

STATE / LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

January 6 – January 10, 2014

STATE LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

Bills this Week / Analysis

Source: Jess McCarty (CAO)

Economic Development & Tourism

The House Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee filed Proposed Committee Bill (PCB) EDTS 14-03, which is an omnibus economic development bill. Among other provisions, PCB EDTS 14-03 would:

1. Prohibit local governments from applying transportation concurrency or proportionate share contributions to new business development until July 1, 2017, unless individually authorized by a majority vote of the governing body, with certain exceptions;
2. Prohibit local governments from imposing any new or existing impact fee or other fee associated with mitigating transportation impacts on new business development of less than 6,000 square feet, until July 1, 2017, with certain exceptions;
3. Require local governments to reauthorize any impact fee in place on July 1, 2013 by a vote of the governing body.

Here's a link to the bill: <http://static.lobbytools.com/bills/2014/pdf/EDTS3.pdf>

PCB EDTS 14-03 is scheduled to be heard in the House Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee next week on January 15.

Earlier today, the House Appropriations Committee heard a presentation on state university concurrency, which included the possibility of waiving concurrency for state universities or eliminating or revising requirements for campus development agreements. Here's a link to the presentation: http://static-lobbytools.s3.amazonaws.com/bills/2014/event_docs/1/CP_House_H14AppComm_201419_12.pdf.

A proposed committee bill is likely to be filed on this subject. This issue is a carryover from HB 7149 which was considered but did not pass last session that would have eliminated requirements for campus development agreements:

<http://static.lobbytools.com/bills/2013/pdf/AAPC4A1341.pdf>

EDTS3 - *Relating to Economic Development* - 2014
by [Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee](#)
Summary
PCB PCB EDTS 14-03 -- Economic Development

Committees of Reference

» [H Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee](#)

Actions

Date	Chamber	Action
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01/08/14	HOUSE	Filed
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HOUSE	On Committee Agenda - Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee, 01/15/14, 8:00 am, 12 H
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Municipal Property Tax Exemption

Rep. Jose Felix Diaz (R – Miami) has filed HJR 473 re: municipal property tax exemption for the 2014 session. HJR 473 would propose a constitutional amendment to allow the Legislature to exempt from taxation all property owned by a municipality. Currently, municipal property used exclusively for municipal or public purposes is exempted from taxation, so HJR 473 would have the effect of allowing the Legislature to exempt from taxation municipal property used for non-public or municipal purposes. Here's a link to the text of HJR 473:
<http://static.lobbytools.com/bills/2014/pdf/0473.pdf>.

[HB 473](#) - *Relating to Municipal Property Tax Exemption* (Diaz (J))

Municipal Property Tax Exemption: Proposes amendment to s. 3, Art. VII of State Constitution to allow Legislature, by general law, to exempt from taxation property owned by municipality. Effective Date: Not Specified

Miami-Dade Public Health Trust

Rep. David Richardson (D – Miami Beach) filed HB 531 related to Miami-Dade Public Health Trust lease of office space. HB 531 would allow the PHT to negotiate leases for office space rather than requiring a competitive procurement process. This is an issue that has been in the PHT's legislative package the last few sessions. Here's a link to the bill:
<http://static.lobbytools.com/bills/2014/pdf/0531.pdf>.

[HB](#)
[0531](#)

Relating to Public Health Trusts

[Richardson](#)

01/08/14

Public Health Trusts: Authorizes public health trusts to lease certain real property.
Effective Date: July 1, 2014

Emergency Management

The House Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee filed proposed committee bill (PCB) EDTS 14-02 today re: Emergency Management - special needs registry for evacuation & sheltering. PCB EDTS 14-02 would require the Florida Division of Emergency Management to maintain a registry of persons with special needs at the state level. Previous state law required each local emergency management agency to maintain such a registry, this PCB removes that requirement. Under PCB EDTS 14-02, each local emergency management agency would be granted access to the state registry for its jurisdiction.

Here's a link to the bill: <http://static.lobbytools.com/bills/2014/pdf/EDTS2.pdf>.

