

VILLAGE HALL  
500 NE 87<sup>TH</sup> 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: February 22, 2022  
RE: February 2022 Village Manager's Report

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Please accept this memorandum as my February 2022 Village of El Portal Administrative Report to Council and the Community.

### **Hurricane Irma Financial Recovery**

There has been no change since the last update. See this: 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 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**

CFO Taubenfeld submitted additional reimbursement requests to Miami Dade County consultants, Hagerty Consulting, for **CARES Act** reimbursements that are being distributed from the County. The Village will be receiving approximately \$36,000 in CARES Act reimbursements. We are still awaiting this distribution.

American Rescue Program Act (**ARPA**) funds were distributed by the US Federal government through 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 projects. The Village is undergoing a digitization project for all departments, starting with the Building Department and Code Enforcement. By implementing digital services, the Village will make services and operations in those departments more efficient convenient for residents. The Village is also planning for emergency communications, a digital marquee at the Village Hall, and other tech advances that will greatly impact emergency services for the municipality. This project is ongoing.

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 Emergency Management Team continues to observe the viral variants and the numbers that may affect our service.

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Manager's Report**

**Short-term Rental In the Village of El Portal**

There has been no change to last months' update on Short-Term Rental. We are monitoring legislation from Tallahassee and pursuing our own regulations for short-term rentals in the Village.

**State Appropriation Funded School Safety Roundabout 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. The project will be designed, and the construction management will be with Village engineering firm, Craig A. Smith and Associates. Mayor Nickerson and I presented the project at the December 2021 Miami Shores Village Council Meeting. Miami Shores is in full support of the project and has advised us to approach the Miami Shores homeowner to begin the project, 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. Senior Engineer Orlando Rubio and I participated in an update meeting with FDOT, and we were told that we must keep the project moving and have our contract executed by May 2022 in order to keep the funds. We are presently awaiting legal documentation be drafted, presented and executed in order to finalize our contract with FDOT.

For the 2022 legislative session, the Village Mayor, Clerk, Vice Mayor, Public Works Committee Chair Councilperson Pirela and I traveled to Tallahassee, FL to advocate for the Village of El Portal's needs. Through much effort, we submitted requests for funding that address Senate and House of Representative funding appropriations for the expansion and improvement of the Village Hall, our parks renovations, and septic to sewer conversion on NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

**SPECIAL PROJECTS**

**Village of El Portal Parks Renovation**

The Village of El Portal Parks Renovation is on track for 2022. On February 16, 2022, Public Works Chair Councilperson Pirela and I held a kick-off meeting with Craig A. Smith and Associates, and subcontractor Landscaping Architect Jim Santiago, Comcast, Miami Dade County Dept. Transportation and Public Works and Orchidman Artisan Landscaping, and El Portal Public Works to discuss the project, lay out the project. We also conducted another Village-wide parks visit for these stakeholders to get first-hand understanding of the project and to see what they will need to accomplish their portion of the renovation effort. The next steps will include the landscape architect's preliminary plans that will be presented to the March 2022 Public Works Committee and to Village Council in March. The Village of El Portal will be renovating five parks and historic sites. Please check Village website for more information.

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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 implementing a Parks Impact Calculator program, and the Village must input tracking data into this calculator for reporting purposes. New Public Works Technician, Carlos Aguera, will be attending to that project.

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

The Village of El Portal has a lovely electrical shuttle vehicle, fully operating through FreeBee. An application may be downloaded to access the shuttle schedule and map. This information is also provided in a flyer and card that may be picked up at the Village Hall or on the Village website. Signage will also be provided by FreeBee. The shuttle stops are at the Village Hall parking lot (next to the Little Library) and at the El Portal Nature Trail. A security camera was installed to maintain the equipment. Amenities are being planned for the Nature Trail 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 and CFO Taubenfeld prepared the quarterly reimbursement request. Of particular concern is that we are not getting enough ridership to sustain the project. The Village Council and Administration have been promoting the service that requires reporting and community outreach to increase ridership. The ridership for the month of January 2022 is 54 completed rides, with 60 passengers.

