VENICE AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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The Briefing

July 27, 2026

Updates and analysis from the Government & Leadership Office of the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce

INSIDE

BUYING LOCAL PAYS BACK

VACC 2026 Legislative Priorities Status Update

It's time to update VACC Legislative2026 priorities and plan for 2027.

Executive takeaway: VACC's 2026 priorities show measurable progress on business rent tax repeal, insurance market stabilization, workforce funding, and housing policy activity. The 2027 priorities agenda should focus on unresolved local impacts, including transportation capacity, workforce housing, property tax reform, insurance affordability, higher-education access, and disaster recovery financing.

1. Support continued insurance initiatives that create a competitive and stable insurance market which will lower costs for Florida policy holders.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Florida's insurance reform efforts enacted in 2022-2023 continue to show measurable results. Citizens Property Insurance has reduced its policy count dramatically as private carriers return to the market. Multiple insurers have filed rate decreases or held rates flat, and Citizens received approval for an average statewide premium reduction of approximately 8.8% in 2026. While affordability remains a challenge in coastal communities, the market is significantly more stable than in prior years. [flgov.com], [floridarealtors.org]

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2. Support property tax policies that promote economic vitality, protect homeowners and businesses, and ensure transparency and fairness in local governance.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Property tax reform has become one of Florida's most significant 2026 issues. The Legislature approved a constitutional amendment, "Save Our Homes from Excessive Property Taxes," for the November 2026 ballot. The proposal would substantially increase homestead exemptions and could significantly affect local government revenues. While homeowners may benefit from tax relief, local governments have raised concerns about impacts to infrastructure, public safety, and economic development funding. VACC will host a public forum on this topic on August 12, 2026, at the Venice Community Center; email Cthorpe@venicechamber.com for details. [flsenate.gov], [flgov.com] Also see "Did You Know" at the end of this week's briefing.

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3. Monitor Live Local Act affordable housing solutions and ensure Sadowski Housing Trust Funds are used solely for housing programs.

🔴 **COMMENT:** The Legislature continued refining the Live Local Act through HB 1389, known as "Live Local 4.0," during the 2026 Session. New provisions expanded affordable housing development opportunities on certain government-owned and religious properties while further clarifying local government authority. Florida continues to dedicate significant housing funding through the Sadowski programs, and workforce housing remains a top concern throughout Sarasota County. The issue remains active statewide as local governments continue to challenge the scope and impact of state pre-emption. [stearnsweaver.com], [flsenate.gov], [flhousing.org]

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4. Support Florida Commerce and Visit Florida programs that encourage business recruitment and tourism.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Florida remains among the nation's fastest-growing states for business expansion and relocation activity. Florida Commerce and Visit Florida continue receiving state support through the FY 2026-27 budget. Tourism remains a major economic driver for Sarasota County and Venice. [flgov.com], [fox13news.com]

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5. Support the continued elimination of Florida's business rent tax.

🔴 **COMMENT:** LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY ACHIEVED. Florida fully repealed the Business Rent Tax effective October 1, 2025, eliminating both the state tax and associated local surtaxes on commercial leases. This removes a longstanding competitive disadvantage and reduces costs for Venice-area employers, retailers, manufacturers, and professional service firms. [rgcocpa.com], [naihallmark.com]

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6. Support FDOT Work Program funding including SR 681 and I-75 interchange expansion.

🔴 **COMMENT:** FDOT continues the Project Development & Environment (PD&E) Study evaluating conversion of the SR 681 interchange to a full interchange and adding auxiliary lanes between SR 681 and Clark Road. The study is expected to continue through late 2026. Transportation capacity remains one of the area's most critical economic development and quality-of-life issues. [swflroads.com], [swflinterstates.com]

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7. Support flexibility to extend disaster loan payoff terms and reduce interest rates for business recovery after disasters.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Following Hurricanes Helene and Milton recovery efforts, significant state and federal financial assistance remains available. Florida's Small Business Emergency Bridge Loan program and other recovery resources continue assisting businesses. Given recurring storm impacts across Southwest Florida, VACC should continue supporting enhanced disaster recovery financing flexibility and streamlined access to capital. [floridajobs.org], [fema.gov], [careersour...lorida.com]

Coalition priorities for continued coordination with the City, County, EDC, and partner organizations

Workforce Development

1. Expand investments in workforce education and training programs.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Workforce development remains one of Florida's highest funding priorities. The FY 2026-27 budget includes substantial investments in workforce education, nursing programs, apprenticeship initiatives, career and technical education, and workforce grants. Talent pipeline shortages continue affecting healthcare, construction, hospitality, manufacturing, and skilled trades throughout Sarasota County. [sfcollege.edu], [fldoe.org]

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2. Ensure SCF, Suncoast Technical College, and USF receive necessary funding.

🔴 **COMMENT:** State support for higher education and workforce education remains strong in the FY 2026-27 budget, but local impacts require close monitoring because the signed budget transfers the USF Sarasota-Manatee campus facilities to New College of Florida effective July 1, 2026. USF retains more than $22 million in recurring operating funds associated with Sarasota-Manatee, allowing the university to retain faculty and staff and conduct a multi-year teach-out for current students. SCF's most recent operating budget shows continued Florida College System support, including recurring dollars from the Florida College System Program Fund and State Lottery funding for 2025-26. Suncoast Technical College remains central to regional workforce training needs.