PCB EDTS 14-02 is scheduled to be heard in the Subcommittee next week on January 15.

EDTS2 - *Relating to Division of Emergency Management - 2014*
by [Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee](#)
PCB PCB EDTS 14-02 -- Division of Emergency Management

Committees of Reference

» [H Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee](#)

Actions

Date	Chamber	Action
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01/08/14	HOUSE	Filed
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	HOUSE	On Committee Agenda - Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee, 01/15/14, 8:00 am, 12 H
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Issues of Interest

Commissioner Diaz / Aaron Cohen Life Protection Act

This week Miami-Dade Commissioner Jose "Pepe" Diaz was in Tallahassee to meet with key legislators to make the case and ensure that SB 102 - Drivers Leaving the Scene of a Crash; creating the "Aaron Cohen Life Protection Act, passed its first committee of reference. SB 102 is sponsored by delegation member(s) Sen. Miguel Diaz de la Portilla and co-sponsored by Sen. Rene Garcia.

Commissioner Diaz provided testimony, on Thursday, before the Senate Transportation Committee, stating the importance of the legislation. SB 102 was passed unanimously in a 10-0 vote. SB 102 is based on Resolution R-261-13 -Urging Minimum Sentence for Hit and Run, which was Sponsored by Commissioner Diaz and adopted by the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners on April, 2, 2013.

SB 102 - *Relating to Drivers Leaving the Scene of a Crash - 2014*

Sponsor(s)

by [Diaz de la Portilla](#) CoSponsors: [Evers](#), [Garcia](#)

Summary

General Drivers Leaving the Scene of a Crash; Creating the "Aaron Cohen Life Protection Act"; requiring the driver of a vehicle involved in a crash that results in serious bodily injury to a person to immediately stop the vehicle and remain at the scene of the crash; providing that a person commits a felony of the second degree if he or she fails to stop the vehicle and remain at the scene of the crash; requiring the court to revoke for at least 3 years the driver license of a person convicted of leaving the scene of a crash involving injury, serious bodily injury, or death, etc. Effective Date: 7/1/2014

Committees of Reference

» S [Transportation](#)

S [Criminal Justice](#)

S [Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development](#)

S [Appropriations](#)

Actions

Date	Chamber	Action
08/19/13	SENATE	Filed
09/11/13	SENATE	Referred to Transportation; Criminal Justice; Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development; Appropriations
12/19/13	SENATE	On Committee agenda - Transportation, 01/09/14, 9:00 am, 37 S
01/09/14	SENATE	Favorable with CS by Transportation; 10 Yeas, 0 Nays

Identical Bills

[HB 0183](#) - Relating to Drivers Leaving the Scene of a Crash by [Nelson](#)

11/22/13 HOUSE Now in Transportation & Highway Safety Subcommittee

Red Light Cameras

Source: Florida Current

House panel approves bill to stop new red-light cameras

A bill that would prohibit new red-light cameras and cut the fine for red-light citations was approved Jan. 9, 2014 by the House Transportation and Highway Safety Committee.

The bill, THSS 14-01, would lower the red-light fine from \$158 to \$83. Currently, the state makes \$100 off each red-light infraction and local governments bring in \$45. Under the new plan the state would collect \$70 and local governments would get nothing.

Rep. Frank Artiles, R-Miami, said the bill aims to keep the safety of having red-light cameras in place while getting rid of the financial incentive for local government. Although it cleared the panel, Reps. Ed Hooper and Linda Stewart had problems with the bill, with Hooper saying the bill would be debated and likely changed when it comes before the House Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Subcommittee, which he chairs.

Texting While Driving

Source: Florida Current

Bill would strengthen texting while driving law

On Jan. 8, 2014, Rep. Irv Slosberg, Boca Raton, filed a bill allowing police officers to stop vehicles and issue tickets to those who are texting while driving. His proposal, HB 539, eliminates the requirement on law enforcement that citations can only be issued as a secondary action, after someone was pulled over for another reason.

