

# CITY OF SANIBEL

## Legislative Priorities 2026 Florida Legislative Session

Tarpon Bay Weir



Shared Use Path



Tradewinds Neighborhood





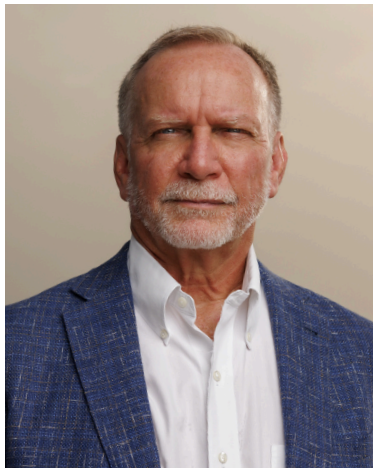
# Sanibel City Council



**Mike Miller**  
Mayor



**Holly Smith**  
Vice Mayor



**Richard Johnson**  
Councilmember



**John Henshaw**  
Councilmember



**Laura DeBruce**  
Councilmember

## Legislative Appropriation Requests:

Sanibel's requests include appropriations for reconstruction of Sanibel's Shared Use Path system, the installation of flap gates on the City's two weir structures to mitigate potential flooding, and a stormwater management project to mitigate regular flooding that is occurring in a Sanibel residential area.

Sanibel's Mayor, City Councilmembers, and staff are available to meet with Legislators at your convenience to discuss the City's appropriation requests.

# 2026 Appropriation Requests

## Hurricane Recovery (Ian, Helene, and Milton)

**Shared Use Path Reconstruction** – Sanibel’s 26-mile shared use path system sustained extensive damage from saltwater storm surge caused by Hurricanes Ian, Helene, and Milton, as well as from subsequent debris placement within the right-of-way (ROW). This vital infrastructure serves as a primary mode of transportation for both residents and visitors year-round and is especially critical during the peak tourist season.

The City is requesting an additional \$2.5 million in state assistance to complete necessary repairs and restoration of the path system. In 2023, Sanibel received a \$1 million state appropriation, followed by a \$2.5 million allocation in 2025. The \$2.5 million allocation in 2025 was part of a \$5 million, two-year appropriation request originally submitted by the City.

The 2026 appropriations request for the remaining \$2.5 million is essential to fully restore the shared use path system and ensure continued safe, accessible, and sustainable transportation for the Sanibel community and its visitors.

**Legislative funding request: \$2.5 million**

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**Weir Flap Gate Modification and Installation** – In 2025, the City of Sanibel completed its Surface Water Management Master Plan Update (stormwater). Based on the plan’s findings, two key improvements are recommended to mitigate saltwater intrusion during high tides:

- Modifying the existing flap gate at the Beach Road Weir, and
- Installing a new flap gate at the Tarpon Bay Weir.

These improvements are essential to reduce the risk of tidal flooding on private properties and to prevent the backflow of saltwater into Sanibel’s freshwater interior wetlands.

The City has included \$130,000 in its FY26 budget to fund the design of these improvements. The total estimated cost for fabrication and installation is \$600,000. Sanibel is requesting a state appropriation of \$600,000 to fully fund implementation once design is complete. This investment is critical to protecting private properties and the island’s sensitive freshwater wetland ecosystems in both the east and west drainage basins from high tide flooding and saltwater intrusion.

**Legislative funding request: \$600,000**

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**Tradewinds Drainage Project** – This stormwater management project is critical to addressing regular flooding in the Tradewinds area of Sanibel. Historically, this area was designed to drain to the Gulf. However, subsequent changes to state environmental regulations required the removal of the Gulf outfall, significantly worsening flooding impacts during even moderate rainfall events.

To help fund the project, the City has applied to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Nonpoint Source Management Grant Program. If the City is awarded partial grant funding, the state appropriations request will be reduced accordingly. If the City receives full grant funding, the appropriations request will be withdrawn.

This project remains a high priority for the City due to its direct impact on public infrastructure, private property, and the overall resilience of the Tradewinds neighborhood.

**Legislative funding request: \$4.2 million**

# Policy Positions

**Home Rule Authority** – **SUPPORT** upholding Sanibel’s current level of home rule authority, which allows the city to retain its unique sanctuary barrier island character and meet its financial responsibilities in providing essential local services to residents. This includes the authority to levy property taxes. **OPPOSE** any legislation that would diminish this local authority without the creation of replacement revenue sources.

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**Local Land Use Planning** – **SUPPORT** legislation and collaborative efforts to revise Section 18 and Section 28 of Senate Bill 180 (2025) to ensure that Sanibel maintains its Home rule authority to complete comprehensive land use planning and to approve local ordinances that will improve community resilience to natural disasters, protect public safety, regulate land use, improve water quality, preserve community character, and protect Sanibel’s natural systems. Sections 18 and 28 of Senate Bill 180 (2025) severely limit Sanibel’s ability to put forward needed amendments to its comprehensive plan and land development code following the catastrophic impacts of Hurricane Ian in 2022 and the subsequent impacts of Hurricanes Helene and Milton in 2024.

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**Vacation Rentals** - **OPPOSE** any changes to State law that would reduce the effectiveness of Sanibel’s existing regulations relating to short-term and vacation rentals, or that restricts Sanibel’s ability to recover costs associated with managing short-term and vacation rentals through existing fees.

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**Elevate Florida Program** – **SUPPORT** increasing funding for the Elevate Florida Program, which has been popular among Florida residents, particularly those impacted by recent hurricanes. According to the Florida Department of Emergency Management website, over 10,000 applications from over 64 counties have been received. However, due to a funding insufficiency, applications to the program were cut off in early April 2025. The Elevate Florida Program can be instrumental in providing the opportunity for Florida homeowners to stay in their homes and in their communities, to reduce repetitive losses and ensure that properties are resilient for future storms.

