

Sixth Annual State of the Village Address

'An Evening to Remember'

Presented by

The Honorable Eugene P. Flinn, Jr.

Village of Palmetto Bay

October 15, 2008

The stakes are high this year. It's going to be a challenging year for many, but I believe this municipality is well-positioned to prosper in these challenging financial times. Amendment 1 passed: a package of property-tax reform measures that reduced our property tax receipts from which we operate our village services. Some 70 percent of the electorate within Palmetto Bay approved this amendment, a loud statement for tax relief.

We thought we were finished with mitigation last year after the State of Florida passed the relief bill; but, as I cautioned last year, the County took it to court and a local judge found the law to be unconstitutional. We are hopeful that the County follows through on their pledge to end mitigation.

And, with the current housing crisis being what it is, property values are decreasing and Palmetto Bay has had to take on the responsibility of cleaning abandoned and foreclosed-upon homes. It appears that Palmetto Bay, along with so many Florida cities, is in the middle of a "Perfect Storm."

There is another cloud to the storm: the State has notified us that there will be a major decrease in revenue sharing due to reduction in sales tax. So far, the reduced contribution from Tallahassee totals \$110,000 dollars.

In spite of all this turbulence, I believe we have achieved safe harbor here in Palmetto Bay. We have many reasons to be optimistic as we mark the close of six years of growth and achievement, a period during which we made many wise and important investments in our community.

We got in right under the wire... through the leadership of this Council, we completed nearly all the key elements of our master plan just before the clouds started gathering. We were able to do the work we needed to do, at a cost-effective and accelerated pace, and now we find ourselves remarkably well-positioned for the uncertain economic period before us.

State of the Village

Tonight, I have the privilege of reporting to you on the State of the Village of Palmetto Bay. Throughout these past six years, we have seen so many improvements in our Village. There is so much for which we should be grateful and proud. It will be difficult to highlight it all in one short evening.

It has been my honor to hold such a privileged office as Mayor, especially during this unique time, and with so much support – the support of family, friends, colleagues... the entire extended family of Palmetto Bay. Thank you, all of you.

I also must say "thank you" to all our fellow-residents. None of this would be possible without you. Our Village continues to flourish as we work hard to nurture this wonderful place we are so fortunate to call home.

During this “Evening to Remember,” we will reflect on the end of an era, as two of our founding Councilmembers move on due to term limits. We will recognize the accomplishments of my good friends, Vice Mayor Linda Robinson and Councilmember Paul Neidhart, as they will soon be stepping down from the Council. Paul, Linda, thank you so very much for everything you have done for this Village.

Yes, tonight will be a bitter-sweet State of the Village for us all... Because, in keeping with our theme, we will look back tonight at the many exciting endeavors of the past year... and talk about what the future may bring.

Introductions

So, allow me to introduce your entire Village Council: again, Vice Mayor Linda Robinson, and Councilmembers Ed Feller, Paul Neidhart, and Shelley Stanczyk. Having served with these outstanding individuals, believe me when I tell you that the public is fortunate to have such committed representatives. In addition to their regular employment, each one remains responsive to the public, 24/7.

Please join me in recognizing our Village staff, many of whom have been with us from the inception of Palmetto Bay. These individuals are highly-professional and dedicated, and we all appreciate their hard work and diligence.

First, our Charter Officers:

- Ron E. Williams, Village Manager;
- Luis Figueredo and Eve Boutsis of Nagin, Gallop & Figueredo, Village Attorneys; and
- Meighan Rader, CMC, Village Clerk.

And from our departments:

- Desmond Chin, Director of Finance
- Ana Garcia, Director of Parks and Recreation
- Corrice Patterson, Director of Public Works
- Ed Silva, Building Official
- Lt. Gregory Truitt, MDPD, Village Police Commander
- Arleen Weintraub, Director of Planning & Zoning

I also wish to thank our sponsors and elected officials present tonight, specifically:

- Baptist Health South Florida;
- Curbside Florist & Gifts;
- Palmetto Bay Village Center;
- The Miami-Dade Police Honor Guard; and
- The students of Westminster Christian School, and Palmer Trinity School for the musical interludes.

In the Beginning

The Village of Palmetto Bay was founded with one regional park, one small neighborhood park, and a virtually unused lake park. Sidewalks were in disrepair, storm-water drains barely worked, street signs were missing or corroded, and residents had a strong desire to see more police officers patrolling their streets. Today, by any measure, Palmetto Bay remains one of the best examples of how well incorporation works, by greatly improving neighborhoods. It certainly has worked for us.

Many projects and programs introduced in our initial years are now coming to fruition. We are seeing the completion of our initial capital improvement plan. The success of six years of planning and implementation is becoming more evident by the day.

It was obvious to the incorporators of Palmetto Bay this is a residential community – built for families, with a well-balanced distribution of parks, A-rated schools, nice-sized homes with great yards, and a strong level of commitment to kids, families, and sports. Few communities compare to Palmetto Bay’s commitment to preserve our balanced, family-centered way of life. Each year the Village and its residents attempt to out-do prior achievements, and we will continue to do so, improving as we go forward.

Since the beginning and in the ensuing years, we’ve naturally kept our eye on the ball, so to speak. With Paul and Linda, your Council is dedicated to capitalizing on our strengths. And one of our greatest strengths continues to be our commitment to parks. Our Village is known as the “Village of Parks.”

