

June 23, 2022

A message on fiscal responsibility from Sarasota County Chairman Alan Maio

SARASOTA COUNTY - During my time on the board, it's been a privilege and an honor to have collaborated with eight different county commissioners. As my second term as your representative comes to an end, there's so much our current and past boards have accomplished that I'm proud to have been a part of.



Our dedication to protecting and improving water quality has been paramount; the Legacy Trail Extension was fast-tracked, we opened seven fire stations to enhance public safety and invested in our park system's facilities and land conservation, to name a few.

But, maybe most importantly, I'm proud that we have been responsible stewards of public funds. Our hard work over the last eight years has helped to keep our community financially stable. Our millage rate has remained flat, despite fluctuations in the housing market, and we've remained focused on a financial future that will benefit multiple generations.

As an example, the total expenditure budgets of departments controlled by county commissioners have increased by just four percent from 2009 to 2022, from \$127.5 million to \$132.7 million. If the board's departments had increased their expenditures by the annual inflation rate, their 2022 expenditure budgets would have been exceeded by \$31 million. But county staff and our board were more careful with the funds.

Sarasota County has continuously found ways to do more with less and has not pursued a millage rate increase in 23 years. (If we had kept the millage rate at what it was in 2000, we would have collected over a billion dollars.) And, once again, the proposed fiscal year 2023 budget for Sarasota County does not include a millage increase.

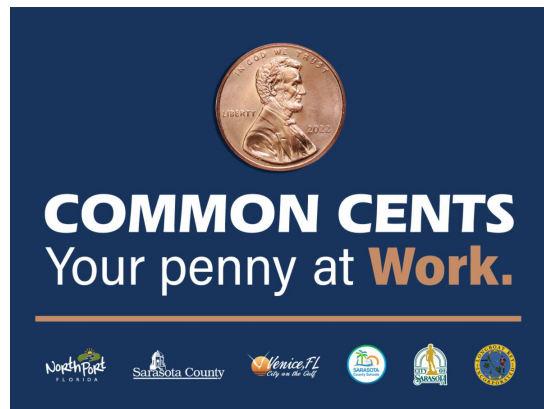
In fact, our current millage rate is the second lowest of the 67 counties in the State of Florida, which is even more important because it took over a decade – from 2008 to 2020 – for our gross taxable property values to recover after plummeting nearly 38 percent during the great recession. Sarasota County has remained focused on our financial priorities related for maintaining a very high level of service despite the ups and downs of the housing market.

For fiscal year 2023, it's important to remember that despite potentially higher property values for the county, homestead property values are capped at three percent growth on their property tax bills, and non-homestead property values are capped at 10 percent.

Regardless of property values, we've remained fiscally steadfast as a board while providing the services our community expects.

Despite what's happened through the ups and down of our local and national economy, whether it was our response to COVID-19 and vaccine distribution, facilitating rental and family assistance funding, small businesses loans, and other challenges that come with governing a dynamic, growing community, we've stayed focused on helping the taxpayers by providing a very high level of service through the unknowns.

Since 1989 you also have entrusted us to collect a penny sales tax that supports community infrastructure projects. We are asking the community to support a third renewal of the one-cent sales tax on the General Election ballot in November, and during early voting in October. Revenues from this sales tax are used to invest in local projects, such as public safety facilities, the environment, water quality, libraries, parks, schools, and roads.



Additionally, we're asking the community to support a second ballot question that will allow the county to issue bonds to borrow above the current charter limit. Bonds would only be issued for projects funded by the penny sales tax. This will save taxpayer money by reducing the costs associated with multiple smaller bonds, allowing us to take advantage of good interest rates should those opportunities present themselves

That means speed, savings, and results. It really is just “common cents.”

Due to a new law taking effect July 1, 2022, local governments will be very limited in their ability to inform the community about these two ballot questions and future referendums that will affect you. I encourage you to visit sarasotacountysurtax.net to learn more about both questions and the exciting projects that will benefit the community for years to come.

The future is bright for our county, for our way of life. It brings nothing but a smile to my face when I look back on my nearly decade of public service, because I know we've been fiscally responsible, providing opportunities for your current and future commissioners to build upon.

It's been an honor to serve you.

***Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners
Chairman Alan Maio***

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MEDIA CONTACT: Drew Winchester, Sarasota County Media Relations Officer,
news@scgov.net, 941-861-NEWS.

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