



## **Florida Legislature Should Not Restrict Community Redevelopment Agencies**

By Dr. Woody Brown, Mayor of Largo, Fla. and Chair of the Largo CRA board

Largo is looking pretty good for being almost 113 years old. We're a little older and a little wiser, but we're certainly not your grandmother's Largo anymore.

The city is committed to community revitalization, and we know that means that we have to be focused on redevelopment for the long haul. Downtown areas and residential neighborhoods that are facing challenging issues require us, as a community, to take a long-term view of economic recovery and reinvestment. We need every tool in the toolbox that we can get to accomplish this important work. We must continue working strategically and methodically on our redevelopment goals and objectives.

This past year, we saw exciting changes in the city's community redevelopment area. Deteriorated apartments on West Bay Drive were demolished to make way for new investment. The construction of a new, 29-unit apartment building was completed on Ridge Road and will serve the burgeoning Medical Arts District, and our Community Redevelopment Agency inherited a weed-filled lot from the Florida Department of Transportation and transformed it into a beautiful pocket park.

CRA's are a planning and financing tool created by local governments to revitalize targeted areas that have been neglected or forgotten. Cities use this tool to breathe new life into communities through projects such as roadway and infrastructure improvements, building renovations, and business development and property improvement grants. The money for improvements is funded through tax increment funding, not state or federal dollars. Tax increment financing is an existing property tax revenue, not an additional tax. When a property's value in the CRA increases incrementally as a result of private and public investment, tax increment funds are reinvested into that specific CRA — right back where the property taxes were originally generated.

Largo's CRA was not created in a vacuum. It was established after significant community outreach, public hearings, planning, and with the consent and approval of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners. Largo's CRA board is made up of members of our City Commission, and we have a citizens' advisory board to advise and weigh in on CRA matters. The CRA works hard to ensure that it is in compliance with reporting requirements designed to ensure government accountability and transparency. As local elected officials, the commission ensures transparency so as to assure city residents that the CRA is a good steward of the public trust. The CRA plans are living, public documents with strategies created by the community (the people) with a shared vision for their neighborhood.

This legislative session, state lawmakers have introduced legislation that would limit how cities and counties can use this important redevelopment tool. The Legislature is only in session for 60 days a year, but local government is responsible to its constituents 365 days a year. So, long after House and Senate

committee hearings have concluded, after the lights go off in the chamber hallways, we will be here — day in and day out — serving our community.

My challenge to Florida's Legislature is this: Let's continue the good work of revitalizing communities across Florida. Don't take away this important tool or weaken its ability to work well for cities and counties. CRAs in our community and around the state are working well; let's not fix something that isn't broken. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, government closest to the people serves the people best.

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*The Redevelopment Works campaign, spearheaded by the Florida Redevelopment Association (FRA), is raising awareness about the importance of Florida's community redevelopment agencies (CRAs), which serve to revitalize communities. For additional information, please visit [redevelopment.net/redevelopment-works](http://redevelopment.net/redevelopment-works).*