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THE VERY PLAUSIBLE IDEA OF USING THE INFRASTRUCTURE SALES TAX TO FUND A NEW KENNEL BUILDING

Some of us at Manatee Shelter Watch, led by member Brenda Glasbrenner, have been looking into the possibility of using some of the revenue generated by Manatee County's Infrastructure Sales Tax (IST) to fund replacing the temporary prefabricated kennel trailers with a publicly accessible concrete block kennel building. I was surprised to learn that this appears to be a very doable solution that also makes common sense. (Note: I do not speak for Manatee Shelter Watch, or the Animal Advisory Board. The opinions below, where made, are mine)

The IST was approved by voters in 2016. It adds a half cent sales tax in Manatee county for a period of 15 years - from Jan 1 2017 to Dec 31, 2031. The revenue is required to go toward 3 specific categories of Capital Improvement Projects: 1) Transportation; 2) Public Safety & Law Enforcement; 3) Parks & Community Facilities. Within these 3 categories, there are three or four sub-categories of projects that each get a designated percentage of the IST revenue. This percentage is set by the BoCC through ordinance and has seen only two minor changes since the percentages were originally set up.

The specific projects that are funded by the IST are added to the IST project list by a BoCC Budget Amendment Resolution.

For the most recent information on IST revenue and spending, we went to the official IST Citizen Advisory Board website. On that page, scroll down to the latest meeting agenda dated April 23, 2026. Clicking there opens a 189 page document linked here:

<https://www.mymanatee.org/.../citizens-oversight...>

Page 9 of the document (see attached photo) includes a table that provides a current summary of the IST major categories, the percentage of the IST going to each subcategory bucket, the total 15-year revenue, the amount of money committed to existing projects and the amount of revenue not yet committed to any specific projects.

The vast majority of IST revenue (73.6%) is earmarked for Transportation-related projects. However, Animal Services & Sheltering falls under Public Safety & Law Enforcement (14.1%), so we focused on the buckets in that major category.

The first two buckets under Public Safety & Law Enforcement are law enforcement related and receive a combined 12% of the IST. Over the full 15 years, these two law enforcement-related buckets are set to receive \$84,350,959.00. More importantly for our discussion, over \$23.5 million of that \$84.3 million is not currently committed to any specific projects.

Compare that with the minimal amount going to Animal Services & Sheltering. It is actually worse than the 2.1% shown because for the first 3 years, it was only .3%.

In 2019, the increase to 2.1% was the result of a unanimous BoCC vote to fund a new east county shelter. However, in 2021 that shelter was removed from the project list by a new BoCC, in part based on the county being donated the use of the Bishop SPCA property (more details regarding the dubious history of shelter approvals in the closing paragraphs below).

THE CASE FOR SHIFTING IST REVENUE TO ANIMAL SERVICES & SHELTERING

The above facts led me to email and submit a public comment urging the BoCC to consider shifting some of the 12% of IST funds currently going to the two sub categories: a) Law Enforcement Facilities/Equip and b) Criminal

Justice/Public Safety Facilities, to help fund a labor efficient, publicly accessible brick and mortar kennel building.

To bolster the case for such a shift, I reminded the board that, in addition to the \$85 million in total IST funding going to these two law enforcement related subcategories, from Fiscal Year 2021 to 2026, the net total Sheriff budget increased by \$131,503,875.00 - an unbelievable 96% increase in just 5 years.

A closer look at some of the specific law enforcement related projects funded by the IST include over \$4 million for an additional helicopter and hundreds of thousands for parking lot improvements at the jail. (All of the projects funded by the IST are listed in the above linked document found on the IST Advisory Board Webpage)

I understand that budgeting going forward is uncertain given the possible approval of Amendment 3. In fact, the Florida Sheriffs Association, the Florida Policy Institute, and many other conservative organizations have come out strongly opposed to Amendment 3. But one could argue that, given the Amendment's language, in theory, the Sheriff is supposed to be insulated from the draconian slashing of local government revenue that would occur if the amendment passes.

(Note: in theory, Animal Services, which is part of public safety, is also supposed to be protected from the necessary budget slashing. But being protected on paper from drastic cuts is a far cry the (supposedly) Florida Constitutionally enshrined power of home rule government being able to decide what is proper funding based on local citizen input and local knowledge of need)

Again, it is important to remember that the vast majority of IST revenue will continue to go toward major transportation improvement projects. But it make sense, based on critical need and what I believe is a prior 11-year funding imbalance tilted in favor of the Sheriff, to make what would be only the 3rd change to the IST funding percentage by increasing the percentage going to Animal Services & Sheltering in order to fund a standard, public-friendly, concrete block kennel building located adjacent to the new Adoption Center and upgraded Medical facility on the donated Bishop property.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HOW WE GOT HERE - 4 DIFFERENT SHELTER DESIGNS, THE FINAL ONE WE ARE STUCK WITH WAS NEVER PUBLICLY APPROVED

As stated above, after years of public advocacy, in 2019 the BoCC unanimously approved replacing the Palmetto Animal Shelter with a new full Shelter to be located on county Lena road property. A private citizen group called Shelter Manatee, led by Pam Freni, committed to raising \$2 million that would be added to the \$8 million the county had tentatively budgeted for the project.

