

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Section 11

Christopher “Chris” J. Russo

Cooper City

City Manager Candidate Report

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Cover Letter and Resume

**Christopher J. Russo
17150 N. Bay Road #2703
Sunny Isles Beach, Florida 33160**

February 15, 2023

VIA E-MAIL

Re: City Manager of Cooper City, Florida

Dear Mr. Baenziger:

This letter and attached resume, is in response to your recruitment for the above-referenced position. The City Manager of Cooper City shares many of the same opportunities and challenges I have been involved with while serving as City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach, Florida (2000-2005/2012-2021), Town Administrator of Southwest Ranches, Florida (2007-2008), and Village Manager of Port Chester, New York (2008-2012). This was also true of my previous positions as the first Administrator of Rye Brook, New York (1987-2000) and Assistant to the Manager in Scarsdale, New York (1980-1986). Each of these communities share with Cooper City an educated, aware and involved electorate.

As with other communities I served, it appears you are looking for a City Manager who is an inclusive and process-oriented leader, one who will assure that all voices are heard in decision-making and who will execute the policies, goals and objectives of the Mayor and City Commissioners in a timely manner.

I believe four key traits are critical to the success of the City Manager: technical knowledge, pertinent experience, highly developed communication and listening skills, and an open-minded attitude toward problem solving. Time and again, I have found that sophisticated governing bodies and citizens require a broad and inclusive participatory process. This openness provides everyone with the opportunity to be heard. And when combined with an open-minded attitude in accepting possible alternatives, it generally results in solutions that are both focused on the need at hand and willingly embraced by the community.

My role is to help the City Commission and team to articulate, prioritize and accomplish their goals in a fiscally responsible way while at the same time creating positive and responsive interactions with sophisticated and occasionally demanding citizens. I succeed by fostering a strong work ethic among staff, by securing the best talent in the community to help unlock a municipality's unique internal resources, and by keeping the municipality first and foremost a service entity, and always managed in a totally fiscally responsible way.

Section 11

I learned the fundamentals of government management while on-the-job in Scarsdale, NY, which has been recognized as one of the best-managed municipalities in the nation. I took this valuable knowledge and made a significant difference during my tenure in the Village of Rye Brook. I am also extremely proud of the achievements in Sunny Isles Beach over a total of 15 years. And I look forward to the opportunity to serve such a highly regarded municipality as Cooper City.

I believe I possess the integrity, vision, skills, experience and attention to detail to meet the challenges and opportunities that go along with the position of City Manager. I have a long history in public service, with an established and verifiable record of professional values and ethics. I hope I have the opportunity to serve Cooper City as the next City Manager.

Very truly yours,

Christopher J. Russe

Christopher J. Russo
17150 N. Bay Road, Unit 2703
Sunny Isles Beach, FL. 33160
cjrsix@gmail.com
786-202-1131

Summary: 30 + years of experience managing all aspects of municipal government operations. Skilled in fiscal planning and budgeting, alternate service delivery, zoning & planning procedures, collective bargaining, consensus building and leadership through adversity, turnaround and rapid growth situations. *Significant consulting experience in both the public and private sectors.* Proven capability to deliver high-quality, cost-effective services in affluent and working-class communities in suburban, urban, and waterfront locations.

City Manager, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL **2012 to 2021**

A diverse, waterfront community incorporated in 1997 with approximately 300 F/T employees, an estimated assessed value of over \$12 billion in 2021. The FY 2021-2022 Adopted Budget is 131.8M including CIP of 28.5M. Was requested by the Commission to come back to Sunny Isles Beach after the city experienced turnover of five City Managers in my absence from 2005-2012.

Major Achievements

- Oversaw \$35 million project to underground FPL and other overhead utility lines and install decorative street lighting throughout the city.
- Oversaw design and construction of two pedestrian bridges:
 - 174th Street Pedestrian Bridge built across a major canal.
 - 163rd Street Pedestrian Overpass across six lanes of a major State Road.
- Oversaw design and construction of the city's premier, five acre Gateway Park.
- Succession Planning.
- Significantly improved relations with members of the Police Union and Non-union Employees.
- Oversaw implementation of Smart City efforts including installation of free WiFi in public parks and the beach, real-time mobile application for the city's free bus service, solar charging benches in city parks and SIBAlert, a voluntary alert program that sends emergency alerts and notifications to residents.

Chris Russo & Associates (CRA), Sunny Isles Beach, FL **2005 to 2012**

I took an opportunity in the private sector to establish CRA, utilizing my municipal management experience to provide municipalities in FL and NY and significant private sector property owners with specialized management services in the areas of planning, zoning, and the full-range of municipal government operations.

Village Manager, Village of Port Chester, NY **2008 to 2012**

Located on Long Island Sound, the Village Port Chester (VPC) is a diverse, urban/suburban community with a large immigrant and low-income population. Key issues are taxes, cost control, housing and property maintenance. VPC was also struggling to comply with Dept. of Justice action concerning voter representation.

Major Achievements

- Restructured organization to better focus resources on high priority tasks.
- Reversed long period of inaction by setting key priorities for Board and plans for staff.

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- Developed long neglected plan for Code Enforcement.
- Addressed long dormant personnel issues such as discipline and evaluation procedures.
- Initiated effort to balance large-scale redevelopment with restoration of the historic aspects of the 'Main Street' business district.

Town Administrator Southwest Ranches, FL 2007 to 2008

Incorporated in 2000, Southwest Ranches provides all municipal services via contracts with private firms and public agencies. As Town Administrator, I was responsible for restructuring and bolstering professionalism of the entire government organization and re-establishing positive working relationships with government agencies and other business entities.

Major Achievements

- Reversed several years of negative financial audits, corrected bidding procedures.
- Rebuilt financial reporting systems to conform to government accounting rules, established the first line-item budget.
- Developed specifications, negotiated contracts for all services, including sanitation, fire and police.

City Manager, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL. 2000 to 2005

A diverse, waterfront community incorporated in 1997 with an estimated assessed value of \$6 billion in 2005. SIB experienced the fastest increase in residential property value in South Florida in 2002. Served as **Chief Administrative and Budget Officer**. Directed all operating departments and responsible for the appointment, supervision and performance of all city employees.

Major Achievements

- Planned and implemented a public/private partnership to spur development of the Government Center.
- Led the effort to work cooperatively with the FDOT to cleanup and beautify the State roads in the city. Those agreements are still in place.
- Implemented the City's first Disaster & Emergency Response Plan.
- Initiated a Master Plan for the Police Dept. and supervised its development.
- Developed the first five year Capital Improvement Plan.

Village Administrator, Village of Rye Brook, NY 1987 to 2000

An affluent community in Westchester County, NY with estimated assessed value of \$3 billion in 2000. Profiled in the New York Times (May, 1992 and March, 1994) as a progressive local government. Served as the municipality's first senior manager, supervising all government services including: budgeting, personnel, police, fire, public works, parks and recreation. Responsible for village elections and records management; acquisition of public lands; contract negotiation and dispute resolution; and planning process and economic development.

Major Achievements

- Utilized master planning techniques for Police, Fire, and Finance, resulting in a surplus despite tight economic times.
- Streamlined sanitation and recycling programs resulting in a savings of more than \$2 million while maintaining high quality services.

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- Planned and led construction of a new Village Hall/Police HQ and the first Fire Dept. and station.
- Computerized village operations and developed the first disaster emergency plan.

Assistant to the Village Manager, Village of Scarsdale, NY **1980 to 1987**

A high-profile affluent community in suburban NY. Estimated assessed value of \$7 billion. Involved in all aspects of village government including contract negotiations with six unions.

Major Achievements

- Headed lead agency program in the Building Dept. to streamline permitting process.
- Contact person for the downtown redevelopment consulting team, working with civic, citizen advisory and business groups.
- Supported the Police Dept. accreditation program by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement.

Consulting Experience **1980 to 2012**

Assisted local governments in NY, NJ and MD with: development of strategic plans; executive search for administrator/manager and dept. head positions; and labor contract negotiations and dispute resolution. Also assessed viability of consolidating local government operations in NY and NJ and served as an invited speaker at more than 30 conferences on topics such as "Innovations in Local Government," "Public/Private Partnerships," "Economic Development Incentives," and "Leadership in Adversity."

Professional Organizations

- Member, Miami-Dade City/County Management Association (2000 to present)
Treasurer in 2021/2022
- Member, FL City and County Management Association (2000 to present)
- Executive Board Member, NY Conference of Mayors (1994/1995)
- Chairman, Point Source Subcommittee, L.I. Sound Task Force to eliminate nitrogen and other pollutants (1993)
- Member, International City/County Management Association (1980 to present)
- Former President, NY Municipal Management Association (1990-1991)
- Former President, A.S.P.A., Lower Hudson Valley Chapter (1985-1986)

Education

M.P.A. Degree with Distinction, Public Administration, Pace University, White Plains, NY 1984
B.A. Degree with Honors, Public Administration, Pace University, Pleasantville, NY 1980
Graduated Salesian High School, New Rochelle, NY 1976

Candidate Introduction

Christopher J. Russo

EDUCATION

M.P.A. Degree with Distinction, Public Administration, Pace University, White Plains, NY 1984
B.A. Degree with Honors, Public Administration, Pace University, Pleasantville, NY 1980
Graduated Salesian High School, New Rochelle, NY 1976

EXPERIENCE

Management Consulting	2022-Present
City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach, FL	2012 to 2021
Town Administrator of Southwest Ranches, FL	2007 to 2008
Chris Russo & Associates (CRA)	2005 to 2012
City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach, FL	2000 to 2005
Village Administrator of Rye Brook, NY	1987 to 2000
Assistant to the Village Manager, Scarsdale NY	1980 to 1987

BACKGROUND

I have most recently been the City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach Florida for a total of 15 years. Located in the northeast corner of Miami Dade County, along the Atlantic Ocean, the 2.4 square miles with a population of 23,000 people, the city has been incorporated for 25 years. During my tenure, the rundown oceanfront motels were redeveloped into luxury condominiums and hotels.

The City of Sunny Isles Beach has a total of 281 employees, about 40 of them are part-time or seasonal. As Manager, I had eight direct reports whom I supervised.

The City is in excellent financial shape. My last Budget was for fiscal year 2021- 2022, the total Budget was \$131,767,716. The General Fund was \$87,212,386. The rest of the budget includes the following; Capital Budget of \$26,010,329. Stormwater Fund \$2,416,038. Special Revenue Funds totaling \$16,128,963 broken down as follows by Fund; Street Construction and Maintenance \$3,110,530. Building Fund of \$11,394,591. Lastly, Public Art Trust Fund of \$1,623,842.

The three most important issues facing the City of Sunny Isles Beach;

1. Continued improvements to eliminate neighborhood flooding and significant upgrading of our storm water system, which includes additional smaller underground storm water pumping stations in parts of the city.
2. The undergrounding of all overhead utilities along the major roads of our City is underway, especially Collins Avenue, SR A1A. This is an undertaking that, when

Christopher J. Russo

completed, will have cost approximately \$50,000,000. Not only this will be a significant aesthetic improvement, it will result in safety by no longer having to worry about most live wires exposed on the streets or sidewalks after a rain storm or hurricane.

3. The concerns of the residents about over development, especially in Town Center and the West side of the City is a very important issue. This is also connected to the issue of affordability. As our new Mayor has said, that we need to look at affordability for young people, seniors, and others.

GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE

I got to know the many good people in Cooper City, when I negotiated for Southwest Ranches for mutual aid years ago. I would want to complete my career as the City Manager of Cooper City. With two young children it's good that I enjoy my profession, and expect to continue it for years to come.

The management style I learned and have employed most of my career is MBO- Management by Objective. It's successful and involves a very straightforward process of setting goals and objectives for my employees, and working together to make them happen. I would describe my management style as thoughtful, inclusive, and experienced. I am aware and on top of everything at all times- so much so my staff would tell you they think I have "ADD"- attention deficit disorder, as I would be doing so many things at once. I joke with them that they have my "complete divided attention".

In other words, I'm pretty much on top of every department all the time. I do delegate, but I still want to know what is going on. If you asked the elected officials for whom I have worked, they would say that I'm responsive, I'm open minded, and can be flexible. I always work to try to meet the desires and expectations of my elected officials.

I believe that my strengths are my experience, knowledge, open mindedness, flexibility and creativity. As for my weaknesses, I've already admitted that getting my attention, on some occasions, can be hard. Once you've got my attention, though, I listen well.

As Manager, I use a fairly standard performance evaluation process. The system ensures that everyone is focused on the areas which support our goals in each department. I encourage active participation in the process for any improvements that are recommended. Compensation of individuals is based on performance, and their contribution to the city. It is very much a traditional long-standing performance evaluation program.

My biggest success in this business my entire career has been being the Administrator and Manager for two brand new municipal incorporations. The Village of Rye Brook in New York was a new incorporation for which I became the first Village Administrator. Fourteen years later

Christopher J. Russo

I became the City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach Florida, working for the City Commission, where we developed a small seaside unincorporated area into a fully functional City that provides excellent services for its residents. These start-up governments, staffing them up, the improvement of aging infrastructure, and the planning and construction of the Government Centers, Community Centers, and Parks for both communities have been the highlight of my career.

Within these overall successes, there were also some failures. In the mid-1990s Rye Brook had been contracting with the neighboring village for fire protection. By this time Rye Brook was paying a significant portion of the cost of this fire service, not having any of the fire service stationed within our Village. We were paying a significant portion of the cost without having a comparable amount of the fire protection. Rye Brook made a decision to contract with a private provider of fire service. This was a company called Rural Metro out of Scottsdale Arizona. They started out with a good service stationed within our Village. They operated with full-time paid firefighters and temporary auxiliary Reserve Firefighters, who are called in on demand when necessary. In the beginning everything was working fine. However, after about a year the number of auxiliary firefighters was dwindling. They were dwindling because they were threatened at their full-time jobs not to do part-time work for Rye Brook. The threats came from the fire union. Eventually, the unions approach worked. At one point we had a house fire but not enough reserves. Thankfully no one was injured. After this incident, we terminated the private fire company. I lead a committee of volunteers and professional Firefighters from both communities to work out a plan that would be equitable and improve the fire coverage to Rye Brook. Although this privatization was a failure, the end result was putting two communities together so something like this would never happen again. To this day, the new system between the two communities has worked very well.

Like most municipal managers, I have had to terminate about 12 to 15 people over about 30 years as a Manager. I believe I have handled these terminations properly and calmly, explaining to them some of their deficiencies for the position. I have never had any negative incidents, though, of course, I've never felt good about this part of my job.

In my opinion, Cooper City's challenges will include future development for increased assessed valuation. I believe that the City has, and should maintain, the existing land-use and zoning regulations with perhaps some changes, from time to time. The City is a great place to have these hometown stores, and eateries. The hometown restaurants, Parks, golf, relaxation areas are disappearing in much of the State of Florida. You will want to retain the character of the residential area- the local retail, commercial, restaurants and special places. There are many creative planning and place-making mechanisms that can address that. Maintaining and upgrading necessary infrastructure will continuously be an issue. However, from what I see, the City has worked hard in finding the funds and improving the infrastructure. Realizing that the community is just about built-out, the future may see more proposed redevelopment projects. Succession planning is also an important challenge.

