



HOME RULE HANDBOOK



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IT'S TIME TO TALK ABOUT HOME RULE

Home Rule is something to be proud of. It's something we fought hard for and have celebrated for 50 years. It is something that we must continue to respect and protect well into the future.

We are not going to let partisan politics turn Home Rule into a dirty word.

There's no Democratic or Republican way to fix a pothole, pick up garbage, respond to a 911 call or build parks for our children. Home Rule is a constitutional power that ensures these services are provided locally, managed locally and decisions about their future made locally – right at home.

We will not abandon the concept or the term we've worked so hard to protect.

But, we can change the way we talk about it...

Define it. Local decision-making. Self-government. Citizen-centered solutions.

The people of Florida overwhelmingly support Home Rule. The term, however, is not recognized by all. It is our job to explain it in a simple way. When people understand what Home Rule means – they're all for it. *Home Rule is the flexibility to address unique local needs with local solutions.*

Localize it. When we use local examples to explain Home Rule, residents make the connection.

When it comes to local issues like tree trimming, vacation rentals, neighborhood safety, road improvements or even urban chickens, we turn to our city leaders. Why? Because Miami is not Mount Dora. Tampa is not Titusville. Local leaders are more connected to our needs and better reflect our values than state politicians.

Tailor it. Make it matter to your audience.

In a state as large as Florida, it's imperative we build partnerships so all Floridians benefit. When talking with *lawmakers*, tell them to leave local issues to local leaders. State lawmakers should tackle state issues. For example, establishing minimum water quality standards is a complex issue affecting every resident in Florida. It needs to be addressed by state lawmakers. Vacation rentals, however, are different in every neighborhood. Therefore, local solutions work best.

When talking with *residents*, we must shift our conversations away from talking about cities as if they aren't a part of us. Stop saying *cities* have or *cities* want... and start saying **WE**. *We* have the right to fight for our community. *We* want a say in what our streets look like. *We* get to choose the services in our neighborhoods. *We* live local, so we will decide local.



Florida's cities, towns and villages are centers of economic, social and cultural energy. Each municipality is a catalyst for the quality of life enjoyed by its residents and visitors. This handbook will prepare you to talk with legislators, your residents and the media about the successes occurring in our cities because of **Home Rule**.

Section 1. What Is Home Rule?

Local decision-making. Self-government. Citizen-centered solutions. The flexibility to address unique local needs with local solutions.

Since 1968, Floridians have recognized the need for cities to have Home Rule powers. It is included in our state's Constitution (Article VIII, Section 2(b)) and was implemented by the Legislature in 1973. This power gives each city the flexibility and authority to craft its laws specifically to its own unique needs. Councils and commissions know their success often rests upon this authority to solve local issues. They do this with a balance of efficiency, effectiveness and innovation to create a city that residents are proud to call their hometown.

Home Rule is a cherished concept, supported by an overwhelming majority of Florida citizens. It is the foundation for local governments as they create fair, effective and responsive policies for their communities.





#LET CITIESWORK

"Repeatedly, we see state lawmakers discuss the role of local authority, trying to shift many hometown responsibilities to the state. One-size-fits-all proposals by the Legislature will not fix or help our neighborhoods meet new challenges nor create opportunities."

Gil Ziffer, Commissioner, City of Tallahassee; FLC President 2017-2018

"In 1968, the will of the electorate enabled cities to take charge of their destiny, and chart a course and direction for future growth and prosperity."

Council Member Kenneth Campbell, Town of Malone; 2018 President, Northwest Florida League of Cities

"Home Rule is what creates the unique character of our individual municipalities. We have an obligation to explore all possible ways to craft local solutions for local challenges."

Mayor Linda Hudson, City of Fort Pierce; 2018 President, Treasure Coast League of Cities

"Having the ability to make decisions locally is vital to ensure the governance of people is closest to the people."