**NE 2nd Avenue Business Corridor including Sanctuary Property**

Mayor Nickerson and I met with the Sanctuary property management team over the course of the month.

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, they 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. The property managers have been extremely accessible and responsive to neighbor complaints and concerns that have been brought to my attention. We expect to continue that good communication level. The property managers are also concerned with the area's sewer conversion as it limits their use and development of the property.

Miami Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava in November 2021 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. More follow-up meetings are expected in February and March. Miami Dade County is presently consolidating its public bus system and stops. Eight stops will be removed from N. Miami Avenue and 87<sup>th</sup> Street over the next six months. The Village will retain four stops in the County's consolidation plan.

## **February 2022 Manager's Report**

The Village also applied for a transportation planning grant last week with the County's assistance, to prepare this project. This is the planning necessary to start the development of the Village's Business Corridor as planned in meetings with me, Mayor Nickerson, our urban planners at Plusurbia, and our Village Attorney to consider policy changes for businesses owners along the NE 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

The vacant lot property at NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and NE 86<sup>th</sup> street is for sale. The property is a former Texaco station, contains five decontamination wells, and requires environmental clean-up, for which it is on a Miami Dade County waiting list to execute. The property owners are asking for \$1M for the property. The Village made a significantly lower offer but have gotten no response. The Village's interest in the property is that it could be a park for the Village of El Portal and could also provide the much-needed stormwater outfall construction for the Village's stormwater improvement plan in the El Jardin neighborhood of the Village.

### **Federal Build Back funds in El Portal**

The Village was awarded \$1.32 M to be utilized for 87 Street from NE to NW. No activity from this federal funding award, due to federal hold. We are awaiting next steps from the federal government to address our 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. 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 87<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **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. Building Official Martinez and I have been addressing permitting questions and timelines with the developers to start the project now that the Miami Dade County permits and impact fees have been paid. I will be meeting with the primaries, AR and Ken Barrington, with Mayor Nickerson and the Building Official Pedro Martinez in the first week of January 2022.

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Skate Bird Miami (Skate Park)

Skate Bird Miami continues to prepare its site for opening. For the first week of December, the owner opened under a special events permit, for two days to hold Art Basel/Art Miami charitable event at the location. The event was well attended, and well organized and executed. The project is still pending ADA parking, fire marshal, and several other requirements before they are to proceed with the opening of the space.

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**

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

*From Police Chief Alex Mendez February 2022*

- *We are reaching out to SAM.gov for assistance in obtaining the grant funds we were awarded for ballistic vests for officers.*
- *The new police vehicles are being equipped with emergency equipment and will be delivered in final in March 2022.*
- *A quote was obtained for the purchase of Village issued police firearms.*
- *Attended the Swearing-In and Promotion Ceremony for Miami Shores PD new police chief and staff with Officer Rajkumar and Manager Alou.*
- *Auditing and preparing the department for administrative needs. Reserve Officer Thomas Harrison is being prepared for a fulltime leadership position within the department. Officer Harrison has been conducting department discipline, IA investigations and background checks, as well as law enforcement grants applications among other things.*

**Code Enforcement**

The Village of El Portal has a new Code Enforcement Officer. His name is Terrell Williams. He started with the Village of El Portal the first week of January 2021 and resigned his position two weeks later. I am presently in communication with a Code Enforcement Staffing company for a replacement, but salary amounts remain an issue for the position.

*From Code Enforcement February 2022*

*No report was provided at the time of this report, this staff position is vacant.*

**Building Department**

## February 2022 Manager's Report

The Building Department is managed by CAP Government under Building Official Pedro Martinez. Our new building clerk is Dina Escobar and assistant building clerk, Franco Roman.

