



City of Anna Maria

February 7, 2025

State Representative Will Robinson
State Senator Jim Boyd

Gentlemen

Thank you for sharing the OPPAGA study on January 9, 2025. I appreciate the comments made in your letter and completely agree that merging or eliminating the Island cities would negatively impact the unique and special character of the Island. The OPPAGA study identified possible areas for streamlining services and you asked the Island mayors to respond to you by February 13, 2025, regarding ways we believe services can be streamlined and better coordinated. From my point of view, streamlining and better coordinating services is important as long as our citizens receive as good or better services as compared to what they are accustomed to and there is a reduction in the amount of taxes that have to be paid.

As you are aware, the City of Anna Maria (COAM) reduced its ad valorem tax rate for 2024 from 2.05 to 1.65. This approximate 20% reduction in the property tax rate was unprecedented and, we suspect, the most significant reduction in property tax rates ever approved by a municipality, county or school district in the State of Florida. Unfortunately, the OPPAGA study did not mention this reduction in our rate. For 2024, the COAM's ad valorem tax rate is approximately 20% less than the City of Holmes Beach, 29% less than the City of Bradenton Beach, 71% lower than the City of Bradenton and 73% lower than Manatee County. The COAM was able to achieve this rate reduction by smartly spending funds on long-term projects providing a return on investment to our property owners. In addition, the COAM operates, in my opinion, a very efficient operation. I am in process of reorganizing our operations, and when complete (expected by the end of April 2025), the COAM will employ only 13 full-time individuals, which will be complimented with 4 part-time individuals who will primarily be in the role of supporting our code enforcement department. The COAM currently outsources its law enforcement, building department, legal, and information technology support functions.

We are in early discussions with Manatee County to arrange an inter-local agreement to have Manatee County provide the COAM with human resource support, which is currently performed in-house, and information technology support, which is currently provided by a third party. We believe financial savings can be realized by the COAM by having such an arrangement with Manatee County and the County would benefit from the revenue stream it would receive from the COAM.

Historically the COAM has not made significant investments in heavy equipment to primarily support the public works department. When equipment is occasionally needed, the COAM has leased equipment from third party vendors. We understand that the City of Holmes Beach has

invested in heavy equipment, which is likely underutilized. I have raised this matter with the mayors of Holmes Beach and Bradenton Beach suggesting we all take inventories of any heavy equipment owned with the intent to reach some type of inter-local agreement on the use of such equipment. It is expected that this would result in savings for the user of such equipment (ie. at a cost less than renting from a third party) and income for the party that owns the equipment.

The City of Holmes Beach has proposed to the COAM and the City of Bradenton Beach consolidation of building department services including building official duties, inspections, floodplain management and permitting assistance. The proposal, however, requires the other two cities to continue to independently maintain their own CRS program, maintain all building related records, retain their own permit tech(s), city planner, city engineer, etc. and provide city planning and zoning services. The Holmes Beach proposal suggests an incremental cost of \$352,500 to provide this service. The COAM renegotiated its contract with a third party to provide all the services described above, except for city planner, and the contract is based off a percent of permit fees collected, with a monthly minimum. This new contract became effective February 3, 2025, and will be no worse than breakeven and likely result in some cost reduction from what had previously been paid. As you are likely aware, the building department is a self-funded operation within the cities. Its operating expenses are paid by permit, planning and related fees and the fees collected have limitations based on the expenses incurred. It is important to note the property owners do NOT save any taxes by streamlining or consolidating building department functions.

The City of Holmes Beach has also proposed to the COAM consolidation of law enforcement services whereby the Holmes Beach police department would replace the Manatee County Sheriff's Department as the law enforcement agency of record. Based on the proposal, which was received February 4, 2025, the cost to the COAM would approximate \$3.2 million in year one and \$2.3 million in year two. Currently the COAM's contract with the Manatee County Sheriff's Department calls for a cost of \$1.5 million and the services provided by the Sheriff's Department are more comprehensive. There is clearly no cost savings that would result from this proposal and, in fact, it would represent a significant increase in cost to our taxpayers.

The OPPAGA study also called out investigating contracted services, most notably solid waste removal, which is separately contracted by the three Island cities. I do agree this should be investigated taking into account when each city's current contract expires. However, please note that the cost of solid waste removal is billed directly to and paid by the property owners; it is not an expense covered by ad valorem taxes.

There were other matters highlighted in the OPPAGA study including items such as duplication with the county on emergency management services and emergency dispatch services. These items would not have a significant effect on the COAM.

In conclusion, I believe from the perspective of the COAM, there are limited opportunities to generate significant tax savings for the citizens without the possibility of sacrificing the quality of services being provided. Certainly, the elimination of the COAM, or the consolidation of the COAM with the other Island cities, or the incorporation of the COAM into the City of Bradenton would dramatically increase the tax burden on the residents and businesses of the COAM and would not result in improved services to such residents or businesses.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Short". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" and last name "Short" clearly distinguishable.

Mark Short, Mayor, City of Anna Maria