

**City Manager's Self-Assessment  
November 2019 to November 2020**

**I. Relations with the Community**

2020 began with the launch of several exciting community engagement initiatives: we kicked off the Southern Grove Master Planning Process, our 2020 National Community Survey™ was distributed resulting in continuing positive feedback trends and we held the 2020 #IAMPSL Citizen Summit with a record breaking 600 attendees.

In early March, the City and the State were placed under a “Safer At Home” order as a strategy to slow the spread of Covid-19. Communicating with the Council and our community was crucial to help deal with the unknown impacts of the virus. The City quickly established extensive website resources for individuals and businesses. A weekly Covid-19 Video Update was broadcast on PSL TV20, social media and was also posted on our website. The City was active on Facebook live; partnering with government officials and non-profits to share information which helped our citizens navigate these uncertain times. We reworked our procedures to ensure safety while continuing to provide for public input and engagement.

While City and County governments across the nation went into a lockdown during March and April, Port St. Lucie implemented an aggressive plan to continue to provide vital services in a safe, responsible manner. Our approach recognized that, at a point in time when citizens desperately needed continuity, citizens should be able to rely on their City government to facilitate business activity and provide crucial services. In late 2019, the Building Department completed construction of a drive-thru window. This project was originally conceived to provide a convenient way to drop off bundles of plans for the Building Department. However, staff reimagined the role a drive-thru could play in business continuity and fostering a Covid-free environment. The drop-off was used by all departments to facilitate the transfer of hard copy information, eliminating the need for the public to come into the buildings. Inspectors in the Building, Utilities, and Public Works Departments began working remotely, going directly to job sites thus reducing inspection time. Our team overhauled the process seemingly overnight –

initiating in-house inspections via Facetime and enlisting the use of drones to assist in performing roof inspections. As a result of these efforts, the number of single-family permits and inspections increased from the previous year. Additional permit types were added to the City's online permit capability further increasing accessibility to City services from the comfort of a home or business computer. To have a good relationship with our citizens, we must start with being relevant to their needs. The focus on continuing vital services and providing reliable and safe services is the foundation of our relationship with the community during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As your City Manager, I strive to be accessible to the organization and to the community. The devastating events of 2020 provided an opportunity to showcase the communications expertise which our organization has developed and focused those resources to help our citizens during the pandemic. My traditional attendance at neighborhood association meetings and service organizations was reduced due to the need for social distancing. Following social distancing practices, in October, I provided a *Year In Review* presentation to the St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce. The Year 2020 will be remembered for the greater appreciation that I, as have others, gained for the flexibility that virtual communication tools provide in being able to keep business and government operating during crises conditions. Although we were not able to physically attend as many functions, I spoke using Zoom and Chime to the Realtors Association, Economic Development Council, and brokers from the Keyes Realty Group.

We continue to monitor our citizens' priorities and their perceptions of City services. In late 2019, our third National Community Survey™ was conducted through the National Research Center (NRC). Those survey responses were compared to a 2009 NRC survey of PSL residents as well as responses to these same questions answered by citizens in cities across the nation. Nearly 80% of respondents rated quality of life as good or excellent compared to 52% in 2009. In addition, 72% of respondents rated services provided by Port St. Lucie as good to excellent as compared to fifty five percent (55%) in 2009. The 2021 version of the Survey was issued this past December; we await the results and look forward to presenting them to the City Council this Spring. The NRC has also awarded the City of Port St. Lucie, for

the second year in a row, the nationwide Voice of the People Award; this year for Transformative Citizen Engagement. Port St. Lucie was recognized for our progress in improving citizen perception of City services. These are the only awards given in local government based on the opinion of community residents and selected recipients display commitment to best practices in moving their communities forward. Under my direction the City's administrative leaders utilize the results of the NRC Survey to tailor service provision to meet the needs of our customers.

To successfully engage the community, the City must use various means in getting out our messages. Just as important, too, is listening to our residents. *The City Managers Bi-weekly Report*, letters to the editor, the *Annual Year in Review*, the Citizens Summit, and Citizens' University are all tools that are used by the City Council and staff to help citizens understand the issues and services provided by City government. Due to the pandemic, the 2020 Citizens University was offered virtually, yet successfully provided 70 citizens with a behind the scenes look at their City government. In addition, we implemented this year the excellent recommendation of the City Council to develop and distribute the City's first ever *Resident Welcome Guide*.