Christopher J. Russo

Should you choose me as your Manager, my plan will begin and end with my listening to, and learning from all stakeholders in the City from the Commission to department heads and employees, and finally the various other shareholders in the City. This will occur during the first six months and probably beyond. I view this process as a mutual one, my getting to know you and you're getting to know me and my management style. Also, in any municipality I'll begin with understanding the finances of the city. In today's world I think it's also important to understand the challenges faced by the BSO Public Safety Department, especially during the pandemic and now. Finally, and important, I will spend time getting familiar with the staff. This is critical to begin to foster a culture of respect and high morale. Included in this item, I will also want to spend some time with the City Attorney so I am familiar with any of the issues with which the attorney may be dealing with. At the end of this six months, I'm still going to be learning. I expect to be circling back to the Commission members from time to time, in order to bring them up to speed by letting them know what I am learning. I don't expect during this time to be making major decisions or making corrections or changes, unless there is an obvious need for action, such as an emergency, personnel claim, or a legal action.

With regard to the media, I have always had a good relationship. I have never had an embarrassing situation regarding the media. The other type of media, social media is a valuable tool to engage with residents, and to help foster a sense of community. In this role I would utilize social media to share relevant and engaging information on activities, events, projects, and initiatives. Sharing information in this way is an important tool for keeping the community informed, as well as keeping a pulse on the interest and concerns of the community. I have utilized social media in my profession, including during my time in the City of Sunny Isles Beach, where we launched a re-branding campaign. We used social media to share information on the progress of the project, as well as to collect valuable input from the community on the development of the new brand. This allowed us to engage a larger percentage of the community, to be a part of the process and as such, created a brand that the community understood, valued, and supported.

I have not experienced adverse social media exposure, but I understand that may now be a reality of the current times we are in. My leisure time is filled up mostly with my children- I have two toddlers as well as two grown-up children. The very little leisure time that's available other than the children, is my classic car.

SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE MYSELF

- 1 Experienced
- 2 Detail-oriented
- 3 Critical thinker
- 4 Friendly/Open
- 5 Caring/Responsible
- 6 Capable

Christopher J. Russo

REASON FOR DEPARTING CURRENT POSITION

Our Mayor resigned during the fall of 2021 from a five member Commission. The Vice Mayor ran against another seated Commissioner for the mayoral position, leaving two open seats. The Commissioner who won to complete the remaining year of the Mayor's term, then *appointed* two commissioners to fill the vacant seats. With those appointments, and this Commissioner had secured enough votes to terminate me. The Police Chief resigned, other positions were also eliminated, and the newly elected Mayor terminated me with no reason given. Having no blemishes on my record, I decided "valor was the better part of discretion" and I left without disputing her decision. She was only Mayor for one year, and lost the recent election for a full four year term.

CURRENT/MOST RECENT SALARY

My most recent salary was \$261,738.55

CB&A Background Checks

**Background Check Summary for
CHRISTOPHER "CHRIS" JOHN RUSSO**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Miami-Dade County, FL	No Records Found
Westchester County, NY	Not Available*
Broward County, FL	No Records Found
State	
Florida	No Records Found
New York	Not Available*

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Miami-Dade County, FL	No Records Found
Westchester County, NY	Not Available*
Broward County, FL	No Records Found
Federal	
Florida	No Records Found
New York	Not Available*

Motor Vehicle
Florida No Records Found

Credit Excellent

Personal Bankruptcy No Records Found

Sex Offender Registry Not Listed

Education Confirmed

Employment Confirmed

Social Media Nothing of Concern Found

* Records are only available in this state for the past seven years and the candidate worked there prior to that period.

**Background Check Summary for
CHRISTOPHER “CHRIS” JOHN RUSSO**

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

**Background Check Summary for
CHRISTOPHER "CHRIS" JOHN RUSSO
Personal Disclosure**

Personal Disclosure Questionnaire

Name of Applicant: Christopher John Russo

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?
Yes No
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?
Yes No
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?
Yes No
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
6. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated?
Yes No
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?
Yes No
8. Please list links to all your social media accounts (Facebook / Instagram / LinkedIn / Twitter, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one. F: @Christopher.Russo.397 / I: @CJRSIX /
Twitter: @Russo954 / L: linkedin.com/in/Christopher-Russo-02027719
9. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?
Yes No
10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.
N/A

Attested to: Christopher Russo
Signature of Applicant

Please email this form via PDF DOCUMENT to Lynelle@cb-asso.com or via fax to (561) 621-5965 no later than 12:00 PM MST 01/06/2023.
(Note: Please be sure to sign the form with your actual signature if you are sending Fax or PDF Document)

CB&A Reference Notes

Reference Notes have been placed after the Internet Research to preserve the page numbering of the report.

CB&A Internet Research

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

https://sibfl.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=378&meta_id=29480

December 3, 2021

CONSULTANT AGREEMENT

THIS CONSULTANT AGREEMENT, made this 3 day of December, 2021 by and between **CHRISTOPHER J. RUSSO** (hereinafter "Consultant") and the **CITY OF SUNNY ISLES BEACH** (hereinafter "City"):

WITNESSETH:

WHEREAS, Consultant has been employed by City for the last nine (9) years and has held the position of City Manager; and

WHEREAS, during his tenure, Consultant has gained extensive knowledge of the City's administrative operations and current capital improvement projects; and

WHEREAS, the City wishes to retain Consultant's services on an as needed basis throughout the term of this Consultant Agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the mutual covenants and agreements as hereinafter set forth, Consultant and City agree as follows:

1. **Services:** Consultant shall advise the City on as needed basis with capital projects that were commenced during his tenure as the City Manager.
2. **Term:** The Agreement is effective December 1, 2021, and shall expire on May 31, 2022. At the conclusion of the term, the Agreement shall automatically terminate unless this Agreement is terminated pursuant to Section 4 below.
3. **Compensation:** Consultant shall be paid in the manner set forth in the General Acknowledgement, Waiver and Release Agreement incorporated herein by reference. All payments to the Consultant shall be made through the City's payroll system.
4. **Termination:** This Consultant Agreement may be terminated by either party upon fifteen (15) days written notice to the other party. Upon termination of the Consultant Agreement, Consultant will be paid consistent with General Acknowledgement, Waiver and Release Agreement including but not limited all benefits set forth therein. In the event of termination, all remaining payments due to the Consultant shall be accelerated and due and payable in thirty (30) days of the notice of termination, but in no event shall payment be issued prior to January 1, 2022.
5. **Entire Understanding.** The parties acknowledge that this Consultant Agreement, together with the General Acknowledgement, Waiver and Release, contains the entire understanding of the parties and that it may not be modified without the express written consent of both parties hereto.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have caused this Consultant Agreement to be signed as of the first date written above.

For the City:

CITY OF SUNNY ISLES BEACH, FLORIDA
A municipal corporation of the State of Florida

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

THIS GENERAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, WAIVER, AND RELEASE AGREEMENT made this 3rd day of December 2021, by and between **CHRISTOPHER J. RUSSO** (hereinafter referred to as “Employee”), and the **CITY OF SUNNY ISLES BEACH**, including its respective current and former city commissioners, employees, attorneys, agents, representatives, and officials (all in their official and individual capacities), as well as their heirs, executors, administrators, predecessors, successors (hereinafter referred as to the “City”), is attached to and made a part of the Consultant Agreement between the parties.

WHEREAS, Employee is employed by the City as the City Manager on a contractual basis as evidenced by Employee’s contract dated July 19, 2012; and

WHEREAS, Employee was terminated effective December 1, 2021, and the parties to this Agreement desire to enter into an agreement in order to settle all issues including benefits to Employee as a result of his separation from employment with the City.

NOW, THEREFORE, for good and valuable consideration, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, the City and Employee agree as follows:

1. Termination from Employment. Effective on December 1, 2021, Employee’s employment with the City is terminated.
2. Consideration. In consideration for Employee’s waiver and release of all claims against the City, the City understands and agrees that Employee shall remain as a Consultant for the City until May 31, 2022, pursuant to the Consultant Agreement incorporated herein by reference,

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

<https://www.sibfl.net/reflecting-on-25-years-of-progress-and-looking-toward-the-future/>

City of sunny Isles Beach
September 1, 2021

Reflecting on 25 Years of Progress and Looking Toward the Future
Author: **Christopher J. Russo**

Many of our residents have lived in Sunny Isles Beach before it was officially incorporated in 1997. To say that our city looks nothing like it did nearly 25 years ago would be an understatement.

The first time I visited SIB was when I interviewed for City Manager back in 1997. I still remember the run-down one and two-story motels, garbage littering the streets, and rampant crime. There were no city parks, not even a blade of grass. There were street crimes, drugs, and prostitution as the City did not have its own police department yet. I was offered the position, but not able to come to terms with then-Mayor Samson; I did not accept the position of City Manager until 2000. But the City's leaders at the time, mostly retirees, made the best decision for the city: turning what was essentially a disjointed strip of land with businesses and condos into a community with prosperous services, utilities, parks, and programs.

In just 20 years, we transformed Sunny Isles Beach from a notorious, dilapidated location, into a desirable, family-friendly residential destination. And we did it on our own the old-fashioned way, through hard work. The Commission allowed total redevelopment on the east side of Collins Avenue, which brought in additional revenue, increasing our tax base while lowering the millage rate.

You may know that I left Sunny Isles Beach in 2005 and returned in 2012. In the nine years since I've been back, we were able to invest \$130 million in capital improvements such as infrastructure and parks, without borrowing a nickel. This is unheard of for a local government. Our TDRs (Transferable Development Rights) and zoning along the east side of Collins provided us not only with the funds to expand our services, utilities and amenities for residents, but also led to interesting, world-renowned architecture.

Some residents criticize the high-rises and development along the beach and around the city, ultimately longing for the 'good ol' days.' But this development, and the height that came with it, is the reason why our city is so successful and the run-down motels and rampant crime are long forgotten. We cultivated a responsive local government, built 11 city parks and two community centers that offer diverse programming and free events for all ages, established an award-winning police department, and helped develop an A-rated school with a \$14 million donation. We are in the middle of a \$30 million utility undergrounding project along Collins Avenue (and getting ready to commence undergrounding in the Golden Shores area), which is moving all power lines underground, enhancing the streetlights and electrical equipment, and redoing all sidewalks. This is the most sophisticated and involved project our City will ever do.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Without the rapid growth we saw over the last 24 years, a city our size would not typically have the means to provide the quality and quantity of services that we do.

We recently completed our citywide rebranding project, which provided us with a new logo and tagline, among many other tangibles. This project involved significant resident, business and community stakeholder participation and we are happy with the results. Our new logo, pictured here, and tagline, The Height of Living, boldly encompass what is considered an enduring attraction of our city, a rich quality of life, while also obliquely referencing the landscape of the high-rises that define our skyline.

I ask residents to think about our city and everything it offers to the community. Our height has provided us unprecedented opportunities for growth, prosperity, and a bright future. I am proud of the City and hope you are too.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

South Florida Media Network (FL)

March 24, 2021

After Fatal Pedestrian Crash, Sunny Isles Beach Residents Demand Change

Author: Aaliyah Pasols

On a Wednesday evening in Sunny Isles Beach last month, 11-year-old Anthony Reznik was with his stepfather and sister. As they waited at the pedestrian crosswalk on the 300 block of Sunny Isles Beach Boulevard, the light signaled that they were okay to cross. According to Miami-Dade police, a distracted driver then came barreling toward the intersection, running the red light and hitting the child. The Norman S. Edelcup sixth-grader was in the hospital in critical condition for nearly two weeks but was eventually pronounced brain dead.

The Feb. 10 incident was not an isolated one, but the most recent addition in a series of pedestrian and cyclist injuries and deaths that Sunny Isles residents say have become all too common. The tragic death of Anthony was felt heavily throughout the community, prompting residents to fight harder for safer streets. The Sunny Isles Beach Commission has heard the voices of the residents and is working toward making much-needed improvements to the city.

In a bicycle and pedestrian safety study conducted by the Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization, the number of bicycle and pedestrian incidents from 2008 to 2013 was shown on maps of Miami-Dade County. In the maps depicting pedestrian and bicycle crashes, Sunny Isles Beach is jam-packed with dots, each representing a crash. Many residents weren't aware that this was an issue until 2018, when another high-profile fatal crash shook the community.

On July 1, a family of four was walking on the sidewalk near 174th Street and Collins Avenue. They were on their way to a park when a driver lost control of his vehicle and plummeted into the family. The father, 34-year-old real estate lawyer Amir Pelleg, was pronounced dead at the scene, while his wife, Zulma Guillot Pelleg, suffered a traumatic brain injury and fell into a coma. Their two young daughters, ages 3 and 7 at the time, endured severe injuries. Johana Rabinovich, 37, remembers Pelleg's death clearly. She has been a Sunny Isles resident for over 10 years now and has two children, ages 4 and 6. She says that after Pelleg died she realized that she needed to speak up. Through her Facebook group, Sunny Isles Beach Moms, she connected with other concerned mothers. Soon enough, a group of about 15 Sunny Isles women had come together to bring their pleas to city hall. At the next commission meeting following the accident, Rabinovich presented a petition to the commission members, which had garnered almost 2,500 signatures. The petition asked the city to take action toward making Sunny Isles Beach safer for pedestrians. Sadly, Rabinovich says, nothing has really changed. "Our government officials' stance has been sad," Rabinovich said. "It's always been, 'Well, accidents happen, you know?' And yes, accidents happen but what are you going to do to make it somewhat safer? We need to invest into the future of what we want this city to become; we can't just be a city of billionaires with high-end high-rises where you can't walk a block because it's so unsafe."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Christopher J. Russo***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Several more accidents occurred after 2018, with some resulting in fatalities. Just last April, a 17-year-old boy was killed. Sholem Benchimol, a soccer player at Scheck Hillel Community School, was riding his bike at the intersection of Collins Avenue and 172nd Street when a car rammed into him. Benchimol was the son of Jose Benchimol, a well-known rabbi at Beit Rambam Congregation. Last month's tragedy seemed to be the last straw for many residents, who feel as if these crashes have become normal. This sentiment echoes through the Facebook group Sunny Isles Beach Insider, which is also run by Rabinovich. "I'm outraged!" one member, Inna Shef, commented on a Facebook post in the group. "We've talked about this again and again. [I] spoke to the Vice Mayor this time last year. She said she'll talk to the Chief of Police about the issue of road safety... and nothing!"

A community memorial, which doubled as a "stand for traffic and pedestrian safety," was held on March 7 in Anthony's honor. The event was organized by a group of residents and was approved by Anthony's family. The attendees hoped that it would bring awareness to the ongoing pedestrian safety problem. "Hopefully with his name, a lot of fixing will happen in the city where we live, because the city where we live has a lot of families, little kids," Inna Trakhtenburg, Anthony's mother, said to WSVN following his death. A petition was also created to change the name of Sunny Isles Beach Boulevard to Anthony Reznik Boulevard. It has already received over 3,500 signatures.

The residents in the Facebook group have not been shy about expressing their own ideas to improve pedestrian safety. Increasing police presence has been a popular suggestion. Other ideas include brighter street lights, wider sidewalks, bollards, protected bike lanes, speed bumps and red-light cameras. The city commission has inquired about what can be done at the state level. The day after Anthony was hit, they contacted the Florida Department of Transportation to review the pedestrian walkway at Sunny Isles Beach Boulevard and State Road 826. James Wolfe, District Six Secretary of FDOT, responded to the city's request via email. Wolfe declined an interview request, but his office provided his response to the commission inquiry. "It is particularly tragic that the collision should have been easily avoided," he wrote in the email. "The pedestrian signal was working as intended. The crash was caused by a driver that ran the red light." Wolfe also listed several projects that FDOT will take on to better pedestrian safety, including: additional streetlights at the crosswalk, adding "PED XING AHEAD" pavement markings, and teaming up with the city's police department to implement an education and enforcement campaign.

