



2025

# Legislative Priorities

<b>Appropriations</b>		
<b>Roads and Drainage</b>		
<b>Road Projects</b>	<b>Amount</b>	
Power Line Road Phase 2	\$5 million for ROW	(Total cost of the ROW is est. at \$26 million)
<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Amount</b>	
10 <sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit (Polk, Hardee, Highlands) Medical Examiner Facility Expansion & Renovation	\$6 million	(Total cost of the project is \$15.5 million. Polk \$7.5 mil, Highlands \$1.5 mil, Hardee \$500k)
Central County Jail Chiller Replacement	\$1.3 million	
Courthouse Electrical Upgrade Project	\$2.1 million	(Total cost of the project is \$4.2 million. Polk to fund difference)
<b>Parks and Natural Resources</b>	<b>Amount</b>	
Headwaters of Peace River Floodplain Protection and Restoration	\$2 million	
<b>Additional Supportive Actions</b>		
Heartland Headwaters Protection and Sustainability		(Project funding request -PRWC)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$16.4 million</b>	

<b>Grant Request to Monitor</b>	
Polk County New Ag-Center & Livestock Equestrian Facility Phase 1	\$3.675 million (FDACS grant request - 100% match req.)

**Policies**

<p>Allowing Alternative Solutions to Addressing BMAP Requirements for Wastewater Treatment Facilities</p>	<p>Support language modification of F.S. 403.067 to allow utilities providing wastewater treatment within basin management action planned watersheds to offers alternative solutions to meet the nutrient load reduction requirements by considering the results of modeling efforts of reclaimed water usage and treated effluent disposal based on actual operating data.</p>	
<p>**Provide local governments with the opportunity to receive broadband grant funding for critical infrastructure and anchor institutions.</p>	<p>Advocate for the Department of Commerce Office of Broadband to revise funding mechanisms to allow local governments to directly apply for and receive grant funding, ensuring the grants meet their original intent of enhancing broadband infrastructure and access.</p>	
<p>** May involve federal \$ prohibiting local government spending (Anfield to confirm)</p>		

