

Jennifer Pippin

jennifer.pippin@aol.com

The Property Tax Amendment and Water Infrastructure

HJR 1F on the November 3 ballot would raise the non-school homestead exemption to \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, which county leadership estimates could cut the county budget by roughly \$50 million once fully in place. Do you support this amendment? If it passes, how do you expect the revenue reduction to affect the county's support for water utilities, Lagoon monitoring, and water quality improvement projects? If you intend to protect those water programs, how specifically would you make up the shortfall, and which other services or staff positions would you reduce?

Yes, I support Amendment 3 and meaningful property tax relief for Florida homeowners. I believe government must learn to live within its means, just as families and businesses do every day.

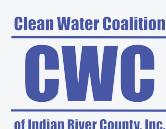
I recently attended the entire County Commission budget workshop from start to finish. I was the only County Commission candidate and the only citizen who remained in the chambers for the entire meeting. During that workshop, staff presented a recommended budget reduction of \$91.9 million while maintaining essential county services. That demonstrated to me that significant reductions are possible when we carefully review spending and prioritize needs over wants.

I would protect critical water quality programs, Lagoon monitoring, and necessary utility infrastructure. The Indian River Lagoon is vital to our environment, economy, and quality of life. I would also aggressively pursue state and federal grant funding for water quality and septic-to-sewer projects to reduce the burden on local taxpayers.

To address revenue reductions, I would start with the \$3.7 million in taxpayer funding directed to nonprofit organizations, review vacant positions and positions lost through retirement or attrition before automatically refilling them, eliminate unnecessary consulting contracts, and conduct a department-by-department review for duplication and waste.

Cuts should begin with nonessential spending, not essential services. I will listen to the community, study the budget line by line, and make decisions based on facts. Wednesday's budget workshop proved that responsible reductions are difficult, but absolutely doable.

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Sustaining Restoration Under Funding Pressure

Much of our local restoration relies on layered and non-guaranteed outside funding (EPA National Estuary Program dollars, competitive NOAA grants, the state Indian River Lagoon Protection Program, and water management district contributions). If state and federal funding are severely cut, how will you keep research and restoration moving for the Indian River Lagoon ? Would you support a dedicated, recurring county funding source to insulate these projects from state or federal shortfalls?

The Indian River Lagoon is vital to our environment, economy, property values, and quality of life, and I do not support reducing the county's commitment to protecting it. The work must and will continue.

As I have previously stated, I attended the entire County Commission budget workshop and listened as staff presented a recommended \$91.9 million budget reduction while maintaining essential county services. This is exactly why I believe we can provide property tax relief without abandoning critical priorities such as water quality, Lagoon monitoring, research, and restoration.

If state or federal funding is reduced, the county must prioritize existing revenues, aggressively pursue every available competitive grant and partnership, and carefully review nonessential spending, consulting contracts, vacant positions, duplication, and other areas of the budget before cutting Lagoon protection efforts.

I would not immediately support creating a new dedicated recurring tax or funding source that places an additional burden on taxpayers. Before asking citizens for more money, county government must first prove it has reviewed every dollar it already collects and prioritized spending responsibly.

There will not be a reduction in my commitment to Lagoon funding or the work being done. Protecting the Indian River Lagoon is an essential county priority, and I will work to ensure research, monitoring, and restoration efforts continue even when outside funding becomes less certain.

Understanding Our Local Waters

The St. Johns River Water Management District's 2025 monitoring showed a significant rebound in Lagoon seagrass coverage after years of decline. What is your understanding of the current water quality issues facing the Indian River Lagoon and Blue Cypress Lake, and do you read the recent seagrass recovery as a reason to sustain current spending and effort, or to ease off? Beyond funding, what concrete county-level measures would you champion to restore and maintain the health of both water bodies?

The recent rebound in seagrass is encouraging and shows that the work being done is producing results. I do not see success as a reason to ease off. I see it as a reason to continue the efforts that are working and make decisions based on measurable data.

