



"2018 State of the City Address"

Peter Lear, North Port City Manager

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*Presented to the North Port Chamber of Commerce's
Annual Meeting and State of the City Address Luncheon*

Hello, my name is Peter Lear, City Manager for the City of North Port. Annually, the City Manager gives a "State of the City" address, detailing all the accomplishments the City has achieved. This year, we'd like to take it online for all residents to see. Thank you for taking the time to listen and learn about our City.

One of the many exciting endeavors the City is taking on is the coming of the Atlanta Braves spring training facility. This, and several other projects, show the economic health of the City of North Port.

The growth, in turn, has helped to boost values. For the fourth year in a row, we have seen an increase in property value. This year it went up by 12.62%. Our fiscal year 2018 budget saw a decrease in our property tax rate from 3.47 to 3.40 mils; no change in our fire assessment; a decrease in our Solid Waste assessment and an increase in the Road and Drainage assessment. For the third straight year, we have ensured that we are not using our savings to pay for our daily expenditures.

Back to baseball for a moment. The City of North Port is now officially the home of the Braves. The Major League organization helping to bring a first-class spring training facility to our backyard. This is probably the most buzz-worthy development for the City in many years. A joint venture with Sarasota County and the West Villages Improvement District, the 8,000-seat capacity stadium and training facility is projected to provide 300 jobs and boost tourism in our City. We contributed \$4.7 million to the \$100 million project. It should be open in time for the 2019 spring training season.

Speaking of opening doors, our Economic Development Division has been hard at work securing business growth in our community, while making sure the local businesses continue their successes.

The Economic Development team works hard to maintain business retention by stopping in to local businesses or making phone calls to see if there is anything they can do to assist them. Our team partners with the Chambers for a monthly workshop called "Lunch and Learn," where

business-owners can attend at no cost, with a different topic of discussion each month. The team is also working on an entrepreneurial program that will start up in 2018.

Economic Development is dedicated to helping small businesses both inside and out, literally. The Façade Improvement Program is a grant program put in place for businesses in a targeted area along U.S. 41. The aim of the program is to create a cohesive and cleaned up look for businesses along our main thoroughfare. The City is celebrating the first building to use the allocation, and hopefully more will follow in the near future.

Thinking larger, North Port was named one of the Best Places for Manufacturing by Southern Business and Development magazine in 2017. MTI Equipment will be open for business in the Commerce Park sometime in the summer or fall of 2018. King Plastics, the City's largest manufacturer, will be finishing their new building and eventually adding roughly 100 new jobs to their existing 160 employees.

The Finance Department goes above and beyond to ensure our City is economically sound. The department has received the "Distinguished Budget Award" from the Government Finance Officers Association every year for the last decade, and an Achievement of Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association. The Fiscal Year 2018 budget is roughly \$140 million, with large projects like the Braves, aquatic center and the Price Widening Project contributing. The budget was adopted without using fund balance in the General Fund for recurring expenditures. This is the third consecutive year this has been achieved.

From those who oversee and protect our funds to those who help protect our neighborhoods. The Police Department continues to serve the community effectively and safely. In a recent ranking conducted by Safe Home Organization, the City of North Port was named the #2 safest city with a population over 50,000 in Florida. Think about that, number two across the entire state of Florida. This comes as no surprise.

Crime in the City of North Port is down 10% in comparison to the previous 3-year average during the same timeframe. We contribute the decline to our community, surrounding law enforcement organizations, and our great men and women who make it all work. The Department completed the re-accreditation process with the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation and will be recommended for Excelsior status once again in February 2018. The City hired a use-of-force expert to provide training and an independent review of officers' responses to resistance and continue its transparency as a checks and balance measure. This ensures the department is operating within the best practices of law enforcement.

The Police Department has participated in many noteworthy events, including the Shop with a Cop program, Operation Santa Surprise, National Night Out, Coffee with a Cop and several others. The NPPD Mascot "Justice" made numerous appearances at the local elementary schools and special events. Justice was named through a competition with the area schools and a Facebook vote.

The City has received numerous awards for its social media efforts in engaging the community and solving crime. 2017 *Best Use of Facebook Award* from City-County Communications and Marketing Association for the police department's use of *Facebook to solve crimes*. In 2017, our page had a reach of 5.5 million.

The Fire Rescue Department continues to deliver top-notch service. Crews responded to nearly 8,000 incident calls from January 1 through December 31st, 2017. The Department is rated as an ISO-1 operation – one of only a handful in the country that has obtained that designation. This helps the insurance rating of every resident and business-owner. Despite the prestigious ISO-1 rating, the Department is always looking for improvements. Fire Rescue conducted a study in 2017 to research what residents think of us and how we can better protect and serve the community.