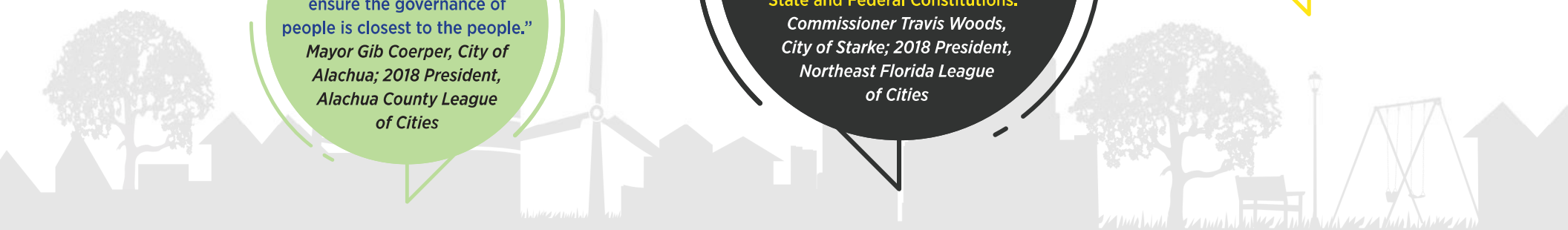
Mayor Gib Coerper, City of Alachua; 2018 President, Alachua County League of Cities

"The City of Starke and similar sized cities cannot compare to larger cities such as Miami. Our financial revenues are significantly less. We need the ability to govern ourselves as long as our rules adhere to the State and Federal Constitutions."

Commissioner Travis Woods, City of Starke; 2018 President, Northeast Florida League of Cities

"Home Rule means making the best decisions for my city without someone in Tallahassee who has never even been to my city making decisions for me!"

Commissioner Barbara Manley, City of Fort Meade; 2018 President, Ridge League of Cities



Section 2. Working with...

LEGISLATORS

Cities are committed to creating a stronger partnership with state government and working collaboratively to benefit all Floridians. However, the term Home Rule does not resonate with all legislators. For some, it is a lack of knowledge. For others, it is a lack of interest. And for a few, local interests are being superseded by special interests. We cannot let this deter us from our efforts to educate state leaders on Home Rule and the local impact of legislation. That's why we're asking them to trust city leaders to do the jobs we were elected to do – solve local problems with local solutions. This partnership and prudent partition of responsibility will help make Florida the best it can be.

1. REINFORCE RELATIONSHIPS. In real estate, it's location, location, location. In politics, it's relationships, relationships, relationships! Connect with members of your legislative delegation throughout the year and not just during session. The more legislators see you and learn what you are doing to improve services and the quality of life for your citizens, the more they will want to support you. Whether you invite them for coffee to talk about economic development plans for your city or send them a text message in response to an action alert, stay in touch with your legislators.

"Being engaged means having the cell phone number of your legislators and reaching out to them all year long - not just when you need them!"
Vice Mayor Dominick Montanaro, City of Satellite Beach; 2018 President, Space Coast League of Cities

"We must work to ensure that the State of Florida does not further erode the ability of cities to effectively govern and meet the needs of their local citizens."
Commissioner Chris Bell, City of Fruitland Park; 2018 President, Lake County League of Cities

Accept No Excuses.