Coral Reef Park

- We are still new to the business of operating a Summer Camp Program – having just completed our second year – but you’d never know it by the measure of success. Our dedicated Parks and Recreation team continues to provide an excellent – and affordable – product for Palmetto Bay families. In fact, this year, we added several new programs such as the Softball Camp (at Palmetto Bay park, too)... and, we enhanced others by adding more field trips and indoor activities... we extended the Camp from eight to nine weeks, which was really popular with working parents... and, it was obvious that the program is a success, as many of the camp-counselors returned for the second summer.
- Our Annual Village Picnic is loved by everyone because it offers a little something for everyone. Musical performances, great food, games, exhibits, and family activities. It’s a lot of fun and enormously successful with more than 4,000 people joining us this year. It keeps getting better as we add new events such as the “Battle by the Bay,” the baseball game pitting Palmetto Senior High against Coral Reef Senior – battling for bragging rights and the Mayor’s Cup, which went to Palmetto this first year. And, who knows? Maybe you might see some of your favorite elected officials in the dunk tank again this year. Warm up your pitching arm and have your dollars for charity ready.
- Speaking of Panthers baseball, thanks to Councilmember Neidhart for his sponsoring a resolution that named Field 3 in honor of Palmetto Senior High’s outstanding baseball team. This use of the field is a prime example of how local governments and the School Board can work together toward the same goal – taking care of our children.
- Also at Coral Reef Park, our popular Movie Night program continues to be a big draw. In fact, we have budgeted to buy our own equipment this year to show the movies. This will save a lot of money in the long run, while giving us greater flexibility to show wonderful, family-themed films, whenever and wherever we want.
- This park also is home to the large gazebo that remains an attractive central feature for our art shows, picnics, and large parties. We are looking for performers, schools, and other local talent who want a venue to play.
- Additionally, the modernized Coral Reef Tot Lot has drawn the attention of *South Florida Parenting* magazine, as we just received the “Kids’ Crown Award” for the “Best Park for Toddlers in 2008.” That, my friends, is an outstanding achievement.
- Toddlers, seniors, and everyone in between... we’ve got something for everyone here... like the heavily-used beach volleyball area; the Ken Robinson Meditation Garden; new benches; new trees; and a revitalized walking path.

- And by late 2009, we will have a modern, brand-new concession stand and community room – for all park users to enjoy. This new amenity will provide much-needed and long-overdue restrooms to the field sites. It will provide concessions for all park attendees, and will provide seasonal storage of 650-square feet that will be available to the Village and to all programs at the park. This building will benefit our ongoing programs, a partial list includes:
 - Tot-lot users;
 - Beach volleyball players;
 - Walkers;
 - Bicyclists;
 - Kite fliers;
 - Frisbee players;
 - Palmetto High;
 - Summer and Fall baseball programs;
 - YMCA programs including soccer;
 - Lacrosse;
 - Howard Palmetto Baseball; and
 - Broncos

We are working hard to provide amenities, programs, and activities at a park that is truly for all groups and all people – not just a few.

- This concession stand and restroom area will provide the ability to bring your kids to the park and not have to leave for a refreshment break. I'd like to see some quality specialty coffees for the morning playgroup parents.
- And let us not forget that we also provide a home for the Cultural Council's art show, "In the Park with Art," a wonderful community event that brings out residents, families, and many visitors to our Village. It'll be held on October 25th and 26th this year – see you there!

Perrine Wayside Park

- Heading south is Perrine Wayside Park... our Dog Park. I am so thankful to Dee Chess and Friends Forever Rescue, Inc., for their invaluable assistance to me with the design and construction of this top-notch park. It's the best dog park in Miami-Dade County – and incredibly popular... A wonderful place that's not just for the family dog, but the entire family.

Palmetto Bay Park

- Onward to Palmetto Bay Park... We took the original Perrine Park land, negotiated with the County for the adjacent seven acres, paying fair-market value, and expanded it... transforming it into Palmetto Bay Park, a state-of-the-art venue offering a wonderful diversity of activities and attractions for boys and girls, young and not so young, including the largest boundless playground in South Florida where children of all abilities can play together. Thanks to Dr. Feller for your assistance with this playground. It also offers new well-lit walking paths used by joggers and walkers; and a fully renovated community room for parties and meetings.
- We offer flag football for boys and girls on our expansive fields. And, residents can enjoy family activities, such as kite flying and Frisbee; and the renovated basketball courts are always in use.
- In the middle of it all, is our striking new concession stand, which draws you in with its distinctive architecture. This park is also home to our premier softball complex, one of the best in the nation, where, last March, we proudly hosted the prestigious "SlamFest" tournament. Over a two-day

period, it brought in participants and their family members from 36 high schools across Florida. Just last weekend, the Village was host to the first College Softball Tournament ever to be held in Miami-Dade County.

- The Skate Pavilion, also at Palmetto Bay Park, is a success story all its own, as we continue to draw talented and less talented skaters alike. There is a lot of family participation out there, too... well, that is if you count the moms and dads warily watching from the sidelines! Thank you, Paul, for inspiring this hugely popular amenity. The kids love it; in fact, this summer, some of the young enthusiasts took it upon themselves to host a fundraiser so the Village could do additional maintenance there. It was a real grassroots effort, showing the spirit of volunteerism in our community.

