
Mayor's State of the City Address

State of the City 2016



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Mayor, City of Sunny Isles Beach

Citizens of Sunny Isles Beach, I am very pleased to deliver this State of the City address after serving my first year as your Mayor. We have made a lot of progress this past year and I would like to first thank my colleagues on the Commission for their support and dedication. Additionally, nothing could get accomplished without the hard work of our City staff. They spend many hours going above and beyond the call of duty to ensure everything we do flows smoothly. So I also want to extend a heartfelt thanks to all departments of our City and the excellent leaders who manage those areas. Notably, we lost two members of our first City Commission this past year, Lila Kauffman and Irving Turetsky. In December, we also lost our International Ambassador, Elena Baronoff. We thank them all for their public service and our thoughts go out to their families.

On a personal note, this month is very special to me. My wife, Dione, and I are celebrating our 30th wedding anniversary and we have been fortunate to live in Sunny Isles Beach for the past 25 of those 30 years! The other benefit of living here is that our three wonderful children, now all in their 20's, still look forward to coming back home for vacations and holidays.

As I stated last year, I am once again pleased to report that our city is on very firm financial ground. For the fourth year in a row we have reduced our tax millage rate. From 2014 to 2015 our property values experienced the highest growth rate of any city in Miami-Dade County at 18.5%. We are approaching a collective assessed real estate value of \$10 billion. This extraordinary tax base has enabled us to keep the portion of property taxes that funds our city services to one of the lowest millage rates in the county. However, we are still maintaining a level of services and emergency reserve funds commensurate with what our community has come to expect.

Under our City Charter we have a Commission-Manager form of government. This means that the City Manager acts much like the CEO of a company running the day-to-day functions of the City. While the Mayor and City Commission act more like a Chairman and a board of directors establishing policy, approving budgets, passing ordinances and setting the overall vision for the City. Over the past year, I have put a renewed emphasis on ensuring that our City is managed as the City Charter intended. I am pleased to report that we are seeing excellent results with no turnover of personnel within the top management positions and minimal turnover throughout the rest of the organization. A well-functioning organization, be it a municipality or a business, attracts and maintains strong employees to carry out its initiatives. I am happy to report that our City is doing just that.

Given this was my first full year in office, I took the opportunity to seek out and form relationships with the Mayors of our surrounding cities. There are many issues of common interest with our neighboring communities that, when we work together, we have a stronger opportunity for success. One issue that made headlines was the Mayors Coastal Community Alliance to raise awareness of beach erosion. This successful alliance, and subsequent press coverage, prompted the county to provide much needed funding for beach erosion mitigation.

We have also met with our neighboring Mayors and City Managers to ensure we have coordination on issues such as emergency evacuation and transportation coordination.

This past year, we have been busy expanding our parks, educational and civic spaces. We completed the acquisition of additional land on the south end of our city to continue the Intracoastal Park system. Also acquired was the parcel adjacent to City Hall with which we are in the final planning stages for an expanded school, senior meeting center and civic auditorium. The Gateway Park is nearing completion. This facility will house a professional stage, playground with a water feature, parking garage and new restaurant concept. We also have an agreement in principal to acquire the lot at the entrance to Golden Shores on 186th Street which would fulfill our comprehensive plan's goal of having a park within walking distance of every resident in the City. We recently received a commitment from Miami-Dade County Parks Department to permit us to move the skate park, currently located in Town Center Park, to the county operated Haulover Park. This initiative is also where the alliance of Mayors has been helpful as some of our neighboring communities have indicated that they will provide support to the reestablishment of the skate park at Haulover Park for use by their residents.

A mandatory update of our comprehensive plan is nearing completion. This update is focused on pedestrian safety and traffic mitigation. It includes provisions for pedestrian bridges over our major roadways as well as better traffic signalization technology to improve traffic flow during peak hours. With the encouragement of the Florida Department of Transportation, this past year we have begun the process of acquiring land and easements to accommodate the future construction of pedestrian bridges. Our studies have determined that this is one of the most important initiatives we can work on for pedestrian safety and traffic mitigation.

The Comprehensive Plan amendments also are to reinforce and create policies that will support a path to address our built environment, improve our resilience to changing conditions, and improve coordination with external agencies. We have been making strides in creating more opportunities for feedback from our citizens. The level of public participation in this process was unprecedented. We hosted three Town Hall meetings, received approximately 400 survey responses, had several meetings of the Manager's fact-finding group, and acquired several public comments and observations. This compilation of information formed the foundation for the newly proposed amendments to our Comprehensive Plan.

