

VILLAGE HALL
500 NE 87TH ST
EL PORTAL, FL 33138
CHRISTIA E. ALOU, ESQ.
VILLAGE MANAGER



MAYOR OMARR C. NICKERSON
VICE MAYOR ANDERS URBOM
COUNCILPERSON LUIS PIRELA
COUNCILPERSON ANNA LIGHTFOOT-WARD
COUNCILPERSON DARIAN MARTIN

MEMORANDUM

TO: Village of El Portal Council
FR: Christia E. Alou, Village Manager
DATE: November 23, 2021
RE: November 2021 Village Manager's Report

Please accept this memorandum as my November 2021 Village of El Portal Administrative Report to Council and the Community.

Hurricane Preparedness 2021

The Village of El Portal Emergency Management Team has prepared staff, Citizens Crime Watch Block Captains, and members of the community all 2021 Hurricane Season. As we see the closing of this season, in December 2021, the Emergency Management Team will debrief and commit best practices and inventories for next season.

Hurricane Irma Financial Recovery

The Village was granted a 120-days extension of the line of credit loan we have with Synovus Bank that paid for Hurricane Irma debris removal. There has been no change in the reimbursement amount this month, with the Village owing \$679,750.56. The Village's Appeal of the partial de-obligation of reimbursement is still pending with FEMA.

Corona Virus/COVID-19 Pandemic Municipal Response

I have been working with the Florida Department of Emergency Management, FEMA and Miami Dade County to make funding reimbursement requests through their portals to get reimbursements for the Village's Corona Virus/COVID-19 pandemic recovery and response. I completed a Close Out process with Miami Dade County Contractor, Hagerty Consulting, over the last two weeks for CARES Act reimbursements that are being distributed from the County. The Village will be receiving approximately \$32,000 in CARES Act reimbursements. We are still awaiting this distribution.

The Village Attorney, Interim CFO, and Mayor and I have reviewed the restrictions of use imposed by the federal government for the American Rescue Program Act (ARPA) funds that are being distributed by the US Federal government but managed by Florida Department of Emergency Services. The Village of El Portal is a non-entitlement unit (NEU) and has been allocated funds to be utilized in our pandemic response efforts that address front line employees dealing directly with the public, technology-based service delivery, parks, pandemic related water

November 2021 Manager's Report

projects. A funding use memo was provided to the Council in September 2021. Educational material is being distributed to the community, door-to-door.

Since March 2020, the Village Administration observed state and county executive orders to follow the CDC guidelines in practicing safe social distancing. The Village Hall is open to the public and we are asking visitors to wear masks, observe social distancing and hand sanitization when visiting our offices. Staff continues to wear masks when interacting with others or utilizing small workspaces. All Village parks are open. The Tot Lot is being sanitized weekly by the Village's cleaning contractor, Clean and Clear Cleaning Services. The Emergency Management Team continues to observe the viral variants and the numbers that may affect our service.

Short-term Rental In the Village of El Portal

We continue to get complaints and requests for information about the regulation of short-term rentals (STR) in the Village. The Administration has been working with the members of the Council a recommendation to adopt regulations and/or require registration that will collect the contact information for those who operate these rentals as well as annual registration fees and safety inspections. Councilperson Martin and Councilperson Pirela are pursuing policy to fit the issue. A discussion item was workshopped in the November 2021 Planning and Zoning Committee meeting. Presently, short-term rentals are treated as home-based business and are asked to obtain a business tax receipt annually. This only applies to STRs that sleep six persons or more. We are awaiting a policy order for the upcoming December 2021 Council agenda before we will pursue public education and enforcement.

State Appropriation Funded Traffic Calming at Horace Mann Middle School

The Village received \$300,000 from the State of Florida in the 2021 Legislative Appropriations to fund the development of a traffic calming project at NW91 Street and NW 2nd Avenue. The project will be designed, and the construction management will be with Village engineering firm, Craig A. Smith and Associates. We met with Miami Shores Village Manager Esmond Scott and Miami Shores Public Works Director Chris Miranda and will be meeting with Mayor Harris of Miami Shores Village to resolve some public right-of-way issues in the design. The issues also affect residential landscaping which we hope to resolve in the next week with the property owner former El Portal Mayor Cubillos on the Southwest quadrant of the intersection. The stakeholders are Florida Department of Transportation, Miami Shores Village, Miami Dade County, and the Miami Dade Public Schools. CAS and I are responding very quickly to production requests from Florida Department of Transportation Contract Coordinator and to establish and stick to timelines for completion of the project.

