Palm Beach County State Legislative Update

Session Week 2 — Week of January 19

UPDATES FROM THE LEGISLATURE

The Florida House and Senate wrapped up the Second Week of Legislative Session. Included below are a few highlights of what happened this week in Tallahassee.

Florida Association of Counties Day at the Capitol

Florida Association of Counties Day at the Florida Capitol brought together County Administrators and Commissioners from across the state to discuss pressing issues that may come up during the 2026 Legislative Session. Palm Beach County Commissioners Maria Marino, Greg Weiss, and Bobby Powell along with Chief Deputy County Administrator Todd Bonlarron were engaging in Tallahassee with decisionmakers on key county legislative priorities. The event highlighted the importance of home rule, ad valorem revenue amid the property tax debate, unfunded mandates, and preemption legislation moving through the legislative process.

Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee

The House Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee advanced several bills of interest dealing with local government finance and administration as well as permitting.

HB 103: Local Business Taxes, sponsored by Rep. Adam Botana, would repeal Florida's local business tax framework by eliminating Chapter 205, ending local authority to impose such taxes and removing related registration and receipt requirements across statute. The bill creates s. 218.150 to allow municipalities already imposing a gross-receipts-based merchant tax to continue doing so, with limited authority to revise the definition of "merchant" but no ability to raise existing tax rates. Supporters argued the tax has become burdensome and functions as a "slush fund" for certain counties, while opponents warned of potential revenue losses and challenges for local governments in tracking and monitoring businesses. During debate, Rep. Gantt questioned whether the original state interest behind the tax had been fulfilled, and sponsor Rep. Botana responded that the bill aims to eliminate misuse rather than a necessary regulatory tool. Rep. Gerwig supported moving the bill forward despite concerns about enforcement and visibility, while Rep. Michael opposed it, citing fiscal uncertainty for local governments. The bill was reported favorable by the subcommittee on a 10–6 vote and now heads to the State Affairs Committee.

HB 967: Electronic Payments Made to Units of Local Governments, sponsored by Rep. James Buchanan, requires units of local government to modernize payment systems by mandating acceptance of credit cards, debit cards, electronic funds transfers, and other electronic payment methods, including a required online payment option, replacing prior discretionary language with a statewide requirement. The members questioned whether the bill was optional, whether funding assistance or delayed implementation was available, and how local governments would afford compliance. Sponsor Rep. James Buchanan clarified that the requirement to have an online option available is mandatory, includes no funding provisions, and does not allow delayed implementation. The bill was characterized as a governmental modernization measure intended to expand access and convenience for residents and businesses. No members spoke in opposition, the bill was reported favorable by the subcommittee with a unanimous vote, and now heads to the State Affairs Committee.

HB 4035: Palm Beach County, sponsored by Rep. Jervonte Edmonds, updates contractor licensure procedures in Palm Beach County by modernizing the Board's examination and applicant review process. The local bill requires applicants to pass the licensing examination before their applications are presented to the CILB, ensuring competency is verified at the outset. This change streamlines the process by advancing only qualified candidates, reducing administrative workload, and expediting certification for successful applicants. By aligning Palm Beach County's licensing system with best practices in professional regulation, the amendment promotes fairness, consistency, and efficiency while strengthening the overall integrity of the licensing process. The local bill was reported favorable by the subcommittee on a unanimous vote and now heads to the Industries & Professional Activities Subcommittee.

HB 1049: Building Permit Requirements, sponsored by Rep. Tiffany Esposito, restricts local building permit requirements by prohibiting new permitting or technical amendments for licensed contractor–installed backup power systems and barring permits for most single-family home improvements valued under $7,500, while preserving inspections and key safety standards under the Florida Building Code and Fire Prevention Code. The bill allows in-person or virtual inspections without a permit, authorizes private provider inspections, requires contractors to retain written documentation for non-permitted work, limits stop-work orders to immediate life-safety issues, and prevents denial of a certificate of occupancy solely due to a failed backup power system inspection. Members raised concerns about safety, virtual inspections, and potential contractor underbidding to stay below the $7,500 threshold, while supporters emphasized reduced backlogs, faster installation of backup power systems—particularly important in hurricane-prone Florida—and fewer bureaucratic delays for homeowners and contractors. Rep. Esposito maintained that safety is preserved through inspections and that the threshold was developed with statewide stakeholder input, though the bill does not specifically address underbidding or create new consumer-recourse provisions. The bill was reported favorable on a 10–6 vote and now heads to the Industries & Professional Activities Subcommittee.

