
Delegates Okay Two Proposals on Annexations

By Concetta DeLuco

SEMINOLE - Two bills on annexation took up most of the discussion when the county's legislative delegation met at St. Petersburg College last Friday, while a proposal to merge the Metropolitan Planning Organization and Pinellas Planning Council got the unanimous approval of the 10-member delegation.

Relegated to almost no importance, was proposed legislation to allow the increase from five to eight children to occupy a home care environment without obtaining licensing.

The delegation had its discussion before a packed public hearing with the two annexation proposals getting the chief focus in the final meeting of the delegation with the public before the annual legislative session begins in March.

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Similar to the "all or nothing" approach used in 2009 with a bill involving Tierra Verde, it would require the annexing municipality—in this case, Oldsmar—to take all of the area or nothing.

Mike Fasano (R., New Port Richey) said, "The last thing the county wants is the city cherry picking and breaking up (an annexed area) for a revenue stream." Voters would have a final say in the annexation.

The biggest protest on the bill came from Oldsmar officials who Fasano claims are seeking additional tax dollars that annexation would generate. "Fasano also represents the Northern part of Oldsmar and I encourage him to remember that," said Oldsmar City Council Official Jerry Beverman. "Oldsmar is not going to annex anyone who doesn't want to be annexed."

to Oldsmar or Tarpon Springs.

In fear "that the matter needs to be resolved or they won't be heard," Jack Latvala (R., Clearwater) said that while issues continue to be sorted out the 10 year limitation creates a united consensus on the bill.

The full Legislature and Gov. Rick Scott have to approve the legislation, but the delegation's full support is almost always a necessary step.

In the other annexation issue, the unincorporated area of the Lealman fire district once again continued its fight against annexation, which the delegation supported, 8-2 vote.

Like the "all or nothing" conditions of the Oldsmar-East Lake matter, it would require any annexing city to take the entire district, which stretches between St. Petersburg and Pinellas Park, and is divided by Kenneth City. The reason for that is to stop taxes in the district from increasing.

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stretches between St. Petersburg and Pinellas Park, and is divided by Kenneth City. The reason for that is to stop taxes in the district from increasing.

"Every parcel of land that Lealman loses to a city potentially forces the cost of the fire district to go up for each resident," Latvala, who is a co-sponsor of that legislation, said.

That bill also proposes lowering the cap on the fire tax rate for Lealman property owners from \$10 per \$1,000 of taxable property value to \$5.75.

A high foreclosure rate and an increase in annexations have decreased property tax revenue for the Lealman Fire District causing the fire tax rate to remain high. Both Pinellas Park and Seminole have agreed to not annex property from the district, but Kenneth City, which annexed 16 parcels of land this year, was the biggest opponent to the bill.

"This is a death sentence for Kenneth City," said Troy Campbell, a resident who claims Kenneth City relies heavily on the Lealman District for tax revenue.

Rep. Larry Ahern disagreed, prompting Kenneth

Referring to the current two-year old interlocal agreement between Pinellas County and Oldsmar that protects East Lake residents from involuntary annexation, Beverman opposes a clause that would require Oldsmar to wait 10 years before attempting another annexation if such a move fails.

That provision came into effect two years ago after 92 percent of the 33,000 East Lake-Woodland voters turned down an Oldsmar annexation proposal.

However, that same clause would allow East Lake residents the option of voluntary annexation

City to venture to other neighboring districts.

On the MPO-PPC merger, which is being proposed in anticipation of possible future rail system, Latvala said, "Discussions of the rail coming through Pinellas County will need the combination of both land and transportation planning committees, elements that each of the now independent agencies deal with."

County Commissioner Karen Seel has been working on this merger since last spring. While the merger would allow each to maintain its independence, a single board would oversee them.
