



MAYOR'S STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
"PURSUING OUR VISION"
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2008
RACHEL D. MURRAH CIVIC CENTER

[PowerPoint slide show of past year photos to the song "Small Town" by John Mellencamp]

I don't think any of us can argue that the small town appeal of Winter Park is one of the things we love about our city. As the song depicts, many of us were born here and our friends and family live here, and those are just some of the reasons why we live in and return to Winter Park. But before I continue with more reasons of why Winter Park is so special, I would like to continue a State of the City tradition that officially marks the start of this annual address, the playing of Winter Park's official fanfare.

[Playing of the City of Winter Park Fanfare]

I would like to thank Dr. John Sinclair and the trumpeters of Rollins College Department of Music for helping us continue this annual tradition.

One of the things I enjoy most in my role as Mayor of this beautiful city is having the opportunity to tout the excellent work our City Commission and our devoted city staff has accomplished throughout the year.

This year was an especially challenging year as we were faced with preparing for the ramifications of the passage of Amendment One. Our 2009 Fiscal Year budget had to reflect the reductions as mandated by this amendment in addition to our own efforts to becoming a more streamlined and efficient government.

I'm happy to report that through the Commission's leadership and the staff's creativity we were able to develop and adopt an unprecedented operating budget that cut over \$2 million in recurring costs without compromising public safety or other essential services. These reductions have allowed funds to be allocated towards capital improvement projects that have been put on hold for over a decade. They have also allowed us to increase our reserves by \$1 million for unforeseen contingencies which in turn helps improve our financial ratings.

In a tight budget year, grants become even more beneficial and this year the city was very successful in obtaining grant money to help support important city projects. In addition to the \$1.2 million undergrounding Electric Utility grant that I will talk about in a few minutes, the city also received \$300,000 for the Lake Berry Storm Water Treatment Project, \$250,000 in CDBG funds to expand the housing rehab program citywide to the senior and disabled population, and \$237,500 in USDA Forest Service funds for the Forestry Division. Grants are very important to our bottom line and they help the city fulfill its vision and strategic plan objectives.

Our State of the City theme this year is “Pursuing our Vision” and if you’ve been to City Hall recently, you’ll see why. Displayed in the lobby and above the dais in the Chambers is our new Vision Statement that reads “We aspire to continue to be the best place to live, work and play in Central Florida by preserving a superior quality of life for today’s residents and for future generations.”

This vision statement was adopted in June of this year as part of the city’s overall Strategic Plan. The adoption of the Strategic Plan is so important because it serves as a guide for what the city will focus its resources on for the next few years. Several of the initiatives from that plan have already been completed while others are well on their way to completion.

Undergrounding our power lines is one of the major initiatives included in the city’s strategic plan. Our Electric Utility Department continues to make significant progress on making our system more reliable by advancing the undergrounding initiative. In January we officially started the undergrounding of the first mainline feeder project along Webster Avenue and parts of North Park Avenue and Denning Drive which is now complete. The first seven major projects have been bonded and the first Plug-In project is also complete. We were also successful in obtaining a \$1.2 million grant from the State of Florida to fund a large portion of the Aloma Avenue undergrounding project which is now underway.

The Community Redevelopment Agency has undergone major transformations this year including the formation of a new city department called Community Redevelopment. This department will still focus on improvements and preservation of neighborhoods and commercial businesses within the CRA. But it will also focus on addressing economic development concerns for the entire city by promoting and supporting growth, expansion and retention of business within the City of Winter Park.

Under the CRA, we have continued our efforts in supporting the city’s strategic plan and CRA Strategic Plan’s number one goal to rebuild the community center. Plans have been presented and the city is in the process of moving toward a groundbreaking date of September 2009 for a new Winter Park Community Center.

Also to further enhance the services offered at the Community Center, the city privatized the youth programming to the Boys and Girls Club. This move is expected to raise the programming opportunities for our youth to a higher level in both quantity and quality. Since implementation in September, the Boys and Girls Club have a current enrollment of 102 children in their programs.

In support of the CRA Strategic Plan’s affordable housing goal, the second project of the Hannibal Square Community Land Trust, the West Comstock Housing Development, celebrated its grand opening in December. Three of the four new affordable, single-family, green building certified modular homes are currently occupied with the fourth aggressively in the market awaiting a qualified buyer.

