



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

October 6, 2021

**VOTERS APPROVE OKALOOSA COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
DISTRICT EXPANSION**

Shalimar, Fla. – Voters in Okaloosa County have elected to expand the tourism development district countywide. After polls closed on October 5, 2021, Supervisor of Elections Paul Lux shared that, out of the 18,817 votes counted, the unofficial election results ruled 12,296 in favor of expanding and 6,500 opposed. The election will be certified later this week.

Beginning March 1, 2022, Okaloosa County will now be one of 59 out of 62 counties in the State of Florida that collect bed tax on overnight stays countywide. The tax only applies to short-term stays under six months at accommodations such as hotels, condominiums, short-term vacation rentals and campgrounds.

“Tourism tax has been collected on overnight stays in the south end of the county for decades,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Carolyn Ketchel. “Time has shown that the entire county feels the effects of tourism so the moment was right to let the voters decide on expanding countywide. We’re looking forward to this bright new opportunity for our residents and guests of Okaloosa County.”

On June 15, 2021, the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners approved a special election so that voters could decide whether or not to expand the tourism district countywide. Until now, taxes were collected and spent on tourism-related initiatives in South Okaloosa County including Destin and the South Fort Walton Beach area including parts of Cinco Bayou and Mary Esther. All areas of the County will now receive benefits from tourist development taxes.

The current Tourism Development District typically brings in between \$21.5 and \$23.5 million in revenue per year. Collections in the expanded district will begin on March 1, 2022. The expectation is that there are 2-3,000 lodging rooms in the newly expanded district that will add roughly \$2-\$3 million more in annual revenue. In addition to approximately 10% more in new revenues, local tourism tax collection by the Clerk of the Court is set to begin on January 1, 2022. It is hoped that local collection will provide more data for marketing and a better understanding of tourism impacts countywide.

Immediate plans include: adding new Board members from across the County, inserting additional information about the northern part of the County in the annual tourism guide; integrating new tourism products into the “Little Adventures” marketing plan, working with all the cities on their capital plans; bringing on a few new tourism team members over the next 12 months and lastly, completing a detailed inventory of facilities and vendors by working with all

cities, tourism related businesses, and other key stakeholders. The overall goal would be to continue current tourism activities while incrementally ramping up efforts countywide and hitting full stride by this time next year (at the start of the new fiscal year).

More details on the special election can be found at TourismWorksForOkaloosa.com.

###

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT APRIL SARVER AT (850) 585-7059 OR AT
ASARVER@MYOKALOOSA.COM