As for solutions at the city level, Vice Mayor Larissa Svechin said that most of it is out of their control. However, there are some changes that are being carried out. Starting Feb. 26 and lasting until May 14, there will be "high visibility enforcement" conducted by Sunny Isles Beach police on Collins Avenue. They will also increase their enforcement citywide. Additionally, the city is undertaking the construction of two pedestrian bridges. One, called the Government Center Pedestrian Bridge, will be built at 180th Street and Collins Avenue. The second, the 174th Street Pedestrian Bridge, will be sprung up at 174th Street and Collins Avenue.

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Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City Manager **Chris Russo** says that the 180th Street bridge has 90% of its plans complete, with construction possibly beginning by the end of this year. The 174th Street bridge will require some more time, however, as it is a much larger project. It will aim to mimic Manhattan’s High Line, functioning as a bridge and park for residents to enjoy. The cost is an estimated \$13 million, according to **Russo**.

Some residents such as Tony Schneider are welcoming the idea. “It would be amazing. Less accidents, no waiting for the traffic signal, great... exercise, less traffic jams [and a] good looking structure,” he wrote on the Sunny Isles Beach Insider group. Others are not as convinced. Rabinovich argues that the budget for the expensive bridges should go toward more ambitious efforts. “The answer is not bridges,” she said. “I wish that we would [instead] invest the multimillion dollars in creating safer streets from north to south. If you’re [building] these bridges to make it safer for pedestrians, how is that safe for the person that lives on 190th Street that still has to walk south to get to one of the bridges?”

Svechin is aware of residents’ frustrations and has acknowledged their ideas as “good suggestions.” She hopes to mobilize some of these proposals as the city moves forward in building a safer, pedestrian-friendly community. “We are actively working on improving the safety of our roads for our pedestrians,” she said. “Because that’s our goal, we want people to be walking around, we want to alleviate traffic... It has to be a combination of road design and educating the residents, drivers and legislators so they understand what we’re dealing with... There’s a lot of variables here but it doesn’t mean that we’re going to stop.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City of Sunny Isles Beach (FL)
December 29, 2020

Speed Limit on Collins Avenue

Author: **Christopher Russo**

There has been a lot of discussion among the community regarding the speed limit on State Road A1A/Collins Avenue within our city limits. We have listened to the residents who brought their concerns to us that the current speed limit of 35 miles per hour is too high due to the density of vehicles and pedestrians on the road. Since Collins Avenue is a State-owned road, we as a local government do not control the speed limit and do not have the authority to change it. What you might not know is that we have petitioned the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) three times before in 2002, 2009, and 2016 to reduce the speed limit. However, we reached out to FDOT again to see if our residents' request of reducing the speed limit from 35 mph to 30 mph, similar to one of our neighboring communities, could be possible. To determine if the current posted speed limit of 35 mph was reasonable and a safe maximum speed for all vehicles to travel on, FDOT completed a traffic engineering study. The purpose of the speed zone study was to evaluate the existing traffic safety and operations along the study corridor. This was accomplished by performing qualitative field observations, spot speed studies, crash summaries and collision diagrams, and assessing geometric conditions. Here is how FDOT conducts the study. They use the '85th percentile' method of determining appropriate and safe posted speed limits along with the maximum statute-based speeds. The 85th percentile is the speed that 85% of the observed free-flowing vehicles are traveling. This method is based on extensive nationally accepted studies and observations. In our case, it is clear that most of our severe traffic accidents have been caused by driver distraction. The study concluded that the posted speed limit of 35 mph is appropriate for our stretch of Collins Avenue.

We appreciate the concern our residents share for the safety of our community. As administrators of Sunny Isles Beach, it is our responsibility to uphold the highest level of safety in our city and we want nothing more than for our residents to feel safe whether they are driving to work, walking their children to school, or going for a bike ride. It is important that everyone follows the rules of the road. In addition to following the speed limit when driving, eliminate distractions and always keep an eye out for pedestrians. And if you are a pedestrian or cyclist, there are rules you must follow too. We have 16 signalized intersections and three signalized pedestrian midblock crosswalks. Use them. Look both ways before crossing the street or driveway. A widespread misconception is that cyclists do not have to follow traffic signals when riding their bicycle on the road. That is false. Bicycles are considered vehicles when on the street and must also follow the same rules as cars. In addition to our safety campaigns and expanded visible police presence, we are in the process of building two pedestrian overpasses along Collins Avenue at 174 Street and 180 Street at the SIB Government Center as many of you may know. Having two additional overpasses provides the added value of allowing pedestrians to avoid crossing Collins Avenue altogether at two major crosswalks. The speed limit is staying the same at this time, but our attitudes and actions can certainly change. If we stay alert and aware while on the street, we can avoid accidents, injuries and fatalities. Let's stay safe this New Year.

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Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City of Sunny Isles Beach (FL)
November 30, 2020

Meet Our Condominium Ombudsman
Author: **Christopher Russo**

As I discussed last month, the City is helping facilitate resident access to the State of Florida Condominium Ombudsman. Every other Monday, the Ombudsman is working out of the SIB Government Center and is available to meet with condominium unit owners, board members, and associations.

I want to introduce you to the State of Florida’s Condominium Ombudsman. Spencer Hennings was appointed as the Condominium Ombudsman in July 2020 by the Governor. Originally from Florida, Spencer grew up in the South Florida area and his experience with transactional real estate law provides a strong foundation for his work. As a new Ombudsman, Spencer is eager for this unique opportunity to help individuals throughout the entire state of Florida with stimulating and rewarding work.

Spencer’s role as Ombudsman consists of four main tasks: election monitoring, education, facilitating effective communication, and making recommendations for new condominium laws. He functions as an external liaison and neutral third party for the state of Florida with the primary purpose of resolving issues before they become official complaints with the State, arbitration or litigation.

One of the best resources the Office of the Condominium Ombudsman can offer is election monitoring. In condominiums, unit owners have no rights to run the association or property beyond voting for the board. This makes elections of the utmost importance. If a condo creates a petition and obtains 15% of the unit owners’ signatures, the Ombudsman will appoint an election monitor who is trained and independent. This individual will conduct the election to ensure there is no ballot tampering or misconduct.

Another way the Ombudsman can help is through education. By virtue of education about rights and responsibilities, unit owners and associations can cut an arising issue at its roots. Condominium laws are changing nearly every year; between the special interest groups that lobby for unit owners, associations or attorneys, the laws are constantly evolving. The Ombudsman will not interpret the law for residents nor tell you what will likely happen in court, but he can tell you what the law says about your issues and let you know what the possible options are for your situation.

So why would someone in Sunny Isles Beach need to meet with a Condominium Ombudsman? We all know there can be three sides to every story and Spencer says that can be the most challenging part of condominium disputes. But by facilitating what he describes as a ‘meeting of the minds’ with all affected parties, they can move closer to resolving the issue with effective communication. He states that the cause of these disputes and issues is primarily a lack of

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transparency and communication. If a unit owner and a condo association are involved in a conflict, the Ombudsman can help navigate the issue in order to resolve it before it escalates. This could include disputes over records requests, disagreements about opening public spaces during the pandemic, or unwarranted application denials.

In a mutual agreement between the State and Sunny Isles Beach, Spencer will be working out of our Government Center twice a month to be more accessible to our residents and also our neighboring communities. The main office of the Condominium Ombudsman is located in Fort Lauderdale, with another office in Tallahassee. But now, anyone in Miami-Dade County is welcome to make an appointment and meet with Spencer in Sunny Isles Beach or call to utilize his expertise.

I want to again thank Spencer's colleagues from the DBPR, Director of the Division of Florida Condominiums, Boyd McAdams; Deputy Secretary of Business Regulation, Michael B. Johnston; and Secretary Halsey Beshears who all helped make this arrangement possible. You can make an appointment with the Condominium Ombudsman by calling my office at 305.792.1909. More information about the Condominium Ombudsman is available at sibfl.net/ombudsman.

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City of Sunny Isles Beach (FL)
August 31, 2020

Update on Gateway Center
Author: **Christopher Russo**

Every day we work to fulfill our mission to keep Sunny Isles Beach a world class city that offers the highest quality of life for our residents. The completion of the Gateway Center is just the latest extension of our promise. When the privatization of the space for a market and restaurant fell through, we realized there was a greater need to utilize the building as a recreation facility for residents. The buildout of the Gateway Center is anticipated to be completed by the end of September 2020.

The Gateway Center optimizes 15,000 square feet of interior space at Gateway Park for the usage and enjoyment of residents. When you enter the facility, you will be greeted at the serene reception area. Past the lobby, the facility guides you down a social hallway with seating and game tables. This is a space for socialization, engagement and leisure. Those with a valid City-issued SIB Resident ID Card have access to the facility to utilize the social hallway, hang out, and mingle with friends. Further in is a fitness room with oak wood floors and mirrored walls, large and small classrooms, and a full-fledged catering kitchen. One notable feature of the catering kitchen is a camera system designed to follow chefs cooking in the kitchen with the intention to air the video feed in a classroom or play back at a later date. The kitchen is an added opportunity to expand our program and rental offerings.

Elevating the Gateway Center even further is a 3,600 square foot banquet space, which can accommodate 240 seated at round tables. Equipped with top-of-the-line technology, the ballroom will be available to rent for presentations, receptions, weddings, and various special events. Throughout the Center you will be privy to our audio/visual equipment, which connects sound and music throughout the facility in the hallways, rooms, and in the exterior surrounding the banquet space. Unlike any other facility in the City, a Hearing Loop system is built into the floor of the banquet space and fitness room. While invisible to the eye, this high-tech solution delivers sound from the AV system directly to hearing aids and cochlear implants with telecoils, strengthening the sound of the presenter for those who have difficulty hearing. As in every aspect of our work, we strive to provide accessible services for all residents.

The aesthetic of the Gateway Center is emblematic of our oceanfront location with blue, green and coral colors dispersed throughout. Providing a calm, relaxing and safe space for residents to enjoy was critical during the design phase. The Center will also have a satellite visitor center, an addition to the original one in the Government Center. Promotional merchandise will be on sale such as shirts, cups, and key chains, as well as light food and beverage items including coffee, sodas and snacks.

Barring any unexpected delays, staff will be able to move in beginning this October. As you might have guessed, COVID-19 restrictions have delayed a grand opening event for the Gateway

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Center. In the meantime, our team is diligently preparing programming and events for when it is safe to open and we can share this new space with all of our residents. We are also drawing up a facility rental package for the banquet space with the hopes of accepting rental applications for 2021, providing that it is safe to do so.

It is bittersweet to celebrate the completion of our brand-new facility that was championed by former Sunny Isles Beach Commissioner Roslyn Brezin, who passed away in February 2019. It was her staunch determination and vision that served as the impetus for the buildout of the Gateway Center. As we prepare to open the facility, we remember her leadership and advocacy for residents, and seniors in particular, in Sunny Isles Beach. When it is safe to open, the Gateway Center will be an elite facility for residents to learn new skills by sampling a selection of diverse programs, for teens to meet in a safe setting without their parents, and for seniors to gather for social activities. We are excited for the opportunities the Gateway Center will provide all residents of Sunny Isles Beach.

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Christopher J. Russo** is listed below.]

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/state-politics/article243873932.html>

Miami Herald
August 20, 2020 updated

What did Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis veto to cut budget by \$1 billion? Here's the list

Author: Mary Ellen Klas, Joey Flechas, Aaron Leibowitz and Douglas Hanks

When Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced the signing of the new state budget that goes into effect on Wednesday, July 1, he vetoed more than \$1 billion worth of local projects and line items. South Florida took a big hit.

Sunny Isles Beach won't get \$1 million that state legislators had agreed to provide for a pedestrian bridge across Collins Ave. at 174th Street, which is currently in the design and approval stage. City Manager **Chris Russo** said the project could ultimately cost around \$12 million. "It's not gonna stop us from going forward, but it would have helped a lot," **Russo** said.

Russo said lobbyist Ron Book "worked hard" to secure the \$1 million for the city, which was more than Sunny Isles had received in state help for two previous pedestrian bridges. But, he said, "this is not one that we can complain about based on what the governor is faced with."

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City of Sunny Isles Beach (FL)
July 30, 2020

Message from the City Manager: Update on Town Center North Overlay
Author: **Christopher Russo**

We are moving forward in determining the future of the Town Center North Overlay (TCNO). However, due to delays from COVID-19, the City Commission is in the process of extending the moratorium through March 2021 to allow for ample time to complete the public outreach process and provide final recommendations to proceed. Our consultant team from Calvin, Giordano & Associates (CGA) has facilitated the outreach process, and on June 4, they presented their initial findings and recommendations to the City Commission.

The outreach process consisted of stakeholder meetings with residents, landowners, developers, and elected officials; gathering and analyzing information about present conditions; public outreach through pop-up activities, an open-house workshop and online survey; and synthesizing all the community input. Throughout this outreach process it was important for us to educate the public about the TCNO before gaining feedback. The CGA team found that while there were strong opinions regarding the TCNO, many did not fully understand the complexity of the area. Education was a key component at each outreach activity. Staff explained the history and composition of the TCNO, which is three distinct areas, including the Collins commercial corridor, the midsection and the bayfront.

Typically, a “town center” is a central, walkable place that people can easily access for a variety of purposes: to shop, dine, work, exercise, enjoy a movie or concert, or just congregate as a community in a social public place. According to this description, the current Town Center District seems to be deficient, and our residents know this. The purpose of the public engagement is to determine what our citizens want to see there.

What did we learn?

Through a combination of face-to-face interactions and online engagement, we were able to gain a wealth of public input about the current view of the TCNO and its future. We reached over 500 points of direct public engagement, with several hundred more estimated from interaction with the website, social media posts, and emails. We found that most participants would rather see a moderate skyline here, favoring the current districtwide mix of heights. Participants would like to see a better selection, both in quantity and quality, of shopping, dining and entertainment options. They prioritized broader quality of life issues such as walkability, connectivity, multimodality, pedestrian safety, green space, and infrastructure capacity over regulatory issues. Residents desire for the TCNO to remain unique when compared to development on the east side of Collins Avenue, placing importance on the need for a sense of retreat.

Possible Paths

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The CGA team developed four possible paths for the City to take. The Commission must now prioritize what they want to achieve in terms of policy goals and how to achieve those goals with regulatory implementation.

Let it be

Keeps the TCNO in the Comprehensive Plan as is.

Involves adding density and intensity measures that are currently absent to comply with Florida law.

Requires amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code.

A New Vision

An overhaul of the current TCNO and would implement new land use designation.

Involves a depth of analyses to document the new district and re-designation of land.

Requires amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Map, and Zoning Map and Code.

Toss it away

Eliminates the TCNO in the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map, leaving the existing underlying land use districts to guide future redevelopment

Requires amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Map, and Zoning Map and Code.

A narrower focus

Subdivides the TCNO to reflect the distinct character subareas of the overall district.

Resizes the footprint so the overlay applies only to the present commercial or residential area.

Adjusts guidelines to promote a higher caliber of future redevelopment for this area.

Requires amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Map, Zoning Map and Code.

Where do we go from here?

As we pursue the path of extending the moratorium for an additional six months, we will continue engaging with the community to receive your feedback. The City Commission will then deliberate at a formal public meeting and may select one of the four options to move forward with, ask for a variation of the paths or revisions, or provide direction to staff regarding other options. Once they provide feedback, staff will prepare the policy and regulatory amendments necessary to implement their decision.

