



**Speech delivered by Mayor Steve Leary
2018 State of the City Address
February 23, 2018 ▪ Noon
The Alford Inn ▪ Winter Park, FL**

Thank you Betsy and the Chamber for hosting us today and for all that you do. I want to thank my fellow City Commission members. We each bring a unique perspective to the dais and I appreciate your commitment. Thank you to our city staff who work every day to keep us such a special place, and most especially I want to thank each of you for your contributions to Winter Park.

2017 was another great year in Winter Park. I'd like to share some highlights, some of the things we're working on and then talk about some challenges and our path forward.

This past year we added 55 acres of parkland to Winter Park with the acquisition of the **Howell Branch Preserve**. To give you an idea of the scale of this park, it is larger than the golf course and central park combined. Plans call for this to be a natural park for hiking, canoeing, kayaking and more.

2017 was the first full year in operation of our newly renovated **Winter Park Golf Course**. It is now rated as one of the top 10 courses of its kind in the U.S. We also went from an annual loss of close to \$250,000 to a break even.

We've instituted **Project Bloom** which is sprucing up landscaping around town.

The Friends of **Mead Botanical Gardens** continue to revitalize our largest park.

We've seen the great success of **Showalter Field** which tomorrow will host Restore the Roar to raise funds to support the WP High School Foundation.

This year we will begin work on the **St. Andrews Trail** a \$2 million project funded by the state. And our great friends at Full Sail University are leading the charge alongside The Nature Conservancy in bringing awareness to Central Florida regarding **The Monarch Initiative** which helps protect pollinators. More details about this will be unveiled in April as part of Earth Month.

Transportation and congestion on our roads is an important quality of life issue. Between 2010 and 2017 the Winter Park population grew by just under 1,500 residents (about 5 percent). During the same period, Metro Orlando grew by 252,727 residents. The traffic in Winter Park, is on our major north/south and east/west corridors and is from our neighbors moving through Winter Park.

So what are we doing to help alleviate this impact? In 2017, we approved the funding of a **fiber optic network** that will connect our traffic signals. We can use this network to feed into an **Intelligent Traffic System** to help smooth the flow of traffic through the city. We are also seeing the benefits of the **Lee Road extension** which has smoothed traffic at Lee, Webster and US Highway 17-92. And last year we purchased the old **Fairbanks Bowl property**. This was acquired so that we can widen Fairbanks around the 17-92 intersection and lengthen the turn lanes. This will allow us to move traffic more efficiently, especially at rush hour, through this critical corridor. And this year we will be working with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) on an FD&E study for 17-92. This will help with traffic flow and include major beautification efforts.

Our Electric Utility

Last year we completed **more than five miles of electric undergrounding**, slightly more than our normal pace, and we're getting better at this.

After Hurricane Irma, your city commission approved an **additional \$1 million** to address issues and areas that made themselves evident during the storm, primarily in the electric system.

So this year we will have at least **\$4.5 million** going to our electric utility efforts. We have **nine years left** on our original 20-year program and we continue to review ways in which to responsibly expedite even that timeline.

And our **fiber network** that I mentioned earlier?

During Irma, wastewater lift stations failed due to power outages and sewage began to work back up the line. Our response was delayed because the third party cellular network that communicated operational activity, failed. Now these **systems will be connected by our underground fiber network** giving us real time information on their performance so if needed we can get power generators on site as the weather permits.

We have done all of this and more, much more, responsibly. We have been good stewards of your tax dollars. We have **+20 percent of our general fund in reserve** and we have **not raised the tax rate** in Winter Park in 11 years. We enjoy the **fifth lowest rate** in all of Orange County. These are just some of the many achievements from this past year.

There is also the groundbreaking for **Project Wellness**.

Our new **Community Paramedicine Program**.

Our new **Police Neighborhood Advisory Committee**.

The creation of the **Arts & Culture Subcommittee** – which created and hosted the very successful Weekend of the Arts this past weekend.

We've added to our Historic Places inventory through **incentives**, not by forcing people into a program.

We provided funding assistance to the **Winter Park Housing Authority** to build a handicap accessible apartment at the Meadows and **increased funding** for both the **Welbourne & Winter Park Day Nurseries**.

This room is filled with individuals and organizations that make this community special. We as elected officials cannot do this alone.