Thalatta and Bayside

- Our more recent acquisitions, Thalatta and the Bayside Library, are nearly at fruition. These parks have put the “Bay” back in Palmetto Bay. Thalatta remains one of the most serene parks in Miami-Dade County. When you visit this park, you’ll find yourself breathless with the splendor of the view of Biscayne Bay. I’m looking forward to the renovation of the carriage house so we can begin hosting small-scale events.
- And, the Bayside Library. Thank you Dr. Feller and Councilwoman Stanczyk for all your help on this project. Construction of our library park is nearing completion. It will be home shortly to a small community-based library and community room providing activities for our youngest to the oldest residents of the Village. Even County officials agree that our Palmetto Bay branch is located in one of the best locations. Libraries are awesome facilities – they not only encourage children to get excited about reading, but they are also great learning and social environments for adults. We look forward to the library opening just after the new year. I am also thrilled about the future partnership possibilities for additional child-, youth-, and family-programming in Palmetto Bay.

Total Parks Investment

Of interest, the total amount we have spent on making Palmetto Bay the most family friendly community in South Florida is ... \$16.8 million dollars, not including dollars spent on such items as landscaping, signage, plumbing, electrical, and the like. That’s right – almost \$17 million dollars has been spent or budgeted on parks improvements between 2002 and the current 2008-09 fiscal year.

That’s the equivalent of more than \$350 dollars per-year, per-household, over the past six years - a small amount, considering the large reward. \$350 a year to use some of the finest park facilities and recreation programs available in South Florida.

Uniform Sport Leagues Fees

All municipalities, and Miami-Dade County, charge organized league fees. Our charges are a realistic mechanism for the Village to ensure upkeep of the parks, maintenance, ensure the parks are revenue neutral. These fees help provide some relief to our taxpaying residents and represent the only way that non-residents contribute to the operational costs of these parks. Our fees are fair and responsible when you consider the outstanding parks system that we have developed.

The value a community places in its parks says so much about that community. Clearly, Palmetto Bay Parks has made – and continue to make – a strong statement about family livability. Special thanks to Director Ana Garcia, her Manager Fanny Carmona, Administrative Assistant Josie Bober, and the entire Parks & Recreation staff.

Family Livability

So, suffice to say our Village – our parks and along our streets – makes living easy and better for every member of your family, from toddlers to seniors – from singles to married couples – parents and grandparents – everyone. The Council knows well the importance of maintaining a family-friendly community. Of course, that’s why we all originally settled in what is now Palmetto Bay – we’re all parents (some of us grandparents); our kids grew up and continue to grow up here. We all know the value of families to a community and a community that’s all about family.

Comparing Our Parks...

I recently looked at Miami-Dade’s Parks and Open Space Master Plan available on the Internet. I was thrilled to see a parallel emerge between what they envision for the future and what we have already achieved right here in Palmetto Bay. We have certainly done extremely well by the County’s own standards.

For example: They imagine, ***“a future Miami-Dade County where every resident can walk within five minutes to a central neighborhood park and civic space for picnics, special events, informal play and socialization.”*** The walk might be a little longer for some of our residents, but certainly you can reach such spaces in Palmetto Bay by golf cart within five minutes. Thank you Councilman Paul Neidhart.

They also envision a time when, ***“Every resident can safely and comfortably walk, bicycle, or take transit to community parks, recreation center, and special use/sports facilities.”*** We’ve easily got this covered.

How about this one: ***“Existing streets are transformed into tree-lined boulevards and parkways that define the County’s urban form.”*** We achieved this goal too. As stated earlier, 600 planted trees, with more to come.

And, ***“Parks should provide for a balance of active and passive users.”*** In Palmetto Bay, this County vision is our reality. You can run the bases on a state-of-the-art softball field at Palmetto Bay Park or relax on a picnic blanket amidst its wide open green space. You can play baseball, lacrosse, or gather your friends for a game in the sand at our new beach volleyball courts at Coral Reef Park, or quietly read email passages under a quaint Meditation Garden gazebo.

“Public art, signage, and cultural/historic exhibits are integrated into every park...” We’re well on the way here, too.

And as a last example, their ideal Park system of the future would ensure that – quote – ***“The Parks department works with municipalities and the School District to provide public access to schools, parks, and recreation areas.”*** An example of our progress is the recently adopted resolution calling for extension of the use contract so that the Palmetto High School Panthers can continue to call Coral Reef Park Baseball Field 3 it home. In fact, a separate resolution proposed earlier this month would allow us to name the field the “Panthers Home Field.” Councilmember Paul Neidhart is behind both of these pieces of legislation.

Public Works

Though we continue to be widely recognized as “The Village of Parks,” we continue to be appreciated among our residents as the Village of Public Works. One thing is for certain: Public Works has been a huge priority since incorporation.

We have addressed many of the infrastructure necessities over these last six years, and I assure you, we will continue to do so. Because that's what our residents want. We're proud of the work we've done on your behalf. And I believe we've done it well.

One of the main reasons this Village is so responsive to resident needs is Corrice Patterson, our Public Works Director. She skillfully manages a remarkably lean staff consisting of Kristy Bada, her Administrative Assistant, Supervisor Danny Casals, and two other hard-working employees: Jimmy Pruneda and Tony Tomlin. It is amazing how much work is done by these five employees each year in this outstanding department. Public Works truly understands the meaning of "do more with less." This is a perfect example of small, efficient government.

Drainage continues to be the primary focus of Public Works. In 2008, we received \$800,000 dollars in appropriations from the State, of which we will match with dollars from our storm-water utility – your tax dollars at work – to continue numerous drainage programs through the Village. I, again, thank and recognize Olga Cadaval who works with the Council in identifying and processing the grants and appropriations that the Council has received.

