



## **Mayor Claudia V. Cubillos' State of the Village Address**

**August 23, 2016, 7pm**

Good Evening Everyone---fellow Village Council Members, Distinguished Guests, Village Staff, Police Department Members, and most importantly the Residents of El Portal! I am your Mayor ---Claudia Cubillos--and I am humbled and privileged to deliver the 2016 State of the Village of El Portal Address.

First of all, how about round of applause for the outstanding job the Miami-Dade Color Guard did with the posting of our national colors. They do a great job---don't they? Thank you officers for setting the standard again this year and dedicating your lives to protect us all. And, what about another outstanding delivery this year of our nation's pledge of allegiance by Liyah, the

singing of the National Anthem by the entire crowd, and Taj Echols, thank you for delivering a beautiful invocation.

Ms. Chante Sweet--Thank you once again for your heartfelt introduction –you did such a great job MCing the State of the Village Address last year—I knew we had to bring you back for an encore this year! I’d like to commend Vice Mayor Nickerson, Councilperson Mathis, and Councilperson Isaacs for your service to the Village. Unfortunately, Councilperson Brunson could not join us tonight. I’d also like to recognize my husband: COL Noel Pace, who just this past weekend took command of a 248-bed Army Reserve Field Hospital, which is headquartered at Jacksonville Naval Air Station and has elements around Florida prepared to respond in times of emergency and disaster.

A special welcome and thank you goes out to our new Village Manager David Rosemond—David is already proving that he was the right leader, at the right time for our burgeoning (flourishing) Village. I would also like to recognize our Village

Clerk Yanise Jacobi—who has been a breath of fresh air and an excellent addition to our team; and I would like to acknowledge our long-serving Village Attorney Joseph Geller; and Chief Morales, and the entire El Portal Police Department! I would be remiss in not thanking every single Village employee that works here and who contributes to making our little Village—just as I mentioned last year— into the Village that “Could,” the Village that “Has,” and the Village that “Will”!!

Lastly, I want to once again thank the El Portal Residents—almost all 3000 of you—because we are almost 3000 strong!! I am here again this year because of you—as I am here to serve you. I am here because I believe in the vision of the Village of El Portal; I’m here because 24 months ago, I made an important decision—a decision to run for the Office of Mayor —and it’s a decision I have continued and will continue to take very seriously. As I recently walked the entire Village—and where I saw and spoke to so many of our great residents---I’m again happily

reminded of why I am here –of why I serve in public office–I continue to serve because I care about the future—the future of our children and the future of our Village! Last year, I made a continuing promise that there would be a new attitude in El Portal--a “let’s get it done, and more importantly let’s get it done today attitude”—and I am continuing with that proactively today. We must lead by example, we must be proactive, we must be focused and there is a lot of evidence that this proactive result-driven attitude is transforming the culture of our Village of El Portal and that of your local government for the better, BUT we are far from done!

Tonight, I’m proud to report that the State of our Village is more UNITED, and Getting EVEN STRONGER! With that, I am happy to tell you about some of our results we have achieved over the last 12 months in the areas of Quality of Life, Civic Engagement, and “Curb Appeal.” Then I will set the

way ahead for the issues we are tackling for the new fiscal year, as we enter 2017.

In our efforts to improve Quality of Life and Civic Engagement, I would like to highlight some of the events that continues to bring our Village together over the past year. I would first like to mention the great job everyone did with our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Halloween Block Party and this year is shaping up to be even bigger and better than ever--as almost every neighbor on 87<sup>th</sup> Street is now participating. Again our Village children did a great job at our Neighborhood Christmas Caroling event last December. In April, we achieved great success at our second annual — El Portal Art Fair. Hosted by our Mayor's Task Force and led again by event-chair, and recent citizen of the quarter: Vimari Roman, and it featured over 20 art exhibitors, gourmet food trucks, live music, and attracted over 600 both El Portal residents and our friends from surrounding communities. In addition, I hope you are enjoying the Food Truck Night on the 3<sup>rd</sup>

Friday of each month at the Village Hall. This is another great event that the Mayor's Task Force has planned and so far it's been a great success—I mean who doesn't love a "Zombie Ice"? And let's face it, the Morgan's Food Truck with the glass panels and the wood fired pizza oven a couple months ago was amazing! And, by popular demand they will be back in September!!

