

City of Mount Dora
2011 State of the City



Prepared by:
Melissa DeMarco, Mayor

Greetings,

It is my great pleasure to once again address the citizens, community organizations and businesses of Mount Dora with the mayor's annual State of the City. It is my continuing honor to serve the City of Mount Dora. We are working through and together surviving and thriving one of the most tumultuous times in recent history. As we embark on the first year of our second century we must continue to honor the intentions of the City's founders as we work together to create our legacy to future generations of residents.

Last year marked the City of Mount Dora's 100th anniversary of incorporation. The Mount Dora 2010



Committee is to be commended for the impressive series of events they planned, executed and paid for to honor the centennial. They did a remarkable job and I want to extend thanks on behalf of the City Council as well as my own personal thank you to this wonderful volunteer group. From New Year's Eve Celebration 2010 to the New Year's Eve Celebration for 2011, they worked throughout the entire year to honor the history of the City and to preserve that special year for us all.

Even as we celebrated the City's Centennial - our community, along with the rest of our nation, endured the painful realities of a severe financial recession and the continued slump of the housing and real estate markets. Unemployment has been higher and tourism has been lower. As with most periods of turmoil, adjustments and transitions were made and the City's government modified its business plans, expenditures and investments accordingly. Some of these modifications have been painful but some of them have been opportunities for positive change. Even in times of economic downturn the City plans for and invests in the future. Our duty as a council is to be thoughtful stewards with the resources and offerings we make available to current residents while planning for the success and prosperity of future residents.

Our downtown saw several new businesses launch in the latter half of the year. We saw the opening of a major new commercial establishment at the gateway to the City on State Route 441. Our community service organizations redoubled their efforts to address needs within the local community to bridge the gaps that government could no longer afford to span. We saw wonderful business and civic involvement in decorating the downtown for the holidays. "Mount Dora never looked prettier," was a sentiment that I heard over and over again this year throughout the holidays. We initiated new and innovative practices to address employee compensation and save taxpayers money.



Our Department Directors continued to pare staffing while concentrating on streamlining core operational functions. Our local schools performed at higher levels than we had experienced in the past several years. We faced critical issues, we worked through them and we continued to celebrate our community and each other.

Last year the City of Mount Dora's ad valorem property taxes were down by approximately 10%. That trend is expected to be replicated again this year. Our residents are again paying the lowest ad valorem tax millage rate among the Golden Triangle Cities while enjoying higher property values relative to the surrounding areas. We must assess again this year if we will be able to offer the safety, services, maintenance and amenities that our residents have come to expect with the current millage rate or if we will have to further cut services and/or adjust our millage rate. This consideration comes before us each and every year as we weigh the needs and priorities of the community against the available funding.

Other sources of revenue are also affected and most have been significantly and consistently reduced over the past several years. In aggregate, the City's collection of discretionary sales tax revenues, grants funding,



investment income and fees collected for services are down significantly from the highs that were experienced several years ago. Due to rate increases and accounting changes we do have a bright spot in that our City Electric Department is showing a positive balance this year. The City has planned well and kept a sharp eye to the trends that affect various operating and capital improvement funds. For example, revenue forecast came within 1.3% of the actual resources collected by the City. The City administration has done an admirable job of keeping tight control over spending and the operational budget in order to minimize negative impacts to our community.

As is required, the City delivered a balanced budget for 2009/2010. Mount Dora experienced over a 9% decrease in property values yet the council held the millage rate and due to sound fiscal practices we were able to increase our reserves. Last year the City reduced its total debt by \$2.9 million even though we did experience that \$483,000 drop in property tax revenues. The City of Mount Dora continues to actively participate in the Lake County Purchasing Consortium to take advantage of volume purchasing and expedite the bidding process. There were no salary increases for general employees for the third consecutive year and those same

employees began contributions to their new defined contribution retirement plan when council froze the defined benefit program.

