

VILLAGE HALL  
500 NE 87<sup>TH</sup> ST  
EL PORTAL, FL  
CHRISTIA E. ALOU, ESQ.  
VILLAGE MANAGER



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

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Village of El Portal Council  
FR: Christia E. Alou, Village Manager  
DATE: May 23, 2023  
RE: May 2023 Village Manager's Report

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Please accept this memorandum as my May 2023 Village of El Portal Administrative Report to Council and the Community.

### **State of Florida Legislative Session 2023**

The Village of El Portal submitted two projects for requested funding through the Florida legislature appropriations process. After watching both projects through the appropriations process, our legislative team determined that the Village Hall Renovation funding request would be more successful and pulled the parks renovation project back. The Village's legislative team reports that the request is still alive in the senate budget at this moment (Village Hall renovations), but there is a pending amendment to reduce the requested amount. Mayor Nickerson and I met with the legislative team and members of the appropriations administrative staff to discuss the Village Hall Renovation project and its importance. Police Chief Mendez wrote a supporting letter to Governor Ron DeSantis explaining the need to separate the administrative departments from the police and public safety department, which was met with positivity. We are awaiting further response. Fingers are still crossed.

The Village of El Portal's legislative team, Richard Pinsky of Akerman, LLC and Eli Nortelus and David Roberts of Nortelus Roberts, PA, advised that the State requires that municipalities prove and provide matching funds for all appropriation requests. Our requests are sponsored by our State Representative Dotie Joseph and State Senator Shevron Jones. Our legislative team will be representing the Village of El Portal throughout the session and thereafter, and will attend upcoming Council meeting to provide information about the session, any funding that comes to the Village of El Portal, and preparation for fall session.

### **Hurricane Irma Financial Recovery**

The Village of El Portal is in the process of re-negotiating our loan with Synovus Bank for Hurricane Irma recovery expenses as we continue to await fund reimbursements from the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and the state, Florida Department of Emergency Management (FDEM). This month, FDEM finalized its review of another category of funds for distribution to the Village of approximately \$100,000. I have been in several meetings with FEMA and FDEM to review the projects again. Due to constant staffing turnover at the state level (FDEM), we are reintroducing the appeal, but remain hopeful. We await FDEM's obligation of those funds and their

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distribution as we continue to await the distribution of the obligated appeal amount from September 26, 2022 of \$448,998.21. Once FDEM sends the obligated funds to the Village of El Portal, those funds will be wired to Synovus Bank to pay on the \$695,551.21 note. We hope that these funds will become available soon..

**Corona Virus/COVID-19 Pandemic Municipal Response and Recovery**

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 utilizing these funds to enhance the El Portal Police Department with equipment and staff that has been long-needed, and 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 and convenient for residents. The Village also conducted light inner-office renovations to allow for more space for co-workers to safely distance from one another, emergency communications that includes a digital marquee at the Village Hall, and other tech advances that will greatly impact emergency services for the municipality. The Village CFO and I will be provided a report to the federal government on April 30, 2023. All ARPA funds have been expended per our commitment.

**Short-term Vacation Rental (STVR) In the Village of El Portal**

The Florida Legislature did not reach an agreement in its plan to address short-term vacation rental properties. Therefore, there is no change at the state level. Currently, the state Department of Business and Professional Regulation issues licenses for vacation rentals.

As for VOEP's STVR policy, there has been no update since February 2023. Councilperson Darian Martin, Chairperson of the Village of El Portal's Planning and Zoning Committee and Attorney Joseph Geller held a second community workshop to discuss resident concerns about the Village's Short-Term Vacation Rental Ordinance on Thursday, February 23, 2023. It was well attended. Discussion and concerns about the ordinance and fees were had, and the result may be the presentation of an amended ordinance from the Village Attorney and the Planning and Zoning Committee in the coming months. In the meantime, the Village is not enforcing its STVR Ordinance. The Village of El Portal passed an ordinance regulating Short-Term Vacation Rentals (STVR) within the municipality in May 2022.

**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 was designed, and the construction management will be with the Village engineering firm, Craig A. Smith, and Associates. Miami Shores Village Manager, Code Enforcement and Public Works

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Departments are in full support of the project, and it has been presented to the State for final approval. Once approved, the Villages will execute a MOU for the shared location, but this is an EL Portal project. An RFP will be issued for general contractors to construct the project, and mobility plans and information about the project will be shared with residents of both municipalities and Horace Mann Middle School. This project will take three weeks to construct once construction commences after general contract selection is made through the appropriate procurement process. This project is ongoing.