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## Policies

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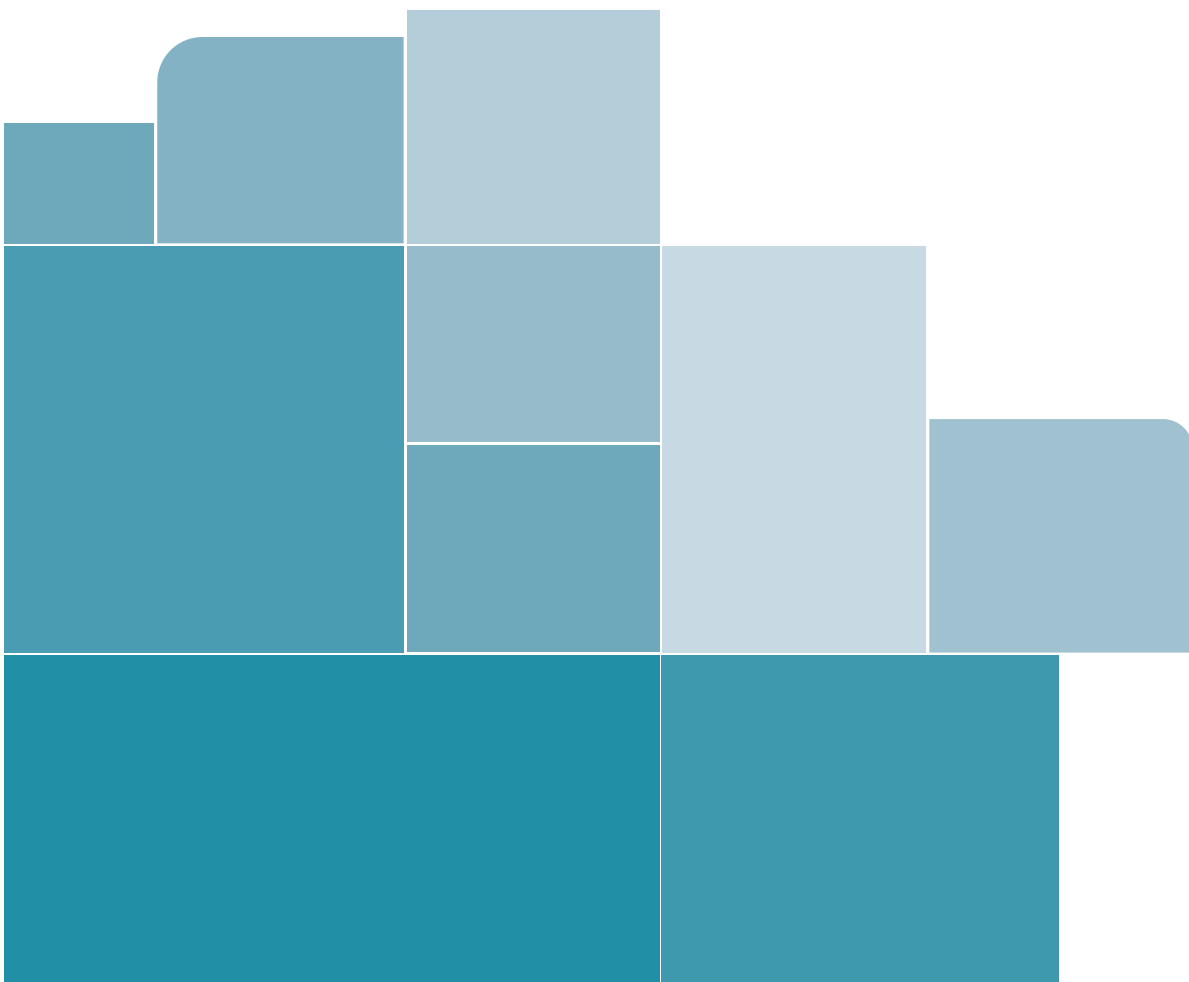
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# Appropriations



## Alternative Route for Hwy 27 and Highway 17/92 – Power Line Road – Phase 2

**Request:** A state appropriation of **\$5 million** for the Power Line Road Widening Project - Phase 2 from two-lanes to four-lanes at a total cost of \$26 million.

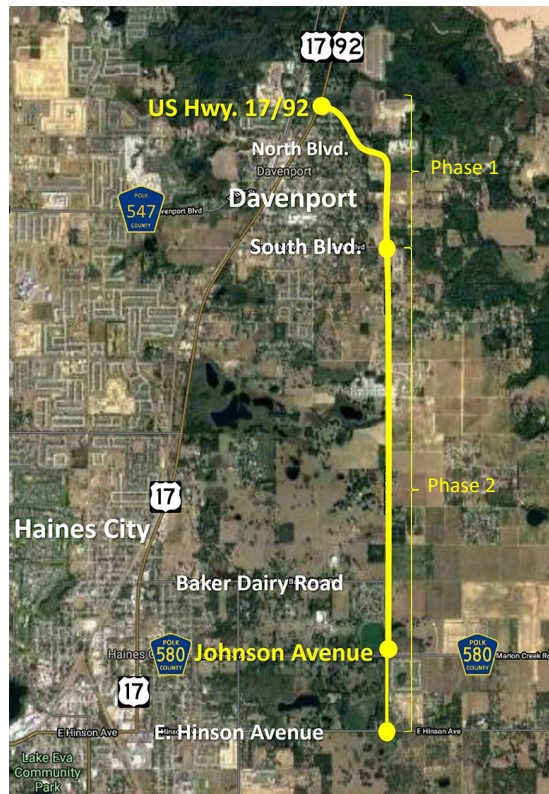
**Background:** Power Line Road is currently a two-lane road on the east side of Haines City. As Polk County develops, traffic has increased drastically over the past few years on Power Line Road. The county in a Private/Public Partnership has extended the existing Power Line Road from South Boulevard to Highway 17/92 to provide an alternate route to Highway 27 and Highway 17/92 to get traffic around the urbanized areas of the cities along the ridge in Polk County that are going north and south through the east side of Polk County. The county has already allocated more than \$18 million to the Power Line Road project.