SB 840: Land Use Regulations for Local Governments Affected by Natural Disasters

The Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously approved **SB 840**, sponsored by Sen. Nick DiCeglie, which seeks to correct unintended consequences of 2025 legislation (SB 180) governing post-hurricane redevelopment. SB 180 was designed to prevent local governments from slowing rebuilding efforts but has been used to block unrelated comprehensive plan changes statewide, prompting litigation from cities and counties. SB 840 would narrow the geographic scope of post-storm land use restrictions from 100 miles to 50 miles from a hurricane's track and shorten the duration of certain SB 180 provisions tied to Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton, setting an expiration date of June 30 instead of late 2027. The bill also limits restrictions to properties that were actually damaged by a hurricane and clarifies that local governments may continue essential planning activities, including work in areas of critical state concern and infrastructure projects related to water, sewer, stormwater, and flood protection. During Senate debate, members focused on correcting unintended consequences from last year's legislation, particularly the scope of its geographic impact. Senator Lori Berman questioned Senator Nick DiCeglie about reducing the impact radius from 100 miles to 50 miles and how the Senate version compares with the House companion bill. Senator DiCeglie explained that the narrower radius better targets communities actually affected while relieving restrictions on areas with minimal impact, and he committed to working with the House to align both versions. The discussion drew bipartisan support, with Senator Berman praising the approach as "threading the needle" and Senator Rosalind Osgood expressing support, while no opposition was voiced. The measure now heads to its final stop in the Senate Rules.

SB 484: Data Centers

SB 484, sponsored by Senator Ávila, received unanimous approval (8–0) in the Senate Regulated Industries Committee. The bill establishes a comprehensive framework for large-scale data centers by prohibiting state agencies from using nondisclosure agreements to shield development details, reaffirming local government authority over land use and planning, and directing the Public Service Commission (PSC) to create large-load electricity tariffs that ensure data centers fully pay for the cost of service without shifting expenses to other ratepayers. It also bars public utilities from serving large-load customers controlled by foreign entities of concern and strengthens water use permitting by requiring hearings and prioritizing reclaimed water where feasible. Members questioned how the PSC would structure tariffs, how off-grid facilities would be treated, and the scale and employment impact of major data centers, but debate ultimately centered on balancing Florida's competitiveness with strong consumer, infrastructure, and water protections. With no opposition voiced, the committee expressed broad consensus that the bill appropriately protects ratepayers and local communities while allowing responsible data center growth in Florida. The bill now heads to Senate Community Affairs.

HB 803: Building Permits and Inspections

HB 803, sponsored by Representative Trabulsy, received unanimous approval (16–0) in the House Industries & Professional Activities Subcommittee. The bill aims to modernize and streamline Florida's building permit and inspection process by eliminating delays, standardizing local requirements, reducing high fees, and updating outdated rules that slow construction and drive up costs. HB 803 allows homeowners to use licensed private providers for inspections while maintaining Florida Building Code standards and local oversight. It exempts minor projects, routine residential hurricane/flood protection walls, and certain retaining walls from permits, sets uniform permit application timelines, reduces fees, and requires electronic submissions. The bill also establishes a registration process for private providers and prohibits local governments and homeowners' associations from adding extra requirements beyond state standards. Members discussed balancing local control with efficiency, ensuring safety, and preventing misuse of the $7,500 threshold. Supporters emphasized faster permitting, experienced private inspectors, and uniformity, while no members spoke in direct opposition. The bill now heads to the Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee.

Senate Community Affairs

The Senate Community Affairs Committee advanced several bills of interest addressing growth management and permitting regulations.

SB 548: Growth Management, sponsored by Senator Stan McClain, addresses concurrency requirements and impact fee regulations through a plan-based methodology that uses recent, localized data to project 10-year growth, plan for capacity needs, and identify necessary capital projects. The bill requires interlocal agreements to address extra jurisdictional impacts, mandates transportation concurrency agreements follow the plan-based approach, and limits agreements extending beyond October 1, 2031. It defines "extraordinary circumstances" for exceeding impact fee phase-in limits, requires current local data for capacity projections, and prohibits outdated or automatic deductions. SB 548 also establishes a structured process for increasing impact fees, including phased caps, public workshops, and unanimous approval for exceeding standard limits, and entitles prevailing petitioners to refunds with interest and reasonable legal costs if fees are improperly assessed. Committee discussion focused on clarifying extraordinary circumstances, baseline fee updates, and preventing abrupt fee spikes, with sponsors emphasizing fairness, transparency, and predictability. No members opposed the bill, the bill was reported favorably on a unanimous vote, 8-0, and now heads to Senate Finance & Tax.

