



Date: December 3, 2020

To: Mayor Hagen Brody & the City Commission

From: Tom Barwin, City Manager

Subject: 12/07/20 Agenda Item, XVI.3 – 2012-2020 Review

As I transition from serving as Sarasota's City Manager over the past 8.5 years, I have taken the liberty herein to share some of the notable achievements which have occurred in Sarasota during my tenure, many of which have required collaborations with others. During my tenure I have had the honor of working directly with 14 different City Commissioners, 3 County Administrators, 3 School Superintendents, 2 Sarasota Memorial Hospital CEOs, 2 Chamber of Commerce Presidents, dozens of members of the media and over 100 citizens who volunteer to serve on our various boards and commissions. I am grateful that City staff has been an island of stability and continuity throughout my tenure.

BACKGROUND

When I arrived to become City Manager in Sarasota in September of 2012, if I were to attempt to describe the state of the city government in a word it would ship-wrecked.

Staff morale was very low, the city was adrift, consumed by a fabricated political scandal and accusations of corruption, eventually proven to be unfounded. The homeless situation was such, sitting benches had been removed from Selby Five Points Park. A complete exodus of senior leadership at SPD was underway, not to mention the community and local economy was continuing to work through the remaining vestiges of the Great Recession.

With morale low and related productivity being the immediate crisis that I inherited, my initial efforts focused on calming the waters, changing the subject to legitimate community building and opportunities on the horizon. Within a few months of my arrival the scandal era was brought to closure and the dark cloud above City Hall moved on. I worked diligently to meet as many people and organizations as I could within the community which began to open many dialogues and potential partnerships within the community.

A REFOCUSED CITY GOVERNMENT

As good city managers do my priority was to assist the City Commission and staff get back to the basic work of city government beginning with maintaining our basic infrastructure while

improving city services and supporting the growth of the local economy and quality of life within the community.

LIFT STATION 87

The second significant problem I inherited was the crisis of Lift Station 87, which had been stopped dead in its rocky, micro-tunneling tracks. With no utility director on board to take responsibility or shed light on why the project had stopped, an enormous amount of time was spent reviewing every aspect and element of the project in what proved to be a very dangerous, poorly conceived, and horribly mis-engineered plan.

As I prepare to depart I am pleased to note that we now have an exceptional Director of Utilities, in Bill Riebe, and that the properly built Lift Station 87 is operational and functioning with the last phase of the project scheduled to be completed in early 2021.

The infrastructure will serve 1/3 of the community, including the SMH and medical district, for the next 100 years +, having been built to survive virtually any storm event, and able to continue to function in the face of potential sea level rise, and any associated storm surge and/or power outages.

While costly, over the course of 100 years it will remain a permanent asset of the utility system serving many generations to come. As we are now seeing in Sarasota County and LBK, the risks of neglecting, and cost of maintaining and replacing aging infrastructure are significant, but doing so is essential to protect the environment, and cannot be deferred indefinitely at risk of compounding those repairs. Several improvements have also been completed over the past few years at our advanced wastewater treatment plant, one of the best in the State of Florida.

As the City and I moved away from crisis management we began to focus on team building, community needs and opportunities, beginning with public safety.

PEOPLE, PARTNERS AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Organizations, including City Government, do not run themselves. Throughout my tenure in Sarasota I have prioritized the recruitment, training and retaining of the very best, motivated talent and leadership available to head our various departments and divisions. It is important we remain competitive in this area.

Each department requires a special knowledge/business skill set in addition to the temperament that is required working in the highly transparent, highly participative, heavily scrutinized public service sector of the economy.

My first major appointment in December of 2012, was filling the Sarasota Chief of Police position. I remain proud of my appointment of Bernadette DiPino as SPD's Chief of Police. While many noted Chief DiPino was the first female Chief in our region, more important has been her leadership and the many constructive collaborations within the community she has facilitated.

Over the past 8 years, crime has been reduced within the city by 35%. I believe that has exceeded national trends and can continue to move in the right direction because of the dedicated public men and women of the SPD and the many timely reforms Chief DiPino has initiated. This evolution began with her willingness to advance the concept of Partnership Policing, a concept I coined, which strives to make crime reduction a full-fledged community partnership and responsibility, achieved through strengthening police-community communications, understandings, trust and collaborations to unprecedented levels.

