

Mayor Henderson's 2017 State of the City Address

Good evening. It is my honor and pleasure as Mayor of the City of Fort Myers to report on the State of the City. I want to begin by taking a moment to recognize City Council members Teresa Watkins-Brown, Johnny Streets, Terolyn Watson, Michael Flanders, Forest Banks, and Gaile Anthony. It is an honor to share the dais with each of you as we work to make The City of Palms a better place to live, work, play and invest.

I will briefly report on the City's accomplishments for the last year, as well as give a preview into the upcoming plans for our great City. There are far too many projects and accomplishments to mention here, so I invite you to visit the City's website, to review the entire FY16-17 budget book found on the Finance Division's webpage under "Budget".

Kudos to the City's top-notch Finance Department for their steadfast work developing and presenting the budget and the 5-Year Capital Improvement program. Our Finance Department received the GFOA Distinguished Award for the 25th consecutive year.

Property values increased for the fourth consecutive year, adding 10.16% to the City's tax base. Other revenue streams related to population, consumer confidence and construction are trending favorably as well. While this is encouraging news that reflects improvements in the economy, an increasing population, and growth, general fund total revenues still do not fully fund recurring operating expenses. While there are several contributing factors putting a squeeze on the budget, two of the biggest are rising health insurance rates and pension contributions even though many City departments remain understaffed.

Governance can be a difficult challenge but no city or county does it better than this one. I say with confidence that the City of Fort Myers does everything in its power to provide the best in governance and service, and the efforts made are a tribute to those providing the service. For the City to continue improving its financial stability, responsible spending restraints will remain, and fresh new ways to cut costs continuously explored. With further growth in the tax base and the discipline to maintain spending levels, enabling the reserve balance to grow, the City can avoid future fiscal distress.

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Department organization and performance studies were completed in 2016 for Fire and Community Development by outside consultants. The studies made suggestions for improvements but revealed that these departments are run efficiently with the resources afforded them, and that staffing levels should be enhanced in several areas. A 2017 needs assessment for the police department was completed in February. I'd like to take the time to discuss that a little later in my address.

The City is also underway with a classification and compensation study that addresses changes in job duties and responsibilities as well as organizational relationships, recruitment, and retention issues. Results presented to City Council indicated that City of Ft Myers employees receive on average 12% less pay than other jurisdictions of similar size. While the cost to implement an across-the-board pay increase is prohibitive, Council will be addressing the recommendations as soon as practical and making changes where possible.

Moving on to truly exciting happenings in the City of Ft Myers, last August 2016, we celebrated the completion of the \$628,000 exterior restoration phase of McCollum Hall! Built in 1938 as a commercial/entertainment center for African-Americans, McCollum Hall attracted performers like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, B. B. King, Otis Redding, Count Basie, and Lucky Milliner. It also served as a USO for black soldiers training at Buckingham and Page Field during World War II and housed a grocery store, barbershop, coffee shop, and retail shops. In 2008, the Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency purchased McCollum Hall from the McCollum family, and began making plans for restoration. Council and city leadership have taken bold action to preserve this gem and we are hopeful the private sector will find opportunity and excitement in repurposing this famous building. Perhaps a public private partnership will emerge and result in putting this building back in service.

The interior renovation is expected to cost \$2.5 million, and will begin when funding is secured. The ultimate goal is to attract a restaurant tenant and up to six retailers, as well as create a community event space on the second floor. A restored McCollum Hall will add new local jobs in the hospitality and retail sector, provide retail goods and services to an area currently under-represented, and will fulfill a long-standing need for event venues in the Dunbar community.

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The City recently negotiated with The Imaginarium Group, Inc to operate the Imaginarium Science Center effective January 1, 2017 for a ten-year period. Our own Matt Johnson took the reins to lead the charge for the non-profit organization, and we expect no less than great success with Matt at the helm. This change will provide future cost savings to the City.

A lease agreement was also negotiated with the Southwest Florida Community Foundation for the revitalization of the historic train depot to be re-purposed as their headquarters and "Collaboratory." The new headquarters will serve as a gathering place for philanthropy and nonprofits in the heart of midtown Ft Myers and will provide high-speed technology access through the Florida LambdaRail. Through the partnership, the City will receive \$2.5 million of the Foundation's \$10 million New Markets Tax Credit Allocation to be used to improve streetscape and infrastructure in the area. A plan is underway for an entire redevelopment of the "Midtown" area of Ft Myers to expand downtown southward and spark economic development in the currently distressed neighborhood. The City's Midtown redevelopment plan covers the areas south of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd, north of Edison Avenue, east of U.S. 41 and west of Fowler Street. We celebrated a construction kickoff with the foundation in late April, and renovations are getting underway.

