

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILL ANALYSIS

This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

BILL #: [HB 4023](#)

TITLE: Ave Maria Stewardship Community District,
Collier County

SPONSOR(S): Melo

COMPANION BILL: None

LINKED BILLS: None

RELATED BILLS: None

Committee References

[Intergovernmental Affairs](#)

14 Y, 0 N



[Ways & Means](#)



[State Affairs](#)

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill revises the charter of the Ave Maria Stewardship Community District (District) to remove approximately 1,001 acres from the District's boundaries. The bill authorizes the District to continue to provide water and sewer services in the areas removed from the District subject to an agreement between the Ave Maria Utility Company and the Collier County Water and Wastewater Authority.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

None

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

The bill revises the charter of the [Ave Maria Stewardship Community District](#) (District), an independent [special district](#) in Collier County, to remove approximately 1,001 acres from the District's boundaries. (Section [1](#))

The bill authorizes the District to establish and collect rates, fees, or other charges within the service area limits of the [Ave Maria Utility Company, LLLP](#), as of August 1, 2025, as approved in Final Order No. 2023-02 of the [Collier County Water and Wastewater Authority](#), and to discontinue water and sewer services to customers in those areas for non-payment. These service area limits are coterminous with the areas the bill removes from the District.¹ (Section [1](#))

The bill provides an effective date of upon becoming a law. (Section [2](#))

FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

The Economic Impact Statement for the bill states that the bill will have no fiscal impact as district services in the area are not needed and the district has no existing district assets or liabilities in the area. The bill is removing the same undeveloped area that was added to the district boundaries in 2023.

¹ See Ave Maria Utility Company, [Water Tariff](#), p. 3.3 (last visited Dec. 4, 2025).

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

Special Districts

A “special district” is a unit of local government created for a particular purpose, with jurisdiction to operate within a limited geographic boundary.² Special districts are created by general law, special act, local ordinance, or rule of the Governor and Cabinet.³ A special district has only those powers expressly provided by, or reasonably implied from, the authority provided in the district’s charter. Special districts provide specific municipal services in addition to, or in place of, those provided by a municipality or county.⁴ Special districts are funded through the imposition of ad valorem taxes, fees, or charges on the users of those services as authorized by law.⁵

Special districts may be classified as dependent or independent based on their relationship with local general-purpose governments. A special district is classified as “dependent” if the governing body of a single county or municipality:

- Serves as governing body of the district;
- Appoints the governing body of the district;
- May remove members of the district’s governing body at-will during their unexpired terms; or
- Approves or can veto the budget of the district.⁶

A district is classified as “independent” if it does not meet any of the above criteria or is located in more than one county, unless the district lies entirely within the boundaries of single municipality.⁷

Special districts are governed generally by the Uniform Special District Accountability Act (USDAA).⁸ The USDAA centralizes provisions governing special districts and applies to the formation,⁹ governance,¹⁰ administration,¹¹ supervision,¹² merger,¹³ and dissolution¹⁴ of special districts, unless otherwise expressly provided in law.¹⁵ The USDAA requires notice and publication of tentative budgets and final budgets.¹⁶ Certain budget amendments are allowed up to 60 days following the end of the fiscal year.¹⁷

Special districts do not possess “home rule” powers and may impose only those taxes, assessments, or fees authorized by special or general law. The special act creating an independent special district may provide for

² See *Halifax Hospital Medical Center v. State of Fla., et al.*, 278 So. 3d 545, 547 (Fla. 2019).

³ See ss. [189.02\(1\)](#), [189.031\(3\)](#), and [190.005\(1\)](#), F.S. See generally [s. 189.012\(6\)](#), F.S.

⁴ Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee, *Local Government Formation Manual*, p. 56 (last visited Dec. 4, 2025).