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3. Support work-based learning and Career & Technical Education.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Career and Technical Education (CTE), apprenticeships, and work-based learning remain major state priorities. Florida continues investing in workforce pathways linked directly to employer demand. VACC should continue expanding local partnerships connecting Venice-area employers with students and training providers. [sfcollege.edu], [fldoe.org]

Environmental & Resiliency

4. Support water quality, beach renourishment, and Resilient SRQ initiatives.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Environmental resiliency remains a major budget priority statewide. Significant state funding continues for resiliency, water quality, Everglades restoration, and coastal infrastructure. Following recent hurricane impacts, Sarasota County's beach renourishment and resilience initiatives remain critical economic and environmental priorities. VACC supports these priorities. [flgov.com], [floridianpress.com]

Human Services

5. Expand access to behavioral health, addiction treatment, and youth mental health programs.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Mental health and substance use treatment continue receiving legislative attention. Additional investments in psychiatric care, Medicaid behavioral health services, and community-based treatment programs have been incorporated into recent budgets. Workforce shortages in behavioral health services remain a challenge. [flsenate.gov], [floridabha.org]

Utilities & Broadband

6. Business and school access to broadband and internet services.

🔴 **COMMENT:** Broadband expansion has largely shifted from infrastructure deployment to connectivity, telehealth, workforce, and educational access initiatives. While Sarasota County has relatively high broadband availability, gaps remain for resiliency, telehealth, and workforce applications. VACC should support continued state and federal broadband funding opportunities. [telehealth.hhs.gov], [fl-counties.com]

Priority Accomplishments

✅ Business Rent Tax eliminated statewide (major win)

✅ Insurance market stabilization showing measurable progress

✅ Continued workforce and higher education funding, with USF retaining Sarasota-Manatee operating dollars during the campus transition and “teach-out” for enrolled students completing USF programs

✅ Ongoing commitment to housing development through Live Local, the issue of county vs. state control of how this happens certainly keeps the topic in the headlines.

Priority Concerns

⚠ Property tax constitutional amendment could affect local government revenues and infrastructure funding

⚠ Workforce housing affordability remains a significant challenge

⚠ I-75/SR 681 mobility improvements remain in planning stages and require continued advocacy

⚠ Behavioral health workforce shortages continue despite increased funding

⚠ USF Sarasota-Manatee facilities transfer to New College creates a local higher-education access and implementation issue requiring close monitoring; VACC supports accessible, high-quality bachelor's degree programs for the region.

Recommended 2027 Emphasis

1. Transportation (I-75/SR 681 acceleration)
2. Workforce Housing
3. Property Tax Reform Impacts if the Amendment Passes Nov. 3rd.
4. Insurance Affordability
5. Workforce Development, Higher Education Access & Healthcare Talent Pipeline
6. Disaster Resiliency and Business Recovery Programs

Buy Local Perks – Nicolas Liberoni

Large corporations have become an increasing part of the American economy. These large corporations can withstand economic headwinds better and rebound to increase their revenue. While the revenue of large corporations continues to increase, there has been a recent movement to shop locally.

The "Buy Local" movement looks to help family-owned, local businesses become stronger and grow the community. While large multinational corporations make up far more of the national GDP and profit than small businesses, there are a multitude of reasons to shop locally.

For starters, businesses that are locally owned are far more likely to contribute to the community than large chains. According to Civic Economics (2008), "local restaurants, for example, return more than 56 percent of their revenue to the local economy in the form of wages, goods and services purchased locally, profits, and donations."

This money that you spend locally has a higher chance of positively affecting those in the community than spending at large global chains. According to Sustainable Connections, small businesses donate about 2.5 times more per employee to community charitable organizations than large national chains.

Beyond the economic benefit of buying locally, shopping locally can help reduce emissions and traffic. If local businesses can succeed and better weather economic headwinds due to increased consumption, more businesses can thrive closer to neighborhoods. This means that buying locally could bring shorter commutes, which would help mitigate the stress present on local transportation infrastructure.

A study in the Seattle area found that the communities with more local businesses had 26% fewer miles logged on automobiles than those with fewer local stores (Stacy Mitchell, Grist, 2009). A similar reduction in car mileage would help reduce CO_2 emissions, traffic, and gas bills, all in the name of helping local entrepreneurs.

A great way to help Venice grow sustainably is to shop locally. This summer, the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce has kicked off its annual Buy Local event, where you can bring receipts of purchases for a chance to earn prizes. The idea is to encourage community members to consume in the Venice area, help our local economy, and see a benefit from doing so.

If you have receipts of purchases in the Venice Area with a minimum of $25, you can bring them into the chamber for an entry into a $1,000 cash raffle. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Did You Know?

As we get closer to November here is something from the "Florida Tax Primer": a "primer" was developed by policy experts to "help business leaders, lawmakers, and community stakeholders gain a clear understanding of how property taxes work in Florida and what tradeoffs may arise in the process. **Florida has a $1.87 trillion economy, 67 counties and 411 cities so getting any changes right is essential."**

Property Tax Amendment Brief: Current Law vs. Proposed Changes – Florida Chamber of Commerce

Florida Property Tax Primer White Paper – Florida Chamber of Commerce