This may seem like a long and arduous process, but it is necessary to gain public input before moving forward. In the weeks to come, we will announce additional opportunities for public engagement as well as the date for another virtual public workshop.

I encourage you to learn more about the Town Center District, the public engagement project report, and the steps the City is taking to create a better future for Sunny Isles Beach by visiting sibfl.net/towncenternorth. I invite you to share your comments online or by calling 305.792.1740.

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Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Miami Herald (FL)

April 7, 2020

Miami-Dade Lets Construction Go on Amid COVID-19. Some Cities are Banning it Anyway

Author: Aaron Leibowitz, Martin Vassolo and Joey Flechas

Since the town of Surfside issued a ban last month on all construction except for emergency repairs, some of the feedback has been harsh. About 10 homeowners have asked for permission to continue with ongoing work, saying it can be done without risking the spread of COVID-19. But so far, despite state and county leaders giving builders the green light to forge ahead with projects, the little oceanfront community of Surfside hasn't budged. "I care about our families and our neighbors more than I care about construction projects," Eliana Salzhauer, a recently elected Surfside town commissioner, said during a virtual meeting March 31.

Other municipalities in North Dade — including Golden Beach and Sunny Isles Beach to the north of Surfside and Key Biscayne to its south — have also taken measures to try to limit or ban construction in recent weeks. Larger cities like Miami and Miami Beach have let it continue mostly unabated while trying to enforce social distancing rules at work sites. But momentum may be building in the other direction. Miami Mayor Francis Suarez said he's heard from many residents who want construction sites closed. He said city administrators are considering a shutdown, but are still seeking clarity on a statewide stay-at-home order that "supersedes" local authorities.

Gov. Ron DeSantis later said cities could enact stricter measures, confusing local officials. On Monday, Suarez was leaning toward a closure with exceptions for emergencies. "It's hard to argue that they're essential," Suarez said. "Obviously, it's a big industry in our community, but every single industry in our community has been impacted." Miami Beach officials have also discussed the possibility of putting a hold on all non-essential construction, Mayor Dan Gelber said, though they haven't acted on it yet. "There have been some discussions about limiting the ones that are going on," he said.

A spokeswoman said the city has ordered two sites to temporarily stop work due to a "lack of social distancing," and shut down eight others for working without permits. "New interior construction permits are not being issued and we are continuously performing social distancing checks on active construction sites," the spokeswoman said. Gelber said city officials have done 250 site inspections based on complaints they've received, calling the city's response "aggressive." Construction sites have far fewer workers today than before the coronavirus pandemic began in order to maintain social distancing. But cities that have gone a step further and shut down construction sites have met backlash from builders and the residents who rely on their work.

The president of The Shul in Surfside, Steve Dunn, asked town officials during the March 31 commission meeting to consider letting his synagogue continue with a major expansion. Dunn

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Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

said he was working on a plan to enforce social distancing at the site, provide protective gear to workers, and keep workers out of commercial areas. "The Shul has a very substantial commercial project that has been interrupted," Dunn said. "What I would ask is, if a case-by-case scenario is going to be considered for the residential properties, that likewise our case be considered."

But the commission wasn't moved by his case, nor by the pleas of homeowners. There are over 2,300 active building permits in Surfside, according to town officials, and for now, Salzhauer said, they should all be put on hold except for emergency repairs. "Everyone has an equal right and an equal hardship here," she said. "We've only been doing this for two weeks. People in other countries have been doing this for months. Suck it up for a month, then we can revisit this."

MH Tipline CTA embed

Only one other municipality in Miami-Dade County has issued a blanket ban on construction akin to Surfside's: Golden Beach, an affluent community at the northern tip of A1A that has banned almost all visitors from entering in response to the novel coronavirus. The town consists entirely of single-family homes, meaning it doesn't rely on the construction industry as much as Miami or Miami Beach. Still, Mayor Glenn Singer said he has heard many complaints about the move. "I've had numerous contractors contact me, homeowners contact me saying, 'I've got to get my job done,'" Singer told the Herald. "It's not about my job or this job, it's about the community as a whole."

Golden Beach announced March 16 that construction sites must be closed, and even revoked all active building permits so that it is now illegal to be present at a site. "The frustrating thing is that the other cities are now starting to see the light," Singer said, referring to those that have restricted construction more recently. "This could have been done three weeks ago and it seems like Dade County is behind the ball." On Friday, the island village of Key Biscayne — which, like Golden Beach, has moved to restrict visitor access — ordered all construction at multi-family buildings to stop by Monday at 6:30 p.m.

Mayor Mike Davey said he wasn't aware of any major ongoing projects, but that he got calls from condo managers who were "feeling inundated with construction workers." If you have a broken pipe in your apartment, Davey said, fix it. But "this isn't the time to remodel your kitchen," Davey said. "Now is the time to sit tight." Other cities like Sunny Isles Beach, which is brimming with oceanfront condo towers along Collins Avenue, have treaded more lightly while still trying to discourage construction. A construction worker pauses at The Estates at Acqualina construction site in Sunny Isles Beach under a sign ordering social distancing.

Last Wednesday, city officials sent an email to condo managers and boards "strongly urging" them to limit projects at multi-family buildings to essential work only. Officials said they had heard from many residents about non-essential work taking place at condos. "While we are not ordering construction to cease, we urge condominiums to limit the work to only what needs to be completed for the safety of residents," the email said.

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Christopher J. Russo

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City Manager **Christopher Russo** told the Herald on Monday that he expects the city to issue a new emergency order this week to formally limit construction in occupied residential buildings. He said his administration, much like Miami's, is still seeking more guidance from DeSantis on whether the city is authorized to shut down projects entirely and declare construction non-essential. Multiple major condo projects are ongoing in Sunny Isles, including at The Estates at Acqualina and the Turnberry Ocean Club. "We're still working on what we can do to limit or at least put in more safety measures on new construction," **Russo** said.

At the county level, Mayor Carlos Gimenez has resisted calls for a construction shutdown, even after work on two major projects — a \$300 million Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines headquarters building at the Port of Miami and a University of Miami UHealth Care center in North Miami — was delayed indefinitely due to uncertainty about COVID-19. One of Miami-Dade's leading builders, Sergio Pino, issued a public plea last Tuesday for the construction industry to shut down sites entirely and prevent an outbreak of coronavirus among their workers. But Gimenez said during a virtual press conference later that day that construction can still be done safely. It remains on his list of "essential" businesses exempt from a countywide stay-at-home order, he said, because of "the jobs that it's creating." "They're taking our warnings very seriously," Gimenez said, adding that Miami-Dade police have conducted hundreds of inspections to make sure workers are staying six feet apart and following county protocols. "If we see that there are problems with construction sites, we will shut them down individually."

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Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Christopher J. Russo** is listed below.]

The Miami Herald (FL)
April 5, 2020

Valet Parking – South Florida Cities Urge Valet Restrictions for Coronavirus
Author: Carli Teproff and Howard Cohen

Required valet parking is a common sight at many condominium buildings and businesses across South Florida. But key fobs, steering wheels, door handles and other vehicle surfaces are just another way COVID-19 can spread. So some South Florida cities, condos and businesses are reining in the service, allowing drivers to decide whether they want someone else in their car. "There is no playbook for this," said James Baum, general manager of Icon Brickell Master Association. Baum said the board decided last week that shutting down the valet operation for the 1,800-unit complex was the right thing to do. "Once we started seeing the numbers and how this is spreading we made the decision," he said. All residents now self-park. If someone is visiting, they have to park in a nearby lot. Most hospitals also have suspended valet service - including Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, Jackson Memorial and UHealth in Miami, and Memorial Healthcare in Broward. Here's a look at what some cities are doing:

Sunny Isles Beach

The city typically doesn't have valet for the commercial retail shopping centers in the city, so that has not been an issue, said City Manager **Christopher Russo**. "With regard to the condominiums, it would be impractical for the city to put out a blanket order due to the fact that most of our buildings have a combination of individual parking spaces, tandem parking spaces, and mechanical spaces," **Russo** said. "This is one that must be determined by the board of each building based on their circumstances. We would urge them to do the best they can to allow self-parking as much as possible if that's what is desired by the residents."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

South Florida Media Network (FL)

December 6, 2019

\$1.8 Million Sand Renourishment Project to be Completed in Sunny Isles Beach Mid-January

Author: Anna Radinsky

Vacationers and snowbirds may need to avoid nearly a mile of the beach in Sunny Isles due to a multi-month sand renourishment project – though no one seems to know exactly when. The project was scheduled to run from mid-November to mid-January from approximately Terracina Avenue to 185th Street, about three-quarters of a mile. It has been delayed because contractors are working on getting permits to start the project, according to Kathryn Matos, the assistant city manager. She is unsure when work will begin. The Estates of Acqualina will pay around \$1.8 million for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to add 80,000 cubic yards of sand to the beach, according to Alexandra Wesley, the spokeswoman for Acqualina.

Sunny Isles Beach is not paying for the renourishment and only designates the location for the sand placement, which is decided by the city commission “based on the area of greatest need at the time the beach-fill project is being planned,” said City Manager **Christopher Russo**. “Developers on the east side of Collins Avenue are required by city ordinance to place whatever quantity of material is excavated from their project site, back on the beach in the form of beach quality sand, which goes through rigorous quality testing by the state and county before it is allowed to be placed,” said **Russo**. “They’re paying \$62 a cubic yard for sand. That’s the size of a filing cabinet. It’s expensive because they’re getting it from upland areas,” said Randall Parkinson, an associate professor for Florida International University’s Sea Level Solutions Center.

Parkinson was a chief scientist for the Sebastian Inlet Tax District Commission in Brevard County, where he designed and managed beach nourishment projects in the 1980s. The sand will be coming in from the Vulcan Materials Witherspoon Sand Mine, located in Moore Haven, southwest of Lake Okeechobee. It is a 100-mile trip from Sunny Isles Beach. “A typical dump truck can carry 10 cubic yards of sand. So, 14,000 dump trucks are going to be coming in and out of Sunny Isles, creating potholes, accidents, tip-overs, dust, dirt, air pollution and noise pollution,” said Parkinson.

In addition, the sand coming in does not match the sand that originally covered Sunny Isles. “If you stand barefoot on real sand, it’s not going to be hot even if it’s hot outside. Now if you stand on fake sand, or synthetic sand, then it would be hot, which it’s always hot in Miami Beach,” said Nicholas Machin, the Assistant Project Manager of Gonzalez & Sons Equipment, Inc. Engineering, contractors of the sand renourishment project. Machin does not think that sand will run out for renourishment projects. Parkinson disagrees. “Sand is not a renewable resource. You mine sand from deposits offshore or from inland mines but that’s not an infinite supply and it will run out,” said Parkinson.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Coastal cities around the U.S. work on sand renourishment projects to combat sand erosion. “On average we lose approximately 15,000 cubic yards of sand per year, so the coordinated efforts between our city staff and government agencies have proven successful thus far at renourishing sand on our beach,” said Sunny Isles Beach Commissioner Alex Lama in a newsletter. Parkinson says that beach nourishment should be used as a transitional, not a permanent, strategy for sand erosion and the growing threat from sea-level rise. “Now that we know that climate change is real and happening now, these challenges to urbanizing coasts are only going to get more intense because we’re going to have more frequent and intense tropical storms and hurricanes and sea-level rise is accelerating,” said Parkinson. He said that cities need to prepare for managed withdrawals from cities. “We’re going to have to retreat from the coastline. That’s it. We do not have a choice.” The beach will remain open but a temporary construction fence will be set up in affected areas. Project hours will run from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on weekdays. Work on Saturdays will only take place if needed to catch up from delays. No work will take place on Sundays or on holidays.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City of Sunny Isles Beach (FL)
April 24, 2017

Neat Streets Miami Awards Street Tree Matching Grant to the City of Sunny Isles Beach
Author: Unknown

In an effort to expand Miami Dade County’s tree canopy by leveraging local resources, Neat Streets Miami awarded the City of Sunny Isles Beach a Street Tree Matching grant for its Central Island Tree Planting Project during the Biennial LEAF Summit which was held on March 23, 2017. In its second year, Neat Streets Miami’s street tree program awarded matching grants to 13 organizations to help advance the Million Trees Miami initiative, a community-wide effort to plant one million trees and achieve a 30 percent tree canopy cover by 2020.

Awardees were announced by Neat Streets Miami Chairman, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Dennis C. Moss, District 9, at the Biennial LEAF Summit, South Florida’s premier exchange on trees. Approximately 200 community leaders participated in the 2017 LEAF Summit to learn and apply best practices for getting more trees planted in Miami-Dade. “With the Street Tree Matching Grant program, the County is leveraging funds to get more ‘green’ on the streets,” said Commissioner Moss. “By matching resources for trees, we are creating more shade, beautifying corridors and gateways and encouraging more activity in communities throughout the County.”

“I want to sincerely thank Neat Streets Miami, the Board, and Chairman Moss for this award and for their encouragement to increase the City’s tree canopy. We are excited about this partnership and look forward to continuing to work together to beautify and green our community through planting trees,” said Sunny Isles Beach City Manager, **Christopher Russo**.

This year, Neat Streets Miami gave priority to applicants in neighborhoods with a low tree canopy and underserved populations, in an attempt to achieve at least a twenty percent tree canopy coverage (Miami-Dade County’s average) in all neighborhoods. As part of this project, the City of Sunny Isles Beach will plant approximately 60 canopy trees to provide shade and beautify the community. The trees will be planted along the sidewalks at the following locations: from North Bay Road from 174th Street to 178th Street, 178th Drive from North Bay Road to 178th Street, Church Street to Atlantic Boulevard; Atlantic Boulevard from 178th Street to 175th Terrace; and 175th Terrace from Atlantic Boulevard to Collins Avenue, for a total distance of 2.3 miles.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City of Sunny Isles Beach (FL)
March 31, 2017

Serving Sunny Isles Beach Seniors
Author: **Christopher J. Russo**

The City Commission, since incorporation has always had senior programs listed as a priority. What started simply as group tours to shows in the beginning, 20 years later has flourished into a wealth of opportunities for our seniors to participate regularly in programs that provide education, arts and culture, athletics and yes, even twice monthly bingo! There are AARP driving courses, medical and political lectures, daytime movie and pickle ball, as well as dinner dances, concerts and still twice monthly trips and tours.

Always searching to do more, in December, the City Commission approved a \$10,000 donation to Marian Towers, a not-for-profit HUD subsidized elderly housing apartment building located right in the center of Sunny Isles Beach. Mayor Scholl, Commissioners Gatto and Svechin and City Manager **Christopher Russo** were welcomed by Luis Herrera, Social Services Coordinator, and Ada Hernandez, the Marian Towers Property Manager, to a February resident party for the check presentation.

Sunny Isles Beach Mayor George “Bud” Scholl commented, “We are so pleased to see the support that Marian Towers extends to our senior residents. In turn, we are pleased to provide this donation on behalf of the City to assist with these important initiatives.” The City will be working with the property management to provide improved programming including computer training and other collaborations to benefit the more that 250 senior residents of our City. When asked how the donation will benefit the residents, Ada Hernandez and Juana D. Mejia, V.P. of Housing Development & Operations / Catholic Housing Management explained, “We are using the donation to purchase a projector for movie nights and to set up a computer in the common area, to enable residents who do not have online access to learn and have better communication with their relatives, the Social Security Administration and other entities.”

