

State of the City February 14, 2017

My Fellow Council Members, Mr. City Manager, Mr. City Attorney, Madam City Clerk, City Staff and my Fellow Residents of the City of Venice: Venice continues to be a vibrant city with a remarkably engaged population, the State of our City is healthy and we continue to experience an uplifting revitalization of our city. The heart of Venice is beating strong and our prospects for the future look bright. Our business district, one of the five main pillars of our community, is bustling and some of our merchants just completed a record breaking year. Occupancy in our downtown area is high and turnover appears relatively low. When there is a change of ownership, it is completed quickly and virtually seamlessly; businesses are being bought out with very few being closed and vacated. Most of our residents indicate satisfaction with the direction this council has taken as was memorialized in the last election and I have no doubt the citizenry will continue to stay engaged by making their desires known at each election as well as at city council meetings. The civil addressing of council on topics of concern is deeply appreciated by this mayor and I am sure by this council.

My last State of the City address was January 27, 2015 and I hope, by the conclusion of this address, you will understand why no update was given in 2016. City Council, past and present, has not required the mayor to make a State of the City address; this is a shortcoming I hope the current council rectifies this fiscal year. My suggestion would be for the address to be delivered the first meeting in February of every fiscal year. This will keep the address out of the political arena and will give any new mayor time to gather thoughts for delivery to the constituents of our Venice community.

Great strides have been made in changing our budgetary process to become more streamlined and transparent and we will continue to modify the process so that future councils will have forms and format that are easier to understand by both council and our residents. We must continue to be good stewards of the public funds placed in our care and continue to provide value to our citizenry. The trust

placed in us to expend tax payer dollars properly and prudently cannot be overstated and must not be violated.

Two years ago I stated several shortcomings of council as outlined in our Strategic Plan, they were:

- We have tackled short term parking solutions but have failed to provide intermediate or long term solutions.
- We have failed to provide a long term solution to eliminate the underfunding in the Police and Fire pension plans.
- We have failed to provide sufficient resources to rewrite the Comprehensive Plan on a timely basis.
- We have failed to develop and implement a plan for the rehabilitation of Wellfield Park.
- We have failed to acquire additional land for expansion of city services to make up for the loss of buildable land at Pinebrook Park.
- We have failed to fund the hardening of our Police Department building.
- We have failed to come up with a plan to help in the rebuilding of the Seaboard area caused by the 41 bypass widening.

These seven shortcomings were major projects and most were multi-year efforts and most were not ready for updates until now. Let us look at the progress we have made on these topics:

First, intermediate and long term parking solutions – council has reduced the duration in Centennial Parking lot from 5 to 3 hours and is using a trolley to circulate patrons between remote lots and down town. Both of these actions should cause patrons and employees to utilize our parking lots that are not in the immediate downtown area. In addition, approximately 300 ground spaces have been added throughout the city over the past several years, largely through the

efforts of Council Member Daniels and the acquisition of what is now the temporary library. Although parking will always be a “problem” in that there will never be enough spaces right in front of every destination to satisfy demand, we seem to have sufficient spaces for most days in areas convenient enough for most people. The need for a parking garage has moved to a lower priority. We are ready to build out a much needed ground parking lot at North Brohard Park Beach to help resolve that crowded beach parking. With the rapid advancement of driverless vehicles, it would behoove council to explore that technology and other new technologies as a longer term alternative solution for parking. We may find that by maximizing the space of the ground parking currently in use and that which is planned, we may be able to hold off building a parking structure for several more years. I will be inviting some alternative transportation presenters to council meetings this year with the hope of exposing us to alternative transportation systems that may help us find a more permanent and economical solution. In addition, I will be asking council to limit street parking to 3 hours on Harbor between Tampa and Miami Avenue. We have plenty of space just a little further out for those who need longer term parking, we do not need to have all day parking within a half block of the business district.