**SPECIAL PROJECTS**

The Village of El Portal has a new Landscaping and Tree Services Contractor, Green Dreams Paradise Co. Hurricane preparedness tree trimming for safety only will be conducted June 12, 13 and 14, 2023. We welcome Green Dreams Paradise to our El Portal family.

**Village of El Portal Parks Renovation**

The Village of El Portal conducted a search for general contractor services for parks renovation and preservation in February and March 2023. One general contractor responded to RFP 2023-03 and is still being vetted due to pricing. As points of information, these parks projects have nuance and unique characteristics. For example, Sherwood Forest Park and the Tequesta Mound must have all restoration and preservation work done under the guidance of a certified archaeologist. When the project moves forward, the Village will engage Mr. Bob Carr, former Miami Dade County Archaeologist to oversee the renovation project in Sherwood Forest Park and the Tequesta Mound.

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

We are considering a smaller, less expensive vehicle that will not diminish the level of service. Though a small service, it is heavily relied upon by a small group of residents. Options for the service are being considered to increase ridership, such as expanded hours and expanded service area. This enhancement is forthcoming. Please stay tuned.

**NE 2nd Avenue Business Corridor**

The Sanctuary Property is now "Village Plaza". The Village Plaza project is ongoing, with permits and plans having been submitted this month. The project is planning a private sewer conversion of the property with Miami Dade County and Miami Shores Village and is expected to run from NE 88<sup>th</sup> Street to NE 1 Avenue to the closest Miami Shores Village lift station at NE 96 Street. The Village Administration and El Portal Police will work with the community and the Village Plaza Property team to communicate and accommodate local impacts for this project. According to the property managers, they are planning to develop two small restaurants, retail and offices at the location.

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Roadway and Traffic – The Village submitted our completed traffic study report and mobility study to Miami Dade County Transportation and Public Works to support the Village's request for reduced speed limit to 25mph on Village streets, for painted intersections at NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and N. Miami Avenue, and for a "road diet" to reduce NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue from four lanes to two lanes to match the City of Miami and Miami Shores Village. The Village's Public Works Director, Mohan Thampi is preparing a permit application for the speed limit reduction and will submit this to Miami Dade County which has been approved, and the Interlocal Agreement for the reduction of the speed limit is being presented at the May 23, 2023 Council Meeting. An information campaign to residents and visitors is forthcoming to educate about the new lower speed limit. This project is ongoing.

To report a pothole, please contact [publicworks@villageofelportal.org](mailto:publicworks@villageofelportal.org) with a physical address and photo.

**Biscayne Boulevard/Annexed Area Development**

The Kavista Rental Development at El Portal Annex

The Kavista Project continues developing according to plan, with occupancy expected by the end of the year. City of Miami residents have complained about the Skatebird for music noise and Kavista construction project noise. Under the Code and according to the Z5 zoning, music and noise are permitted within 100 feet of the property in its usual course of business. For the Village of El Portal, music and noise outside of business hours and construction hours are permitted only upon application and approval of Special Events Permit. Skatebird Miami is preparing a noise mitigation plan that will include a sound curtain for the property, that they will submit to the Village in response to the request for it.

The owners of the Kavista Project development are planning a second development along the canal coast of the El Portal Annex entitled The Launch. Finalized plans are being prepared for submission in the coming months.

Skate Bird Miami (Skate Park)

Skate Bird Miami is open for business with a temporary certificate of occupancy, but has submitted plans for its kitchen, that when approved will satisfy the requirements needed to obtain its Certificate of Occupancy.

Former Trailer Park "Little Farm"

This property is still in receivership. The problems any developer will face with this property is the brownfield status and mitigation of the water and ground pollution on the site. Once that is addressed and corrected, then development will follow.

**VOEP DEPARTMENTS HIGHLIGHTS**

**Police and Public Safety/El Portal Police Department (EPPD)**

Mayor Nickerson, Chief Mendez, Major Harrison and I met on May 23, 2023 to review the hurricane and emergency preparedness plans for the Village of El Portal. This is the annual preparation conducted by the Emergency Management Team to ready the staff and the residents. A preparedness

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video message is being prepared for the first week of June that will be placed on the Village of El Portal website and on Village social media. Village of El Portal Police Department to receive three new exterior impact doors, three impact windows, a generator, and a new air conditioning unit from a HUD grant (\$50,000) the Village received. We look forward to the improvements.