For the 2022 legislative session, the Village will pursue funding appropriations for the expansion and improvement of the Village Hall, our parks renovations, and water projects. CAP Government engineers and Craig A. Smith and Associates engineers provided the technical information required in these appropriation requests. The legislative session started last month and continues.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Village of El Portal Sustainability and Resiliency

**November 2021
Manager's Report**

Most public works activities affect the Village's sustainability and resiliency. The Village of El Portal Sustainability and Resiliency Taskforce Liaison, Mayor Nickerson, makes reports to Council. CAS and I have prepared and submitted resiliency and sustainability grant applications to request state funds for stormwater improvements and septic to sewer conversion on NE 2nd Avenue. I will keep you informed as to whether our grant applications are approved or not.

I met with Dr. Tiffany Troxler, from Florida International University, who leads the Miami Dade County Resilient305 Collaborative. Dr. Troxler was awarded grant funds to install flood monitoring locations and is exploring the possibility of station deployment in the Village of El Portal. As a result of a site visit in the Village, Dr. Troxler found that the NE 2nd Avenue bridge and the pedestrian bridge at Soar's River Estate Park (west side of the Village) are the best locations for the stations. I will coordinate discussions with the property owner at the NE 2nd Avenue location and will consider alternative locations in case this is not accepted by the property owner.

Village of El Portal Parks Renovation

The Village of El Portal Parks Renovation and Renewal Project (funded by Kavista developers fees). I am pursuing additional state funding through appropriations requests for FY 2022 as noted in the above paragraph. The Village will be renovating our parks and historic site with these funds.

Craig A. Smith and Associates provided a proposal for design and construction management for the parks that was approved by the Village Council at the October 2021 Council meeting. I have also scheduled meetings with the playground equipment company to meet with me, but they have still not provided a date for the site visit as of the time of this report. Comcast will be coordinating with us for the installation of wifi/broadband at the parks.

The Village of El Portal follows the Miami Dade County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and I meet bi-weekly with the South Florida Parks Coalition. The County is now implementing a Parks Impact Calculator program, and the Village must input tracking data into this calculator for reporting purposes. When a Public Works staffer is identified this will be a responsibility for that person.

Village of El Portal Transportation Circulator Pilot Project Shuttle to Downtown Transit

We are still on course for the project, with the FDOT grant agreement and the service provider contracts were executed. I am awaiting a delivery date (December 2021) on the electric vehicle order scheduled to arrive any day now. I met with FreeBee and our Building Official this week to coordinate the installation of the electric vehicle charging station that will be located at the last parking space of the Tot Lot/Village Hall parking lot West. Signage will also be provided by FreeBee. I ordered the awning for the shuttle stop at the Village Hall as well as replacing the damaged awning from the police department door. Also being installed in the coming week is a bench and trash container at the Village Hall stop. The shuttle stops will be at the Village Hall parking lot (next to the Little Library) and at the El Portal Nature Trail. A security camera will need to be installed to maintain the equipment. Amenities are being planned for the Nature Trail

**November 2021
Manager's Report**

stop through a FDOT grant application in Spring 2022. The Village has requested the execution of an Interlocal Agreement for the circulator with Miami Dade County. I submitted the first FDOT quarterly report for the service. Despite not having the service started yet, we are still required to report.

NE 2nd Avenue Business Corridor including Sanctuary Property

Mayor Nickerson and I met with Miami Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and several department directors and leaders to discuss areas of partnership with the County such as the Pedestrians First, the Resiliency and Sustainability Adaptation Action Area, and areas of collaboration with departments such as Economic Development, Transportation and Planning, Water and Sewer, and Community Action. A follow up meeting with the Department of Transportation and Public Works is next week to discuss the Village's sidewalks and ways to bring the Pedestrians First initiative to the Village of El Portal.

Mayor Nickerson and I have met with our urban planners and our Village Attorney to begin the dialogue and consider policy changes for businesses owners along the NE 2nd Avenue corridor that include septic to sewer conversion that is critical to the Village's economic development, as well as signage and short-term rentals and lodging. Traffic changes are also a consideration for NE 2nd Avenue.

