



City of Holmes Beach

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September 23, 2025

Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Senator Jim Boyd
717 Manatee Avenue W, Ste 100
Bradenton FL 34205

The Honorable Representative Will Robinson
1051 Manatee Avenue W
Bradenton FL 34205-7801

Dear Senator Boyd and Representative Robinson,

The City of Holmes Beach values our relationship and we appreciate your continued interest in our citizens and property owners. We are also supportive of your commitment to finding ways to reduce the costs associated with owning property in our city, county and state.

The City of Holmes Beach is committed to providing exceptional service to our residential and business property owners. Our city works hard to attract and retain year-round residents while providing them with the quality of life we all expect as Floridians. As you can appreciate, however, competing with the demands of Florida's coastal tourism industry comes with significant challenges. The balance we obtained within these competing interests is something we in Holmes Beach are most proud of. Affordability in this state remains a focal concern as the cost of living continues to rise rapidly. Factors such as certain elements of tourism, hurricane fatigue, and the increasing costs of property taxes and property insurance continue to drive population changes in this community and many others throughout Florida.

Here in Holmes Beach, we are working to maximize the services we provide to our residents and businesses, while also refining the services we deliver to tourists. We are the frontline government agency that many visitors interact with when they come to Holmes Beach. The city must carefully balance the responsibility of serving our taxpayers and tourists alike with increasing costs. With all of this in mind, our city welcomes your input not only on efficiency, but also on identifying alternative revenue sources for local governments

across Florida as you approach the upcoming legislative session. We hope this letter outlines both the proactive steps Holmes Beach has taken and several areas where state legislative support could meaningfully reduce costs for our residents while improving public services island-wide.

As we share the same goal in finding ways to reduce costs for our citizens, we are challenged with meeting the criteria for Resort Tax Funding. The city alone has contributed well over 30 million to this tax. Any consideration in opening this funding source to public safety and infrastructure improvements so cities can better serve this industry would be most beneficial to our visitors and the property owners who are daily subjected to the heightened intensity of use in their communities. Allowing the cities to tap into this funding source directly would be a tremendous revenue source and help alleviate some of the costly infrastructure costs to property taxpayers.

As you noted in your correspondence, all three cities have been in depths of recovery from the greatest catastrophes to have hit our coastline. Fortunately, the City of Holmes Beach invested in an Emergency Management Plan and participated in annual exercises with the county. Several years ago, state and county officials strongly encouraged each city to be more self-sufficient in their response efforts from disasters if county and state resources are routed to areas deemed more critical. Fortunately, all city essential employees are trained extensively in their grey sky roles, and our missions, coordinated with county and state resources, are successful.

We respect and appreciate your request to think outside the box and identify efficiencies that generate real cost savings.

In February of this year, we provided draft interlocal agreements and proposed shared services for consideration by the 3 island cities. They are follows:

Development Services Department:

In response to the significant impacts of Hurricanes Milton and Helene, the City of Holmes Beach Development Services Department acted quickly to support recovery and rebuilding throughout the community. The Building Department created emergency permit forms for all hurricane recovery work and began expediting applications to accelerate rebuilding efforts. To further ease the burden on residents and businesses, we opened 6 days per week, and all storm-related permit fees were waived. This waiver continues to remain in place today, saving a combined total of those impacted of approximately \$750,000 in fees. Since the storms, more than 4,000 building permits have been issued, reflecting both the scale of the damage and the urgency of the recovery effort.

Code Compliance also played a critical role in recovery, despite losing their office during Hurricane Helene. The team relocated to City Hall and worked closely with the Building Department to conduct property damage assessments, public outreach, and ensuring continuity of essential services during this challenging period.

By early December 2024, substantial damage assessments were completed, and the team assessed 3,331 structures citywide. Their findings noted the estimated cost of

damages totaled \$334,200,151 for residential properties and \$17,618,430 for commercial properties.

The city's response demonstrates the importance of cities having fully trained, cross-functional staff capable of mobilizing quickly when disaster strikes. By leveraging the expertise of the Building Department, Code Compliance, Planning and Zoning, and outside partners, Holmes Beach was able to provide timely assessments, expedite permitting, and maintain resident support during a critical recovery period.

The City of Holmes Beach Development Service Department has a streamlined permit process to thoroughly evaluate compliance with FEMA's 50% Rule, ensuring that substantial improvement and substantial damage determinations are made consistently and in accordance with federal requirements. This diligent approach, combined with other floodplain management activities, has resulted in the city earning an improved Community Rating System (CRS) classification through the National Flood Insurance Program. Holmes Beach has advanced from a Class 6 to a Class 5 rating, increasing the flood insurance premium discount for property owners from 20% to 25%. The city has also accumulated enough points to qualify for a Class 4 rating but must first complete the prerequisite of a watershed master plan. Work on this initiative is underway, and upon completion and reclassification, Holmes Beach could achieve a Class 4 or even Class 3 rating, which would provide residents with up to a 30% discount on flood insurance. Our permit applications, checklists, policies and procedures are available online and have been provided to the cities.

The three island cities currently partner in interlocal agreements for building department services to maintain services on a short-term basis as needed.

The City of Holmes Beach was called to action to provide emergency inspection services to the City of Bradenton Beach during their recovery efforts.