From the Drug Market Initiative (DMI), an alternative path for drug offenders, to the Turn Your Life Around (TYLA) with Selah Freedom – to more humanely respond to Human Trafficking, to forming Homeless Outreach Teams (HOT), to enhanced de-escalation and Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for all members of the SPD, to initiatives to get guns off the streets, to more recent restorative justice initiatives SPD has again become a recognized police agency leader on the Suncoast.

Support for several SPD initiatives have been supplemented thorough a foundation which was begun a few years ago to further expand SPD's crime-fighting partnership opportunities. In fact, just yesterday \$15,000 was donated to the Police Foundation. I do not expect the department will rest on its laurels as policing in America remains a very challenging profession.

Most remain impressed and appreciative of SPD's efforts in concert with Public Works and the Special Events office, to help manage dozens of very large-scale Special Events every year.

This year also required SPD to manage with great sensitivity over 20 protests following the George Floyd tragedy amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Their performance was exemplary. It has been a rare day over the past 8-plus years that Chief DiPino and I have not talked, at length, at all hours of the day or night.

REVITALIZING THE LOCAL ECONOMY – THE ROSEMARY EXPERIMENT

As the vestiges of the Great Recession lingered, staff, the City Commission and I began to identify opportunities for economic renewal and recovery. From my experience I identified the Rosemary District as an area ready for revitalization.

Within months of my arrival we began taking the simple step of adding on street parking where space permitted, including on Lemon Avenue north of Fruitville Road to help spur local business success. Soon thereafter the owners of the pioneering apartments now known as CitySide approached staff to explore the possibility of increased density in the Rosemary District. I immediately recognized the proposal as an opportunity to spur economic recovery within the community.

Within weeks of those discussions the City Commission was supportive of an “experiment” in the Rosemary District to allow a three year, triple density, from 25 to 75 units per acre, experiment, within the targeted area, without increasing overall density in the Rosemary District.

The experiment has proven to be highly successful and has since been modified and extended through a very successful and innovative collaboration led by Planning Director Steve Cover, in collaboration with residents, and stakeholders, of the Rosemary District organized by Howard Davis. The new overlay includes an innovative affordable housing incentive component.

The experiment in the Rosemary was well timed and indicated at the time that Sarasota was again open for business. The bold experiment can be credited, or blamed depending on ones' perspective, to have spurred the second biggest and longest building boom in Sarasota's 100-year history.

I have been gratified personally to have observed how this experiment has created many local jobs, benefitted the local economy, and bolstered our tax base, which has long been the foundation upon which Sarasota County has been built.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Relatively early in my tenure the City Commission placed the administrative responsibility of the Information Technology Department (IT) and the Public Information Officer (PIO) under the City Manager's Office administration. This has proven to have been a very positive move as both departments have thrived through working hand in glove with all other city operations to meet our technology and communications needs and opportunities.

The Sarasota IT department led by Herminio Rodriguez, has garnered national attention and acclaim for quickly and effectively shutting down ransomware attacks similar to those which rendered much larger cities and entities inoperable for weeks. Simultaneously our IT department has continuously enhanced and modernized our formerly obsolete technology hardware, software and outward facing virtual city hall operations.

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE/COMMUNICATIONS

The vast majority of city employees work very hard and are dedicated to their public service work. This is especially true with our small, but tenacious, two-person public information team led by former TV news anchor and City Hall veteran Jan Thornburg.

While a relatively small community, Sarasota enjoys the unique circumstance of being home to a robust daily newspaper, two local television stations, two local radio stations, a well-established weekly newspaper, daily digital publications and several high-quality magazines. This combined with the fact that Sarasota has a higher than average regional, statewide and national profile (as evidenced by our 2020 Ranking by US NEWS & WORLD REPORTS as the 16th Best Place in the Country to Live and #1 Best Place to Retire) the PIO office responds to a never ending stream of deadline driven media information requests in our 24/7 new media world.

The office has however gone well above and beyond the basics by assisting with our web site content, supporting internal communications within our operations, and maintaining our robust

social media presence via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Next Door and You Tube, which currently includes 95,000 followers.

Within the context of the above, our PIO office has produced the community-wide digital newsletter every Friday afternoon called Briefs from Barwin, with 3,400 residents currently receiving this weekly gem. The newsletter would have won many awards had we had time to apply for them because in one easy to read, ongoing and regular publication that comes out like clockwork, any citizen that signs up can have delivered to them the latest information regarding city operations and upcoming decisions available, including:

- information and photos which shed light on 5 of the most interesting or important issues or projects in the community which the general media may not have covered, and
- links to all current job/career opportunities available in our city government,
- information and links to all volunteer board and commission openings citizens may consider serving on, and
- links to the agendas and all backup materials to upcoming city commission meetings and all other boards and commissions considering any aspect of city business, just as if they were a member of City Commission or voluntary board.

