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THE FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Representative Will Robinson
71st District

January 9, 2025

Via Electronic Mail

Mayor John Chappie
107 Gulf Drive North
Bradenton Beach, FL 34217

Mayor Mark Short
PO Box 779
Anna Maria, FL 34216

Mayor Judy Titsworth
5801 Marina Drive
Holmes Beach, FL 34217

Dear Mayors Chappie, Short, and Titsworth:

Our community has faced significant challenges over the past few months due to devastating storms that caused unimaginable pain and suffering for many. However, since the storms, we take pride in the progress we've made together on our Island's road to recovery. While we still have a long way to go, we are grateful for your tireless efforts that have brought us to this point. The effectiveness of your emergency messages, the outstanding work of emergency management officials, and, most importantly, the dedication of law enforcement saved countless lives.

As you all know, we have met several times before the storms about finding ways for the cities on Anna Maria Island to work better together. The Manatee County Legislative Delegation unanimously approved the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability ("OPPAGA") to study and provide an independent view of how governments are operating on the Island and whether there are things you all could be doing to make things more efficient. We have received the study and have enclosed it with this letter.

Through this entire process we have maintained no personal agenda or set conclusions about what should happen but, instead, our goal has always been to use the OPPAGA independent study as a tool to assist in finding areas of efficiency with the ultimate goal of lowering property taxes. The top two areas we hear from all our constituents are the high cost of insurance and property taxes. We have recently passed legislation to help lower these costs, but more work needs to be done.

We truly value our relationship with you all as partners in what we believe is a common goal of finding efficiencies and streamlining services, which would result in lowering property taxes. We have spent the last year meeting with residents and business owners on the Island and those meetings have provided great feedback. Residents and business owners have consistently told us that finding ways to drive down taxes is very important,

but not at the cost of losing the unique character of the Island we all love. The uniqueness and the low-density island feel are what makes Anna Maria Island so incredibly special.

The OPPAGA study confirms what we have discussed over the past year. Merging or eliminating cities could negatively impact the unique and special character of the Island and could have a detrimental impact on issues like building height. The lower height of buildings on the Island must be valued and maintained at all costs. We have been very clear that Anna Maria Island must never become a high-rise community and anything that would cause that to happen would be a nonstarter to us.

The OPPAGA study mentioned several possible areas for streamlining services, including law enforcement, emergency management, and contracted services. While consolidating three law enforcement agencies is a valid goal, it may be a challenge to streamline for several reasons, including the different retirement systems of the City of Holmes Beach and Bradenton Beach. You all may want to look at whether these systems could work better together and possibly fall within the Florida Retirement System. We have enclosed a letter from Mayor Chappie, that does a wonderful job of laying out further options for consideration to streamline services. We would note that we have spoken to the Manatee County Government and the Manatee County School District about finding ways for them to become more efficient and the need to lower taxes. We are proud of what Florida has accomplished over the last several years, including passing some of the most significant tax cuts in history, even with a growing population of nearly 1,000 residents per day coming to our great state. We know that cutting taxes and finding efficiencies is challenging, but we believe it is possible to accomplish this with hard work and now with this OPPAGA study as a roadmap.

We stand unified in our common goals and ready to continue this great work with you all on the following:

1. Keep and maintain our Island cities, which are so special and unique to our area.
2. Streamline services that "could result in savings for island residents." [per the OPPAGA study]
3. If necessary, enact additional state or local regulations to prohibit buildings going higher than allowable under your local codes.
4. Continue to find ways to balance the quality of life of the Island residents with the ability for Manatee County visitors to access and park on the Island to enjoy a day at our beautiful beaches.

Our residents should demand that all their public officials, even in areas of disagreement, continue to communicate, find common ground, and work together. We have always valued you as partners in the above goals, and we have never lost our ability to communicate with each other. Thank you for all you have done for our great community and for helping restore and rebuild our Island. As we head into the 2025 Legislative Session, we would like to hear from you prior to February 13, 2025, on ways you all believe services can be streamlined and better coordinated.

Sincerely,



Representative Will Robinson



Senator Jim Boyd

Enclosures