One program that I am especially proud of is the very aggressive tree-planting program. At the direction of this environmentally-conscious Council, we planted 78 live oaks and 52 Japanese Blueberry trees during fiscal year '07-'08, mostly along the well-traveled thoroughfares and along commercial areas in the Village's southwest side. Combined with about the same number of trees planted the previous year, and the hundreds of shade trees recently introduced along park walkways and playground areas, we have installed more than 600 new trees into Palmetto Bay since incorporation. And there's another 130 on the way, budgeted over the next 12 months.

As a result of the significant amount of trees being planted, I am pushing for the Village of Palmetto Bay to be officially designated as a "Tree City USA" participant, a program of the national Arbor Day Foundation. Considering the volume of new trees here and the fact that, as a Village, we already officially observe Arbor Day, Palmetto Bay is well on its way to receiving this prestigious designation. This title helps present the kind of image our citizens want - it tells visitors, residents, and business owners that ours is a community that cares about the environment.

Speaking of green initiatives, we have installed traffic-calming devices of all types – including one traffic circle, three chicanes, and six traffic tables. How is this green? Such efforts not only make our streets safer for our kids, but they're environmentally smart, too. By slowing the traffic along our roadways, we are also fostering an environmentally-friendly Village by reducing carbon emissions. I hope everyone drives carefully around our schools and notices the modifications spearheaded by Public Works. They've conducted traffic studies, installed delineators, and worked with Miami-Dade County on cross walks. I'll just mention this again, the installation of traffic-calming devices slow cars down to ensure safer passage of our children to school every day.

Public Safety

Making our streets safer in school zones is a key function of our local law enforcement. But, of course, their reach goes much further by ensuring that all the streets of our Village are safe... So allow me to share a few words about our Public Safety program and the excellent service being provided by our Palmetto Bay Policing Unit under Commander Gregory Truitt.

The Village acted quickly within the first six years to enhance child safety by enacting a stringent anti-sex offender and anti-sexual predator ordinance for our area parks. We require background checks for those who work with children. Last year we updated our laws to coincide with the County parks rules, requiring

enhanced background checks resulting in more stringent child safety laws. This is the County-wide Shannon Melendi Law championed by Commissioner Javier Souto. The Palmetto Bay updates were so important that Commissioner Souto and the Melendi family personally attended the Council meeting to advocate for this ordinance. Their appearance was a strong statement toward the importance of protecting area children.

The Village has supported the police department and our children, by addressing crossing-guard costs and safety. The Village Council took on school crossing guards costs, reducing the cost of these services by \$26,000. The Village intends to put this money back into other child safety initiatives. That's tough negotiation by this Council. That's clear Council direction and that is one great job by Manager Williams. Child safety is – and must continue to be – Palmetto Bay's number one concern.

Take solace that our police are doing their job – and doing it well – by noting this important statistic: the number of arrests made in our Village this year is up by more than 100, as compared with the same period last year. The majority of these are for crime-prevention arrests, such as loitering and prowling, trespass, and traffic arrests – arrests made before the criminal has the opportunity to do harm. Our proactive approach provides the best opportunity to reduce crime in the Village, and we have challenged our officers to those ends.

Once again, I strongly encourage residents to join together and establish more Citizens' Crime Watch Groups, such as "Pinewood 181." I was so pleased to hear that Jarene Williams, who lives on 181st Terrace and 84th Avenue, has managed to successfully organize a solid base of concerned neighbors to work together to make that area of our Village safer for our kids.

Our Village Policing Unit will schedule a time to visit your homes to discuss just how easy – and smart – it is to get a group going. These groups often end up being more than just Crime Watch gatherings. They often open doors to great neighborhood networking opportunities and socializing.

If you attended our Village budget hearings just last month, you heard the Major J.J. O'Donnell advise that Palmetto Bay enjoys the lowest response time for any MDPD unit. That's impressive – and important to maintain.

Police can't be everywhere so please watch out for your neighbor. If you see something suspicious, call. It's always better to be wrong, than to be uncaring.

Our Officer Friendly Program continues to be an important and well received outreach program of the Village Policing Unit. Kids at our various elementary schools learn early lessons about personal safety, including stranger danger programs. These lessons keep them motivated to be responsible citizens.

And on Halloween night, you may see one of your Councilmembers in a squad car, working the area to help keep our kids safe. Each year, your Council participates in the annual the "Pumpkin Patrol," where we catch a ride with our Policing Unit officers and visit local neighborhoods to hand out candy and interact with the kids.

I'd like to take a moment to remember someone that left us too soon. Officer Randy Distefano will always be remembered as an original member of the Palmetto Bay Policing Unit; Palmetto Bay's first motorcycle officer; a loving husband; a conscientious neighbor, and a great friend. This Village owes a debt to Randy for his excellent performance – he was an exemplary officer.

Grants And Appropriations

Throughout my talk tonight I have focused on so many of the quality-of-life issues that affect us. From infrastructure to livability improvements, none of this would have been possible without significant help from Tallahassee along with the hard work of this Village Council team.

\$11,365,645 was the total announced at the 2007 State of the Village for grants and appropriations for Parks and Public Works projects – an incredible amount for which we were grateful to receive. As we all have noticed, this has been a very lean budget year for Tallahassee. Despite this, we were successful in returning with key funding. Here is the 2008 breakdown of state grants we received for this year:

- \$800,000 dollars for storm-water projects (primarily drainage);
- \$200,000 dollars for Thalatta Park;
- An additional \$135,000 dollars for Thalatta in the form of a Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program grant; and
- \$100,000 dollars for recycling initiatives.

