

State of the Village 2010: The Village of Pinecrest- it's a paradise!

Mayor Cindy Lerner

At the beginning of 2009, I stood before you to present my first State of the Village address. My goals for the year were to create a new partnership with the Council, residents, AND to invigorate our schools, and businesses, by building a much stronger sense of community in the Village. We are here today in the gardens complex as it is emblematic of the themes of my address, and of my administration's goals. We live in a community with a rich history, beginning with the creation of the Gardens, formerly Parrot Jungle, we have a wealth of residents who settled and pioneered this community, many of whom are still here adding to the rich fabric of our lives. In these 22 acres central to the Village we have all the ingredients for community well being, and we are well on our way to create a world class community, with physical, spiritual, educational resources among the best in South Florida. By creating connections between us, and offering opportunities for young and old alike to enrich us and each other, we will reach our goals. Pinecrest Gardens offers us a setting to bring cultural arts, physical and spiritual health and lifelong learning together to enrich all our lives. By involving you in future planning and programming, we will have met all the goals that I believe local government should attain.

My view of good governance includes several principals that I hope we will live up to.

The first principal is: Involving the residents in decision making, makes for good decisions. So our residents must be well informed, and have opportunity to participate, and comment. I would like to share with you what we have done to make good on that principal.

The Village Council meetings provide an opportunity for residents to speak on agenda items in an open and non threatening environment, and allow the councilmembers to have a real dialogue among themselves in order to understand each others concerns, respond to citizen's concerns and create solutions. They are now streamed live over the Internet. This provides far more access to what the issues deliberations and decision making of your local government is. It provides the access, beyond what law requires in terms of open government, meetings and I invite you to take a peek. All meetings are archived so you can access a specific topic and the discussion, and all supporting documentation after the fact, in a very user friendly format.

We have added an additional meeting each month, known as the "Committee of the whole", to allow for your Council to discuss and have dialogue with each other about various issues, we must plan for, and think about, without the pressure of coming to a vote at that moment. Those are open to the public for input as well.

And of course we provide monthly E-News to allow residents who do not attend meetings a glimpse into the issues and decisions the Council is making on their behalf. It includes a profile of a member of the Village staff, a member of the

Pinecrest Business Association, a crime prevention tip, of the month and the community calendar as well. The readership of the E-News is growing each month, but still fairly small, so I encourage you all to share the news with neighbors to help us expand our reach.

This year, we have included in the budget the development of a new web site. The current one has served the Village for thirteen years, and with current electronic Internet capabilities, it was time to update and make the site more user friendly. Under the watchful and competent eye of the village clerk, Guido Inguanzo, the web site is continually updated with useful information and notifies the community of important events. The new site should be complete by the summer.

I have also initiated several new advisory councils, made up of community volunteers in order to provide a forum for informal discussion regarding initiatives, open dialogue between council and the residents to solicit your input and to help develop future leadership to move the village forward.

The **Education Advisory Council**, which has met monthly since January 2009, includes our five local school principals, the PTA parents, sometimes teachers, Dr. Larry Feldman, school board member, Ellen Book our librarian, and even empty nesters who are still involved with our schools, and care about them. My goal is to provide a forum whereby the Village of Pinecrest can be a facilitator for strengthening our schools; after all, these are what draw young families to move to Pinecrest, so we have a responsibility to help keep them first class. We have listened to the concerns of the principals and parents and are working on developing additional tutoring and study hall options and resources, as well as increasing the after school enrichment classes offered at our community center. We have brought in speakers to inform us of the Green Schools Challenge, walk and bike to schools initiatives, organic gardening, and development of a compact between the Village and the school district. My newest initiative, and one that we are all excited about, is to create a private fund raising campaign to have a smart board in every class in every school in Pinecrest- For those of you who do not know what a smart board is, I will share with you what I just learned when acting as principal for a day at Pinecrest Elementary school. Ms Diaz informed me that the grant of \$10,000 that she receives from the Village of Pinecrest each year, last year went for three smart boards. So she took me into a 5th grade science class to observe the class learning experience with the smart board. I was blown away. A smart board allows for everything that can be accessed on a computer and the Internet to be brought to the smart board, an intelligent whiteboard on the wall of the classroom, and to be an interactive tool for students to be far more engaged in the classroom experience.

All new schools being built in the county have these boards in each classroom. So our older schools and they are all older, even if some enjoy a new wing, are at a technological disadvantage. Since the role of our advisory group is to determine how we can help to facilitate strengthening our public schools, it is only fitting that we help develop an ambitious campaign to raise the dollars, privately and by grants to assure

we have smartboards in every classroom in every school in Pinecrest. We are working with the Pinecrest Business Association to power up the Taste of Pinecrest, by establishing this ambitious but very achievable goal. We will have a marketing campaign developed, and I am looking for those major \$10,000 sponsors to step forward and lead us down the path to reaching that goal.

