



## TAMARAC STATE OF THE CITY: 2009

*Presented by Mayor Beth Flansbaum-Talabisco on March 11, 2009*

This evening I speak to you at a time when our country, our state, and our city face great challenges.

In Tamarac, we are experiencing the same anxieties and tests that communities all over the nation are facing.

Yet, my fellow residents, despite these challenges, the state of our City is strong.

Through the efforts of my dedicated fellow Commissioners, a devoted team of management and staff, our first responders who keep us safe, an engaged business community, and our faithful citizenry, Tamarac endures, flourishes, and perseveres.

As I look around the chambers this evening, I see many friends and “community patriots” who help us do just that – patriots such as our two newest Commissioners. These women from different perspectives and backgrounds threw themselves into the politics of our City with the goal of making a difference.

The first is Commissioner Pamela Bushnell, a newcomer to Florida politics and exactly the type of story we love. Last year Pam was a student of the 2008 class of Tamarac University. There she received an insider's view of the City, and it was that knowledge, along with a love for her community and the encouragement of friends and neighbors, that prompted her to run for the District 1 seat last year. She handily won that election and has been a wonderful addition to our Commission.

Along with Commissioner Bushnell, the City also gained a new Commissioner in District 3. Diane Glasser is a veteran of City, County, State and Federal politics. Another wonderful story, Diane has been a loyal observer of the City's politics for some time. In fact, if you look to your left you will notice she graces our wall of past Commissioners having previously served as Commissioner of District 1 from 1991 – 1992. Her depth of knowledge and her involvement with County, State, and national politics are advantages for our City, and our Commission. and the historical perspective she brings is truly appreciated.

This Commission is complete because of the commitment of its' existing members, Vice Mayor Patricia Atkins-Grad and Commissioner Harry Dressler. In the six years that I have had the privilege of serving this City, these two individuals have truly brought a breath of fresh air to City Hall.

Commissioner Dressler with his grasp of the matters affecting the world at large, and how they trickle down to our local issues, brought a unique intellect and curiosity to the Commission. His background in finance and economics has been a tremendous help as we continue to deal with tough realities.

Vice Mayor Patricia Atkins-Grad was new to politics when she won the District 2 seat in 2006. She quickly found her stride and dove head first into her position of Commissioner and again this year as she has taken on the role of Vice Mayor. She brings boundless energy and enthusiasm to our Commission.

Each member of this Commission plays a vital role in the success of our community through their involvement with a variety boards and committees. Commissioner Dressler represents the City on the Metropolitan Planning Organization, the group that tackles our tough transportation issues at the Federal level. Commissioner Bushnell has recently been appointed to the State Road 7 Collaborative to help with the development and revitalization of this essential economic and transportation corridor. Commissioner Glasser was named to the Advisory Board of the Aging and Disability Resource Center to assist with the needs of this vital population throughout Broward County. And Vice Mayor Atkins-Grad serves on the Broward County Water Academy contributing to the ideas that will lead South Florida into the future of conservation. These are just a few of the many activities my colleagues participate in.

I must also take a moment to recognize our staff led by City Manager, Jeff Miller. It's Jeff's unflappable demeanor and his steady hand tempered by years of experience in government that serve our City so well. As many of you who have attended our workshops or Commission meetings have observed, no matter how animated some of our debates may become, Jeff is always composed as he listens to all sides and formulates a balanced approach to resolving issues. Jeff, we thank you for your hard work and leadership.

And thank you to our City Attorney, Sam Goren, and his staff as well. They keep us abreast of the issues affecting our City, State, and surrounding communities, while at the same time keeping us following proper protocol, policy, and guidelines.

I also want to thank our dedicated Executive Team and City staff who day-in and day-out go about the business of the City. It is their resilience, innovation, and enthusiasm that make our City work so well.

And of course, my husband of 18 years, Jack. It is your unfailing support that keeps me going and looking toward the future.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge our two most recent former Commissioners as well, Commissioner Ed Portner and Vice Mayor Mark

Sultanof. Throughout their years of service, these two gentlemen left an indelible mark on our City.

There are many more people I would like to acknowledge and thank for their service to our Community... those I call “community patriots”. Like our Commissioners, these citizens, business owners and leaders, who support the City in so many ways, play a vital role in our success.

I’m reminded of a quote by William Shakespeare: “What is the City, but the people?”

People like Lung Chui, President of our Buddhist Temple, and Se Fa, the Master of our Buddhist Temple, who love our community so much that they have pledged a wonderful donation to help us with a Parks and Recreation program.

Or the group of men from Temple Beth Torah who recently spent a Sunday morning mulching landscape at Tephford Park.

Or our Kiwanis Club that has pledged up to \$3,000 to our future Community Garden.

People such as the Grads – of Margate. Residents who travel from their home to our People and Pups park regularly because they love the facility, and what it offers our expanded community.

And others like Tom and Abby Ashford who were dealing with an extraordinary health issue and reached out to me. And thanks to help from our Social Services department, they are back on their feet and back out in the community.

