



# Carolyn Ketchel

## Okaloosa County Commissioner

### **SURTAX IS A WIN FOR OKALOOSA COUNTY**

The voter-approved infrastructure surtax has been a hugely successful program that has allowed us to make significant infrastructure investments in Okaloosa County that will improve the daily lives of our residents for decades to come. Approved by citizens in 2018, it has raised more than \$136 million. These funds have been used to acquire matching grants for a total of \$279 million. Wait! There is more good news. About one-third of surtax revenue comes from tourists throughout the year — over 50% during the peak season!

This  $\frac{1}{2}$  cent surtax has paid for over 57 projects ranging from roads to stormwater to public safety and sidewalks. We are particularly proud of the Southwest Crestview Bypass, which will soon be unveiled, the dirt road stabilization project in the north end, and the installation of 12 communication towers throughout the County. These towers will allow public safety and law enforcement officials to communicate on one system in the event of a County-wide emergency. Some of our other completed projects are listed below:

- A \$44,965 Sheriff Office project to replace and upgrade the vehicle fleet, including safety vehicles such as evidence vans, water search vessels, patrol and dive vessels, surveillance and prisoner transport vehicles.
- A \$185,724 sidewalk project to close gaps in developer-installed sidewalks linking Indian Bayou Trail and Matthew Blvd in Destin. The project was completed under budget and \$189,276 in unused funding was returned to the Surtax reserves.
- A \$200,000 project to address persistent flooding in Bluewater Bay. The County was awarded a hazard mitigation grant, comprising study/design and construction phases, along with requiring a 25% local match. This match included 18% from the Bluewater Bay Municipal Services Benefit Unit (MSBU) and 7% from the County.
- A \$214,500 project to enhance all seven beach accessways on Okaloosa Island with newly designed crosswalks including installation of signs and flashers. These new crosswalks provide safe pedestrian access from the north side of Santa Rosa Boulevard to the beach access parks on the south side.
- A \$287,850 project to address frequent stormwater flooding along Meigs Drive in Shalimar. The completed project included installation of shoreline rip rap and sod replacement.
- A \$431,618 project to improve the intersection of Lewis Turner Boulevard and Hospital Drive near the newly improved Liza Jackson School in Fort Walton Beach. The project included stormwater detention facilities, intersection upgrades and a new turn lane,

making the intersection safer for vehicles and pedestrians. Moreover, the project was completed under budget and the remaining allocation of \$68,382 was returned to the Surtax reserves to be utilized for additional future projects.

- A \$682,901 project to address stormwater runoff and flooding of roadways in and around Standish Court and Lafitte Crescent in Fort Walton Beach. The investment of \$682,901 in allocated Surtax funding, coupled with \$420,432 of RESTORE grant funding, allowed the County to replace the deteriorating pipe system with a modern, smooth-lined high-density polyethylene pipe network. Originally \$800,000 was allocated from Surtax Reserves and \$117,099 has been returned to the Surtax Reserves, reflecting our steadfast commitment to fiscal responsibility by leveraging strategic grant opportunities.
- An \$857,029 project to improve Commons Drive in Destin. The intersection of Commons Drive and Henderson Beach Drive was selected as a surtax project for the installation of a traffic signal to enhance safety and improve traffic flow. The project included turn lane enhancements, intersection upgrades, and improved pedestrian facilities. \$100,000 of the signalization funding was contributed by the City of Destin through developer funds.
- A \$1,350,000 project to improve pedestrian traffic around Redwood Avenue and Plew Elementary School in Niceville. Although there were some sidewalks in the area, connecting them was essential for enhanced pedestrian safety. This project also included enhanced stormwater systems and improved safety along Redwood Avenue and the intersections of Redwood, 18th Street, and Sycamore Avenue. The City of Niceville donated half the cost of extending the sidewalk from Valparaiso Boulevard to 11th Street.
- A \$1.5M project to install sidewalks along Old Bethel Road west of Highway 85, east of Davidson Middle School to Normandy Road in north Crestview along with crosswalk improvement and handrails at appropriate locations.
- A \$1,918,093 project to install a Mass Notification System, which allows for video monitoring and tracking of forty public school buses by the Emergency Operations Center which provides significantly faster communication and coordinated responses to safety issues faced by our local schools. Also included in this project was the purchase of ballistic projection equipment and K-9 unit replacements.
- A \$3,100,000 project to construct a Sheriff's Office Training Center, which offers several benefits, including improved joint response and capabilities to active assailants, expanded and improved training capabilities to greater quantities of 1st responders (Police, Fire, EMS), and allowing for indoor scenario-based training capabilities.
- A \$3,127,171 project to improve the aging stormwater infrastructure along 9th Ave. and 6th Street in Port Dixie (Shalimar).

In addition, there are upcoming projects funded by surtax (additional grant funding for these projects has also been secured):

- Lewis Turner & Poquito Rd traffic signal (north Fort Walton Beach).
  - In 2026, FDOT will design the project and will likely draft an agreement for the County to pay for half of the construction cost with Surtax.
- Lloyd Street Drainage (central Fort Walton Beach)

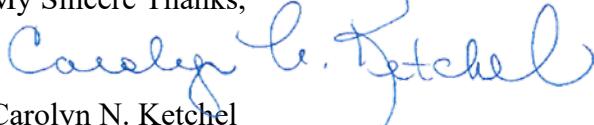
- This project includes stormwater modeling, pipe inspection, design and construction of stormwater infrastructure in the drainage basin that includes Lloyd Street and Mayflower Avenue and outfalls to Cinco Bayou.
- Beachview Drive Drainage (eastern Fort Walton Beach)
  - This project will alleviate the flooding that occurs on Beachview Drive at the intersection with Eglin Parkway near the Eglin Federal Credit Union. The project is being done in coordination with FDOT because Eglin Parkway also floods at this location.
- John King Road Widening (south Crestview)
  - Construction will occur in 2026. This project will provide dual left turns onto, and off of John King Road at SR 85.
- Santa Rosa Boulevard Improvements (Okaloosa Island)
  - Construction is scheduled for 2026 to improve Santa Rosa Boulevard between US 98 and the 1st Beach Park.
- College Blvd Multi-use Path (north Niceville)
  - Provides a multi-use path along the south side of College Blvd from Palm to Forest and the west side of Forest from College Blvd to Rocky Bayou.
- Traffic Management Center
  - Will attach to the Emergency Operations Center in Niceville and provide real-time monitoring and adjustment capabilities for traffic signals and arterials in Okaloosa County.

Surtax has been a win for our community. Please visit our website at <https://myokaloosa.com/bcc/infrastructureprojects> to learn more about how we have assisted in improving military readiness, addressed seven environmental and flood reduction projects, and helped save lives by providing additional law enforcement, safety signage and equipment. A citizen oversight committee, appointed by county commissioners, reviews and approves financial reports and makes recommendations to the Commission for projects in addition to the original needs list. Without surtax revenue, the completion of these projects would have required an increase of 19% of property tax.

In 2026, the citizens will once again have an opportunity to vote for extending this ½ cent surtax to assist the county in building and improving roads and bridges, funding essential law enforcement and public safety facilities, and addressing flood control and water quality improvements for another ten years to 2038. I ask you to please consider the good work that has been accomplished when you go to the polls to vote.

It is an honor to serve as your Commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



Carolyn N. Ketchel

District 2

County Commissioner

Okaloosa County, Board of County Commissioner