2017 was a year of “new” for Fire Rescue, adding a new station, trucks and employees. Fire Station 85 on North Biscayne Boulevard was officially opened in October. The station was dedicated to Christina Doyle, a crew member who lost her life due to Leukemia in 2015.

Crews responded to The Raintree wildfire, which sparked in May. 3,500 acres burned, and the event lasted for more than 7 days. Thanks to the arduous work of the responders, no lives were lost, and no homes were damaged.

While not responding to emergencies in the City, Fire Rescue members participated in over 130 special educational events this year at festivals, schools, clubs, businesses, city sponsored functions and at permitted events. There were nearly 9,000 interactions with kids and nearly 4,000 interactions with adults.

Our Emergency Management Division was tested this year with Hurricane Irma. It made landfall in the Florida Keys as a Category 4 hurricane, and later made a second landfall as a Category 3 storm on Marco Island. North Port was fortunate enough to miss the major wrath of Irma. Though the storm wasn't strong near us, it still showed the strength of our community. Before Irma even arrived, our City was recertified as a StormReady Community by the National Weather Service, through the efforts of Emergency Management. Our Emergency Management Division Chief conducted Hurricane Preparedness Talks for numerous homeowner and community groups. Additionally, Risk staff worked with FEMA and Fire Rescue to assess damage and prepare for any needed repairs. Fire Rescue coordinated preparation, response, and recovery for all city departments before, during and after. Post-storm, Solid Waste collected household and yard waste storm debris from September 15 to November 5. Household collection is estimated at nearly 2.4 million pounds of material and 10,000 pounds of recyclable material.

In North Port, we value our green space and work hard to protect the environment. The Public Works Department has made great strides in keeping our green spaces green and clean. The

Solid Waste Division's new recycling program has motivated more residents to recycle than ever before. In April, the Solid Waste Division decreased the landfill tonnage by 180 tons and in June, collected an additional 112 tons of recyclable material over the previous year. They have collected 6,200 tons for the year.

Because of all their hard work in advertising this new program, the department won two national awards. "2017 Best Recycling Public Education Program" from the National Waste & Recycling Association, and the "Silver Excellence Award" in the Awareness Campaign from the Solid Waste Association of North America.

Back to the stats. The Department rehabilitated an equivalent of 701 football fields of roadside swales and 829 football fields of retention ditches. Additionally, just over 6,000 linear feet of roadway, culvert and outfall pipes were replaced to provide a positive flow of storm water.

The 2017 Road Bond and Routine Maintenance contract with Preferred Materials continues. As part of the Road Bond Project, over 60 miles of roadway have already been resurfaced. As part of the Routine Maintenance Project, approximately 31 miles of roadway have been repaired. The total contract cost is just over \$17.5 million.

The Engineering Division was hard at work this year. A ribbon-cutting was held for the completion of the Biscayne Drive Median Improvement Project. The project included new curbing, plants, irrigation and landscaping on South Biscayne Drive, between Elyton Drive and Safford Terrace, totaling about 1.5 miles.

The Utilities Department has been "flowing" through many projects and improvements this year, creating a "waterfall" of achievements.

Check out these numbers: over 1.3 billion gallons of water provided to our customers, over 800 million gallons of wastewater treated, nearly 20,000 completed work orders and over 250,000 meters read.

The Department continued work on several projects including the Aquifer Storage and Recovery Project, Wastewater Plant Improvements, U.S. 41 FDOT Road Widening Project and numerous others. Staff completed the Deep Injection Well Pump Replacement, as well as the completion of the Water Treatment Plant Chemical Feed and Piping Improvements Project.

Several West Villages inspections were completed, along with inspections at the new Suncoast Technical College, Suncoast Plaza, Tuscola Commons and several other sites.

Speaking of West Villages, Utilities staff have been working with engineers from the West Villages Improvement District on the design of a new facility.

Now that we have all the infrastructure in place, let's talk about what's being built in the City. Our Neighborhood Development Services Department's Building Division issued just over 1,000 new residential permits from October 1st, 2016, to September 30th of this year. In the same

timeframe, 59 commercial and over 7,000 miscellaneous permits were doled out. Along with this, just over 40,000 inspections were performed.

The Property Maintenance Division completed around 5,000 general and 247 special event work orders, enhancing and supporting City facilities and events. Staff re-paved the Warm Mineral Springs parking lot, painted and added landscaping at the Family Service Center, and completed several more projects.

