



## **Volusia ECHO Referendum**

In 2000, voters approved a ballot initiative that would levy of an additional ad valorem tax not to exceed 1/5 mill for 20 years and the authorization to issue limited tax general obligation bonds not to exceed \$40 million. These funds would be to finance acquisition, restoration, construction, and improvement of ECHO (Environmental, Cultural, Historical, Outdoor) projects.

The intent was to allocate funds geographically throughout the county and apportioned suitably among the four components of ECHO. Grants-in-aid would be awarded on a matching basis only upon the recommendation by the oversight committee to municipalities and non-profit organizations subject to the standards, procedures, and criteria established by the Council.

The program has operated with an Advisory Committee to review/oversee projects under consideration and to make recommendations regarding objectives of the program.

Since its inception, ECHO funds have been used for a variety of projects including improvements to Jackie Robinson Ballpark as well as Ponce Inlet Lighthouse; Daytona Beach News Journal Center, oceanfront property for off-beach parking; Athens Theater in Deland, and other projects.

During this timeframe, 206 projects received grant money related to six areas: beach parking, emergency stabilization, municipalities, non-profits, water-front access, and county projects. Total expenditures on projects from FY 2002 through FY 2019 totaled \$82,053,638.

At their May 19 meeting, County Council members received an audit report ranging from November 2000 to September 2019 which stated that “overall, the ECHO program is running efficiently and effectively”. It also included several concerns as well as recommendations to address those concerns.

An analysis of ECHO funding found that the county itself received 42 percent of the total funding (the largest recipient of grants) while nonprofits were allocated only 27 percent of the revenue stream.

The ad valorem tax revenue supporting the ECHO program will be ending in FY 2021 unless renewed.

If the ECHO program is renewed, the County audit recommended that the grant application be revisited, as well as the match requirement to make it more inclusive to smaller nonprofit organizations. Other recommendations pertain to project readiness, maintenance costs, allocation between all four ECHO categories, and East/West and to increase citizen awareness.

At the end of FY 2019, there was \$12.6 million available in fund balance that was not committed to projects. At the end of the final grant cycle, this amount may be around \$15 to \$18 million based on the last few years of grants awarded.

### **Position**

**The Daytona Regional Chamber supports the renewal of the proposed Volusia ECHO referendum.**

**8/2020**