

Property Tax Relief and Reform

- The “highest and best use” appraisals standard should be changed to force uniform enforcement throughout Florida, and to have appraisers take into account permit and zoning allowances before using this standard. Rep. Lopez-Cantera has a bill filed (HB 129) to address this issue, as does Senator Jeff Atwater (SB 626).
- The Value Adjustment Board (VAB) appeal process should be changed in two important areas, both by statute. The presumption of correctness the appraiser enjoys should be changed to the “preponderance of evidence”; and the makeup of the VAB should be more representative of the taxpaying citizen. Rep. Attkisson has indicated his belief that a constitutional amendment is required and has filed HJR 7005, but FAR will work with him and the Legislature to craft language that should address the issue statutorily.
- Though it will require passage of a Constitutional Amendment, more relief for first-time and recent homebuyers will provide relief where it is needed and strengthen the validity of Save Our Homes and the recently passed Amendment 1. Rep. Dean Cannon and several House Democrats came together and agreed on this topic during Special Session “D” – it was dropped by the Florida Senate. Rep. David Simmons has the resolution addressing further relief (HJR 421).
- The Tax and Budget Reform Commission – 2007 FAR President Nancy Riley was appointed by Governor Charlie Crist to the state’s Tax and Budget Reform Commission (TBRC). The Commission will propose amendments to Florida’s Constitution which will go on the November 2008 ballot. FAR is working with the TBRC for further property tax relief and to prevent a sales tax on Realtor services.

Insurance

- The state’s insurance markets have yet to regain their footing from the storms of 2004 and 2005. Carriers continue to reduce their risk in Florida and complain of overregulation and unfair competition from Citizen’s Property Insurance Corporation.
- FAR continues to support “My Safe Florida Home,” the state’s windstorm inspection program, which has proven effective in lowering rates for many homeowners. As a result, FAR will advocate for additional mitigation funding in 2008.
- We have seen the three large carriers (Allstate, State Farm, and Nationwide) steadily reduce their number of insurance policies in the state. We are encouraged, however, that approximately 25 new companies are stepping up to the plate. In 2007, FAR supported an earmark of \$250 million in a loan matching program to help attract companies and 13 insurance companies either expanded or started because of that. FAR will advocate that this program continue in an effort to bring more private companies into the market.

Economic Stimulus / Workforce Housing

- The Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund should be utilized for its intended purpose – to provide housing and a jumpstart to Florida’s sluggish economy. Rep. Cannon is the Council Chair where this fund is appropriated.
- With over \$500 million available to be allocated, the Legislature should invest in Florida’s housing infrastructure. The economic multiplier effect is enormous – for every \$1 million in state funding of Sadowski, over \$10 million in economic activity is generated, and over 100 jobs are created.

Florida Forever

- Reauthorize the Florida Forever program and provide for adequate land management once state lands are purchased.
- The Florida Association of Realtors is part of the Florida Coalition for Responsible Preservation of Public Lands (RPPL). The RPPL supports enhancing the future of lands purchased under the Florida Forever program by:
 - Allowing responsible public access to water areas that can be used for recreational purposes
 - Use lands purchased in the future under the program to assist in alternative water supply development
 - Allow the fund to purchase lands currently inhabited by imperiled species, and further, manage that land to ensure those habitats remain native.
 - Allow transmission lines/pipelines to intersect or cross state owned lands, thereby creating a revenue source to manage the lands without adversely affecting them.
 - Identify a specific land-management strategy that would enhance all state owned lands and possibly provide resources to help with proper management instead of simple acquisition.

Licensure

- Concerted efforts have been made to make the Florida Department of Business Regulation (DBPR) and the Florida Division of Real Estate (DRE) more responsive and accountable to its licensees, and the results are beginning to show. Over 10 new positions have recently been added to the DRE and, to allow quicker response times for the 11 million pieces of mail the department receives each year, the DBPR has added a state of the art document imaging system. Much work remains to be done however, and FAR continues to seek further improvements.
- FAR will seek to prevent the Legislature from reallocating the department’s real estate related trust funds while requesting the conversion of 4 OPS positions to FTE investigative positions and the continued proviso appropriation of \$400,000 from the unlicensed activity fund.

- Additional new DRE positions are needed and have been requested, but 2008 poses incredible budgetary challenges -- even though DBPR is funded solely by trust funds and not General Revenue.

Water Quality/Septic Tanks

- As water quality becomes more important to Florida's residents and visitors, the issue of onsite sewer systems is also evolving. Previously viewed as a local issue, septic tanks and their regulation are beginning to have statewide implications. FAR is committed to working with other stakeholders and state agencies to ensure costs, effectiveness and property rights are fairly balanced, and Florida's groundwaters are protected.
- FAR's Board of Directors (BoD) passed motions to support continued use of conventional septic systems in appropriate locations and to encourage the Legislature to study cost-effective, alternative technologies that can be adapted to conventional systems. The BoD also voted to oppose statewide mandates to impose performance-based systems in lieu of conventional systems without completion of proper study.