Again this year we have continued to build on our relationships with the Villages of Miami Shores and Biscayne Park, and now North Bay Village, where the four mayors get together to see how we can share resources, save money, and leverage our strengths to everyone's benefit and through the Greater Miami Shores Chamber of Commerce. Just last month, the now Four-Village Committee hosted its second annual Four Village Social at the El Portal Village Hall.

As I continue to talk about civic engagement and quality of life, it brings me to an organization; near and dear to me. . The El Portal Women's Club [Pause]. The El Portal Women's Club was a

civic organization that was started in 1946 and I had the great honor of getting to know some of their long-serving members when I was first elected to the council in 2008. These ladies shared their stories, shared their work, shared their pictures, shared their initial yearbook, and shared their vision with me. I was impressed by who they were and what they did for our community. One woman who left a lasting impression on me was the late Libby Bowen. Libby Bowen was a former leader of the El Portal Women's Club and a pioneer in this village, and before she died I committed to her that I would resurrect this organization and ensure it becomes a strongly founded organization when I became Mayor. ...Well... I hope the women before us are proud, because in the last year we did just that. As the Founder of the 2016 El Portal Women's Club, I selected Maribel Fruitstone to spearhead it as the President, and to ensure the legacy of the great women before us is continued and done so with integrity and with the Village of El Portal as its priority. I look forward to serving as

their guide and mentor. We continue to deliver the Quarterly Peacock Express—Its a great publication to keep you connected to us and your neighbors.

We also hosted a slew of other events again such as: the Armed Forces 5K Run/Walk—now in its 9th Year; the Spring Egg Hunt, the Mayor’s Back to School Book Bag and School Supplies Giveaway, which we hosted in conjunction with the Police Department National Night Out focusing on public safety and of course our Great Independence Day BBQ, which for the first time in 5 years was held on the “west side” and drew a great crowd.

On a more serious note, it is clear that Zika Virus poses a significant public health threat to El Portal due to our closeness to Wynwood, but we have worked closely in conjunction with Miami-Dade County to put anti-mosquito “donuts” in the storm drains, and encouraged our neighbors to clear any standing water from their properties. But, at the same time, we also have to remember that we are still right in the middle of hurricane season,

and there are many other hazards as well. I've asked Waste Management to do a thorough sweep through our village, as well as, I've asked that code enforcement officers to conduct a sweep identifying areas where mosquitos can fester. In addition, I am also hosting a Disaster Preparedness Panel at the Miami-Dade County League of Cities Best Practices Conference on October 7, 2016. On April 18, 2016, I met and learned of Community Hoops Inspiration, led by resident Teeal Broughton and Coach Dre. Here's an organization right in our backyard doing great—actually amazing work with, and for, young men—many who attend Horace Mann Middle School. I was impressed by their mantra, “Work hard in silence—let success make the noise!” That's who they are, but I'm going to make some noise for them—because since I have known them, they have shown up, helped out, but ask for nothing! I want El Portal to know who they are, what they stand for, and perhaps together we can help this organization, these kids, and hey, maybe we can even have our very own Village

Basketball Junior League Team: The El Portal Thunders! I want to give a shout out to their coaches and these great young men!

Over the past year it's been an initiative to make our Village the next TreeCity USA municipality; therefore, at the March Council Meeting, I had recommended the following El Portal Residents to represent us and serve on our New Tree Board, Barbara Fuechsl, Hugh Gladwin and Adam Old. These board members collaborate and present to the Village Council so that we not only become TreeCity USA compliant, but to ensure that we have in place the necessary and proper Tree Plan! As a result, and for the first time, the Village of El Portal celebrated its First Arbor Day on April 29th, taking one step, in a 4-step process, closer to becoming a TreeCity USA Village!! It was a fantastic event led by El Portal appointed Tree Board Chair Barbara Fuechsl and with the assistance of so many residents.