I am therefore proud to report that, with this year's \$1.235 million in new dollars awarded – over six years, Palmetto Bay has received \$12,600,645 dollars.

I want to particularly recognize our State Senator Alex Diaz de la Portilla and House Speaker Marco Rubio for their assistance over the years, but particularly this past year, on the much-needed \$800,000 dollars for storm-water funding. This money will quickly be put to good use. We have numerous projects out to bid, in design, and in progress for certain neighborhoods that remain in need of drainage improvements. Thank you to the entire Dade Delegation.

Thank you State Senator Larcenia Bullard who is always there for us, as well. She also championed the \$100,000 dollars in recycling money this last year. Thank you, Senator Bullard.

And to another State Senator who represents us well – Gwen Margolis – I share heart-felt thanks. We are truly blessed with outstanding representation in Tallahassee and Senator Margolis is another strong friend of our Village. She has been there for us, both on the appropriations, as well as by helping us with transportation legislation.

We are thankful to the House for the assistance received from state representatives J.C. Planas and Julio Robaina, not only this year, but every year.

Along with House Speaker Marco Rubio, I also want to thank North Florida Representative, Speaker Pro Tem Marty Bowens, who spent part of her life down here in South Florida, graduating from Southwest High School. I personally felt like she was part of the Dade Delegation in how she assisted us in our funding endeavors.

The State of Florida has provided much-needed financial assistance to Palmetto Bay and it is the responsibility of your Council to spend it wisely. We have worked together to utilize this funding in a fiscally-responsible manner – always mindful that we, too, are taxpayers. We have watched your dollars. We will endeavor to move these projects along without delay.

Being Creative To Reduce Costs

We have also worked diligently to trim costs, when and where possible. In fact, here's a good example – among many: Earlier this year, rather than trying to muster up \$100,000 in taxpayer dollars for new

scoreboards at the softball complex at Palmetto Bay Park, your Village found a sponsor to cover that cost. As you might imagine, professional scoreboards are essential to a state-of-the-art complex. We worked out an exclusive agreement with Coca-Cola to sponsor our scoreboards. Smart move. Significant savings.

Specific Bond Appropriations

Additionally, we had received from the Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond Program specifically earmarked for the development of the softball fields. As a result, we have delivered on our commitments and created an amazing facility.

Delivering On Commitments

So much of our history is about delivering on commitments... It's also about having a dedicated staff in place willing and able to deliver.

I just can't say enough about the caliber of our team, your team, and the staff of Village Hall. The Palmetto Bay team is a proud and hard-working group of professionals... in fact it's an incredibly lean group, too. It's astonishing when you consider all they do to keep this Village of 25,000 residents running so smoothly – with fewer than 20 full time non-police employees on the payroll. Of course, that's not including the 42 members of our Policing Unit we have on the streets.

With such a lean team, we're able to provide all services that you want – and do so in a smart and efficient manner. Here again, another perfect example of small, efficient government.

Have we added employees over the six years? Of course. We added employees primarily in the parks in order to properly maintain and operate these wonderful facilities. It would be irresponsible to suggest that you build the best park facilities then fail to properly staff them.

Our Village staff watches the parks, provides programming, and keeps our streets neat and clean... They provide a helpful voice on the phone, friendly service at Village Hall; keep our homes and buildings safe and code-compliant. They manage your tax dollars, and spend it wisely.

'Mow & Go'

When this Village was incorporated, residents were clear - they didn't want too much government. They didn't want a Village government to dictate how long your grass should or shouldn't be, or to impose other restrictive measures. But, this philosophy is changing somewhat as a result of the foreclosure crisis and its impact on our neighborhoods. The "mow-and-go" ordinance will ensure that foreclosed homes are taken care of aesthetically, that we are stepping in on behalf of the neighbors. These properties must be maintained from a health and safety standpoint. Thanks to Vice Mayor Robinson for sponsoring the law that allows us to care for your community.

By no means is this easy work, but our staff – your staff – has stepped up to the task. To date, we have cleaned 30 properties and through our efforts; 34 were cleaned by either the absent owners or the mortgage companies. Thank you, Manager Williams, Public Works, and our Code Compliance staff for working so diligently.

Finance

Village financial management is secure. Our initial \$2.5 emergency reserve remains untouched – locked away. We continue to save money each year, despite paying mitigation, and we continue to receive unblemished audits every year. Thank you, Director Desmond Chin. Another Department that may surprise you when you discover that only three individuals manage to keep us prosperous – thanks to Marti Brasovan and Dorothy Henderson for your diligence under Director Chin's leadership.

Proper financial management has allowed your Council to make significant investments over these years. Last year, I advised you that our budget for services was operating on only 1.8 mills of property tax revenue - 1.8 mills. The difference between what we are paying in property tax and the operation of our Village government is the mitigation fee paid to Miami-Dade County. While mitigation increased from .57 to .63, the Village maintained its current 1.8 mills for operations – we are determined to be fiscally responsible.

October 1, 2008, marked the start of our 7th budget year. This year's budget is available, as always, online. The operation budget total for this current budget year is \$21 million. This provides for the following expenditures:

- \$1.4 million on Parks operation.
- \$6.4 million on Police, including school crossing guards
- A half-million dollars on Public Works, including the maintenance and operation of the roads and other infrastructure.

A second part of the budget is our capital projects. The entire budget for the 08/09 fiscal year is \$7 million. This portion of the budget funds the capital improvements, such as the Public Works drainage and traffic-calming initiatives, parks construction, and other non-recurring expenses.