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**Florida Small Business Emergency Bridge Loan Program** – **SUPPORT** increasing the emergency bridge loan limits to \$200,000 for disaster impacted businesses. The Department of Commerce Emergency Bridge Loan program provides short-term, zero-interest working capital loans that are intended to “bridge the gap” between the time a disaster impacts a business and when a business has secured longer term recovery funding such as federally or commercially available loans, insurance claims, or other resources. However, the present program caps the loan amount at \$50,000. This limit, given inflationary effects in recent years, is no longer adequate and should be increased to at least \$200,000, for a minimum term of 5 years with 0% interest.

# Policy Positions

**Everglades Restoration** – **SUPPORT** funding to meet Governor DeSantis’ goal detailed in Executive Order 23-06 to invest \$3.5 billion over 4 years and maintain funding for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) consistent with prior year funding of over \$650 million in order to complete critical infrastructure projects.

- **SUPPORT** expedited progress on the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) and the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir, to ensure that these critical projects move forward in accordance with the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS).



**Water Quality and Quantity** – **SUPPORT** legislation and budget appropriations that support:

- Continued funding and construction for regional water quality and storage projects in the Caloosahatchee Watershed to implement the Caloosahatchee Watershed Protection Plan and the Basin Management Action Plan.
- The ongoing work of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Red Tide Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force, including research, water and air quality monitoring, prediction, notification, and mitigation efforts pertaining to red tide and blue-green algae.
- The Water Quality Improvements Grant Program, and a continued allocation specifically for projects in the Caloosahatchee Watershed to assist local governments in constructing critical stormwater and nutrient removal projects to meet the State’s Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) Program.



**Renewable Energy and Net Metering** – **OPPOSE** any Legislation that would diminish a property owner’s investment in customer owned renewable energy sources by reducing the financial benefit net metering currently provides for in Section 366.91, Florida Statutes.



**Potable Water Facilities and Infrastructure** – **SUPPORT** any Legislation and budget appropriations that will improve the resiliency of Island Water Association’s (Sanibel & Captiva) facilities and infrastructure.

# City of Sanibel Strategic Goals - FY2026

**Hurricanes Ian, Debby, Helene, Milton Recovery:** Manage the island-wide recovery from the effects of Hurricane Ian (2022) and Hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton (2024) by considering appropriate revisions to the Land Development Code and policies, promoting greater community resilience, minimizing bureaucratic procedures and costs, actively pursuing external funding sources for lost revenue replacement and recovery and mitigation projects, and providing general support of resident and business recovery efforts.

**Infrastructure:** Focus on infrastructure needs that sustain and protect the island's quality of life, including maintaining and improving roads, pathways, historical structures, bridges, sewer, and stormwater systems, and implementing coastal resiliency initiatives.

**Community Resiliency:** Build Sanibel's resilience to future threats from natural and manmade events by developing plans and implementing solutions that serve to harden and adapt critical infrastructure and mitigate hazards; promote energy efficiency and the use of reliable renewable energy sources; continually update vulnerability, response, and recovery plans; and promote community engagement concerning storm preparation, building codes, flood protection and the benefits of native vegetation.

**Quality of Life:** Sustain the safety and well-being of residents, businesses, and visitors by ensuring resources are provided for law enforcement, disaster preparedness, and the delivery of on-island educational, historic, cultural, social, and recreation activities for a diverse multi-generational citizenry.

**Environmental Stewardship:** Lead by example in environmental stewardship to restore, preserve, and enhance our island sanctuary, lead on issues to positively impact local water quality, and support land conservation, waste minimization, renewable energy, and provide recurring education on the Sanibel Plan.

**Fiscal Health:** Maintain and promote fiscal health of the city by providing efficient and transparent service delivery and maintaining appropriate financial policies that ensure appropriate fund balances and diverse revenue streams and maximize grant opportunities to support the City's Strategic Goals.

**Customer Service:** Manage human capital to deliver responsive and high-quality customer-oriented services by investing in technology, maintaining competitive pay and benefits for city employees, adjusting organizational structures as needed, and communicating public information in an effective and timely manner.

**Affordable Housing:** Increase the number of on-island and near-island affordable housing units available to Sanibel's workforce and general populations by collaborating with Lee County, the nonprofit sector, the private sector, and the City's housing foundation, in accordance with the Sanibel Plan.



# About the City of Sanibel



The City of Sanibel is situated on a barrier island off Southwest Florida's Gulf Coast just west of Fort Myers in Lee County.

Sanibel has embraced an ecological vision that places the natural environment at the top of its hierarchy of values. Our citizens recognize the connection between the natural environment and our quality of life and have supported policies and programs that protect and improve water quality throughout our region.

The people of Sanibel are sustained by the beauty and health of the Island's natural and restored habitats, and they rely on the coordinated vigilance of residents, government, and private enterprise to ensure Sanibel will remain a barrier island sanctuary where a diverse population lives in harmony with the Island's wildlife and natural habitats.

The City of Sanibel is forever grateful to the State of Florida for its fast, effective, and sustained response and recovery efforts directed toward Sanibel following Hurricane Ian. Through the support of the Lee County Legislative Delegation, the Florida Senate and House of Representatives, and Governor DeSantis, the State has also provided millions of dollars to the City in the form of loans, grants, and services, which have significantly helped advance Sanibel's physical recovery and financial position.

As we move forward, continued vigilance and support are essential to address the ongoing challenges posed by future storm events and to ensure a bright future for Sanibel. Our legislative priorities and appropriation requests reflect our continued focus on the recovery and resilience of our island community.