The City is currently staffed with 206 full-time positions. In addition to managing and aligning Human Resource strategies with departmental goals, during 2010 the Human Resources/Risk Management Department entered into collective bargaining with the City's Fire and Police Unions, managed the initiative of the council to reform the general employees' pension program, researched, laid groundwork and established the initial contracts to develop an Employee Health and Wellness Center and conducted an appraisal of all City owned property. During the coming year they will continue to work with the existing unions – and will now also be charged with bargaining with the general employee group who are in the process of forming an organized labor contingent. Human Resources will also be engaged in preparation of a comprehensive wage and benefit study in the coming year so that we are able to better gauge the competitiveness of our compensation to City employees and note trends and concerns for future hires.

The City's Public Works and Utilities Department continues to provide for the water needs of 12,000 customers and the power needs of 5,685 electric customers within the City and surrounding area. This year the City was awarded a Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant in the amount of \$249,900 to upgrade

City owned facilities/assets and conduct energy audits for residents and businesses. The City has also developed a “net metering” program to enable customers who have on-site power generation or solar panels to get credit for power delivered from their system back to the City system.

The City of Mount Dora Public Works and Utilities Department provided 1,065,613,000 gallons of safe, affordable water to users last year. Also during the past year, concerted effort and time was directed toward anticipating, identifying and prioritizing the needs for future infrastructure maintenance and repairs as our system ages. Public Works also completed several major stormwater repairs projects during 2010. The 4th Avenue and 7th Avenue stormwater projects will reduce flooding and benefit homeowners, businesses and tourism in our community. Plans for the new Eastern Water Plant are at 90% completion.



With the construction and completion of that plant the City will have an alternate to its current single water source, the elimination of low pressure zones in certain areas of the City and the opportunity to provide water to our future employment center on State Route 46.

Your Public Safety Departments employ 33 sworn police officers plus communications personnel and administrative positions. There are 25 fire department employees. Together the Public Safety departments account for approximately 60% of the City’s annual budget and accounts for almost 40% of the City’s paid staffing. There has been an increased emphasis placed on working cooperatively with neighboring agencies during this tight economic climate. Both branches of our local Public Safety Department have benefited from more efficient communications among fire, EMS and law enforcement agencies throughout the county. While these agencies have always worked closely with their jurisdictional neighbors more time and resources are being devoted to identifying areas where we may complement each other’s efforts to offer higher levels of service for less cost to taxpayers.



In 2010 your police department responded to 23,829 emergency calls for service – or 65 calls per day in to the Police Department. In addition, there were over 5,000 traffic stops made resulting in over 3,200 citations being issued. The police department made almost 800 arrests in Mount Dora during 2010. Although those may sound like startling numbers, we are fortunate that overall crime statistics indicate crime in Mount Dora has declined steadily and significantly over the past three years.

The Mount Dora Police Department is working to continue to streamline its efforts. As vacancies have occurred over the past several years, operations were reevaluated and three sworn officer positions have been eliminated. In some cases, positions were redefined and in some cases vacancies were kept open.

Northeast Community Policing continues to perform successful outreach to the community with primary funding coming through the area's Community Redevelopment Agency.

You will see the Police Department increasing its efforts in the areas of neighborhood awareness and safety education throughout 2011. Expect to see a series of meetings to be announced in 2011 that will be led by your police department and will be held in various neighborhoods throughout the City.

The fire department responded to almost 2,500 medical calls and over 950 non-medical calls. They responded



to 26 fires – several each of structure, vehicle and outdoor fires. The fire department has upgraded its radio system which was made possible by funding from Lake County. Fire safety and education programs are actively staffed and promoted in our schools by the Mount Dora Fire Department and have been embraced and supported by the schools and our local business community – which has participated as sponsors for these efforts.

