


## MEMORANDUM

TO: Village of El Portal Council  
FR: Christia E. Alou, Village Manager  
DATE: March 31, 2020  
RE: March 2020 Village Manager's Report



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Please accept this memorandum as my March 2020 Village of El Portal Administrative Report to Council. During the Month of March, the Village Administration observed state and county executive orders to practice social distancing and self-quarantine for those experiencing symptoms of the Corona Virus.

On March 6, 2020, I issued a memo to staff and the Village Council outlining the protocol for our response to this pandemic. The Village Administrative office was closed on March 27, 2020 due to a worker, who had been on bereavement and then sick leave, who tested positive for the Corona Virus. He reported to me his test results on the evening of Thursday, March 26, 2020. Earlier in the evening, County Mayor Gimenez issued an executive order for non-essential staff to follow a Safe-At-Home order. It was my intention to close the administrative offices for non-essential staff at that time because we were following the County's lead in terms of closures as is our protocol. I alerted all non-essential staffers – Building Clerk, Code Enforcement, Office Administration and consultants and contractors including CAP Government, PlusUrbia, Craig A. Smith, and Ecostrata, of the administrative office closure and the results of their colleague's medical test results. I instructed them to seek medical testing if they experienced symptoms and to continue practicing social distancing and follow the Safer-At-Home Order. Our police department, and Police Chief Magnusson and I are essential staff, continuing to work from the Village Hall and from home. The Village Hall offices were bio-sanitized on Friday, March 27, 2020 with the exception of the Village Clerk's office, which was cleaned on Monday, March 30, 2020 because she is the only person with her office key and will have to come into the office to allow the cleaner inside. Our staff showed immense poise and dedication during the time leading up to the office closure. All staff reported to work, practiced the social distancing within the offices and executed their jobs in a professional and socially responsible manner. Since the closure, we continue to communicate, and they have provided me information including bullet points for this report from home. Also, of note, the Village's Internet, affecting our phone and wifi/computer functions, were non-operational from March 20, 2020 until March 26, 2020 due to a problem with Comcast. This was a huge setback for us, but we persevered.

Presently, the cleaning contractor, Clean and Clear Cleaning, will continue to clean the Village Hall and its offices on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Labor Finders, a temporary placement service will provide the Public Works staffer on a part-time basis to clean the parks and trash receptacles owned by the Village of El Portal. And most important, our police department will continue its duties and diligence

on their existing schedule. Chief Magnusson and I agree that this is not the time to increase their workload with a more rigorous schedule. We have our eyes on what will develop in the coming weeks.

During this time, I was contacted by Congresswoman Fredricka Wilson's office for a submittal of infrastructure and emergency needs of the Village including quotes, that will be included in Congresswoman Wilson's requests for the Corona Virus Rescue Package (\$2 Trillion). Mayor Cubillos and I provided the report with supporting documentation the following day.

In response to Governor's Executive Order, the Village will be utilizing Zoom for a virtual public meeting on March 31, 2020. This method was tested with Mayor Cubillos, the Village Council and Village staff and members of the community three times to ensure viable public participation and appropriateness.

This item remains open due to Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic that became priority number one throughout federal, state and local government. I will keep this item in my report because it remains and will resume with regular governmental operations.

### Special Projects

#### **NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Business Corridor**

##### **State Appropriations**

The Village of El Portal presented three legislative priorities for funding to this legislative session through our lobbying team. They are the septic to sewer conversion of NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, stormwater improvements, and a traffic calming school safety project on the west side of the Village of El Portal. The septic to sewer conversion of NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue (approximately \$500,000) and the school safety project (approximately \$300,000) made the legislative priorities of the house and senate and are presented to the Governor for funding. Mayor Cubillos, our lobbying team and I participated in phone conference meetings last week to answer questions and give more detail about the two projects that are recommended for funding by the state. We had very good discussions but were told that the Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic is the priority, and funding and the possibility of it will be on hold until the pandemic is over.

