

2016 STATE OF THE CITY

Delivered by Mayor Steve Leary

Friday, January 15, 2016 ▪ Noon
The Alford Inn

Good Morning.

The state of Winter Park is strong...as strong as the Live Oaks that line our streets.

We finished 2015 with slightly over 27 percent of our General Fund in reserve.

We reference this stat often as many use it as a barometer of a city's financial strength. If comparable cities even have reserves, most are in the single digits.

We have seen some tremendous projects undertaken or completed that will add to the fabric of our community for generations.

With the help of the Friends of Mead Gardens, we have made significant improvements with close to \$1 million invested over the past five years.

We have dedicated ourselves to improvements to Showalter Field and the track within.

We are renovating existing, and building new bathrooms within Ward Park where our children spend weekends playing baseball, softball, lacrosse, etc...

And this year we're adding a geothermal heating system at the Cady Way Pool so this regionally significant facility can be used comfortably throughout the winter months.

New York and Denning avenues are being revisioned and new streetscapes will be undertaken this coming year.

We completed approximately four miles of additional undergrounding to our electric system and we remain on schedule to completion.

You have seen, and will see more smoothing of the RR crossings, and quiet zone work will begin this year.

We've just approved the 2016 annual general fund budget of \$49 million and a total citywide budget, which includes the general fund, of \$156 million,

and for the 7th straight year we did not increase the millage rate for the City of Winter Park.

We maintain the 3rd lowest millage rate in all of Orange County.

I want to thank Randy Knight and his entire staff for they deserve recognition for our financial stability.

Our emergency services departments and personnel continue to be the envy of the region. Chief White and Chief Railey thank you for your dedication and that of your teams.

A special thank you to Chief Railey and Deputy Chief Vern Taylor. After 35 years of service to this community and Vern with 28, both will be retiring later this year.

The analogy of Winter Park to that of a Live Oak tree is apt for many reasons.

There is the obvious strength of the oak.

Our financial strength is beyond compare.

Our property values are at all-time highs.

Beyond our strength, Winter Park matches the beauty of the mighty oak. We have been featured on TV as well as on the cover of, and within the content of well-regarded domestic and international magazines. And we are home to Rollins College, the most beautiful campus in America.

We have been listed as one of the most "Perfectly Picturesque Small Towns in Florida";

one of Florida's "Hidden Gems"; and

one of the best places in Florida to "Raise a Family"; and

beneath the surface, our roots are deep and our brand is strong and steady.

We have families and businesses that have been a part of our community for decades and generations.

They provide a solid foundation for our city to grow as the roots provide stability for the continued growth of a great oak.

John Craig on Park Avenue will celebrate 20 years of business this year.

They continue to achieve industry-wide recognition on The Esquire Retail 100, the prestigious, short list of America's finest menswear specialty stores. With a total of eight locations throughout Florida, John Craig employs dozens of people and is an active participant in every market they serve.

Please help me recognize Craig DeLongey, founder and President of John Craig.

And Susan Johnson, a former small business owner on Park Avenue is here. Susan founded Support our Scholars. This non-profit provides under-privileged young women in our community, who have received college scholarships, with additional money to be able to meet living expenses. Imagine being the first person in your family to be able to go to college...

You get a scholarship but don't have the funds to get back and forth or even to purchase the necessities that we all take for granted. Support our Scholars provides this financial assistance and also assigns a mentor to help these young women through this challenging time.

I'd like to recognize Susan and Lauren Grabell the Executive Director of Support our Scholars.

But a word of caution.

As we tend to the mighty oak, we must tend to our community to prepare for the future.

I had a lacrosse coach who used to say "Let's go ahead and wait." And "Let's go ahead and not do that."

These don't make any more sense today than they did to a teenager those many years ago.

Going ahead and waiting. Going ahead and not doing something?

You don't get ahead by waiting or not doing.

For example our Tree Canopy:

The hurricanes of 2004 did not so much wreak havoc on our tree canopy, but rather expose the weakness in it.

It is not enough to sit back and say “look the trees are tall and green. They are perfectly healthy.” That is not a strategy...at least not any more.

Our role as a City Commission is to set policy. To set policy that delivers to future generations not the same city that we inherited.

But rather to deliver a canvas true to our history that allows for generational customization.

The world and indeed our region, is changing at a more rapid pace than ever before.

Cell phones. Electric cars. The internet. Ipads. Texting, tweeting, Facebook®, etc... All things hardly imaginable a mere generation ago.

As your civic leaders we must account for the only thing that is guaranteed. Change.

Modest growth projections have Orange County’s population doubling by 2030.

We must continue to serve the needs of our CURRENT residents, businesses and guests.

But names such as Chase, Chapman, Mizell, Rollins, Holt, Morse, Phelps – all came from someplace else.