SB 686: Agricultural Enclaves, sponsored by Senator McClain (R), authorizes owners of certain parcels to seek certification as agricultural enclaves, establishes an expedited local review process with automatic certification if local governments fail to act within 90 days, and allows judicial review if certification is denied. Approved enclaves are treated as conforming uses for single-family residential development, overriding conflicting local plans or zoning, and local governments are prohibited from imposing more burdensome regulations. The bill also expands the definition of agricultural enclaves, permits multiple contiguous parcels under single ownership, and requires written agreements between owners and local governments for development approvals. Certain provisions are set to expire on January 1, 2028, unless amended. SB 686 had no opposition and bipartisan support, including praise from Senator Sharief (D) for the sponsor's collaboration with local governments. The committee approved the bill unanimously, 8-0, and now heads to Senate Judiciary.

SB 830: Public Records/County Administrators and City Managers, sponsored by Senator Tom Leek, expands public records exemptions to protect the personal identifying and location information of certain county and city management officials and their families. Specifically, it shields the home addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth of county administrators, deputy and assistant administrators, city managers, deputy and assistant city managers, as well as the names and contact information of spouses and the names and addresses of schools or daycares attended by their children. Senator Leek cited reports of increased threats and violence against city managers, noting the importance of extending protections already granted to other local officials. The measure, supported by the League of Cities and the Association of Counties, passed favorably in the Senate Community Affairs Committee with an 8-0 vote, and now heads to Senate Government Oversight and Accountability.

SB 1138: Qualified Contractors, sponsored by Senator Ralph Massullo, streamlines local planning and development permitting by allowing property owners to use qualified contractors for preapplication reviews of permits, plans, or plats. The bill requires local governments to establish a program and registry for these contractors, prohibits duplicative or additional local requirements for certified applications, and expedites building permits while maintaining local final approval authority. It also preempts conflicting local ordinances and places oversight of contractors under professional licensing boards. Supporters highlighted efficiency, cost savings, and safety, while some opposition focused on preserving local authority, though concerns may be addressed in the future. The measure passed favorably in committee, on a 6-2 vote, and now heads to Senate Judiciary.

SB 1234: Building Permits and Inspections, sponsored by Senator DiCeglie, is the Senate companion bill to HB 803, sponsored by Representative Trabulsy. The bill was favorably passed on a unanimous vote with no questions or opposition from members. The bill ensures single-family building permits remain valid for at least 180 days or until the next code edition, exempts certain minor non-structural work under $7,500, and reduces barriers for using private providers. Senator DiCeglie emphasized the professionalism of these private providers and welcomed stakeholder input on refining exemptions, record-keeping, and standards. The bill now heads to Senate Regulated Industries.

HB 433: Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

HB 433, sponsored by Representatives Alvarez, D. is a comprehensive agriculture and consumer services bill that received broad support in the House Commerce Committee, moving forward with a strike-all amendment adopted without debate. The legislation preempts local restrictions on gasoline-powered farm and landscape equipment, revises rules for surplus state lands and fairs, strengthens penalties for commercial driver license test violations and contractor nonpayment, and updates biosolids regulations. It creates new

programs, including the Farmers Feeding Florida Program and the Food Animal Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program, while consolidating fair associations and revising oversight and permitting processes. Additional measures address food safety enforcement, health studio exemptions, emergency recovery loan eligibility, shellfish lease adjustments, viticulture references, and prohibitions on misleading concealed weapon displays and signal jamming devices. The bill also eliminates Florida's participation in the Southern States Energy Compact, removes the Babcock Ranch Advisory Group, and authorizes departmental reorganization within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Overall, HB 433 modernizes and consolidates agricultural, consumer protection, and fair-related statutes while enhancing enforcement and programmatic flexibility. The bill now heads to the State Affairs Committee.

Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee

The House Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee advanced several bills of interest addressing local government regulations.

HB 105: Local Government Enforcement Actions, sponsored by Rep. Robbie Brackett, advanced favorably out of the subcommittee on a unanimous vote. The bill establishes a uniform process to prevent arbitrary or unreasonable enforcement actions by counties, municipalities, and special districts. Local governments must follow their own ordinances, and individuals or businesses may request a review of enforcement actions, with a 30-day response requirement. Legal action can be filed within 180 days, with potential recovery of attorney fees, costs, and damages up to $50,000 per occurrence. The bill also requires local governments to adopt review procedures, extends whistle-blower protections, and preempts conflicting local policies. During the committee discussion, the sponsor clarified that no new boards would be created and that fire marshals and building officials must continue to follow existing rules, addressing member concerns about life safety. The bill now heads to the Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee.