I can point to people at every table that make Winter Park, and our entire region special. I recognized **Allen Trovillion** earlier. Also at my table I have **James and Julie Petrakis**, a couple with deep roots in the community who, not too long ago, opened The Ravenous Pig in a slowly redeveloping area of town on Orange Ave. They have been recognized for their culinary talents across the country and beyond, but the nerve and grit it took to open their restaurant years ago, have helped revitalize the entire Orange Avenue corridor. They now have other concepts including Swine and Sons, and other locations including Disney and the airport, to take a bit of Winter Park and share our brand elsewhere. Thank you James and Julie for your investment in Winter Park.

Also at my table is **Hal George**. You may know Hal as the owner and operator of Parkland Homes. But Hal's commitment to Winter Park is so much greater. He serves on the CRA and the Winter Park Housing Authority among other community service organizations. But he also is the driving force behind Habitat for Humanity in Winter Park. He has led the charge to provide 54 (and an additional 10 in Maitland) homes to low-income residents and families to make sure that Winter Park is available to everyone. Not bad for an old, Rollins College water skier. Thank you Hal for your commitment to Winter Park.

Now this next one, **Leslie O'Shaughnessy** has been involved in so many ways with the city over the years, her impact is impossible to quantify. She worked as Congressman Mica's local representative and made sure that we were always a consideration in Washington. Currently she serves as Special Assistant to Orange County Mayor Jacobs for Homelessness and Housing, coordinating efforts on homelessness across the county.

Her work touches lives here in Winter Park and beyond. She has also “volunteered,” to serve on our Library & Events Center Task Force to help guide that program forward. Thank you Leslie for your broad perspective and your positive impact. With people like these, and all of you, we will continue to improve Winter Park in areas such as parks, transportation, emergency services, utilities, and more.

Last year I asked that we all look to the future and combat the obstacles that will prevent us from becoming all that we can become. I asked that we all pay particular attention to how we treat one another. We cannot be a special place if we treat others in a common manner. We are in competition with communities across the globe, to attract the best and brightest to Winter Park. The “NO” people who stand against everything and have no plausible alternative to all that they oppose, are moving on. Because you cannot build a community on “NO,” it holds NO value, NO hope, NO promise. We, and many others, build community and we will keep doing just that. I ask again that you join me, follow the lead of our founders and continue to be a welcoming community.

This year I warn of another concern and ask for your assistance. Our leaders in Tallahassee have lost their way. Members of the Florida House and Senate have chosen leadership, party, lobbyists and their own selfish interests over the constituents that elected them. Their overt attempts to preempt home rule and create one-size-fits-all legislation is beyond dangerous, it is borderline unconstitutional.

This is not hyperbole. We are not Orlando, Ocoee, Oviedo or any of our other closest neighbors and friends. We operate in conjunction with and, in many ways, in competition with one another. We don’t lack respect for our neighboring towns – indeed, our strength is in our appreciation of our differences. Decisions regarding local issues need to be made at the local level to maintain each community’s uniqueness.

Decisions regarding vacation rentals, where your neighbor’s house can become a daily rental. Or CRA’s which have agreements between cities and counties to assist in revitalization efforts of specific areas. Think Hannibal Square, a huge success. Or mileage rates, where Tallahassee would set our local tax rate. There was even an attempt this year to set state wide standards on tree trimming...unbelievable.

Yet these, and many other power grab bills, were proposed this year in Tallahassee. Having these decisions made for all of us by the state legislature means less diversity and choice for residents, businesses and guests. The overreach by the State House and Senate is shocking. How many people in here can name the Speaker of the Florida House and tell me where he is from? How many can name the President of the Senate and his hometown? How many can name the three individuals that represent us in Tallahassee?

Yet they are crafting legislation that would impact our daily life, our uniqueness. You know us, your local leaders. You see us in the supermarket, at church at community events. We hear from you on a frequent basis. It is true that "Government closest to the people, is best."

Leadership, parties, lobbyists and individual self-interests have trumped your interests in Tallahassee. This issue has been featured in the media this past year. We didn't think it could be worse than last session. We were wrong, it is much worse. It is an all-out assault on our rights.

We will post on our website information on how to get in touch with these individuals and please let them know that you expect them to represent you. And don't let them tell you that you don't understand how things work in Tallahassee. Though that may be true, THEY may know how things DO work, because THEY have forgotten how things are SUPPOSED to work. We need your help. Your vote is the only thing outside of leadership offices that spark a response.

Friends, thank you again for being here today. 2017 was a phenomenal year. Thank you for standing together to build upon our Founder's vision. Thank you for your commitment to Winter Park's past, present and future.

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