

NATION

Obama Center opens in Chicago

Event draws a celebrity crowd

SCOTT BAUER
Associated Press

Former President Barack Obama formally opened his presidential center in Chicago on Thursday with a call to defend democracy as three former presidents joined him on stage in an extraordinary event featuring politicians, A-list celebrities, athletes and other internationally known figures.

"I hope this center will serve as an affirmation of just how special, how precious our democracy truly is and

remind us what we can achieve when we embrace our shared responsibilities as citizens," the nation's first Black president told the crowd.

Bono, John Legend, Christina Aguilera, Marc Anthony and Eddie Vedder took turns on the stage ahead of Bruce Springsteen and Stevie Wonder, who closed the show singing "Higher Ground" as the former presidents, world leaders and others danced along.

President Donald Trump was conspicuous both in his physical absence and by not being mentioned by any of the speakers or performers. Trump called the \$850 million center a

"total disaster" in a social media post in February.

Obama voiced his support for character, honesty, integrity, kindness, compassion and sense of duty, praising both Democrats and Republicans, including those he defeated.

"Every president here today, as different as we are, has tried our best to uphold values that John McCain and Mitt Romney believed in no less than I did," Obama said. "It is our greatest inheritance."

Reflecting on his arrival in Chicago in 1985 as an untested political organizer, he said he could not have built the Obama Presidential Center anywhere



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Former President Barack Obama, right, shares a laugh with former first lady Michelle Obama, left, on stage during the dedication ceremony for the Obama Presidential Center, Thursday, June 18, 2026, in Chicago.

else. He met his future wife Michelle nearby, their wedding reception was within walking distance, his children were born in the neighborhood and he launched his first candidacy not far away.

"It's an expression of thanks, an acknowledgment that so much of what I hold most dear I owe to the people of this city and the people of the surrounding neighborhoods," Obama said.



CITY OF PUNTA GORDA

AdventHealth's three-phase plan for a Punta Gorda hospital campus.

Plans/

forward to the city council on July 8.

Bonasera said future approvals and coordination with AdventHealth staff will continue through the city's Developmental Review Committee process.

The City Council meeting will be 9 a.m. July 8.

Both meetings will be at 120 Laishley Court, Unit 111, Punta Gorda.

Punta Gorda resident Tim Ritchie made a public comment after Lawrence spoke.

"For about five years, I've been suggesting to the Charlotte County

Commissioners that Punta Gorda needs, not only one hospital, but three hospitals," Ritchie said.

"With the influx of more people, it takes three to five weeks to get an appointment with doctors. Hospitals: yes, immediately."

More information about City of Punta Gorda meetings can be found at: ci.punta-gorda.fl.us

Projects/

In 2015, the Florida Bay lost 50,000 acres of seagrass due to hypersaline, or overly salted, water drainage, Wittman said.

GRASSROOTS BEGINNINGS

The algae bloom inspired Wittman and other fishing guides to create the non-profit organization Captains For Clean Water. Their goal is "to give individuals and stakeholders a voice, a mechanism to amplify their voice, and to have policy makers hear from them," Wittman said.

A bipartisan effort to restore the Everglades and clean Lake Okeechobee began in 2000, with a projected timeline of 30 years. None of the 68 infrastructure projects were completed by the halfway point in 2016, Wittman said.

"It was because there was a lack of political will," Wittman said. "There was simply a lack of public pressure."

Their advocacy made environmental changes in 2022. CFCW brought fishing guides and boats outside the capitol building to protest against Senate Bill 2508.

The legislation would have placed new requirements on the South Florida Water Management District when recommending lake levels to the Army Corps — which would have gone against the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual. The bill also would've allowed \$13 million to be funneled to other projects.

CFCW's opposition efforts expanded beyond Florida. More than 43,000 people in the nation signed a petition to veto the bill. Social media engagements reached more than nine million people.

On June 8, 2022, Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed SB 2508.

"The power of people's collective voices can change the course of policy, even if you are told there is no way to beat it," Wittman said.