*From Police Chief Alex Mendez for May 2023*

- *Department completed (3) day certification training in Active Shooter*
- *Multi-Agency active shooter drill conducted at FIU North Campus along with Miami Dade Priority Response Team*
- *Officers S. Canela and R. Padron completed a 40-hour certification training in Tactical Medical Response with the City of Miami and Miami Dade Police.*
- *Arrival of Baby Harrison (Police Major Thomas Harrison) on Wednesday May24 @ 7:30 AM. 🥰*

### **Code Enforcement**

*From Code Enforcement Officer Fitzgerald Simmons for May 2023*

- *Open Cases (CCIN's, NOCI's, Verbal Warnings) -272*
- *Open Cases (May 2023) -10*
- *Active Liens- 7*

### **Building Department**

*From CAP/Building Department Building Official Pedro Martinez for May 2023*

*Total Fees Collected - \$21,407.30*

*Total Permits Issued – 43*

*Total Construction Value \$151,167*

*Conducted several extensive public records requests this month. Assisted with the on-boarding of new Zoning contractor, The Corradino Group.*

### **Planning and Zoning**

Plus Urbia Design will now conduct Planning services only for the Village of El Portal. The Corradino Group is now the Village's Zoning contractor. They will conduct site plan reviews, variance requests and zoning inspections for the Village. Please contact the Village's Zoning Department at [Zoning@villageofelportal.org](mailto:Zoning@villageofelportal.org).

### **Public Works and Maintenance**

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*From Public Works Department Director Mohan Thampi for May 2023*

- \* *MDC Transportation and Public Works permit application by Village Public Works recommending lowering of 30MPH road speed limit to 25MPH with David Plummer & Associates report as backup. Application submitted and approval received from MDC.*
- *MDC NE 2nd Avenue Mobility (Traffic) Study by David Plummer & Associates completed with 3 recommendations to be presented at May Village meeting.*
- *Review projects for potential USDOT Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) FY 2023 Grants.*
- *Construction on hold with Tot Park. Awaiting Council approval of new contractor, Victor Marzo, whose scope and agreement will be presented to Council in May.*
- *Attend CoMotion23 Miami Conference about electric vehicles and parking at Port of Miami.*
- *Drafted MS4 Permit Illicit Discharge Ordinance regarding discharge of contaminants and pollutants in the stormwater drainage system. First reading made at April Council meeting with second reading in May.*
- *Public works and Code Enforcement staff attended NPDES MS4 Stormwater Inspection Certification Training*
- *Coordinating plan to start replacement of windows and doors, air conditioning unit and generator for Critical Facilities Hardening Grant for Police station.*
- *Drive and inspect daily to various areas of Village to check for litter, problems or issues.*
- *Coordinate landscaping activities with Orchidman whose services are being terminated effective June 30, 2023, and will be replaced with Blue Dreams Paradise Landscaping Co.*
- *Continue to make inspection and inventory of streetlights which need repairs and bulb replacement.*
- *Continue checking stormwater drainage inlets, clear and clean them of surface debris blockages as needed.*
- *Continue to review various Village right-of-way permit applications and those submitted to Miami Dade Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTPW) for construction in Village Road right-of-ways.*
- *Finalizing Village Hall Building 40 Year Recertification & Inspection – 40 Year Certification Study by HMB Engineering Services PA.*
- *Respond to queries on right of way requirements by contractors.*
- *Coordinating tree stump removal from a right-of-way.*

Village of El Portal Sustainability and Resiliency

Mayor Nickerson, Public Works Director Thampi, Public Works Coordinator Aguera and I attended a meeting with Ms. Elizabeth Fata Carpenter, Executive Director of the Miami Environmental Law Center and Chairperson of the Village of El Portal Sustainability and Resiliency Taskforce to review the MS4/NPDES year four report, and to plan the year five activities. It was a very detailed and technical meeting that we will follow up with a second meeting.

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.