The Indian River Lagoon continues to face challenges from excess nutrients, stormwater runoff, aging infrastructure, and septic systems. Blue Cypress Lake has also faced serious nutrient and phosphorus concerns. These issues did not develop overnight and will require continued monitoring and responsible long-term action.

At the county level, I support continuing septic-to-sewer conversions in the areas with the greatest environmental impact, addressing aging infrastructure, improving stormwater management, and expanding the use of natural buffer zones to reduce pollutants before they reach our waterways. I also support continued water quality and seagrass monitoring so taxpayer dollars are directed toward projects with proven, measurable results.

We must also work closely with our agricultural community, municipalities, water management districts, and state and federal partners to reduce nutrient runoff and identify problems at their source.

The seagrass recovery is great news, but the job is not finished. We should sustain the work that is showing results, hold every project accountable, and remain focused on protecting both the Indian River Lagoon and Blue Cypress Lake for future generations.

Future Water Supply and Utility Expansion

What is your assessment of Indian River County's long-term potable water supply, and how do our existing and expected future utility operations (both wastewater and potable) affect the county's overall water resources? What specific expansion of county utilities do you believe is necessary both to meet future demand and to restore our water resources, including the planned connection of legacy septic systems to central sewer?

Indian River County must plan now to ensure a safe and reliable potable water supply for future generations. As our population grows, our water and wastewater infrastructure must keep pace. Responsible growth means ensuring the infrastructure and resources are available before development outpaces our ability to serve residents.

I support expanding county utility capacity where data and projected demand demonstrate it is necessary, while protecting our groundwater and surface water resources. Water conservation, responsible long-term planning, infrastructure maintenance, and the use of reclaimed water where appropriate must all be part of the county's strategy.

I also support continuing the connection of legacy septic systems to central sewer, prioritizing areas with the greatest impact on the Indian River Lagoon and our water resources. These conversions must be planned responsibly, and the county should continue pursuing state and federal grants and partnerships to reduce the financial burden on homeowners and local taxpayers.

Wastewater and potable water operations cannot be viewed separately from environmental protection and growth management. They are all connected. My focus will be on using current data, monitoring future demand, addressing aging infrastructure, and making sure utility expansion is strategic and fiscally responsible.

We must protect our water supply, continue restoring our waterways, and ensure our infrastructure keeps pace with growth without placing unnecessary financial burdens on our residents.

Annexation and City–County Collaboration

The recent Sebastian Pines and Cresswind annexations approved roughly 1,512 homes on former agricultural land. Because Sebastian operates no water or wastewater utility of its own, both developments will rely entirely on the county's system under an interlocal agreement. How will you navigate situations where a city approves major density increases that the county is ultimately responsible for serving? Do you believe the current interlocal agreements give the county enough leverage, and if not, what specific changes would you pursue? Where else do you see tangible opportunities for the cities and county to work together?

The county, our cities, and all local government partners must work together to make decisions that benefit the entire community. Growth does not stop at a city or county boundary, and neither do the impacts on water, wastewater, roads, public safety, and our natural resources.

When a city approves a major development that will rely on county utilities, the county must be involved early in the planning process. Communication and coordination should happen before final approvals, not after decisions are already made and the county is expected to provide the necessary infrastructure. I would carefully review our current interlocal agreements to ensure the county has a meaningful voice when significant increases in density create additional demand on county-owned systems.

If changes are needed, I would support clearer requirements for early coordination, infrastructure capacity planning, and ensuring that the cost of necessary expansion is appropriately addressed and not simply shifted to existing taxpayers and utility customers.

There are also opportunities for greater city and county collaboration on Lagoon protection, septic-to-sewer conversions, stormwater management, transportation planning, emergency services, and responsible growth.

Residents do not care which government boundary a problem falls within. They expect their local governments to communicate, work together, and solve problems. I will support strong partnerships with our municipalities while always protecting the interests of Indian River County taxpayers and residents.