People such as Stewart and Lisa Silver, and their son Todd, who live, work, play, and go to school in Tamarac and are always eager to lend a hand to help make our City even greater.

And Dan Sturmer, a colleague, friend and Weston Commissioner, who drives through our City regularly, who called to tell me how much he loved our new logo and signage... and how inviting Tamarac is.

Ben Chicofsky, who at 96 years young, is a standard-bearer within our Community. Ben was part of the group of citizens who, over 20 years ago, began the *Tam-A-Gram* in its original incarnation and has been involved ever since.

It is men, women, and children like these who make up our City – whether you live here or in a surrounding community, do business here or pass through on your way to another destination... Tamarac touches lives and invites you in.

There is no question that the months ahead will bring tremendous challenges for Tamarac. The world economy is in disarray and as we wait for our national leaders to work through ideas and solutions, we must stay ever vigilant of the task closest at hand. Tamarac exists to serve its people and we remain dedicated to *Customer Service... Second to None!*

In order to maintain that level of service, difficult choices will need to be made.

In anticipation of additional reductions in revenue sharing from the State and Federal governments, we have already taken steps to reduce expenditures for the coming year. Steps such as:

- Closing Satellite City Hall;
- Imposing a moratorium on hiring, except for “critical” positions;
- Eliminating temporary staff positions; and
- Putting on hold orders of new equipment and systems.

It is these cost saving measures, combined with others, that will allow us to weather the storm we now know as the worst recession in decades.

Make no mistake these decisions are never taken lightly. Closing a facility gives us great pause because of the possible residual effects on service. Putting a freeze on hiring can have the same consequences, as can the elimination of temporary staff positions, and the suspension of new equipment orders.

Just as the decisions to close a facility, freeze hiring, or to not order new equipment, are undertaken with intense scrutiny, so too are the decisions to open that Satellite City Hall, hire that new groundskeeper, or order that new vehicle.

This is not excess we are forced to trim. These are holes we are forced to fill.

The services we provide to our residents include necessities such as water, sewer, fire and police. We also provide programs and activities, information and knowledge, clean streets, manicured medians, and much more that all cost money and require staff to maintain.

Service is the heart of our governing philosophy – as a way to compensate for the loss of our Satellite City Hall, and to streamline our customer service facilities, residents will soon be able to take care of all their needs in one convenient location – at the Tamarac Community Center on Commercial Boulevard. Our customer service staff is being consolidated to better serve the community with longer operating hours.

This consolidation of service contributed to our being able to meet the demands of a 5 million dollar reduction in the fiscal year 2009 budget. Expecting further shortfalls, and to continue to stay ahead of the curve, the day the Commission signed off on that budget, City staff immediately began working on the 2010 fiscal year budget.

More than just revenue shortfalls from the State and Federal governments, Tamarac's slice of the property tax pie is also shrinking. Foreclosures are on the rise as layoffs mount and unemployment figures continue to increase.

The bursting of the housing bubble has taken its toll, and the affects will be felt for years to come in the form of de-valued properties and dwindling tax proceeds.

Without question these are immense challenges, but we must also recognize the silver lining that is shining through.

Recently Tamarac was awarded 4.7 million dollars in Neighborhood Stabilization funds from the Federal government. These funds are available to assist first-time homebuyers in purchasing homes that have been foreclosed on. Homes at affordable prices, bought with down payment assistance – what a wonderful program!

In January our Housing Division held a seminar for realtors to educate them about the Federal Funds available to first-time homebuyers. They expected 20, maybe 30 agents to show up. They had over 120. We also partnered with Coral Springs to hold an educational seminar about foreclosures – over 300 people attended!

In addition to helping new homebuyers get into foreclosed homes, Tamarac also offers a Neighborhood Partnership Program. This program, available to Homeowner and Condo Associations, offers matching grant dollars to assist in beautifying the common elements of your communities.

We have also recently revised our Code of Ordinances. These changes are aimed squarely at improving the look of our neighborhoods and commercial areas which will in turn help to improve and maintain property values.

The housing issue is just one of the topics discussed as we lobby at the State and Federal levels for additional funding. Trips to Washington and Tallahassee by our lobbyist, and where appropriate, by myself and my colleagues, as well as senior staff, are not in vain. We must get Tamarac on the list of municipalities in need. And we must also get Tamarac on the list of communities that want to contribute to the solutions.

We will not be left behind or forgotten. Although we cherish our past, we are no longer the “sleepy retirement community” that many would have us portrayed as. Our demographics have changed – as I often say, Tamarac is comprised of “*juniors, seniors, and in-betweeners.*” All with specific wants and needs from their City government.

You only have to take a short drive to our Community Center to see the diversity in action. From knitting to computer lessons, badminton to basketball, yoga to line dancing. We offer it all.

