Marion County’s Proposed 2027 State Legislative Priorities

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Section I. Appropriations Requests

1) Funding for roadway construction on the Marion Oaks Manor Extension Project

Description/Background:

The Marion Oaks Manor Extension project involves extending the road from SW 49th Avenue to CR 475, which includes the construction of a flyover bridge over Interstate 75 (I-75). This flyover will provide a critical new route for residents south of Highway 484, offering a safe and efficient way to cross I-75. The extension of Marion Oaks Manor will also include widening the road to four lanes, addressing future traffic congestion based on projected growth in the area. The widened roadway will improve traffic flow, reduce bottlenecks, and enhance overall safety. The project will include necessary upgrades to intersections, traffic signals, and signage to improve traffic efficiency and ensure the smooth operation of the newly widened road. In addition to the roadwork, the project will implement a stormwater management system that meets environmental standards, ensuring proper drainage and preventing flooding. Environmental assessments will be conducted to comply with all regulations, and any required mitigation measures will be put in place. Right-of-way acquisition and utility relocations will be necessary along the project corridor to accommodate the road extension and bridge construction. Public outreach will be a key element, ensuring that local residents, businesses, and commuters are kept informed throughout the project's duration. The flyover bridge and widened road will not only provide an alternative route for crossing I-75 but also alleviate congestion and improve the overall quality of transportation for the growing community.

Requests: *Marion County is requesting $2,000,000 for planning, design, and right-of-way acquisition costs associated with the project.*

2) Funding the Lowell Municipal Drinking Water Project

Description/Background:

The Lowell area, located in northern Marion County, includes multiple state-run facilities, including the Florida State Fire College. The area is not attached to municipal services at this time. Instead, residents rely on wells to provide them with drinking water. It has also been identified as having soil contamination above FDEP's provisional cleanup target levels. Marion County has developed a concept plan to extend a centralized potable water system into the Lowell area, which would provide clean drinking water to the citizens within the region, including the State Fire College and any other state-run facilities in the vicinity. Marion County received $3.5 million in state appropriations during the 2024 legislative session and an additional $1 million from the 2025 session, which will be used for construction costs. Further, the county secured $1.25 million in principal forgiveness funding through the State Revolving Fund. Those funds will be used for the planning & design portions of later phases of the project.

The proposed 12-inch water line extension is approximately 35,513 feet or 6.73 miles in length, with valves, fire hydrants, and a water booster station included, with the goal of extending a centralized potable water system into the Lowell community. This would provide clean drinking water to the residents and state-run facilities within the area, including the Florida State Fire College.

Request: *Marion County is requesting $2,500,000 for construction costs.*

3) Funding for the Florida Department of Health – Marion's Belleview Clinic

Description/Background:

The current modular building FDOH-Marion utilizes for its Belleview clinic is 25+ years old and is well past its expected life cycle. This project is to construct a new site-built health facility on the existing property to replace the aging modular building currently in use. Marion County's Facilities Management has replaced all the HVAC units once and will need to replace them again in the next 2 – 3 years. The roof has been replaced, as well as all the floor decking. Over the years, they have also repaired and replaced many sections of the access ramps and steps leading into the facility.

The current structural condition of the facility is in fair to poor condition, and there are minimal possibilities to remodel the building to make it more compatible with current health care facility functions. The new facility will be a modern site-built facility that is designed to provide health care services to the residents of southeastern Marion County. It will be designed to withstand 140 MPH wind loads to allow it to withstand hurricane-force winds and be operational after such an event to aid in the recovery efforts. The project is currently in design, and DOH-Marion & Marion County have allocated $433,920 for design of the new facility.

Request: *Marion County is requesting $1,000,000 for the construction of a new FDOH-Marion clinic in Belleview*

4) Funding for improvements to the Bradford-Ma Barker House

Description/Background:

The Bradford-Ma Barker house is located in the Carney Island Recreation and Conservation Area. The home is famous for being the location of the longest gun battle in FBI history. The home was originally located on property owned by Carson Bradford, who bought the real estate in Ocklawaha in 1892. His son, living in Miami, built the house in 1930. It is a two-story Florida cracker-style home with three bedrooms and two baths, with a total of 2,100 square feet. The home was quiet, nestled back from the street with a view of Lake Weir, the fifth largest lake in Florida. The Bradford family built the home as a weekend and summer retreat from Miami.