So another of my strategic responsibilities is to ensure that Winter Park is THE desirable location for POTENTIAL residents, businesses and guests.

As these million people come to our region, we must create an environment to entice the best and brightest to make Winter Park their home or chosen leisure place.

As a land-locked and developed community, Winter Park is not immune to this growth. One of my neighbors said to me, and I give him credit, “But why do we want more new people?”

With all due respect that is not the question.

The fact is that our region will experience significant growth, and we must see it as an opportunity OR do ourselves and future generations a tremendous disservice.

Every aspect of our community needs to be flexible enough to account for major global and generational factors.

The real question is how do we maintain our vitality and relevance, in both a regional and global environment whose market dynamics are evolving MORE rapidly than ever before?

I mentioned the Tree Canopy.

When property owners are discouraged from removing dead, dying, dangerous and diseased trees, a powerful force will make the adjustment for us with disastrous results.

The great culling of 2004 provided the impetus for the city's first ever proactive, Urban Forestry Management Plan. This plan will guide our approach so that future generations can look up and around to see the beauty of our trees, but also live to appreciate the health of our canopy. This is the type of proactive management you should expect from your city.

Our City Arborist and Assistant City Manager took on long held FALSE doctrine to deliver a sound, forward-looking plan.

I would like to recognize City Arborist Dru Dennison and Assistant City Manager Michelle Del Valle Nuener.

We have Advisory Boards and Task Forces to help us prepare for the future. I want to thank all of our community volunteers who work to provide guidance to the city. These individuals participate for even less money than I get for this Mayor gig.

Our very own golf course, the Winter Park Country Club, is our largest single park, yet in over 100 years it has never undergone a complete renovation. Every aspect of this course needs to be addressed.

In 2015, our Golf Course Task Force recommended a plan to rethink this gem and make it the envy of the region.

The plan brought forward recognized first the importance of the geography as a city park.

It should be as beautiful to walk and drive by as it is challenging and fun to play. The work will begin soon and we have hired some very talented young golf course architects to create an aesthetic and entertaining landscape.

I'd like to thank the entire Task Force and recognize Matt Hegarty who is with us today. Matt played a key role in the development of the recommendation.

Maintaining THE desirable community requires great partners. We are truly blessed to have these in spades.

Many of you know of our relationship with Full Sail. Whether it is hosting events on campus or providing their expertise allowing us to communicate more effectively with our community. They are partners in every way. They are always there for us as individuals and as an organization.

I recently had the privilege to cut the ribbon for Full Sail Labs. This is a new venture for Full Sail which offers classes in movie making, robotics, coding and game design. Not for college students.

This cutting edge stuff is offered to school age children. The youth in our community. Our kids. Our future.

Many of you know Full Sail President Garry Jones and CIO Isis Jones. Garry, you make our community more complete and inclusive and continue to push the envelope on our offerings.

Please help me thank Garry & Isis and the entire Full Sail family.

As we nourish our tree canopy, organizations such as the YMCA and the Winter Park Health Foundation strive to make Winter Park the healthiest community possible.

The Winter Park Health Foundation will soon begin construction on Project Wellness. This roughly 82,000 sq. ft. facility will be the first of its kind in the U.S. integrating health, wellness and fitness.

The architecture will look similar to the critically acclaimed Dr. Philips Center for the Performing Arts and they are seeking Gold LEED Certified status. As well the landscape plan offers neighbors and residents new, active space and there will be new dining options on site for the area with a healthy café.

The facility will have two pools - one for laps and one for rehab/therapy. This will be a beautiful and functional facility that will benefit the health of our community.

Thank you to Patty Maddox and your team for your commitment to the nourishment and health of our community.

As a healthy oak needs regular pruning and culling to maintain overall health, so too do some of our own assets.

This includes private and public structures. If we wish to remain relevant we need to have a variety of housing options available for a variety of residents.

Single and multi-family product for all income levels and demographics (young, established, downsizing individuals, couples and families) should be available.

And encumbering neighborhoods with additional regulatory restrictions is the role of a Home Owners Association, not your City Commission.

Meddling with an individual's property rights under the guise of Historic Preservation by crafting an Ordinance that the majority of this commission agrees does nothing to save historic homes is simply irrational.

For the record I own properties on the national historic register and I have invested my own money to renovate both historic and simply old properties.

Just this past Monday we had two families voluntarily add their homes to the Historic Register. Good for them AND Good for us.

I support an individual's right to register their own home and I support your right to keep other's hands from your property.

I look forward to future modifications to this ordinance that will hopefully encourage more voluntary historic nominations.

Regarding the proposed new library/civic center referendum. We seated a diverse group of individuals to the Library Task Force. They did not agree on much when they first met.

Some were not even convinced that we needed a new library. They worked through need, size, location and other important considerations and came before the commission with a unanimous recommendation.

