

**State of the Village**  
**Mayor Joseph M. Corradino**

December 6, 2017  
Pinecrest Gardens | Hibiscus Pavilion

The State of the Village Address is always an important event in any city. Fortunately, in Pinecrest, it is also an occasion to celebrate. We have the opportunity to look back at the past year and take stock of what we did and how well we did it. We are able to look at our performance in context of our historic norms, and we get to provide an outline for how in the upcoming year and beyond we will address the issues that affect us. It's also a time to thank all of those who helped us get here and hopefully inspire those who will help us move forward in the future.

I am happy to report that the State of the Village is excellent. Our incorporation was a bold visionary experiment initiated in a time of great need. It was an exercise of true self-governance, in a rapidly expanding county, Pinecrest sought to provide the highest quality services underpinned by: police protection, control over its local development patterns, high quality parks, recreation and cultural facilities, all done as efficiently and effectively as possible. Over 20 years later, what many said would not work, has proven incredibly successful. We do what we do very well.

We also know that, because of recent events, in a large sense, the issues that led to incorporation are the similar issues that we will face moving forward. People in Pinecrest desire a higher level of service than the larger governments are capable of providing. This is the primary challenge we face. We will continue to evolve, by protecting and preserving our neighborhoods so that we may enhance our character and quality of life as we have done in the past...as ONE Village, with determination and focus.

The outward signs of our success can be seen in the things that we can measure...

- Pinecrest continues to have one of the lowest tax rates in Miami-Dade County. PERIOD. Our current millage rate of 2.3 mils is, in fact, lower than it was a decade ago and it has never exceeded 2.4.
- We maintain a solid AAA bond rating.
- Even after Hurricane Irma and the retirement of the bond approved in the early 2000s which financed acquisition and development of Greer Park and the Pinecrest Municipal Center, the funds in our reserve budget exceed the amount prescribed by our sound and conservative financial policy and

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continue to provide an important funding cushion in the case of an emergency.

- We have a 95% customer satisfaction rate
- More importantly to us as individuals, our property values increased by 6% in the last year, and in the past two decades, have appreciated at a greater rate than in almost any other community.

Our personal financial investments in Pinecrest as a place to live, raise our children and retire continue to pay off. But being a Village is more than the utilitarian concept of providing high quality services at the lowest cost. While many communities struggle with it, We've got that down. There are other indicators of success that you can't readily quantify. Much of what we do is attitude. This attitude is carried out day to day by the highest quality professional staff, many of whom have been with us for a long time and provide deep institutional knowledge. Every day they come to prepared to first listen, seek to understand what their constituents need, then figure out how to deliver for them the best path to be successful. The attitude, exemplified by Major Bowman of our Police Department when interviewed by a local news channel while assuring that there was order at our gas stations leading up to Irma, when he said "This is the "Pinecrest Way." Each department has done a lot. But in the Pinecrest Way how we do something is just as important as what we do.

Planning:

We processed 318 planning applications, but, more important than numbers is how we handled those matters. We spent nearly a year working on one of the most potentially controversial planning and zoning issues that we could face. Our staff worked hand-in-hand with the applicant and the neighbors to assure that issues on all sides were addressed. They were able to go back and forth, in often contentious negotiations, and ultimately arrived at a solution that each party could live with. So at the meeting, which took nearly 9 hours....No yelling, theatrics or grandstanding. Just well-behaved professionals working to get the job done.

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**Building:**

We issued 3,162 building permits, including 37 for new homes. A clear sign of the robust housing market in the Village.

**Public Works:**

Our Public Works staff is constantly working to assure that one of our greatest assets, the physical character of our streets and rights of way remain unique to Pinecrest. You know you are someplace special when you enter our Village. It simply does not look like any place in the county. We will continue improvements to the aesthetics of our streetscapes starting with Kendall Drive this coming year and replacements of our iconic street signs throughout the Village.

