



MEMORANDUM

February 18, 2025

TO: Mayor Jerry L. Demings
Commissioner Christine Moore, District 2
Commissioner Mayra Uribe, District 3
Commissioner Maribel Gomez Cordero, District 4
Commissioner Kelly Semrad, District 5
Commissioner Mike Scott, District 6

FROM: Commissioner Nicole Wilson, District 1

SUBJECT: Requesting Discussion and Board Direction Regarding Infrastructure Surtax Modeled After Alachua County's Wild Spaces & Public Places Tax.

Purpose:

In response to the GreenPLACE Advisory Board's request for consideration of a voter-approved funding effort for land acquisition and conservation, I would like to propose the establishment of a dedicated infrastructure surtax in Orange County. This initiative aims to enhance public parks, conservation areas, and essential infrastructure while ensuring long-term ecological sustainability and community resilience. I am seeking Board feedback and direction to evaluate an infrastructure surtax alternative to the Transportation Sales Tax.

Background:

Orange County's GreenPLACE conservation land acquisition efforts face increasing demand, yet funding for this program remains limited and no sustained funding sources have been identified to meet this need. The success of Alachua County's Wild Spaces & Public Places program serves as an example for establishing a comparable framework in Orange County.

Alachua County's Wild Spaces & Public Places tax, a one-half cent sales surtax, has successfully funded land conservation, park improvements, and recreation projects. In November 2022, Alachua County voters approved an expansion of the program through a 1% sales surtax lasting until 2032. This surtax is evenly divided: 50% funds for environmental and recreational projects, while the remaining 50% supports critical infrastructure, including road maintenance, affordable housing, and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

COMMISSIONER NICOLE H. WILSON, DISTRICT 1

201 South Rosalind Avenue, 5th Floor ▪ Reply To: Post Office Box 1393 ▪ Orlando, Florida 32802-1393

407.836.7350 ▪ Fax 407.836.5879



The program has driven significant progress in the development of new neighborhood parks, community centers, and improvements to existing recreational facilities. To ensure transparency and accountability, Alachua County established the Infrastructure Surtax Citizen Oversight Board, responsible for monitoring expenditures and assessing project efficacy. Implementing a similar oversight mechanism in Orange County would enhance public trust and ensure fiscal responsibility.

Incorporating these elements into Orange County's proposed infrastructure surtax can provide a comprehensive approach to funding essential public facilities and infrastructure projects, including pedestrian and bicycle pathways, while promoting environmental conservation and community well-being.

Proposal:

An evaluation of the one-half cent versus full cent infrastructure surtax to be levied in Orange County for a period of ten years would potentially provide a basis for a ballot measure.

The revenue generated would be strategically allocated toward:

- Expanding and maintaining conservation areas, green spaces and public parks.
- Improving recreational infrastructure, including trails, bicycle networks, and pedestrian pathways.
- Enhancing stormwater management and water quality initiatives to mitigate environmental degradation.
- Upgrading public facilities, such community centers, to accommodate population growth.
- Supporting sustainable urban development and multimodal transportation options.

Benefits:

- Provides a consistent funding mechanism for essential infrastructure investments without increasing property taxes.
- Drives local economic development through investments in parks, eco-tourism, and recreational facilities, subsequently increasing property values.
- Enhances the county's resilience to extreme weather events.
- Protects environmentally sensitive lands, reducing urban heat island effects and enhances ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water filtration.
- Expands access to public spaces, community well-being, physical activity, and improved quality of life.



Next Steps:

- Schedule a Commission workshop to get staff evaluation and guidance, ensuring legal compliance with state laws.
- Public Engagement & Outreach: Conduct town hall meetings, surveys, and other stakeholder engagement to gauge community interest and address concerns.
- Potential draft ballot measure language public hearings.

Conclusion:

A dedicated infrastructure surtax would provide an opportunity for Orange County to secure a sustainable funding source for conservation and public infrastructure without overburdening property owners. Our citizens have expressed support for environmental conservation and preservation, but with limited dedicated funding we will be challenged to sustain those efforts in the future. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/

Nicole H. Wilson

Commissioner, District 1

Cc: County Administrator Byron Brooks, Cheryl Gillepsie

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nicole H. Wilson".

Nicole H. Wilson

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