I believe the PIO office and its ability to respond to the media in a timely fashion has created a mostly positive impression of our community through our commitment to open, honest government which welcomes examination and input, a quality many communities strive for but never achieve. I have received very positive feedback about this service from the media and the general public alike.

PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS

People visit and choose to live in Sarasota for its quality of life, to pursue longevity and enjoy the opportunity to be outdoors much of the year. Over time and various financial challenges, I observed that Sarasota City Parks had become tired, and a low priority in our budgeting process, almost an afterthought in terms of our basic responsibilities.

In addition, the County had decided in a cost saving move of their own to sunset a long-standing intergovernmental agreement to manage 5 of our major regional parks. The agreement was developed many years ago as a way to address a legal dispute related to double taxation.

To address declining City Parks the City Commission majority welcomed the concept of creating a Parks and Recreation Department as well as forming a city-wide parks district. Maintaining our 50 parks and funding these important quality of life assets in our community needed a plan and commitment.

Under the leadership of Jerry Fogle, our parks have begun to make a remarkable come back with a new Parks Master Plan now in place to guide our future efforts. The recent addition of an all-

purpose athletic field at the Robert L. Taylor Community Center as well as dramatic improvements at the Payne Park Tennis Center have been well received and are enjoyed by thousands of area residents of all ages.

Again, the timing of renewing the quality of our parks has been fortuitous in that the Covid-19 Pandemic has reminded everyone of the vital importance of outdoor spaces and places to visit, relax and/or exercise. The recent opportunities to create a new park in the Rosemary District and a large-acre environmental and nature preserve at the Bobby Jones Golf Course property are underway and reflect important community priorities. In addition, next year will feature a new children's playground and splash pad at Bayfront Park.

THE ENVIRONMENT

As a coastal community we enjoy the joy and benefits as well as the inherent challenges and risks associated with miles of ocean, bay, bayou, and canal shorelines.

One of the early and best decisions the city made during my tenure was to join the litigation resulting from the environmentally and economically devastating British Petroleum Oil Spill of 2010. The \$2 million proceeds we netted from the litigation were strategically targeted to be invested into rebooting our environmental initiatives as well as affordable housing.

Several important initiatives have resulted from these strategic decisions which include adoption of Climate Adaptation Plan, committing to the Ready For 100 Initiative, and experiments with environmentally responsible living shorelines versus traditional seawall. The impacts of our actions, which have been spearheaded by Stevie Freeman-Montes, has resulted in Florida's Department of Environmental Protection Director Noah Valenstein recent visit to Sarasota. During his visit, Mr. Valenstein shared with the group who welcomed him, that "Sarasota is one of, if not the most environmentally conscious cities in the State and a leader in the field."

As a coastal community beginning to confront the realities of sea level rise, climate change will become an increasingly vital challenge that must be addressed and managed with vision. Florida and the country need cities that will lead by example. A good foundation has been laid.

BEACH AND SHORELINE PROTECTION

Over the past several years we have had several tropical storms and Hurricane Irma to deal with. After each storm, our Public Works Department led by Doug Jeffcoat, in association with Emergency Manager Todd Kerkerling, have mastered the debris and storm cleanup efforts.

Each storm has also taken a toll on Lido Beach. The City had traditionally responded to storm damage and erosion with emergency response beach renourishments to maintain a protected shoreline and a welcoming, accessible beach. Those lengthy, heavily regulated responses and uncertain funding lagged far behind the need to renourish and presented ever increasing dangers to the city.

Shortly after my arrival staff and I, coordinated by City Engineer Alex Davis-Shaw, began meetings with County staff, the State, and the US Army Corps of Engineers on the long-term prospects and programs available to maintain Lido Beach on an ongoing basis.

Following years of effort and challenges, the first renourishment of a 50-year program is about to be completed and was the only New Starts Beach, Hurricane and Shoreline Protection funded in the federal budget last year. This was a total team effort between staff, management, and the City Commission. A special thanks goes out not only to Alex for her expertise and stamina to see this through, but to the Lido Key Residents Association for their legal assistance, Robert Fournier and the City Attorney's Office for prevailing on various legal challenges to our permits to proceed, and the City Commission for funding our share of the project and approving various agreements. Our Washington DC lobbyist was also vital to securing approval as was former Mayor Willie Charles Shaw who spent considerable time and effort in Washington DC meeting with key congressional committee representatives and US Army Corps of Engineers leadership.