PUSH FOR EVERGLADES RESTORATION

CFCW and other organizations commissioned a study about the economic impact the 2005-06 and 2018 algae blooms had on



SUN PHOTO BY NICOLE DROEGER

Captain Chris Wittman speaks about the importance of community engagement and pressure for environmental policy change.

Lee, Collier and Charlotte counties.

Tourism suffered, with a total of \$17.8 billion dollars lost in property values, and \$5.2 billion lost from the coastal economy.

In June 2023, DeSantis signed an executive order to direct the SFWMD to expedite the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program and "make every effort" to advance the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir Project and assist the Army Corps with LOMOS.

Wittman said the EAA Reservoir Project is now projected to be completed in 2029. The latest LOSOM update stated that a 27% reduction in harmful lake discharges will occur. They will also send more water south into the Everglades for restoration.

"The value of people engaging with agencies and policy makers on these issues is the number one thing we've seen progress," Wittman said. "Those 68 projects are now underway. Over 60 of them have been completed or are currently under construction."

Wittman ended the presentation by encouraging the council to meet with the Army Corps to discuss the importance of water quality to the Punta Gorda community.

"Your voices as council members to other agencies and committees carry a lot of weight," Wittman said.

In response to the presentation, Councilman Greg Julian stated he was on board. Mayor Deborah Lux agreed.

"We are so environmentally sensitive," Lux said.

More information about the economic impact of water quality in Southwest Florida can be found at: captainsforcleanwater.org

The archived city council meeting can be found at: charlottecountyfl.gov

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

By the Board of County Commissioners for DeSoto County, Florida to Consider a Petition to Establish the Oak Stone Community Development District

DATE: Tuesday, June 23, 2026
TIME: 6:30 p.m.
LOCATION: Room 103, County Administration Building
201 East Oak Street, First Floor
Arcadia, Florida 34266

In compliance with the provisions of Chapter 190, Florida Statutes, a public hearing will be held by the Board of County Commissioners for DeSoto County, Florida, to consider an ordinance to grant a petition to establish the Oak Stone Community Development District ("District"). The proposed County ordinance title is as follows:

AN ORDINANCE BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF DESOTO COUNTY, FLORIDA ESTABLISHING THE OAK STONE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT PURSUANT TO CHAPTER 190, FLORIDA STATUTES; NAMING THE DISTRICT; DESCRIBING THE EXTERNAL BOUNDARIES OF THE DISTRICT; DESCRIBING THE FUNCTIONS AND POWERS OF THE DISTRICT; GRANTING SPECIAL POWERS; DESIGNATING FIVE PERSONS TO SERVE AS THE INITIAL MEMBERS OF THE DISTRICT'S BOARD OF SUPERVISORS; PROVIDING A SEVERABILITY CLAUSE; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

The proposed District is comprised of approximately 343.90± acres, generally west of SW County Road 769, in the southwestern portion of DeSoto County, as depicted in the map herein. The petitioner has proposed to establish the District to plan, finance, acquire, construct, operate and maintain infrastructure and community facilities which may be authorized by such District under Florida law, including but not limited to roadways, stormwater management, utilities (water & wastewater), hardscape/landscape/irrigation, onsite wetland conservation/mitigation, streetlights/undergrounding of electrical lines, and other infrastructure.

Copies of the petition, the proposed ordinance, and the staff reports are available at the Development Department Room 204, Administration Building, 201 E. Oak Street, Arcadia, Florida five days prior to the meeting dates and are available on the County's website at www.desotobocc.com under Department News and News & announcements. For more information, call (863) 993-4800.


All interested persons and affected units of general-purpose government shall be given an opportunity to appear at the hearing and present oral or written comments on the petition. Pursuant to Section 286.0105, F.S., any persons or affected unit of general-purpose local government, who wish to appeal any decision made by the Board with respect to any matter considered at this public hearing will need a record of the proceedings. For that purpose the person or unit of general-purpose local government may need to insure that a verbatim record/transcript of the proceedings is made that includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Within five working days of receipt of this notice, please contact the County Commissioners' Office, 201 East Oak Street, Room 201, Arcadia, Florida 34266.



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