Polk County has completed the alignment study and is undergoing design and permitting.

We anticipate that design and permitting will be completed in mid-2025.

Benefits to the State of Florida include:

- Improving current and projected traffic congestion along US Hwy 27 and US 17/92 by providing an improved route to Interstate 4.
- Better movement of existing freight and rapidly growing freight generators, such as the CSX Integrated Logistics Center both in and outside of Polk County, which continues to be an important state economic initiative.
- The project is consistent with the Polk County Long Range Transportation Plan.



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## Medical Examiner's Facility Expansion

**Request:** A state appropriation of **\$6 million** to support the expansion and renovation of the Polk County Medical Examiner's Facility. This project includes:

- **Design and construction** of a new 12,000-square-foot office, breezeway, and morgue.
- **Renovation** of the existing 12,500-square-foot office, breezeway, and morgue located at 1021 Jim Keene Boulevard, Winter Haven, FL.

### Background

The current facility, built in 2003, no longer meets the growing operational demands of the 10th Judicial Circuit of Florida, which includes **Polk, Hardee, and Highlands Counties**. In 2023, the Medical Examiner's Office conducted **1,181 autopsies and inspections**, a number expected to increase by approximately **45% over the next 20 years** due to population growth and increased caseload complexity.

The current building is showing signs of structural and operational fatigue and fails to meet the administrative and operational standards required to efficiently serve the region's growing needs. The facility's limitations impact the timely and effective performance of critical medical examiner functions, which are vital to public health, law enforcement investigations, and judicial processes.

### Benefits to the 10th Judicial Circuit

The Medical Examiner's Facility Expansion will significantly enhance the capacity and capability of services provided to the 10th Judicial Circuit, ensuring:

- **Improved service efficiency** for autopsies, forensic investigations, and death certifications, benefiting public health, law enforcement, and judicial proceedings.
- **Enhanced support for legal and investigative processes** within Polk, Hardee, and Highlands Counties.
- **Capacity to handle increased caseloads** and future population growth without compromising service quality.
- **Modernized facilities** that meet current administrative, operational, and safety standards for employees and visitors.



## Funding Commitments

This project represents a collaborative effort among local and state governments:

- **Polk County:** \$7,500,000 committed
- **Hardee County:** \$500,000 committed
- **Highlands County:** \$1,500,000 committed
- **State of Florida Appropriation Request:** \$6,000,000

This partnership highlights the shared responsibility of supporting this critical state operation, with the counties collectively contributing \$9.5 million toward the \$15.5 million total project cost. The requested state funding will close the financial gap and ensure timely project completion.

## Conclusion

Investing in the expansion and renovation of the Polk County Medical Examiner's Facility is vital to maintaining the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of forensic and medical services for the 10th Judicial Circuit. This project represents a proactive approach to addressing current deficiencies and preparing for future demands while fostering collaboration between state and local governments.

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## Polk County Central County Jail Facility Chiller Replacement

**Request:** Support funding of **\$1.3 million** to replace the aging 300-ton centrifugal chiller at the Polk County Central County Jail in Bartow, FL, with a more energy-efficient system.

**Background:** The current 300-ton centrifugal chiller, which supplies chilled water to cool the entire Central County Jail, is now **25 years old** and nearing the end of its operational life. Reliable cooling is critical to maintaining a safe and functional environment for inmates and staff alike.

The Central County Jail houses hundreds of inmates daily, and maintaining appropriate temperature levels is essential for:

- **Security and Safety:** A controlled environment ensures Detention Deputies can perform their duties efficiently and safely, particularly during stressful situations.
- **Inmate Well-being:** Proper cooling helps mitigate potential health risks for inmates, especially during Florida's hot and humid summers.
- **Operational Continuity:** The chiller plays a vital role in ensuring the jail remains functional during normal conditions and extended power outages.