Carson Bradford had never rented his house on Lake Weir when in late 1934, he got a surprisingly generous offer from a representative of Mrs. T.C. "Kate" Blackburn, describing her as "a sweet little old lady" who was looking for an out-of-the-way cottage to spend some quality time with her sons.

They needed a place to rest and recoup away from the cold Northern winter. Bradford said the house wasn't for rent. Not willing to accept no for an answer, the rent offer went up with an offer to pay cash in advance for the entire season. "It is the only time the house was ever rented," says Carson Good, Bradford's great-grandson.

Two months later, the Bradford house was riddled with bullets and was (and still is) the scene of the longest FBI shoot-out in history. Only when the shooting was over did Bradford learn the true identity of his tenants. He had inadvertently rented to the notorious gangster, Ma Barker, and her son Fred. It was the FBI they were fleeing, who had zeroed in on them as Public Enemy #1 after the FBI caught and or killed John Dillinger, followed by Al Capone, and Pretty Boy Floyd. The Barker-Karpis gang knew Hoover was coming for them next, so finding the hideout overlooking Lake Weir was a smart move at that time.

The property was sold in 2016, and the new owners did not want to preserve the house. It was to be torn down or moved. Marion County officials decided to preserve the house, accepted it as a gift, and moved it on a barge to its present location across Lake Weir in October of 2016 to its new home at Carney Island Recreation and Conservation Area, a county-owned park, at a cost of over $252,000. The county has funded further design and construction repairs on the house as well, including a new porch at a cost of over $63,000. The project received an appropriation from the state legislature in 2025 for $237,000. The vision is for the public to enjoy maximum access to one of the most famous houses in America. Marion County intends to recreate the setting by opening the house to the public and providing abundant exhibits to interpret the history of the house, what happened during the shootout, and how it effectively ended a history of organized crime and gangs in the country.

Funds would be used for infrastructure, permitting, and site preparation for additional buildings, including an interpretive center to comply with ADA requirements. Improvements include stormwater facilities, tree clearing as needed, and conduit for electrical work, amongst other improvements.

Action: *Marion County is requesting $500,000 for infrastructure improvements to the Ma Barker House*

5) Funding for Marion County Utilities' SE Regional Water Treatment Plant

Description/Background:

The Marion County Utilities' SE Regional Water Treatment Plant (SERWTP) is located in the SE region of the County. It is located to efficiently connect to the existing Marion County Utilities (MCU) East Consolidated public drinking water supply system, which has several water plants interconnected to serve the region.

The purpose of this project is to develop a new regional alternative water supply and water treatment plant that will utilize the Lower Floridian Aquifer (LFA) as a water supply source. The LFA is an alternative water supply that will protect the water supply and Springs in Marion County. Its use will offset water demand from the Upper Floridian Aquifer (UFA). MCU has completed the construction of a 16” test well to the LFA. The water quality and quantity were both better than anticipated, so the site is expected to be a viable Water Treatment Plant (WTP) to connect to the existing MCU water distribution system. With the interconnect(s), we anticipate decommissioning existing small WTPs and wells in the UFA, thereby reducing water withdrawals on the UFA and protecting the natural springs in Marion County. Silver Springs is one of Florida's largest and most cherished natural landmarks, attracting visitors since the 1870s.

Action: *Marion County is requesting $30,000,000 for Planning, Design, and Construction of the SE Regional Water Treatment Plant*

6) Funding for the Southwest Regional Water Reclamation Facility Expansion

Description/Background:

The Southwest Regional Water Reclamation Facility (SWRWRF) Upgrade and Expansion Project will increase daily treatment capacity to 3.5 MGD to support regional growth in southwest Marion County. By transitioning the entire facility to Advanced Wastewater Treatment (AWT) standards, the project achieves high-level nitrogen and phosphorus removal to meet Florida Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) targets. These vital infrastructure enhancements directly safeguard Outstanding Florida Waters and iconic local natural resources, specifically Rainbow Springs and Silver Springs. Ultimately, the upgraded facility will produce premium reclaimed water to recharge the Floridan Aquifer and/or offset local potable water demands. This project seamlessly fulfills Florida's legislative priorities by prioritizing the long-term restoration and protection of fragile state springs and watersheds.