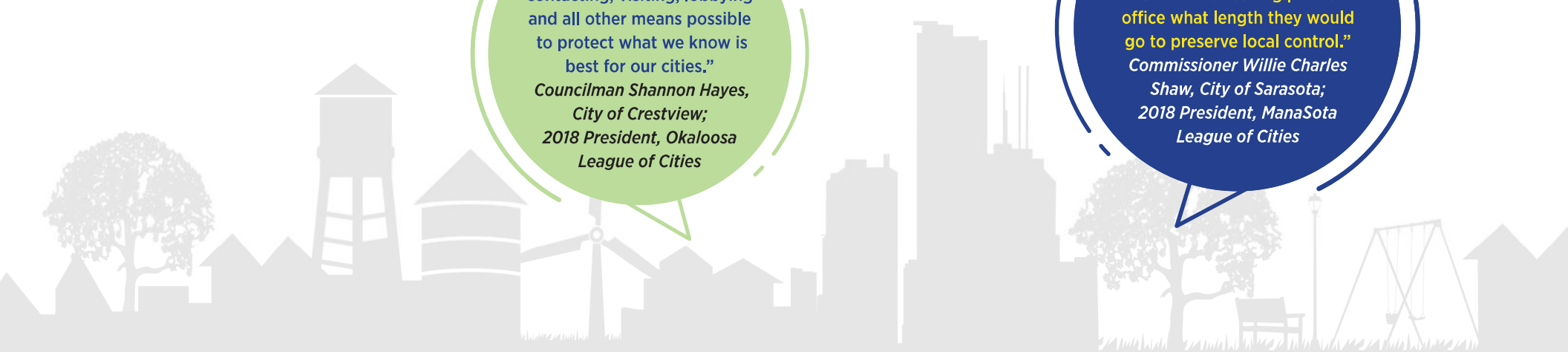
"I'm not on the committee." Your legislator's job is to fight for your district. They need to advocate for your interests with colleagues who are on the committee tasked with considering your issue. Help arm them with stories and data to help.

"I had to follow my party/caucus/leadership/etc." Leadership did not elect your state lawmaker; the people in your community did! It is their job to fight within their respective party or caucus to support you. No one else is better equipped. Encourage them to join forces with local government champions to pass bills good for cities and help block those bad for cities.

2. BE PREPARED WITH LOCAL IMPACT. To be successful, you must know the issues. You must understand how a proposed bill will affect your city and know how to communicate this to your state lawmaker with precision. Value their time and yours by being prepared with real life data and personalized stories to describe the *local impact*. Preparation also means understanding the legislative process. Don't assume the rules they follow mimic your own.

3. MAKE THE ASK. When you talk with legislators on issues impacting your community, be specific in what you want them to do. Do you want them to vote a certain way, lobby a fellow lawmaker, ask a question during committee? Do not assume they will support your position by the strength of your argument or because you had a pleasant chat. Give them the opportunity to say yes to your request and then hold them accountable on the campaign trail, during committee weeks and throughout session.

4. SHOW APPRECIATION. A brief, well-written thank you note is always appreciated, especially for those who stand up for Home Rule. Even if you disagree with your legislator on an issue, they are more likely to listen if you find a way to praise them. And don't underestimate your interactions with staff. Legislative aides, district secretaries and even interns are often the gatekeepers and can have tremendous sway in ensuring your meeting requests, information and phone calls get shared.



*"We must continue to support Home Rule by contacting, visiting, lobbying and all other means possible to protect what we know is best for our cities."
Councilman Shannon Hayes,
City of Crestview;
2018 President, Okaloosa
League of Cities*

*"We should keep Home Rule in the forefront of every conversation by asking every candidate seeking public office what length they would go to preserve local control."
Commissioner Willie Charles
Shaw, City of Sarasota;
2018 President, Manasota
League of Cities*

Section 2. Working with...

YOUR RESIDENTS

It is tough for everyday people to have their voices heard by a state government that is miles away and meets infrequently. This is precisely why local government is so effective! But in today's climate of state interference, it is more important than ever to engage as many local residents as possible in the statewide fight to protect and respect Home Rule. Business owners, community leaders and everyday residents are all tremendous assets. You must prepare constituents to take a stand to support the right to self-govern.

1. PROVIDE LOCAL EXAMPLES. What issues have your council successfully addressed in the recent past? What solutions are you working on now that residents care about the most? How are special-interests driving state policy development instead of local interests? And what are the negative impacts of those proposals on the neighborhoods in your community? Localizing the issues gives residents a reason to become passionate advocates for Home Rule.

