

A NEW YEAR – A NEW LEGISLATIVE SESSION

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Happy New Year!

There was a time, not too long ago, when I would need to make a mental note to begin writing the new year on my checks to ensure they were not rejected by my bank as being “stale.” Those days are past as I cannot even remember the last time I used a check to pay a bill or make a purchase. Pretty soon both checks and currency will only be used on an exceptional basis with electronic forms of payment much more convenient.

But, alas, I digress. With the New Year, we are about to enter the “most dangerous 60 days of the year,” the period when our legislature is in session. This year the legislative session will begin on January 9th. Florida’s Constitution allows the legislature to start session early in even numbered years (when all state representatives and ½ of the state senators can stand for election unless term limited).

Florida’s residents need to keep an eye on Tallahassee in January and February to ensure the session does not create too many surprises.

From a municipal perspective, last year multiple attempts were made to transfer responsibility for many of the tasks handled by the locally elected members of city/town councils and commissions to the state. These attempts to preempt locally elected

municipal officials flies in the face of logic and the Florida Constitution.

The concept of local self-government (Home Rule) has been protected by a provision added to the Florida Constitution nearly 50 years ago. A municipality is created by its residents for a variety of reasons including increased services, a desirable business or residential environment and more voice in how their local government is run.

Residents expect their local government to provide various municipal services (e.g., water, sewer, garbage collection, fire protection, law enforcement and much more). Before "Home Rule" was granted to the municipalities, a Special Act would be brought before the legislative body to address each local issue. The process was inefficient, often taking years to be addressed

Today, elected members of each municipal governing body meets within its corporate limits. Residents can conveniently attend those meetings. If these matters were being addressed in Tallahassee it would be very difficult to attend or offer direct input.

Local issues are handled in a transparent fashion. Backroom deals not allowed under the requirements of the Florida Sunshine in Government laws.

It is imperative for municipalities to retain this ability to address resident needs, locally. Home Rule is why no two municipalities are identical. Residents of each

political subdivision take pride in this diversity. Strong Home Rule powers ensure the government stays close to its residents.

During the 2017 legislative session CS/HB 17 and SB 1158 would have eviscerated the principal of Home Rule and it is expected similar bills will be introduced in January.

Stay alert and make your elected representative aware of your concerns to forestall attempts to divest us of the power of self-government.

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