#### **Cristo Rey Miami High School at The Sanctuary Rader Church**

Over the course of the month, I have met with members of the Council, staff and the principles of the Cristo Rey Miami High School project to achieve special exception in the use of the property formerly Rader Church/Sanctuary Project. On March 10, 2020, the second reading of the Cristo Rey Miami High School was achieved at the Planning and Zoning Committee meeting. A development agreement is outstanding on the completion of this project.

#### **Parking Plans**

The status remains as it was in February 2020 - PlusUrbia has been working with the office of Alice Bravo, Director, Miami Dade County Public Works and Transportation, to bring traffic calming, additional parking to NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. They are presently setting up a meeting for the Village to discuss the parking matter and traffic calming. We do not have a date yet. In the meantime, **Dr. Margaret**

**Okonkwo has closed her pediatric practice** and moved to Arizona. As the owner of the property, she is attempting to lease the property to another pediatrician. Before departing, she did document her continued request to have the potholes and paving replaced on the swale parking lot at her building on NE 2 Avenue and NE 88<sup>th</sup> Street. We have not been able to repair/replace the paving due to flooding in the area. Paving companies encourage us to install French drains or more storm drainage to curtail the flooding problem that caused the potholes and broken asphalt. The cost of just repairing the paving is between \$12,000 and \$16,000.

### **Biscayne Boulevard Development**

#### **Kavista at El Portal/Annexed Area**

The Barrington Brothers submitted plans to the Village of El Portal for the Kavista project at the March 10, 2020 Planning and Zoning Committee meeting. They are also tasked with holding a town hall meet and their special exception and variance is being presented at the March 31, 2020 Council meeting.

#### **Former Trailer Park Development**

There has been no activity to report this month. Fullview, the property owner, is aware of the development of the Kavista at El Portal project as well as the Skate Park at Don Bailey's on Biscayne Boulevard.

### **Hurricane Irma Recovery**

FEMA has obligated over \$2.1 for reimbursement funds to the Village of El Portal. We are awaiting further instructions and timeline of actual funds being received. It has been six months since we were informed that there was a potential problem with our reimbursement due to an audit review of our Contractor, DP&O. Mayor Cubillos, Interim Attorney Powell and I met with DP&O to get an update on its status with the audit review. DP&O stated that the review has been minimal, and they have complied with every request. Interim Village Attorney Powell sent a letter requesting an update from FEMA and the Department of Emergency Management. We have not received a response.

Our line of credit with Synovus Bank remains in good standing with interest payments being met as we await the reimbursement. We will have to negotiate either another extension of the line of credit (if Synovus allows it) or prepare loan documents and repayment of that loan as this current line of credit becomes due. During the Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic, interest rates have dropped, we have asked Synovus to present any lower rate options to the Village for us to consider and possibly take advantage.

We, with Miami Shores and Florida City, are also in a holding pattern as we await the results of the DP&O audit review and hopefully will receive our reimbursements in 2020. I have reached out to Governor DeSantis to ask for a meeting with Florida Department of Emergency Management to inquire about the status of the audit review. I was told that the Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic was priority at this time, and that we could resume this matter after. State Senator Jason Pizzo emailed information to me and fellow City Managers on March 18, 2020 regarding an executive order from Governor directing DEM to release Hurricane Irma funds to municipalities. Our lobbying team is also assisting us with follow ups to the executive order.

## **Village of El Portal Transportation Shuttle and Transit**

Ongoing – There is no update on this project at this time. I reached out to TPO Director Aileen Boucle on two occasions for an update but no response. The Village remains at the ready, for the County's CITT and TPO shuttle transportation to and from the Virgin/Brightline train station in downtown Miami. The Village's surtax and CITT funds will be utilized for this pilot program that will provide Village residents access to the new train transportation for free. Our pilot program was set to start in November 2019 but has been pushed back by the County to early 2020. I will keep you informed as I continue to work with the TPO on this project. The Village was required to present the County with a report on how we will spend the funds that are available for utilization under our CITT Transit category. I requested an extension on that report until May 2020, so that I may speak with Ms. Boucle about the total cost of the shuttle pilot, when, if ever, it will start, and review the funds we will be able to utilize for transit related spending. Councilperson Roman requested two bus stop shelters. Bus Shelters are approximately \$15,000.00. And I am considering sidewalk installation and/or repairs. Both are allowed under the CITT Transit spending, but we have a very limited amount of funds to use. We have used the CITT Transportation funds as collateral for a FDEP loan for the septic to sewer conversion which is still on-going. Please see status in Public Works section.