Flood Insurance

Source: Miami Herald

The Florida Legislature took the first step toward creating a private alternative to the National Flood Insurance Program on Wednesday, as a Senate committee unanimously approved a bill to create a framework for a regulated Florida product.

The proposal, which passed the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee, has been put on the fast track in the Senate, which wants to jump-start the private market by allowing companies to offer homeowners alternatives to the flood insurance now available only through the federal government.

“This bill provides choices for consumers to fit their individual circumstance,” said Sen. Jeff Brandes, R-St. Petersburg, sponsor of the bill.

For example, consumers would have the option of covering either the outstanding balance of their mortgage, the replacement cost of their property, or the actual cash value of their property, rather than a single policy now available under the national program.

Under the Biggier-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012, premiums were required to rise to reflect the true flood risk, forcing rate increases of at least 20 percent for the policyholders across the nation and much higher for homeowners in older homes that had benefited from subsidized rates for years.

Because nearly 37 percent of all policies written by the national program are in Florida, there are an estimated 268,500 homeowners who will lose their subsidized rates, sending a chilling effect on the housing market, particularly in Pinellas County, where rates have risen as much as 900 percent.

The Senate bill sets in motion the option of a private market, but there is no guarantee that new companies will enter the market and there is no assurance they will offer lower rates.

“So you could have more companies offering the same exorbitant rates, and then who have we helped?” said Sen. Nancy Detert, R-Venice. She said she was encouraged by the proposal but warned there are no guarantees it will work.

A bipartisan coalition of Republicans and Democrats in Congress this week proposed legislation to delay the effective provisions of the bill by as much as four years, but Brandes said even if Congress delays the implementation, Florida should adopt his legislation.

"Hoping that Congress is going to act is not a strategy," Brandes said. "A delay will allow the rest of the insurance market to catch up."

At least one company, Tampa-based Homeowners Choice Property & Casualty Insurance Company, has received approval from state regulators to offer flood insurance coverage to Florida policyholders and Brandes said he hopes the bill will encourage others to join in.

Under the bill, policies would have to provide at least as much coverage as that provided by the national program and disclose to consumers what the policy will not cover. Optional coverage would be available for additional living expenses, personal property and contents, and law and ordinance coverage.

A similar measure is being proposed in the House by Rep. Larry Ahern, R-Seminole.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/08/3859626/legislation-is-fast-tracked-to.html#storylink=cpy>

Putnam touts ports, tax cuts

Source: Florida Current

Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam said Wednesday he is going to Panama for three days next week to observe the widening of the Panama Canal, which he said could boost agricultural exports from Florida.

Putnam also said he is building a coalition in support of his funding proposal to slash energy taxes for businesses and shift the remaining revenue to schools and colleges.

Putnam said Florida has made a tremendous investment in a Miami port-deepening project that will allow larger ships. He said he will leave this week for the three-day trip to Panama with the Miami ports director and Florida businesses that are gaining a foothold in that country.

"The business model for post (Panama Canal) ships is when you unload those goods, you are not going to send an empty ship back to its home port," he said. "What is the product that Florida produces that can go back on those ships?"

"In the intermediate term, perishable agricultural commodities will be an attractive component of that -- not the entirety, but a component of that."

In October during his department's energy conference, Putnam announced he will push for a \$250 million reduction in the taxes that businesses pay for energy.

He said he would propose cutting the commercial energy sales tax in half, with the remaining 3.5 percent going toward the Public Education Capital Outlay Fund. Called PECO, the fund was

established in 1963 to pay for school construction and maintenance programs but has been receiving general fund revenue since 2011.

Putnam is working to build a coalition of education leaders in support of the tax cut and funding shift, and said he will announce coalition members soon.

Putnam also said he supports a bill that would allow tax collectors to process applications for concealed firearms permits. He said his Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services would continue to conduct background checks and issue permits.

Assisted Living Facilities

Source: LobbyTools

SB 248, the assisted living facilities reform bill for an industry with about 80,000 seniors, passed unanimously with several minor changes from the Senate Health Policy Committee on Jan. 8, 2014.

