

Hillsborough Citizen Advisory Committee proposes \$3B budget savings, possibly spent on transportation



MITCH PERRY 1 day ago Apr 18, 2017

A new report issued by the **Hillsborough County Citizens Advisory Committee** identified potential savings in 14 specific areas could save more than \$3 billion over the next three decades, which could be spent on transportation, infrastructure and/or tax cuts.

The 13-member committee has met twice a month since July analyzing the budget before handing off its list of recommendations to the BOCC last week.

“We determined you don’t have to have a sales tax to raise this amount of money,” says **Spencer Kass**, a member of the committee who was selected by Commissioner **Sandy Murman**. “There’s also no cuts to police. No cuts to fire.”

That’s an important note because a year ago some county officials said a referendum was needed to fund transportation projects. They said there simply wasn’t enough in the general budget without making major cuts to other critical agencies.

Then the commission **approved a proposal** last month to spend \$812 million on transportation over the next decade (though critics note almost all of that funding is on roads, and not transit).

Among the more controversial proposals on the proposed list of savings is eliminating the funding of a number nonprofits which made financial requests to the BOCC. The proposal calls for a developing a “rigorous, proactive process” that would first identify the basic needs

of the county, and then issue requests for proposals to fund them. The plan calls for phasing out support of nonprofits the county funds within the next five years.

Currently, the **Seminole Tribe** contributes unrestricted dollars to Hillsborough County under an agreement with the state. The CAC advises how to reallocate those dollars to the general fund for transportation, which they say would be worth \$60 million over 30 years.

The CAC also proposes eliminating paid contributions for disability and one sick day, a projected savings of over \$189 million over 30 years.

“The County currently pays for these benefits, which is out of line with what is typically offered in the private sector,” the document reads, adding that the plan may “negatively impact the ability to attract and retain talent.”

After a yearlong impasse, the Hillsborough County Tax Collector’s office and Airbnb announced last year that the **county would collect taxes on each night booked** through the San Francisco-based company’s online portal. The CAC says that money could be used for tourism purposes, free up at least \$9 million over 30 years to spend on transportation projects.

The CAC also is calling for the elimination of the county’s **vast public relations department**, and instead have county departments respond individually to the press and public. That would save \$60 million over the next 30 years.

CAC member **Eric Seidel** (an appointee of **Al Higginbotham**) said that these proposals are extremely conservative, with the advisory council intentionally underestimated the savings.

“All the cuts are from things that are great to have, but at some point, if you’re saying you’re going to say your priority is to put in money into

transportation, you've got put your money where your mouth is," Seidel adds.

Kass celebrated the fact that the group of liberals and conservatives could come together on a plan.

"I was dealing with the most liberal of liberal people, and we were able to come up with something that every member was able to get behind," he says.

Kass also says the fact that the volunteer group was able to find so much money in the budget for transportation should silence those who believe a referendum is the only way to raise money for transit.

"We have debunked that. We have proven that's flat out not true," he says.

The other members of the CAC include: **Barbara Aderhold** (selected by **Kevin Beckner**); **Kay Doughty** & attorney **Adam Bantner** (**Stacy White's** appointees); **Joseph Caetano** and **Ron Govin** (**Victor Crist's** appointees); **Linda Porter** and **Wendell Duggins** (**Les Miller's** appointees); **Lee Lowry** and **Joseph Pullara** (**Ken Hagan's** appointees); **Joseph Wicker** (selected by Higginbotham) and **Cristan Fadal**, Commissioner Murman's other appointee.