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Scheffler doesn't like comparisons to Woods, but inspired by him

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Drivers should expect delays as Inverness begins major paving project



CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

CHRONICLEONLINE.COM • THURSDAY, AUGUST 21, 2025 • VOL. 131 ISSUE 233 • \$4.00

County seeks return of anonymous code complaints

Commissioners join state efforts to repeal the ban, relieving residents' fears of retaliation

By **MICHAEL D. BATES**
Chronicle Reporter

Not long ago, if a Citrus County resident saw a yard piled with trash, weeds knee-high, cars up on blocks or suspected unpermitted construction, they could call code enforcement and file an anonymous complaint.

That changed in 2021, when Florida lawmakers banned anonymous reporting. Now, complainants must provide their full name and address before the county can investigate. That resulted in a drop-off of local complaints, though the numbers have rebounded.

Supporters of the law said it was aimed at stopping frivolous or malicious complaints. Others argue the unintended consequence has been fewer eyes on the ground and more violations going unreported.

The Florida Association of Counties (FAC) will lobby lawmakers in the upcoming legislative session to roll back the ban on anonymous code enforcement complaints and restore the public's ability to file them.

County commissioners are backing that effort.

Without anonymity, many people won't come forward, particularly in small or rural neighborhoods where everyone knows

each other, the FAC said.

"In today's polarized society, disclosing the personal information of a person who files a complaint could allow the alleged code or ordinance violator to retaliate against the person filing the complaint, including engaging in retaliatory actions resulting in property damage, threats, acts of violence, bodily injury, or even death," the FAC said in a statement.

County commissioners at a recent meeting agreed to support the initiative and include the proposal as part of its 2026 legislative agenda. FAC leaders say building consensus among counties will give their lobbyists more leverage when the legislature convenes Jan. 13.

Commissioner Diana Finegan supported the move but with limits. She said residents should be

required to provide a name and phone number so code officers can follow up, but that information should not be made part of the public record. That, she said, would discourage frivolous complaints while protecting residents from retaliation.

Citrus code enforcement officers can still investigate without a named complainant in cases of imminent threats to public health or safety, or destruction of sensitive habitat. They may also act on violations they see themselves, but traditionally rely on the public's eyes and ears.



FINEGAN

County backs body-cam proposal for code officers

State association seeks support to amend law authorizing their use

By **MICHAEL D. BATES**
Chronicle Reporter

The Florida Association of Counties (FAC) is pushing for body cameras for code enforcement officers and is seeking support for the proposal from individual counties.

Citrus County commissioners recently added the proposed policy to their tentative list of state legislative proposals. County spokesman Michael Bridges said the county will finalize its 2026 legislative priorities in September.

See **CODE TIPS**, page A5

See **BODY-CAMS**, page A5

How a ship that glides like a pelican could change travel, defense

By **MATT O'BRIEN**
AP Technology Writer

NORTH KINGSTOWN, R.I. — The winged passenger ferry gliding over the surface of Narragansett Bay could be a new method of coastal transportation or a new kind of warship.

Its maker, Regent Craft, is betting on both.

Twelve quietly buzzing propellers line the 65-foot wingspan of Paladin, a sleek ship with an airplane's nose. It looks nothing like the sailboats and fishing trawlers it speeds past through New England's largest estuary.

"We had this vision five years ago for a seaglider — something that is as fast as an aircraft and as easy to drive as a boat," said CEO Billy Thalheimer, jubilant after an hours-long test run of the new vessel.

On a cloudy August morning, Thalheimer sat in the Paladin's cockpit and, for the first time, took control of his company's prototype craft to test its hydrofoils. The electric-powered watercraft has three modes — float, foil and fly.

From the dock, it sets off like any motorized boat. Farther away from land, it rises up on hydrofoils — the same kind used by sailing ships that compete in America's Cup. The foils enable it to travel more than 50 miles per hour — and about a person's height — above the bay.

See **SEAGLIDERS**, page A6



Charles Krupa / AP

The **REGENT Viceroy Seaglider**, a winged passenger ferry, glides over the surface of Narragansett Bay on a test run on Aug. 6 off the coast of North Kingstown, R.I.



Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

A member of the Florida Highway Patrol records evidence Wednesday morning at the scene of this single-vehicle crash on East Gospel Island Road. The crash claimed the life of the driver of the car. The owner of the home where the crash occurred said his house shook when the car impacted the large oak tree in his front yard.

Teen dies in crash in Inverness

Car hits tree and breaks in half

By **CASMIRA HARRISON**
Chronicle Reporter

A Citrus High School student was killed when the car he was driving failed to navigate a curve on Gospel Island Road in Inverness on Wednesday morning. Witnesses to the crash saw the car slam into an oak tree between South Van Buck Drive and East Pocono Drive with such force that the vehicle broke in two.

The crash occurred around 7:40 a.m., witnesses said. Deputies with the Citrus County Sheriff's Office and Florida Highway Patrol troopers had shuttered the roadway and redirected traffic around the site. At 10 a.m., FHP traffic crash investigators could still be seen examining the crash site and deploying drone cameras.

Highway Patrol Public Affairs Officer Sgt. Steve Gaskins said the 18-year-old from Inverness was traveling west on East Gospel Island Road, near South Van Buck

Drive when he failed to negotiate a curve in the roadway.

"The vehicle departed the (roadway), rotated, and entered the north shoulder," Gaskins wrote in an email Wednesday afternoon. "The vehicle then traveled back across the roadway, entered the south shoulder and collided with a tree."

Residents who lived near the scene said the driver had a Citrus High School parking pass in the seat of the white Chevrolet Malibu.

"My wife and I were in the bedroom when we heard it," said Mark Beck, whose property became the site of the tragedy that shook his house and rattled both he and his wife. "It was just a horrendous wreck."

Beck said they both ran outside within 30 seconds of hearing the sound of the crash and his wife, who is a nurse, immediately checked on the driver but she couldn't find a pulse.



Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

The rear of the Chevy Malibu is torn in two with the front coming to rest several yards away.

"If there's any consolation in it, he didn't feel any pain, I'm sure of that," Beck said, still clearly shaken from the scene. "And, geez. I mean, it was such a hit — to shear that car into two pieces — he must have been flying."

Austin Jordan, another

neighbor, said he was in the front yard when he saw the car come flying around the curve in the road, run into the grass and then slingshot across the street into the tree in Beck's yard.

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