⁵ The method of financing a district must be stated in its charter. Ss. [189.02\(4\)\(g\)](#) and [189.031\(3\)](#), F.S. Independent special districts may be authorized to impose ad valorem taxes as well as non-ad valorem special assessments in the special acts comprising their charters. See, e.g., [ch. 2023-335, s. 1\(6\), Laws of Fla.](#) (East River Ranch Stewardship District). See also, e.g., ss. [190.021](#) (community development districts), [191.009](#) (independent fire control districts), [197.3631](#) (non-ad valorem assessments), [298.305](#) (water control districts), and [388.221](#), F.S. (mosquito control), See also [ch. 2004-397, s. 3\(27\), Laws of Fla.](#) (South Broward Hospital District).

⁶ [S. 189.012\(2\)](#), F.S.

⁷ [S. 189.012\(3\)](#), F.S.

⁸ [S. 189.01](#), F.S., but see ch. 190, F.S. (community development districts), ch. 191, F.S. (independent special fire control districts), ch. 298, F.S. (water control districts), ch. 388, F.S. (mosquito control districts), and ch. 582, F.S. (soil and water conservation districts).

⁹ See ss. [189.02](#) (creation of dependent special districts) and [189.031](#), F.S. (creation of independent special districts).

¹⁰ See [s. 189.0311](#), F.S. (charter requirements for independent special districts).

¹¹ See [s. 189.019](#), F.S. (requiring codification of charters incorporating all special acts for the district).

¹² See [s. 189.0651](#), F.S. (oversight for special districts created by special act of the Legislature).

¹³ Ss. [189.071](#) and [189.074](#), F.S.

¹⁴ Ss. [189.071](#) and [189.072](#), F.S.

¹⁵ See, e.g., [s. 190.004](#), F.S. (Ch. 190, F.S. as “sole authorization” for creation of community development districts).

¹⁶ [S. 189.016\(4\)](#), F.S.

¹⁷ [S. 189.016\(6\)](#), F.S.

funding from a variety of sources while prohibiting others. For example, ad valorem tax authority is not mandatory for a special district.¹⁸

[Ave Maria Stewardship Community District](#)

The Ave Maria Stewardship Community District (District) is an independent special district in Collier County created by special act in 2004.¹⁹ The District provides community development systems, facilities, services, projects, improvements, and infrastructure to the Ave Maria community.²⁰ The District is authorized to provide these services extraterritorially subject to an agreement between the District and the Collier County Board of County Commissioners or other applicable public or private entity as long as the provision of those services is not inconsistent with the Collier County Comprehensive Plan, the Growth Management Plan, and the Stewardship Overlay which implement the single special purpose of the District.²¹ The District is governed by a five-member board of supervisors elected to serve four-year terms by the landowners residing in the District on a one-acre, one-vote basis.²²

The District is authorized to impose ad valorem taxes, non-ad valorem maintenance taxes as authorized by general law, maintenance special assessments, and other special assessments.²³ The District may also collect user charges and fees for District services including, but not limited to, recreational facilities, water management and control facilities, and water and sewer systems.²⁴

In 2023, the District charter was revised to expand the District's boundaries by approximately 1,001 acres.²⁵ The bill's associated Economic Impact Statement stated that the expansion property would be developed similarly to Ave Maria and would require the District to install infrastructure as well as to issue bonds to fund the project.²⁶ In October 2025, Ave Maria Development, LLLP, the same development entity that began Ave Maria in 2005, stated that this 1,001-acre area is now intended for a privately financed, age-restricted community that will include its own amenities.²⁷ In August 2025, the Collier County Board of County Commissioners issued a resolution stating that the District's proposed boundary amendment was consistent with the County's adopted comprehensive plan and that they had no objection to the District's boundary amendment.²⁸

[Ave Maria Utility Company](#)

The Ave Maria Utility Company (Company) has provided water and wastewater services to the Ave Maria community since 2007.²⁹ These services include potable water, wastewater treatment, and reclaimed water. The Company's service area was expanded in 2023 to include the approximately 1,001 acres added to the District charter by the 2023 special act.³⁰ This expanded territory was still within the Company's service area limits as of August 1, 2025.