Second, we have instituted a plan to provide a long term solution to the Police and Fire pension plans. All new Police and Fire personnel are now covered by the Florida Retirement System (FRS) and many on the force made a voluntary change from the City of Venice retirement plan to the FRS. Although both city plans are still underfunded, both now have a finite group of future retirees and adequate funding will bring these plans to a healthy level in the not too distant future. We did raise taxes by 1/2 mill this year, some to shore up our reserves and some to fund what I believe was the highest level of required city contribution to the retirement plans in our history; a high contribution rate was anticipated due to lowering the rate of return expectation and the poor performance of the stock market through September 30, 2016. This year our Annual Required Contribution (ARC) should go down by a respectable amount but I am going to recommend to council the final piece of the puzzle in making a long term solution to both funds; I

am recommending that we do not lower the amount of funding from its current level in either the Police or Fire plan until each plan is at 90% of the fully funded rate. One of the reasons we are in poor shape in our plans is that in the past, the recommendation to council was to only fund the plans to the ARC. If we change our mindset and instead of just funding ARC and we use the 90% fully funded rate as a target before we drop the level to the ARC, we will assure that our Firefighters and Police have worry free retirement incomes for the rest of their lives – a promise they have earned, a promise they deserve and a promise we must keep. Once we hit 90% fully funded rate, we can drop the contribution level to the ARC level and stay at the minimum as long as the plans stay at 80% fully funded or higher. I think the Police plan, currently at about 81% fully funded should be at 90% or better within 2 to 3 years as long as we have normal markets, however, the Fire plan, currently just above 50% will take considerably more time.

Third, the comprehensive plan revisions are nearing completion and community meetings to comment on the new plan have already begun. Rather than committing the financial resources that would have moved the process along more rapidly, we placed what at times could be described as extreme burden on our Planning Department and our Developmental Resources Director Jeff Shrum, as well as our highly capable Planning Commission under the leadership of Barry Snyder; the resources we committed were human rather than monetary. Council Member McKeon did a great job as liaison communicating the challenges of the Planning Commission to Council and the questions of Council to the Commission. We are thankful for the efforts of the Planning Department and Planning Commission and look forward to a finished product being delivered this year; a finished product that is understandable, user friendly, consistent and concise.

Fourth, we have gone just about as far as we can with the Wellfield Park rehabilitation under the current configuration. Any further drainage issues might cause the closing of one or more sports fields during rehabilitation. Our Parks and Recreation Advisory Board is currently gathering important statistical and visual information on Wellfield and should be ready to present that data soon. Council

requested the data by April 15, and then at the very next council meeting, requested information as to what would happen if the City took the southernmost 10 + acres of land bordered by Pinebrook and Ridgewood for Public Safety and Fire buildings. This, of course, became a priority and may cause a delay in the full park assessment. Additionally, it will be the responsibility of this council to notify the county that some of the fields must move regardless of the location of the Public Safety and Fire buildings. We cannot continue pretending that 10 pounds of sports will fit well in a 5 pound field.

People using Wellfield deserve the same amenities as are found elsewhere in the county regional sports fields, including ADA restrooms, parking and shade. It is not the responsibility of the city to provide regional sports fields; it is our responsibility to use city tax dollars for the benefit of the city residents. We are county residents and pay county taxes at the same rate as all county residents; we deserve county amenities at the same level of service as those county residents that use the Englewood Sports Complex or the Twin Lakes Complex. If those basics are not provided on all regional fields by the county, including those regional fields located within city limits, perhaps the city should not be providing a regional sports field at all. We are happy to provide the land for Wellfield, but it is the county's responsibility to provide the upkeep of that field, not the city's responsibility and we must make this point known to the county beyond any reasonable doubt. It is a topic that will take many more hours of discussion this year.

Fifth, we have acquired additional land to make up for Pinebrook Park change of use from potential expansion of city services to a preserve. If that is our intention, we must finish this process so that there is no doubt by future councils as to the use of that section of Wellfield. We must officially change the name of that park to Pinebrook Park and add the category of Preserve to our land use designations.

If it is the desire of council to leave the zoning the way it is, we could offer up the land to expand the regional sports park system and invite the county to build out that side of the park as the need exists. Having it remain as it is currently zoned invites future councils to build out the park to achieve some of the recommendations in the Master Parks Plan. Leaving the zoning the way it is invites uncertainty for a piece of land that has become very special to many residents in Venice and is definitely something that cannot be replaced.

Additionally, the land acquired from Ajax was purchased to make up for the anticipated loss of use of Pinebrook Park. The Ajax parcel completed the shortcoming that was addressed two years ago. We must resist making any permanent change to that parcel, other than that of the Utility pumping station, until there is a clear definition of Pinebrook Park and a final decision is made for its future use. The Ajax acquisition is the only parcel the city owns that can serve as expansion land for city services.

Sixth, we now have a plan for the new location of a new Public Safety building. The people of Venice have spoken and have graciously given the City the power to borrow sufficient funds to build a new state of the art hurricane hardened facility; a building that our first responders need and deserve. We know where the building will be located and construction should start in late 2017 or early 2018. I would again like to thank the people of Venice for their generosity and foresight in approving this bond.