An upgraded, energy-efficient chiller will not only enhance operational reliability but also reduce energy consumption and long-term maintenance costs, contributing to Polk County's sustainability goals.

### Financial Details:

- **Estimated Replacement Cost:** \$1.3 million for the chiller and associated installation.

### Justification:

Replacing the aging chiller is critical to the safe and efficient operation of the Central County Jail. Without reliable cooling, staff and inmates face increased risks to their health and safety, and operational disruptions could arise, placing additional strain on county resources.

The investment also supports the county's commitment to energy efficiency by reducing the facility's carbon footprint and lowering operating costs over time.



**Conclusion:**

Funding the replacement of the 300-ton chiller at the Polk County Central County Jail is essential to ensuring a secure, comfortable, and energy-efficient environment for both staff and inmates. This project enhances public safety, supports the health and well-being of inmates, and aligns with long-term operational sustainability goals.

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## Polk County Bartow Courthouse Electrical Upgrade

**Request:** Support funding of **\$2.1 million** to upgrade the electrical infrastructure at the Bartow Courthouse to ensure uninterrupted operations for judicial and court-related activities. Key components of the project to include:

- Purchasing property to accommodate a generator capable of powering the entire 560,000-square-foot courthouse, including HVAC systems.
- Replacing and relocating the main electrical switchgear to the interior of the building for enhanced protection and reliability and generator acquisition.

**Background:** The Bartow Courthouse, constructed in 1989, is an 11-story facility serving as the hub for critical judicial operations of the **10th Judicial Circuit Court, State Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, Polk County Clerk of Courts, and Polk County Sheriff's Office Court Operations.**

Currently, the courthouse relies on emergency power systems that only support life safety features such as lighting, limited receptacle power, and elevators. Power outages during operational hours disrupt:

- Judicial proceedings, requiring rescheduling and delaying justice.
- Civic responsibilities, inconveniencing citizens serving as jurors in multiple trials.
- Court-related operations, adding strain to already burdened schedules and processes.

This project will ensure all court and judicial operations can continue uninterrupted during power outages, minimizing delays and safeguarding the integrity of the justice system.

### **Connection Between County and State Operations:**

The Bartow Courthouse is vital to both county and state operations:

- **Judicial Process:** Supports state and county justice systems, including criminal and civil proceedings that directly impact public safety and civic responsibilities.
- **Jail Operations:** Court disruptions can lead to delays in processing detainees and inmates, creating logistical and financial strain on the **Polk County Jail System**, which operates under county oversight but works in tandem with state judicial processes. Ensuring uninterrupted court operations minimizes the time inmates spend in pretrial detention, reducing costs and optimizing resources.



### **Fiscal Impact:**

The total project cost is **\$4,200,000**, which includes:

- **\$3,000,000** for construction, electrical upgrades, and generator.
- **\$1,200,000** for property acquisition to accommodate the new generator and associated infrastructure.

This investment supports both state and county operations, ensuring the seamless functioning of the justice system while protecting taxpayers' investment in critical infrastructure.

### **Conclusion:**

The Bartow Courthouse Electrical Upgrade is a necessary investment to enhance the resiliency and reliability of judicial operations in Polk County. By ensuring uninterrupted court proceedings, this project safeguards the justice process, minimizes delays, and strengthens the partnership between county and state operations.

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## Headwaters of Peace River Floodplain Protection and Restoration

(Phase II of Peace Creek Water Preservation Project)

**Request:** A state appropriation of **\$2 million** for this phase of the Headwaters of Peace River Floodplain Protection and Restoration – Phase II of the Peace Creek Water Preservation Project, which focuses on the protection of floodwater storage areas and providing an increase in storage capacity of excess water during extreme weather events near the Headwaters of Peace River. Through implementation of approximately 360 acres of floodplain, hydrologic, and ecologic restoration of lands, on the Wilson Ranch Reserve, the Headwaters of Peace River will have improved water quality, reduce invasive plant species, provide for additional floodplain, and restores wildlife habitat that was lost over time because of the site being ditched and drained for agricultural practices over many decades.