The City of Holmes Beach is currently providing inspection services to the City of Anna Maria and will be entering into an agreement for building official and flood plain management services beginning October 1, 2025.

In addition to these efforts, the City of Holmes Beach has shared its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) plans with neighboring cities and has initiated discussions about conducting island-wide hurricane round tables. These initiatives aim to strengthen regional coordination, ensuring a more unified and effective response to future storm events, and improving long-term resilience for all of Anna Maria Island.

Public Works:

Our Public Works department has been coordinating on shared equipment and personnel needs with the City of Anna Maria. We are currently providing mutual aid cost estimates for equipment and operators for the street sweeper, portable message signs, and the bucket truck. Initial steps to develop an interlocal agreement to formally assist with this have been taken. Consideration was also given in sharing response teams and resources for emergency recovery. After review, this was found to be less responsive to island residents as after incident exercises revealed that each city was fully engaged in their recovery

missions. Without additional staffing and equipment, assisting one another would have slowed down responsiveness and quality of service for island residents. Holmes Beach removed over 127,000 CY (5,389 loads) of debris because of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Therefore, sharing blue sky equipment is the most effective and efficient way to help our residents.

The FEMA Public Assistance program is a valuable resource for our recovery. The City of Holmes Beach has requested just under \$5 million in expenses due to Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The cities of Anna Maria and Holmes Beach utilize the same consultant to assist in meeting the requirements for this funding source.

The County's Local Mitigation Strategy team includes invitations to all cities within the County. The LMS responsibilities include prioritizing mitigation funded projects through and to the State. While each city gets one vote in the prioritizing process, Holmes Beach staff could provide some intellectual assistance in navigating this process to help each island city get the most out of this system. The city alone has applied for just under \$26 million in HMGP mitigation projects through this program. The City of Holmes Beach values the partnerships with Anna Maria and Bradenton Beach as island-wide resiliency is a benefit to all.

The Sarasota Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) consists of over twenty state and local planners, engineers, traffic engineers, transit operators, airport/seaport operators, and environmentalists. The TAC assists the MPO by reviewing transportation plans and programs and making recommendations as to the technical adequacy of the plans and programs. The MPO's TAC has a voting seat for a regular member agency designated for the Island Transportation Planning Organization (ITPO) representing the City of Anna Maria, the City of Bradenton Beach, and the City of Holmes Beach. The ITPO is established pursuant a 2011 Interlocal Agreement between the cities. Currently, the ITPO has designated the Holmes Beach Public Works Director/City Engineer Sage Kamiya as their representative to the MPO TAC. Representation on the MPO TAC provides valuable benefits to the island cities to both provide input and receive information about the funding of transportation in the region. This participation enables the Cities to work together to request funding of key transportation projects and to have a joint voice in the development of transportation projects on the island.

The Barrier Island Complete Context Sensitivity PD&E Study was initiated to evaluate multimodal alternatives along SR 789 from north of Longboat Pass Bridge to SR 64 (approximately 3.8 miles) and Gulf Drive from SR 64 to White Avenue/85th Street (approximately 2.2 miles). The total project length is approximately six miles. Bradenton Beach and Holmes Beach have been working together on this project since 2024, coordinating with FDOT as this project has progressed with stakeholder and public meetings. This project is a culmination of several historical projects dating back to as early as 2007 and included coordination between the cities to improve roadway safety throughout the island. FDOT, Bradenton Beach, and Holmes Beach are considering community context-sensitive strategies to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and enhance mobility options for all users and to maintain the quality of life for residents and visitors.

Police Services:

Holmes Beach presented a draft interlocal agreement with a shared goal to improve efficiencies and neighborhood policing by combining services with the City of Anna Maria. After careful evaluation and review it was determined that the upfront costs to train and outfit an additional nine officers, in addition to the annual costs associated with providing services, would not support a decrease in expenses to the budget in the cities. Any considerations will need to weigh the benefits verses the additional costs in moving forward including any potential funding sources available through appropriations for upfront costs.

Human Resources:

In a shared goal to improve efficiencies with island cities, the City of Holmes Beach has provided our Employee Handbook, Employee Policies, salary ranges and job descriptions with the City of Anna Maria. This will also be provided to Bradenton Beach upon request. This includes FEMA training matrix required for each essential employee and elected officials. Recruiting and retaining exceptional staff in a local high traffic tourism environment, shared with the burdens of the high costs of living in the county, are challenging for the entire Island. Sharing successes allows island cities to become more competitive in the employment field and more effective in our ability to continue to provide public safety and exceptional customer service.

In closing, we thank you once again for your partnership and advocacy. Holmes Beach remains committed to interlocal cooperation and operational efficiency while also being fiscally responsible. Our decision to maintain last year's millage rate, despite storm-related declines in taxable value, reflects this commitment — a choice that cost the city over \$535,000 in ad valorem revenue but protected our property owners from additional financial burden.

We respectfully request your support in the following areas:

- Legislative flexibility in the use of Tourist Development Tax funds for public safety and infrastructure.
- Consideration of additional tax to help fund tourism-related infrastructure.
- Support for future appropriations to mitigate against the threats of future hurricanes and to accommodate public safety.

Please don't hesitate to reach out should you wish to discuss these matters in more detail. We welcome any opportunity to work together toward a more resilient, affordable, and thriving Florida.

Sincerely,



Judy Pittsworth

Mayor