The City of Palms is also one-step closer to seeing its long-awaited convention hotel come to life! Mainsail Lodging and Development is preparing to break ground on The Luminary Hotel and Company, an Autograph Collection Hotel by Marriott. The hotel will stand twelve stories tall with approximately 225 guest rooms and suites and will feature a signature restaurant, local diner, rooftop bar, and culinary theater. The four to five star hotel will also encompass a parking garage with 210 parking spaces. Street-level retail storefronts, designed to match the character of existing downtown architecture, will attract more shoppers to the area.

The hotel, in combination with Mainsail's planned renovations to the Harborside Event Center, will make the Downtown River District a new destination for business and convention travelers and add renewed interest for both residents and visitors. In addition to the conference space available at Harborside, the new hotel will provide 20,000 square feet of function space. Developers plan to break ground next month and be up-and-running by early 2019.

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Phase one of the \$60 million Campo Felice project, which includes 323 senior independent living apartments, a restaurant, shops, and other amenities is nearing completion. The City is thrilled to have the old vacant Amtel Hotel take on new life in downtown!

A second phase of Campo Felice will be underway soon and will include 100 assisted living units, 50 memory care units, and a 40,000 square foot medical office building. The projected cost of Phase II is \$49 million, resulting in a total investment in this project of over \$100 million.

Two major, luxury, waterfront, condominium developments are coming online this year. Both Allure, with 292 units, and Prima Luce, with 176 units, have development agreements in place and have begun pre-sales.

It is evident that construction is making its way back to the city as investors are finding favor in our marketplace once again in the City of Palms. In 2016, the Community Development Department Building Division staff processed, issued, reviewed, and inspected 9,300 construction permits. Construction values continue to rise increasing to \$539 million and 27% over the previous year. This trend is expected to last as the economy continues its recovery, and developers reinvest in our City.

Some of the large projects completed over the past year include Fire Station One, Edison River Open Air Pavilion, an Assisted Living Facility, Waffle House, Crown Linen, two new buildings at New Hope Presbyterian on Plantation Road, WaWa on Colonial Blvd, and Compressed Natural Gas facility on Dividend Drive.

Some projects currently underway include The Venetian on Winkler Avenue, a revived 436-unit Apartment Complex from 2005, Discovery Village Phase II, large expansions to LeeSar, Florida Cancer Specialists, JJ Taylor Warehouse, and many more.

In February 2016, an electronic plan review process went live, allowing customers to submit their plans for review electronically. Although there were some growing pains, customers are now thrilled with the ease and speed of the process.

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City Information Technology staff created a process that automatically extracts GIS Geographic Information System – or GIS-- data to update the permitting software database resulting in more timely and accurate information for the departments' end users. In addition, a new GIS layer of address points provides a complete geographic record of officially assigned addresses citywide, which will become the backbone of future software systems, including those used for emergency response. And City Council recently voted to adopt new GIS integrated permitting software systems to replace the aging permitting system that has been used for the past 14 years.

The City's Planning Division is busy working with consultants to complete several projects such as amendments to the Eastwood Village PUD, review of the Riviera San Tropez retail/commercial and hotel/motel uses, amendments to the Comprehensive Plan's Transportation Element, review of the Land Development Code related to junkyard and recycling businesses, and the CSX/Seminole Railroad project. In addition, Planning has numerous meetings and responsibilities related to other development and redevelopment projects. The Business Tax division, also under Planning, issues renewals and new business taxes each year to the nearly 7,000 businesses operating in the City. The current number of businesses in the City increased by 4% over last year.

The purpose of every government is to provide safety, public services, and an enhanced community environment for its citizens. Our men and women in blue do an exceptional job of patrolling our streets and keeping our citizens safe. Today there is a renewed effort to connect with the citizens of Ft. Myers under the leadership of Police Chief, Derrick Diggs. We are excited to have him onboard, believe we made an outstanding choice, and are beginning to see new strategies implemented to thwart violent crime in our community.