2. IDENTIFY AND UTILIZE INFLUENCERS. Messengers matter. When recruiting members of the public to get involved, make sure to share your message with likely advocates. Reinforce their belief in local decision-making to resolve local challenges and ask them to share this with others. When you engage the right business, civic and religious leaders and community activists, the message of protecting Home Rule will resonate throughout your city.

Where to find key leaders in your community

Ask to speak at meetings or events hosted by:

- ▶ Chambers of Commerce
- ▶ Civic groups like Kiwanis or Rotary
- ▶ Faith-based organizations
- ▶ HOAs and neighborhood organizations
- ▶ Senior centers

Or host your own:

- ▶ Coffee with a Commissioner
- ▶ Morning Walk with the Mayor

These are all great ways to connect with residents on issues that celebrate your city's ability to solve local problems and spur innovation.

"People must be the priority, not the profit of special interest. Citizens must act to reclaim their rightful place in government!"
Mayor Tim Lonergan, City of Oakland Park; 2018 President, Broward League of Cities



3. START SMALL. One of the easiest ways to overwhelm an advocate is to demand too much action too early. Start by offering easy ways to get involved: sign-up for more information, share a message on social media, take a pledge. Then up the ante with more involved actions: craft an individual message to a specific legislator, make a personal phone call, or meet face-to-face with a lawmaker in their office or committee.

4. STAY IN TOUCH. Too often we only call on residents when we want them to take action. And too often the sparse communications results in missed messages. Just like you must cultivate relationships with state lawmakers year-round, so too with your local advocates. Always provide immediate follow-up when you issue a call to action – even the simple stuff. Highlight their efforts in your digital communications, via social media and during council meetings.

“We must enlist the residents of our communities to contact state lawmakers. Call, send emails, write letters. We must preserve local control.”

Mayor Drinda Merritt, Town of Inglis; 2018 President, Suwannee River League of Cities

“We must advocate, advocate, and advocate some more to enrich our cities’ way of life!”
Councilmember Donald Shroyer, City of St. Cloud; 2018 President, Tri-County League of Cities




Section 2. Working with...

THE MEDIA

With today's 24-hour news cycle, effectively working with the media has become more challenging. In most communities, stories move fast and reporters must keep pace. If you want to leverage the media in our quest to educate lawmakers and residents on the value of Home Rule, you must start by building relationships with your local media outlets and establishing yourself as a go-to resource for local government issues. To maximize impact, you must also know how to use the tools of their trade.

1. READ THEIR STUFF. One of the best tips for establishing a relationship with a reporter is to be familiar with what they write. Whether it is an established news outlet or a blogger, reporters are easier to engage when you know their style and the issues they cover. Check out their social media feeds, too, to know what interests them beyond the news. This gives you more angles to find connection.



"Our state government has used one or two cases to justify some terrible 'one-size-fits-all' statutes. We know this approach does not serve our communities well as we are all unique in our own way. Communicating our similarities and differences is so important when supporting or opposing pre-emption. It is our job to tell our stories and to prevent the erosion of our local landscapes."

Mayor Rachel Keesling, City of Punta Gorda; 2018 President, Southwest Florida League of Cities

Traditional Media Tools

MEDIA ADVISORY: A media advisory is a one-page sheet that alerts reporters to an upcoming news event. It provides a compelling preview of what will be shared but not the actual news itself. It should be sent out a few days before the event and followed up with a phone call.

PRESS RELEASE: A press release announces breaking news and should be written like a news story. To stay relevant, this tool should be sent out as soon as possible to the actual public announcement of the news you are sharing.


OP-ED: An Op-Ed is a column or guest essay – about 750 words – published in the opinion section of the newspaper, usually **Op**posite the **Ed**itorial page. This tool should be timely, present strong arguments and be authored by a well-respected community leader considered knowledgeable on the subject.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Letters to the editor are short, timely responses to recently published articles or commentary. This tool allows you to offer a short rebuttal or add a crucial missing perspective. Most letters are 150-250 words.

