

WEST VILLAGES IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT
C/O Special District Services, Inc.
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In September 2023, the West Villages Improvement District (WVID) Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to authorize WVID staff to seek legislative changes to the District's enabling documents to clearly define how the Board of Supervisors transitions from a one-acre, one-vote landowner election to a general election of qualified electors. The requested change seeks to provide clarity to community members, while updating WVID transition rules to be in line with those governing improvement or stewardship districts throughout the State of Florida.

The WVID has prepared this FAQ to better inform and educate residents about the proposed changes.

What is the West Villages Improvement District?

The WVID was created by an act of the Florida Legislature in June 2004 to ensure a timely, cohesive, cost-effective and high-quality implementation of public infrastructure within WVID boundaries. The District currently spans 12,44 acres within the City of North Port and unincorporated Sarasota County.

The WVID is governed by a five-member Board of Supervisors.

Who elects the WVID Board of Supervisors?

In accordance with state law, four members of the WVID Board of Supervisors are currently chosen by a one-acre, one-vote landowners' election. The fifth seat is held by a resident-elected representative pursuant to a general election process conducted by the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections.

How does the District determine when another seat transitions to a resident-elected seat?

The WVID is statutorily required to prepare population estimates to determine the timely transition of seats on the Board of Supervisors from a one-acre, one-vote landowner election to a general election of qualified voters. This report is conducted using criteria outlined in Florida Statutes for defining urban areas.

Currently, the transition occurs when urban areas reach certain population thresholds. If an urban area constitutes 25% or less of the District, one member of the Board of Supervisors is elected by qualified electors, while the remaining members are elected through a one-acre, one-vote landowners election. Under current rules, a second resident seat transitions when the urban area constitutes 26% to 50% of the District.

Over the past 20 years, every single stewardship/improvement district established after the WVID's establishment has used an objective method of calculating board turnover in lieu of the subjective method that the WVID is currently required to utilize.

How is the urban area determined?

The applicable statute defines an “urban area” as contiguous developed *and* inhabited urban area within a district that meets certain density criteria.

How urbanized is the WVID?

The WVID began transitioning board seats in 2014, when the 26% threshold was far from being met. At that time, the WVID used a generalized method of determining population, which included all properties within a platted urban area, rather than focusing solely on inhabited areas which is what is required to be calculated by the statute. This method resulted in an over-calculation of the urban area, but allowed staff to preserve financial and time resources associated with preparation of the report until the time in which the district is closer to meeting the 26% urbanization threshold.

With development well underway over the past several years, the WVID updated its model to create a more precise urban area map in 2022. This model used the number of single-family residential lots with a certificate of occupancy (CO) to determine urbanization. At that time, it was determined that 6.58% of the District was an urban area.

In 2023, the map was updated to show that 1,017 acres, or 8.17% of the District, was in the urban areas. This was in line with the current district population versus the total district population at build-out, which was 9.6%.

The District also engaged Dewberry, the District’s engineers, to develop an alternative model that included all developed residential areas, not just inhabited areas as a comparison. Using this more liberal approach, which was more expansive than required by Florida Statutes, the District estimated 2,540 acres, or 20.41%, was in the urban area.

Both methodologies also calculated *all* residential unit types instead of just the single-family unit type required by the statute.

Under either methodology, the percentage of urban areas was below the 26% threshold for turnover of a second seat on the Board of Supervisors.

Has the WVID had its 2023 urbanization calculations independently reviewed?

In 2023, an independent analysis by the Sarasota County Engineer also found substantially the same amount of urbanization as the WVID had identified, utilizing its more liberal calculation.

When is the WVID next required to calculate its urbanization?

Under current law, the WVID is required to update its urbanization calculation in 2028.

Why is the WVID trying to change the criteria for Board transition?

In September 2023, the WVID Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 (with Supervisor Meisel opposing) to seek legislative changes to the District’s enabling documents to clearly define how the Board of Supervisors transitions from a one-acre, one-vote landowner election to a general election of qualified electors.