## **II. Relationship with the City Council**

It is my goal to treat all Council members equally well. I constantly monitor staff to ensure that employees treat the Mayor and Council with respect. I share information with the City Council about the status of program implementation through written reports and verbal updates. On a weekly basis, I meet with each Council member to provide information on the Council's upcoming agenda items. *The City Managers Bi-weekly Report* and financial status reports are all tools used to communicate with the Council. To recap the accomplishments of 2019 for the City Council and the community, the award-winning *Year in Review* was compiled and published early in 2020.

Ensuring that all members of the City Council have full access to information necessary to govern our City is one of my primary responsibilities. The Strategic Plan, Policy Retreats, Budget, and Capital Improvement Plan provide the foundation to help the Council adopt policy

direction. A critical process for ensuring that each Council member begins their service with an understanding of their role and responsibility as an individual and as a member of the governing body is the New City Council Member Orientation. Council member David Pickett was elected to the City Council replacing retiring City Councilman John Carvelli. A thorough new member orientation was provided to Councilman Pickett which was based upon the Council's Strategic Plan. The two-day agenda reviewed local and state laws which impact the role of Council and an overview of the services provided by each department. The intent of the orientation was to welcome Councilman Pickett, providing him the necessary tools to be effective in his new role.

On rare occasions, an incident may occur that warrants a telephone notification and discussion with individual members of the Council. When an issue warrants this heightened attention, I call each member and impart the same information.

### **III. Fiscal Management**

The City continues to maintain an excellent bond rating, and indicators such as millage, debt per capita, and employees per capita are stable or improving.

Although Port St. Lucie has been impacted by the worldwide pandemic, we continued our progress toward becoming a high performing organization with excellent financial management and indicators. Our Chief Financial Officer continues our fiscal technology transition by implementing new modules to the Munis Financial Management System. In 2020, staff implemented payroll and personnel modules which will substantially improve the accountability and accuracy of these systems. In addition, we are currently implementing the Munis Contract Monitoring Module.

Since 1989, the City of Port St. Lucie has been acknowledged and awarded by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) with its Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. But in 2020, for the first time in the City's history, it received the Special Performance Measures Recognition as part of the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for Fiscal Year 2019/20. This was excellent national recognition of the

hard work staff is doing to highlight their performance metrics in a relatable way in the City's budget document. Only 20 out of the 1,123 municipalities participating in the GFOA's Distinguished Budget Award program received the coveted Special Recognition on Performance Measures.

In 2015, the City had a total bonded indebtedness of \$1,200,000,000. The City Council adopted a strategic objective of substantially reducing bonded debt that has proven successful. The FY21 Budget projects that total debt will decline to less than \$800,000,000; a reduction of nearly 34%.

The total shut down of most businesses, beginning in March of 2020, created an environment ripe for economic disruption. Our March FY21 budget predictions were for a 20% reduction in consumption-based revenues for the balance of FY20 and FY21. I worked with the Leadership Team to enact immediate reductions in discretionary spending and began to prepare for an austere FY21 Budget. To engage leaders from all departments and at all levels of our organization, I appointed a Team, which self-identifies as the Port St. Lucie Forward Team, to develop recommendations to assist the City identify opportunities to reduce spending or increase revenues. The Team, facilitated by a Special Assistant to the City Manager, provided ten recommendations which were considered in preparing the FY21 Budget. Thankfully, the worst-case projections for budget impacts were not realized. Port St. Lucie's solid financial management and growth experienced in the residential sector ultimately provided for an increase in revenues to meet the needs of a growing community.

The Land Development Functional group (also known as the Cloud Group) is comprised of all division or department directors who have a role in land development services. This Team meets regularly to ensure communication and collaboration on important objectives. The Cloud Group was asked to anticipate the potential impact of a pandemic-induced recession on construction of new residential and commercial structures, Port St. Lucie's largest economic driver. The Cloud Group identified improvements to the development review process which speed the process concurrent with ensuring compliance with the City's rules and regulations.

The product of this effort is titled "A Recovery for All Ages," and serves as a roadmap for continuous improvement of the land development process.