Both the operational and capital budgets represent the investment we continue to make in our community. The entire budget should be regular reading. In August of each year, the proposed budget is online so you can be fully prepared to participate in the public budget workshops and hearings.

Mitigation And Legal

The Village Council has taken a strong, proactive position toward ending mitigation. The Village directed the filing of two lawsuits against Miami-Dade County to end mitigation. The Village anticipates, with County support, the amicable resolution of mitigation.

We are hopeful for a final mitigation relief this year that will include some return of the money budgeted. The die was cast for ending mitigation when Commissioner Seijas brought forward a resolution to end mitigation for Miami Lakes for the 06/07 budget year.

None of this would have happened if Mayor Bermudez of Doral, Mayor Slaton of Miami Lakes, and I had not pushed the issue along with our Councils.

The levels of support varied, but we did achieve successes including the creation of a Mitigation Review Task Force by the Miami-Dade County Commission. This Task Force determined unanimously that the County was making a profit off mitigation and that mitigation should end. The County had four representatives and each affected municipality had one representative. I'd like to personally thank our representative to this task force, Brian Pariser. Thank you, Mr. Pariser. This committee may well have been the main turning point in changing the opinion of the Board of County Commissioners toward ending mitigation.

I'd like to express our gratitude to the Village's legal team for their strong advocacy and defense of the Village Council's decisions. The Village has a vision that is not only administered through our local laws, Comprehensive Plan, and Zoning regulations, but, the enforcement taken after the decisions are made.

The Village has made a commitment to spend Village resources wisely and to ensure that it protects its decisions – for the benefit of the entire community.

Office of the Village Clerk

We are proud that our Village Clerk, Meighan Rader, and her staff – again, a lean staff – she and Ana Gomez manage the entire function – for their quick response to resident’s records needs. Many records are online for 24/7 access or are available via email. The proposed budget is always available, weeks in advance of the budget hearings. We maintain our Village codes on Municode, an online resource that can be accessed directly or through our Village website.

Our complete agenda packages are posted on line in advance of meetings. There is also a separate “agenda only” document that is a much more quick and easy download and view. Recently, the agenda packet has been made available for download in sections so that residents can access portions of interest quickly.

Village Communications

In every family, in every relationship, communication is key. And we have made great strides in this area. Along the lines of being environmentally friendly and fiscally responsible, we have developed an informative electronic newsletter called *e-Currents* to keep you up to date on key events, important news, upcoming Council meetings, zoning hearings and the like... to view photos of your kids taken at Summer Camp and during Earth Day and on the first day of school... And even though it’s not scheduled to officially launch until November, we successfully tested an early version of *e-Currents* during Tropical Storm Fay and when Hurricane Ike brushed by us last month. It worked extremely well. We even used *e-Currents* to remind folks of this evening’s State-of-the-Village event. Thanks to our newest member of the Village family, Bill Kress – our Public Information Officer. He is the latest addition to the Clerk’s office and we are fortunate to have him.

I also continue reaching out to my friends and neighbors with the personal electronic updates that I have sent out since day one of my election in 2002.

I also wish to mention the launch of another important communication tool: GovQA. This internet-based program, accessed from the Village’s homepage, allows residents to submit questions and concerns directly to the Village – from the comfort of your own home. Whether it’s a tree down in your neighborhood, a concern about canal erosion, or how to apply for a garage sale permit, you’re guaranteed a response.

I’d like to thank Councilmember Stanczyk for these recent efforts to provide increased public access. Additionally, in order to insure that residents had every opportunity to be heard, she sponsored an ordinance was adopted that re-arranged our previous agenda pattern. Now, residents speak first, rather than having to wait until the end of a meeting. This has opened the door to many great, fresh ideas and also is a smart approach to removing any barricades that individuals may have previously faced when it came to addressing their government representatives.

We also held numerous public forum workshops and town hall meetings. By whatever name you want to call them, these public meetings were held throughout the year on various issues including:

- The yearly Hurricane Workshop at Deering;
- The yearly public Budget Workshops; and
- The Mortgage & Foreclosure Forum; to name a few.

Building Services

Again, services continue to improve. Thanks to Building Official Ed Silva for his diligence in improving the streamlining of services provided by our Building Department. In 2007, we made a wise choice and decided to make the positions of Building Official and Building Office Manager Village positions. Thanks to Gladys Javier for being Ed's right-hand person.

The recent story in Community News wherein Official Silva was given praise for his kind, sympathetic treatment of a resident is evident that we did the right thing. Additionally, they listened to the suggestions of the public and the Building Review Committee and have expanded hours and installed an expedited call-in inspection service.

I also want to mention the hard-working employees of CAP, our outsourced service providers, who provide building services support for our Village: Carlos Bertot, Yocelyn Cassau, David DeJonge, Joseph Garcell, Carlos Gonzales, Tomas Menendez, Carlos Naumann, Felix Pousa, Aurelio Ramos, Morelia Rodriguez, George Sariago, Bert Saymon, Elisa Vera, and Natalie Winters.

Community Development

We're safe in declaring victory by building and providing an amazing park system during the past six years. And it can only get better. In fact we're looking at many ways your parks will be enhanced over the next months and years. So stay tuned. Dust off your library card for the Bayside Park opening and get your cameras ready for sunrise shots of the sunrise over Biscayne Bay at Thalatta Park. We've only just begun.