Ada emphasized that this donation does not merely benefit the residents of Marian Towers. Their friends, who are all neighbors and Sunny Isles Beach residents, are always welcome to join in their programs. Luis and Ada are very grateful for this donation which will directly benefit our residents. Recognizing that ‘seniors’ are an evolving demographic where younger, more active retirees’ are soon to be our new target audience in this programming block, the City will be looking at new and fresh opportunities to offer them.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City of Sunny Isles Beach (FL)

November 1, 2016

Evaluating Our Hurricane Preparation

Author: George “Bud” Scholl

We were very lucky to have such a powerful storm, in close proximity of our coast line, resulting with minimal issues. However, we were still very prepared. Even though Miami-Dade County never officially came under a Hurricane Warning (we were under a Tropical Storm Warning), given that the county line just above Golden Beach was the southern edge of the Hurricane Warning zone, we still needed to be vigilant. As an individual home owner, there is a lot to do to prepare for a hurricane. As a City, proper preparation is a very big challenge.

Our Building and Code Enforcement Departments need to ensure that all construction sites and single-family homes are secure. This includes mitigating the potential for flying debris, making sure cranes are properly cared for and fencing is secured. I am pleased to report that our Building Official, Clay Parker, his staff, and Code Enforcement did a great job in getting to these sites early to verify they would not create problems. Our Cultural & Community Services team has to deal with securing the parks and public spaces that we enjoy. This includes removing canopies, removing benches and securing equipment. Susan Simpson and her staff had everything taken care of in preparation for the storm. Our Public Works staff have to deal with securing equipment, ensuring our drainage systems are prepared for the onslaught of rain and dealing with securing our public buildings. Rob Williamson and the rest of our Public Works folks had everything prepared and protected.

During storm preparedness, especially when we face mandatory evacuations, law enforcement is a key component to keeping people safe. Our officers were out on extra shift duty before, during and after the storm. Fortunately, we had no material incidents, however the level of engagement and visibility that was demonstrated by Chief Maas and his team ensured we all remained safe and secure. Every preparedness planning effort needs a leader and in the case of our City, this is the City Manager, **Chris Russo**. He stayed in constant coordination with the various staff members throughout the event. On the day of the storm **Chris** and I rode throughout the City to check on everyone and determine any damage assessments. We have the added benefit of our City Manager living within our City, so **Chris** ensures that our collective home is well taken care of. Fortunately, Hurricane Matthew spared us. Due to a dedicated and proactive team of professionals, the City of Sunny Isles Beach hoped for the best, but was prepared for the worst!

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

City of Sunny Isles Beach (FL)
April 1, 2016

Utility Live Undergrounding Project to Commence in Sunny Isles Beach

Author: Unknown

Starting Sunday night, April 3, 2016, Sunny Isles Beach contractors will commence work to underground electric distribution and other utility lines along the City's major thoroughfare, State Road A1A, also known as Collins Avenue. This will require the closure of 2 southbound lanes of Collins Avenue, leaving one lane open, between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 6:30 a.m. between 159 Street and the southern border of the City at Haulover Park for the first week. The project will move north from there. Visit www.sibfl.net/alerts for weekly closure updates.

“We understand that this project is going to inconvenience our residents and visitors for the short term, but the long-term benefits will far exceed this temporary disruption,” said City Manager **Christopher Russo**. “We have been planning this for quite some time and have contracted with experienced and knowledgeable contractors to ensure that this project runs as smoothly as any project of this magnitude can,” **Russo** continues, “work will be performed at night to minimize the disruption to the daily lives of our residents as much as possible.”

Moving electrical and telecommunications lines from overhead to underground is a huge endeavor. It takes years of planning and cost millions of dollars. The benefit is a safer city. With power lines underground, they are not susceptible to damage from storms with high winds, car accidents, falling tree branches or other mishaps. Additionally, there is an aesthetic advantage of removing unnecessary poles and cables from city streets.

In Sunny Isles Beach this project has been in the design and permitting phase and is now breaking ground. During this phase, contractors will be closing lanes of traffic to dig trenches to lay the conduit (large pipes) under Collins Avenue / State Road A1A. This work will be performed at night between 9:00 p.m. and 6:30 a.m., 5 days a week, excluding Friday & Saturday. Both northbound and southbound traffic will be open but will be limited.

This phase of the project, scheduled to start in April, will last approximately one year. Work will start at the south end of the City and work north. This is the most disruptive phase of the project for the public. Residents and visitors are advised to plan their travels accordingly. Once this phase is complete, the actual power and communication lines will be pulled through the conduit and conversion to live service can be transferred to the underground utility lines. The final phase of the Collins Avenue portion will include the removal of all unnecessary overhead poles and wires and the installation of new decorative street lighting including provisions for seasonal banners. The final phase of this decade long project will be to underground the utilities in the Golden Shores neighborhood. This area is currently in the planning stages.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Miami Herald (FL)
October 3, 2015

In Sunny Isles Beach Condo Blast, Cleanup Continues

Author: Michael Vasquez

Traffic is back to normal, all of the injured have been released from the hospital and the cleanup is underway. That was the update from Sunny Isles Beach Mayor George "Bud" Scholl on Saturday — a day after a blew out big chunks of the 34th floor at Château Beach Residences, a just-completed waterfront luxury condo tower. "The two burn victims were released this morning," Scholl said. "They had second-degree burns. It wasn't as bad as we originally thought it was." Miami-Dade Fire-Rescue has said a total of six people were injured in the blast, which is believed to have been caused by a gas explosion. They included construction workers, two county firefighters and, according to the mayor, a guest who was on the pool deck at the next-door Monaco Resort hotel.

Witness account of explosion at Sunny Isles Beach condo tower Aldo Mottolese, who lives next door to the Chateau Beach Residences in Sunny Isles Beach, describes the explosion. "The debris fell on the Monaco ... he got hit by debris," Scholl said. After being treated for minor injuries at the hospital, the man was released, city officials said. Still unclear: when the still-dangling slab of concrete hanging off of the Château tower will be removed. The slab has now been tied down with cables that are welded to the building, but it remains enough of a concern that the Monaco hotel remains evacuated for the foreseeable future. Initially, city officials and the construction firm, Coastal Construction, were discussing bringing in a temporary crane to remove the hanging slab, but that plan ran into a hiccup Saturday afternoon.

As Scholl was speaking with the Miami Herald, City Manager **Christopher Russo** walked over to inform him that engineers at Coastal's office are now saying a 500-ton crane won't be big enough. "They're proposing an 800-ton crane," **Russo** said. That would require bringing in the crane from out of state, and assembling it next to the condo tower, at a city park. "We're talking for, like, three weeks, or more," **Russo** said. **Russo** and the mayor were lukewarm to that idea. The solution to removing the hanging concrete, the city manager said, is "to be determined."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Tampa Bay Times (FL)
October 2, 2015

GUN RANGE PLAN UPSETS NEIGHBORS

Author/Byline: Barbara Behrendt

Christopher Russo is doing what any other businessman does. He has found a niche to fill, developed a business plan and, in the final analysis, hopes to serve the community and put food on his family's table. But **Russo's** plan is not going over well with his potential new neighbors near the gated Glen Lakes community, off U.S. 19 north of Weeki Wachee. "We are looking at opening a gun store and outdoor gun range," **Russo** said. "Our first and foremost goal and agenda is the safety of the community."

In August, **Russo** submitted his application to county planners to rezone a 3.75-acre parcel north of Long Lake Avenue, just south of Glen Lakes, from agricultural to planned development project recreational. As part of the process, he convened a community meeting last month to discuss his plan and answer questions. The session wasn't what **Russo** expected. "It was like a public lynching," he said.

Ever since word of the proposal got out, county commissioners have been inundated with letters from nearby residents voicing concerns that they and their children and pets would be in danger and that their peaceful way of life - without the constant sound of gunfire - would be destroyed.

"We purchased a 5-acre property in this peaceful and tranquil area to get away from the hectic, busy world," wrote Richard Todd Lazar and Melanie Cheri Lazar. "As an agricultural community, it was guaranteed that we would not have commercial and industrial impacts upon our residence. "Adding a noisy commercial gun range destroyed the exact reason why we chose to live here in Hernando County. That in turn impacts my ability to sell and the value of my property over all."

Diane Malone, a 24-year teacher, urged commissioners to vote no on **Russo's** proposal. "Children live in our neighborhood. They bicycle, fish, and the adults as well are outdoors walking their dogs past the proposed gun range," Malone wrote. "This is a huge concern for myself and our neighbors. It is not a neighborhood-friendly operation, and I plead with you to understand and stop this rezoning."

Jim Engelage, a retired military officer who is not opposed to guns, does object to having a gun range so close to Glen Lakes. "Apparently, the person proposing this outdoor gun range believes he has friends on the commission as he has already begun to construct a berm on the property," Engelage wrote. "A berm might be a physical barrier for some rounds, but it does not prevent the noise pollution that would certainly accompany even small arms fire."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Oliver and Glenna Akers took a different approach. "My family does not criticize without offering a solution," they wrote. "Instead of permitting a shooting range in our back yard, which is one mile south of Glen Lakes, move it to one of your back yards."

Russo said he is following every rule presented to him by the county to ensure that the range is in complete compliance with zoning laws and codes. He noted that the people who came to his public meeting were all from areas outside the 250-foot radius around the project where the county requires an applicant to notify those affected. He said he believes the public has a right to protest, but "I'm going to defend my constitutional Second Amendment rights."

Regulating anything related to firearms at the local level has proven tricky because Florida Statutes reserve for the state Legislature all forms of regulation of firearms and ammunition. Any public official who knowingly and willfully violates that rule by enacting a local regulation faces a \$5,000 civil fine, which cannot be paid with public money, and the person could be removed from public office by the governor, according to state law.

In early 2012, the County Commission reluctantly granted a permit for a man to sell guns from his Spring Hill home after County Attorney Garth Collier strongly cautioned commissioners against denying the application. At the time, Collier told the commission the statute lacked any wiggle room. "Never have I seen a more crystal clear preemption in my life," Collier told commissioners. "It's crystal clear (state lawmakers) don't want any fingers in this subject."

County planners are still working on **Russo's** application, and no date has yet been set for a hearing before the Planning and Zoning Commission. The County Commission will have the final say on the rezoning.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/aventura/article29549260.html>

Miami Herald
July 30, 2015

Sunny Isles Beach commission proposes lowering city's tax rate again

Author: Kathleen DeVaney

For the fourth consecutive year, the city of Sunny Isles Beach is proposing to lower the property tax rate for the upcoming 2015-16 fiscal year.

THE PROPOSAL

The city commission has proposed lowering the tax rate to \$2.50 per \$1,000 of taxable property value.

IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS

Under the proposed rate, the owner of a median condo valued at about \$241,000 would pay about \$482 in property taxes, which is about \$14 less than last year. This assumes the owner qualified for the standard homestead exemption and the home's assessed value increased by 0.8 percent, the maximum allowed by law this year for an owner-occupied home. The city will likely not raise that rate any higher as the budget season goes on, but it can be lowered or remain the same. "I'm pretty confident that it [the tax rate] will stand as already decided by the commission," City Manager **Chris Russo** said.

IMPACT ON SERVICES

According to the city's administration, although the tax rate is being lowered again, the growth in the city's tax revenue is what will allow the same services to be provided. Additionally, the city won't have to tap into its reserve funds.

WHAT THE CITY MANAGER SAYS "We are steadily improving the quality of our services in addition to our facilities," **Russo** said, explaining that the city is in the process of completing capital projects over the next few years. Recently, the city completed the Intracoastal Park system along Collins Avenue and is also about to complete Gateway Park along Sunny Isles Beach Boulevard. Additionally, the city acquired property next to City Hall, which is planned to be a mixed-use building for the Norman S. Edelcup K-8 School, as well as the Sunny Isles Beach Civic and Senior Center.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: To view the entire case, please follow the link below.]
<https://www.leagle.com/decision/innyco20150429575>

<https://www.leagle.com/decision/innyco20150429575>

MATTER OF RYTELEWSKI v. RUSSO

2013-07469, Index No. 15899/10.

127 A.D.3d 1207 (2015)

9 N.Y.S.3d 85

2015 NY Slip Op 03543

In the Matter of STEPHEN RYTELEWSKI, Appellant, v. **CHRISTOPHER J. RUSSO**, as Village Manager of the Village of Port Chester, New York, et al., Respondents.

Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York, Second Department.

Decided April 29, 2015.

In a proceeding pursuant to CPLR article 78 to review a determination of the Village Manager of the Village of Port Chester dated May 13, 2010, which denied the petitioner's administrative appeal and affirmed a decision, made after a hearing, finding the petitioner guilty of 16 charges of misconduct and imposing a penalty, the petitioner appeals from a judgment of the Supreme Court, Westchester County (Hubert, J.), dated June 13, 2013, which denied the petition and dismissed the proceeding.

[127 A.D.3d 1208]

Ordered that the appeal is dismissed, and the judgment is vacated; and it is further,

Adjudged that the determination dated May 13, 2010, is confirmed, the petition is denied, and the proceeding is dismissed on the merits; and it is further,

Ordered that one bill of costs is awarded to the respondents.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Miami Herald (FL)
September 25, 2014

Sunny Isles Beach Approves 2015 Budget

Author: Allison Horton

Sunny Isles Beach commissioners on Tuesday gave their final approval to a \$76 million city budget for the upcoming fiscal year that shifts away from capital projects to providing "world class services and maintenance" to its residents. The new 2015 budget is smaller than the current budget of \$93 million. The 2014 budget included at least \$40 million for the construction of major one-time projects such as Gateway Park at 18115 North Bay Road and two pedestrian bridges in the city. Gateway Park, which will include restaurants, a water feature and a theater stage, is expected to be complete in March 2015, and both bridges are expected to begin construction this year. The 2015 budget year starts Oct. 1. The new budget does include \$2 million of an estimated \$2.5 million for the redesign of the Gilbert Samson Oceanfront Park at 17425 Collins Ave. About \$500,000 was already earmarked in the 2014 budget.

The renovation of Samson Park includes expansion of bathrooms, creation of a new covered platform performance area and playground, and new electrical and sewer systems, **Russo** said. Construction is expected to begin in May and be completed at the end of 2015. As the capital projects are completed, the focus of Sunny Isles Beach will shift to providing "world class services and maintenance" for at least the next five years, **Russo** said. This goal resulted in a 9 percent increase in operating expenses to \$49.3 million compared to last year's \$42.9 million.

The 2015 budget also includes an increase in the city's reserves for emergencies and other contingencies to nearly \$19 million from this year's \$13 million, **Russo** said. About \$1 million of this year's reserves were used to repair an emergency seawall that collapsed in August behind the Intracoastal Park at 16100 Collins Ave, **Russo** said. "That has never happened in the history of the city," **Russo** said. "That is the first time the city manager had to spend that kind of money since the city was formed during the month the commission is on recess," said **Russo**, adding the commission ratified the expense after the session resumed. "This was an emergency repair that we had to initiate."

The commissioners also approved a tax rate of \$2.60 per \$1,000 in assessed home value, down slightly from this year's \$2.70. This is expected to generate almost \$19 million, compared to last year's \$17.7 million. The Miami-Dade County property appraiser assessed Sunny Isles Beach property values at \$7.679 billion compared to \$6.736 billion last year. However, the assessed value of an owner-occupied home or condominium can go up no more than 1.5 percent this year because of limits in the state constitution. The city's nearly 14 percent, or \$800 million, increase in assessed value is due mainly to increase in property value and not new construction, City Manager **Chris Russo** said. "That is pretty incredible [considering] we have 15 projects in some stage of development in the city," **Russo** said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Miami Herald (FL)
April 7, 2014

Sunny Isles May Sue Condo Over Land for Bridge

Author: Allison Horton

Sunny Isles Beach commissioners may sue to force the sale of a small piece of property needed for a bridge, unless officials can negotiate a deal first. The City Commission adopted a resolution last week authorizing eminent domain proceedings if negotiations break down with the Porto Bellagio condominium, 17100 North Bay Rd.

