

A Note From the President

By Sharon Merchant, CEO & President

In my ongoing pursuit of new opportunities, I've somehow found myself back on the speaker circuit—and I had forgotten how much I enjoy it. Public speaking challenges me to take a deeper dive into current legislative affairs and sharpen my attention to detail. It's always a pleasure to highlight [Florida TaxWatch](#), the taxpayer watchdog. Their nonpartisan research, strong advocacy, and recognition of innovative public sector employees make a real difference across our state.



BOMA – the Building Owners and Managers Association

Earlier this month, I was the guest speaker for [BOMA](#). One topic of particular interest is property taxes. Will legislative leaders and or Governor DeSantis offer specific plans to eliminate or decrease property taxes on primary homes of private residences? According to Tax Watch, property taxes generated \$55B in 2024. Some interesting tidbits from the Florida Department of Revenue, Florida Tax Watch and the Florida League of Cities:

- We could raise Homestead Exemption to \$500,000 and forbid foreclosure on delinquent taxes – Speaker Perez
- We could waive taxes for senior citizens who have been in their homes for at least 20 years – Speaker Perez
- We could phase elimination to allow local governments to adjust to reduced revenues.
- We could eliminate all property taxes except for school taxes.

- Florida's DOGE – the Department of Government Efficiency – is looking for waste, fraud, DEI, inappropriate public sector perks, mismanagement and redundant government functions in local budgets.
 - So far, they have examined the budgets for Alachua, Broward, Hillsborough, Manatee, Orange, Palm Beach and Pinellas counties and in Gainesville, Jacksonville, Orlando, Pensacola and St. Petersburg.
- Eliminating property taxes means replacing city and county money for police, fire, schools, disaster planning and response, public health, local elections, solid waste, local roads and public transportation, personnel...
- There are 67 School Superintendents and their legal and lobbying teams. Property values are not uniform statewide and neither are funding formulas.
 - Union County gets 91.7% of school funding from state funds and 8.3% from property taxes due to their low property values. (FDOR)
 - Holmes County gets 88.9% from state funds and 11.1% from property taxes.
 - Hillsborough is 66.8% state funds and 33.2% property taxes.
 - Palm Beach is 34% state funds and 66% property taxes.
- Two thirds of all seniors in owner occupied housing have no mortgage – this is just a perpetual tax.



JASPER COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA SALES TAX TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

The Merchant Strategy (TMS) is excited to be working on the Jasper County Sales Tax Transportation Program with Infrastructure Consulting & Engineering (ICE). Jasper County proposed a 1% sales tax increase as part of a referendum asking voters to approve funding for transportation improvements and greenbelt preservation. The referendum was approved on November 5, 2024, and went into effect March 1, 2025. ICE was awarded the project and will act as the Program Manager. TMS is on the ICE team to provide public involvement services. TMS will develop an interactive website with GIS mapping and a project dashboard; we will develop a Public Involvement Plan, and other collateral materials such as mailers and flyers; we will set up and monitor a project hotline and a Facebook group page; and will facilitate public meetings to inform and engage stakeholders. ICE is a transportation consulting and design firm specializing in highways, bridges/structures, hydrology/hydraulic design, geotechnical engineering and foundation testing, pavement evaluations and design, traffic engineering, environmental documentation (NEPA), construction management and inspection services, architectural design and aviation planning. ICE is headquartered in South Carolina with offices in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.



Cam's 2 Cents, by Cameron Merchant

My friend Miss Liz helped Mom decide to rescue me a couple of years ago, and I'll always love her a little extra for that. This month, I got to go to lunch with her and visit her office! While she and Mom were in a meeting, I took my job as "Office Security Chief" very seriously — by licking and slobbering on anyone who tried to come inside. No intruders got past me! Mom also takes me on bank runs, which are the best because I get two treats every time. (That's called financial motivation.) On weekends, when I've got too much energy and Mom says I'm "being a handful," we go to my favorite dog park. It's been rainy lately, but when I finally get to go — oh boy, I GO, GO, GO! Last time, there were four other dogs to run with and jump on. Best. Day. Ever. I've also been helping Mom cheer for the Seminoles. We started strong — three wins! Then things got a little... ruff. Mom says she might have to suit me up to run the ball. Honestly, I think I'd crush it. Fast paws, fierce tail, and unstoppable enthusiasm — what more could a team need? Halloween's coming up, and I need costume ideas! Don't forget me when you're passing out (or eating) candy. Buck was a Chihuahua one year, so I'm thinking about something fun — maybe a Poodle (do curls itch?), a Great Dane, or even King of the Jungle. What do you think? That's all for now — tail wags and slobbery kisses,

Cam 🐾