Green Initiatives

Our newest Councilmember, member-elect Howard Tendrich, will be of great assistance on various green initiatives and will continue the work of the Council on additional greening of our code, including assisting me in completion of the designation of Palmetto Bay as a Tree City USA, and adding important greening elements to our Village code.

Everyone has heard me talk about the seven P's: "Police," "Parks," "Public Works," "Planning and zoning," "Public Schools," "Participation" and, the reason for it all, its "People." Now, let me introduce the R's: Reduce, Re-use, Recycle. With this motto we need to not only act locally, but also affect globally.

We continue to remain concerned and determined to do all that we can to protect and preserve our environment. Some of the small, but important, steps that we have taken include the re-usable water bottles given at past Village picnics, the water jugs for Council's use at our meetings, of course, our ongoing tree-planting program, and the traffic calming devices that also help reduce carbon emissions. Don't forget as you leave this evening, staff will be handing out Palmetto Bay blue tote bags – that are actually very green... 100% recyclable and reusable, to be used at our local market.

Earth Day in the Village this year focused heavily on our kids and family... Ask any local student, aged five to eight, if they remember "Palmetto Bay's Earth Days" this year. The answer likely will be a resounding yes! The lady bug release we hosted was geared to encourage kids to take home and share with their families' earth-smart lessons on how to fight common garden pests – by using hungry Lady Bugs.

Also during Earth Week we hosted a neighborhood clean-up (thanks to the efforts of the Alexander Montessori School students and several concerned residents), and a bicycling event where the participants learned about Palmetto Bay's incredible Pine Rocklands and the South Florida Water Management District's flow way project at the Deering Estate.

These events were a good first-year effort. And we're going to build on it. Thanks to the Green Mobility Network, Ludovici and Ludovici, Golden Rule Seafood, EDC, Miami-Dade Transit, the Deering Estate, Jason Neal of Waste Management, Evan Skornick of South Florida Water Management, and Dr. Jack Fisher of Fairchild Tropical Gardens.

Village I-Bus

You either believe in mass transit or you don't. I do – you can't have smart growth without it. I remain a huge supporter of the Village's IBus. We are one of the few communities properly spending CITT funds. Proper spending – government – are terms not often enough expressed together. This Council has worked hard to make it part of the culture of governance in Palmetto Bay. Proper spending in government is not a contradiction in Palmetto Bay.

I am proud of the creativity and diligence of staff – you give us a challenge, such as encouraging and motivating people to ride public transit, and we will tackle it. Ridership keeps increasing, thanks in part to soaring gas prices – and rising awareness of our dependence on fossil fuels.

Kudos to Councilmember Stanczyk for participating in a Sunshine meeting between me and Julie Goldman, the General Manager of the Falls. We hope to coordinate a holiday and regular fixed route shuttle service to take residents to and from major shopping areas to alleviate traffic and also continue to help the environment.

Economic Development

Another new effort – an exciting green effort for the future – the newly planned weekly Open Air Farmer's Market. This outstanding endeavor will begin on November 2nd on Perrine Avenue, just in front of the historic Chamber South/Economic Development Council building. These markets are awesome – they spark interest in our community, you can buy produce from local vendors, thus helping to reduce our carbon footprint, and you can spend a nice morning visiting with neighbors and meeting new friends.

I am told that there is a skate shop that opened near the new Palmetto Bay Park – more economic development and the beginning of resident friendly redevelopment... What we're seeing is economic development from the seeds planted at this park.

Planning and Zoning

So much of our progress in the area of economic development can be traced back to our hard-working Planning and Zoning team led by Director Weintraub. The behind-the-scenes work leading up to the launch of our Farmer's Market being just one example.

Again, let me express my gratitude to Director Weintraub and Attorney Boutsis for their hard work on the Zoning Code – these laws are important as we implement the policies set by our Comprehensive Development Master Plan and the charrettes.

And what better time to mention the lean team in our Planning and Zoning division: Efren Nunez, Jian Santana, and Vanessa Bencomo. Again, small staff, significant amount of work. Thanks to you all.

Additionally, two programs began in 2007 that are vital components to the overall economic development of our Village: Art In Public Places and Historic Preservation. Both programs directly influence the image of our Village as an attractive and inviting location, whereby increasing the viability of Palmetto Bay as a place where new businesses and residents may wish to settle.

And just last night, at our Village Zoning Hearing, the Council made it possible for a hub of locally owned restaurants to open up at 168th Street and Old Cutler Highway – thanks to the support of the neighbors who came up to the microphone to express not only their approval of this plan, but their gratitude that there will now be restaurants nearby where they can walk or ride their bikes. Another true, green initiative...

Water & Sewer

Not enough is said about the positive working relationship between the County, Palmetto Bay, and local community-based organizations such as the Economic Development Council of South Miami Dade – or EDC.

We all cheered for the beginning of infrastructure improvements along the US-1 commercial corridor. The actual groundbreaking ceremony was held last Friday, October 10th. Actual digging started this week. Special thanks to Councilmember Paul Neidhart who envisioned a greater sense of community for us – his hard work is the reason behind the shovels turning.

Thank you, EDC, which includes both John Breder and Paul Neidhart, for their 15-plus years of hard work on this project. Thank you also to the voters who approved the General Obligation Bonds that are a large part of this project – taxpayers never get enough credit. Thanks also to County Commissioner Sorenson for bringing this project forward. As she stated at the ground-breaking ceremony – private investment follows public investment. This is a great investment. Expect better businesses to be attracted to Palmetto Bay as a result.

