



City of Wilton Manors

2020 Wilton Drive • Wilton Manors, Florida 33305 • (954) 390-2100 • FAX (954) 390-2199

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City Manager

Kerry Ezrol
City Attorney

February 11, 2014

Via US and Electronic Mail

Honorable Barbara Sharief
Mayor, Broward County Commission
115 S Andrews Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

RE: Florida Panthers Proposal to shed debt payment obligations for BB&T
Center/Tourism Development Tax Dollars

Dear Mayor Sharief:

We want to share our position with respect to the letter received from Hollywood Mayor Peter Bober opposing the use of bed tax dollars to support a stadium for the Panthers. First, we agree with Mayor Bober that all cities must not take a purely provincial attitude toward the expenditure of bed tax dollars and that what benefits Broward County also benefits its cities. As the Broward County Commission considers the present proposal from the Florida Panthers, however, using bed tax dollars to relieve the Panthers from paying their construction debt payments is NOT in the best interest of the County.

As you undoubtedly recognize, Wilton Manors, as the center of LGBT vibrancy, street festivals and entertainment year round in the County, contributes significantly to Tourism Development Tax Revenues and tourism generally in the County. The Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) has published that LGBT tourism is worth over \$1 billion annually to our County. According to the CVB, some 1.3 million LGBT travelers visited here in 2013 spending \$1.48 billion. The marketing budget to attract such LGBT tourists is \$750,000. Our small City spends thousands of dollars to host local LGBT events throughout the year – our Stonewall Pride festival in the summer and “Wicked Manors” Halloween events alone attract over 50,000 attendees. Our City, local bars, restaurants and businesses spend thousands to advertise with LGBT media and partners throughout the United States. Wilton Manors is regularly mentioned in media in San Francisco, Toronto, NY, and other major cities as a “friendly” destination.

You may have heard of the many gay cruises that sail to and from Port Everglades. The Celebrity Silhouette recently left Ft. Lauderdale on a Sunday for a gay cruise. Many of the thousands of gay tourists taking this cruise came in early to spend the weekend in the “greater Wilton Manors metropolitan area” (as the Kinsey Sicks stated at their recent Broward Center performance). Such gay and lesbian cruises abound in season. These are high-end cruises, with tourists spending significantly in our area. In fact, Wilton Manors is a “shore excursion” for some of these cruises with buses transporting passengers to Wilton Drive. While we are not aware of documented evidence, I am fairly confident in representing that that LGBT tourists do not come here to attend a hockey game. They come for our beaches, our port, our night life, our festivals, our welcoming community, our LGBT sporting events such as softball and tennis tourneys and so on. In fact, the South Florida Gay Tennis association will be hosting its clay court tournament this Presidents weekend

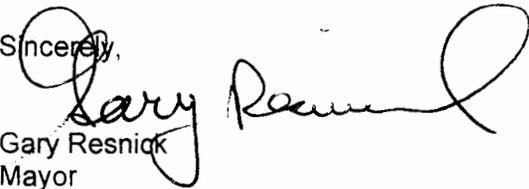
and players, friends and families travel here not only from around the country, but the world for this event.

It should be noted that we value and support the Florida Panthers. The Panthers' "you can play" project and support for our LGBT community should be commended. While the economic impact of the Panthers is important to our region, we should not take away needed bed tax funds that are meant to market tourist activities. Rather, such funds should continue to be used to market to tourists. In addition, we would support expanding the use of such funds to support the many events and festivals hosted by cities that bring thousands of tourists to our area.

Please continue to use "bed tax" dollars to promote tourism in our respective cities and the county as a whole.

Sincerely,

Gary Resnick
Mayor


cc: Mayor Peter Bober (via email)
County Commission (via email)
Wilton Manors Commission
City Manager
Broward County League of Cities (via email)