I also must add congratulations to Mr. Weiner, Palmetto Senior High School's fabulous principal, for being nominated as Region 5 principal of the year.

The **Transportation Advisory Council** has met under the leadership of Councilmember Joe Corradino to solicit input from residents about transportation problems and to propose solutions. We held a public workshop in January and invited the Citizens Independent Transportation Trust director, and Pinecrest resident Charles Scurr, to present and inform residents of how the municipalities in the county can use their allocations. As a result of the discussion there, the transportation advisory council followed up on that as the first topic to focus on and the council then moved the item by asking for a feasibility study to see whether to develop a circulator/ trolley and the potential for serving the needs of the Village residents and reducing our collective carbon footprint is great.

The advisory council next focused their discussion on the need for sidewalks along certain highly utilized streets where children are walking to bus stops and where they would, as we have since learned, be able to safely walk to school or to our community center and parks if there were sidewalks. The Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization is working with the Florida Department of Transportation, and Miami-Dade Public Schools to support the "Safe Routes to School" program. Growing up here in Pinecrest in the 60s, I walked three blocks to Palmetto Elementary and rode a bike to Palmetto Junior, now middle school. The MPO advises us that 40 years ago half of all school children in the nation walked to school, today less than 10% do and less than 2% travel by bike. Individuals are 65% more likely to walk in a neighborhood with sidewalks and safe routes to school programs can increase walking and bicycling by 20-200%.

Going forward, we will be utilizing the CITT generated allocations to conduct traffic calming analysis, and recommendations, as well as sidewalk and bike path recommendations which will all fit into an eventual transportation master plan for the Village.

We have also had dozens of very specific intersections of local hot spots identified, and reviewed the US 1 Intersection Study conducted several years ago, which merits follow up as well. Finally we have initiated a feasibility study approved by Council several months ago to determine whether there is enough interest and would be sufficient rider ship to establish a trolley system in and around the Village. In addition to reducing our carbon footprint, providing a transit system to take people to Metrorail station, or just shopping at Dadeland, South Miami or The Falls, we can reduce the intense traffic crunch at our schools by developing a school route for students who live

within the two mile limit for eligibility to ride the school bus, AND we can provide students with transportation after school to parks and community center and library.

The **Pinecrest Gardens Advisory Committee** under the leadership of Councilmember Nancy Harter last year, and Karen Mashburn this year, has overseen the continued updating and implementation of the botanic master plan, has heard presentations from the Miami Beach botanic garden director Laura Jamison and from the volunteer coordinator at Fairchild Tropical Gardens, Arlene Ferris, about how to create a strong volunteer program at our gardens. They also heard from the staff director of the county historic preservation board to learn how the preservation board must review any and all improvements to the gardens historic designated areas. The committee also reviewed new projects for the gardens and approved, such as the Garden Pop, the installation of a new waterfall at the entrance as a result of a donation from Pinecrest Garden Club and the development and creation of a Secret Garden as a result of a donation from the Community Gardens Charitable Fund. They recommended the Council move forward with the structural re-organization by separation of the gardens from the Parks Department, making a stand-alone department with the project, the hiring of a new Executive Director for the Gardens and to hire lighting consultants to design an artistic lighting setting for nighttime events. Finally they heard from the former Banyan Bowl Committee to provide them with their final report which had recommendations as to how to improve the amphitheatre in order to conduct theatre and musical programming and after meeting with Miami-Dade cultural arts director Michael Spring, and hearing his recommendation to go forward with an analysis of the feasibility of developing the bowl into a cultural arts center, AMS, an arts and entertainment consultant has been retained and will analyze the potential and develop a business plan.

Going Green Advisory Council, which began as a result of my signing the U.S. Mayors Climate Control agreement committing the Village to reduce its impact on the environment. Our first advisory council meeting in April, enabled us to learn together as a community how we can reduce our impact on the planet, and save taxpayer dollars by becoming more energy efficient, reusing and recycling and change old habits. We heard from local experts, green vendors and organizations. We assigned committees to research recycling systems for the municipal buildings, parks and gardens, and will be asking council to approve the proposal this month when I propose a resolution that will direct the manager to develop a Green Action Plan for the Village, to include the recycling program, revise our procurement policies to assure we are using the most energy efficient green products and to conduct an audit, and identify where we can improve operations to be more energy efficient thus saving tax dollars., and implement policies and procedures that will assure operation at every department and every level is reducing carbon impact . Finally, we will train staff to have LEED certification, and review land use and building ordinances of other local governments to determine how we can create incentives more energy efficient building in the Village in the future.