The Sanctuary Property – According to the property owners, there has been no changes at The Sanctuary. They have gotten the County's approval of the interior demolition plans. The Village is currently reviewing and once completed, we will apply for temporary power and water service so to begin the interior demolition and asbestos abatement. They have been able to complete the roof repairs, allowing the interior to dry out. There is a propane tank on the exterior of the building. They have discovered that the tank still contains gas so they will be removing the gas prior to removing the tank. Their redesign is on hold until they can safely demolish the inside.

FINALLY, Miami Dade County replaced the streetlights along NE 2nd Avenue! The Village of El Portal, El Portal Police and several residents reported the outage of the streetlights between NE 86th and NE 90 Streets on NE 2nd Avenue. For many months this stretch of Miami Dade County owned and operated street within the Village had no lighting and was a danger to anyone driving on it. Through the efforts of Miami Dade County Mayor Cava's office and the many 311 Reports from the Village, the lighting was finally restored. The lighting at N. Miami Avenue is still not restored as of the time of this report.

Sustainable Streets and Business Corridor Plans – In August 2021, the Village received \$1.32M in funding for NE/NW 87th Street - Federal Transportation and Infrastructure Committee senior member Congresswoman Frederick Wilson aided in the Village receiving these funds. In April 2021, with our engineers at Craig A. Smith and Associates Steven Smith and Orlando Rubio, as well as Miami Dade County engineer Christopher Rosenberg, of the TPO, we prepared the technical project summary for the only project that qualified for the Infrastructure Improvement funding – NW/NE 87 Street Corridor Improvement Project, as identified and sponsored by FDOT and Miami Dade County TPO. The TPO will update its Transportation Improvement Program.

**November 2021
Manager's Report**

This road was the only one in the Village of El Portal that qualified under the guidelines of the investment program. We are pleased to receive the funds and look forward to receiving the funding agreement to see the specifics of how these funds are to be used for 87th Street. It is our hope to address some sustainability and traffic calming with this fund, but we will follow the federal requirements. There have been no follow-ups from the state or federal agencies on these funds as of the time of this report.

As requested by the Council in the May 2021 Committee meetings, the quoted price for the multi-lingual "You Have Taken the Scenic Route. Slow Down" yard signs. The quotes were shared with Vice Mayor Urbom as this project is one of his initiatives. I am awaiting direction for next steps. I was informed that the County is in the process of amending its traffic flow modification procedures, and that any changes would have to be approved by Miami Dade County. It was recommended that El Portal hire an independent traffic engineering firm to conduct a traffic study, present that study to Miami Dade County and if its approved, we will get the speed limit lowered on the Village streets to 25 MPH, with a possibility of 30 MPH on the County roads (NE 2nd Avenue and N. Miami Avenue). I met with three firms that conduct these studies and submitted them to the Council with no action taken.

Biscayne Boulevard/Annexed Area Development

The Kavista Rental Development at El Portal Annex
The Kavista Project is on track to begin construction in the first quarter of 2022.

Skate Bird Miami (Skate Park)
Skate Bird Miami continues to prepare its site for opening. The project is still pending ADA parking, fire marshal, and several other requirements before they are to proceed.

Former Trailer Park "Little Farm"
Mayor Nickerson, PlusUrbia and I have met with prospectors of the property. But no movement to sell or develop has been reported at this time.

DEPARTMENTS

Police and Public Safety

Police Chief David Magnusson retires this month, and Incoming Police Chief Alex Mendez was sworn in on Tuesday, November 16, 2021. On October 30, 2021, I received a letter from the police department staff expressing their support of Chief Mendez' promotion to the position. In that correspondence, they stated that he is kind, thoughtful, wise and a tempered and humble public servant. In my experience with Alejandro Mendez, I echo this sentiment, and happily accepted the department's recommendation.

Chief Mendez came to the Village of El Portal Police Department as a Lieutenant of Police in July 2019, after serving for twenty-nine years with the City of Miami Police Department in Patrol,

November 2021 Manager's Report

Motors, Internal Affairs/Anti-Corruption, Special Investigations, Administration and Criminal Investigations. We are blessed to have him take the helm and continue the excellent work he has demonstrated since coming here. His priorities will include increasing the police staff with three new officers, two of whom will be exclusively dedicated to night shift at this time.