2. DON'T BURY THE LEDE. Reporters like ledes. They especially like ledes that are compelling and attention grabbing. They also like ledes that come in the format they are used to (tools like press releases and media advisories), coupled with all the relevant information they need to quickly and effectively write a story that the public will be interested in.

3. UTILIZE INFLUENCERS. Letters to the editor or op-eds are great tools to highlight an opinion or raise concern on a current issue but choose the author wisely. It may be perfectly appropriate for you or your elected colleague to pen, but is there someone else in the community that the message would be more powerful coming from? A local business owner highly respected in the community? Or perhaps a religious leader? This is also a great way to engage residents!

4. RESPECT DEADLINES. If a story is brewing and a reporter asks for more information, this is your opportunity to establish yourself as their go-to resource. But it can quickly be thwarted by taking too much time. Reporters want to publish ASAP. If you say you will find something out and call back – find whatever it is out and *call back* promptly!



"If the state legislature dictates how my city is to regulate short-term rentals, it would cause a huge rift among my citizens. We must preserve Home Rule and the right of cities to make these types of decisions on the local level!" *Commissioner Judy Reiker, City of New Smyrna Beach; 2018 President, Volusia League of Cities*

Section 3. Amplify Your Message with Social Media

As we tell our stories of local self-government success, don't underestimate the power of social media to reach a broad audience – lawmakers, residents and the media! You have the opportunity to craft and share important messages directly to your target audience in real-time right from the convenience of your mobile device or computer. The rules for engagement, however, differ greatly from more established modes of communicating.

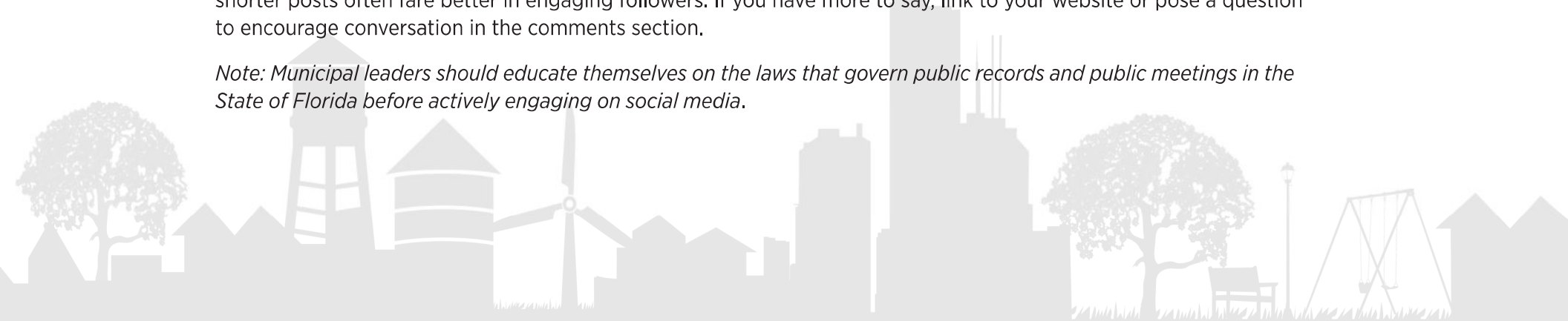
1. PLATFORM SELECTION: The most popular social media platform is Facebook, but depending upon the intended audience of your message, you may want to consider others. Facebook is very popular among thirty-somethings and older. Reporters and state lawmakers are more likely to see your message (especially if you tag them!) on Twitter, while younger constituents are more active on Instagram. Cross-posting on all platforms is usually a good idea as you will likely reach different audiences on each.