The success of this initiative moves the city away from crisis response to pre-planned, regular, permitted, and funded renourishments. This breakthrough will now allow time to explore additional best practices to protect our main beach and shorelines as the world organizes to address climate change in hope of reducing the worst-case scenario possibilities of rising sea levels that will inundate the barrier islands within the century if not reversed.

TRANSPORTATION AND ROUNDABOUTS

Since 2002 a necklace of two-lane roundabouts had been conceived and planned along US 41. As I complete this summary, the first three are near completion at US 41 and 10th, 14th, and Fruitville Road, with the fourth scheduled to begin in the Spring of 2021. Impressive Public Art sculptures are in process for each.

These major infrastructure improvements included replacement of underground infrastructure and involved a tremendous amount of public engagement and education.

My office also consistently advocated for the ballot question and the successful voter approval of the Legacy Trail extension into the heart of the city. To prepare for this major transportation, recreational, economic, and quality of life enhancement the City has prepared, and the City Commission accepted the first ever citywide transportation plan called Sarasota in Motion.

Led by the Planning Department and Transportation Planners Colleen McGue and Megan Lui, the exciting plan features Legacy Trail and bicycle connections to most city neighborhoods and business districts as well as to St. Armands and Lido Beach.

The water taxi component of the plan will be available in 2021 with the essence of the initiative being to improve transportation while also improving pedestrian, bicycle, and motorists' safety for all. As land use planning is increasingly coordinated with transportation planning this effort also advances the concept of walkable neighborhoods which most of our new residents have identified as one of the attractive features that helped draw them to the city and enhance their desire to stay.

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is the most challenging and frustrating public administration issue I have faced. To be clear, the issue exists due to the federal and state governments defunding of public health, specifically, mental health and substance abuse over the past four decades.

Fraught by politics, unique legal issues, funding shortages, and notions of quick fixes, in the face of this reality the city has worked diligently to pull a coalition together to plan and fund a strategy to address the problem within our resources to do so. This effort began with the ground-breaking decision to establish and deploy the City of Sarasota's first Homeless Outreach team.

The regional collaboration premised on coordinated casework and mental health services was spearheaded by the City Manager's office with support from the City Commission and key partners and funders, including the Gulf Coast Community Foundation & John Thaxton, Sarasota County, resident/businessman Jim Doyle (who donated \$1 million toward housing the homeless) the Suncoast Partnership and others.

Ultimately, one of our biggest challenges has also been one of our greatest successes. Coordinated by homeless outreach coordinator Kevin Stiff the city has won several awards for our efforts and we have been invited to various forums and venues around the country to share our success, including national exposure on the PBS news hour.

Although much remains to be done, chronic homelessness has been dramatically reduced within the city by over 50%, with over 500 individuals becoming housed utilizing the coordinated effort. Combining counseling, case work and housing while our street teams educate and encourage the homeless to participate has clearly worked.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Long discussed the city has made substantial strides on affordable housing over the last decade, another extremely challenging issue in our setting where land is expensive and market realities dominate the housing market. Nonetheless the city has provided regulatory and/or financial support to affordable housing developers and the Sarasota Housing Authority on several recent initiatives. Those initiatives include the new, 80-unit Arbor Village complex on Fruitville Road. The 130-unit Lofts on Lemon has broken ground. And a contract has begun to be awarded for single family home development with Habitat for Humanity to be built on city-owned lots with the \$ 1 million set aside from our CRA settlement with Sarasota County.

Our affordable housing plan includes several new possibilities including the pursuit of accessory dwellings where warranted and density bonus incentives for affordable housing as are being implemented now in the Rosemary District.

Overall, the City has created and in recent years set aside \$4 million in an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, for its continued use and leverage to bring make more workforce and affordable housing available within the community.

Like mental health challenges, affordable housing needs to be approached on a regional basis. After decades of experience we have learned that all low-income or affordable housing should not be concentrated in one or two neighborhoods in Sarasota City or County.

Experience has proven that deconcentrating poverty serves the community well including families and neighborhoods. William Russel, Cindy Emshoff and Ryan Chapdelain are all knowledgeable, experienced, and innovators in this realm and should be consulted as current and/or new initiatives are advanced.

