# South Indian River Water Control District

## Palm Beach Country Estates

### Board Policy Options for Road Stabilization (Paving) Referendums



# Introduction

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During the July 2026 Board of Supervisors meeting, staff was directed to develop and present options for the Board's consideration regarding road paving referendums within the Palm Beach Country Estates community.

This presentation has been prepared in response to that direction and is intended to facilitate discussion of potential policy approaches and their associated implications.

# Level of Support Required

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What level of Palm Beach Country Estates unpaved landowner support should be required before an assessment-funded roadway project moves forward?

1. 90% Threshold (Current Policy)
2. 67% Supermajority
3. 51% Majority
4. Referendum
5. Pause on new paving

# Paved Roads vs. Unpaved Roads

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The discussion surrounding paving often reflects differing values rather than simply engineering considerations.

Consistent with the District's Mission and Vision, District staff evaluate roadway projects through the lens of public safety, engineering performance, infrastructure reliability, financial sustainability, and long-term maintenance. Staff also considers landowner input, environmental stewardship, and community character while striving to uphold the District's core values of Resilience, Responsiveness, Reliability, Stewardship, Transparency, and Collaboration.

# Balanced Discussion Points

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A key policy question is whether the Board views Palm Beach Country Estates road paving primarily as a:

- **Infrastructure and transportation improvement issue** -where the focus is reliability, access, and long-term asset management; more costly, or
- **Community character issue** - where the focus is preserving the rural nature and identity of Palm Beach Country Estates; less costly, or
- **Balance of both objectives**, allowing roadway improvements to proceed only when a sufficient level of community support exists

This underlying question may be just as important as determining whether the approval threshold should be 51%, 67%, 90%, an unpaved landowner vote, or a 5-year pause on Road Stabilization (Paving).

# Staff Assumptions

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- Staff's focus remains on providing reliable, sustainable, and equitable infrastructure solutions for the community
- Property owners' desires drive District actions and assessments
- The Board's policy decisions should be based on community infrastructure needs and benefits
- Individual financial circumstances may vary; however, addressing personal financial hardship is outside the District's primary mission as a flood control and infrastructure management district

# Applicable Assumptions

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## Staff Assumptions

- District continues administering project financing.
- All benefited-assessed parcels are eligible to vote.
- Each parcel receives one vote.
- Multiple owners must designate one authorized voter.
- Assessments are collected through the District's assessment process.

# Referendum Framework

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## Approval Formula

Affected Landowners Affirmative Votes ÷ Total Affected Landowners = Approval Percentage

**Definitions:**

**Total Affected Landowners** - All parcels within the area in question and included in the project assessment roll.

**Votes Cast** - Returned ballots marked Yes or No.

**Abstentions** - Ballots not returned or expressly marked as abstentions.

**Note on Abstentions:**

Abstentions are reported separately for transparency.

Abstentions do not count as affirmative and are thus counted as negative votes.

Only ballots submitted by the deadline are counted as votes cast.

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# Take No Action - Maintain 90% Approval Threshold

**Policy**

Road project approved only if affirmative votes equal at least **90% of all affected landowners.**

**Pros**

- Demonstrates overwhelming community support
- Protects property owners from projects lacking broad consensus
- Minimizes disputes regarding legitimacy of approval
- Preserves existing policy and avoids procedural changes

**Cons**

- Extremely difficult to achieve
- Low participation effectively counts against approval
- One of the highest approval standards possible short of unanimity
- May prevent projects desired by a significant majority of residents

**Key Discussion Question**

Does the Board believe road projects should require near-unanimous approval?

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# Supermajority - Reduce Threshold to 67%

## Policy

Road project approved if affirmative votes equal at least **two-thirds (67%) of all affected landowners**.

### Pros

- Commonly recognized supermajority standard
- Reflects strong support without requiring overwhelming participation
- Improves likelihood of project approval
- Encourages practical decision-making

### Cons

- Nearly one-third of owners could oppose a project that passes
- May be viewed as insufficient for projects creating long-term assessments
- Reduced consensus compared to current policy

### Key Discussion Question

Does a supermajority provide sufficient protection for assessed landowners?

# Option Three

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## Traditional Majority Rule - Reduce Threshold to 51%

**Policy**

Road project approved if affirmative votes equal at least **51% of all affected landowners**, the minimum threshold in the Charter.

**Pros**

- Simple and easily understood voting standard
- Most achievable threshold among majority-based options
- May accelerate infrastructure improvements
- Reflects traditional democratic majority rule

**Cons**

- Limited consensus may exist among affected property owners
- Nearly half the landowners could oppose the project
- May increase dissatisfaction following approval
- Greater potential for community division

**Key Discussion Question**

Should road assessments require more than a simple majority?

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# Referendum for Dirt Roads

**Policy**

Road project approved if affirmative votes equal at least **51% of all affected landowners**, the minimum threshold in the Charter.

**Pros**

- Provides an opportunity for the entire community to establish a long-term vision for all remaining dirt roads
- May produce lower overall construction costs through economies of scale
- Allows for comprehensive planning rather than piecemeal implementation
- Potentially avoids overlapping major assessment obligations by coordinating implementation with the retirement of potable water debt
- Improves roadway connectivity, emergency access, and overall infrastructure quality throughout the Palm Beach Country Estates community

**Cons**

- Larger projects require more extensive planning, engineering, and financial management
- Perpetual borrowing requirements on a 15-year cycle
- Construction timing will be delayed when implementation is coordinated with completion of potable water financing obligations

# Option Five

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## Five-Year Pause - Potential Benefits

**Pros**

- Reduces capital spending
- Preserves financial flexibility
- Avoids construction disruptions
- Allows additional planning and analysis
- May reduce assessment or funding pressures compounded by stormwater projects

**Cons**

- Future paving costs will increase significantly
- More maintenance may be required
- Delays desired infrastructure improvements
- Potential resident dissatisfaction with postponement of projects

# Comparison of Options

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| Option | Approval Threshold | Level of Consensus | Ease of Approval |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 1 – Maintain Current Policy** | 90% | Very High | Very Difficult |
| **Option 2 – Segment-Specific Supermajority** | 67% | Moderate-High | Moderate |
| **Option 3 – Traditional Majority Rule** | 51% | Moderate | Easier |
| **Option 4 – Referendum for Remaining Dirt Roads** | Board decision | Moderate | Moderate |
| **Option 5 - Five-Year Pause on Road Stabilization** | 3 of 5 | Board Approval | N/A |

# Financing Philosophy

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The District Treasurer, Chief Financial Officer, and Executive Director are to determine how roadway improvements in Palm Beach Country Estates will be financed with board approval.

Debt financing for construction and resurfacing with assessments for repayment.

# Key Considerations

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## Infrastructure, Palm Beach Country Estates Community Character, and Property Rights

Staff recognizes that reasonable people may reach different conclusions regarding roadway improvements.

Some landowners view paving as an important infrastructure investment that improves access, safety, reliability, and long-term asset management.

Others believe that dirt roads are an important component of the rural character and identity of Palm Beach Country Estates and should be preserved whenever possible.

The Board's challenge is to determine what level of support should be required when these differing viewpoints exist.