In 2001, the city approved Porto Bellagio with the condition that the condo give the city a 20-foot-wide easement along the entire property to accommodate a bridge. The bridge would carry North Bay Road across a canal that separates 74th Street from 172nd Street, said City Manager **Christopher Russo**. "The bridge will be primarily used for pedestrians and bicycles and in the event of an emergency it could be used for vehicles if there was a total blockage on Collins or emergency vehicles," **Russo** said.

Now the city is seeking an additional 72 square feet of land for the easement. That property wasn't called for in the original agreement. An easement remains the property of the owner but gives the city the right to travel upon it. The city says it needs the land so fire trucks will have enough room to turn around. The approved resolution authorizes the city to negotiate "voluntary acquisition" or initiate eminent domain proceedings to force the issue. The city also wants the removal of electric boxes constructed on the easement. "They should not have been put there in the beginning," **Russo** said.

At a previous commission meeting, on March 20, City Attorney Hans Ottinot said he'd made oral and email requests to the condo board about the easement agreement but had not received any response. The commissioners decided then to hold off authorizing a lawsuit after Tucker Gibbs, an attorney for the Porto Bellagio stated that his client was "mystified" about the city threatening to sue and the first time they heard of the city's request was in an email the preceding week.

Gibbs said at the March 20 meeting that the electrical boxes have been in place before the city acquired the easement and the city was aware of the boxes. He also stated the condo board needed an official letter seeking the movement of the boxes before the issue could be discussed amongst the condo board. Ottinot said at the March 20 meeting that it was the first time the condo had asked for a formal letter, which occurred after the property manager of the condo was shown the resolution seeking legal proceedings.

A formal letter has since been sent to the Porto Bellagio but the city hasn't received a response. The condo board is meeting this week to discuss only the movement of the electric boxes and will respond to the city after the meeting, Gibbs said. Although the city has dropped off documents about the additional "sliver" of land needed for the easement, Gibbs said there hasn't been a formal request asking for additional property.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
October 3, 2013

Sunny Isles Beach approves small tax cut

Author/Byline: Elizabeth de Armas

Sunny Isles Beach commissioners have unanimously agreed to cut the property tax rate by 10 cents. Residents will pay \$2.70 per \$1,000 of taxable value for the 2013-14 fiscal year, which begins Tuesday. This year, residents paid \$2.80 per \$1,000.

The longtime owner of a condo assessed at \$150,000 would pay about \$277, or \$3 less than this year. That assumes the homeowner qualifies for the standard \$50,000 homestead exemption and that the condo's assessed value increased by 1.7 percent - this year's state limit.

At the second budget hearing, which took place Sept. 26, commissioners also unanimously voted to adopt an operating and capital improvement budget for 2013-14.

Christopher Russo, the city manager, said there were no comments made by the public that would change the budget from the date it was tentatively adopted on Sept. 17.

Sunny Isles Mayor, Norman Edelcup, says he hopes the city will end the year with another surplus and continue lowering the tax rate on an annual basis, assuming the market value of properties continues increasing.

The next commission meeting will be held on Oct. 17 at 6:30 p.m. at the Sunny Isles Beach Government Center, 18070 Collins Ave.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Christopher J. Russo** is listed below.]

Miami Herald, The (FL)
July 2, 2013

PROPERTY TAXES - Miami-Dade tax roll up sharply - While most municipalities in Miami-Dade County posted growth in their property-tax rolls for 2013, a few areas are still struggling.

Author/Byline: Martha Brannigan

Miami-Dade County's property-tax base rose 3.39 percent for 2013, marking the second consecutive year of growth after the great real-estate crash that crippled the region's economy and forced many local governments into painful downsizing. But the recovery remained spotty across the sprawling and diverse county, with some municipalities posting big gains and others still seeing their tax base shrink.

Miami-Dade Property Appraiser Carlos Lopez-Cantera said Monday the overall taxable value of county real estate at the end of last year was \$197,133,835,984. That countywide taxable value turned out to be a bit better than a June 1 estimate from the property appraiser, which put growth at 3.1 percent.

The July 1 preliminary certification of taxable values enables cities and other taxing authorities such as the School Board and the Children's Trust to set their budgets for the 2013-14 year and to decide on proposed property tax rates. But they are sort of stale news for those interested in current market values. "These values are not the best to determine what your property is worth," said Lopez-Cantera, noting assessments are based on prior-year values. "Today's real estate activity won't be reflected until 2014."

Among other big winners was Sunny Isles Beach, where fancy high-rise condominiums dominate the skyline and taxable value jumped 10.32 percent year over year to \$6.90 billion for 2013, both from increasing values of existing properties and some new construction.

"We've got some of the finest, highest quality luxury condos going up in the country," **Christopher Russo**, Sunny Isles' city manager, said. "It's not a surprise. We are fortunate in where we are located."

Russo said staff is still working on the next fiscal year's budget, but some of the extra revenues would be used to finance existing capital improvement projects such as the Gateway Park, Intracoastal Park, an emergency pedestrian bridge running north-south between 174th and 172nd streets and upgrades for Samson Oceanfront Park. The bigger tax base will also be used to decrease the tax rate, he predicted.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Christopher J. Russo** is listed below.]

Miami's Community News (FL)
December 21, 2012

Holiday Cheer

Author: Bari Auerbach

‘CHEER FOR GREAT LEADERS’

City Manager **Christopher Russo** has also returned to his post (as of Oct. 15). **Russo** formerly served as City Manager from 2000-2005.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Port Chester Daily Voice (NY)
April 30, 2012

Port Chester Trustees Decrease Property Tax Levy

Author/Byline: Luke Lavoie

While some village governments fight to stay within the new 2 percent property tax levy cap, the Port Chester Village Board of Trustees adopted a budget that decreases the property tax levy for the second year in a row on Monday with a vote of 5-1, with Trustee Bart Didden as the dissenting vote. Trustee John Branca, who has been suffering from an illness for months, was absent. The board's adopted budget decreases the levy by 0.28 percent, bringing the total levy number down to \$21,896,467. The village's total operating budget for 2012-13 stands at \$36,219,672.

The original tentative budget filed by Village Manager **Chris Russo** in March called for a 2.4 percent increase in the property tax levy, the maximum allowable levy increase under the 2 percent tax cap. Going into a budget workshop last Thursday, the board, through weeks of work sessions, trimmed expenditures and decreased the levy by half to 1.20 percent. Included in both the tentative budget and the adopted budget is a new sewer rental system that is estimated to save the average homeowner \$105 in its first year.

The board ultimately passed 28 amendments to **Russo's** original tentative budget, including a \$134,750 reduction in the amount budgeted for November's elections. Also among the expenditure cuts was the elimination of a \$23,000 increase for the Port Chester-Rye Brook Library's operating budget. Many members of the library board and staff attended and asked the board to reconsider. "What we asked the village for is not what we want but we need," library Board member Lisa Simon said. "If we don't get an increase from Port Chester, we will have to make big cuts." In response, the board passed an amendment appropriating an additional \$60,000 into the contingency budget, which is used at the board's discretion and would consider giving some of that to the library.

Overall, the board passed 21 expenditure decreases, six expenditure increases, one revenue decrease and several revenue increases totaling \$62,200. The total decrease in expenditures from the tentative budget totaled \$527,228.

Trustee Sam Terenzi, an experienced municipal tax accountant, said he was proud of the board's ability to come up with, what he called, a tight budget. "I've done a lot of this over a long period of time," Terenzi said. "I would put this board up with any board in the county as it relates to the financial acumen we have. I'm proud of the guys here and I think we've done a good job." Terenzi also said the board has been able to reduce the village's long term debt from \$36 million to \$31 million. Mayor Dennis Pilla said he was proud of the board's ability to put aside partisanship and construct the best budget for the village. "This is an example of a board that's putting the village ahead of politics," Pilla said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Voice (NY)
April 19, 2012

A Plan to Spend \$40,000 to Hire a Third Judge was Debated as the Port Chester Board of Trustees Held a Budget Work Session Wednesday with the Village Justice Department
Author: Unknown

The Justice Department will need another judge to help process the anticipated increase in building code enforcement cases as the village brings its crumbling infrastructure up to code, Village Manager **Chris Russo** said. Village Justice Matthew Troy said the department does not need a third justice now but will soon. Does the work today require three judges? No, but there will come a time when that happens," Troy said. "We have to be prepared because it could explode overnight, and once the cycle gets going, it's like a snowball rolling down a hill."

The recommended budget proposes an increase of \$80,000 in personnel services for the Justice Department in 2012-13 and an overall increase of \$100,000. According to **Russo**, the addition of a third judge would account for about \$40,000 in spending, with another \$40,000 for part-time court clerks. The discussion centered on whether a justice could be added in a tight budget. Ultimately, the board did not reach a decision. It has until May 1 to decide on the position and all other matters pertaining to the 2012-13 budget.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Port Chester Patch (NY)
April 5, 2011

Sarcastic Salvos: Terenzi Returns to Old Form During Budget Meeting
Some trustees are falling back to familiar political territory after last month's mayoral election.

Author: Nik Bonopartis

After listening to almost an hour of talk about tax levies and fund balances, most of the dozen or so residents who turned out to Monday night's budget meeting sagged in their chairs or propped themselves on their elbows, waiting for their chance to speak. Some trustees even stared off into space as Village Manager **Christopher Russo** flipped through a presentation of graphs, pie charts and number-heavy lists. But Trustee Sam Terenzi, an accountant in his day job, was not put to sleep by the numbers. He listened attentively, until he heard **Russo** utter the words he'd been waiting for. "...fourteen percent tax rate increase..." "I don't think I heard you say that!" a delighted Terenzi said, interrupting **Russo**. "You started mumbling over that number a little bit." A handful of residents suddenly perked up, chuckling.

The proposed \$36 million budget -- a hike of more than \$1.2 million over this year's budget -- would result in a small tax levy increase, but an effective 14.7 percent tax rate increase. That was the point Terenzi kept driving home during the first budget meeting of a nearly month-long process. "You keep evading the issue, **Chris**," Terenzi said in a subsequent exchange. "It's the tax rate, not the tax levy." Despite the absence of Mayor Dennis Pilla, Terenzi's favorite sparring partner, Monday's meeting marked the first time in months that the Republican trustee launched into his trademark outbursts. "Over the last couple of months, I have toned down my style. I didn't want to interfere with the mayoral campaign," Terenzi explained this weekend in a comment on Port Chester Patch. "I wanted to make sure there was a level playing field and not distract from the issues that were being discussed during the campaign."

Since voters chose to give Pilla a third term in last month's mayoral election and most of the campaign signs have been plucked from village lawns, some board members have fallen back to the familiar political territory they occupied before the campaign. For Terenzi, that means often being the loudest -- and most sarcastic -- voice among the board's four-vote Republican-Conservative bloc. While other board members and a visiting county legislator were quick to blame New York State for Port Chester's cash woes, Terenzi instead elected to keep hammering **Russo**, who trails only Pilla as the target of Terenzi's sarcasm. Unlike Pilla, **Russo** rarely retorts; usually, he picks up where he left off, ignoring Terenzi's interruptions.

Later in the meeting, Terenzi asked **Russo** to talk him through an alternate plan that would avoid an immediate tax increase by shifting long-term debt. Terenzi cut in again, turning to the people in the small courtroom. "**Chris** went to the same creative accounting course that I went to in 1978," Terenzi said. "I don't think he passed, though." The last time Terenzi gave **Russo** an earful, it was after a series of meetings where he'd publicly berated other high-visibility employees, including former Recreation Superintendent Thomas Hroncich and Treasurer Leonie

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Douglas. In late August, barely two months into the new board's term, residents pushed back, describing the trustee's style as "disgusting" and "embarrassing."

This time around, there was no sign of that outrage: not only has it been months since the community has seen a Terenzian outburst, but the general tone of the residents indicated most agreed with the Republican trustee, even if they don't agree with his self-described "style." "The minimum this board needs to do is make sure that the average house does not have a \$216 increase," said Richard Abel, a resident and publisher of the Westmore News. "Whether or not you can get it down 14 percent, as John [Branca] said, might be a disservice to the community as a whole and might be a gutting of services." As **Russo** closed the last slide on his presentation Monday night, another trustee thanked the manager for his report, and Terenzi saw an opportunity for one last bit of sarcasm. "Thank you," Terenzi said, "for the 15 percent increase, Mr. **Russo**."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Port Chester Patch (NY)
March 17, 2011

Trustees Certify Mayoral Election, Quiz Manager on SUV Purchase
Tuesday night's election results were made official during a special meeting Thursday night.

Author: Nik Bonopartis

Port Chester's trustees certified this week's mayoral election without much discussion Thursday night. Blink and you could have missed it. "You've got me for another two years," Mayor Dennis Pilla said after apologizing for presiding over the meeting in what he called "casual attire" – a white dress shirt under a cream-colored jacket. Five of six trustees were present for the canvass of the vote, making Tuesday night's results official. Republican Joe Kenner was absent from the meeting. The only real discussion during the meeting was related to the single item on the agenda – approval for the purchase of a Ford Expedition, to be used by the DPW's acting general foreman.

Trustee Bart Didden questioned Village Manager **Christopher Russo** on why the village was purchasing the 2011 Expedition XL SSV from an East Hanover, NJ, company instead of from nearby Rye Ford, which employs several Port Chester residents. **Russo** told Didden that the New Jersey company, Warnock Fleet, currently has a contract with New York State. Since the company deals exclusively with municipalities, it's able to offer vehicles at a lower cost. The Expedition will cost the village \$26,620.85. It will be used to transport personnel and goods, and will be outfitted with a plow during the winter months. Didden voted against the resolution to approve the purchase; Pilla and trustees Sam Terenzi, John Branca, Daniel Brakewood and Luis Marino voted in favor of the purchase.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Port Chester Patch (NY)
October 5, 2010

Russo Has a Change of Heart, Announces He'll Stay as Port Chester's Manager
Village Manager Christopher Russo rescinded his September resignation on Monday, telling the mayor and trustees that he'll remain in the post through the end of this year.

Author: Nik Bonopartis

Port Chester won't have to look for a new village manager – at least until the end of the year. On a night when trustees were expected to hammer out the search for a new manager, Mayor Dennis Pilla announced **Christopher Russo** would remain in Port Chester's top non-elected post. "He advised the board today that he intends to rescind his letter of resignation, that is to say at least until year end," the mayor said. Next up? Renegotiations. The board will meet in executive session – which is closed to the public – on Oct. 12, when they'll talk to **Russo** about keeping his \$194,000-a-year job past the new year.

Russo's resignation in early September threw the board into upheaval, with a round of finger-pointing over who was to blame. **Russo** himself remained mostly mum, saying only that he was dissatisfied with the pace of progress in the village. Residents and former trustees blamed the board after **Russo** found himself on the receiving end of what observers called "childish" verbal abuse. Trustee Sam Terenzi was blamed for berating professional staff – including Recreation Superintendent Thomas Hroncich and Treasurer Leonie Douglas – at meetings, but four board members backed Terenzi and shifted the blame to Pilla.