In 2016, the Police Department continued its focused efforts to classify and vigorously pursue the most violent offenders within our community. Representatives from the Fort Myers Police Department along with surrounding local and federal law enforcement partners, held bi-weekly meetings to address violent crime and violent offenders within SW Florida. The group maintains a current list of the most violent offenders and shares this list amongst all of the partnering law enforcement agencies. Since its inception in 2012, the effort has resulted in a total of 177 arrests of violent offenders, successful state prosecution of 82 violent offenders, and 11 Federal indictments.

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The Fort Myers Police Department has successfully secured a number of grants for programs such as Solving Cold Cases with DNA, DUI Checkpoint Program Funding, and Enhancing Enforcement Efforts on Aggressive Driving. Equipment provided by grant funding includes a new vessel for the Marine Unit and a Firearm Training Simulator.

Last year our police department also acquired 25 new patrol cars. This Council has approved a number of new positions in the police department, which should allow it to operate more efficiently, including four full time telecommunications officer positions, a telecommunications supervisor, two new lieutenant positions and a deputy police chief.

The Police Department currently has 142 body cameras assigned to officers, one for every patrol officer in the force. The use of the cameras while on-duty provides hard video evidence of decisions made by officers in high intensity situations. The City's investment in these cameras will not only increase the transparency and accountability of our men and women in blue, it will also protect them against false accusations and abuse against officers.

The City's Fire Department recently moved into the new Fire Station One. This state-of-the-art facility is energy efficient with LED lighting and on-demand tank-less natural gas water heaters. Built to withstand a category four hurricane with winds up to 170 MPH, this facility provides a safe haven for our first responders to ensure their availability to the community during emergencies. With five apparatus bays, the new station allows for a ladder truck to be placed downtown for better coverage of the City's high-rise structures. The training room and conference room both have interactive touch screen projection for a more immersive training experience and are already being utilized for public meetings.

Completed in 2016 was the Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification survey. The survey analyzed the structural fire suppression delivery system, the City's water supply system, the emergency communications system, and risk reduction efforts provided to the City of Fort Myers. Our community improved its rating to an ISO Class 2, the second highest classification level, achieved by only 2.5% of all rated communities. This rating provides property owners the ability to receive reduced insurance rates.

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The Fire Prevention Division leads our Community Risk Reduction efforts aimed at improving the safety of the citizens of Fort Myers. Working in conjunction with the Red Cross, more than 60 homes in our community had new smoke detectors installed or new batteries placed in existing detectors. On the customer service side, Fire Prevention added a Contractor Portal for reports and the ability to accept credit card payments.

The City's Human Resources Department successfully negotiated a renewal for the City's health insurance with a six percent increase for the three plans, and the return of the prior benefit levels for two of the three plans. As part of the negotiations, the provider has agreed to reimburse the City one percent of the total premium paid if the City employees meet the wellness challenge in FY2017.

The City continues to offer an employee wellness program that includes monthly lunch-n-learn sessions with speakers on various health-related topics, quarterly Mobile Mammography, informative newsletters, an employee walk-in clinic, free flu shots, and a discount at the Skatium fitness center. A healthy lifestyle diet initiative is in the works through a partnership with FGCU, and the city also participated in the Florida Blue wellness challenge. Several City teams participated in the Healthy Weight Loss Challenge last year and the Ft Myers Police and Fire teams won 1st and 3rd place respectively with team awards of \$10,000 and \$3,000! Another challenge has just completed and we expect to have more great results to report in a few weeks.

The review and update of the Policies and Procedures Manual was completed and taken to City Council on September 19, 2016 for final approval. Use of PowerDMS, a document management system, made the manual available electronically.

The "Step Up to Work" summer youth program, coordinated by the Human Resources Department, presented twenty-two local youth with the opportunity to work thirty-two hours per week in various City departments. A citywide tour to educate the students on City operations and services is included in the program. In addition, representatives from four local educational institutions and the National Guard met with the student aides to provide information regarding future opportunities. The Step Up To Work program has been renewed for 2017, and we're excited to see more students joining us for the summer.

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In order to maintain the City's information security, the ITS department launched a mandatory Cyber Security Awareness training program for all City employees with online classes every 6-8 weeks. Topics include general security awareness, Payment Card Industry compliance, plus mobile device and credit card security. The program solidifies the City's commitment to information security.

A Phishing Alert button was also introduced to City staff to provide an easier way to report suspicious email to the ITS Department. This tool and training program equip City staff with the skills necessary to help keep the City's network safe and secure.