The Mount Dora, Tavares and Eustis Fire Departments are making exceptional advances toward the potential creation of a single, cooperative agency within the Golden Triangle. Their efforts will be concentrated on the goal of increasing the quality of our service while saving taxpayer money by decreasing response times and offering higher levels of service throughout the area. By standardizing equipment, eliminating redundant equipment with our neighbors, by pooling workforce to eliminate the needs for overtime pay, by participating in joint purchasing efforts we do see a potential for savings without diminishing service to our communities. We will continue to review the potential opportunities that may be associated with this effort throughout the coming year.

This year the City of Mount Dora, along with our two sister cities in the Golden Triangle have focused their efforts on the review and study of the feasibility of combining resources to develop a more efficient and cost-effective joint fire effort. While this is not a new concept (it has been discussed over the past 15 or 20 years within the area) we have recently achieved unprecedented levels of communication and collaboration between the cities relative to fire and life-safety issues. Our fire departments are a wonderful example of intergovernmental teamwork and an innovative operational model.



The citizens of Mount Dora have continually demanded a high quality and quantity of park offerings within the City. Your Parks and Recreation Department and your City Council continue to respond to those priorities and to initiate new and creative programs and offerings that appeal to and engage the widest possible audience of

users. The City of Mount Dora Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for 26 parks, cemetery services and maintenance, city facility rentals and repairs and custodial services as well as pool operations.

In conjunction with our citizen partners, we have been able to continue to upgrade and increase our park experiences. With the help of individual volunteers and civic organizations such as Kiwanis Club, UCAN Leaders of Lake County, the Library Association, the Mount Dora Community Trust, the Ocala Mountain Bike Association and many, many more the City has offered increased programming as well as tangible physical improvements to our Parks and Recreation offerings.

Our City's W.T. Bland Public Library continues to be one of the City's best used and well loved resources. With a total of 18,374 registered borrowers and a collection of over 81,025 items that circulate 318,903 times in one fiscal year, we are straining at the seams. A long-planned renovation of the library should start this summer. The library is another resource of the City that is a recipient of citizen contribution, involvement and volunteerism. There is no way that we could provide all of the programming that we do without the support of the volunteers who so graciously offer their time and service. It would require 2.5 full time employees or 5,176 paid hours of labor to fill the shoes of those volunteers. We are all grateful for their time and passion to the causes that increase the sense of community and the cause of literacy.



The Simpson Farmhouse next to the library has been a welcome addition to the offerings available for communal space in the City. Various organizations meet at the Farmhouse and use it as a site to from which to launch community outreach and involvement programs. Later this year we expect to offer Wi-Fi access both from the Simpson Farmhouse and outside in Donnelly Park.

The City's Planning and Development Department has overseen several projects over the past couple of years that have had a significant impact upon the City. In particular, the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) staff provided the oversight for the Community Building restoration project, the Highland Street improvement project (in conjunction with Lake County) and the redefining of and oversight of incentives to business and property owners within and through the Downtown Community Redevelopment Agency.

The Planning and Development Department also works closely with the Building and Fire Services Divisions. This year the Building Division has issued 942 permits that represent values of \$42,387,687. There were over 6,900 inspections performed through the department including almost 200 rental inspections and 200 fire inspections. The Building Division is made up of seven employees, most of who are cross-trained and perform multiple functions related to inspections and reviews of development and site permits.

The Planning and Development Staff will be occupied with several large-scale special projects this year. In addition to providing staff support and regulatory oversight and insights to the citizen committees and boards of the Northeast Community Redevelopment Agency, the Downtown CRA, the Public Arts Commission, the Historic Preservation Board and the Planning and Zoning Board your Planning and Development staff also represent us regionally and keep us apprised of the issues impacting the community from outside Mount Dora. They will be working this year in conjunction with Lake County and the Metro Orlando Economic

Development Commission to brand, market and seek financial partners for utility extensions into the Employment Center area along State Route 46. They are working to strengthen partnerships with the Department of Transportation and/or the Metropolitan Planning Organization of Lake and Sumter counties relative the Wekiva Parkway, the Rails to Trails plan, and the Tremain Street Greenway projects.