CAP government and the Village of El Portal's IT contractor, Complete Care IT, continue the Village's Administrative transition into digitized document maintenance. This technological advance 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. The project is currently in the prepping stage where documents are being prepared for scanning. Since the Village has documents which are very old, they require extra careful handling. Laserfiche was activated and we currently have a coding template which we have completed that will bring about the documents management system for the Village.

*From CAP Building Department February 2022*

*36 Permits issued*

*No new Certificates of Occupancy*

*Kavista development project permit issued (Annexed Area at Biscayne Boulevard and NE 83<sup>rd</sup> St.)*

### **Planning and Zoning**

Plusurbia continues to provide the items for review for signage, short-term rental, and other important planning and zoning matters before the Council. Mayor Nickerson, PlusUrbia and I are meeting with entities interested in purchasing the "Little Farm" property and NE 2<sup>nd</sup> 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**

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

*From Public Works Department, Director Mohan Thampi for February 2022*

- *Mohan Thampi, PE Public Works Director attended with Christia Alou, Village Manager, the VOEP Parks Renovation Kick-off Meeting on 2/16. Village Manager indicate that VOEP had been just awarded funding for El Jardin. Attendees were representatives from Miami Dade Parks, VOEP landscape consultant Craig A. Smith, FPL, Comcast/Xfinity, and VOEP landscape contractor Orchid Man. Jeff Ransom, Miami-Dade's Chief Archaeologist, was not well and send his comments by email for discussion. He had*

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*recommendation for landscape improvements and adding cover to the Tequesta Mound. It was agreed that Craig A. Smith would get landscape architectural plans for the various parks to the various parties at the meeting. Comcast would indicate the best location for modems and routers on the plans and where they need electrical power connection. These would need power from FPL who would provide electrical wiring to service points if no electrical service was available at parks. Craig A. Smith would then draw them on the constructions which would be bid.*

- *Requested that Craig A. Smith and Associates to update their 2019 VOEP Road and Sidewalk Repair report. Will use updated report to prioritize repairs using CITT funds.*
- *Participated in and Environmental Review meeting on January 25th with Henry Hernandez of Florida DEO, Village Manager Christia Alou and Robert Ruano, Grants Consultant, regarding environmental forms and reports required to be completed in order to finalize Police Station Hardening Project (IO180).*
- *Reviewed a Miami-Dade DTPW permit review request to see if El Portal had any comments on a permit application from Mastec.*
- *Carlos Aguera, Public Works Maintenance Coordinator has conducted department inventories, making minor repairs, cleaning the Bus Stop at NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and overseeing contractors are working on replacing electrical lights, replacing Marquee signs, and conducting landscaping. The following have been completed:*
  - a. *For the Public Works Equipment and Tool Room, a first inventory and then organized them to be accessible for use. An excel spreadsheet list the type of equipment and tools and their condition.*
  - b. *Cleaned the Bus Stop of graffiti and garbage and repair the light. Conducting daily inspections of all Village properties.*
  - c. *Repaired the bollard light in Sherwood Forest Park.*
  - d. *Seeking proposals for the replacement of the Village Hall Marquee with waterproof Digital The intent is to have a digital board with software where messages can be programmed wirelessly from the Village Manager's office. Have contacted and now awaiting three sign contractors for the price and installation quotes.*
  - e. *Monitoring the landscaping activities of the Village's contractor, Orchidman. Have had them trim trees near roofs at Tot Lot.*
  - f. *Continue to make inspection and inventory of streetlights which need repairs and bulb replacement. Have contacted two of the electrical contractors, FPL and Miami Dade County.*
  - g. *At Police Chief Alex Mendez's request, have started making inventory of stored items in Police Shelter Shed.*
  - h. *Have identified and tagged all Village keys and stored in key cabinet.*
  - i. *Attended the MS4 Group Meeting (NPDES)*

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Village of El Portal Sustainability and Resiliency

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. Mr. Thampi and Mr. Aguera will participate in the taskforce in the coming months as guests.

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.