Over the past year, the City's Nationally-Accredited Public Works Department has made neighborhood improvement a top priority. From drainage improvements, to the replacement of aging water and sewer lines, to roadway enhancements and sidewalk repairs, the City's infrastructure is developing to meet the needs of Fort Myers' growing population. Beautification and landscaping of the city's parks, properties, and medians continue to make our City a better place to live.

Beauty also includes the City's public art. The "Allure Your Senses" bronze sculpture exhibit in downtown Fort Myers has delighted residents and visitors alike—this temporary exhibit has been "held over" because of popular demand. New art came to Roberto Clemente Park with a permanent mosaic sculpture, entitled "What Dreams We Have and How They Fly." The City's new Public Art master plan will guide the Fort Myers' public art program for the future.

You might not think of sanitation trucks as beautiful, but Fort Myers begs to differ. In 2016, our Compressed Natural Gas refuse haulers won a national award for their graphic design. Last year, the City was able to add two more of these energy-efficient trucks to the fleet. Thanks to grant funds, from a partnership with the American Lung Association, Solid Waste now has 17 of these natural-gas powered trucks.

More city enhancements come in the form of Americans with Disabilities Act compliance improvements at the Yacht Basin, Fort Myers Cemetery, the Burroughs Home, the Fort Myers Police Department, and City Hall. These changes were necessary, not only to complete the

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requirements of the City's agreement with the US Judicial Department—but more importantly, to keep Fort Myers' facilities and amenities accessible to all of our citizens.

The City's future needs for both water quality and quantity are being met through new wells. Expansion of the city's well field has increased water production. The Water Plant continues to meet or surpass all water quality compliance levels and requirements from regulatory agencies.

Enhancements at the Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plants include structural repairs, improved filtering for reclaimed water, and a new odor control system at the Central Plant.

Fort Myers children are getting out and playing more, thanks to a \$20,000 playground improvement grants awarded to Jefferson Park by Kaboom and the Dr Pepper Snapple Group. It was one of just five grants given nationwide. The City collaborated with the National Parks Trust, for the second annual "Kids to Parks Day", a play day at Centennial Park, with more than a thousand kids joining the fun.

2017 marks a milestone for one of the city's most recognizable landmarks-- the Fort Myers Country Club. This December, "The Fort" will celebrate its 100th Anniversary. Voted the best public golf course in the region by readers of Gulfshore Business magazine last year, the course continues to improve with age. Professional and amateur competed in the Yuengling Open at the Fort Myers Country Club. Formerly known as the Coors Light Open, this is the longest running golf event in the region at 55 years!

Four depreciated monuments, originally installed by the City, are in the process of being replaced in the oldest sections of the Fort Myers Cemetery. These monuments each contain names of at least 50 people interred in past years by Lee County.

The SW Florida Enterprise Center, assisted by grant funds through the Housing and Real Estate division of Community Development, has partnered with Healthy Harvest Farms in spearheading the development of a commercial kitchen on-site. The program unites agriculture with education, nutrition, entrepreneurship, and local economic development. The end goal of the project is to use locally grown food and farming initiatives to encourage healthy food choices, promote good

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health, create new food-related businesses and jobs, and help spur economic growth through entrepreneurship and tourism.

The City's Housing and Real Estate Division expended over \$800,000 in Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) funding to provide housing rehabilitation, public services, and economic opportunities to City residents. Over 21 low to moderate-income homeowners benefited from the rehabilitation program with no interest/no payment loans. The City used over \$88,000 in federal funding to partner with non-profit organizations to provide job training, housing counseling, crime prevention services, basic computer training, and fraud prevention counseling to 149 low to moderate-income residents.

The City is a cleaner and safer place due to the Code Enforcement Division's diligent efforts to eliminate blight. Code Enforcement collection efforts generated over \$408,000 in general fund revenue, including approximately \$144,000 in abandoned property registration fees. Four Code Enforcement Officers and one Supervisor opened nearly 5,200 cases involving 6800 violations, and conducted 17,600 site visits last year, with a 44% compliance ratio.

The City of Fort Myers Yacht Basin, a city-owned and operated facility since 1939, is proudly exceeding its mission to accommodate area boaters. The waiting list for long-term slip leases is currently at 100 boats, as the demand for dockage in this area increases. FY2015/16 saw revenues that were the largest ever in Yacht Basin history and the current year is on track to exceed that amount. The Yacht Basin continues to provide public access for boaters looking to visit and support the River District on a day-to-day basis, and earns the praises of its many customers as they enjoy Fort Myers by boat.