HB 481: Public Nuisance Abatement, sponsored by Representative Erika Booth, was reported favorably on a unanimous vote by the Subcommittee. The bill removes the $15,000 cap on fines for chronic nuisance properties, allows fines of up to $500 per day for nuisances lasting over a year, clarifies attorney fee awards to include nonclerical legal support, and extends continuing jurisdiction over properties until nuisances are abated. It also establishes a foreclosure process for unpaid liens, beginning after three months and required if unresolved after two years. The sponsor emphasized that these measures provide stronger tools for local governments to address persistent safety concerns, citing a tragic local incident. The bill now heads to the State Affairs Committee.

HB 1009: Governmental Agency Publication of Advertisements and Public Notices, sponsored by Representative Griffitts Jr., aims to modernize how governmental agencies publish legally required advertisements and public notices by expanding digital options. It adds clerks of court, comptrollers, and tax collectors to the definition of "governmental agency" and allows notices to be posted on official or designated private websites, potentially eliminating newspaper requirements if online posting is more cost-effective. The bill removes the mandate for mailed notifications to property owners and residents. In committee, discussion focused on ensuring public access, protecting local newspapers, and providing clear criteria for agencies choosing online over print. Supporters highlighted cost savings and flexibility, while opponents raised concerns about internet access and impacts on traditional newspapers. The bill passed favorably, 12-3 and now heads to the Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee.

SB 594: Local Housing Assistance Plans

SB 594, sponsored by Senator Colleen Burton (R), was favorably reported by the Senate Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development. The bill expands local housing assistance plans to provide short-term lot rental assistance, as well as repair and rehabilitation funds, to mobile home owners—particularly seniors—facing rising lot rents or displacement due to park closures. Senators Tom A. Wright (R) and Kristen Arrington (D) praised the bill for addressing affordability challenges for mobile-home residents, noting the growing impact of large investment groups increasing lot rents. The bill also removes the previous 20% cap on manufactured housing expenditures, ensuring broader eligibility for assistance. No opposition was voiced and the bill now heads to Senate Rules.

HB 203: Phased Out Elimination of Non-school Property Tax for Homesteads

HB 203, sponsored by Representative Miller (R), proposes a gradual elimination of non-school ad valorem property taxes on homesteads over a ten-year period, while keeping school district taxes intact. The bill increases the homestead exemption by $100,000 annually starting in 2027, ultimately fully exempting homesteads from non-school property taxes by 2037, with lower-value areas potentially seeing full relief in as little as three years. It also raises the initial exemption cap from $75,000 to $150,000 and constitutionally protects public safety funding by prohibiting reductions to law enforcement, firefighter, and other first responder budgets below the higher of the 2024 or 2025 levels. Committee debate highlighted support from Republicans for voter choice, tax relief, and affordability, while Democrats expressed concerns about rapid local revenue loss, potential fee increases, cuts to essential non-public-safety services, and

the absence of a comprehensive implementation plan. The committee reported the bill favorably with the committee substitute, 11 Yeas and 5 Nays, and now heads to the House Floor.

HB 4033 – Palm Beach County

The House State Affairs Committee passed HB 4033, sponsored by Rep. Anne Gerwig, this week related to Palm Beach County. The local bill revises definitions of family day care homes & large family child care homes to specify maximum number of children allowed to receive care in such homes in the county. The local bill now heads to the House Floor.

HB 213: Modification of Limitations on Property Assessment Increases

HB 213, sponsored by Rep. Griff Griffits, advanced favorably out of the House State Affairs Committee on a 17-7 vote. The bill shifts homestead and nonhomestead property reassessments from annual to a three-year cycle, capping homestead non-school levies at the lower of 3% or inflation, retaining annual caps for school property, and increasing nonhomestead caps from 10% to 15%. It also prohibits local governments from reducing total funding for first responders below prior high levels. Supporters argued the measure provides predictability, slows rapid property tax growth, and protects core public safety funding, while opponents expressed concern that less frequent reassessments could strain local budgets, reduce funding for essential community services, and fail to address inequities in Save Our Homes. The sponsor emphasized that local governments retain flexibility with millage rates and that appraisers could manage market fluctuations, presenting the bill as a balanced approach to modernize Florida's property tax system. The bill now heads to the Ways & Means Committee.