Among a long list of reforms, the bill makes the fines for violations by the facilities more predictable and equitable “rather than leaving it up to AHCA,” said Sen. Eleanor Sobel, D-Hollywood. It clarifies when the agency must revoke or deny a license, establishes a study of how inspections are carried out, and creates a rating system of ALFs similar to the state’s nursing homes.

She thanked the members for their support of a proposal she says is very similar to the one that failed last year except for a few “tweaks.”

“This bill is the product of years of study, discussion and input from constituents, health care experts, policymakers, advocates and other stakeholders across Florida. We also incorporated recommendations from the two reports compiled by the Agency for Health Care Administration’s ALF Workgroup,” said Sobel, according to the [Sunshine State News](#). “The atrocities we read about in *The Miami Herald* are primarily preventable. This legislation makes great strides toward improving oversight and strengthening the enforcement of current regulations for state-licensed ALFs.”

Electronic Cigarettes

Source: Florida Current

A bill banning the sale of electronic cigarettes to minors has passed a state Senate panel.

The bill (SB 224) would include e-cigarettes on the list of tobacco products prohibited from being sold to minors. The bill would also outlaw tobacco samples in this form from being given to minors.

The bill was heard in the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice on Wednesday.

“Allowing a child to become dependent upon nicotine is not something Florida should be interested in supporting, and Senate Bill 224 is a step in the right direction,” said Senate Majority Leader Lizbeth Benacquisto, R-Fort Myers, who is sponsoring the measure. The bill would not change any other tobacco-or nicotine-related statutes, Benacquisto said. It would not outlaw e-cigarettes from being used indoors.

The bill has received unanimous support in its first two Senate committees and has two more committees to go before it hits the floor. It heads to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice next.

House companion legislation has not received a committee hearing.

Controlled Substances

Bill to ban smoking on playgrounds passes

On Jan. 9, 2014, the Senate Regulated Industries Committee passed a proposal by Sen. Rob Bradley, R-Orange Park, allowing local governments to ban smoking on playgrounds.

Sen. Nancy Detert, R-Venice, asked if it was first step to banning smoking entirely, but Bradley said that was not his intent. Remembering her experience when banning smoking in restaurants, she warned, “Be prepared to hear from your veterans.” [Smoking prevalence is higher](#) among people who have served in the military.

After questions from members, Bradley agreed that the bill, SB 342, could use a clearer definition of what constitutes a playground.

Healthcare

Source: Associated Press

Bondi asks Obama for meeting on health care overhaul

Attorney General Pam Bondi and her counterpart in South Carolina, Attorney General Alan Wilson, asked the Obama administration on Jan. 7, 2014, to meet to discuss concerns about the health care overhaul, according to [The Associated Press](#).

The two wrote a letter saying, “Due to the lack of response to the multitude of concerns shared with your Administration by numerous states over the last several months, we are requesting you to direct Secretary Sebelius to meet with the concerned attorneys general to address those issues.”

According to Wilson’s office, Tuesday’s letter marks the first time the prosecutors have reached out directly to the president.

Neither the White House nor the Department of Health and Human Services immediately responded to AP's request for comment.

Water Quality

Source: LobbyTools

Key senators agree to support filing springs bill

A key group of Senate committee chairmen meeting among themselves on Thursday said they support filing a bill that would provide nearly \$380 million a year to remove or improve septic tanks to protect springs and groundwater.

The draft legislation, which deals with a wide range of activities affecting springs, would earmark 20 percent of the net documentary stamp tax revenue, or about \$378 million per year, for sewage hookups and septic tank improvements in springs areas, according to Senate staff.

Sen. David Simmons, R-Altamonte Springs, met with Sen. Wilton Simpson, R-Trilby, Sen. Alan Hays, R-Umatilla, and Sen. Bill Montford, D-Tallahassee. All four are committee chairman.

"I feel very positive about it," Simmons said afterward. "I think we are heading in the right direction."

Sports / Major League Soccer

Source: Miami Herald

David Beckham and his investors pushing for a Major League Soccer franchise and new stadium in downtown Miami have hired a Tallahassee lobbyist to help the potential team secure state funding.