Over this past year our community school has continued to grow and become more overcrowded. As your Mayor I have taken a very tough position with our county school board when it comes to the number of students in our school who do not live within the legal boundaries to attend. These district jumpers are a significant contributing factor to the school's overcrowding. The school expansion project is being pursued in conjunction with the Miami-Dade County Public School system. However, our city's participation is contingent upon a concerted effort by the school system to deal with the district jumpers to ensure that every student who lives within our city, and has a right to attend this school, will be able to do so.

One of the busiest interior streets in Sunny Isles Beach, 174th Street, is getting a needed makeover with new storm and flood drainage, new sidewalks, improved lighting and new landscaping. This project is slated to be completed in June. This past year we completed the planning and engineering phase of burying the electrical and utility lines along Collins Avenue. The most disruptive part of this project, the installation of conduits on Collins Avenue, was awarded at the January Commission meeting. This is a complex multiyear project that will still require significant cooperation from the bordering property owners. But it will bring many benefits to our city from safety to beautification. The next area to be addressed for undergrounding will be the Golden Shores neighborhood.

This past year I gave our Information Technology Department a challenge that has been coined the Mayors Technology Initiative. I met with our City Manager and Chief Information Officer and asked them to get their staffs together and come up with their ten best ideas for the use of technology to make our residents lives easier and the city to run more efficiently. They came up with some great ideas like sensors on our buses so arrival times can be tracked and displayed at the bus stop, on your phone or over the internet. They found park benches that are also solar charging stations for phones and tablets as well as devices that monitor critical equipment and report issues automatically. Some of these ideas are already starting to be implemented. So keep an eye out for new technology popping up around our city.

This past year was also the time when we took a closer look at the various ways we communicate with our residents and guests. We determined that expanding our Islander newsletter to a monthly mailing and sending it out to all residents would be a more effective means of communicating than some of our previous efforts. So if you have not seen it already, look out for a new and improved Islander now coming to your door monthly. We also publish Living magazine on a quarterly basis which is a very nice, and popular, coffee table quality publication. Our website www.sibfl.net is always the most current source of information for events, meeting schedules, contact information, city services and select articles and that too has been enhanced.

Everyone who spends any amount of time in our City knows the extraordinary number of events and activities that our City provides and last year was no exception. Our staff did a great job and our residents enjoyed all the traditional events including our anniversary party, sunny serenades, specialty holiday events, movie nights, farmers markets and car shows just to name a few. However, our City continuously evolves and we endeavor to grow with the community. This past fall we partnered with the Sunny Isles Beach Foundation and have chosen a national consulting firm to create the first Cultural Master Plan for the City of Sunny Isles Beach. This plan will provide us with the ideas and guidance to ensure we are providing cultural and entertainment experiences that best meet the interests and needs of our residents and guests. This does not mean we will do away with all our previous events, but we will enhance them to appeal to our changing demographic. We are very excited about completing our Cultural Master Plan and working with the Foundation on the realization of many of the new plan's initiatives.

This year we received visits from dignitaries of two of our sister cities, Taormina, Italy and Netanya, Israel. We are working on a program to host an intern each year from one of our sister cities, with our first intern coming from Taormina. We also have had communications from our sister city Hengchun, Taiwan, which has donated two Joy Perfume Trees and a park bench which will soon be placed in Gateway Park. Additionally we have had preliminary discussions with Punta del Este, Uruguay which would be our first sister city in Latin America. Named after our sister city of Netanya, we were pleased to see the completion and opening of the One Netanya office building. This project brought Mount Sinai Medical Center to our City and established additional quality medical resources for our residents.

We experienced the occurrence of one of the most tragic events in the history of Sunny Isles Beach when an apparent buildup of natural gas caused an explosion on the top floor of the Chateau Beach Residences. Fortunately, no one died and all the injured have fully recovered. The day the incident occurred, for the safety of the public, a six block stretch of Collins Avenue was closed in both directions for several hours. Our Police Department, along with the Miami-Dade County Fire Rescue teams, performed an extraordinary job in managing the conditions and ensuring everyone in the building was located and safely evacuated. I want to thank them once again for their efforts during this most difficult event.

No State of the City address would be complete without pointing out the development activity that continues to bring notoriety and economic prosperity to our City. We currently have nine new projects under construction and nine projects that have received approvals but not yet broken ground. The development community continues to raise the bar in terms of the quality of the architecture and amenities associated with each new building design.

As I stated earlier, in addition to your five elected officials governing your City, managing your City takes a team of dedicated professionals. It also takes many volunteers who either serve on a committee, help out at events or teach a class. So to everyone who works in or around our wonderful City, on behalf of myself and the rest of the Commission, I want to thank you for your dedicated service. I am certain that working together in 2016, we will continue to make Sunny Isles Beach one of the most desirable places to live in South Florida. Thank you and god bless you.