To protect our environmental assets as indicated in the strategic plan, the city has added some new parkland and park amenities to its list of assets. In May, the city celebrated the grand opening of the new 10.38 acre Howell Branch Preserve Park. This new park features a playground, boardwalk and observation deck overlooking the wetlands, fitness trail with exercise equipment, picnic pavilion, public restrooms and open lawn area. The success of this park is attributed to many organizations including the Florida Communities Trust, the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program, the Winter Park Health Foundation, CH2MHill and the Orange County Medical Society.

A little closer to downtown, we also celebrated the grand opening of the new playground at Azalea Lane Park. Through active neighborhood involvement and also with funding from the city and Keep Winter Park Beautiful, the existing area was renovated and a whirlwind of new fun activities were added for toddlers and kids of all ages to enjoy. The renovations include new playground equipment, benches, picnic tables with shade structures, a crazy cup, ladybug and train.

Moving into the heart of downtown, the new West Meadow was developed in July of this year. Now seeing it fully green, it is difficult to remember that it used to be a large asphalt parking lot. With the lush Zoysia grass and the planting of over 20 trees including Laurel and Live Oaks, Magnolias, Drake Elms, Western Red Cedars and Longleaf Pines, this new green space in an already built out downtown, is not only rare but also very inviting. The West Meadow is now available for citizen and visitor enjoyment, and can be rented for a variety of private and civic events, with the first private event, the Park Avenue Fashion Show, happening this Saturday.

Speaking of “green,” and in support of the strategic plan’s green initiative, in January, the city adopted a resolution to pursue measures to become a green local government. With the passage of this resolution, the Environmental Review Board, working with the Public Works Department, has stepped up its efforts by developing the city’s first Green Plan.

As part of its implementation, the city has purchased two hybrid vehicles and two electric cars, discontinued the purchasing of individual bottled water, eliminated Styrofoam cups in city buildings, converted our major Communications’ mailings to recycled paper, is developing a Water Conservation Plan, placed recycling receptacles in City Hall and other city facilities and is in the process of developing a new landscaping ordinance that will help the city’s water conservation efforts.

In addition the city held its first “Going Green” forum for the community and is a publicity sponsor of the Winter Park Public Library’s Going Green Fair on November 15. In the midst of going green efforts, the Public Works Department has continued its streetscaping projects including the Orange Avenue and Pennsylvania/Lyman Avenue projects. Both projects are underway, and upon completion, will transform these areas into premiere commercial corridors for the city. Brick pavers, new traffic light arms, decorative street lights, trash receptacles, street benches, new landscaping areas, shade producing street trees, curb bump outs, pedestrian crosswalks and underground electric are new elements of these streetscaping projects.

For those of you that frequently travel Palmer Avenue, you were also impacted by the diligent efforts of our Public Works department as you were detoured off Palmer for road improvements. Driving it now, you may not see a major difference outside of the new smooth asphalt and new curbs. That is because much of the work was done below the road's surface to improve 400 feet of concrete storm pipe, six storm inlets and manholes, and complete rebuilding of all bridge surface structure. To avoid more asphalt cuts into a recently repaved street, in conjunction with the renovation project, Winter Park Electric installed over 3,000 feet of electric conduit to be ready for undergrounding the power lines in the near future. That's an excellent example of city departments working together and thinking ahead.

Speaking of departments working together, almost every department in the city works with our Building and Code Enforcement Department prior to the grand opening or occupancy of any construction project. Just this past year, this department completed over 14,500 inspections in total of residential and commercial projects throughout the city. Some significant commercial projects included the Walgreen's at corner of Orlando Avenue and Fairbanks, the four-story addition to Winter Park Hospital, the new bank at corner of Orange Avenue and Holt, the mixed use buildings on West New England and Pennsylvania avenues and the new Water Storage and Repump facility on Wymore Road.

This new Water Storage and Repump facility was the final stage in the Water and Wastewater Department's upgrades to the city's water improvement program. About eight years ago, the city began this large initiative upgrading our treatment to ozone. If you recall, before this ozone treatment was in place, the city would treat its water by adding chlorine and using an aeration system that only took 50 to 60 percent of the naturally occurring hydrogen sulfide, which is that "rotten-egg" smell and taste, out of the water.