Brian Ballard, a well-known and experienced lobbyist, will work on behalf of Miami Beckham United to seek a state sales-tax subsidy similar to what other professional sports teams across Florida have received for building stadium facilities.

"We've been retained to make sure that Miami Major League Soccer is treated like every other professional sports team in the state," Ballard said.

He wouldn't go into specifics on how much Beckham and his investors might ask for. In the past, teams like the Miami Dolphins have received a \$2 million annual subsidy that acts like a sales-tax rebate for 30 years.

Ballard said a Miami soccer franchise could be successful because it wouldn't be asking for any different than other teams received -- unlike the Dolphins, which wanted additional help.

Beckham's investment group has also boosted its odds by saying it would pay for a new stadium with private dollars and not seek local taxes — unlike the Marlins in the past and the Dolphins last year.

"You can succeed in Tallahassee if you have a reasonable, responsible request," Ballard said. "You don't try to over-ask. You don't try to demand too much."

If a soccer franchise makes the case that it's going to generate more money than it would receive in its subsidy, then legislators have the same incentive to grant the funding, he added.

"There's little policy difference between the Tampa Bay Rays, the Jacksonville Jaguars, the Tampa Bay Bucs — the original funding they received — and Major League Soccer," Ballard said.

Lawmakers would have to add Major League Soccer to its list of professional sports teams in Florida. Then they would have to come up with a competitive funding mechanism for any new team, Ballard said.

While Beckham's proposal is still in the works, MLS has already announced a new franchise in Orlando, which may also seek funding.

"We're very confident there's going to be legislation moving that's going to address this," Ballard said.

Read more here:

<http://miamiherald.typepad.com/nakedpolitics/2014/01/david-beckham-investors-hire-tallahassee-lobbyist-for-miami-major-league-soccer-push.html#storylink=cpy>

Sports Tax Breaks

Source: Florida Current

Tax break bill for Daytona Speedway clears Senate panel

Sen. Dorothy Hukill's SB 208 to provide the Daytona International Speedway with \$60 million in state tax money over 30 years for making \$400 million in upgrades to the stadium passed unanimously through the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee on Jan. 8, 2014. The bill has a long way to go to make it into law, however, with at least four more committee stops in the Senate alone.

SB 208 - *Relating to Motorsports Entertainment Complexes* - 2014

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Sponsor(s)

by [Hukill](#) CoSponsors: [Hays](#), [Latvala](#), [Negron](#), [Simmons](#), [Simpson](#), [Thrasher](#)

Summary

General Motorsports Entertainment Complexes; Providing for a monthly distribution of a specified amount of sales tax revenue to a complex certified as a motorsports entertainment complex by the Department of Economic Opportunity; specifying that the department may certify only one motorsports entertainment complex; authorizing the Auditor General to verify the expenditure of specified distributions and to notify the Department of Revenue of improperly expended funds so that it may pursue recovery, etc. Effective Date: 7/1/2014
Committees of Reference

Announcements:

New House State Affairs Chairman Committee

Rep. Jim Boyd, R-Bradenton, was named chairman of the House State Affairs Committee on Friday by House Speaker Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel.

He replaces Rep. Steve Precourt, R-Orlando, who resigned his seat Thursday to take on the executive director position for the Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority.

In other appointments to fill Precourt's spots on committees, Weatherford named Rep. James Grant, R-Tampa, to the Appropriations Committee, and Rep. Frank Artiles, R-Miami, to the Government Operations Subcommittee.

Cabinet / Chief Financial Officer

According to the [Sun Sentinel](#), on Jan. 7, 2014, Sen. Jeremy Ring said he is considering a run for the CFO job.

"It's certainly way too early to rule it out. I've got to consider it," he said. "I just have to determine over the next 10 days or so if the opportunity aligns with the timing."

Under state law, Ring would have to resign his seat in the Senate in order to run for CFO. Florida Atlantic University is expected to make a decision on the next university president on Jan. 17. Current Florida CFO Jeff Atwater is one of the finalists for that position.