**Parks:**

We have always been blessed with wonderful parks and recreation facilities, which other communities emulate. We have worked diligently to assure that they are appropriately programmed and adding to the cultural wealth of the community. This year we dedicated the new tennis center at Coral Pine Park and we are excited about the opening of the improved and expanded community center this coming spring. We also welcomed Robert Mattes – the new department director. Also a special thanks to Loren Matthews, our retiring parks director. We are sad to see her go. She was part of the family for quite some time.

**Finance:**

The finance department exemplifies transparency in government and was once again recognized with awards for both budget and annual audit reports – congrats to a job well done by our new director – Marie Arteaga – and her staff.

**Police:**

We incorporated because we needed police protection. In 1995, if you waited to see the police you would wait weeks. If you called, you would wait hours. Today the Village is one of the safest communities in the State of Florida and, fortunately, crimes continue to trend downward. Our professional Police Department is second to none, recognized as a Gold Standard agency. It is one of the few agencies in

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Miami-Dade County with the dual accreditation. We have worked hard to understand the crime, develop creative strategies to prevent it, and catch and incarcerate the criminals that commit it. Should you need them, the police response time is just minutes – not hours. As always, we remain committed to providing the police with the tools and resources they need to continue combating crime in the Village.

Pinecrest Gardens:

Pinecrest Gardens has had an incredible year as our cultural arts park. This venue is unique and provides a high level of culture for our entire community.

- The jazz series has become an important part of the performing arts scene in South Florida and
- The art exhibits, including this year's Stickwork by world-famous artist Patrick Dougherty, are incredible. Please while you are here take a look it is dramatic
- We also have our first artist-in-residence – Xavier Cortada.
- We have opened the doors to our 4-legged friends, allowing dogs in the park on Sundays, an extremely successful initiative, like a mini popup dog park.
- We are nearly complete with the restoration of the historic Cypress Hall, the old cafeteria, which will reopen this winter.
- We will find that noise that hums on the north side
- and will work very hard to minimize the impacts of the facility to the surrounding neighbors.

Communications:

All of what we do is tied together by communications. This year the manager formed a committee of professionals, chaired by the clerk, who reviewed our communication efforts. Their work has produced greater citizen engagement via our social media sites, a new web site and an expanded quarterly newsletter – our Pinecrest Sun.

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Because of our successes over the years, some people say that working in Pinecrest must be easy, and that we don't have real problems in Pinecrest. I tell them that just like other places we have our issues. It is that in Pinecrest we have met them head on, and come together as a community to address them. Of this, we should be proud but not satisfied..... so last winter, after our first two decades as a municipality, we began a process of introspection, maintenance and renewal, by holding intensive strategic planning sessions with the Council and staff. We outlined and begun work on important initiatives that would review and renew our policies, ordinances, processes and procedures. As the year progressed, during our budgeting sessions over the spring and summer, we cleared room by retiring one of our original bonds, so that the potential cost of this renewal, the maintenance of our buildings, parks, signs, etc., would have a neutral impact on our budget. And we began the design of the Inspire Pinecrest campaign

Then came September. Up until 24 hours before it hit, Hurricane Irma was projected to be a Category 5 storm, with 180 mph winds, and we were in it's path. I remember looking at the forecast map a few days out and seeing a big red 5 tracking up Biscayne Bay between Key Biscayne and Mathison Hammock. For the first time many of us can remember, mandatory evacuations were called for a significant part of our Village.. The week leading up to the event was frightening and stressful situation. To the community's credit, we were prepared. Nobody panicked. Supplies were purchased, houses were shuttered and evacuation plans were implemented. The storm hit and we were fortunately spared the brunt, but the Village's tree canopy took significant damage. Consider Irma a practice run for future years. We hadn't had such practice in over a decade.

The aftermath of the hurricane was a difficult time. In the days and weeks after the storm, we learned the areas in which we were strong and the areas in which needed to improve on.