[Collier County Water and Wastewater Authority](#)

The Collier County Water and Wastewater Authority (Authority) is a county advisory board established in 1996 to regulate utility rates and related matters regarding non-exempt water and wastewater utilities in unincorporated

¹⁸ See, e.g., [ch. 2006-354, Laws of Fla.](#) (Argyle Fire District may impose special assessments, but has no ad valorem tax authority).

¹⁹ [Ch. 2004-461, Laws of Fla.](#)

²⁰ [Ch. 2004-461, s. 2\(5\), Laws of Fla.](#)

²¹ [Ch. 2004-461, ss. 3\(4\) and 4\(9\)\(h\), Laws of Fla.](#)

²² [Ch. 2004-461, s. 4\(4\)\(a\), Laws of Fla.](#)

²³ [Ch. 2004-461, s. 4\(14\), Laws of Fla.](#) The District may only impose ad valorem taxes if such levy is approved by the district voters in a subsequent referendum. [Ch. 2004-461, s. 4\(14\)\(a\), Laws of Fla.](#)

²⁴ [Ch. 2004-461, s. 4\(22\)\(a\), Laws of Fla.](#)

²⁵ [Ch. 2023-333, Laws of Fla.](#)

²⁶ Fla. House of Representatives, [HB 1027 Local Bill Economic Impact Statement Form](#) (Dec. 4, 2022).

²⁷ Ave Maria Development, [Frequently Asked Questions \(Oct. 24, 2025\)](#) (last visited Dec. 4, 2025).

²⁸ Collier County Board of County Commissioners, [Resolution No. 2025-164](#), August 26, 2025.

²⁹ Ave Maria Utility Company, [About Us](#) (last visited Dec. 4, 2025).

³⁰ See Ave Maria Utility Company, [Water Tariff](#) (last visited Dec. 4, 2025).

Collier County.³¹ Three of the five board members are required to have technical expertise in engineering, finance, and/or business administration. The remaining two board members are appointed on the basis of individual civic pride, integrity, and experience in any area of regulation. Board member terms are appointed to four-year terms and the Authority meets on a regular basis at its principal office and at other times and places as necessary.

Local Bill Forms

The Florida Constitution prohibits the passage of any special act unless a notice of intention to seek enactment of the bill has been published as provided by general law or the act is conditioned to take effect only upon approval by referendum vote of the electors in the area affected.³² A legal advertisement of the proposed bill must be placed in a newspaper of general circulation or published on a publicly accessible website³³ at least 30 days prior to the introduction of the local bill in the House or Senate.³⁴ The bill was noticed in the [Naples Daily News on October 10, 2025](#).

The House local bill policy requires a completed and signed Local Bill Certification Form and Economic Impact Statement Form be filed with the Clerk of the House at the time the local bill is filed or as soon thereafter as possible.³⁵ Under the policy, a committee or subcommittee may not consider a local bill unless these forms have been filed. The following forms have been submitted for the bill:

- [Local Bill Certification Form](#)
- [Economic Impact Statement Form](#)

RECENT LEGISLATION:

YEAR	BILL #/SUBJECT	HOUSE/SENATE SPONSOR(S)	OTHER INFORMATION
2023	HB 1027 - Ave Maria Stewardship Community District, Collier County	Melo	Became a law on June 23, 2023.

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee	14 Y, 0 N	12/11/2025	Darden	Hilliard
Ways & Means Committee				
State Affairs Committee				

³¹ Collier County, [Water and Wastewater Authority](#) (last visited Dec. 4, 2025)

³² [Art. III, s. 10, Fla. Const.](#)

³³ [S. 50.0311\(2\), F.S.](#)

³⁴ [S. 11.02, F.S.](#) If there is no newspaper circulated throughout or published in the county and no publicly accessible website has been designated, notice must be posted for at least 30 days in at least three public places in the county, one of which must be at the courthouse.

³⁵ Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee, [Local Bill Policies and Procedures Manual](#), p. 11 (last visited Dec. 4, 2025).