With the proposed wetland restoration efforts described above, and protection of additional historic wetlands to be acquired on or along Peace Creek Canal, at a minimum of 400 +/- acres, it is anticipated that this regional project can provide around 6,000 acre-feet annually of storage near the headwaters of the Peace River. The increased floodplain and wetland storage capacity projects will ultimately perform as passive wetland treatment systems providing water quality improvements through attenuation of the waters moving from Peace Creek to the Peace River.

This phase and funding request will cover a portion of \$1,000,000 for construction and \$1,000,000 for acquisition for a total request of \$2,000,000.

Future funding will be sought to complete these projects.

### **Background:**

#### **Flood Protection**

Over the past several years extreme weather events have increased the need to create additional floodwater storage in this region. Hurricane Milton, the most recent event in memory, created a critical emergency in at the Headwaters area of the Peace River. High rain amounts, threatened to impact a Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant along the Peace River. Providing additional water storage in the Upper Peace River watershed along the Peace Creek Canal increases storage capacity to better manage extreme storm events and alleviate flooding of critical assets.



The estimated net water quantity benefit is proposed to improve flood resilience within the watershed and provide greater connection of the Peace River to the historical flood plain through the removal of approximately 7,000 LF of berm that runs along the south/east side of Peace Creek and protection of over 400 acres of historic wetlands.

### **Water Quality Benefit**

The estimated net water quality benefit is proposed to improve water quality in the Peace River. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) identified the Peace River watershed (WBID 1623J) to be impaired for nutrients, dissolved oxygen (DO), and biological oxygen demand (BOD). The improvements will result in a net, average annual reduction between 20% - 35% Total Nitrogen and 10% - 30% Total Phosphorus contributions from flows entering the Peace River after running through the project.

### **Ecological Benefit**

**Wetlands:** The project will restore approximately 60 acres of Floodplain Swamp and 90 acres of herbaceous wetlands (Floodplain Marsh and/or Wet Prairie). This restored habitat would be further augmented by enhancing approximately 210 acres of existing habitat (120 acres of forested wetlands and 90 acres of herbaceous wetlands). The restored and enhanced wetlands will receive additional support from adjacent upland enhancement.

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## Heartland Headwaters Protection and Sustainability Act

**Request:** Support legislation that would enable Polk County, on behalf of the Polk Regional Water Cooperative (PRWC), to secure funding to develop non-traditional alternative water supply projects and interconnect piping to “wheel water” throughout the county, optimizing existing allocations and facilities.

**Background:** With the passage of the Heartland Headwaters Protection & Sustainability Act (F.S. 373-463(1)) in 2017, the State Legislature declared that there is an important state interest in partnering with regional water supply authorities and local governments to protect the headwaters of the State’s major rivers and water resources in our region. The Legislature also stated that priority state funding consideration must be given to collaborative solutions that manage the water resources of the state.

The Polk Regional Water Cooperative, in coordination with all our member governments, prepares a comprehensive annual report on water resources projects prioritized for state funding within our members’ jurisdictions. Projects that qualify include drinking water supply, wastewater (including reuse), stormwater and flood control, environmental restorations, and conservation projects. The report includes a ranked list of projects, estimated costs, estimated completion dates, and sources of and amounts of financial assistance provided by the PRWC or its members. The PRWC submits the comprehensive annual report to the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Department of Environmental Protection, and the appropriate water management districts.

Municipalities within Polk County have identified the Southeast Wellfield as the first project to provide a sustainable, alternative water supply to its members. To ensure its success, the PRWC is placing a funding priority on individual member receiving facility projects necessary to fully implement the program. Further, PRWC has created a Conservation budget which it intends to prioritize for funding in response to member interest in offsetting the cost of new water supplies and reducing overall reliance on the Upper Floridan Aquifer.