We are hosting a Going Green Conference right here at the gardens, on January 29th, to encourage other cities to go green with a basic greening 101, and also have a track for residents to sit in on workshops that will inform them of ways to become more energy efficient in their homes, conserving water, recycling and learning about solar and alternative energies.

Finally, the Youth Advisory Council - We passed a resolution in October creating the YAC and opened applications in November. The first council has just been appointed, and will receive an orientation on local government, the structure, the responsibilities and the resources. This is going to be more than a civics lesson in action, we will be developing leadership skills, service learning, community service initiatives and identifying enrichment opportunities, and working with the Pinecrest Business Association to identify skills needed and hopefully some internship and work experience opportunities. For those teens not appointed to the council this year, the term is one year, so look to get involved in their projects, and apply for next year.

Good governance principal two: We elected officials have a responsibility to our constituents to be well versed in the subject matter before us. We cannot make decisions in a vacuum, but must have data, analysis, from experts in the field even antidotal information, and know how others similarly situated have fared under similar circumstances.

Let me first say that we are quite fortunate to have a professional, exceptional and caring staff, who are committed to the best interests of the Village, and that we are often recipients of compliments to staff, the Building Department, the Police Department, Parks Department and the gardens. And on a personal note, I have found the village clerk, the manager and assistant manager and their staff and the village attorney to be wonderfully responsive and appreciate how easy they are to work with.

Consultants provide analysis to help with planning for the future, by providing a substantial amount of data, evidence based information by experts in the field. I can sit at the computer and Google information all day long, but until someone with expertise in the field tells me how to apply it to the local facts on the ground, I am not able to make the best decisions possible. So for the past year, we have done just that, brought in consultants to provide us with expertise; to audit the new Community Center, to determine the feasibility of developing a trolley system for Pinecrest, to analyze the current cultural arts environment and create a business plan for the Banyan Bowl at the gardens and to create a Strategic Plan for the next five years.

Community Center- Mr. Ken Ballard of King/ Ballard, a nationally renowned recreation consultant, is completing his operational audit of the community center programs operations and outreach to increase the revenue stream. We realize the tremendous opportunity the facility presents to us, so we must make sure we are meeting the needs of the community, increase the membership and the frequency of use, with a goal of having at least 30% of the community using the center, being

realistic, so we will be increasing the marketing for the center to raise awareness throughout the Village and its neighboring communities of this great recreational and enrichment resource. We have also solicited suggestions for programming from the Education Advisory Committee, which has brought many new enrichment classes to the center. Going forward, the center will expand marketing efforts, continue to provide opportunities for input on classes and programs desired, look into expanding the space allocated for fitness center longer term, conduct satisfaction surveys and probably modify the memberships to allow shorter terms.

Transit- Feasibility study for circulator-Kimbley Horn is conducting a study to determine whether the residents have a high enough interest in using a circulator or trolley to justify the development of a transit system. Once we get their recommendations, we will know how to proceed, rather than making assumptions that could be wasteful and unjustified.

Pinecrest Gardens- Lighting design - the gardens can be a magical place in the evenings, and we have missed opportunities to provide cultural arts programming, musical and theatrical performances, children's performances and evening fund raisers and weddings due to the fact the gardens have no lighting for evening events. So this past fall the Village Council directed the manager to hire landscape lighting consultants to provide the design for lighting the gardens. We made sure to include a citizen committee, with neighbors of the gardens to review proposals and assure the plans are not unduly infringing on their properties. Banyan Bowl - Miami-Dade cultural affairs director Michael Spring encouraged us to pursue the idea of a cultural arts center and recommended finding a specific arts and entertainment consultant, which we have now retained and are looking forward to their expertise applied to analyze the potential for bringing real cultural programming to the gardens, specifically in the Banyan Bowl;, so we await the development of the proposed business plan.

Strategic plan- the Village is entering its 14th year, and there is currently no strategic plan to direct the future needs, or set priorities for the Village. It is important that we determine with our residents how we want to plan for the next five years, setting short term and longer term goals. The process began in October, and our consultant will work with the community, the council and staff over the next few months. We will be reviewing everything from transportation, sidewalks, parks, police, code enforcement and communications to identify unmet needs and determine future direction.