Gwen Margolis – 40 Years of Service

Source: Miami Herald

40 years have passed since state Sen. Gwen Margolis, D-Miami Beach, first became a state lawmaker.

Margolis, 79, hasn't held state office the entire time. She spent eight years on the Miami-Dade Commission, and made unsuccessful bids to become a member of Congress and Miami-Dade property appraiser.

She made history when she became the first woman to hold the Florida Senate presidency in 1990.

Senate President Don Gaetz celebrated the occasion Wednesday by presenting Margolis with 40 roses during the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee meeting.

Read more here: <http://miamiherald.typepad.com/nakedpolitics/2014/01/margolis-celebrates-40-years-of-public-service.html#storylink=cpy>

Press Releases:

[Governor Scott Recommends Historic \\$100 Million in Funding for VISIT FLORIDA](#)

[The Tampa Tribune: "Scott to Obama: Delay flood insurance hikes like you delayed Obamacare"](#)

[Attorney General Pam Bondi Announces Selection of Tyler Cathey as Chief Deputy Attorney General](#)

[The following letter from Senator Margolis was hand delivered to the Senate President this afternoon.](#)

2014 Legislative Session Dates

January 13, 2014	Interim Committee Week
January 24, 2014	Senate Bill Drafting Request Deadline
January 28, 2014	Senate Bill Drafting Approval Deadline
February 3, 2014	Interim Committee Week
February 10, 2014	Interim Committee Week
February 17, 2014	Interim Committee Week
March 4, 2014	Legislative Session Convenes Bill Filing Deadline – 12:00 pm
May 2, 2014	Legislative Session Scheduled to Conclude

Fly-In Dates

Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce (Road to Tallahassee)

February 10- February 12, 2014

Florida Association of Counties (2014 Legislative Day)

March 27, 2014

Florida League of Cities (Legislative Action Days)

April 1 –April 2, 2014

Miami Dade County Days

April 2-April 3, 2014

LOCAL NEWS

DORAL

Source: Miami Herald

In order to avoid excessively long meetings, the Doral Council voted to split its monthly meetings into morning and afternoon sessions, starting on Jan. 15.

The morning session will start at 9 a.m. and break when that agenda is complete. The evening session will start at 6 p.m.

The idea is to square away city business that typically doesn't attract a lot of public comment or reaction, like the consent agenda, staff reports and certain discussion items, during the morning session.

After a midday break, the Council will resume in the evening for presentations to community members, public hearings and discussion items that are likely to attract public input.

Vice Mayor Christi Fraga said the change benefits both residents and city staffers. It will be more convenient for residents — some of whom have fallen asleep waiting for their items to get discussed in past meetings — and city staffers, who won't have to stay until the early morning hours and be back at City Hall at 9 a.m.

City Council meetings routinely ran late into the evening last year, with the November meeting lasting 7 1/2 hours. It was at that meeting, which ended at around 1:30 a.m., that the council asked city staff to look into different meeting times.

Council members have said they intend to treat this as a pilot program while gauging the community's response.

The council meets at City Hall, 8401 NW 53rd Terr.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/06/v-print/3855441/doral-council-to-split-meetings.html#storylink=cpy>

HIALEAH GARDENS

Source: Miami Herald

With the arrival of new merchandise distribution centers, clothing companies, restaurants, and gyms, Hialeah Gardens expects an investment of at least \$60 million in 2014, Mayor Yioiset de la Cruz said this week.

That private capital is expected to create more than 600 new jobs, according to the mayor. At the beginning of 2013, the city estimate for investment was \$75 million. The total grew to about \$117 million, thanks to the city's ongoing search for business development, said De la Cruz.

Located in northwest Miami-Dade, Hialeah Gardens is a city of 4.2 square miles with easy access to Okeechobee Road, a route that allows a fast connection from the county's west toward Miami International Airport and the PortMiami, as well as the Palmetto Expressway, the Florida Turnpike, and I-75.

Its location was critical to the decision by ice-cream producer Blue Bell, based in Texas, to move its South Florida distribution center from Miramar to Hialeah Gardens, said Will Bonnacaze, the firm's general manager.