With all of these positive changes happening in El Portal, it is necessary to have a codified official plan and we have dedicated an unprecedented amount of time to planning during the past year.

Not since the Village of El Portal was created eight decades ago, has so much energy and passion been dedicated toward planning a brighter, more livable future for the Village.

Collaborating with the company PlusUrbia Design, our efforts through planning respect the Village's past, while addressing the present's needs and paving a path for a brighter future.

The planning regulations and form-based code that we are creating will first and foremost protect the trees, lush landscapes, unique houses and peaceful tranquility that makes El Portal an unrivaled oasis in the heart of one of the biggest counties in America.

Second, the planning effort addresses the present needs of our residents. The process is taking the wealth of input gathered

during the 2013 Design Charrette and putting it to a flexible, living, easy-to-understand code that provides predictability, addresses the needs of our Village and serves as a guide for future development within the character of our quaint yet thriving community.

Finally, the form-based code addresses a future of healthy/active living with new places to work, shop, buy healthy food, dine out, and enjoy the arts.

In 2013, the Village annexed land and it is working closely with our planning firm to make sure developers build in ways that enhance our village without changing its quiet, tree-lined, peaceful way of life.

A form-based code is a land development regulation that implements the village's vision in a predictable way. Form-based codes take archaic, confusing old zoning codes based on separation of uses and replace them with visual, simplified, plain language codes that can be understood by everyday people.

The Little Farm site is an opportunity to create a town center that serves the resident of El Portal. We are working with the developer to hand-tailor the look, feel and scale of this mixed-use development.

This will not be a cookie cutter strip mall or big box center. This will be a development that feels like a natural extension of El Portal, on the eastside of the railroad tracks toward Biscayne Boulevard and buffered from our homes west of the tracks.

This transformational project will replace a very unfortunate situation, where human beings were living in substandard housing with structural, code, safety and sanitation issues. The El Portal town center will create a destination with shops (I heard maybe even a Trader Joe's grocery store) that provides services to our residents. It will create jobs and new housing opportunities. Best of all, the town center creates the opportunity for new open space, civic buildings and access to 21st century public transit. In the City of Miami, not far south of the town center and annexed

properties, a new commuter rail station will provide unmatched access to transportation for the people of El Portal. In the near future, a person will be able to have the best of both worlds – the living in a quiet, forested suburb, while being within walking distance of trains that connect to all the major job centers, arts facilities and activity in Miami and through the county.

The annexed parcels will also have mixed-use development. This will create additional opportunities to live, work and become a part of the El Portal, in a modern development that is properly buffered from the low-rise Village core.

Along NE 2nd Avenue, we are facilitating a rebirth of the corridor. Serving as our planning and zoning department, the firm is working on reactivating the commercial spaces along the avenue. While new opportunities for dining, shopping and services – such as doctor and professional offices – the heights will be capped so the residential enclaves adjacent to 2nd Avenue will retain their quiet character and human scale.

The Sanctuary at El Portal will preserve the Church building with adaptive re-use. While the iconic façade and steeple will be retained, the inside will be renovated and reborn as a local hangout place. Uses could include a coffee shop and café, small shops and galleries, and space for creative events.

Once the Form-Based Code is adopted, our unparalleled commitment to planning will not be finished. Our bright future will include urban design that promotes a healthy, active lifestyle.

We will assess the viability for new bike lanes, the enhancement of pedestrian safety and the connectivity throughout our Village. We envision a future where our residents can walk safely and easily to buy healthy food, play at an improved park or catch rail transit to all— both job centers and cultural assets throughout the region.

Working with all government agencies, a potential redesign of NE 2nd and N. Miami avenues can allow more pedestrian

connectivity. New street design could feature parallel parking, crosswalks, bike lanes and other enhancements.

