

2014-2015 State of the Village Address  
Mayor Cindy Lerner

December 12, 2014  
Evelyn Greer Park  
Pinecrest, Florida

We come together today, at our annual Pinecrest Pioneers Holiday luncheon, one of my favorite events, to provide the annual State of the Village address as required by our Village Charter, and delivered before our Pinecrest Pioneers and other residents. This event, you should all know, is an example of how we have collaborated with our residents, and with the Pinecrest Garden Club, to create a new event and a program that is now a much beloved tradition.

One of the first actions I took six years ago was to ask the Council to develop a strategic plan to guide us as we moved forward, to provide basic principles and goals that we, as a Council, together with input from our residents and businesses, would create. We conducted a survey, held focus groups, and over the course of several months of meetings and discussions, we developed six priority areas of focus and outcomes we would work toward. The plan was finalized in 2010 and was updated in 2013. At that time, we acknowledged the goals that we had reached, updated others and added a few new ones.

We created a *Vision Statement* which reads: The Village of Pinecrest is a highly livable community, with an excellent government, stable finances, safe streets, outstanding recreation facilities and infrastructure, a high-quality residential chapter with lush streetscape, excellent schools, valuable cultural assets and sustainable operations and living with leadership which progressively enhances opportunities for citizen interaction and participation.

We have made much progress over the past six years, and have met many goals, and are well on our way with others. One of the first steps was to further engage our residents. As a component of meeting that highest standard of civic engagement, as stated in our plan, we added four new advisory groups: a Transportation; Community Center; and an Education Advisory group. Each of which offers residents an opportunity to learn more about the Village, to help problem solve and to innovate in rendering advisory recommendations to the Council. We also created the Pinecrest Youth Advisory Council, something I am immensely proud of. Over the past six years, we have seen dozens of our middle and high school students blossom, engage in our community, help develop new programs and eventually go off to college and begin life as young adults. They participate as a team in our Pinecrest, Relay for Life, they collaborate with the Cleo Institute and offer programs during the Earth Day Festival, and they engage in community service projects. I know that the hands-on civil lessons they learned will help them be leaders in their communities, and hope some of them will return to Pinecrest, perhaps one day, to serve in an elected capacity!

We can be proud of broad array of programming and services for children, youth, adults, and seniors. We added a senior activities position, which is now full-time, and hiring the coordinator, Janice Drewing, who is responsible for providing a full compliment of enrichment, educational, cultural fitness, and social activities for the adult and senior set. We instituted the Pinecrest People Mover several years ago, our own transit system for our middle school and high school students, to transport them to and from school each week day and to also bring them to the community center and library after school. My vision for the future of our transit system is that the Council will invest in extending the transit services to our seniors, by purchasing a new transit van so that we can begin offering transportation to our seniors who can no longer drive, but are still interested in attending programs and classes at our community center and library.

On a typical week day at the community center, you will see a class of *Mommy and Me* toddlers in one room, and a seniors stretch class in another. There are Spanish and Chinese classes, lectures on health, and numerous enrichment programs and speakers, there is a game day for seniors to play cards or board games, a weekly lecture, the Osher lifelong learning classes, and in the afternoon, students take dance, fencing, violin, and karate. Adults take dance, as well. The weekends also include children's violin and tutoring programs. The wellness and fitness programs include strength training, Yoga, stretch, Spinning, and several varieties of dance including Zumba, and jiving jazz. Recognizing that the size of the community center no longer meets our vibrant community needs, and that an audit and consultant recommendation to expand was our only option to be able to meet the needs of our residents, the Council made a decision this past year committing to expand the community center. This expansion will add additional rooms including a new senior activities room and a new multi-purpose room; the fitness rooms, movement room and the spin room will be enlarged, as well as a snack bar area at the entrance and an indoor play area for young children. This year, the Council also approved playground and building improvements to Coral Pine Park - we will be renovating the tennis building and improving and updating the playground area and adding new landscaping.