Strategic Planning is a pervasive theme throughout the Port St. Lucie organization. Just as the City Council adopted a Strategic Plan, the City's Leadership Team conducts a Strategic Planning Session that involves key staff members who assist departments as they transition the Council's goals and objectives to departmental goals. Each Department prepares a strategic business plan which links that department's operations to the Strategic Plan. The list of projects and objectives initiated and/or accomplished is extensive. A few of the more significant accomplishments include:

- ❖ Implemented "Project Fusion," which tracks development applications from concept planning to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy,
- ❖ Negotiated a Naming Rights Agreement to brand the Civic Center as the MidFlorida Credit Union Event Center for a five-year naming rights fee of nearly \$1,000,000,
- ❖ Implemented the "We Love Lucie" Concert Series at the MidFlorida Event Center with a sold-out premiere performance by the band STYX,
- ❖ Completed Phase I of the Southern Grove Master Plan,
- ❖ Presented for approval of the Governmental Finance Corporation (GFC) a Purchase and Sales Agreement to sell 44 acres of Tradition Center of Commerce to Cleveland Clinic; cementing Port St. Lucie as the home for future expansion of Cleveland Clinic Florida,
- ❖ In the first quarter of FY20 Cleveland Clinic executed a 15-year lease of the City's 107,000 sq. ft. building to open the Cleveland Clinic Florida Research and Innovation Center,
- ❖ Presented for approval of the GFC a purchase and sale agreement to sell 65 acres to Sansone Group on the Becker Road-end of the Tradition Center of Commerce,
- ❖ Presented for approval of the GFC options to purchase 300 acres of land to the Sansone Group, when combined with the 65 acre sale, Sansone is establishing the South Florida Legacy Center in which up to 3,000,000 sq. ft. of industrial or distribution space will be constructed offering up to 3,000 high paying jobs,
- ❖ Presented for approval of the GFC a purchase and sales agreement for the Sansone Group to purchase 22 acres for a Federal Express Regional Distribution Center,

- ❖ Presented for approval of the GFC a Letter of Intent for Project Bullet to purchase up to 75 acres for a warehouse/distribution center employing from 400 to 700 employees,
- ❖ Expedited the plan review and permit for Accel International's 150,000 sq. ft. manufacturing facility,
- ❖ Reduced the annual carrying cost for the Tradition Center of Commerce from \$5,400,000 annually after acquisition in 2018 to \$3,800,000 in FY 21,
- ❖ Received City Council approval to negotiate an agreement to purchase the 20-acre City Center property from the Securities and Exchange Commission,
- ❖ Assisted Torrey Pines and the Florida International University (FIU) to purchase the Torrey Pines Building for FIU research,
- ❖ Constructed the Winter Lakes Neighborhood Park,
- ❖ Completed a master plan and design concept for a world class children's playground at The Port,
- ❖ Completed Cell #2 of the McCarty Ranch Water Quality project (Cell #3 is nearing completion),
- ❖ Completed over one-quarter of a mile of boardwalk at The Port,
- ❖ Installed 5.7 miles of new sidewalks as reflected in the 10-Year Sidewalk Master Plan,
- ❖ Resurfaced 29 miles of roadways as reflected in the 10-Year Road Resurfacing Master Plan,
- ❖ Constructed a Round-A-Bout at Torino and California Boulevards and a second at Torino and Cashmere Boulevards,
- ❖ Installed art in the Bayshore Boulevard and Selvitz Road Roundabout,
- ❖ Completed Phase II of the Microbial Source Tracking Study,
- ❖ Began construction of Phase I of the Floresta Drive Project under the One-Half Cent Sales Tax Initiative,
- ❖ Adopted an Arts Master Plan,
- ❖ The Communications and Planning & Zoning Departments led a multi-department team to collaborate with the Census Bureau to encourage census participation resulting in a completion rate of 74% which exceeded the County, State, and national completion rates,
- ❖ Port St. Lucie's Police, Public Works, and Building Departments achieved re-accreditation; all three are national and international benchmarks for excellence,

- ❖ Code Enforcement Division received 4-Star national accreditation,
- ❖ The City was awarded over \$43,000,000 in grant funds from various funding partners, and began to work interdepartmentally through the Grants & Advocacy Team including critical agency partners such as the South Florida Water Management District who hosted their meeting in City Hall Chambers for the first time this year and supported the City's successful request for \$2.5 million in water quality grants providing the City with opportunities to continue to improve our waterways through the St. Lucie River/C-23 Water Quality Project at McCarty Ranch, the Sagamore Basin Stormwater Project and the Floresta Baffle Box.
- ❖ For the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row, the City ranked as the Safest Large City in the State of Florida,
- ❖ The Building Department has been selected as one of the finalists in the International Code Council for the Innovator of the Year for 2020.