2. ENGAGE MORE THAN YOU BROADCAST: Social media platforms use a fairly sophisticated algorithm to determine who sees what posts and when. One of the factors in that algorithm is your engagement with others. If your social activity is solely broadcasting your own news, you are not maximizing the reach of your posts. Likes, reactions, comments, retweets and shares are a great way to engage with your followers and those you want to *be* your follower!

3. UTILIZE ONLINE INFLUENCERS: An influencer is someone who shares and/or comments on social posts to help that post reach a broader audience (because they themselves have a large social following). Once you identify the key influencers in your community and/or related field, determine how you can engage them as social advocates for Home Rule. This is not an activity that you should pay for, but rather rely on your natural allies to help spread your messages. (See *Working with Your Citizens* section)

4. BE BRIEF: Social media is designed to be consumed quickly. Keep your posts brief. On Twitter, you are limited to 280 characters including links to resources for more information. While the other platforms allow for longer posts, shorter posts often fare better in engaging followers. If you have more to say, link to your website or pose a question to encourage conversation in the comments section.

Note: Municipal leaders should educate themselves on the laws that govern public records and public meetings in the State of Florida before actively engaging on social media.



Section 4. The League Is Your Resource.

The Florida League of Cities has a dedicated team to support your advocacy efforts. From issue briefs to action days, we are your resource. You can access the following tools and information on our website at any time. Just visit www.floridaleagueofcities.com/advocacy.

- ▶ Talking points and issue briefs for priority and key issues
- ▶ Sample resolutions
- ▶ Voting records on key issues
- ▶ On-demand advocacy and legislative training
- ▶ Free-to-use public service announcements
- ▶ Information on statewide trends
- ▶ Legislative bill summaries (updated weekly)
- ▶ Key legislative dates
- ▶ The League's legislative policy development process
- ▶ The League's legislative conference (pre-session) and legislative action days (mid-session)
- ▶ Detailed tip sheets for engaging residents and working with the media

In addition, we provide customized services based on your needs. Contact us for:

- ▶ Legislative briefings in your region, the League office or at the Capitol
- ▶ Assistance in facilitating roundtable discussions with state lawmakers
- ▶ Guidance on hosting a candidate forum
- ▶ Daily news clips service delivered to your inbox
- ▶ Weekly emails in the weeks just before and all throughout session (On Tap @ the Cap)
- ▶ Weekly advocacy calls before and during session (Monday Morning Call-ins)
- ▶ Assistance with media and speech writing

"Looking for something not listed here or have a question? Please contact me at apayne@flcities.com or (850) 222-9684. Our team is always here to assist."

Allison Payne, Manager, Advocacy Programs and Federal Affairs, Florida League of Cities



Section 5. Home Rule in Action.

"Thanks to Home Rule, we were able to enact a height restriction on buildings that was highly desired by our residents. This helped define our community with a small-town feeling."

Mayor Jordan Leonard, Town of Bay Harbor Islands; 2018 President, Miami-Dade County League of Cities

"We have as many of 18,000 horses in town during the Winter Equestrian Festival, and manure is a serious concern. We need to be able to make rules for disposal that protects our environment and promotes the industry that has put us on the map!"

Mayor Anne Gerwig, Village of Wellington; 2018 President, Palm Beach County League of Cities

"Home Rule gives our city the ability to discuss and set annexation fees. We were able to reduce these fees to encourage those living outside our city limits to join our city. This increase in our tax base will allow us to expand wastewater services and reduce the number of homes and businesses in the region connected to septic tanks."

Commissioner Billy Rader, City of Panama City; 2018 President, Bay County League of Cities

"Our community is undergoing a massive transformation using local planning and zoning tools. The result is a mixed-use, thriving core providing real solutions for housing and economic development. Without the authority to do these things, our city's safety and redevelopment efforts are surely at risk."

Commissioner Heather Gracy, City of Dunedin; 2018 President, Suncoast League of Cities

Moving Our Agenda





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