Tallahassee Democrat.

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# What happens when cities can no longer afford to serve? | Opinion

**Eleanor Warmack** Your Turn

Oct. 23, 2026, 5:04 a.m. ET

### Key Points

- The author argues that Amendment 3 could reduce local government budgets, forcing difficult choices.
- Reduced resources may lead to cuts in public services like parks, libraries, and recreation programs.
- The article suggests that budget cuts impact real people, such as children and seniors who use community facilities.

Imagine being a parent with several children you love equally.  One needs braces. Another needs new shoes. One needs help with a school project. Another needs medicine. And another needs you to drive them to practice.

Then imagine someone tells you that your household budget is being reduced—and you must choose which children will get what they need. How do you decide? Do you tell one child, *"You matter less than your brother"?*

Of course not. Because a parent doesn't have favorite children. A parent has responsibilities to all of them.

That is the difficult position local decisionmakers could face if Amendment 3 passes.

Local governments don't have the luxury of simply eliminating the things people depend upon. They must make choices among public safety, infrastructure, parks, recreation, libraries, cultural programs, maintenance, community facilities and countless other services that make a community work.

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And when the available resources shrink, the choices become increasingly difficult. It can mean fewer programs, shorter operating hours, higher fees, less maintenance, fewer recreation opportunities for children and seniors, deferred improvements, and older facilities waiting longer for repairs.

Consider this: when just one recreation staff member loses their job, as many as 25 children may lose the opportunity to participate in a recreation program. That is not simply a staffing reduction on a budget spreadsheet. There are 25 children who may lose access to the activities, relationships and positive experiences that help them grow and thrive. These are the kinds of difficult choices local leaders may face as resources become more limited.

The people making those decisions aren't choosing between things they care about and things they don't. They are choosing between needs.

That's what can get lost when we talk about property taxes only as numbers on a tax bill. Behind every local government budget are real people and real services. The playground that needs repair.  The athletic field that needs to be maintained. The community center where seniors gather. The pool where children learn to swim.

The recreation program that gives a child a safe place to belong.  The park where a family spends a Saturday together. These aren't just line items on a spreadsheet.

They are part of the quality of life Floridians have built in their communities.

And when resources become more limited, local leaders may be forced into choices that no parent would ever want to make:  Which child gets what they need—and which child has to go without?

That's why the consequences of Amendment 3 deserve more than a conversation about whether we want lower property taxes.

Floridians should also ask: What happens to the services our communities depend upon if the revenue supporting them is reduced?  And perhaps most importantly: Who will have to make those choices—and what will they be forced to give up?

Before deciding on Amendment 3, look beyond the promise of savings on a tax bill. Look at the community around you. Look at the services your family uses. Look at the people responsible for maintaining them.

And ask whether we are comfortable putting local leaders in the position of having to choose which of their community's needs matter most.

Because local leaders should not have to choose their favorite children. They should have the resources and flexibility to serve all of them.

*Eleanor Warmack is the Chief Executive Officer of the Florida Recreation and Park Association (FRPA), representing Florida's parks and recreation professionals and advocating for the vital role parks and recreation play in strengthening communities and enhancing quality of life.*

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