That group of trustees – which includes Terenzi, Joseph Kenner, Bart Didden, John Branca and Luis Marino – was "looking forward to replacing Mr. **Russo** as soon as possible," according to a statement attributed to Didden. Now they'll have to live with him until at least 2011. With **Russo** back on board, Port Chester avoids a change in command and turbulence during already hectic times. Officials are trying to find millions to pay for a new sea wall to replace the crumbling bulkhead, and at least a million more for sewer repairs. In the meantime, police are investigating mass theft from the village's parking meters and allegations of bribery in the building department, and both department heads in those cases have resigned in disgrace.

Calling off the search for a new manager – at least in the short term – is one less thing Port Chester's elected officials have to worry about, and for that they seemed grateful. "I think what's in the best interest of the village at this point is stability," Trustee Daniel Brakewood said. "I want to appreciate you and say how much I'm glad you have agreed to stay on, at least through the year."

CORRECTION: Village Manager **Christopher Russo** will meet with the board on Oct. 12 to discuss his contract. An earlier version of this story incorrectly listed the wrong month.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Port Chester Patch (NY)
September 29, 2010

Port Chester Spared Hearing, Legal Fees After DPW Chief's Resignation
Former DPW supervisor Gary Racaniello waived his right to a hearing – but not his civil service benefits – when he resigned last week.

Author: Nik Bonopartis

The resignation of Port Chester's embattled former DPW chief last week saved the village a drawn-out hearing process – and potentially tens of thousands of dollars in fees for attorneys and mediators. Gary Racaniello, foreman of Port Chester's Department of Public Works, is the first public employee targeted thus far in a pair of investigations into systematic theft from Port Chester's parking meters. Racaniello was suspended without pay on Sept. 14 and faced 36 disciplinary charges, then resigned last week.

If Racaniello – who worked his way up to DPW supervisor after starting as a garbage man two decades ago – had chosen to fight the charges, the village would have been forced to hire a hearing officer and the process could have dragged on for months. Racaniello's resignation "saves us a lot of money in lawyers and hearing officers," said Village Manager **Christopher Russo**. Although it's impossible to say how long the hearings would have stretched, **Russo** said the process could have cost Port Chester as much as \$30,000 in legal fees.

The village collects about \$500,000 a year from its meters, and began quietly looking into the collection process in June after getting tipped off that employees from the Department of Public Works may have been pocketing the meter cash. Since then, Port Chester police and the Westchester County District Attorney's Office have been conducting a criminal investigation, while an administrative investigation was carried out by staff at village hall. As investigators comb receipts, bank deposits and other records, a private company, Central Parking Systems, has temporarily taken over meter collections with a four-month, \$45,000 contract from the village.

In early August, Port Chester released preliminary data showing a marked increase in over two weeks of supervised collections. The two-week sample size was reported and extrapolated in some media reports, with one estimate claiming the stolen money could amount to "millions." While there's little evidence behind those estimates, new data from the investigation shows that in June, July and August, Port Chester collected \$40,000 more than it had over the same three-month stretch last year. Officials don't believe all of that can be attributed to theft, since more than 100 of the village's 750 parking meters were broken or awaiting replacement until recently, but the numbers do give a clearer picture of how much money was pocketed.

If all metered parking spaces were occupied at every hour of the day, the village could potentially collect up to \$1.4 million in parking meter revenue. "Even at 50 percent usage, you're talking about a number of \$700,000," said Trustee Sam Terenzi. "Is it possible the village could be doing \$650,000 or \$700,000? Yeah." A larger data sample should paint a more accurate picture of the scale of the thefts, while correcting for seasonal aberrations, construction projects

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

that closed metered lots and other compounding factors. "As we go further on, the numbers'll really get solid, and you'll really be able to look, year over year, over all the seasons," Terenzi said. "It's still an evolving situation."

On Sept. 21, Terenzi met with officials from the district attorney's Public Integrity Bureau. Investigators asked Terenzi about the timing of a resolution to eliminate Lombardi's position. A story in Monday's Journal News notes Terenzi put forth the resolution "the day after Racaniello's suspension." But Terenzi said "one thing has nothing to do with the other." He said he had been in talks with other trustees to eliminate Lombardi's \$79,000 position as a cost-cutting measure, and decided to wait on the resolution because they didn't want to interrupt Lombardi's ongoing administrative investigation. The trustees pulled the resolution over unsettled legal questions about Lombardi's civil service status, he said.

Some village hall employees have anonymously floated the idea that Terenzi was trying to disrupt the investigation, and it's likely the district attorney's investigators heard the same allegations. Sounding exasperated, Terenzi said he doesn't know how the accusations could have merit when the police and prosecutors are conducting their own separate investigation. "The district attorney seems to be on the case and seems to be motivated to get to the bottom line, and that's their job," he said. "But that's not going to deter us from doing what we have to do with Lombardi or anyone else we feel is a luxury we can't afford right now

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Posted in Government & Politics, Port Chester, Rye Brook, Rye Town (NY)
September 2, 2010

Port Chester Village Manager Christopher Russo Resigns

Author: Leah Rae

Port Chester Village Manager **Christopher Russo** has announced his resignation, Mayor Dennis Pilla said this afternoon. **Russo** came to Port Chester two years ago under a three-year contract.

He has given advance notice beyond the 60 days called for under the contract, according to the mayor. “It’s unfortunate for Port Chester,” Pilla said. **Russo** was Rye Brook’s administrator in the 1990s. In 2000, he moved to Florida, where he was city manager for Sunny Isles Beach, outside Miami.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

South Florida Sun Sentinel (FL)

June 15, 2008

Ranches, Pines Feud Over Roadways Is Resurfacing

Author: Joe Kollin

The wounds that were slowly healing may be starting to fester again. Southwest Ranches officials have asked Pembroke Pines to revise the December 2005 contract that ended their feud over road barricades. But angry Pembroke Pines commissioners refused to send a response. "They [Southwest Ranches] have not done much of anything they were supposed to do," Commissioner Iris Siple said. "Now they're asking us to do something with nothing coming back to us. It's still neighbor fighting neighbor."

To head off a new battle, Pembroke Pines City Manager Charles F. Dodge and Southwest Ranches Town Administrator **Chris Russo** have been trying to arrange a meeting. In early 2005, Southwest Ranches erected barricades at its border on Southwest 199th, 202nd and 205th avenues as a way to protect its semi-rural neighborhoods from outside drivers trying to reach Griffin Road. After a nasty feud and under threat of a lawsuit, the town agreed to remove the barricades if Pembroke Pines helped pay to extend Southwest 54th Place from 205th to 210th Terrace, which would provide an alternate route to Griffin Road. Southwest Ranches removed the barricades but did not build the extension. Now it's asking to build two blocks less than what the contract calls for. Instead of extending 54th Place west to 210th Terrace, it wants to go only to 208th Lane. "The original agreement made no sense," said **Russo**, who wasn't working for the town at the time. "With 208th going out to Griffin, there was no point building a [longer] road." Besides, he said, the land needed for the extension isn't as easily available as both municipalities had thought.

The contract also called for Pembroke Pines to build a bridge linking new and old Sheridan streets at 136th Avenue. That's because in 2005, the town let its residents block worshippers from reaching Abundant Living Ministries on Southwest 142nd Avenue on Sunday mornings. Although the church is in Pembroke Pines, the only access is through Southwest Ranches. The agreement said Southwest Ranches would handle all issues involving wetlands that could be lost because of the bridge. Work on both projects was to be completed by May 1, 2007. However, none of it is done, and the deadline - extended twice - is up in the air.

Pembroke Pines says it can't do its part without a replacement wetlands site that Southwest Ranches was to provide. **Russo**, however, said Pembroke Pines didn't want the wetlands site near the church. Now, state regulators have said the replacement wetlands must be near the church. The two sides can't agree where. "We're in an abatement mode while we explore our options," Pembroke Pines City Attorney Sam Goren said. "There is no doubt from a legal standpoint that the agreement will have to be revised," Southwest Ranches Deputy Town Attorney Keith Poliakoff said. "It's readily apparent both sides are in violation, so it is vitally important to maintain a dialogue so [the agreement] can be amended to take into account the needs of both municipalities."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Christopher J. Russo** is listed below.]

Sun Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, FL)
May 8, 2008

COMMUNITY NEWS ROUNDUP

Author/Byline: Sun-Sentinel and Forum Publishing Group

Southwest Ranches
Town ready to switch fire service to Sheriff's Office

The Broward Sheriff's Office may soon provide all fire-rescue services to the town. Town Administrator **Christopher Russo** is negotiating with the sheriff to take over all fire services, including the portion Davie provides. Currently, the sheriff's office handles fire services in all areas west of Southwest 172nd Avenue and Davie provides fire services to all areas east of it.

Davie notified the town that it can no longer provide these services at the same rate in its contract and the sheriff's office notified the town that Station 55, which is owned by Weston, will not be available to Southwest Ranches as of Oct. 1.

Russo reviewed preliminary proposals for fire services from both Davie and the sheriff and determined it was in the long-term best interest of Southwest Ranches to stick with the sheriff's office as the sole provider, according to a town memo.

The Town Council agreed and passed a resolution last week authorizing **Russo** to negotiate an agreement with the sheriff and bring it back to the council for approval. The town also is looking for a temporary home for its fire-rescue service.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

South Florida Sun Sentinel (FL)

February 17, 2008

Some Cities are Considering Increase in Tax Rate Amendment 1 Puts Governments in a Bind

Author: Juan Ortega Scott Wyman, Linda Trischitta, Jennifer Gollan, Robin Benedick, Lisa Huriash, Brittany Wallman; Staff Researcher William Lucey

It wasn't supposed to increase taxes. But two weeks after voters approved a statewide tax-relief plan, some Broward County cities officials say they may hike taxes and fees to make up for the money lost. Officials from Deerfield Beach, Lauderdale Lakes and Southwest Ranches say they haven't ruled out increases, one of several options to recover dollars taken away by Amendment 1, approved by voters Jan. 29.

Most other cities declined to discuss their plans, saying such decisions will come in August and September when elected officers vote to approve budgets for 2008-09. The new budget year starts Oct. 1 with tax bills coming out in November. "I will be considering all avenues prior to making my recommendation to the commission," said Deerfield Beach City Manager Michael Mahaney, adding that the commission ultimately decides whether to increase taxes. "On the revenue side, this will include raising the millage rate, fire assessment fees, etc."

Christopher Russo, Southwest Ranches town administrator, said he hasn't ruled out a tax increase but said much will depend on what the Town Council decides to do with spending for capital improvement projects, such as a new town hall, park improvements and bridge and road improvements. At a minimum, he said, the town needs to generate as much revenue for next year as it will do this year to pay for such work. "Certainly, we need to hold the tax rate at the very least," **Russo** said.

To offset money lost because of the amendment, Lauderdale Lakes would have to raise its taxes by about 40 cents on every \$1,000 of taxable value on a house - about \$75 on a \$200,000 house with a homestead exemption, estimated Larry Tibbs, the city's finance director. Amendment 1 attempts to cut taxes by doubling the homestead exemption on property values from \$25,000 to \$50,000 and placing a 10 percent annual cap on taxable value increases on nonhomesteaded properties. But nothing in the amendment stops cities from raising tax rates to make up such losses.

It wouldn't be the first-time cities don't fully comply with proposed tax cuts. State lawmakers tried to impose cuts during their June 2007 session, but seven Broward communities last year voted not to cut as much as the state wanted. They were Lazy Lake, Lauderdale Lakes, North Lauderdale, Pembroke Park, Pembroke Pines, Sea Ranch Lakes and Southwest Ranches. By raising taxes this year, local governments risk angering voters such as Josie Higgins, 58, of Lauderdale Lakes, who voted "yes" for Amendment 1. "Groceries are high, taxes are high and we need something back," Higgins said. Dominic Calabro, chief executive officer of Florida

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

TaxWatch, a nonpartisan government watchdog group, called any tax increase after Amendment 1 unfair, saying cities want to reel in money through "the good times and the bad times." Lauderdale Lakes Commissioner Levoyd Williams said there is more pressure now for the city to abide by the tax-relief plan, since the amendment was approved by 64 percent of voters statewide and by 71 percent in Broward. "They spoke loudly. People are clearly saying that they are hurting for dollars," Williams said. But he said he couldn't guarantee that the city wouldn't raise taxes. "I'm trying to make sure we don't lose any jobs," Williams said. Also saying he's unsure about approving a tax increase is Pembroke Pines Mayor Frank Ortis, who as president of the Florida League of Cities opposed Amendment 1. "The people have spoken. Every precinct [in Pembroke Pines] voted for the amendment," Ortis said.

Meanwhile, among those saying they would not support tax increases are commissioners in Fort Lauderdale and Sunrise, the two Broward cities that last year cut more in taxes than the state wanted. "That is not an answer," Sunrise Commissioner Roger Wishner said. "We are better financially than I think we've been in a long time," Fort Lauderdale Commissioner Cindi Hutchinson said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

South Florida Sun Sentinel (FL)
February 6, 2008

Ranches Tightens the Reins Town Adopts New Business Practices

Author: Robin Benedick

It's no longer business as usual in Southwest Ranches. After almost a year on the job, Town Administrator **Christopher Russo** is trying to instill professionalism in how the town operates. But not everyone is happy about it. **Russo's** predecessor, John Canada, doled out some work with a phone call to a neighbor or local company. Now, businesses are being asked to submit formal bids and post bonds to guarantee their prices. **Russo**, a former city manager of Sunny Isles Beach in Miami-Dade County, wants to consolidate town contracts, some of which have expired, for better coordination and oversight to save money.

Some longtime residents don't like the shift away from the small-town approach of keeping things simple and hiring people you know. "Our needs aren't Weston's needs, our needs aren't Sunny Isles' needs, our needs aren't Bal Harbour's needs," said Marygay Chaples, a 50-year resident of Southwest Ranches whose company does some mowing for the town as a subcontractor. Others say it's time for the town of 7,500 people, which contracts most of its services to private companies and nearby cities, to become more sophisticated. "The way we've been doing things in the past is a joke," said Councilman Don Maines.

A lot is at stake on Thursday, when the council considers awarding a contract worth about \$350,000 for landscape maintenance to one company, Luke's Landscaping of Hollywood, instead of spreading the work around as it does now to several companies with local ties. Whatever the council does will set the tone this year as other contracts come up. "We need to get away from doing so many things on hourly rates that are not based on a bid and negotiate the best deals for the town," **Russo** said. He replaced Canada, a longtime Southwest Ranches resident, who lost his job amid accusations of poor financial management, lack of communication and hiring his wife and daughter as town employees.

Though **Russo** has forged good relationships with council members, getting the landscaping contract approved is a big challenge. The council voted 3-2 in December to accept Luke's as the only legitimate bidder for the job and to authorize **Russo** to negotiate a better deal with the company. Two other companies lost out because they didn't meet the bond requirement of putting up a small percentage of the base contract cost or providing a \$15,000 check.

Now some residents are demanding that council members give the companies another shot. They also accuse **Russo** of favoring Luke's because it did work in Sunny Isles Beach when he worked there. "You have a terrible perceptual issue here," said Alyn Kay. "You could draw the conclusion that this bid was written for one vendor" because Luke's is the only company large enough to provide all of the services required. **Russo** denied he wrote the bid to favor Luke's and called the process fair and unbiased.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Resident Holly Hugdahl, a financial consultant for several South Florida municipalities, said she is concerned about the direction the council will take if Luke's bid is rejected. "Are they going to trust their manager who is a professional manager or are they going to let the committees continue to run this town?" Hugdahl said. "Why pay \$160,000 a year to a manager if you're not going to listen to him?" Some council members want to reject Luke's bid, scale back the proposal and put it out for bid again.