Our strategic plan also includes as a goal a commitment to strengthen our community relationships, and to increase cooperative opportunities with civic and community based organizations, and I continue to seek out those opportunities. We have a strong collaboration with many organizations, CLEO Institute on climate change policies and programs, as well as the League of Cities at the county, state and national levels. And of course, we are quite proud of our international Sister City relationship with Cognac, France. Celebration of Cognac Day continues every February 15th and again this year, the mayor of Cognac will be visiting with a delegation. Our high school students will be visiting France and Cognac, the students will continue to Skype, and we are planning a panel discussion on sustainability with French experts and local businesses.

For the past six years we have focused on advancing this Village as a sustainable community, and, several years ago, Pinecrest attained the USGBC Sustainable City Silver Certification after an audit of all operations and revisit our procedures to be more efficient. This year, we were recognized with the *Sustainable Government Award* in recognition of our outstanding achievements and excellence in helping to create a sustainable economic, environmental and social future for Florida by Sustainable

Florida at its 17th annual event. In addition, also last month, I was awarded the *Most Outstanding Green Elected Official Award* by the U.S. Green Building Council, South Florida Chapter, as a result of the leadership Pinecrest is known for in the field of sustainability.

The Strategic Plan also commits us to raise the visibility of our Police Department through a proactive crime prevention campaign by working with residents to establish more crime watch groups throughout the Village. The department has made great strides in their crime prevention programs, expanding community awareness and involvement through our Neighborhood Crime Watch. This year, ten new neighborhood watch groups have been created, bringing to a total of 19 groups. The focus is to make sure our neighbors get to know each other, and to be more alert and look out for anything out of the ordinary in the neighborhood. Each group has a telephone connection, they share information from our police and keep track of any other crimes occurring in the area. Our Police Department has also become a member of a multi-agency task force to expand our collaboration with other law enforcement agencies, and they have made technological advances to be better able to communicate to our residents what crimes have occurred in their own neighborhood to better alert them to their surroundings with such applications as crimemapping.com. We also committed to evaluate where pedestrian safety needs to be enhanced and to implement all phases of the Safe. Routes to School program, to complete the US 1 Corridor Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility study and implement the walkability initiatives identified in the study.

Another important priority in the Strategic Plan is to improve the amount and variety of arts and culture in the Village, and we have broadened and enhanced our cultural offerings each year. This year, we are proud to have attracted an amazing exhibit, the 4 Seasons, a group of 4 fiberglass sculptures each 15 feet high, inspired by the art of Giusippe Arcimboldo's renaissance paintings, by Philip Haas for six months. They are nothing short of magnificent in our Pinecrest Gardens, and we are now among a very short list of botanic gardens in the world to have exhibited them. Recently, the Council was so proud to support our Pinecrest Gardens Director as she was the recipient of a grant of \$75,000 she applied for three years in a row and, finally, perseverance paid off and we won the grant - Knight Arts to enhance our Jazz series. We have free Sunday concerts each month, the jazz series, theatre, including the Miami Acting Company, Palm Beach Shakespeare Festival, Miami Children's Theatre, dance performances, and family movie nights. In addition, we have fabulous community events each month such as Live Like Bella Nights of Lights, the Art Festival, Easter Eggstravaganza, and Earth Day Festival.

Our five public schools have been the bedrock of this Village for more than 50 years. The Village has a strong partnership with them. Our Education Advisory Council meets monthly, with the five principals, PTA Presidents, School Board member Dr. Feldman, and region representatives. We began a new joint community fundraiser to benefit all five schools; this will be our third year for the signature Fashion in the Gardens on February 27<sup>th</sup> at Pinecrest Gardens.

Collaboration is key to much of our success, with neighboring cities, and with our local schools, through our participation with non profit organizations such as Anti-Defamation League where we participate in the *No Place for Hate/Community of Respect* Anti Bullying program, which provides classroom discussion, events and integrates the concept into school activities at all of our schools, to 6,000 students – as well as Pinecrest being named a *Community of Respect*. We are doing that again this year. All of our schools will see building enhancements and upgrades by the school district as a result of the 21st Century Bond and the school board and superintendent's commitment to renovate the aging infrastructure in most of our local public schools. As the vice chair of that advisory committee, I have the opportunity to have hand-ons knowledge and advocate for our own schools. They have also seen an increase in new technology as well as continued focus to support them by our Village. The crowning achievement will be a new \$29 million dollar high school built on the site of the current school.

