

'Live Local' law stirs critics, becomes election year clash

Lawmakers have added to Live Local yearly, tilting the table further toward builders, opponents say.

John Kennedy Capital Bureau | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

July 24, 2026, 5:06 a.m. ET

- Florida's 2023 "Live Local Act" was designed to increase affordable housing but is now a contentious issue in state and local elections.
- The law limits the ability of local governments to reject development proposals, even if they conflict with existing zoning and density rules.
- While supporters say the act combats the "not-in-my-backyard" mentality, opponents argue it strips local control and favors developers.

Affordability is a [top issue](#) promoted by candidates from [both parties](#), but the Florida Legislature's signature attempt to lower housing costs is under attack in many elections across the state.

The state's Republican-controlled Legislature, under then-Senate President Kathleen Passidomo, R-Naples, approved the "[Live Local Act](#)" in 2023. It steered [policies and money](#) toward encouraging cities and counties to create more lower-cost apartments and houses.

But Live Local also handcuffed local governments, [making it tougher](#) for officials to say 'no' to developers proposing everything from apartment complexes in neighborhoods not zoned for large residential, to soaring condo towers that defy community height and density restrictions.

Lawmakers have added to Live Local every year since it passed, tilting the table further toward builders, opponents say.

'Live Local' now part of election season

Now, the law has become a talking point in the 2026 campaign.

"We've seen growing frustration throughout Florida from citizens who have realized that there may be no opportunities for them to comment and for their locally elected officials to debate and vote on development proposals that meet a loose definition of affordable housing," said Paul Owens, president of 1000 Friends of Florida, which describes itself as a 'smart growth' advocacy organization.

Permitting has been fast-tracked and cities and counties limited in what they can reject – all in the name of making housing more available and affordable.

The 2023 Live Local Law allows developers to skip local zoning regulations without a public hearing if they set aside 40% of the units as affordable housing. It has spawned lawsuits across the state as developers push projects deep into areas where they formerly weren't allowed.

Passidomo, who pushed the legislation, didn't respond to requests for comment, but in the past she's said the law was intended to combat the "not-in-my-backyard" view affordable housing often sparks among neighbors. The law "is working in many, many places. And it's all about leadership on a local level," she said last year.

Still, the Brevard County Commission drew loud applause July 20 when it [rejected a developer's proposal](#) under the Live Local law for an apartment complex including as many as 337 units on Merritt Island, in an area zoned agricultural residential. That typically is more rural and designated for single-family homes.



"If you approve this appeal today, you're effectively telling every developer in Florida that our local zoning maps do not matter," Pamela Steel, a nearby resident, told commissioners.

GOP has disdained what it calls burdens on development

Florida Republicans in the Legislature have been intent on stripping away what they condemn as burdensome local regulations. But now, Live Local is emerging as an issue in legislative and county commission races across Florida.

The development industry always is a major donor to Republican campaigns across the state. Builders again are betting heavily on GOP candidates, from Byron Donalds in the governor's race to incoming Senate President Jim Boyd, R-Bradenton, along with scores of county commission contenders.

In Miami-Dade County, where Live Local has spurred a wave of high-rise development, Democratic and Republican candidates in five state House races say the law needs at least to be reined in.

Republican House District 113 Republican candidate Bruno Barreiro, a former county commissioner and ex-legislator, told the Miami Herald editorial board that Live Local was a "knee-jerk reaction" to Florida's housing woes.

It needs to be "at least minimally fine-tuned, if not substantially redone," Barreiro said.

Another Republican District 113 contender, Tony Diaz, called it the "Live Local Scam."

"I want to repeal it, or I want to amend it to the point that it becomes useless," he told the Herald.

In Sarasota County, the County Commission in April blocked a half-dozen development projects seeking Live Local protection to move forward, mostly in rural and low-density areas.

Soon after, lawsuits were filed by developers who sued Sarasota County and each commissioner individually for voting down the projects. In one lawsuit, SITC, Inc., said the county illegally rejected their plan to build a 500-unit apartment project in eastern Sarasota County.

Was Sarasota's government 'weaponized' against law?

The company added that commissioners "knowingly weaponized governmental power" by ignoring a memo from Sarasota County Attorney Joshua Moyer. He had acknowledged that the vote to sidestep state law would be difficult to defend.

Now, the clash is making its way into county commission races.

"I've been very clear on this particular topic ever since we first found out about Live Local. Taking local government control, elected officials, out of the equation, taking your voice out of the equation, is crazy," said Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Neunder.

“This is not political theater,” he added. “This is the real world.”

Neunder, a Republican, is facing a Aug. 18 primary challenge from Jim DeNiro, a Realtor. The two have squabbled over who is more friendly with the development community.

Kristina Sargent, a Republican challenging fellow Republican District 2 Commissioner Mark Smith, argued that commissioners were out of line when they defied state law.

“Good governance requires more than passion,” Sargent wrote in a guest editorial. “It requires discipline. It requires following the law even when it is politically unpopular.”

There are Live Local supporters, to be sure

Live Local has its supporters. AARP Florida backed the latest expansion of the law, signed by DeSantis in March, speeding up the permitting process for developers and toughening requirements for governments looking to reject construction proposals.

“What we’re seeing for a lot of our older residents here in Florida is that housing is costing a lot. And it’s taken a large percentage of people who are on fixed incomes, monthly income. Social Security has not gone up,” said Zayne Smith, AARP Florida’s senior director of advocacy.

The affordable housing standard in Live Local means developers must make 40% of rentals available to households making up to 120% of the local median income, or about \$115,000-a-year in much of urban Florida.

Live Local fits into the playbook of Gov. Ron DeSantis and GOP lawmakers, who in recent years have embraced a range of preemption measures that limit local governments’ ability to tax and spend; promote diversity, equity and inclusion; and even ban single-use plastics.

They’ve prevented cities and counties from enacting restrictions on rent hikes and safety protections for those working outdoors in Florida’s summer heat.

Another effort has effectively blocked new planning regulations – helping the development industry flourish. It represented the “largest incursion into local home rule authority” in Florida’s modern history, according to one of two lawsuits that attempted unsuccessfully to overturn the new law.

The battle in Brevard: [Brevard County denies 'Live Local' housing appeal in unanimous vote](#)Property tax overhaul a power shift: [Property tax overhaul could give state more muscle over cities and counties](#)Sarasota defies state law: [Sarasota County blocks 'Live Local' law, risking clash with developers](#)

Property taxes could be biggest swipe at cities, counties

Still, the property tax overhaul bound for the November ballot looks like the biggest swipe of all at the power of cities and counties.

With property values climbing, local tax collections have doubled since 2014, according to analysis by Florida TaxWatch, the research organization. Collections are 46% higher than what was taken in by cities and counties across the state just four years ago.

But the November ballot proposal would erase \$5 billion in tax revenue next year and almost \$12 billion by 2031, according to state economists. If approved by 60% of voters, it would increase the homestead exemption from the current \$50,000 to \$150,000 in 2027 and then to \$250,000 in 2028

Local governments warn that public safety, parks, road maintenance and a host of other services are certain to suffer – and that residents will face new fees for services now paid by property taxes.

“Florida has a serious shortage of affordable housing,” 1000 Friends' Owens said. “But the best way to meet the need is still for local officials and their constituents to work out solutions.”

John Kennedy is a reporter in the USA TODAY Network's Florida Capital Bureau. He can be reached at jkennedy2@usatodayco.com, or on X at @JKennedyReport.