Miami Dade County Bus Route Consolidation Project

Miami Dade County is conducting a bus route consolidation throughout Miami Dade County that will eliminate a bus stop at N. Miami Avenue and 86<sup>th</sup> Street. The amenities are to be removed along with the bus stop. Miami Dade County Transportation and Public Works requires that the Village remove the bench. I asked if we may relocate the bench to another bus stop and am awaiting a location. Eight bus stops will be removed in the Village of El Portal, four will remain.

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

NPDES - 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 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 –The Village will pay Pennon 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.



## **February 2022 Manager's Report**

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 Pedro Martinez and Robert Ruano. I have painstakingly prepared 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 and wrapped up this month. A road resurfacing project for the affected roads was conducted with Village's Surtax funds. Contractor, Southeastern Construction is requested additional funds for the project due to unexpected work.

3. Coastal Waste and Recycling – The 2022 bulk pick-up schedule is posted on the Village website and was distributed by Mayor Nickerson in his neighborhood walk tours.
4. FPL Utility Update – This month, I met with FPL to discuss service fee increases. The breakdown of which will be posted on the Village's website.

## **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.

The Village Administration is coordinating a FreeBee Village of El Portal Ride-Along to introduce the new free shuttle service to the community. A video is planned and will be placed on the Village website to encourage ridership.

A blood drive will be held coordinate with Ms. Marie Etienne of OneBlood Mobile for a single blood drive event in the Village in conjunction with the El Portal Women's Club's March 2022 Movie Night to be held in the El Portal Tot Lot.

## **Administration and Finance**

The Village of El Portal has successfully identified a CFO/Finance Director. His name is Harry Taubenfeld, and he is working with the former-Interim CFO Chris Wallace to complete the 2019 and 2020 Audits.

### ***From Chief Financial Officer Harry Taubenfeld for February 2022***

- *Completed Open Item List for 2019 Year end audit so that auditors can complete audit.*
- *Audit currently ongoing with a projected completion date of Mid-march*

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- *Communicated with JLAC regarding outstanding audits and anticipated completion dates so that no funds are withheld from the State of Florida*
- *Continuously speaking with Synovus Bank as it relates to audit. Was able to hold off bank from defaulting loan*
- *Finalized and Increased reimbursement with Miami Dade County as it relates to COVID reimbursement.*
- *Worked with FDOT to submit quarterly reimbursement for ride sharing service*

***From Office Administrator Christian Abril for February 2022***

- *Assisting CFO Taubefeld with ongoing audit.*
- *Processing changes in payroll deductions for the new year of employee benefits.*
- *Ongoing processing of village invoices and payroll.*
- *Ongoing processing of cash receipts and check deposits received from the front desk.*

I, along with Mayor Nickerson, Vice Mayor Urbom, Councilperson Pirela and Clerk Jacobi participated in Miami Dade County Dade Days at the Capitol on February 2 -3, 2022. We met with our lobbying team, Akerman and Nortelis Roberts, LLC, for strategy and meetings to advocate for the Village's Parks Renovation (House Bill 9143 Rep. Joseph, LFIR#2037 Sen. Pizzo), and Village Hall Renovations (HB 9145 Rep. Joseph, LFIR#2038 Sen. Pizzo), and VOEP Septic to Sewer Conversion – Phase 1 Connection to County Central Sewer System at NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. We were not able to meet with Senator Pizzo due to family illness but were later told by our lobbying team that he is strongly urging the Village to take out an infrastructure bond for the sewer project.

I have been undergoing a leadership training through the International County and City Managers Association, entitled Leadership Development Academy, since January. The training requires six to ten hours of coursework each week, with meetings on Thursdays and Fridays. I am quite happy with the training, and excited for the results that will follow. The training will last until the end of April 2022. I also attended the Florida County and City Managers Association web training on Psychological Empowerment. I have set up a Zoom training for all Village Staff and Council members with the Miami Dade County Commission on Ethics for Wednesday, February 23, 2022 11AM-1PM. And I am seeking to organize a federal EEOC training refresher for the Village staff in the coming weeks.

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.