Action: *Marion County is requesting $30,000,000 for Planning, Design, and Construction of the SE Regional Water Treatment Plant.*

Section II. Legislative Language Change Requests

1) Marion County requests legislation raising the CCNA continuing contract study cap for professional services

Description/Background:

Florida's continuing contracts under the Consultants' Competitive Negotiation Act (CCNA) are a critical tool for local governments to expedite the professional services procurement process. These contracts allow counties to avoid restarting the full selection process for each task, eliminating the need for repeated shortlisting, presentations, and negotiations. By prequalifying firms and streamlining the path from concept to execution, continuing contracts save valuable time and taxpayer dollars. For fast-growing counties like Marion, where infrastructure demand is rising rapidly, the ability to activate work orders under an existing continuing contract is essential to avoiding delays that would otherwise stall road, utility, and facility projects.

However, while the Legislature wisely increased the construction-related continuing contract cap from $4 million to $7.5 million in 2024, with CPI indexing bringing it to $7.725 million in 2025, the study cap remained unchanged. This has created a growing imbalance. Engineering and planning studies, even those previously considered modest, now consume a disproportionate share of the existing study cap due to inflation, labor costs, and market demand. The cost of securing qualified engineering services has increased significantly, yet the cap has not moved at all. As a result, local governments are often forced to initiate full CCNA procurement processes for smaller studies, delaying projects and draining staff resources. Marion County respectfully requests that the study cap be raised proportionally to the updated continuing contract threshold, ensuring that the statute reflects economic realities and allows us to keep pace with the needs of our residents.

Action: *Support legislation that would amend 287.055(2)(g) F.S. that raises continuing contract study activity thresholds for professional services.*

287.055 Acquisition of professional architectural, engineering, landscape architectural, or surveying and mapping services; definitions; procedures; contingent fees prohibited; –

(g)1. A "continuing contract" is a contract for any of the following:

a. Professional services entered into in accordance with all the procedures of this act between an agency and a firm whereby the firm provides professional services to the agency for projects in which the estimated construction cost of each individual project under the contract does not exceed $7.5 million. Beginning July 1, 2025, and each July 1 thereafter, the department shall adjust the maximum amount allowed on the preceding June 30 for each individual project in a continuing contract by using the change in the June-to-June Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the United States Department of Labor. The department shall publish the adjusted amount on its website;

b. Study activity if the fee for professional services for each individual study under the contract does not exceed ~~$500,000~~ $800,000, and beginning July 1, 2027, and each July 1 thereafter, the department shall adjust the maximum amount allowed on the preceding June 30 for each individual project in a continuing contract by using the change in the June-to-June Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the United States Department of Labor. The department shall publish the adjusted amount on its website; or for

c. Work of a specified nature as outlined in the contract required by the agency, with the contract being for a fixed term or with no time limitation, except that the contract must provide a termination clause.

2) Marion County requests legislation related to special assessments on agriculturally zoned land

Description/Background:

In Marion County, we're committed to improving local infrastructure while keeping taxes low. Some of the key tools we use to fund these improvements are the multi-year Municipal Services Benefit Unit (MSBU), as well as one-time road improvement assessment programs. MSBUs allow neighborhoods to fund roadway and infrastructure upgrades through either resident petitions or a Pavement Condition Index (PCI)—a process where costs are assessed without a petition due to poor road conditions. These programs have been essential to maintaining and enhancing neighborhood services such as road paving, street lighting, stormwater drainage, and infrastructure. This is especially important in Marion County, where many subdivisions are still located on unpaved, dirt roads and rely on these programs as their only realistic path to improvement.

However, a recent change in state law is significantly altering how we can move forward with these types of projects. In 2023, the Florida Legislature passed HB 7063, updating Section 125.01(1)(r) of the Florida Statutes. The revised law now prohibits special assessments from being assessed on vacant property with an agricultural classification. That means vacant properties or those with an agricultural exemption (classified as "08") can no longer be included in sharing the cost, even if they're located within the neighborhood receiving the improvements. In addition, the law prohibits local governments from redistributing the unpaid share of those parcels to other property owners. This restriction makes it extremely difficult to move forward with improvement projects in areas where a significant number of parcels cannot legally be assessed.

