

Thomas R. Sawyer

Of Counsel

Stuart, West Palm Beach

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Practice & Industry Areas

- Real Estate Law
- Environmental & Land Use Law

Education

- University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL, LL.M., Real Property Development, 2021
- Cumberland School of Law, Birmingham, AL, J.D., 1986
- Samford University, Birmingham, AL, M.B.A., 1986
- University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, B.A., Business Finance, 1983

Bar & Court Admissions

- Florida, 1986

Overview

Tom Sawyer, certified by the Florida Bar as a Real Estate Specialist, joined Gunster following eight years of government service and 25 years of private practice in Stuart, Florida. Tom advises on all aspects of real property acquisition, development, financing, leasing and environmental permitting. He describes himself as a “dirt lawyer” at heart and believes his private practice experience brought added value to his government work.

While serving as Deputy General Counsel for Public Lands in the Office of the General Counsel at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Tom experienced first-hand the manner in which the wheels of state government turn. Tom worked closely with the Florida Cabinet aides to formulate monthly agendas for the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund of the State of Florida (TIIF). During this time, Tom was primary

counsel to the Division of State Lands (DSL) which is responsible for the issuance of Sovereign Submerged Land leases. Following his departure from the state capitol, Tom landed closer to his Stuart home in West Palm Beach to work in the Office of Counsel at the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). Tom's primary client at SFWMD was the Division Director for Real Estate and Field Operations.

Tom thrives in crafting creative solutions that can overcome the most difficult challenges sure to arise during the development of a real estate project. Tom comments that "no two transactions are alike" whether it is the unique qualities inherent in the land or simply mediating the divergent personalities involved. He focuses on maintaining a watchful eye over environmental justice issues that are critical to keeping Florida the most beautiful and attractive state in the union. In Tom's mind, scorched earth tactics are not of any value in getting a transaction to the finish line, and Tom believes a real estate practice is not a win-at-all-cost game. Tom takes great pride when a client tells him, "You are unlike any lawyer I have ever met," which he attributes to the notion that he personally cares about making a transaction function in a way that seeks to maximize benefit to all stakeholders.

Tom has served as a title agent since the mid-1980s with deep roots in the title insurance business, which is a skill he brings to every closing.

Representative Matters

- Acquisition by South Florida Water Management District of Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands project area fee and easement interests in exchange for the District's fee interests needed by a major Florida utility to cobble together its preferred/consensus distribution corridor originating from a South Florida nuclear reactor site. The exchange transaction effectively removed the utility company's distribution corridor out of Everglades National Park which entailed cooperative efforts with the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps); Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund of the State of Florida (TIIF); and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).
- Exchange transaction between South Florida Water Management District and a broadcast entertainment group to acquire additional fee interests in the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands project area in exchange for a Radio Broadcast Antennae Easement adjacent to Krome Avenue, Miami-Dade County, FL. This transaction also entailed cooperative efforts with DOI, Corps, and FDEP.

Honors

- *Stuart Magazine*, "Top Lawyers," Real Estate Law, 2023

Professional Associations & Memberships

- Florida Bar Association
- Martin County Bar Association
- Florida Bar Real Property, Probate, and Trust Law Section, Standing Member
- Real Property Council of Martin County, President, 1996, 2003
- Greater Martin County Board of Realtors
- Economic Council of Martin County
- Exchange Club of Martin County, President, 1989

Civic & Community Service

- LEADERShip Martin County – Class III
- Loan Executive Recruitment Chair, United Way of Martin County, 1996-97
- Board Member, Friends of the Lyric Theatre
- Martin County Gator Club, President, 1991
- Juvenile Justice Services, Inc., Arbitrator