Once the new Public Safety building is complete, a domino effect of city improvements will begin. The Public Works department will be able to occupy the old Police building and we are in negotiations with the county to occupy a parcel of land closer to the land fill area for solid waste vehicle parking and maintenance. Repurposing of the current Public Works land in the Seaboard area should provide resources to rebuild Fire Station #1.

With prudent use of the one cent sales tax and the sale of the Seaboard Public Works land, we should be able to modernize most of the remainder of our city

buildings without having to ask our citizens for any further bond referendums. This one referendum for Public Safety will be the catalyst that begins a much needed rehabilitation and rebuilding of our neglected city capital assets.

Finally, out of the seven items mentioned in the 2015 State of the City Address, coming up with a plan to help in the rebuilding of the Seaboard area has barely begun. We have been stonewalled in any attempt to begin serious communication with the county on redevelopment of this area, even though about half the area affected by the widening of Bypass 41 is county land. We would be hard-pressed to find a more text book case of an area where two governmental bodies could work together for the good of the people. The Seaboard area is a Community Redevelopment project, not a Community Reinvestment project. It is a large area that will require many years of rebuilding and tax incentive spending, it is an area that should not be bogged down in politics and paperwork filing of small individual projects that may or may not get funded. This is an area that needs to be taken out of the political arena and placed with an independent board that will work for the betterment of not only the city and county, but for the betterment of those who currently occupy the Seaboard area. Let us work together and expose publicly what went wrong on previous CRA's in the county and what went right. Let us structure the new CRA to prevent a repeat of what went wrong and move forward. The Seaboard area needs forward looking planning to start today, not 10 years from today. When the Nolen Plan was drafted 90 + years ago, the Seaboard area was on the eastern outskirts of Nolen's vision and Venice was not an island. Even a visionary as great as John Nolen could not predict the expansion of the city boundaries as far out as they have gone; his plan called for a light industrial area on the outskirts of the city, not just in the central part of our business district. We cannot, we must not allow the expansion of the borders of Venice to prevent us from making essential design changes in land that was part of the original plan. If we employ the services of a modern day Nolen Scholar, we will be able to make changes that will shape the future of the City of Venice and positively affect our citizens for years to come. We are capable of redeveloping this area without destroying its historic

nature and we are capable of redeveloping this area without being a detriment to those who currently occupy it. We do not have to relocate everyone that is in the Seaboard area, but we do have to help the current occupants redevelop what they have and help them relocate if they so desire.

In addition to these seven major projects listed in the January 27, 2015 State of the City, council has held two Strategic Planning sessions and has identified many additional tasks for staff. Our most recent plan, dated July 12, 2016, outlined 6 Goals with 26 Objectives and 68 Tasks for fiscal 2017. This plan is meant to be the guiding light for staff to utilize when they do their departmental retreat to develop an action plan for the city. We must use caution when revising this plan this year to assure we are clear in our expectations as to which Goals, Objectives and Tasks are tactical (expectations for beginning implementation within the fiscal year and completion within 2 years), strategic (expectations for beginning implementation and completion within 5 years) , and ongoing. We must come up with a reasonable number of goals, objectives and tasks that council deems as critical and require staff to report on progress of these assignments at least quarterly. We must use caution in assigning additional tasks that may pull our finite resources away from working on what is already assigned. As an illustration of this point, from January, 2016 through January, 2017, council has assigned staff an additional 50 projects of which 13 were completed and 37 are still in progress. These are over and above the regular daily work load and do not fit into the category of required maintenance or safety concerns, they are additional staff assignments not necessarily found in our Strategic Plan. Before council assigns additional tasks, we should ask staff to identify the work involved in performing the task and the approximate time that it would take to complete the task. We should ask what already in progress projects would be delayed by the additional assignment and how the additional assignment might be incorporated into the work flow. It will then be up to council to determine which of the currently assigned projects would move down on the priority list in order for the new task to be added. This is a change in the way we have made assignments in the past and will hold both staff and council accountable for additional work assignments.

There are several tasks that I would ask council to put on our priority list as we move forward in this current year and begin strategic planning for 2018. These tasks have been mentioned from time to time and need to be addressed and carried out or they need to be eliminated from our Strategic Plan, Federal Priorities and Legislative Priorities.