For fast-growing counties like Marion, this presents a serious funding challenge. It limits our ability to respond to community needs and puts increased pressure on the general fund and other already-stretched resources. Even more importantly, it places an unfair burden on homeowners who want to see their roads improved but find themselves stuck because surrounding properties are ineligible to contribute. This change leaves many neighborhoods without a clear or viable path forward for essential upgrades.

Action: *Support legislation to amend Section 125.01(1)(r), Florida Statutes, to allow the levying of special assessments on agricultural-zoned or exempt land for the purpose of infrastructure improvements.*

125.01 Powers and duties. —

(r) 1. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a county may not levy special assessments on lands classified as agricultural lands under s. 193.461 unless the revenue from such assessments has been pledged for debt service and is necessary to meet obligations of bonds or certificates issued by the county which remain outstanding on July 1, 2023, including refundings thereof for debt service savings where the maturity of the debt is not extended. For bonds or certificates issued after July 1, 2023, special assessments securing such bonds may not be levied on lands classified as agricultural under s. 193.461.

2. The provisions of subparagraph 1. do not apply to residential structures and their curtilage, or when a neighborhood or group of property owners have voluntarily requested a special assessment for their benefit

3) Marion County requests legislation removing revenue offset requirements for the fire rescue surtax

Description/Background:

Florida Statute 212.055(8) establishes a framework allowing counties to levy a discretionary sales surtax of up to 1 percent dedicated to emergency fire rescue services, with revenues distributed among all qualifying fire rescue providers based on their historical expenditure levels. While the statute is designed to create a uniform, countywide funding mechanism, it also imposes mandatory fiscal offsets that significantly limit the practical benefit of the surtax. Subsection (e) requires each participating entity to reduce its ad valorem or non-ad valorem fire assessments by the amount of surtax revenue received, and subsection (f) further mandates that any collections exceeding projections must be used to reduce ad valorem taxes in the following year. These provisions effectively convert the surtax into a revenue neutral substitution rather than a tool for strengthening or expanding emergency services capacity.

For rapidly growing jurisdictions such as Marion County, where call volume, personnel needs, and capital requirements continue to rise, these mandatory reductions undermine the ability of fire rescue agencies to use surtax proceeds to address service gaps or invest in long term infrastructure. As a result, the statutory structure, particularly subsections (e) and (f), presents a material challenge to achieving sustainable emergency services funding unless those provisions are amended or removed.

Action: *Support legislation that would remove 212.055(8)(e) and amend 212.055(8)(f) F.S. to allow surtax revenues to supplement existing fire rescue funding for the purpose of ensuring sustainable growth in emergency services capacity.*

212.055 Discretionary sales surtaxes; legislative intent; authorization and use of proceeds. —

~~(e) Upon the surtax taking effect and initiation of collections, each local government entity receiving a share of surtax proceeds shall reduce the ad valorem tax levy or any non-ad valorem assessment for fire control and emergency rescue services in its next and subsequent budgets by the estimated amount of revenue provided by the surtax.~~

(f) Use of surtax proceeds authorized under this subsection does not relieve a local government entity from complying with chapter 200 and any related provision of law that establishes millage caps or limits undesignated budget reserves and procedures for establishing rollback rates for ad valorem taxes and budget adoption. ~~If surtax collections exceed projected collections in any fiscal year, any surplus distribution shall be used to further reduce ad valorem taxes in the next fiscal year.~~ These proceeds shall be applied as a rebate to the final millage, after the TRIM notice is completed in accordance with this provision. If a local government entity receiving a share of the surtax is unable to further reduce ad valorem taxes because the millage rate is zero, the funds shall be applied to reduce any non-ad valorem assessments levied for the purposes described in this section. If no ad valorem or non-ad valorem reduction is possible, the surplus surtax collections shall be returned to the county, and the county shall reduce the county millage rates to offset the surplus surtax proceeds.

4) Marion County requests legislation offering a clearer statutory definition of the term rural

Description/Background:

Marion County is comprised of several incorporated municipalities, including Ocala, Belleview, Dunnellon, Reddick, and McIntosh, yet Ocala stands alone as the county's sole urbanized center. Its population size, economic concentration, and institutional infrastructure distinguish it from the county's other municipalities, which maintain predominantly rural identities shaped by low density development, agricultural land use, and small community governance. This urban–rural contrast defines Marion County's overall landscape, where a single metropolitan hub is surrounded by communities with distinctly rural characteristics.