VAN WEZEL PERFORMING ARTS HALL & THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY IN THE CITY

Whoever becomes the new City Manager is also responsible to supervise the iconic Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. The Hall is owned, operated, and managed by the City of Sarasota. As such, and responsible for the efficient management of all city operations, the City Manager should be expected to attend events at the hall with some regularity.

From Ken Thompson to me, the City Manager has played a role in securing gifts for the Hall. I was proud to have played a small role, along with many others, in getting to know, work with, and visit Herta Cuneo who donated a record gift of \$10 million dollars to the Van Wezel Foundation upon her passing.

Gifts to the city result from many small acts, contacts, and confidences from potential donors that their visions for the future will be honored. This often depends on the good character of the people they are working with which can only become known through various contacts in a variety of settings. I am pleased to have participated in significant increases in city philanthropic collaborations in many areas during my tenure and the capstone \$10 million donation to the Van Wezel.

The Director and staff value city management and city commissioner engagement with improving the product, meeting the staff and hundreds of volunteers who help service the hall. During my tenure, under Ms. Bensel's leadership the Hall has not be subsidized by taxpayers and has been making a profit.

THE BAY CONSERVANCY

The visionary plans for future public and environmental enhancements of the 53 acres around the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall are truly breathtaking. Led by AG Lafley and supported by Bill Waddill and its visionary, Sarasota loving board, I was honored to help facilitate this initiative and its support system from day one. Their work to create a very special, welcoming place for our residents is underway and the Bayou walk has already become a favorite destination for area walkers.

There are too many to thank here for the early success of this initiative but I would be remiss if I did not thank Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown, and also Assistant City Manager John Lege

for his quiet focus and diligence in facilitating the recent City – County collaboration in establishing a TIF District to help advance the future park plan and future performing arts hall.

Much has been made and overblown of city – county relations, yet the staff work on this initiative and the behind the scenes political work by city and county staff, elected officials, and individuals, indicates people of goodwill can and do come together on important challenges and opportunities. I hope this remains the primary pattern in the future.

I would also be remiss if I did not thank outgoing Sarasota County Commissioner Charles Hines for his leadership on this regional project and his leadership and support of our cultural community.

WORTH NOTING

While I've gone on too long already, the dedication to public service by your talented city staff in collaboration with the City Commission has resulted in many other major and notable accomplishments over the past several years which new commissioners should be aware of, and include:

Reducing our unfunded liability by over \$100 million.

Establishing the SMH teaching clinic on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Way in North Sarasota.

Support for bringing two Ringling College Sound Stages into reality.

Led by Human Resources Director Stacie Mason, achieving basic labor harmony over the past 9 years, settling all labor contracts fairly and in recent years timely.

Led by Mark Lyons, completion of three award winning, attractive parking garages serving the downtown and St. Armands.

Led by Deputy Manager Marlon Brown, negotiating a 3-year parks transition plan.

Led by Kelly Strickland, reserved funding in advance for Implementation of Police-worn body cameras allowing the City Commission and SPD to implement in 2021.

Continued tradition of our Finance Department being honored with Awards for Best Government Practices for budgeting, finance, auditing, reporting and presentation.

Covid-19 – being one of the first if not the first city in the state to reach a local consensus and declare and immediately implement a local public health emergency on March 13th, 2020, as Covid-19 surged. This quick action eliminated an immediate threat of thousands of people risking becoming infected at the outset of the pandemic locally.

Our initial Covid-19 response effort was followed promptly by a massive mask distribution, and consistent ongoing public communications to encourage the public to follow CDC public health

guidelines, while making provisions to accommodate business as possible with free, easy permitted expansion to utilized ROW's and parking areas.

CONCLUSION

Lastly, the record of achievements which have been summarized above were only possible with the support of the administrative staff of the City Commission and City Manager office.

Kathy King and recently retired Diane Taylor, literally kept our hyperactive office on time and on schedule while managing hundreds of citizens' calls, emails, and requests on a daily basis, never having lost their composure or dropping the ball.

I remain indebted to them for their service.

It has been an honor and pleasure serving the people of Sarasota and working as trusted partners with an outstanding and dedicated municipal team and the many truly wonderful people, organizations, and businesses within this very special community.

My only advice is to strive to minimize politics in your decision making processes to as great a degree as possible, continue to hire/retain top talent and defend and support them in the face of unfair or uncivil criticism if and when that may occur.

Thank you for the opportunity, and best wishes in your future endeavors.