First: redevelopment of the Seaboard area. We must move from talking about it to acting upon it. We have several new County Commissioners and they should be open to dialog about using a CRA for that area. There is no valid reason that we cannot collectively design a redevelopment area that will benefit the occupants of the area as well as city and county residents.

Second: relocation of the distribution portion of the Post Office. There is little reason to have a major portion of our downtown area taken up by a distribution center that could be located anywhere. We have been given guidelines as to what the city has to do for the relocation and I have made an appointment with our postal contact in Washington at the end of this month to review and if necessary revise those guidelines. I hope to report back to council in March with a more definitive game plan and have council support the initiative this time. I am still convinced that we can accomplish this move with little to no expenditure of tax payer funds.

Third: develop a priority listing of the condition of our buildings and determine a time line for repair or replacement including approximate cost and source of funds to complete each task.

I cannot overemphasize the need to develop specific reserve funds for all capital items, not just our vehicles. With specific dedicated reserve funds we are at least acknowledging that our capital assets will need repair or replacement and we will at least have some money set aside for the future. Every corporation I know of does an asset inventory at least annually; the inventory not only identifies that we still own the asset, but updates the condition of that asset. Although we have started to develop an inventory, I think it safe to say we don't really know what

we own and we don't know its condition. This has to change or future councils will go through the same frustrations that we have encountered of having leaking roofs or frayed carpeting but no money to fix them and no idea where the money will come from to make the repair or replacement. I think our citizenry would be very supportive of us identifying problems and fixing them, not pretending that they don't exist and hoping that a future council will fix them.

Fourth: we must begin the process of developing a more fair tax system within our county. The residents of Venice are a generous and trusting people; they will pay for what they receive, but I do not think they should pay for what they do not receive. There are methods available to equalize charges within the county for services received; the most common method is the Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU) and the easiest service to identify is the Sheriff's Department. We are blessed in Sarasota County in that we have a great Sheriff's Department and there are portions of it that we all should pay for. We also have a great Venice Police Department and Venice residents do pay for all of it. The portions of the Sheriff's Department that are not required in Venice save the County and the Sheriff's Department real dollars. It is those services that our residents should not have to pay for. We do not charge the county for services that Venice has that the county doesn't use, the county should not charge Venice for services they have that we don't use. There should not be a penalty for incorporation of a city and until that penalty is removed, we will continue to have inequality in services paid for versus services received.

Fifth, we must continue to seek adequate and affordable workforce housing. Council Member Gates has repeatedly reminded us of this need, yet we have failed to provide for those who provide for us. With an aging population, the demands for a larger workforce will continue to grow. We will need people to educate us, people to protect us, people to provide restaurant services, people to care for us when we no longer can do it ourselves. These people deserve to be able to live in the community in which they serve and we are currently not

providing that opportunity. We can and must do a better job of providing living opportunities for our workforce.

Lastly, I think we must be ever mindful of the 5 major pillars of our community and do our best to assure they remain for our citizens today and those of tomorrow:

First, our history and historic downtown area has to be preserved as the focal point of Venice. It is what makes us what we are and we remain one of only a few cities in the country that remains true to its original design.

Second, our natural resources, especially the beach and park system must be preserved to provide the recreational opportunities and quality of life that our citizenry requires and deserves.

Third, our hospital or hospitals – we must continue to lobby for top rated medical services for our aging population. We are fortunate to have a highly qualified and dedicated medical staff within our city; we must assure that they have the facilities they need to perform their duties.

Fourth, we must continue to support and maintain our airport. The history of the airport is as important as the history of the rest of the city and we are fortunate to have a general aviation field within our city limits. Our airport with its adjacent public golf course is a unique jewel in our city and its upkeep must continue. We cannot let the quality slip back into the poor shape it was in just 6 years ago.

Fifth, we cannot fail to mention the quality and capability of our citizens and staff of the City of Venice. What really makes Venice so special is the high number of caring people that live here and work here. I know of no other place that has such a high level of professionalism, volunteerism and dedication to the betterment of the city. The people and staff of the City of Venice are special and we are thankful for the contributions they make on a daily basis.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the people of Venice for giving me the opportunity to serve this city for a third term. This is an honor that I do not take lightly and I am deeply humbled by and forever grateful for the trust you have placed in me and my fellow council members. Thank you seems like too little a way to express my gratitude, but in reality, those two words say so much, thank you. Please continue to express to council what your expectations for the city are and continue to stay engaged.

Thank you and may God Bless you all.