This distinction becomes especially significant under Florida law, where different statutes apply different definitions of "rural." Under Florida Statute 288.0656, which governs Rural Areas of Opportunity and influences eligibility for certain state grants and economic development programs, Marion County as a whole does not qualify as rural because Ocala's urban profile elevates the county above the statutory thresholds. In contrast, Florida Statute 25.03 recognizes the rural nature of smaller municipalities such as Belleview, Dunnellon, Reddick, and McIntosh allowing the majority of the county's genuinely rural communities to access support and resources that more accurately reflect their needs.

While comprehensible that Florida maintains multiple definitions of "rural" to address varying policy goals and case-specific circumstances, the county believes there is value in establishing a clearer, more consistent definition. One that acknowledges rural municipalities within counties that are not classified as rural in their entirety. Such clarity would help ensure that communities with legitimate rural characteristics are not unintentionally excluded from critical funding and assistance.

Action: *Support legislation that would clarify 288.0656(2)(e) F.S. to align more closely with 425.03(1) F.S. and establish a clearer, consistent definition of "rural" that accounts for rural municipalities within counties not classified as rural in their entirety, ensuring these communities remain eligible for appropriate state programs and assistance.*

5) Marion County requests legislation allowing state-designated Community Transportation Coordinators sovereign immunity when operating public transit

Description/Background:

Marion Senior Services, Inc. (MSS) is the state-designated Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) for Marion County. In that role, MSS operates the Senior Transit fixed-route and paratransit system that provides public transit throughout the county, delivering essential mobility to seniors, persons with disabilities, and other transportation-disadvantaged residents who have no other means of reaching medical appointments, employment, grocery stores, and community services. MSS is designated to perform this public function under a contract established through Florida's Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged and the Florida Department of Transportation's coordinated transportation system, operating under state guidelines and rule.

Unlike governmental transit agencies, MSS is a private, nonprofit organization and therefore does not enjoy the protection of §768.28, Florida Statutes, or its sovereign immunity liability caps of $200,000 per person and $300,000 per incident, even though it performs the same public transit function as a governmental agency and does so at the state's direction. As a result, a single serious transit-related accident could expose MSS to uncapped tort liability far exceeding its available insurance coverage. Because MSS is a comparatively small nonprofit that also provides Meals on Wheels, in-home care, and other critical services to Marion County seniors, a judgment of that magnitude would threaten not only the Senior Transit program but the organization's entire ability to operate. Faced with this exposure, MSS may be forced to discontinue public transit service altogether, leaving thousands of the county's most vulnerable residents without transportation.

Section 768.28 already extends agent-of-the-state status and its associated liability limits to numerous private and nonprofit entities that perform public functions under state contract, including correctional and juvenile-justice service providers, contracted rail operators for the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority and FDOT, and independent medical schools serving as agents of public teaching hospitals. The proposed amendment would apply this same, well-established framework to Community Transportation Coordinators. By clarifying that a state-designated CTC is considered an agent of the state while providing public transit services within the scope of its contract or applicable rule, the amendment would allow MSS, and CTCs statewide, to continue delivering essential public transit to the residents who depend on it.

Action: *Support legislation that would clarify 768.28 F.S. to allow sovereign immunity caps to extend to state-designated Community Transportation Coordinators.*

768.28 Waiver of sovereign immunity in tort actions; recovery limits; civil liability for damages caused during a riot; limitation on attorney fees; statute of limitations; exclusions; indemnification; risk management programs.—

(10)(g) For purposes of this section, a Community Transportation Coordinator, as designated by the state, is considered an agent of the state while providing public transit services within the scope of and pursuant to guidelines established in such contract or by rule. For purposes of this paragraph, the term "public transit" has the same meaning as in s. 341.031(6).