Or, take a stroll through our new People and Pups Park. Some questioned its timing, but I assure you I have no regrets. We were able to take an underused area of land and reshape it into, without question, our City’s most popular park. The energy and sense of community you feel upon entering this space will remind you what City parks are all about – an escape from the world... if only for a moment.

It is that escape that Cities need to offer, now more than ever. With families cutting back on going out, we have the opportunity to provide them with low cost, and in many cases free, activities. Whether that be a relaxing stroll or a vigorous bike ride; a concert at twilight; a fireworks display; or swimming at the Aquatic Center, Tamarac is *The City for Your Life.*

As uncertainty is delivered to us daily in print, on the internet, and on television, Tamarac is like a *“port in the storm”* for our residents.

A port that we have been speaking about for several years is our mixed-use corridor – otherwise known as Main Street. I am very pleased that after years of planning, my colleagues and I have been able to sign-off on the developer’s plans for phase one of this very exciting project. We look forward to a ground-breaking, and the new retail shops, offices and restaurants, not to mention the new jobs, this project will bring to our City.

*No City, or City government, is an island.* The ties to our community define who we are and the direction we will take.

This evening I am announcing two new initiatives.

The first is the formation of an “Interfaith Leadership Council” comprised of members of Tamarac’s religious organizations, some of whom are here this evening. Tamarac is an Inclusive Community and we value the opportunity to play host to such a wide variety of faiths. The Interfaith Leadership Council will work hand-in-hand to promote unity, and cooperation.

I realize the active role faith-based groups play in our community and I have asked them to form the back-bone of my second initiative... the “Tamarac

Community Partners Food Drive”. We all know that the effects of the economic downturn are far-reaching and this community-wide Food Drive will help serve those in need – and not just for human consumption, this Food Drive will also include donations for our four-legged friends. To help me kick off this initiative I would like to ask the children in the audience to come forward with the food items they have brought with them. This basket is just the beginning... in the weeks ahead I will host a group of community leaders to discuss how best to move forward with this Community Food Drive, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Commission to make both of these projects a success.

It is often said that “it takes a village” and this should resonate in all of us. By reaching out to our neighbors and offering to help those less fortunate, we build bridges and we solidify ties. Tamarac is our *village*. It is where we live, work and play. And it is here that we all must come together to find solutions to the challenges we face.

In the months ahead you will hear more about these initiatives and I encourage all of you to become involved.

I just spoke of Tamarac as the place we live, work, and play... so too is Tamarac a place where we shop and dine. Over the next several weeks and months we will be promoting “Live, Work, Play, Shop, Tamarac!” as a way to insure the success of our local economy. I encourage each of you to join me in utilizing the

services available to us by the hard working men and women who make up Tamarac's business community.

There is no denying, the challenges of the recent past and the foreseeable future are vast, but through it all we continue to achieve great things. Such as:

- We broke ground on our new recreation center on University Drive; and
- We opened an additional 15 acres of new ball fields at our expanded sports complex;
- We unveiled a new City logo;
- We won the prestigious Emerald Trophy for Environmental Stewardship;
- We won the ArtServe Encore Award for a second year in a row;
- We were the first City in South Florida to receive Silver Certification from the Florida Green Building Coalition;
- We're one of the first cities to be on Twitter; and
- Tephford Park and the Gary B Jones Park for People and Pups opened – both named for friends and colleagues taken from us far too soon.

We must also recognize the Tamarac branch of the Broward Sheriff's Office. Our partnership with BSO is stronger than ever and it is a relationship that we are very proud of. Everyday the men and women who protect our community and put their lives on the line, are to be commended for the work they do.

We have many amazing individuals within the City that make all of this possible, but there are two in particular whom I would like to single-out for their exceptional service.

The first is our Social Services supervisor, Rose Cure-Persad, who was a finalist for the 2008 Florida League of Cities Employee of the Year award.

The second is Joe Scimeca, our Senior Code Officer. Joe, a retired New York City police detective, put those skills to good use last December when he found a fugitive mother who was on the run, with one of her daughters, and helped get them to safety. He and Rose exemplify the type of employees we have here in Tamarac.

When speaking of accomplishments I must also mention the numerous grants the City receives. As you may know, we rely on grant dollars to help us fund many of the City's projects, whether it be new park facilities, life saving equipment, or the covered walkway between the Community Center and Library. If we have a need, or an idea for a project, we always look for ways to get somebody else to help pay the cost. Over the past year or so we have received a staggering amount of grant money ... over 10 million dollars... dollars our tax payers did not have to finance.

Please join me in applauding, our incredible staff.

In closing this evening, I'd like to share with you the words that continue to motivate and comfort me.

"May the long time sun shine upon you. May all love surround you and the pure light within you guide your way on." Tamarac is 45 years young and, through good times and struggles, the sun continues to shine on us. Our love for the City we call home, and our united purpose will light our way into the future, and make us stronger and an even better City. We must never lose sight of the fact that we live in an incredible time of hope, inspiration, and opportunity and that we are all on this journey together.

May god bless and protect us. Thank you.