## Departments

### **Police and Public Safety**

The PBA, through of-counsel attorney, Brenden Coyle has brought suit against the Village of El Portal for unfair labor practices/failure to utilize negotiate in good faith based on a request made in the Summer 2019 Re-Opener labor discussions that resulted in the take-home cars pilot program being implemented.

Interim Attorney Powell scheduled a series of meetings to negotiate the step-increases and promotions being requested by the PBA and Mr. Coyle. The Village Administration is not making a counter-offer regarding raises and step-increases under the PBA's request. A notice of Impasse was filed by the PBA representative this month.

The EPPD continues to have difficulty with the fleet. We are awaiting funding review of past repairs as well as the fiscal impact of the take-home car pilot program.

Chief Magnusson continues to address the Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic strategies and the needs of the department. He provided the below bullet points for the month of March 2020.

### *From Police Chief David Magnusson*

- Police made three Domestic Violence arrests last week. Fortunately, this appeared to be isolated incidents and not indicative of Sheltering In Place
- Chief Magnusson is Miami-Dade Chiefs of Police COVID-19 Committee Chairperson and as such has been disseminating a lot of up to the moment information from the Health Department and Governor regarding COVID-19
- Sgt. Borrell attended line supervision class. It was the last class before training had been shut down by the County.

- Police participate in Little River Clean Up on Saturday March 14th.
- Village Hall and Police Station bio-sanitized on Friday 27 March 2020 and Monday, March 30, 2020.
- Participated in Public Safety meeting on 3 March 2020, and Administration and Finance Committee Meeting on March 10, 2020 (Lt. Mendez)
- The Department established relationship with CarFax, who will provide law enforcement a service to help identify cars and drivers with minimal information based on their data base.)
- Continued to focus on 87th Street speeding
- Improved communication with FDOT following a construction project where we were not notified and traffic backed up heavily on 87 Street for a few days.

### **Code Enforcement**

At the March 2020 Code Enforcement Committee meeting, Code Enforcement Officer King presented his recommended changes and improvements to the Village's code. The Committee reviewed and discussed, and we are awaiting some more information to then present to the full Council. In that meeting, two residents requested better access to code violation citation information of their fellow Villagers. The Committee discussed whether that would be a deterrent or just a way of embarrassing the violators. The Committee did not pursue that request but is continuing to look into this. We must replace the Code Enforcement and Public Works vehicles as soon as possible. Our Interim CFO is still working on a report for the Administration and Finance Committee regarding the impact of the police take-home car pilot program and the amount of vehicle repairs in the past couple of fiscal years.

*From Code Enforcement Officer Emir King*

Paint Inspections -5

Code Complaints - 5

Self-Initiated Complaints – 30

Property Warnings (CCIN) – 28

Property Violations (NOCI) – 2

Properties Brought Into Compliance – 29

The detailed list of each infraction, as is usually provided in this report by Code Enforcement Officer King, is not available due to office closure and the lack of remote access. Please feel free to make a request for that information when our non-essential Administrative office resume regular operations.

### **Building Department**

Last month's status for this department remains the same this month. With the priority shifted to Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic. Our Building Clerk, with CAP Government provided building services until the administrative offices closed to all non-essential staff on Friday, March 27, 2020.

Still ongoing - The Village met with CAP Government's lead inspector and Raul Rodriguez in December 2019 to discuss building permit fee increases. CAP Government provided me a comparison of other neighboring municipalities' fees. The Village of El Portal is significantly lower. According to CAP, the Village's building permit fees have not increased since before they came on-board in 2005. I believe this is an opportunity for the Village to increase its building permit fees and to increase our venues to aid in operations. I presented this information and the recommendation to the January 21, 2020 Administration and Finance Committee.