6) Marion County requests legislation updating the length of continuous residence for RV parks

Description/Background:

FS 212.03 has long distinguished transient lodging from long term residential arrangements by setting a six-month threshold for continuous residence, a standard that has remained consistent across historical and current versions of the law. The statute has been updated over time to include additional lodging types, such as mobile home parks and recreational vehicle parks, while continuing to exempt bona fide written agreements for continuous residence longer than six months from transient rental taxation. The intention to amend subsection 7(c) and increase its continuous-residence requirement from three months to six months brings this subsection into alignment with the statewide threshold that has served as the legal benchmark for decades. This update is particularly important in Marion County, where RV parks and long term stay facilities are experiencing increased use by seasonal workers, retirees, and residents seeking affordable housing options. Aligning the local provision with the six-month standard provides clarity for RV park operators, ensures consistent tax treatment across facilities, and helps avoid confusion for long term residents who may wrongly be categorized as transient under the shorter three-month requirement. Strengthening statutory consistency enhances administrative certainty for the county and supports a predictable regulatory environment for both residents and businesses.

Action*: Support legislation that would amend 212.03(7)(c) F.S. to increase the continuous-residence requirement from three to six months, ensuring consistency with statewide standards and providing clarity for long-term RV park residents in Marion County.*

212.03 Transient rentals tax; rate, procedure, enforcement, exemptions. —

(c) The rental of facilities, as defined in s. 212.02(10)(f), which are intended primarily for rental as a principal or permanent place of residence is exempt from the tax imposed by this chapter. The rental of such facilities that primarily serve transient guests is not exempt by this subsection. In the application of this law, or in making any determination against the exemption, the department shall consider the facility as primarily serving transient guests unless the facility owner makes a verified declaration on a form prescribed by the department that more than half of the total rental units available are occupied by tenants who have a continuous residence in excess of ~~3 months~~ 6 months. The owner of a facility declared to be exempt by this paragraph must make a determination of the taxable status of the facility at the end of the owner's accounting year using any consecutive ~~3-month~~ 6-month period at least one month of which is in the accounting year. The owner must use a selected consecutive ~~3-month~~ 6-month period during each annual redetermination. In the event that an exempt facility no longer qualifies for exemption by this paragraph, the owner must notify the department on a form prescribed by the department by the 20th day of the first month of the owner's next succeeding accounting year that the facility no longer qualifies for such exemption. The tax levied by this section shall apply to the rental of facilities that no longer qualify for exemption under this paragraph beginning the first day of the owner's next succeeding accounting year. The provisions of this paragraph do not apply to mobile home lots regulated under chapter 723.

Section III. Marion County – Supported Local Priorities

1) Continued support for funding Septic to Sewer programs

Description/Background:

In 2016, the Florida Legislature passed SB 552 and the Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act (part VIII of chapter 373, Florida Statutes) to protect our water resources in Florida. The policy calls for a Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), which is a comprehensive set of site-specific strategies to reduce or eliminate pollutant loadings and restore particular waterbodies to health. A specific part of this policy is the septic-to-sewer conversion requirement that would help to reduce the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) into the spring shed through the reduction of nitrogen pollution released into the Upper Floridian Aquifer (UFA).

To achieve this, Marion County proposed a program to fund septic to central sewer projects, package plants to central sewer projects, and enhanced septic tanks within the Primary Focus Area (PFA) utilizing a match funding within the program at a 50/50 rate; other funds and in-kind services secured by the County to advance the BMAP initiatives. The septic-to-sewer project will bolster the State's (SJRWMD's, SWFWMD's, and FDEP's) goal of reducing nutrients by eliminating decentralized wastewater systems and on-site sewage treatment and disposal systems (OSTDS), which will result in a reduction of nutrient loading to groundwater and the springs. By decreasing nutrient loading, the County can decrease the potential of algal blooms and eutrophication.

Action: *Marion County will continue to implement the developed septic-to-sewer plan through the ongoing Wastewater Feasibility Study with the ultimate goal of reducing the nutrient levels within the Silver Springs and Rainbow Springs BMAP. This will include the reduction of septic tanks and independent package plants through the installation of central wastewater collection systems.*

2) Allowing swimming once again at Silver Springs

Description/Background:

In 2013, the Florida Park Service took control and assumed management of Silver Springs, merging it with the adjacent Silver River State Park, forming Silver Springs State Park. In 2014 the state's Unit Management Plan (UMP) for Silver Springs State Park included creating a public swimming area at the headsprings and the construction of a mooring/convenience dock downriver from the headsprings. In 2016, Wild Waters Waterpark was closed, and the infrastructure of the park was removed in 2019. Since the state gained ownership of the park almost a decade ago, a host of improvements have been discussed and planned, however, few have come to fruition as the projects, including reopening swimming at the springs, have been mired in bureaucratic processes. The Marion County Board of County Commissioners, its citizens, and its legislative delegation strongly believe that opening the headsprings to swimming, increasing opportunities for access to the park specifically from Silver River, and increasing the opportunities for public/private partnerships within the park will be key components in the revitalization of the Silver Springs community.