Other Initiatives

I look forward to working with our neighboring municipalities to address regional issues in this next year. Neighbors like South Miami, Pinecrest, Cutler Bay, Homestead, and Florida City.

Along this same line, we need the County to reach out and work with these municipalities and its residents when they explore the feasibility of the Miami-Dade Transit study wherein the busway could become a managed lane – that would allow for a limited number of cars to use it for a fee. This study needs to involve the area stakeholders and the surrounding communities we are committed to providing a voice for our residents on any proposed project.

Finally, I am in discussions with our newly-elected School Board Member, Dr. Larry Feldman, on an educational initiative that would involve the area municipalities. Working together, we can strengthen opportunities for our children.

More details on all these initiatives will be forthcoming as they are developed through the Village Council process. Stay attentive and stay involved.

The Village of Palmetto Bay's First Vice Mayor & Councilmember

We experience a bittersweet first in our sixth year – the close of an era where we lose our first Councilmembers to term limits, our first Vice-Mayor, Linda Robinson, and Councilmember Paul Neidhart.

There are so many achievements and improvements to the Village that were a direct result of the efforts of these two outstanding individuals. I have mentioned some already, but indulge me for a moment. This list is certainly not all-inclusive, otherwise, we'd be here all night.

First, **Vice Mayor Linda Robinson**, fondly known as “the mother of Palmetto Bay:”

- ◆ From the beginning, Vice Mayor was liaison to the Planning, Zoning and Code Enforcement Advisory and the Public Information and Community Awareness Committees. This last committee was transformed into the Special Events Committee. So, each time you attended our picnic and had a great day – you could thank Vice Mayor Robinson for this – she and the committee did an excellent job
- ◆ Served as a non-voting member of the Building and Permitting Advisory Committee. If you have a positive experience in that Department, tip your hat to her. The Vice Mayor has always been and remains committed to customer service.
- ◆ Her experience in the field of real estate, led her to begin meaningful discussion with the public and she, almost single-handedly, organized the public forum wherein she moderated a panel of experts. This forum led to her sponsoring the ordinance on abandoned homes and lot maintenance. You can thank her for beautifying the Village with this effort.
- ◆ And, personally, I want to thank her for her compassionate and soothing presence on the Council. Others will thank her, too, for being my calming influence.

Now, to **Councilmember Paul Neidhart** – the very first Council member, as a matter of fact. In September of 2002, he ran unopposed for his current seat – a tribute to the name he has made for himself in this community. His efforts as a Councilmember include the following:

- ◆ The first person to utter the word “charrette” and the person who initiated the vision for the Franjo Triangle/Commercial Island district improvements;
- ◆ Liaison to the Community Services and Public Works Advisory Committee. This commitment to insuring that public works’ needs are met continued. He remained diligent in his contact with the Public Works Department, initiating several street re-paving projects and traffic calming devices.
- ◆ We can also thank Councilman Neidhart our own “kid at heart” for his constant interest in improving the quality of life for our young residents. The gazebo at Coral Reef Park was host to the first concert – The Mosquito Heads played – thanks to him. Additionally, he listened to residents talk about fun, group activities and thus beach volleyball came to fruition. The real challenge there is not how hard to spike the ball, but trying to find a time when those courts are not in use.
- ◆ The Palmetto Panthers can thank him, too. Paul was instrumental in meeting with staff and the school representatives to negotiate the agreement that allowed the baseball team to have continual use of Field 3. Additionally, naming the field Panthers Home Field gives the young men the sense of permanency, knowing that they can consider us their home.
- ◆ And, the skate park – probably the most active amenity our parks have to offer. This is an ideal activity for kids to meet like-minded kids and really show their stuff – the athleticism involved in doing an "Ollie" is serious.
- ◆ Throughout his efforts with several community organizations, such as his long-term service in Rotary, Palmetto Bay Business Association, and EDC, Paul has served as the consistent ambassador for the Village. And, as stated previously, 15 years of effort went into the US-1 Commercial Corridor infrastructure project. Thanks, Paul, because of you, our Village will grow and flourish.

And, if you saw the TV news recently, you’ll know the King of the Road is Paul and his golf cart. He realized that golf carts were a great way to be environmentally-conscious and also a nice way to connect

with your neighbors. It's much easier to wave hi to friends when you don't have windows to roll down. Thanks again, Paul.

Conclusion

I personally enjoy the responsibility – the opportunity – to stand before you, my fellow residents and taxpayers, to provide this yearly report. I think all elective representatives should provide updates in a state of their districts. The report provides focus. It's accountability.

As I mentioned, this report has been special in a bittersweet way. We also recognize two of our initial Councilmembers, Vice Mayor Linda Robinson and the first-ever elected Councilmember Paul Neidhart. More than mere representatives, for years they have been our friends, our neighbors.

This Council has brought us wonderful change over these last years. Not merely good, but great change for this area. And this change would not have been possible without the “Ps” that I often mention. But there's yet another “P” worthy of note – “Participation” from so many of our area residents that leads us to another “P” - “Positive Change.”

Thank you Paul and Linda for being integral parts of the positive change. Tonight, we close an era.

I believe that we in Palmetto Bay have experienced positive change over these last six years and I want us all to continue to move forward. After all, Palmetto Bay represents the type of community that other communities want to emulate.

I hope that you'll leave here feeling that this Council continues to prepare our community well to face whatever challenges and victories the future may bring. I encourage all of you to become involved or remain involved in your government.

Again – it's not “see you next year,” rather, it's “I'll see you throughout the year.”

Good night and thank you for being such an active part of these first six years.

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