The PRWC acts as a clearing house for all the project funding requests within the region, providing a mechanism for consolidated funding requests to the State. All final funding agreements will be made directly to the State agencies administering the funds and the member project sponsor. The only funding agreements the PRWC will engage in are projects that will become PRWC assets. Annually, the PRWC will coordinate with the appropriate water management districts to submit a status report on projects that received priority state funding for inclusion in the Consolidated Water Management District Annual Report.

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# Policies





## Allowing Alternative Solutions to Addressing BMAP Requirements for Wastewater Treatment Facilities

**Request:** Support language modification of F.S. 403.067 to allow utilities providing wastewater treatment within basin management action planned watersheds to offers alternative solutions to meet the nutrient load reduction requirements by considering the results of modeling efforts of reclaimed water usage and treated effluent disposal based on actual operating data.

**Background:** Subparagraph 403.067(7)(a)9., Florida Statutes, specifies that wastewater treatment and effluent disposal within a BMAP are contributors of a least 20 nutrient loadings and must be remediated. The solution required at this time is that wastewater treatment facilities be constructed or retrofitted to provide advanced wastewater treatment. This option can cost into the tens of millions of dollars. Utility providers should have the ability to propose other options that may offer a greater reduction of nutrient loading for a similar cost.

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## Broadband Grant Funding Opportunities for Local Governments

**Request:** Provide local governments with the opportunity to receive broadband grant funding for critical infrastructure and anchor institutions. This includes removing restrictions that limit broadband grant funding to residences and relaxing rigid Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) requirements. Specifically, these requirements currently encompass detailed technical specifications, labor guidelines, formal apprenticeship programs and matching fund commitments. The requested funding could be reallocated from grants that were challenged or initially unfunded under the Broadband Opportunity Fund (BOF), the Broadband Infrastructure Program (BIP) and the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) programs.

Polk County requests:

- Fully fund this project at an estimated cost of \$73 million; or
- Advocate for the Department of Commerce Office of Broadband to revise funding mechanisms to allow local governments to directly apply for and receive grant funding, ensuring the grants meet their original intent of enhancing broadband infrastructure and access.

**Background:** Polk County, located in Central Florida, is the fourth largest county in size with an estimated 2023 population of 818,330. Despite applying for grant funding for critical projects—such as connecting fire stations and water/wastewater treatment facilities— Polk County has been denied twice.

During Hurricane Milton, Polk County's broadband infrastructure sustained significant damage. Despite prior grants awarded to local internet service providers (ISPs) through programs like BIP, BOF and BEAD, the county faced severe communication disruptions. Local ISPs have indicated that expanding broadband services to remote areas of the county remains cost-prohibitive due to its vast geographic size. This has resulted in a persistent lack of resiliency and redundancy in broadband services for critical infrastructure and community anchor institutions.

By allowing local governments to access broadband funding through the state's grant application process, Polk County can address these gaps. Specifically, broadband infrastructure can be aligned with the Department of Commerce Office of Broadband's Strategic Plan to extend services to essential facilities such as fire stations and water treatment plants. These facilities, equipped with generator backup, would provide critical infrastructure connectivity during emergencies, ensuring public safety, damage assessment and emergency management operations remain functional. Additionally, they could serve as hubs for ISPs to extend services, foster competition and enhance overall resiliency. The project would also address the needs of underserved and unserved communities.

When new broadband grant opportunities are developed, it is critical that functional requirements, technical specifications, procurement processes, and labor guidelines do not exclude local governments from participation. Draft proposals for these programs have included requests for



detailed technical specifications—such as fiber types and interconnects—along with cost estimates, which are often only available after a successful Request for Proposal (RFP). These RFP processes also require contractors to meet specific labor requirements, such as formal apprenticeships, which can be a barrier for county-led initiatives.

Notably, current BEAD funding proposals already exclude such requirements for incumbent providers that have previously received funding, creating an unequal playing field.

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