There still remains work to be done to complete our municipal infrastructure by acquiring the state or county funding necessary to complete the potable water project as there are still approximately 800 homes on wells. Although state and federal funding had dried up for several years after the economic downturn, now that there is a surplus in the state's economic picture, we have renewed our efforts, and redoubled them to assure we are recipients of state grants as a donor community, we are certainly deserving of those funds. And our collaboration with the county in identifying an appropriate site for a new fire rescue station to service the southeastern part of the Village – and it appears they finally have secured one on Old Cutler at 142 Street serving the north-side of PB and southern part of Pinecrest.

This is the proper point in which to recognize the dedicated professional staff here in Pinecrest. Our manager, the department directors, our clerk and attorney, all the way to our code compliance officers, building department, parks, and public works staffs, and of course, our police, all of which are so caring, of each other, and of our residents...this is a caring Village and I thank all who work for the Village for your commitment to excellence and to building a sense of community.

The future of Pinecrest is also part of our Strategic Plan, and one intended outcome, is to explore the potential annexation of neighboring areas and analyze the impact, positive and negative, on municipal services. We are now in the process of doing that, as we recently received a consultant's study of the adjacent neighborhoods that both we and they could consider annexing to become a part of our Village. We have several options, for me, the most obvious direction to grow our Village would be to "go west young village, go west;" it is the land of opportunity for us. Should Pinecrest expand its boundaries? Should we grow and if so, in what direction, how big and how soon? Most municipalities typically will expand their boundaries over the years, and Pinecrest, which will soon be 20 years old, has opportunities to do so as well. The County Commission has been considering the future of the unincorporated areas over the past few years, by convening a Task Force which offered recommendations last year, and last month approved a new study to recommend the best process for going forward. It is critical that our Council, along with input from our residents, plan for what would make the most sense and provide our Village with more opportunities for expansion along the US 1 corridor, as well as bring in new neighborhoods that are high value and surround us.

At the October Council meeting, the Council received a report on the potential options we should consider if and when there is a decision to expand the Village boundaries. Personally, I see this as an important direction for us to take, but in modest doses. The fact that our commercial sector is so small, and accounts for only 13% of our overall tax base, places a heavier tax burden on the residents. The western boundary along US 1 could be expanded further west and include the commercial section on the other side of US 1 from Dadeland to The Falls. The study by the consultant looked at a huge area west of US 1, in fact as far as the Don Shula Expressway, but I would not be in favor of going nearly that far west. However, the analysis shows a large potential revenue base with a small expenditure needed to properly serve that area. Of course it would also immediately raise the property values of any properties that would be annexed into Pinecrest. It is a discussion we should begin now, so we will convene a working committee in the near future.

This past year, I had the honor to serve as the President of the Miami Dade County League of Cities. There are 34 cities in Miami-Dade County. It has been a great opportunity to broaden my perspective on municipal governance by learning from the history, the successes and challenges of all of our neighbors, and most important, I learned how important it is to advocate with a unified voice. I am also serving on the Board of the Florida League of Cities, and on the Board of the National League of Cities. Last month, I was appointed by the President of the National League of Cities to be Chair of the Policy Steering Committee on Energy, Environment and Natural Resources. Members of this committee come from all over the country, and we all share a commitment to the future, assuring sustainable practices to make sure we are leaving our cities in better shape than we found them. I have learned so much about how cities all over this country address challenges, create new initiatives with their residents and with their businesses, learned best practices, and about the tremendous opportunities that await us as we grow and move forward as a community. So much of the advocacy that we, your local officials assert on your behalf focuses on county, state and federal funds, programs, laws and frequently barriers to the needs of cities. Cities are impacted in significant ways by the actions of our county, our state and the federal government. So, the more we join together, the stronger our voice. at one of the state league of cities meetings recently, someone said to me, "Oh Pinecrest, that's the small town with the big reputation." We work hard to deserve that big reputation, so you have much to be proud of and much to celebrate. Thank you for the honor of being your mayor.