The EPPD fleet plan was implemented and six EPPD and one Code Enforcement vehicle were ordered through Enterprise Leasing. The vehicles are expected to be delivered soon, though they were promised in October 2021. A slate grey exterior color was ordered per the request of the EPPD.

Two new full-time officers were hired after successfully completing the rigors of the interview and security clearance. Officer Daniel Sanon, and Officer Carlos Vives will be joining the El Portal Police Department this month.

We are awaiting three quotes to purchase computers and portable printers for the department.

From Police Chief Alex Mendez November 2021

Chief Mendez is quite busy with staffing and operations changes in his department, therefore no report is provided at the time of this report. A department highlights report will be coming from Chief Mendez in December 2021.

Code Enforcement

Code Officer Michelle Shahryar resigned her position with the Village of El Portal last month. Officer Shahryar accepted a higher paying position with Ft. Lauderdale Code Enforcement. We wish her the very best and will miss her tremendously. We are accepting resumes and exploring staffing options to find her replacement, but the low salary has been a deterrent to qualified applicants. I expect a proposal from a placement company, Calvin, Giordano, and Associates this week.

Last month, the Village's Code Enforcement software was upgraded to GovPilot, and a subscription was paid per the budget line item approved by Village Council in September 2021.

From Code Enforcement November 2021

I am conducting interviews to fill this position. We have put the announcement on Indeed.com and the Village website. I am also requesting a proposal from the only entities in the area that provide Code Enforcement/Compliance workers, Calvin, Giordano & Associates, and CAP.

Building Department

The Building Department is managed by CAP Government under Building Official Pedro Martinez who came on board at the end of last month. To date, Mr. Martinez continues to fine tune the department while applying the letter of the law to all building projects to preserve health and

**November 2021
Manager's Report**

safety of the Village of El Portal. Ms. Grettel Fernandez is awaiting a permanent assignment with the Village of El Portal through CAP.

I met with CAP government and the Village of El Portal's IT contractor, Complete Care IT, to begin our transition into digitized document maintenance. There will be document management set up followed by scanning that will digitize the Village's administration allowing for better, faster customer service and freeing up much needed office space for employee safety and productivity. This will be a long process, but one that will garner much favor with our resident/customers and staff.

From CAP Building Department (Daysi Hycert) for October 2021 (A November Department Highlights Report has not been completed at the time of this report.)

**Permits Issued as of 10/30/2021*

- *31 Issued Permits*

**Inspections*

- *81 Inspections conducted between 10/01/2021 to 10/30/2021*

**Lien search requested for:*

*200 NE 85 ST
188 NW 89 ST
286 NE 90 ST
353 NE 85 ST
161 NW 89 ST
275 NE 89 ST
30 NW 88 ST
450 NW 91 ST
9001 NE 1 AVE*

Village Manager prepared two lien release documents that were filed with Miami Dade County Property Appraiser's office this month.

Planning and Zoning

Mayor Nickerson, PlusUrbia and I are meeting with entities interested in purchasing the "Little Farm" property and NE 2nd Avenue commercial property for sale, discussing the Village's charette, zoning requirements, sanitary sewer capabilities and parking matters related to the properties potential use.

Public Works and Maintenance

This month, the Village Council approved that CAP Government will provide Village of El Portal Public Works and Maintenance services for the Village. This service, to be provided by a part-time engineer and a full-time service employee, will coordinate existing contractors for electricity,

**November 2021
Manager's Report**

landscaper/arborist, cleaning, environmental plumbing and services for backflow and storm drain maintenance, as well as preparation and submission of local, state, and federal reporting, and a host of other necessary public works and maintenance duties for the Village.

Miami Dade County's Renovation of C7 CANAL BRIDGE at N. Miami Avenue

There has been NO CHANGE of the N. Miami Avenue Bridge at C7 Canal from last month's report. According to Miami Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works, the bridge reconstruction project remains halted because soil conditions did not allow for the implementation of the canal bank slopes originally permitted by the Army Corp of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District. Therefore, the County's Design Build Team developed an alternative solution for the canal embankment protection and is in the process of obtaining the permit modifications required for the new design. Once these modifications are approved by the permitting agencies, the bridge construction will resume. In the meantime, the Design Build Team is inspecting and maintaining the site regularly, ensuring the safety of the public and that the Maintenance of Traffic devices are properly in place. Stay alert and stay safe.

