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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?

I support responsible property tax relief, and I believe voters deserve clear information about the local impact before they decide. HJR 1F provides relief to homeowners, but it also shifts significant costs to counties without a dedicated replacement, which could mean tens of millions in reduced revenue locally.

If it passes, protecting water resources remains a top priority—drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, septic-to-sewer, and lagoon restoration are essential investments. Importantly, stormwater and water quality work are supported in part by dedicated funding sources like stormwater utility fees and outside grants, which are more insulated than general fund services.

To address the potential \$50 million loss, I would require a transparent public budget review, prioritize efficiency, reduce administrative overhead, eliminate vacant positions, limit consulting, and defer nonessential capital projects before cutting core services.

I would also expand pursuit of state and federal grants and ensure new development pays its fair share of infrastructure costs.

A reduction of this scale has real consequences. My priority would be to protect essential infrastructure, public safety, and environmental programs, while making thoughtful reductions in lower-priority general fund spending first.

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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 one of our county's greatest environmental and economic assets. We cannot assume state and federal funding will always be available, so the county must be prepared to prioritize projects that deliver measurable improvements to water quality.

I would aggressively pursue every available grant and continue partnering with the St. Johns River Water Management District, the state, and nonprofit organizations to maximize outside funding. At the same time, I believe new development should contribute its fair share toward the infrastructure needed to protect the Lagoon.

I would support a dedicated recurring county funding source only if it is transparent, narrowly focused, and includes strong public accountability for how every dollar is spent. Before asking taxpayers for additional funding, I would require a thorough review of existing environmental spending to eliminate duplication, improve coordination, and ensure resources are directed toward projects with proven results.

If outside funding declines, I would prioritize stormwater improvements, septic-to-sewer conversion, and other projects that have the greatest measurable impact on reducing pollution entering the Lagoon. Protecting this resource requires long-term planning, fiscal responsibility, and investing in projects that produce lasting improvements rather than simply spending more.

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 recovery in seagrass is encouraging, but it is evidence that restoration efforts are working—not a reason to slow down. The Indian River Lagoon and Blue Cypress Lake still face ongoing challenges from excess nutrients, stormwater runoff, septic systems, sediment, and the pressures of continued growth. We should build on our progress, not declare victory.

At the county level, I would prioritize stormwater improvements, septic-to-sewer conversion where practical, protecting natural wetlands, and ensuring new development pays for the infrastructure needed to protect our waterways.

I also believe restoring our waters requires stronger community engagement. The county should partner with local businesses to create volunteer incentive programs that reward residents for participating in shoreline cleanups, habitat restoration, and environmental education. Businesses could offer discounts, coupons, memberships, or other rewards in exchange for volunteer service, creating a culture where protecting our Lagoon becomes a community effort rather than solely a government responsibility.

Finally, every environmental project should include measurable performance metrics so taxpayers can see what is working and where improvements are needed. Protecting the Lagoon and Blue Cypress Lake requires smart investment, community partnerships, and accountability—not less commitment simply because we've begun to see positive results.

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 decades ahead, not just for today's demand. Our long-term water strategy should focus on both increasing sustainable water production and reducing the impact our utility systems have on the environment.

Expanding central water and wastewater service, including connecting legacy septic systems where practical, is one of the most effective ways to protect the Indian River Lagoon and our groundwater from excess nutrients. As our population grows, new development must pay for the infrastructure it requires rather than shifting those costs to existing residents.

At the same time, we should invest in next-generation water technologies. That includes expanding reclaimed water use, advanced wastewater treatment, environmentally responsible biosolids management, atmospheric water generation, and evaluating desalination as part of a diversified long-term water supply. We should also continue improving stormwater systems and aquifer recharge where feasible.

Every utility expansion should be guided by sound science, environmental stewardship, and fiscal responsibility. Our goal should be to produce more clean water, reuse more of the water we already have, reduce pollution entering our waterways, and ensure future generations inherit a county with a reliable water supply and a healthy Indian River Lagoon.

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?

County taxpayers should not bear the cost of growth decisions made by another government. When cities approve major annexations or higher-density developments that rely on county utilities, the county must have meaningful input before those projects move forward.

I support strong interlocal agreements that require developers to pay the full cost of the water, wastewater, transportation, and public safety infrastructure their projects require. If current agreements do not give the county sufficient authority to evaluate capacity, timing, and long-term operating costs before service is committed, they should be strengthened.

Beyond utilities, I see tremendous opportunities for greater city-county collaboration. We should coordinate transportation planning, stormwater management, emergency services, environmental restoration, parks, and economic development to reduce duplication and improve service. Our waterways, roads, and public safety systems don't stop at municipal boundaries, and our planning shouldn't either.

Growth should be coordinated, fiscally responsible, and supported by the infrastructure needed to protect both taxpayers and our natural resources.