

Letter from Mayor Eugene P. Flinn, Jr.



New Village Hall to Provide 'Improved Service for Residents'

PALMETTO BAY, Fla., (March 19, 2009) – *Mayor Eugene P. Flinn, Jr., recently commented on the lengthy process leading up to the selection of a site for a new village hall, the text of which follows:*

With the recent selection of a site for a new village hall, the Palmetto Bay Council has taken an important step toward improving the delivery of services to our residents and spurring development in the village's emerging "downtown" district.

At its March meeting, the village council authorized the village manager to enter into final negotiations to acquire the site known as Neighbors Food Store at 9705 East Hibiscus St, located in the village's Franjo Triangle/Island (FT&I) commercial district.

The purchase of this property is consistent with the many years of planning for the present and future success of our community. I am very proud of this site for our new village hall and the thorough and methodical process behind its selection.

This exciting step reflects community visioning, careful planning, and prudent savings of village funds over the past six years.

The right time to buy

The selection of village hall has not been a hasty process. On the contrary, for more than six years, several locations have been carefully considered. For many years, I have reported on the progress of our search. At the 5th annual State of the Village address, I stated: "Even as the search continued this year, the village council has been able to save more than \$1.4 million in funds specifically earmarked for a new village hall." That figure today has increased to \$2.4 million. Just last fall, in my 2008 State of the Village address, I remarked that "rising property values driven by speculation are ending and progress is being made with active planning for a permanent location in the very near future."

We cannot limit our view of village hall as "how cheaply can we get it." We need to view village hall as a 50- to 75-year investment in the delivery of quality services to the people of Palmetto Bay. Price and availability of a well-suited site are equally important. There are few locations in Palmetto Bay offering similar size and scope as the Neighbor's property, and even less can support a quality village hall.

The future is now

At a recent public meeting on this matter, a speaker identifying himself as a real-estate professional suggested the best time to buy a property is when you need that property. Well, clearly we need a property and your village council has correctly positioned us to the point where we can buy now – and we will purchase now.

Our current village manager has resisted renting additional space for our Palmetto Bay Policing Unit and the Building & Permitting department. The manager, rightfully, does not want to encumber additional lease exposure that would further drive up expenses and remove the benefit of flexibility, nor spend funds that could be directed into savings for a permanent village hall.

We deliberately kept our current accommodations small, leasing slightly more than a third of the total space at our current location, 8950 SW 152 St. The village continues to spend your tax dollars on rent, while not one penny goes toward equity. Annual rent exceeds \$176,000 per year (\$14,714 per month) for use of part of this outdated structure that challenges our mission to deliver quality service. Every dollar alleged to be saved by waiting for the commercial market to drop further is lost to rent and maintenance.

Leadership

A healthy commercial area requires a healthy commercial base. By selecting this site in the FT&I area, we are taking the lead on vitalizing this unique commercial district. I have often quoted our first councilman, Paul Neidhart, whose first word as an elected official was “charrette.” We developed a wonderful plan for the US1 commercial area through public participation. An integral part of this charrette recognizes that a civic center complex would be located within that area.

Leadership is the necessary ingredient for successful growth in this key area of our community. I reject any argument that now is *not* the time to buy. To the contrary, we have a leadership responsibility to take action and to buy into our downtown district, to demonstrate confidence in the strength of our charrette, and to pronounce that now is, in fact, the time to invest in our future.

How can we expect private investors to consider a Palmetto Bay commercial district if the Palmetto Bay government itself refuses to invest here?

Appraisals

There have been two appraisals on the Neighbors property. One valued the purchase price at \$4.4 million, the other at \$4.1 million. Our village manager has endeavored to get the final price below both appraisals.

We should not wait until the completion of the Miami-Dade County water and sewer project in 2010. Property values have long been suppressed due to the lack of this necessary utility service. The completion of this long-awaited project will drastically improve the value of the surrounding community, and demonstrate leadership and confidence in our city.

Opportunities

This property offers unique opportunities. First, it is not located in a coastal high-hazard area, which allows this site to serve as a suitable Village Emergency Operations Center. Second, this site offers both US1 and Franjo Road frontage – in the heart of the commercial development area. By bringing this quality property to its full potential, we will encourage investors and businesses presently waiting for such a tangible sign. This will lead to further positive development of area restaurants, small boutique shops, and professional offices, as envisioned by the charette.

While this site is located in a key commercial area, it is buffered from, but easily accessible to, the residential areas. This location will not require the village to rezone any residential properties. After all, a village hall does not belong in a residential area.

Additionally, by virtue of its proximity to Palmetto Bay Park, this site can provide overflow parking for large-scale events at the park, such as the annual “Slam Fest.”

This location is within walking distance of a major public transportation artery, the Miami-Dade Busway, thus providing needed “greening points” for a certified environmentally-responsible village hall. The site also could be used for future expansion, such as a privately-funded parking garage to provide stable access to transit for residents, which has been shown to have a direct and positive affect on foreclosure rates and the real estate market of an area in general.

This location will allow us the ability to provide state-of-the-art meeting facilities for the Council and our community. The facilities could be made available for community groups to hold suitable events.

This village hall will be so much more than mere “bricks and mortar.” It will be a vibrant community center where quality government services are easily accessible by all residents and businesses, and where community members may meet to continue the important work of improving our residential and commercial areas.

None of this happens by accident. None of this happens by waiting. None of this happens to an area that is neglected. With the purchase of this site for our new “home,” your village is exhibiting positive leadership, proper planning, nurturing, and good investment. The time is right. The time is now. Our community will be much improved by this very important step in the right direction – with this very important investment in the right area of Palmetto Bay.

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*Incorporated in 2002, **The Village of Palmetto Bay** is a vibrant community of 25,000 residents nestled between Biscayne Bay and So. Dixie Highway, about 15 miles south of downtown Miami. The Village is governed by a five-member Council and operates under a Council-Manager form of government. Dubbed “The Village of Parks,” Palmetto Bay offers an extensive system of attractive parks, unique recreational opportunities, and bay access. It also is home to several excellent public schools, and a robust commercial corridor along Dixie Highway offering a diverse range of restaurants, markets, and lodging. Specifically, the Village extends from the centerline of SW 136 St., south to the centerline of SW 184 St., expanding west to the centerline of South Dixie Highway (including the center island), and east to Biscayne Bay.*