This year, one of the most significant initiatives taken up by the council occurs as the Visioning Process begins in March. The Planning and Development staff will work closely with the consultant that was chosen through a vetting process which included an open bid process, interviews and selections of top candidates and input by the planning and zoning board, the city council and the staff of the City. The City Council has

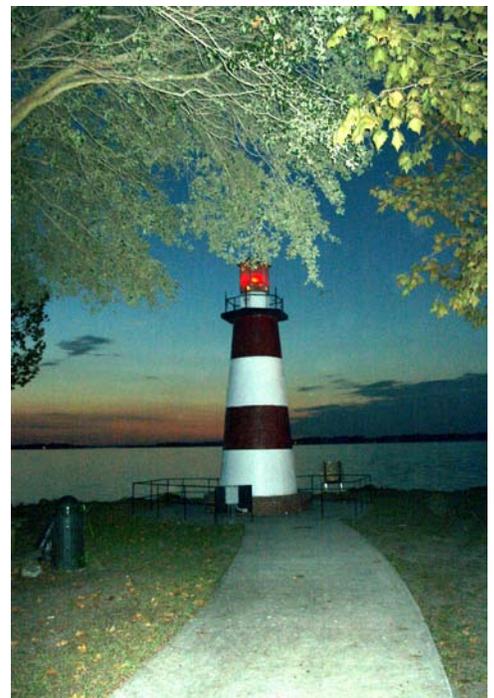
selected a steering committee made up of 12 residents and business owners, along with 3 ex-officio members who will work closely with the consultant and various focus groups to define and articulate a common vision for the future progress and development of the City.

A strategic plan, based upon this visioning process, is the goal of this exercise. No strategic plan can be created without first articulating and establishing the clear vision of the goals and aspirations to be achieved. This visioning process is that step to lay out those goals. Following that step, your council, along with the City administrative staff will then create a strategic plan to reach our goals. The strategic plan will include the financing, timeline, logistics and feasibility of completing the vision of the citizens.

It is critical to the success of this process to have large numbers and diverse interests represented from the community. I cannot express strongly enough how important this exercise will be in helping your council determine their course of action in the coming years. As we struggle with declining revenues and increased requests for more government services the plan that we devise as a result of this visioning process will be the guidebook the council will follow. The end product will be the distillation of the hopes, concerns and desires of the community that participates in the process. Please make your voice heard. Focus group sessions will be advertised to the community. Being a part of the public participation will be a simple task. Each group will meet for a relatively brief time to address an individual aspect of local government that affects our future plans as a City.

The schedules for focus groups will be posted on the City website. Additionally, you may sign up for add notifications about the visioning process by going to the City website and clicking on the link in the upper right-hand corner of the page that is entitled "Envision Mount Dora" and then following the instructions provided. The City will use other forms of advertising for the process, but this is one of the more personal and immediate ways to ensure you are up-to-date on the schedule of events. The City will provide ample and frequent notice to the community for public participation during this process.

The visioning process will take several months and will result in a thorough report to the council from the consulting company. The data relative to the number of participants, the information provided, the frequency with which issues were raised and the level of urgency related by the community about those issues – along with recommendations about how to address concerns will be presented to



the council for their consideration and final action. I have no doubt a significant “wish list” will accompany that report.

Successful execution of a long-term strategic plan doesn't happen overnight. It is to be used as a guidepost to direct us toward a clear mission for our future. The execution of the plan will likely take many years. As the City council and administration formulate the strategic plan for the City in coming years, they will look to the vision of the residents as they develop and prioritize their capital improvement projects lists as well as outline future economic and residential development.

It will be critical to ensure that we do not adopt a strategy that is so rigid so that it precludes us from appropriately reacting to changing circumstances, opportunities and external influences on our community. In the end, when this process is complete and we have developed our strategic plan, as issues and requests come before the city council their approval or denial should always be based upon one simple test. Does it honor the directive from the residents to the City Council by forwarding the goals for the City expressed by the participants of the visioning process?

