



State of the City May 5, 2009

The State of the City of Belle Isle is sound. Since June 25, 2009 the staff has worked diligently towards improving the quality of life in Belle Isle. New vendors have been hired in various areas to seek a higher level of service to the City. A new park on Hoffner at Montmart recently opened and is being enjoyed daily by area residents. The quality of plant material and hardscape have set a new standard for the city and all our parks will be rehabilitated over the next few years to bring them to the new standard of beauty and functionality. The installation at Gene Polk Park (formerly known as Delia Beach) is 98% complete and will be dedicated very soon.

Trimble Park (formerly Lagoon Park) will be dedicated to Jo and Jim Trimble on Saturday, May 9 at 10:00 a.m. (Trentwood Drive entrance) just prior to Jo and Jim's son Thom marrying Terry Lynne Hale at 10:30 a.m. in the park.

The Nela Bridge was formally dedicated on Saturday, April 18th 2009 at 8:30 a.m. Two beautiful bronze plaques commemorate the Committee members who were so active in getting the Nela Bridge beautified. One of the members, Linda Osborn Vogt, passed away before the project was completed is remembered on the plaque. The second plaque, facing east on the east end of the Bridge, commemorates the Mayor and Council who approved the project originally and persevered through the project to ensure the end product was worthy of the investment and pride of our beautiful city. We now have an icon that represents the character, uniqueness and natural beauty of our City.

We have made substantial investments in our infrastructure over the past few years and our Five Year Capital Improvement Program continues to help us plan for the current and future needs of our residents. Many of the projects were funded through a series of Bond Loans from the Florida League of Cities financial services. We are meeting our debt service obligations.

I am proud to say we are funding the extension of an Orange County Utilities water line along "old" Cove Drive which will provide a higher level of fire protection through the installation of two new fire hydrants. Residents may opt to connect to the water line via Orange County Utilities. The City was also successful in working with the City of Orlando to reach an amenable solution to the Cove Drive/Conway Road intersection realignment.

Our designated reserve fund is approximately \$950,000.00 and is stable. We need to restore the designated reserve to \$2.5 million over the next four years. It is the reserve fund that carried us through the 2004 Hurricane season until we started receiving reimbursement from FEMA. It has not been possible to increase the reserve this fiscal year due to reduced revenues and the need to fund the new Police Department. Unfunded State mandates, decreased property values and revenues demonstrate the need for new revenue sources to fund our annual budget. We are receiving less funding from County and State government as they keep more of the revenues to shore up their budget deficits. The city's full time staff increased from eleven to 18 and will end up at 20 before the end of the fiscal year as we fill out the Police Department patrol roster.

Due to the diligence of the Police Chief John B. Tegg, III and Sergeant Casper Johnson, equipment and services have been acquired for the Police Department at substantial savings to the budgeted costs. Grant applications have been made to DOJ CHRP for funding personnel positions; and a local option DOJ Byrne JAG grant was submitted to Orange County Sheriff's Office and was funded, unfortunately it was funded at a level that does **not meet** the FDLE minimum submission.

As the City Manager, I have been carefully examining revenue options and plan to ask the Council to consider a ½ mill ad valorem increase and to allow line item billing for solid waste. These increases are necessary due to our reduced revenues from State and Local shared taxes and increases in operating costs. This request is not made without serious considerations for the taxpayers. A half mill increase in our ad valorem would result in approximately \$300,000 in additional revenues; and the solid waste line item charge result in approximately \$425,000 additional funding in the general fund budget. The city has paid for solid waste collection services for many years through the general revenues. This is no longer fiscally feasible. In previous years approximately \$480,000 was budgeted for off-duty coverage which is now allocated to the Police Department budget. I will propose an annual operating budget for the Police Department of \$880,000 for FY 2009-2010. With the proposed millage increase and line item pass through for solid waste collection the city should be able to adequately fund the current level of services.

The Fire Rescue Services fee is \$1.2 million per year. We will be exploring our options for a reduced annual cost for fire protection and rescue services. We hope this will result in a significant savings to the City.

The staff continues to explore options to make the city more efficient and to find cost effective services. Both Regal (Montmart) Park and Gene Polk Park were developed with FRDAP grant funding. The staff is applying for additional FRDAP grants to finish Trimble Park improvements and to implement the installation of hardscape.

The Five Year Capital Improvement program is being developed and a draft proposal will be available for public review by May 12, 2009. Please remember this is a preliminary draft and will most certainly change substantially prior to the adoption process. Since the bond funding for infrastructure improvements has been exhausted we will be slowing down our number of annual projects. As we further develop a proposed budget for FY 2009-2010 we will work on priority and emergency needs basis. Next year we will resurface Windsor Place and Driscoll Court. Emergency projects already designed will be implemented and top priority projects will be scheduled as funding is available.

A proposed preliminary budget will be presented to Council at the May 27th City Council workshop. I ask Commissioners to contact me regarding any particular projects they feel are needed in their Districts. I look forward to working with the Council through the budget and Five Year Capital Improvement Program process.

Belinda "Be" Bateman
City Manager