The proposed change eliminates the District’s current subjective calculation method, which has

frustrated WVID landowners and residents for years in favor of a turnover threshold formula that provides objective, defined turnover metrics.

When voting in favor of the legislative changes, the WVID Board expressed its desire to move to “a fair and neutral calculation that other special districts throughout the State have used for 20 years without issue” that is more transparent than the current model. The WVID Board also expressed that the legislative amendment was anticipated to ultimately result in long-term cost savings for the district.

What is being proposed?

Filed in February 2025, House Bill 4061 in part seeks to amend the criteria for transition to the total number of qualified electors, as determined by the Supervisor of Elections. Under the proposed criteria, transitions would occur at clearly defined intervals, including:

- Once 22,854 qualified electors reside within the District, two Board members shall be elected through a general election of qualified electors, while three Board members shall be elected by the landowners.
- Once 32,280 qualified electors reside within the District, three Board members shall be elected through a general election, while two Board members shall be elected through a landowners election.
- Once 45,707 qualified electors reside within the District, four Board members shall be elected through a general election, while one Board member shall be elected through a landowners election.
- Once 51,420 qualified electors reside within the District, all five Board members shall be elected through a general election.

The proposed change sets forth clear milestones for turnover, bringing the WVID transition policies in line with its peer districts across the state.

How were the transition milestones determined?

Like other stewardship and improvements districts throughout the state, the WVID used existing land development approvals and undisputable data from both the U.S. Census and the Florida Department of State Division of Elections (DOE) to calculate the proposed transition schedule.

The total build-out for lands located within the District boundaries is 31,320 residential units. Using data from the U.S. Census and based on the average number of persons per household in Sarasota County, it is anticipated there will be more than 70,000 residents living within the WVID at full-build-out.

Based on the average percentage of Sarasota County individuals that are registered to vote determined by the DOE, the WVID estimates there will be more than 50,000 qualified electors living in the District at build-out. Based on this total anticipated qualified elector population at build-out, the Board seats turn over at every one-fifth interval.

These transition milestones have been approved by the Legislature and utilized for nearly two decades by other stewardship and improvement districts throughout the state without issue.

As of January 2025, approximately 7,400 residential units, or 23% of the total build-out, have

received a certificate of occupancy. There were approximately 8,600 registered electors within the WVID as of April 2024.

What impact does this legislation have on who is eligible to vote and/or serve on the WVID Board of Supervisors?

The current methodology only calculates occupied, *single-family* residential properties when determining urbanization. It also only allows landowners, or their spouses, to vote and/or serve on the WVID Board of Supervisors. This methodology disenfranchises residents who live in multi-family communities, such as condominiums, apartments or townhomes, as well as renters within the development.

The methodology proposed in House Bill 4061 considers all qualified electors, including those who reside in single family and multi-family residences within the District, to determine when a seat transitions. The proposed amendment also gives renters, as well as property owners, the ability to vote or serve on the WVID Board of Supervisors.

Other stewardship and improvement districts, as well as community development districts, throughout the state utilize the same definition of a “qualified elector” without issue.

How is the number of qualified electors determined each year?

The number of qualified electors is determined each year by an independent third party- the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections- which would provide an annual report to the WVID each spring. The Supervisor of Elections already prepares this report for all community development districts and other stewardship/improvement districts located within the County.

What impact does this legislation have on the rate of turnover of WVID Board of Supervisors seats?

Due to the inclusion of landowners of multi-family units, as well as renters, within the definition of persons eligible to vote and/or serve on the WVID Board of Supervisors that is proposed by the legislation, it is possible that seats on the WVID Board of Supervisors could turnover faster than is anticipated under the current model.

What else does the legislation do?

The bill also eliminates duplicative, time-consuming, and financially burdensome real property acquisition and eminent domain processes thereby streamlining governmental processes and increasing governmental efficiency for the District, the City of North Port, and Sarasota County, which ultimately benefits each of their residents and landowners.