CAP Government's new engineer, Miguel A. Diaz, is reviewing a submittal from Pennoni that was sent to the Interim Village Attorney this month that discusses their request for an increase in fees to finalize the design of the septic to sewer conversion on the west side of the Village. We will bring this plan to the Public Works Committee and/or the Administration and Finance Committee when we have Mr. Diaz' recommendations.

Due to the pandemic, this project is on hold but will remain on my report until it is resolved. Ms. Aramburu of 120 NW 88 Street whose **blueprints were lost by the Village of El Portal in 2016** and she is now asking that the Village replace the blueprints. She is very upset and is demanding the blueprints. I was made aware of this situation by Mayor Cubillos last month and have reached out to the County Clerk's Office to obtain blueprints. The County's records only go back as far as 1950. We will have to commission this work from an architect. I discussed the matter with PlusUrbia, who is able to complete uncertified blueprints on behalf of the Village in the amount of \$2/square foot.

*From Building Clerk Miriam Herrera*

Permitting and projects are approximately six ongoing, 55 permits issued, and 60 inspections.

### **Planning and Zoning**

PlusUrbia's Juan Mullerat and Camila Zablach worked on the Cristo Rey Miami High School, the Kavista at El Portal Development and the Skate Park Miami (at El Portal) variance and special exceptions. They also presented an architectural guide to the Planning and Zoning Committee this month that focuses on continuity in the esthetics of the Village and its future development. This project was initiated by Mayor Cubillos. The guidebook will be presented the El Portal residents with the comprehensive plan amendments and building fees changes in a town hall/workshop in the coming months.

### **Public Works**

The Village of El Portal Tot Lot was closed until further notice due to the Corona Virus.

Septic to Sewer Project (Pennoni) and El Jardin Stormwater Improvement (Craig A. Smith) Project

Pennoni – The S2S project in the west quadrant of the Village is stalled again due to engineering firms increase of fees:

1. The Village Council passed the easement agreement with the Miami Dade School Board at the October 22, 2019 Regular Meeting. Interim Village Attorney Powell attempted to finalize the negotiations with Pennoni Engineers and coordinated a phone conference between us and Pennoni's Steven Elias to finish the design work of the lift/pump station. Elias states that Pennoni has "lost momentum" and will be asking for an additional \$45,000 to \$50,000 to complete the remaining 8% on the project. We asked for the reason for more money in writing and have not received this proposal as of this day. The Village is required to make the initial payment to Horace Mann Middle School in order to finalize the easement agreement. The initial payment is \$18,000. I have met with the Interim CFO, and we are processing the payment to accompany the executed contract this week. The next payment of \$6,000 is due in twelve months, and the final payment of \$6,000 is due in twelve months after the second payment is made. Interim CFO has booked these payments so that they are distinguished from other payments in the Village's budget. We are still in review of Pennoni's new addendum regarding the payment to finalize the design of this project. Please see Building section for more details.
2. CDGB grant funding request was made of Miami Dade County for road construction related to the stormwater improvement project. We received \$157,000. The Village is in good standing on this project.
3. Craig A. Smith and Associates – El Jardin. Engineer Orlando Rubio executed alternate designs to the El Jardin stormwater outfall project that was presented in the January 7, 2020 Public Works Committee meeting and passed to full council. The new design has been approved by FDEP.

Arbor Day Membership and Neat Streets Matching Tree Grant - The Village of El Portal, through our grants consultant, Robert Ruano and I applied for and received the Neat Streets Matching Tree Grant. This cycle will provide for 37 trees to be planted in various locations in the Horace Mann Middle School and west side of the Village of El Portal that will create a "Green Route to School, Phase 2." Robert Ruano has coordinated 2020 El Portal Tree Board and its reporting. On the Tree Board: Councilperson Roman, Mr. Adam Old, Mr. Hugh Gladwin, Ms. Amy Lubron, Mr. Blair Walker and Mr. Fernando.