The Village of El Portal Parks Renovation and Renewal Project (funded by Kavista developers fees) - please see Special Projects Section for update. I continue to participate in the South Florida Parks Coalition with standing meetings every other Thursday afternoon.

Village Circulator Shuttle Pilot Program – please see Special Projects Section for update.

The Village of El Portal was selected with seven other municipalities for an NPDES audit for 2021. We are responding to the requests and providing required information to the audit. A public education campaign continues on the Village website, and flyers are posted at Village marquees and provided door-to-door.

Other Outstanding Public Works Projects:

1. Septic to Sewer Project (Pennoni) on West Side of Village

Pennoni – Mayor Nickerson, Interim Village Attorney Geller, Grants Consultant Robert Ruano and I have been working with Pennoni primary, Steven Elias, to resolve this project, and to get it back on track. The Village will pay Pennoni to finalize the Septic to Sewer design of the West Side project only, and to do the stormwater construction for that area. We met with Florida Department of Environmental Protection last week and were told that the funding opportunities are still there AFTER the design is completed.

CDBG/HUD critical facilities hardening grant was awarded to the Village of El Portal in February 2021. An environmental assessment was conducted twice and addressed by me and Building Official Marc Jean and Robert Ruano. I have painstakingly prepared

**November 2021
Manager's Report**

all the requirements of the contract with HUD/DEO for these funds. The Village is required to have four financial and administrative policies in place, where we only had one. Interim CFO Wallace has provided some of the policies at my request. We will continue to work on getting the balance of the required items including a training. Robert Ruano and I prepared a draft RFP/Invitation to Bid (ITB) for the necessary work that this grant will provide: the contractor will do the replacement of external doors and the installation of a generator at the Police Station/Village Hall. The grant amount is \$50,000.

2. El Jardin Stormwater Improvement.

The El Jardin storm water improvement project started on October 4, 2021. All neighborhood traffic is closed except for local traffic. Mayor Nickerson and I have been fielding calls from concerned residents about the project and their landscaping. Once the project is completed, all sod and landscaping will be restored to their original status. The timeline for the project (3 months) October to early January 2022. The Village is in good standing with FDEP for the \$550,000 grant funds being utilized for this project. To date, we have used approximately \$300,000, and the remaining balance will be utilized for the construction of the re-design as approved by FDEP.

3. Coastal Waste and Recycling – I am awaiting a date for the 2021 One-Time only holiday tree pick-up, and we will publish the dates of the 2022 bulk pick up, along with a flyer that describes what items are allowed for bulk pick up and recycling. The next scheduled bulk pick up is December 28, December 29, and December 30, 2021.

4. FPL Utility Update - The streetlight outage on NE 2nd Avenue have been reported to FPL and they remain out as of the time of this report. Also, the streetlights on North Miami Avenue have been reported for some months now. Last week, I followed up with Miami Dade County Transportation and Public Works, Traffic Signals and Signs Division, the owners of those streetlights, and was told that they will address the outages.

Public Affairs

My and the Administration's participation in public affairs is to supplement and aid the Public Affairs Committee/El Portal's Women's Club where possible.

I did coordinate with Ms. Marie Etienne of OneBlood Mobile for a single blood drive event in the Village. It is to take place between December 2021 and March 2022. We are awaiting a date that will be set by the Public Affairs committee.

Administration and Finance

**November 2021
Manager's Report**

Interim CFO Chris Wallace continues to respond to follow up questions and document requests for the 2019 Audit. Mr. Wallace commits to work with the Village and provide transition work once a new CFO firm is identified and in place. I have enlisted the services of a HR recruiter to find suitable financial services.

Though this month as had major human resources changes, I hosted a retirement reception for Chief David Magnusson, as well as assisted with the retirement and swearing-in program and reception for Chief Mendez and Chief Magnusson in the November 2021 Council Meeting.

From Office Administrator Christian Abril for November 2021

- Posting code enforcement officer position on Indeed and reviewing resumes received.
- Processing vendor invoices and payroll.
- Journalizing weekly cash receipts from building department.
- Calculating staffing and HR closeouts.

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