Another project of major import that will have long-term impacts on this City will occur this year. That is the redistricting of political boundaries. According to statute, the matter of accounting for the population and reviewing the number of eligible voters within the community must be addressed each time the census is taken. The City must review its population and establish voting districts within the City to ensure that it establishes those districts in a manner that equitably accounts for an equal number of eligible voters within each district. By City charter the council is comprised of four districts, each of which is to be populated by the same number of eligible voters (or citizens over the age of eighteen). As new development has been approved and the population demographics may have shifted over the last ten years we must reevaluate and reapportion our districts to acknowledge those shifts to ensure that each district is truly representative of the population at large.



As development continues toward the north and east of State Route 441 the City council must also be mindful of the importance of engaging those citizens who are not walkable with downtown to that downtown – the community's heartbeat and central business district. I encourage all of our residents to shop, dine and recreate in downtown Mount Dora. Our downtown merchants and business people are dependent, particularly during the summer months when tourism is lower, on our own community for their livelihood. I ask all of our residents to make it a practice to frequent our local businesses and support our hometown economy.

The past year has seen many changes in our local, state and national economic outlook, in our political outlook and in the concerns coming from the homes and businesses of our community. The issues that are grappled with in Mount Dora are not unique. Our neighbors wrestle with the same philosophical questions and dilemmas. Striking the balance between affordability and quality of life will continue to be the very difficult task before your City council and the City manager during the coming year.

Your City Council and your City Manager will continue to aim for the goal of offering what the citizens, businesses and civic groups most want to see from their government while being mindful of the expenses associated with those offerings. There will be shortcomings; there will be exceptional efforts that will exceed

expectations. We will learn from our shortcomings and we will celebrate our successes. We are fortunate to have an engaged and active citizen base who offers experienced and varied viewpoints. As we move into this next century together I encourage you to be involved, be confident that your City is well-managed and financially sound and be proud that Mount Dora remains "Someplace Special".



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Melissa DeMarco". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Melissa DeMarco
Mayor

Dear Citizens of Mount Dora:

This “State of the City” Report is intended to provide you a summary of the City’s progress toward meeting the community’s expectations for delivering quality municipal services within our approved Budget. It not only gives the status of existing work projects and goals, but it also gives a projection of our future efforts. Through the direction provided by the strategic goals of the City Council, the City staff can remain focused on our quest for excellence to serve our citizens and enhance their quality of life in Mount Dora that is so cherished by us all.

While we have made much progress in meeting our goals and objectives for sustaining a quality community, we still have much to do. We must better understand the market forces which have caused a strained economy that diminishes our resources and dilutes our tax base. We must engage our citizens in the community visioning process that will help us determine the balance of development to preserve our community’s character but also enhance our community’s services. We must conserve our natural resources, especially water, as we support our infrastructure needs. We must create quality public spaces that connect our citizens with their community. We must preserve the livability and safety of our unique neighborhoods and downtown. We must expand the use and efficiency of service partnerships with others in order to maximize our quality of service delivery. As these challenges are presented, I can assure you that the City of Mount Dora is prepared and dedicated to answer them with opportunities for future success.

In essence, this “State of the City” Report is a reflection of the values of our community. We already see progress in meeting our Goals as we add more docks to our waterfront parks; program the use of our newly renovated Community Center; design our Eastside Water Facility and Thrill Hill reclaim reservoir project; partner on upgrading transportation infrastructure and promoting trail corridors where available; and involve our citizens in envisioning a new future for our community. We are fortunate to already have in place a community that projects an image of charm and character that invites people to share in our culture, art and commerce. We must not only continue to preserve what we have but be proactive in taking it to the next level of performance and quality to assure our continued success.

Mayor DeMarco has eloquently summarized Mount Dora as “Someplace Special” because of the value and contribution of its citizens. This is the foundation of how our government works. Let us work with you, and together we will preserve our community’s character which makes Mount Dora a place we are proud to call “home”.

Sincerely,

Michael Quinn
City Manager