All the accomplishments of the past year are due to good visionary planning and an incredible workforce. I hope this glimpse into 2017 and the direction the City is heading, excites you as much as it does this Council. The City of Fort Myers has a bright future ahead!

That bright future includes changes coming to our Police Department. By now, everyone in the community is aware of the recent needs assessment that the City commissioned. We asked for an honest, unbiased, and strict assessment of our Police Department, and the City is embracing

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the recommendations that the Freeh Group provided us. This report is an *opportunity* for the City of Fort Myers, and provides us a roadmap for improvement. Fort Myers is committed to the continuous improvement of our Police Department, and I ask our community to stand behind Chief Diggs. The City has a great deal of confidence in Chief Diggs and his ability to lead the department through this transition.

While I want to respect the ongoing work in making needed changes in our law enforcement, it is important that citizens know how the Council has worked to obtain the Freeh report and the background in getting this, perhaps the most transparent evaluation and audit produced in the history of FMPD.

Approximately three years ago when my request of city management and our chief to reach out to experts outside of FMPD to secure assistance in curbing violent crime by partnering with others went unaddressed, city attorney Grant Alley came to my aid, and the Council's aid, by introducing me to former federal prosecutor Nicole Wade. Frustrated with the lack of progress with curbing violent crime I ask her assistance in what could be done to pave a way forward. It was through this action that I learned of the Freeh group and how they aid law enforcement around the country.

Months later and through a thorough vetting and interview process by city manager Saeed Kazemi, Mr. Kazemi recommended hiring the Freeh Group to audit our FMPD.

In addition to this process, the Council, at my request, authorized the establishment of the Mayor's Task Force to examine how we might do better with crime fighting. The law enforcement task force met with me multiple times to update and discuss strategy as they coalesced around our challenges in coordination with FMPD. In addition to this effort, and outside the purview of my high-level committee meetings regarding the big picture, law enforcement professions, Lee County Sherriff Mike Scott, and Interim police Chief Dennis Eads leading the way, executed specials operations resulting in arrest and removing criminals from our streets.

The city is indebted to the Department of Justice, the State Attorney's office, Steve Russell, the division of Tobacco, Firearms and Alcohol, former Police Chief Larry hart, and others for

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meeting and giving of their time and resources to keep the citizens of Fort Myers and the region safer. Clearly they are producing results and the work is ongoing. I owe a debt of gratitude to The Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce and Jim Larkin of Crown Plaza Hotel for hosting a community outreach breakfast briefing from law enforcement so citizens could get a glance in to their world and how they work together to make our city safer. Marcus Goodson of The Fort Myers Housing Authority hosted a breakfast at The Carrie Robinson Center for additional outreach and citizen briefings. And finally, I will never forget all the faith-based groups hosting vigils and prayer for victims of violent crime. Pastor James Givens and Tanya Cola are heroes for our city. We have a ways to go and the right talent and professionals are in place to keep it going. Our citizens are safe, and we trust in our judicial system to assist with appropriate action to keep citizens safe.

I remain highly confident that Chief Diggs will bring decorum, respect and leadership necessary to reset the culture and way forward. In his own words, he will demand “professionalism, courteous and respectful leadership, empathetic leadership.” He has reported that the large majority of his men and women in blue are committed to this culture and want to be the best law enforcement officers possible. I believe him. He deserves the opportunity and time to make his mark. Let's rally behind him and move forward. I commend City Manager Saeed Kazemi for an outstanding selection in Chief Diggs. We are moving on.

I want to express my appreciation to my colleagues on Council who, like me, have been engaged in the community, riding around with our congressional delegates and state delegates, in neighborhoods, reaching out and pushing for ways to do better. Many ride-alongs have been executed and the Council has worked to identify ways to do better. And, we are doing better. We will insist on outstanding community policing, earning the trust of all citizens. We will expand our operations to work cold cases with competent and trained leadership to do so. We will expand and enhance victim advocacy to bring closure, dignity and respect to those who suffer violent crime. Chief Diggs is well on the way. We trust in our justice system and we will continue to execute on all the recommendations in the Freeh report and, expect more recommendations to come.

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Your City leaders will continue to work hard for you, to welcome your input, and to invest in the future of our great City. I thank you for your dedication to this City and for taking the time to be here tonight. God bless you and the City of Fort Myers.