FPL Street Lighting Pilot Program –This pilot program conversion has not started yet in El Portal. Presently the Village has 151 FPL light posts. All lights are high pressure sodium, with no LED lights. FPL is proposing a lighting plan for the Village of El Portal that will reduce power consumption by replacing all the lights with LED lights. The Village is given the choice of three lights: 41-Watt 4000K, 45-Watt 3000K, and 76-Watt 6400K. According to FPL, most of the other municipalities in the County are utilizing the 76-Watt 6400k, which is a white light. FPL is available for a meeting to discuss with the Village its program, pricing and options. Also, according to FPL, all of the new LED lights are wildlife compatible. We have asked that the Sherwood Forest area receive the lowest wattage LED replacements. We do not know when the El Portal conversion will begin.

**Little Library Reading Park/Cove at the Tot Lot.** I met with Orchidman's Jose Perez (owner) on January 13, 2020, to do a review of the five El Portal parks, and their need for renovation/refreshing. He will also work on the new Little Library landscaping to set it apart. Mr. Hernandez will be working with

Artist Nicole to coordinate the new and bigger **Little Library** installation. Mayor Cubillos has pledged to donate the new structure to the Village of El Portal. We are awaiting a response from the artist as to when the structure will be ready for installation. We are also awaiting a formal proposal from our landscaper, Orchidman, regarding creating a space for the new Little Library at the opening of the Tot Lot and for improvements to all parks Village-wide.

#### Maintenance, Update and Beautification of Village of El Portal Properties (Parks) and Village Hall -

The Village ordered and installed new Welcome to El Portal, Bird Sanctuary and Home of the Month signage. Some of the signs are not installed yet but will come when the pandemic is over. To date, there are new signs at NE 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and NW 90 Street, and at NE 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and NE87 Street.

Per resolution passed in summer 2019, the Village has allocated forfeiture funds to complete some Village Hall Building security improvements that included the security cameras. Clerk Jacobi's window was replaced last week (February 19, 2020). We still have a security gate to complete that will commence when the pandemic is over.

The front window of the Village Hall Chambers was smashed on Sunday, December 15, 2019. EPPD made an arrest, and I have filed a claim with the insurance company (Florida League of Cities). Mr. Hernandez is attempting to get the quotes needed for the insurance replacement. One window company has explained that the window setting is too old and won't support a significant pane of glass. We are awaiting other quotes.

#### **Public Affairs**

Due to the Governor's and County Mayor's Executive Orders, all Village public activities scheduled for March and April have been canceled in the interest of public health and safety from Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic. The Miami Shores Mayor's Ball was canceled, but we did not receive a refund. The funds raised from the table sales is used for scholarships, and Miami Shores Alliance asked that we allow them to retain the funds so that they scholarship may be funded. The Alliance says that the Mayor's Ball will be rescheduled for November 2020, and that we will have a table with the sponsorship we provided. The Arbor Day Celebration was canceled, however we will not receive a refund for the deposit made for the tent, chairs, tables, linens rental (half the total cost of approximately \$250), but will receive a credit to use for our next rental.

We have not canceled the 5K Event at this time.

#### **Administration and Finance**

Finance – Interim CFO Chris Wallace continues to address the lack in the finance department and will continue to work on the 2019 end of year budget report, as well as keeping us focused in this budget year. He is also preparing other reporting requirements for the upcoming Audit as well as the financial impacts of other open projects.



Legislative Update – Our Lobbyists are providing the Administration and the Council with weekly updates. Please see first item of this report.

Human Resources - March was a month of intensive focus on health and safety of all staff and residents due to the Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic. Please see first paragraph of this report.

**Councilmember/Resident Requests**

I have met with a number of residents telephonically and in person over this month. If you would like further information about the content and resolution, please do not hesitate to contact me directly. I do keep a file and documentation for this.

There continue to be a myriad of directives and projects I administer at the request of individual councilpersons and members of the El Portal community. For more information, please contact me directly.

