



We Can't Afford These Squabbles in Florida

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One of the biggest continuing challenges facing our state is how to fund infrastructure. Florida's rapid growth and outmoded system for financing roads and schools in particular are significant obstacles. As growth continues, levels of service suffer whenever there is inadequate investment in appropriate infrastructure. Now, I could provide a menu of additional funding options to address some of these shortfalls, but this is an election year, so there is no appetite in Tallahassee or at the local level to raise new funds, or even to use the "t" word. Instead, let me focus on doing more with the funds we have.

No, there is no free lunch here! But consider the following vignette from last week's news. In the rapidly growing area of northeast Polk County – the part near Disney – the City of Davenport wants to expand its water and sewer systems to serve the rapidly suburbanizing area just outside its borders and ultimately to annex this area. But Polk County also wants to serve the area with water and sewer and has threatened to sue Davenport to prevent its intrusion into what Polk says is its franchise area. Obviously, we cannot afford this.

Or consider another small news item from last week. Orange County has sued the Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) over OUC's application to expand its water capacity. Orange fears that OUC's application might reduce water that the County could provide to its customers.

Here we have several examples of local governments fighting over who should provide utilities. These will be costly legal battles at the very least. They are also symptomatic of a bigger problem. Simply put, our state has no policy concerning which level of government should provide which services. Squabbles between cities and counties over water, sewer, police, fire, and most every other service occur daily in Florida. There is no overriding plan about how to provide needed public services, nor is there guidance as to how to achieve the best economies of

scale. And except for picking up the trash, there is, heaven forbid, very little privatization.

I am not at all suggesting that governments are wasteful, wanton, or wicked; each is doing what it believes is in the best interests of its residents. But belief and reality may be two different things, especially when we stand back and look at the results. This competition to provide urban services produces results that are far from ideal. We can do much better and save money as well if our state would decide simply who is in the urban services business and who is not.

This is Hank Fishkind for 90.7 FM, WMFE News.