Property Standards performed nearly 6,000 initial inspections, and by interacting with and educating residents, inspectors closed about 93% of the cases without taking action by a contractor or hearing officer.

Planning and Zoning continues to plan and zone. The CocoPlum commercial development was approved for expansion last year, adding 24,413 additional square feet to house Peace River Medical Center and Kirkland's.

The Department also worked with many applicants to assist new businesses moving to North Port, including 7-Eleven, WaWa, Heartland Dental, Circle K, Heron Creek Animal Hospital, and, you guessed it, several auto parts stores.

Let's dive into the General Services Department. We've celebrated several park improvements this year, including the multi-purpose fields at Butler Park and several improvements at various parks. We didn't forget about our four-legged friends, as 16 parks were deemed "pet friendly" by the City Commission, and pet friendly waste stations were installed. For the eighth year in a row, North Port was deemed a "Playful City USA." This designation is due to our City's continued emphasis on play.

Now, I love swings, slides and monkey bars as much as the next person, but let's talk about another fun pastime, especially in Florida: swimming. In May, the City Commission approved a design to develop an aquatic center at Butler Park. The proposed design includes a 25-meter stretch pool, lazy river, kids' activity pool, two slides, a bowl slide, and much, much more. We're in the design stages, and the estimated \$12 million project should begin construction in the not-so-distant future.

Warm Mineral Springs, which boasts 87-degree mineral-rich waters, received a facelift last year. The property now has new signs, a newly paved parking lot, new lifeguard stands and more. Staff is considering proposals to develop a master plan for the entire site, including rehabilitation of the existing buildings next to the Springs.

Our Social Services Division continues to serve those in our community who need it most. Nearly 500 services were provided or processed in the last calendar year. Local non-profits, community organizations and residents provided more than 1,824 hours of volunteer services in support of Parks and Recreation activities, events and services.

Social Services is who can be called for help by the public, and IT is the Division that City employees call for help.

One of the largest projects the Division took on in the last year was a complete upgrade to the City's phone system. The system consolidated the overall annual cost, including the annual maintenance, end-user devices and networking.

This calendar year, the City has been upgrading hardware in the Commission Chambers to provide better video capture and streaming. IT will be working with the Clerk's Office to implement a public information request system that will allow the public to submit requests online.

Our North RePort app powered by SeeClickFix helped to close over 1,600 submissions, which included reports of debris, illegal parking, noise complaints, tree trimming and dozens more.

These accomplishments so far wouldn't have been possible without one of our newest Departments: Human Resources. 114 new employees were added to our workforce in 2017, bringing the total employee count to 577 employees at the end of December. Per the Commission's direction, HR staff worked with a consultant to complete a compensation and classification study to review City jobs across the different departments, and was implemented October 1st. Wellness initiatives expanded to include focus on mental wellness and healthy lifestyle activities. A safety and wellness fair was held in November to distribute important information about employee benefits and resources.

Looking to the future, a new onboarding system for a more detailed and effective onboarding process for new City employees is on deck. A benchmarking study will also take place after the New Year to compare City employee health benefits with other government agencies.

Now to the City Attorney's Office. We have a new line-up in the department, with a new City Attorney and Assistant City Attorney. The Office helped in completing the Atlanta Braves deal, worked on the medical marijuana dispensary ordinance and assisted with Price Boulevard widening property acquisitions, to name a few.

So, I made a public information request, and found out the City Clerk's Office received 1,300 requests in Fiscal Year 16-17. The office is working on implementing a new system for records management, which – among other things – will allow residents to submit requests online. This year, staff held the first Sunshine Law and Public Records Training for all City employees.

OK, now to the Communications Division.

Many people are unaware that our Communications Division handles outreach for the City including police and fire. It was another award-winning year. In 2017, the City and Police had a reach of more than 10.5 million on their Facebook pages alone. As mentioned previously, the North Port Police Department was recognized nationally for the work being done on social media. Also in 2017, the Government Social Media organization awarded the City with the best

Social Media Policy in the country. The same organization also named the police department as a finalist for the best Overall Social Media Strategy in the country. The City is using the best tool available to help solve crime and keep people safe and informed, and that is YOU.

During Hurricane Irma we used social media to reach millions. We were also able to open an emergency call center which received thousands of calls, and more than 28,000 people used our Hurricane info section on the City's award-winning website. Don't forget to follow us on Facebook, twitter, and the City website.

While this snapshot of our achievements is impressive, there is plenty more we have accomplished in the past year, and will accomplish in the next calendar year. On behalf of the Commission and all the City employees, we'd like to thank you, the residents of North Port, for your continued support. We will continue to work hard to make North Port a City where you can "achieve anything."