The quality of a city's library is one thing that both residents and businesses evaluate when they look to relocate.

This new facility will announce to the region and beyond our commitment to the ongoing development of Winter Park's intellectual capital. This project will set a new standard for excellence.

This decision will be left to the voters. However, both of these facilities are in desperate need of a complete overhaul.

The efficiencies of addressing these projects as a single community offering is a rare opportunity. If we forego this occasion, we will be revisiting both these facilities in the near future and the expense will only grow.

This is not about building a library that we all grew up with. This facility will have the services that a traditional library delivers, but it will be so much more.

It will also encourage greater use of the lightly utilized northern section of Martin Luther King Jr., Park. Better space utilization will MAXIMIZE the park's green space.

I would like to thank our library task force and recognize Sam Stark who chaired this group.

We are blessed with many elected officials who work on our behalf at the national, state and county level. Congressman John Mica, Commissioner Ted Edwards, Senate President Andy Gardiner, State Representatives Mike Miller, Bob Cortez and Rene Plascencia, and former Speaker of the House Dean Cannon.

In just the past few years, their efforts have led to a new train station, \$12 million to underground the electric distribution lines along Fairbanks Avenue, \$400,000 to restore Lake Lillian in Mead Gardens.

These are just a few examples of their commitment to Winter Park. I'm hopeful that in the coming months, once session is complete in Tallahassee, we'll be able to share more good news.

I would also like to thank our other regional civic leaders, especially those in Seminole and Orange counties, who think and operate beyond their geographic borders because they recognize the value of our unified offering.

I am not done looking for ways to improve Winter Park.

Are you?

Do you say that our best days are behind us?

OR

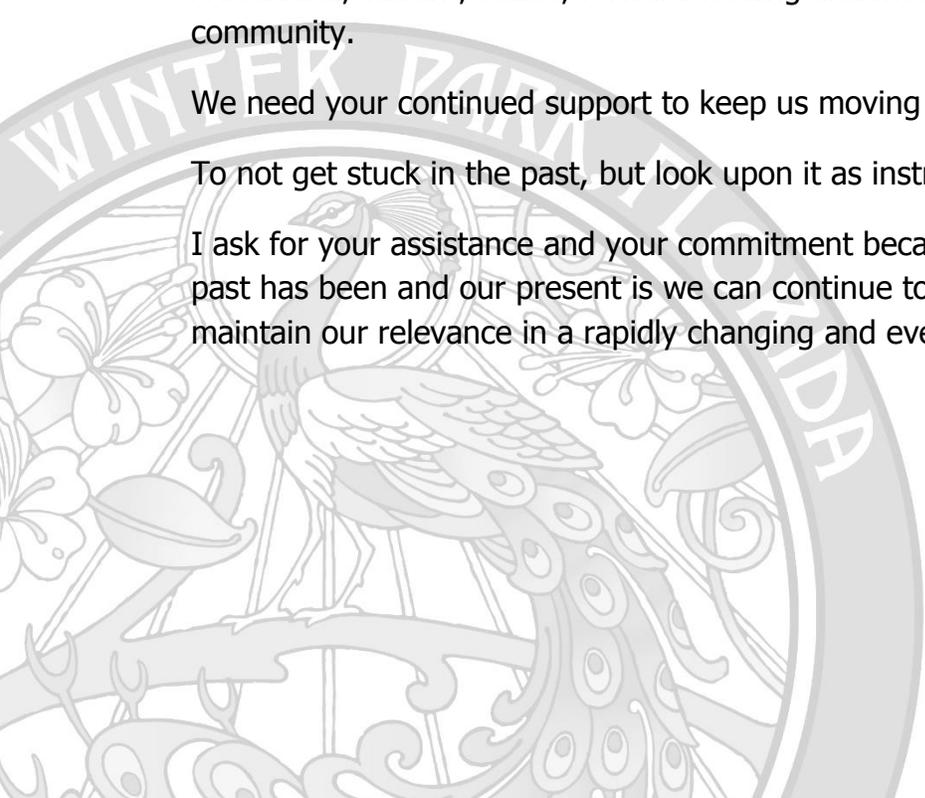
Do you recognize the opportunities that lay before us to provide future generations what we have been blessed with?

A beautiful, vibrant, stable, forward-looking and most importantly RELEVANT community.

We need your continued support to keep us moving forward.

To not get stuck in the past, but look upon it as instructive for the future.

I ask for your assistance and your commitment because I believe that as great as our past has been and our present is we can continue to build on what we have inherited to maintain our relevance in a rapidly changing and ever advancing world.



I end with an old Irish blessing:

May love and laughter light your days,
And warm your heart and home
May good and faithful friends be yours,
Wherever you may roam
May peace and plenty bless your world,
With joy that long endures
May all life's passing seasons
Bring the best to you and yours.

Thank you for being here today and thank you for your continued support.

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