Village Police Department- over the course of the past year, the Police Department has been able to get back to a fully staffed department, which means more cars on the street, and more visibility, which thwarts crime. We are comforted to know that there is a reduction in Part 1 (violent) crime 19% over this time last year, car theft is down 50% and robberies down 41%. The Police Explores program has reactivated and has been promoted at Palmetto Middle and High schools. We presently have eleven active explorers and encourage more youth to join. The Neighborhood Crime Watch program has started three new groups this year, and is now active in Pinecrest by the Sea, Palmetto Island and Sunrise Point condominiums. In the coming year, I will be

asking the Village Council to consider adding an additional member to the police force in order to allow the Village to participate in a federal task force. I have been carefully analyzing the resources available to other municipalities and believe we are missing an opportunity to participate in a task force that yields many benefits to our department and our community. Those municipalities that to participate in drug enforcement task forces have realized significant financial gain as a result of seizures and the funds that are then allocated to task force member municipalities, which can then be used for crime prevention, drug prevention programs school resource officers, and other law enforcement equipment and purposes. The City of North Miami Beach was the recipient of over \$5 million from the federal government last year as compensation for investigative work done by two NMB police officers currently detached to the U.S. DEA. In October of 2009 and in November 2009, Miami Shores Village Council allocated money from the \$236,000 in their forfeiture fund for two new police vehicles and Sunny Isles brought in \$7 million if forfeiture funds from their participation in a federal drug task force. The money comes from revenue seized during various international drug busts by multi –agency task forces, and we know that continues to go on in South Florida, so we should make the investment in staff to enable our participation in proceeds from forfeitures.

Village budget/economic forecast- Although the Village has historically relied on increasingly rising property values in the past that cannot any longer be the exclusive revenue to maintain us. This real estate correction will be with us for years, and the Village has done what it could over the past few years to cut back. So we will be looking at additional sources of revenue such as federal and grant revenue. The Building and Planning department numbers are no longer plummeting, and up a little and are in line with the first quarter projections, and I am happy to say we have had a 4% increase in building permits issued over last year, permits for new houses up from just 2 at this time last year, to 4 thus far this year, We continue to maintain a healthy reserve and have no new capital projects planned for the 2010 budget year, other than the completion of Phase 2 of the water installation and a dog park. When complete, Phase 1 and 2 would have provided access to 1/3 of the homes currently on wells to connect if they choose to, to county water system. If they do not want to connect, we were able to obtain a ten year exemption from mandatory connection unless the home is sold or substantially improved. Drainage projects continue, but much progress has been made. It is important to us that staff work closely with residents to assure they have input, understand the plans for resolving long standing problems and keep them informed throughout the process.

Additional sources of revenue- Federal lobbyist was hired this year for the first time to aggressively go after federal dollars for water, transportation, and capital improvement projects at Banyan Bowl and gardens.

Upcoming Projects-

Parks Planning- the residents have voiced an overwhelming desire for a dog park in the Village, and we have allocated the funds necessary to provide for a park if the

Council were to agree to go forward with it located at Veterans Wayside Park on US 1 and Southwest 112 Street. That park space is over 4 acres, and is not currently meeting its highest and best use by all 4+ acres sitting passively. My hope is that we can come to a consensus to take half the park for a dog park and the other to remain passive. There is no other park space compatible with a dog park.

The other park opportunity on the horizon is the Morningstar property located at Southwest 124 Street and 72 Avenue, the Morningstar Renewal Center is located on 9 acres owned by the Archdiocese of Miami. They have put this property and many other parcels up for sale. The Village has entered into an option agreement, and is conducting two appraisals. If we can come to agreement of the ultimate sales price, we would have to have a referendum, a vote to approve funding the purchase by a bond, which will impose a small tax increase on all property owners. If we are asking the people to vote, we must first ask the people to plan for this property, what kind of park facilities do we need, and together create a community plan. We will be inviting the community to join us in planning in the very near future.

Outreach and involvement- We are partners with more community groups such as Chamber South and the Pinecrest Business Association; and we are working much closer with our neighboring municipalities to plan and problem solve together. as well as many local charities, I will be working with the PBA and the Energy Efficiency Green Action Plan to bring more collaboration between the small business community by creating incentives to encourage the same principles we adopt in government and residential to be adopted by the business community as well.

In the coming years we will encourage more family events such as concerts and cultural events. We will look to the Youth Advisory Council to recommend and sponsor more events, and hope to work with them and our schools to create new and exciting methods of communication. We are starting a radio programming class as an after school enrichment and will then provide opportunities for our youth so trained to actually program on the Pinecrest radio station, record youth performances and maybe even a teen talk show. Imagine the possibilities! We have some extraordinary residents, some of whom work quietly, and others of whom have received and deserve recognition for their achievements. Just this year we had two exceptional athletes receive national recognition, and their hometown wants to celebrate them as well. Tim Hardaway, Heat star whose number 10 was retired by the team and Andre Dawson who was just nominated to the baseball hall of fame. The Village will be celebrating them in the near future.

So, I hope you are excited by the potential we hold in our hands, to continue to build a world class community, and invite you to join us in the effort. To learn more, subscribe to our E-News at www.pinecrest-fl.gov.