it comes to per-pupil funding. We're dead last when you include the additional factor of average income. While hope springs eternal that someday our elected officials in Tallahassee might recall that the Florida Constitution requires that public education be properly funded, there's nothing to suggest that this day is near.*

*With regard to roads, the hole we're in is just as bleak if not worse. In 2014, a county ballot initiative to raise money for road resurfacing was rejected by voters. The most common argument made by those who opposed the initiative was that the county and municipalities should be smarter with their current revenue to find money for roads. To its credit, the county commission has increased funding for roads in subsequent budget cycles, removed the requirement for bike paths on rural roads, and amended the type of resurfacing material that is utilized so as to stretch our dollars farther. I believe they've recognized the need to stop digging the hole deeper. But friends, the backlog is too large to catch up with general fund revenue. Estimates vary in scope, but even the most conservative estimate is well over \$100 million. Believe me, I get it. Paying additional tax dollars to resurface roads is like forking over the copay to the doctor for a colonoscopy, but we've all got to be adults sometimes.*

*Obviously, our community faces other pressing issues, and since starting the i3 project, I've been made aware of other groups that are studying and considering their own ballot initiatives for other worthy causes. In the coming months, we hope to meet with those groups, solicit public input to try to build a consensus on our most pressing needs, and come up with a unified solution that is both politically feasible and is aligned with our community's most significant problems.*

*The good news is that the i3 Steering Committee is comprised of an outstanding group of individuals from diverse backgrounds who are committed to improving this community. None of us are going through the motions here, and it is our sincere hope that we can all come together to find common ground on how best to improve this community for future generations. We look forward to your input and the opportunity to earn your support.*

*BRIAN SCARBOROUGH is a Principal at Scarborough Insurance, an independent agency that sells all lines of insurance and has been serving the community since 1961. Visit [scarins.com](http://scarins.com) for more information.*



## **Chamber Heading Collaboration on Funding Schools, Parks & Roads**

Nov. 2016

By Chris Eversole

*The Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce announced Wednesday (Oct. 5) that it's leading a coalition to forge plans to address critical infrastructure needs in Alachua County — with a focus on children.*

*Members of Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative (i3) include the African American Accountability Alliance Political Action Committee, the Alachua Chamber of Commerce, the Builders Association of North Central Florida and the Alachua County Chapter of the NAACP.*

*The coalition will conduct research and then hold public forums to discuss countywide needs for upgrading and expanding school, enhancing parks and addressing road needs.*

*"These things are the foundation of a community we can be proud to call home," said Chamber President and CEO Susan Davenport. "There is truly a link between community vitality and economic development."*

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*Bryan Harrington, chairman of the chamber's Public Policy Committee, noted that the chamber supports the proposed renewal of the One Mill for Schools, which is on the November ballot. While this measure is important, so is the need to upgrade and expand schools, he said.*

*"In talking about infrastructure needs, the one topic that came back resoundingly was schools," Harrington said.*

*The chamber opposes the Wild Spaces & Public Places sales tax initiative on the November ballot, saying that it would put too much money toward buying conservation land.*

*The Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative will benefit from research that was done for park needs in planning for Wild Spaces & Public Places and for previous failed referendums on funding for roads, Harrington said.*

*Putting Children First Infrastructure Investment Initiative will be citizen-driven, as well as seeking input from staff and elected officials of county government, municipalities and the school district, said Chamber Chairman-Elect Rory Causseaux.*

*The 11-member steering committee will hold its first meeting in January, followed by public workshops — with the goal of issuing a report in the summer. "We want to bring forward a balanced proposal to put on the ballot in the future," Causseaux said.*