Recent progress signals that the effort to return swimming to the headsprings is now moving forward. The state has obtained the required permits from the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), clearing a significant regulatory hurdle that had stalled the project. With those permits secured, the next phase of the project is set to begin near the end of October.

Action: *Coordinate with state agencies and delegation members to assist in the planning, design, and construction processes as necessary.*

Section IV. Marion County – Supported Organizations

1) Continued support for the mission of the Ft. King Heritage Foundation

Description/Background:

The Foundation plays a key role in developing the vision and oversight of the Landmark, with much of the success being attributed to the partnership between it, Marion County, and the City of Ocala. This public-private partnership serves as a shining example of how such partnerships can work together to deliver an excellent experience to both our citizens and the out-of-town visitors who frequent the fort.

Marion County passionately supports the unified vision crafted by the County/City/Foundation partnership for Fort King. We also support the request for funding for the vision to become a reality. With the completion of this phase, Fort King will no doubt become a major destination for tourists. There is no other facility in Florida that will provide such excellent interpretative and educational opportunities for visitors to learn about Fort King, the Seminole Wars, and the early years of Ocala/Marion County.

Action: *Provide the Ft. King Heritage Foundation with any correspondence or other support as needed.*

2) Continued support for Marion Senior Services and its programs

Description/Background:

Marion Senior Services is a nonprofit, charitable social agency providing supportive care services to elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged residents of our county. They help seniors remain living in their own homes independently as long as possible by providing them meals, transit, and in-home support. A variety of public, private, and donor funding enables them to provide services to most people in need, regardless of their ability to pay. Services are provided on a sliding fee basis from no cost to full pay. Marion County supports MSS and its programs, such as the Elder Co-Responder program, a first of its kind in the state designed to identify 911 calls to a residence where someone may have dementia.

Action: Provide Marion Senior Services with any correspondence or other support as needed.

3) Support Marion County Memorial Honor Guard and other veterans' organizations

Description/Background:

As a war veterans' organization, the Marion County Memorial Honor Guard provides ceremonial funeral honors and assistance to all military veterans and their families during their time of need, as well as any patriotic services when requested. It promotes Americanism, dignity, and respect for the USA's warriors by upholding the utmost professionalism and integrity through its conduct and image at all times. With the responsibility bestowed upon them, they will never forget that it is the Veteran who commands the dignity we protect.

The Marion County Memorial Honor Guard was formed shortly after 9/11. It officially started as a Florida Non-Profit Corporation on September 23, 2002. The IRS approved it in 2003 as a 501(c)(19) war veterans' organization which provides tax-exempt status for the Memorial Honor Guard and allows all donations and contributions to be deductible under IRC 170(c)(3). They have no employees. They provide their services free of charge to central Florida and have traveled as far as 800 miles to provide veteran memorial services at Arlington Memorial Cemetery in Arlington, VA. Tax-deductible donations and honorariums are their only source of funds.

Action: *Provide Marion County Memorial Honor Guard and other veterans' organizations with any correspondence or other support as needed.*

4) Support the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition

Description/Background:

The Institute for Human and Machine Cognition (IHMC) is a not-for-profit research institute within the State University System of Florida that focuses on advancing technologies that amplify and extend human cognitive, physical, and perceptual capabilities. IHMC conducts interdisciplinary research across artificial intelligence and machine learning, robotics and exoskeletons, and human health, resilience, and performance. With campuses in Pensacola and Ocala, IHMC brings together experts in computer science, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, engineering, linguistics, and related fields to design systems that function as cognitive or perceptual tools that enhance human abilities much like eyeglasses enhance vision.

IHMC's work is supported by major federal agencies, including DARPA, NASA, AFRL, ARL, NIH, NSF, and ONR, as well as numerous industry partners, reflecting its role as a leading center for research at the intersection of humans and intelligent machines.

Action: *Provide the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition with any correspondence or other support as needed.*