The Village of El Portal was granted approximately \$900,000 for the Resilient 305 2021-22 grant to be utilized for stormwater improvements on Phase Two of the El Jardin community as was detailed

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in the Village's Local Mitigation Strategy. This is a matching grant, for which I met with FDEP leadership to determine if the El Jardin Stormwater Improvement Phase One work that was just completed earlier this year may be considered for the Village's match. The answer is yes, but we must add approximately \$250,000 to make up the residual amount of the match. This is good news for the Village and for our efforts in bringing water quality improvements to the residents. This project is ongoing.

The Village of El Portal was included in the Miami Dade County Reasonable Assurance Plan (RAP), led by Miami Dade the RAP coordinates County water quality policies and initiatives, and prioritizes the County's most vital areas, with El Portal and our neighboring municipalities being identified as most needy due to the C7 Little River Canal's effect on Miami Biscayne Bay's water quality. Mayor Omarr Nickerson is leading a collaborative effort with all Miami Dade County Coastal Mayors of Biscayne Bay.

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

Extremely slow to no progress continues.

Other Outstanding Public Works Projects:

1. Septic to Sewer Project on West Side of Village

99 Homes of the Village's West Side – the Village met with and finalized all portions of the easement payment for the small parcel required for the lift station at Horace Mann Middle School. The first installment payment for \$18,000 was issued to Miami Dade County Public Schools, and the executed land conveyance from MDCPS was received last month. Additionally, Miami Dade County Transportation and Public Works received a grant that they will use to convene the project. We are awaiting a viable scope of work to be prepared and authorized by FDEP.

2. CDBG/HUD critical facilities hardening grant was awarded to the Village of El Portal. 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. Consultant Robert Ruano of Ecostrata Consulting, the Village of El Portal Public Works Department and the Chief Financial Officer and I have done the requisite reports, policy drafts, correspondence with the Miccosukee Tribe regarding the project and are now awaiting responses and approvals. We also 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. We have successfully submitted all required documents and are now awaiting a notice to proceed from HUD. Finally!

3. El Jardin Stormwater Improvement.

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A phase of the El Jardin storm water improvement project was completed in January 2022. Just recently, the Village of El Portal was granted the Resilient Florida Grant for 2021 by Governor DeSantis. This grant is a matching grant that would provide the Village with over \$900,000 from the State (FDEP) to do the next phase of the El Jardin project. Receiving the Resilient Florida grant is a tremendous win for the Village of El Portal, and a meeting between me and FDEP garnered the approval of the use of the El Jardin Stormwater Improvement Phase 1 project to serve as a portion of the match requirements of Phase 2. Phase 2 will require the outfall easement that we desperately need in El Jardin. Craig A. Smith and Associates Consultant Engineer Orlando Rubio and I are meeting with homeowners to begin the process of securing the outfall easement.

4. The Neat Street Tree Planting Matching Grant was received this month and will allow for the planting of 75 native trees in the Village. Planting to take place in May 2023. Tree City USA Certification is being renewed through application. A VOEP Tree Board will hold a board meeting in the coming months under chairman Councilperson Anders Urbom. In the meantime, Grants Consultant Robert Ruano and I continue to process necessary reports and documentation of the Village's Tree City USA status and activity and work with the Public Works Department on day-to-day maintenance. We are still awaiting the arrival of the new trees.

**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 Administration will continue to support all public affairs efforts. At present the Village's website and social media, the digital marquee sign, Mayor Omarr Nickerson's door-to-door flyer distribution with vital information about what is happening in the Village, are being utilized as outreach. Vice Mayor Pirela is assisting in a Code Enforcement Reminder Flyer to residents about waste and recycled bins being addressed and put away appropriately for the health and safety and beautification of the Village. Councilperson Lightfoot-Ward is planning her annual Memorial Day Ceremony and Wreath Presentation for Monday, May 29, 2023. Mayor Nickerson and Members of the Village Council conduct outreach to residents regularly.

**Administration and Finance**

*From Chief Financial Officer Harry Taubenfeld for May 2023*

*From Office Administrator David Perez for May 2023*

- Working out the kinks of the transition to our new payroll company.
- Program employees' biometrics in the new punch clock



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- Processed first payroll with ADP.
- Initiated and currently working on an employee payroll audit.
- Regular day-to-day responsibilities.

There continue to be varied requests, directives, and projects I provide at the request of the Village Council and members of the El Portal community. I also participated in several forums on behalf of the Village over the course of the month. For more information, please contact me directly. Thank you.

*Village Manager Christia E. Alou, Esq.*