However, the 2020 election dramatically changed the makeup of the BOCC. In their first budget for FY 2021, the new board cancelled the shelter project citing the future donation, already in the works, of the Bishop SPCA property near Blake Hospital.

It soon became clear, however, that the Bishop facility would not replace the deteriorating Palmetto shelter. So on March 28, 2023, another new BoCC, including current commissioners Kruse, Ballard, Rahn and Bearden, unanimously approved using the same \$8 million for a new brick and mortar kennel bldg (not full shelter) to be built on the newly donated Bishop SPCA property.

In June 2023, Commissioner Kruse organized a busload of top county managers to take a field trip to see the new Nate's Honor Rescue campus of colorful, "cottage style" kennels, each cottage housing just 4 or 6 dogs. Kruse later stated that these cottages could be had for "\$40 grand" and County Construction manager Yarger told the Board the cottages could be installed in "10 months."

On July 25th, 2023, just 4 months after the March 28th approval of concrete block construction, the BoCC, for the 3rd time, unanimously changed the project design to the Nate's style of "cottages." In the meeting discussion (which was not on the agenda and received no public comment), the word "cottages" was spoken 9 times, including as part of the approved motion made by KVO.

After July of 2023, the shelter project lost all transparency. For example, we were not told that, at some point in 2023, the shelter project's Construction design contractor, HDR, and their subcontractor, Animal Arts (a nationally known shelter design firm) were commissioned, on the taxpayer dime, to do a study comparing the use of a standard, concrete block kennel building vs using large, prefab kennels. Those were the only two options. Neither of them included the "cottages" that the BoCC actually approved. How, when and who approved the change?

In December of 2023, the Animal Arts report was completed. In 45 detailed pages, the report listed exactly why they were strongly recommending against using prefabricated housing for our county shelter.

Here is link to an article I wrote summarizing the method, the data and the actual quoted statements contained in the Animal Arts report:

<https://thebradentonjournal.substack.com/.../guest-column...>

Here is a link to the full report:

<https://drive.google.com/.../10TSQ7FfbeNNtmRMiEqX.../view...>

The report was not made public or discussed at any public meeting. It was only recently discovered via a public records request.

Nonetheless, at some point in late 2023 or early 2024, without any public discussion, without any public input, and without any formal BoCC approval, the design was changed a 4th time from the "cottage" design approved on July 25, 2023, to a design using eight large, monochrome grey, 16-unit prefabricated kennel trailers - which is what were installed earlier this year.

Along the way, the completion time frame was pushed back, again without any transparency. For example, in an April 2024 BoCC meeting, CVS Director Sarah Brown, Deputy Admin Bryan Parnell, and Construction Mgr Tom Yarger told the public that, despite not a shovel of dirt having been turned, that the new kennels would be completed and dogs moved out of Palmetto by the end of the year (2024).

Three of us advocates, in an August 2024 private meeting with Parnell were given an actual timeline showing a completion date of sometime in 2026. In November 2024, an email from Parnell to top county managers revealed that the design was still not even completed as of that email.

Since the prefabs have been installed, much of what the Animal Arts report warned about is coming to fruition. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent on band aids and fixes to make the prefabs safe to use.

However, the fundamental problem of safety, labor inefficiency, and lack of public access are not band-aidable, or even possible without replacing the prefabs with a standard, labor-efficient, public-welcoming, concrete block kennel building.

We must keep reminding the BoCC of this commitment.

Summary of IST over 15 years

	R-24-155	Total Revenues over 15 Years	Total List as of 4.21.26	Remaining Balance
Transportation				
Sidewalks	5.3%	\$ 37,255,007	\$ 29,068,040	\$ 8,186,967
Intersection Improvements	9.9%	69,589,542	61,015,257	8,574,284
Major Road Improvements	55.5%	390,123,188	353,503,931	36,619,257
Stormwater Improvements	2.9%	12,699,837	12,119,774	580,063
	73.6%	509,667,573	455,707,002	53,960,570
Public Safety & Law Enforcement				
Law Enforcement Facilities & Equip	7.3%	51,313,500	29,188,389	22,125,111
Criminal Justice & Public Safety Facility	4.7%	33,037,459	31,642,694	1,394,765
911 & Public Safety Technology Upgrades	0.0%	7,684,979	4,996,119	2,688,859
Animal Services & Sheltering	2.1%	13,984,610	10,044,596	3,940,015
	14.1%	106,020,548	75,871,799	30,148,750
Parks & Community Facilities				
District Parks & Aquatic Facilities	3.5%	24,774,987	23,773,342	1,001,645
Athletic Fields	2.1%	15,279,290	12,072,654	3,206,636
Recreation Buildings & Playgrounds	2.0%	15,007,925	5,747,416	9,260,509
Environmental Preserves & Boat Ramps	2.3%	15,994,643	14,100,339	1,894,305
Libraries & Community Facilities	2.4%	16,179,696	10,151,999	6,027,698
	12.3%	87,236,541	65,845,749	21,390,793
TOTAL	100.0%	\$ 702,924,662	\$ 597,424,549	\$ 105,500,113