The new Blue Bell center, an \$8.5 million investment, started its operation two weeks ago at a 2.2-acre location at 13295 Okeechobee Rd. There, about 40 employees work with a fleet of 18 refrigerated trucks that deliver ice cream to supermarkets in Broward, Miami-Dade, and the Keys.

According to De la Cruz, development will begin in the next few months on a retail center near Okeechobee Road; T.J. Maxx will be the anchor tenant. L.A. Fitness is also planning a location in the city, home to about 22,300 residents, mostly Hispanic. The average annual income is about \$32,000, according to city statistics.

The mayor also highlighted the arrival in 2013 of the Austrian firm Liebherr, which produces heavy machinery.

Helmut Deutsch, general manager of Liebherr, said the company opened a Hialeah Gardens location because its Medley site could not easily accommodate the movement and storage of high-tonnage equipment, such as container carriers and crane parts.

Steven Sosa, the operations manager of Liebherr in Hialeah Gardens, said the 10-acre industrial complex was inaugurated in June after a \$20 million investment. Almost 50 workers were hired.

De la Cruz added that the investment flow also includes shopping centers such as the Lakes Garden Center, now under construction on Okeechobee Road at 130th Avenue

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/08/v-print/3859901/hialeah-gardens-set-for-growth.html#storylink=cpy>

MIAMI BEACH

Source: Miami Herald

The Miami Beach City Clerk's office and Information Technology department did not violate the Citizens' Bill of Rights by failing to respond to a public records request in a timely manner, according to the Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics and Public Trust.

The commission on Wednesday announced that it found no probable cause to the complaint, which was related to a records request by resident Michael Burke.

Burke had requested information about property owned by then-Mayor Matti Herrera Bower. However, the city determined that the request was regarding a nonexistent address and it didn't include a specific date range, the ethics commission wrote in a statement. An ethics investigation also revealed that city staffers communicated with Burke through an email address that Burke "admittedly doesn't use often," according to the commission statement. Burke, however, had sent his request using that email address.

"While dismissing the charge, the Ethics Commission will recommend that the City establish a clearer process and procedure for handling public records requests," the commission wrote.

Read more here:
<http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/09/3861528/ethics-commission-dismisses-complaint.html#storylink=cpy>

SWEETWATER / FIU

Source: Miami Herald

Crossing busy Southwest Eighth Street in West Miami-Dade should become a lot safer for Florida International University students and pedestrians in Sweetwater.

Florida International University was awarded a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grant for \$11.4 million. The grant may be used starting in February for a project that includes a pedestrian overpass bridge over Eighth Street and 109th Avenue, sidewalks and landscaping improvements.

Sweetwater and FIU teamed up to help get the grant. Mayor Jose Diaz said this was a dream of his that has finally become a reality.

The bridge will be located in the city's university district, which includes the area between 107th and 109th avenues and between Sixth and Seventh streets, with a small portion that will possibly go farther north up to Fourth Street.

The grant took about three years to be approved.

Diaz said the city is preparing for a population boom in students living in the city and said adding the bridge would go a long way toward improving safety.

FIU's Modesto Maidique Campus is between Southwest 107th Avenue and Florida's Turnpike, south of Eighth Street, just outside Sweetwater's city limits.

Student dorms are undergoing construction within city limits, adjacent from the campus.

The 109 Tower, a 15-story private dorm with roughly 180 residential units plus first-floor retail, is now under construction on Southwest Seventh Terrace and 109th Avenue. Plans are for the building to be completed sometime in the spring. Diaz said that more dorms are expected.

Although plans are still in the works, the project could be completed in 2017.

Aside from the bridge, the grant will also be used for sidewalk improvements and landscaping along 109th Avenue in Sweetwater, Diaz said.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/09/3861173/114-million-grant-to-help-build.html#storylink=cpy>

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

SAVE THE DATE:

MIAMI-DADE LEAGUE OF CITIES

What: MDCLC 59th Annual Installation Gala

Where: Jungle Island 1111 Parrot Jungle Trail, Miami, FL

When: Saturday, February 9, 2014