



### **Seminole Charter Amendment Endorsements**

Florida's leading nonprofit advocate of planning for fiscally and environmentally sustainable communities, 1000 Friends of Florida, urges general election voters in Seminole County to strengthen protections for rural and natural lands in the County by voting for two proposed amendments to the County Charter on their November 5th ballot.

One of the amendments would require a majority-plus-one vote from Seminole Commissioners to remove property from the County's Rural Boundary, the eastern third of the County with strict limits on urban development established by Commissioners in 1991 and enshrined in the Charter by County voters in 2004. If voters approve this amendment, property could not be removed from the Rural Boundary and its development limits unless four of five Commissioners agree.

The other amendment would require majority-plus-one approval from Commissioners to "transfer or materially change" natural lands owned by the county. With voter approval, Commissioners would not be able to sell, swap or develop such lands without at least four agreeing.

Seminole Commissioners voted unanimously in July to place both amendments for voter approval on the November ballot. Both make good sense in Seminole County, whose identity as "Florida's Natural Choice" will not stay secure without good planning for population growth and development pressure.

In recent years, Seminole Commissioners have united to successfully oppose proposals for major developments within the County's Rural Boundary. They voted down those proposals, then fought, and won, against lawsuits challenging the development limits within the area. But under current County ordinances, just three of five Commissioners in the future could undermine those limits and pave the way for mega developments in the Rural Boundary by agreeing to change its borders.

Meanwhile, in nearby Orange and Osceola counties, leaders agreed to swap a portion of publicly owned land reserved for conservation in the Split Oak Forest for a highway extension to accommodate future development. The proposed Charter amendment would make it much less likely that conservation land in Seminole County would suffer the same fate and lose its permanent protection by raising the required level of local approval to at least four of five Commissioners.

Seminole's current Commissioners have already embraced the principle of super-majority protections for conservation. The County's Seminole Forever land conservation program, which they created in an ordinance they passed last year, requires majority-plus-one support from Commissioners for any changes to the program. They also passed an ordinance requiring the same super-majority support from Commissioners before County-owned natural land can be sold,

swapped, developed or otherwise changed. But putting such requirements in the Charter, the equivalent of the County's constitution, strengthens them.

As Seminole County's population keeps growing, development pressure will grow along with it. Preserving environmentally valuable lands will protect Seminole's ground and surface waters by recharging the aquifer and naturally filtering pollutants from runoff. Safeguarding those lands also will expand the outdoor recreation opportunities that are so popular with County residents and visitors, and a thriving part of the local economy.

In addition, protecting rural and natural lands in Seminole County will encourage more development where it best belongs, in urban areas with the infrastructure to support it. This smarter approach not only reduces the impact of development on vulnerable lands, waters and wildlife; it cushions the blow to taxpayers, who don't get stuck with the bill for stretching public services to distant areas.

To enhance Seminole County's environment, quality of life and economy, 1000 Friends of Florida urges County voters to approve the Charter amendments to protect rural and natural lands.