

ALACHUA COUNTY REFERENDUMS

TO BE VOTED ON NOVEMBER 4 BY ALACHUA COUNTY VOTERS

Three local referendums will appear on the Nov. 4 ballot for Alachua County voters.



WILD SPACES & PUBLIC PLACES: A PROPOSED 0.5% SALES TAX FOR ALACHUA COUNTY

Ballot Language:

Wild Spaces & Public Places Environmental Lands, Parks and Recreation One-Half Percent Sales Tax

Shall Alachua County be authorized to extend the Alachua County Forever Program to acquire and improve environmentally sensitive lands to protect drinking water sources, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and to create, improve and maintain parks and recreational facilities in all cities and the County, with citizen oversight and independent audit, by the levy of a one-half percent (1/2%) sales tax for two (2) years starting January 1, 2009, and ending December 31, 2010?

Background

- Cost of a 0.5% sales tax to a household of 5 in Alachua County: w/ \$30-40,000 income, about \$54/yr; w/ \$70-80,000 income, about \$82; w/ \$90,000 income about \$94. <http://apps.irs.gov/app/stdc/stdc.html>
- The revenues will be divided equally between acquiring land for conservation and creating and maintaining recreational facilities
- The tax will be collected for only two years

Pro

- People passing through the county or here on a non-permanent basis help pay for the benefits of conservation land and public facilities
- Non-property owners share in paying for the benefits provided
- Land is likely to be sold for development if it is not put in conservation
- Alachua County Forever has been very successful in leveraging public funds for land conservation
- Properties identified as important for protection and conservation are available for purchase
- Tax revenues increased \$3,500,000 due to higher value of lands adjacent to conservation areas; <http://www.alachuacounty.us/assets/uploads/images/EPD/Land/Files/Alachua%20Write-up%20Jul%2004.pdf>
Tax revenues decreased only \$24,600 when conservation land went off the tax rolls
- Parks and recreation enhance the quality of life of our county
- Reduced incidence of juvenile crime is documented where there are recreational facilities
- Less juvenile crime reduces costs of law enforcement, juvenile detention, and associated costs (Juvenile detention cost Alachua County c. \$2.3 million in 2007)

Con

- A sales tax impacts the poor more than it does the affluent (In the example above, the \$30,000 household spends 2.3% of its income on sales tax while the \$90,000 spends 1.3%.)
- This is a bad time to add taxes since the economy is depressed
- Putting land in conservation reduces the possibility of using it otherwise
- Cost of managing lands comes out of the general fund and will continue into the future
- We have enough land in conservation
- Proposed distribution of the recreation funds is unfair to some parts of the county
- Funds for facilities maintenance should not come out of short-term sources of revenue
- We have enough taxes



REGISTRY OF PROTECTED PUBLIC PLACES

Ballot Language:

Protection of County-Owned Lands Acquired or Used for Conservation, Recreation, or Cultural Purposes

Shall the Alachua County Charter be amended to require that the sale or conversion to another use of County owned lands acquired or used for conservation, recreation, or cultural purposes be effective only if approved by a majority of the electors in the County in a County-wide referendum election?

Background

This amendment corrects an oversight in the original Alachua County Forever (ACF) enabling language. Once the bonds are paid off, there is nothing to prevent the present or any future Alachua County Commission from deciding by majority vote to sell or convert to another use land that was

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bought with ACF funds. While there could be good and pressing needs for such action, it would certainly be counter to the intentions of the public which voted for the original referendum. The proposed amendment would require a vote of the citizens of Alachua County for any such change. Additionally, any County-owned lands acquired or used for recreation or cultural purposes would have the same protection once placed on the registry by majority vote of the County Commission.

Pro

- This amendment would correct a glitch that could adversely affect the citizens' use of special publicly-owned lands
- Seeking public consent would provide for thorough examination and evaluation of the need for change in status of special places owned by Alachua County
- The generally understood meaning of "forever" in Alachua County Forever would be assured by popular vote should the need arise to change land use in the future

Con

- An election may be required for an issue that could be handled by elected representatives (i.e., the county commissioners)
- County lands not acquired with ACF funds would receive the same special considerations
- A county-wide vote may be required for a relatively minor property issue that could be handled by elected representatives (i.e., the county commissioners.)



ALACHUA COUNTY SCHOOL FUNDING INITIATIVE

Ballot Language:

Approval Of An Additional One Mill Ad Valorem Tax For School District Operating Expenses

Shall the Alachua County School District's ad valorem millage be increased by a total of one mill, beginning July 1, 2009, and ending four years later on June 30, 2013, for necessary operating expenses including funds to provide school nurses; maintain elementary music and art programs, middle school band programs, school library programs, elementary guidance programs, and academic/career/technical magnet programs; and update classroom technology; with oversight by an independent citizens' committee?

Background

This is a county-wide referendum which proposes a 1 mil property tax increase to support funding for Alachua County public schools. One mill is equal to \$1 for every \$1,000 of the taxable value of a property. For the average Alachua County homeowner, a one mill increase would cost about \$120 a year or \$10 a month.

The increase would begin in July of 2009, and last for four years. The additional property tax revenue would provide funding for programs that have been significantly reduced or eliminated due to state and federal budget cuts.

Pro

- The property tax revenue would yield nearly \$13 million a year. This could make up for the \$9 million loss in state funding this year, and an anticipated additional \$5 million loss next year.
- The funding would support elementary art and music programs, funding for career/ technical/ academic magnet programs, elective classes, and classroom materials and technology.
- The additional revenue would support funding for School nurses, for which \$1 million of federal funding is being cut. Medicaid reimbursement funds, which are used locally to pay for 29 school nurses, are being cut.
- Florida citizens gained some tax relief with Amendment 1, which was approved by voters in January and reduced the average homeowner's property tax bill by about \$240 a year. Considering the average \$120 property tax increase with this local referendum, homeowners could still net a property tax savings.
- The U.S. Census Bureau ranks Florida at 50th in the nation for per pupil spending. Additional funding could help improve the poor ranking of Florida's public education system.
- An independent citizens oversight committee would ensure that the revenues are spent as indicated on the ballot.

Con

- Alachua County citizens need additional property tax relief and cannot afford a property tax increase.
- Only citizens with children attending public school should be required to pay for public school education.
- Public school financing should not rely only on property tax revenues. Another source of funding should be used to reduce the tax burden on individuals.
- Funding education is the state's responsibility as clearly stated in the Florida constitution. Counties should not have to fund public school education

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