Now 100 percent of our city water is treated with ozone that removes all of the hydrogen sulfide, therefore producing "bottled-quality" water for our customers. This facility was the last step in this long-term conversion process and I'm proud to say this year was the year that marked its completion.

No State of the City Address is complete without talking about our excellent public safety departments. The Winter Park Fire-Rescue Department remains ahead of the curve as it is internationally recognized for its innovative efforts in ambulance safety. I spoke about this in 2006, and now two years later, not only has local media given this initiative extensive coverage, it has also been featured in national and international trade journals such as *Fire Chief*, *Journal of Emergency Medical Services*, *Emergency Medical Services Magazine*, *FireFighting News.com* and *the Orlando Sentinel*. They were also recently awarded the 2008 ICMA "Program Excellence Award, the 2008 Orlando Lifestyle Magazine "Uniformed and Unique" Award and will feature their ambulance at the National League of Cities "City Showcase" next week at the Marriott World Center.

In addition, OUTREACH, the city's emergency notification system I announced last year has had a very successful year as we have used OUTREACH about 12 times notifying residents of possible flooding, sand bag distribution, and other vital storm related information.

This new system was very beneficial during Tropical Storm Fay. While the system contains numbers for a majority of city residents, several hundred residents have signed up for the notification via the city's Web site and now can be notified via e-mail and cell phone as well. If you are a Winter Park resident and haven't signed up, I encourage you to do so to stay informed during emergencies.

Calls for service on the law enforcement aspect of public safety have also risen especially as the economy weakens. Although crime is on the rise in all of Central Florida, the City of Winter Park continues to be one of the safest places to live in Orange County because of the tremendous job our Police Department does every day. According to the Uniform Crime Reports published by Orange County we are THE safest community in Orange County with populations of 25,000 or more. I don't know about you, but that statistic alone makes me appreciate living in Winter Park.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to highlight a new program that the Police Department has developed called Crime Mapping that is accessed from their Web site. This unique feature allows city residents to see all of the property crimes, personal crimes, other miscellaneous crimes and arrests that have taken place during a specified time period or within a particular street location's surrounding area. Although Winter Park is one of the safest communities in the county, the Police Department was able to use a grant from the Department of Justice to develop this program and encourage residents to be aware and stay up-to-date with what's happening in their immediate areas.

The Police Department also recently won the Florida Department of Transportation and the Florida Association of Chiefs of Police 2008 Technology Award at the Annual Florida Law Enforcement Conference in Orlando. Our Police Department was chosen out of 308 law enforcement agencies in the state of Florida to receive the award in recognition of their cutting-edge technology related to traffic-safety enforcement. So not only do they protect us when we sleep, but they also keep us safe on the road with their award-winning traffic-safety practices.

The Police and Fire Departments were just the tip of the Winter Park iceberg when it comes to the city departments that have been awarded by organizations throughout the country and the world. It gives me great pleasure to wrap-up my State of the City Address with the numerous awards our city has received.

Our Information Technology Division was awarded the 2008 Most Innovative Use of Technology Award for their recent enhancements to public safety technology making information sharing and transmission quicker and more efficient. The Planning Department received an Award of Merit and Award of Excellence for the Citizen Planning Classes facilitated by Laura Turner Planning Services.

Our Finance Department was recognized with the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award that represents a significant achievement by the city reflecting our commitment to meet the highest principles of governmental budgeting.

The Electric Utility Department was presented with the Community Service Award for its commitment to enhancing customers' quality of life through its various assistance programs, Online Energy Audit and residential Surge Protection and HomeWIRE™ services.

At the end of this month, we will also find out whether or not the city will be the recipient of the Florida League of Cities "City of Excellence" award which would recognize the city as a whole for the innovative services that it provides to improve the quality of life in Florida and honors the dedicated city leaders for their excellence in public service. Hopefully we'll be bringing home the award for this prestigious honor.

As you can see, this past year has proven to be another milestone year of great accomplishments and recognitions for our city staff and residents. We still have a lot of work ahead of us in the next few years. We will be making decisions about the major issues and projects that are facing our city including commuter rail, the post office property, the comprehensive plan and the redevelopment of Fairbanks Avenue.

As we have so successfully done this past year, we will continue to do our very best to provide the highest quality city services to our residents by steadfastly "Pursuing Our Vision." Thank you.

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