Planning, zoning, code, regulations...they may sound like government jargon on the surface. But they are the keys that unlock an unprecedented quality of life for the diverse residents of El Portal. Our vision is inclusive: it uplifts the lives of people of all incomes, all ages, all backgrounds and all mobility. Whether you are biking for pleasure, running to train for a marathon, or safely crossing an intersection in a wheelchair to catch the train to work, you will be immersed in our healthy, active lifestyle.

Best of all, these improvements will enhance, not change, the character of El Portal. We will upgrade our healthy infrastructure while preserving our Little River, historic bird sanctuary, and the Sherwood Forest of natural beauty. We truly are planning for a bright future that will enhance the livability for everyone who calls El Portal home.

It may be true that we have made tremendous progress in achieving results in many areas, however our work is far from over--- and now I would like to tell you about our way ahead for the remainder of this year and into 2017.

Folks, nothing is more important than protecting the lives and property of our residents. It is important that we get the best return of investment for your valuable tax dollars and so I'll be working directly with the Village Manager and Chief of Police to better optimize our resources in a business-like manner. The Police Department's Officer Gutierrez and El Portal Resident David Ward have done a great job reinstating and improving our Citizen's Crime Watch Program. And, this year I am going to propose legislation to strengthening & enhance our community policing, adopt the NIXIE community text alert system in times of emergency, bring back an enhanced Senior Citizen Program, as well as focusing on stray dogs, neutering of cats, and speeding cars. On a personal note, with a brother who is a Deputy Sheriff

in North Carolina and with a brother-in-law who is a retired NYPD detective, and now with a niece who is also a Deputy Sheriff, let us never forget that our Police Officers have a tough job to do---and as your elected leader, I will do everything I can to provide them modern tools, an improved car fleet, and the necessary equipment they need. Please let's recognize all our Police Officers here tonight with a big round of applause. You make us proud, thank you for keeping us safe and we ask you to keep yourselves safe too!

Now onto the Village's financial status. Our long-time CFO Irwin Williams has returned after a long illness and is getting a handle on things since the departure of Larry Spring. And, as far as the financial situation of El Portal is concerned, we have never been stronger! We start our year with a healthy reserve of about half a million dollars or about 25% of our approved budget.

Our property values have risen again over 13% since last year, placing us 3<sup>rd</sup> among Miami-Dade's 34 municipalities. In

addition to our strong reserves and our higher property values and our higher property values, we are moving into 2017 in a stronger financial position than ever before, helped by the lien settlement in them sale of the Little Farm mobile home park last year.

We have a bit more than another half a million dollars we received from that settlement, money we will not spend but we will be able to invest in capital improvement initiatives for our Village. Those are projects we have been talking about for so long but that are very expensive: the stormwater drainage project, the improvement to our seawall, burying our utility lines, and updating all our El Portal Village entry-way signs so they are aesthetically pleasing and uniform. All of these projects are in the millions of dollars but we now have the ability to go after the kinds of grants we need to get those projects implemented, the kind of grants which also require matching funds. We now have some matching funds.

As part of our continuing effort to increase civic engagement, enhance our community, and provide better service to you—our constituents, it is our duty to continue to take steps to stay connected and keep you informed and be transparent! It’s important to lead by example, be proactive, be focused, and show up. Let’s work together to stay connected. We all have cell phones/smart phones and tonight we are going to commit to do 3 things:

1. Please log onto Facebook and “like” my official Facebook page: Mayor Claudia V. Cubillos:

<https://www.facebook.com/Mayor-Claudia-V-Cubillos-468230803322107/>

2. Please go to your APP store and download the NextDoor.com APP and join the El Portal Village group:

<https://nextdoor.com/>

3. Please go to the Village website at [elportalvillage.com](http://elportalvillage.com) and sign up to receive email updates:

<http://elportalvillage.com/>

I am passing around instruction sheets for your reference.

These are three immediate ways that will get you connected to us—your elected leaders—because together we can do more; because there is strength in numbers; because it takes a Village; and because together we can and will continue to deliver a prosperous, beautiful, and safe village—where everyone matters!

Thank you and good night!