I received thousands of emails in the first few weeks. People were often frustrated and angry. If there was one theme I took from the emails, it was the following, couched in severe criticism, but the ultimate compliment to the Village. Dozens of emails read like this:

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*Dear Mr. Mayor:*

*Pinecrest has great parks, great police, great services, but I feel we have focused on the wrong priorities. We have terrible electrical service, lack of drinking water and spotty cable and internet service, we are drowning in traffic, and will soon be victim to sea level rise*

So the good news is: People are nearly unanimous in acknowledging that we do what we do very well. We incorporated to provide police, parks, individual services. If we were only in charge of Electricity, Water/Sewer, Transportation, Cable and Internet, those services would be delivered at a much higher level. A great compliment to what we do and how we do it.

*Another note was more specific:*

*Mr. Mayor, on the night of the storm I had a generator fire at my house, which caused significant damage. I called 911, and the Pinecrest Police arrived very fast. As a matter of fact they were the ones that extinguished the fire. They did an outstanding job and should be commended. But I need to know from you where was the fire department when they were needed? Mr. Corradino, you are the mayor of the city and the responsibility for all that happens in the Village falls on your shoulders.*

**The Lesson: Again, the people and resources of Pinecrest responded admirably, running towards problems, when other governments would not. We should all be proud, but the message is clear. We are very good at what we do, and like the reasons we originally incorporated, we need to consider and evaluate our ability to improve the services provided from other governments.**

Pinecrest is a community that prides itself on providing the highest level of service, and not the status quo, or the lowest quality of service the public will tolerate. To that end, we have much work to do and many things to consider.

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Within a week of the storm, the Council held an emergency meeting and developed a preparation plan for the next season. Much of this is new, and some of it is varying our approach to the efforts we have been working on for the past years. Similarly, some of this is directly within our control, but the bulk of it is not and will take considerable work with our partners who actually provide these other services.

In January, as planned, we will be conducting our aggressive and ambitious Inspire Pinecrest campaign. In this uniquely tailored public engagement effort, we will be considering:

1. General Community Enhancements – prioritizing the maintenance items related to our buildings, parks, fields and streets. This is needed to refresh the products of our first two decades.
2. Our ordinances, processes and procedures. – implementing further changes to modernize them.
3. Tree Trimming – working with FPL to make sure trimming standards are met.
4. Potable Water – explore all remedies, including legal, so that the remaining homes still on well water will have access to the county’s water system. Since we started about 70% of the project is complete.
5. Improving Electrical Power System – by exploring options, and costs, of underground and above ground enhancements to the grid.
6. Cell, Internet, Fiber – coordination with all other utilities to insure Pinecrest’s infrastructure is complete and highly functional.

Whether its electricity, water, sewer or traffic, these issues are complex and controversial. The Inspire Pinecrest campaign will facilitate our community conversations. During these conversations, we will agree on a common set of facts, have a healthy and vigorous debate on the issues, determine if we can build a consensus, then adopt a course of action. And we will do this in the near term so we are prepared for the budget season of 2018.

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The Village of Pinecrest is as strong as ever. All of what we have achieved could only have been accomplished by a group of people working together on common goals.

Thanks go to all of you. Thanks to Evelyn Greer and Gary Matzner who had the vision and foresight to undertake incorporation. To The neighbors who get involved and provide constant input. Our Manager, Clerk, Attorney, department heads and staff; all dedicated professionals who make Pinecrest what it is through their day to day efforts. To Cindy Lerner and our past councilmembers. Special thanks to Jim McDonald, Cheri Ball, Doug Kraft and Anna Hochammer, who are a hard working group of people who give a significant amounts of their time to overseeing all aspects of the Village.

I'm very honored to be part of this extended Pinecrest family. I believe we all work well together.

And in special remembrance of former vice mayor Leslie Bowe who recently passed. Leslie was a fundamental catalyst in providing the village its tone and character. Going forward in his memory we will continue with the Pinecrest Way, by striving to protect and preserving our neighborhoods so that we may enhance our character and quality of life and remain the best place to live in our area.

I look forward to continuing on this path.