The past twelve months have been significant for the achievement and completion of Strategic Plan Objectives and Initiatives. A common value throughout our organization is teamwork; none of these projects would have been completed without individuals and departments working together to achieve success for Port St. Lucie citizens.

#### **IV. Personnel Management**

My vision for the workforce is of an organization which is professional, results-oriented, and focuses on providing a high return on investment to our taxpayers. As one of the 2020 Best Places to Work in St. Lucie County, our organization's structure, training and communication with employees are critical to success.

Covid-19 has bent, but not broken the City organization and in many ways led to innovations that have propelled us forward in new methods of collaboration and teamwork. We were forced to pivot to remote work, online, drive-thru and significantly greater reliance on virtual communication to serve our customers. At one point in the late Spring, over two-thirds of all non-field employees were working remotely. The City never closed, services were delivered seamlessly and effectively. Surprisingly, the increased availability of online services resulted in higher levels of productivity and customer satisfaction. Department and Division Directors



enhanced communication with remote workers to provide objectives and feedback to employees. Employees throughout the organization were able to collaborate more effectively through the implementation of new technology thanks to the leadership of the Information Technology department. During the depth of the pandemic, I provided a weekly video message which were posted on the website and published in writing, that shared with employees both the latest information and our strategic direction. Once each month, I met with the employees from a department to share information and to listen to feedback virtually. The number of attendees has increased as well as the level of participation.

In Section I of this assessment, I mentioned the National Research Center as being a vital resource in determining citizen satisfaction with City services. City management has expanded our partnership with NRC, using their resources to reach inward, to our employees.

Human Resources has implemented a continuous improvement program for all employees beginning with the City participating in the National Research Center's National Employee Survey providing valuable insight to help ascertain employee's opinions regarding their satisfaction on the job and the six key aspects of organizational climate: job satisfaction, supervisor and work group, executive leadership, workplace, external customers and support services. The survey compared the City against other national municipalities and in many categories, the City received results similar to or higher than industry benchmarks. Port St. Lucie employees gave evaluations that were higher than employees from other organizations across the country and these ratings increased from 2019 to 2020.

Overall, the City of Port St. Lucie continues to be a great place to work. About 9 in 10 employees reported being satisfied with their job overall, felt positive about working for the City and gained satisfaction from their job. A similar number of employees planned on working for the City a year from now and were likely to recommend working for the City. Employees gave evaluations that scored higher compared to those from other organizations across the country to the work-life balance for staff, and to compensation overall. These ratings increased from 2019 to 2020.

The organizational climate is healthy. At least three-quarters of respondents gave high marks to all aspects of their supervisors and workgroups and these ratings tended to be higher than the national benchmarks. Notably, City employees gave higher ratings to the job their supervisors did at communicating information in a timely manner, encouraging employees to come up with innovative solutions, and welcoming employee involvement in decision making. Port St. Lucie employees continued to give high marks to internal support services in 2020; most ratings were higher than national averages. All ratings remained stable or increased from 2019 to 2020.

The City's first Training and Development Coordinator started in March of 2020 challenging his skills for adaptability. The renewed focus on training produced the City's first Training Catalog which will be available online prior to the end of the year. I feel that we have just scratched the surface for providing a career long path to improving each employee's skill set for providing exceptional customer service. A Career long training continuum is an important priority for our leadership team as we invest in team members, leadership development and improve our succession planning.

A skill common to all high-performing employees is process management. Our City became the first City in the nation to employ a strictly online training program for understanding the processes which serve as the foundation for service delivery. This program is facilitated by Brian Elms, who founded the successful City of Denver Innovation Academy. In the Port St. Lucie Innovation Academy, employees are provided best practices, work as teams to improve processes, and leave with the tools to implement continuous improvement in their departments. As your City Manager, I am committed to offering training opportunities to improve employee skills and organizational culture.

