

Goodlette & Frank

A Naples-ish paper. All the news that fits onto one page.

THE PROPERTY-TAX DISAPPEARING ACT

DeSantis Says You'll Pay Less; Collier Adds \$120 Million Asterisk

Amendment 3 offers qualifying homeowners real savings. The roads, deputies, drainage systems and parks have not yet agreed to become free.

BY THE G&F DEPARTMENT OF THINGS THAT STILL COST MONEY

NAPLES - Gov. Ron DeSantis has joined the campaign for Amendment 3, a proposal that would let some homeowners keep more of their property-tax money while making it harder for local governments to raise revenue from other properties.

For qualifying homeowners, the savings would be real, initially anyway. Unfortunately, Collier County's expenses for local services have declined to participate in the constitutional amendment and will apparently still cost money.

The Collier Clerk's office estimates the measure could create an initial local revenue gap of approximately \$63 million, growing to roughly \$120 million by 2028 if the proposal receives the required 60 percent statewide vote.

That does not mean every lost dollar automatically becomes a service cut. It means local governments would have to decide which services can be reduced, which costs can be shifted and which familiar tax can return wearing a fake mustache labeled 'fee.'

The state's sales pitch is refreshingly simple: homeowners will pay less. The county's footnote is less cinematic: fire stations, roads, deputies, drainage systems and parks continue sending invoices even after the State turns off the revenue spigot.

Collier residents may therefore be asked to perform Florida's favorite fiscal exercise - celebrating a tax cut while discovering that the same money has been relocated to special assessments, service charges or mysteriously longer wait times at local government offices.

Supporters can fairly argue that homeowners deserve relief as property values and tax bills climb, but local officials can fairly ask what is supposed to pay for local services when the revenue disappears.

For now, Tallahassee gets the 'tax cuts' headline. Collier gets stuck with the calculator.

Voters get the asterisk.

Sources: WTXL and Collier Clerk analysis.

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ACCOUNTABILITY WEATHER

Lee Sheriff Ethics Complaint Enters Witness Protection Program

The investigation was reportedly complete enough for a probable-cause hearing, but apparently not complete enough to produce a public result.

BY THE G&F BUREAU OF THINGS THE STATE CANNOT CONFIRM EXIST

FORT MYERS - A Florida ethics complaint involving Lee County Sheriff Carmine Marceno has disappeared in the uniquely bureaucratic sense: everyone knows it was there, months of work reportedly went into it, and the state is now legally unable to confirm whether it even exists.

The complaint was filed by Marceno's former close friend Ken Romano and alleged unreported gifts and inappropriate kickbacks. According to reporting by the Florida Trident and WGCU, the months-long investigation was scheduled to go before the Florida Commission on Ethics for a probable-cause determination.

Then the commission released its latest case decisions without even mentioning it.

Romano surprisingly requested that the complaint be withdrawn on July 30, citing health problems. By that point, however, the ethics investigation had reportedly been largely completed.

The result is an accountability process perfectly calibrated for a powerful public official: the investigation may exist, the findings may exist and a decision may eventually exist, but the public is currently prohibited from knowing which of those things exists.

Marceno has never appeared especially uncomfortable around cameras, press releases or his own name. Yet, in the proceeding asking whether he violated state ethics laws he has suddenly demonstrated a master class in shyness.

The Commission on Ethics says its work eventually becomes public after action is taken. Until then, Lee County residents are apparently expected to trust that the state's accountability machinery is operating effectively somewhere behind the curtain.

To be clear, the commission has announced no probable-cause finding against Marceno, and the allegations remain unproven. That is precisely why a clear public resolution matters. Marceno is entitled to the presumption that nothing has been established against him.

He is not entitled to have the entire question swallowed by procedural fog.

Lee County deserves to know whether the state's ethics referee found no foul, found a foul or simply misplaced the whistle.

Important: No finding has been issued; all allegations are unproven (but they totally match the vibes right?).

Source: WGCU and the Florida Trident.

\$63M INITIAL COLLIER ESTIMATE
NOT A GUARANTEED LOSS

\$120M PROJECTED BY 2028
IF AMENDMENT PASSES

NEWS BRIEFS

Six more things Southwest Florida would like entered into the record.

Lee County Simplifies Public Input by Removing the Public Input Part

After more than 40 speakers objected, Lee County's Local Planning Agency voted 4-2 to recommend eliminating 17 individual community-driven plans and to nuke the requirement for countywide public-information meetings. Staff says the policies would be moved elsewhere, development density would not change and the comprehensive plan would become easier to implement, especially for citizens who found actually getting to participate in their government particularly inconvenient. Lee County has now thoughtfully given them that time back. The vote was advisory, and the County Commission has not scheduled final action.

Source: WGCU.

Naples Opens Bids to Reinstall Beach Before Season

Collier County is opening bids for the Naples Beach Renourishment Project, returning sand to a coastline under the Gulf's firm understanding that it may take the sand back later. The process is expensive, repetitive and slightly absurd. It is also one of those things Collier County does remarkably well: year after year, the county restores and maintains the shoreline so its public beaches remain attractive, usable and protective of upland property. In Collier County, the time-honored tradition continues: placing sand where the Gulf has repeatedly indicated it prefers water.

Source: Collier County solicitation 26-8701.

FPL Creates Website to Help Floridians Pay FPL

Florida Power & Light has launched an online Assistance Center connecting customers with bill extensions, federal assistance and local resources. Eligible households may also receive energy-saving advice and earn a \$200 future bill credit. The portal can help customers locate assistance with food, rent and mortgages, which is convenient for anyone wondering how they were going to pay for those things after paying the electric bill.

Source: WGCU.

Marco Moves Council Meetings to 1:30 p.m., When Most Working People Are Conveniently at Work

Beginning October 5, regular Marco Island City Council meetings will start at 1:30 p.m. That is an excellent time for public participation, provided members of the public work nights, own the company or can explain to their supervisors why representative government requires a four-hour lunch. The city has not said the change was intended to discourage working residents from attending. It has simply selected the precise portion of the day when most working residents cannot attend.

Source: City of Marco Island.

Seasonal Index Raised to Orange After Third Car Carrier Spotted Outside Pelican Bay

Goodlette & Frank meteorologists have raised Collier County's unofficial Seasonal Index to Orange following reports of a third enclosed car carrier approaching Pelican Bay. Conditions remain manageable, although 6:30 dinner reservations have begun forming offshore and several residents have already been heard saying, 'It isn't even season yet.' Ohio plates remain at background levels, but forecasters warn that next season is already approaching somehow.

Source: G&F Seasonal Index, which is not an actual index.

Collier Mails 42,000 Reminders That Vote-by-Mail Doesn't Mail Itself

The elections office sent more than 42,000 postcards to previous mail voters who do not have an active request for November. Florida requests periodically expire, making democracy resemble a subscription service that disables auto-renewal. Requests are due by 5 p.m. Oct. 22. This brief is nonpartisan because paperwork has demonstrated no preference about whom it inconveniences.

Source: Collier Supervisor of Elections, Sept. 3.