Achieving the City Council's goals and objectives requires highly motivated employees. I emphasize the importance of getting the right person in the right position, two-way communication, ethics, accountability, and teamwork. The Port St. Lucie organization continues to place a high priority on recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce and selecting the most qualified individuals to be part of our organization.

**V. Personal Qualities**

A dominant characteristic of my approach to local government is a commitment to providing excellent service to the City Council and the citizens of Port St. Lucie. I believe that to be successful; the organization must have a vision, set goals, live our values, involve stakeholders, act with integrity, and follow-through.

**VI. Relations to other Governments**

To foster improved relationships with St. Lucie County, Fort Pierce, and the other cities and counties in the region, I meet monthly with the managers of these jurisdictions. Ongoing communication between City and County staff has provided a collaborative foundation for providing information on the sales tax projects to the citizens. A joint jurisdictional team crafted the implementation strategy, working together throughout the sales tax process, to provide information to elected officials and our community.

Fiscal year 2020 began with the usual focus on working with the County and other municipalities to share ideas and find areas of commonality to improve services to Port St. Lucie residents. In February, our focus significantly changed to navigating the Covid 19 state of emergency. The municipalities and St. Lucie County met virtually two times a week to share information which would be beneficial to our residents.

Port St. Lucie has been successful applying for grants and receiving approximately \$43,000,000 in funding from State and Federal Agencies. Starting with the Mayor and City Council and the City's incredible Strategic Planning and Initiative Director, Departments throughout the City have developed relationships with the Water Management District leadership, FDOT and Federal agencies which have helped the City to become a trusted partner to implement projects which achieve shared strategic objectives.

Animal Care services were threatened in 2020 when the St. Lucie County Humane Society became financially and programmatically dysfunctional. City staff from the Legal, Police, Finance and City Manager Departments negotiated with St. Lucie County and Fort Pierce to craft a plan to continue provision of animal care services. The Final plan re-established the non-profit Humane Society and included initial Board members appointed by the City Council. City staff have been instrumental in assisting the reinvigorated Board of Directors to gain financial stability and significantly improve services to the community.

**VII. Community Redevelopment Agency and Government Finance Corporation**  
**Executive Director**

As Executive Director of the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) and Government Finance Corporation (GFC), I am pleased with the progress made on revitalizing the redevelopment areas. The recently adopted Southern Grove Master Plan provides a road map for use of the Jobs Corridor properties. The Southern Grove CRA (often referred to as the City's "Jobs Corridor") continues to grow in value, reducing the impact of the special assessment on properties in the CRA. Early projections for buildout of the Jobs Corridor ranged from 20 to 30 years. Demand for properties controlled by the GFC has been strong as exemplified by the sale and option of 365 acres to the Sansone Group to develop Legacy Commerce Park. The first occupant of Legacy Park is a 275,000 sq. ft. Federal Express Regional Sorting Center. In December 2020, the GFC approved a purchase agreement to sell 44 acres north of Discovery Way to Cleveland Clinic. At our current pace, the GFC will divest of almost 50% of the Jobs Corridor by the end of 2021.

After years of assisting the Port St. Lucie City Center's federally appointed Receiver to sell the 20-acre City Center CRA, staff has determined that the burden of the accumulated taxes and special assessments make sale of this property to the private sector highly unlikely. Members of the City Council approved the City making an offer to purchase the City Center properties controlled by the Securities and Exchange Commission. The transfer of this property to ownership and control of the City will set the stage for the long-awaited revitalization of one of the most prominent properties in Port St. Lucie.

I am incredibly proud of the small, but very talented CRA staff. The progress in moving the Jobs Corridor from a vision to reality is a direct result of the CRA Manager's knowledge of the property and diligent work to present the opportunities to grow the corridor.

**VIII. City Powers and Duties**

The City of Port St. Lucie not only complies with but exceeds the requirements of City ordinances. Systems are maintained for finance, procurement, human resources, information technology, budgeting, property inventory control, and risk management.

The City budget process integrates capital, information technology, and operating expenditures and revenues in an award-winning document. A copy of the most recent "Year in Review" is included in the City Council packet for this assessment.

As your City Manager, I attest that the City of Port St. Lucie government is well-run and in compliance with all pertinent Florida Statutes. My commitment to the City Council is to continuously improve my performance and the performance of the organization.



Russ Blackburn

City Manager