Mayor Mecca Fink, who voted against accepting Luke's bid in December, suggests the town relax the rules to encourage competition. Councilman Steve Breitkreuz, who voted to rank Luke's as the only bidder, said he's torn. "This contract is setting us in the right direction and it's making us more professional," he said. "But you're a small town and you know certain people and you know they are going to do a good job and you know they're active in the town and you hate to see them pushed out by a big guy from out of town because frankly, many times a local guy will take more pride in his work than a guy who has no stake in the town.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Sun Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, FL)

September 23, 2007

GARBAGE, FIRE FEES LIKELY TO DOUBLE IN SOUTHWEST RANCHES

Author/Byline: Robin Benedick

Homeowners will pay double for garbage and fire protection under a proposed budget approved last week by Town Council members. The unanimous vote came after the first of two public hearings on the \$20.2 million spending plan for the 2007-08 fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. A final vote on the budget will be after a 6 p.m. public hearing Thursday at Town Hall, 6589 SW 160th Ave. (Dykes Road). Councilman Steve Breitzkreuz was not at the meeting but cast his vote by phone. Council members kept the property tax rate at \$3 for every \$1,000 of assessed value, but most residents will see their tax bills increase slightly because their property assessments went up. They'll also pay more for trash pickup and fire-rescue service. The garbage fee will double to \$562 per year as will the fire assessment, to \$296 per year. One resident spoke against the garbage fee increase, calling it unfair for owners to pay more for less service. The town is reducing bulk pickups from weekly to twice monthly and requiring residents to contain their trash piles to 6 cubic yards, about the size of a Volkswagen Beetle. "We're down to 6 cubic yards twice a month and I can't imagine why it's double," said resident Al Avello. "It shouldn't be that high." By voting unanimously at their final hearing, the town would avoid budget cuts Florida lawmakers have required municipalities to make, officials said.

Council members praised new Financial Administrator Jean Watson and Town Administrator **Christopher Russo** for preparing a budget - his first since being hired in February - that is easy to read and understand. **Russo** took over from John Canada, who lost his contract after an audit found sloppy recordkeeping for the town of 7,500 people. **Russo** is reorganizing the town's administration and consolidating some service contracts for better coordination and to save money. Many town contracts have expired or are expiring soon. They cover everything from law enforcement and fire service to engineering and landscaping. Though no major services or programs are being eliminated, some slight cuts may come after **Russo** puts back about \$540,000 he took in surplus money to balance the budget. Residents and town council members told **Russo** to leave the sum in the fund balance so money available for emergencies doesn't dwindle to about \$1 million.

"I am very concerned about appropriating our surplus," said resident Holly Hugdahl, a government consultant who specializes in public finance. "It is very, very low and we are looking at appropriating one-third of what we have left." Mayor Mecca Fink agreed. "We don't want to use our reserves unless we have to," she said. "We are in uncertain economic times so we have to tighten our belts." **Russo** said after the meeting that he will return the surplus money and make up for it by not funding every position in his office, including a new assistant town administrator. He also will return surplus money he used for capital projects. The council is planning a workshop soon to prioritize capital projects, including new parks, a town hall, drainage and road resurfacing, and will likely consider a bond issue to pay for them next fall.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Miami Herald (FL)
March 11, 2007

Feisty Town Makes Change

Author: Jennifer Lebovich

A new town administrator took the reins last week in Southwest Ranches, a tiny town with a history of picking fights with neighbors. **Christopher Russo**, the new town administrator in Southwest Ranches, gets a car allowance as part of his salary package. But, in a potent symbol of the nature of his new job, one resident offered him a different way to go -- a horse. Dee Schroeder encouraged **Russo** to borrow her daughter's brown and white paint horse so he could appropriately mosey through the small West Broward town, which prides itself on its rural lifestyle.

Russo, 48, last week became only the second person to run the town's day-to-day operations. And getting to know the town's equestrian trails will likely be one of the lesser challenges he faces in the job he started Monday, under a \$166,000 annual contract. Southwest Ranches, which incorporated in 2000, has been known to pick fights with its neighbors, including Weston and Pembroke Pines. It will be **Russo's** job to settle those spats in a way that doesn't give town officials a black eye.

Last October, town officials fired former administrator John Canada, who had been criticized for sloppy bookkeeping, for hiring his wife to keep the town's books, and for once employing his daughter as town clerk. **Russo** will have to pick up where Canada left off, balancing the town's budget, which relies mostly on property tax revenue, while paying for police and fire service, a new Town Hall building and various park projects.

Russo's hiring may signal a shift away from the small-town approach of hiring neighbors to run things. Canada has lived in the town for more than 25 years, and the town's first attorney, Gary Poliakoff, also is a longtime resident. Poliakoff's son Keith Poliakoff -- a Hollywood resident -- handles most of the town's legal work these days. "We've gone through the infancy stages, and now we're ready to move on and be more of a mature town," said council member Don Maines, who credited Canada with helping to shepherd the town through its early years. "We're ready to move to the next step."

Russo got his start as the assistant to the manager more than 25 years ago in Scarsdale, N.Y., a mostly residential community not unlike Southwest Ranches. He then ran the government in Rye Brook, where he was tasked with building the Village Hall and a community center. Mayor Mecca Fink sees **Russo's** background in rural towns as the perfect preparation for running Southwest Ranches, with its mantra of "Preserving our Rural Lifestyle." "I certainly am looking forward to a new beginning," Fink said. Although there is a new administrator in town, most of the players on the Town Council remain the same. The five council members are a quirky and sometimes combative bunch whose town pride occasionally gets in the way of getting along with others.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Southwest Ranches settled its fight with neighboring Pembroke Pines over road closures on the border between the two municipalities more than a year ago. The town put up locked gates because residents complained about too much cut-through traffic. Southwest Ranches is planning to build a Town Hall near the intersection of Dykes and Griffin roads. The town has been managing its affairs out of series of modular buildings on leased land annexed into town. The town also quarreled with its landlord, the South Broward Drainage District, over the lease for the building where they hold their sometimes raucous meetings.

Russo is hoping to head off major problems with some friendly conversation and communication. Before he was even on the payroll, he had met with John Flint, Weston's city manager; Charlie Dodge, who runs Broward's second-largest city of Pembroke Pines; and Leo Schwartzberg, the head of the drainage district. "We may not always agree, but we're going to be able to talk," said **Russo**. "We know we have different constituencies, and we'll all do the best job for our elected bodies." The council chose **Russo** from a field of 29 candidates, citing his experience with municipal construction projects and strong financial management skills.

In 2000, **Russo** became city manager of Sunny Isles Beach, a beachfront community in Miami-Dade that boomed under his watch. He left that job more than a year ago to start his own consulting company. Clients ranged from governments to property owners looking to develop. **Russo** is eager to return to the day-to-day tasks involved in running a city. It's a 24-hour a day job. "My goal is very simple," **Russo** said. "Just to get them out of the newspapers for all the wrong reasons."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

<https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-2007-01-11-0701101031-story.html>

South Florida Sun-Sentinel
January 10, 2007

Council picks Southwest Ranches administrator

Author: Buddy Nevins

The former city manager of Sunny Isles Beach in Miami-Dade County was chosen Wednesday as the new town administrator of Southwest Ranches. Town Council members said they chose **Christopher Russo** because of his lengthy experience, not only in Sunny Isles Beach from 2000 to 2005, but also as the village administrator of Rye Brook, N.Y., from 1987 to 2000.

They said **Russo's** background in a new and growing city -- Sunny Isles Beach was created three years before he became the manager -- gives him an understanding of the growing pains felt by Southwest Ranches, which was formed in 2000. He was praised for his knowledge of small town finances and his understanding of how to get government building projects completed.

"I have difficulty finding a weakness with regards to **Chris Russo**," said council member Jeff Nelson. The only weakness members cited, discovered during a public interview Tuesday and private one-on-one interviews Wednesday, was that **Russo**, who is in his late 40s, talked too much during questioning. Mayor Mecca Fink had a positive take on **Russo's** long-windedness: "It could be an asset against opponents [in negotiations]."

The Town Council must formally ratify **Russo's** hiring tonight and accept an employment contract sometime in February before he is officially hired. Council members hope he can start by March 1. The salary will be part of the contract negotiations. **Russo** was earning \$165,000 in Sunny Isles Beach before he quit to start a government consulting business.

He would replace John Canada, whose company had managed the town and hired its workers since January 2001, just months after Southwest Ranches was formed. The council voted 4-1 on Oct. 12 to fire Canada, who was criticized for poor communication, sloppy bookkeeping and hiring his wife and daughter to work for the town. About two dozen people applied for the job.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald (FL)
April 2, 2006

Sunny Isles Beach
Winning Soccer Team Kicks It Up a Notch
Author: Ben Torter

Even before Sunny Isles Beach Active Park opens, the city-run sports teams are experiencing some success. In its first year in a competitive soccer league, the boys 14 to 16-year-old Soccer Paradise B/Sunny Isles Beach, won their Greater Hollywood League championship March 16. The team had a season of 11 wins, 0 losses and 1 tie. With young families continuing to transform the once retirement community of Sunny Isles Beach into a modern and fast-paced city, the city's youth population is exploding. Today there are more than 1,500 children living in Sunny Isles Beach, up from about 300 when the city was incorporated in 1997.

To keep up with the changing demographic, the city is well on its way to having a K-8 public school. The city's recreational programs will have a permanent home when the Active Park, 18115 North Bay Rd., is completed in the spring of 2007. This will allow the Sunny Isles Beach teams to have home games against other cities, and create a broader range of programs. The park will include a baseball diamond, playground, 12,000-square-foot community center and 8,000-square-foot gymnasium. The city even expanded the Cultural and Human Services Department when it hired Matt High in December as the city's athletics program coordinator.

The department's crown jewel is the 14 to 16-year-old soccer team, sponsored by former city manager **Chris Russo**. Soccer began on an intramural level in Sunny Isles Beach in 2001, but this is the first year the city has had teams in a league outside of Sunny Isles Beach. Team captain Diego Echeverria said the city and **Russo**, who helped pay for transportation and uniforms, contributed to their winning season by bringing in better equipment, players and coaches.

Now they're getting ready for tougher competition in the Copa Coca-Cola Tournament, April 8 and 9 at Amelia Earhart Park in Hialeah. The winning team will get a bid to play at the Copa Coca-Cola in California, and the winner there will go on to Mexico. "It's going to be tough, but we are going to do our best," 15-year-old Echeverria said. The team will also compete in the Easterly Cup in Weston and the Disney Memorial Shootout in Orlando over Memorial Day weekend.

Team coach Sergio Vuguin, who played soccer in his native Argentina, said the winning is fantastic, but what gives him the most satisfaction is keeping the kids off the streets. "My goal is I don't want to see the kids running around on the street," Vuguin said in a telephone interview Wednesday. "[Soccer] keeps them out of trouble and away from drugs." Susan Simpson, director of Cultural and Human Services, said the city's children are demanding more and more activities and time, so a full-time position was created to meet their needs.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

High's background includes coaching track and field and physical education in colleges in Virginia, Tennessee, Texas and Connecticut. Besides the soccer program, High also oversees nine boys' and girls' basketball teams, with a total of about 140 kids and a waiting list for next season. The teams play against each other at St. Mary Magdalen Catholic Church, the temporary court while the park is under construction. They play other teams at North Miami's Ben Franklin, Keystone, and Cagni parks and North Miami Senior High. "Last year they scrambled against each other at the church and this is their first time in a competitive league," High said.

High has also started a Sunny Isles Beach girls' cheerleading squad. About 60 girls ages 5 to 14 participate. In February they were treated to a demonstration by members of the Miami Heat Dancers. High envisions implementing a track a field club, a traveling basketball team, flag football, and a traveling cheerleading team to name a few. For senior citizens he's thinking about tai chi, bowling and painting. "Hopefully when the Active park opens we can have adult league basketball and soccer as well," High said. For information on city-sponsored recreational programs, call the Sunny Isles Beach Cultural and Human Services Department at 305 792-1706.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Sun Post (FL)
November 12, 2005

Sunny Isles City Manager to Resign in October
Russo praised his bosses and touted the city’s accomplishments of recent years.
Author: Randy Abraham

On Thursday, September 8 the Sunny Isles Beach City Commission will discuss how to recruit a new city manager. **Chris Russo**, Sunny Isles Beach’s city manager for the last five years, submitted his resignation Thursday, August 25. It is effective October 31, which will allow him to work on finalizing the city’s general and operating budgets for the 2005-2006 fiscal year.

Russo, 47, said he has decided to work as a consultant on governmental issues and land-use projects after being approached by area businesses. “In recent months I have entertained several offers to join the private sector. After carefully considering these offers, I have decided to work for myself and get involved with Governmental Consulting, Land Development, Project Management and Public Relations,” **Russo** wrote in a memo to elected officials. “This, coupled with a desire to spend more time with my children, has led to this decision.”

Russo has a son and daughter who live in New York, where he worked before accepting SIB’s top administrative position in 2000. **Russo** praised his bosses and touted the city’s accomplishments of recent years. “We have achieved a great deal on behalf of Sunny Isles Beach over the past five years, such as the new Government Center, installation of storm water drainage projects throughout the city, the upgraded and expanded parks, implementation of the streetscape and beautification programs, and the ongoing planning for a new school,” **Russo** said. “All of this has been accomplished with our tax rate and burden remaining the envy of South Florida.”

Russo, also a Sunny Isles resident, said he would be available to help with the transition after his replacement is hired. **Russo** joined the city in 2000 after working as city manager and clerk for the municipality of Rye Brook, N.Y. Before that he was assistant city manager for Scarsdale, N.Y., for six years. “It’s been a goal of mine to leave governmental service after 25 years, and I now have the opportunity to work for myself,” said **Russo**.

He said his proudest accomplishment in Sunny Isles was the construction of a \$4 to \$5 million storm water drainage system in the Golden Shores neighborhood of single-family homes, which was completed in early 2003. “That was the biggest project in the city’s history, and that helped the most people. There was incredible flooding and damage in that area from years of neglect, and we had to create and engineer an entire system. We came up with the best, most innovative system, and it was written up in a number of water management journals,” said **Russo**.

Another project he is proud of, but won’t see through to completion, is a storm water management system for the city’s central district. **Russo** said soon after he was hired, he convinced Sunny Isles leaders to scrap their original plans for the project. The new and improved central district project is scheduled to go out to bid next month, he said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Currently, **Russo** is working on a draft for the city's 2005-2006 budget. The city's tax base increased about 21 percent over last year due to new construction and appreciation of existing properties, and he is working on a plan to cut the tax rate by about 13 percent. **Russo** said his most challenging moments as city manager came soon after he began his duties. The city, under its former manager, was developing a plan for a City Hall on Sunny Isles Beach Boulevard that was threatening to go way over budget. "I told them we had to scrap their plan for their monumental City Hall building and think about a more feasible building plan more centrally located in the city. The original plan would have cost \$30 million, and we were able to build the Government Center for \$23 million," said **Russo**.

Five years ago, **Russo** also recommended raising taxes slightly a year after the tax rate was reduced. He said he was prepared for a tense showdown with elected officials after he voiced his concerns about the City Hall plans and the tax rate. "I didn't think I would last a month," said **Russo**. **Russo** prevailed, and the city went on to develop parks, infrastructure, landscaping and other projects. "It's been a busy five years. We have one of the most aggressive capital improvement plans of any city this size that I've ever seen," said **Russo**.

It's the second time this year a city-chartered officer has resigned from Sunny Isles. Last spring it was City Attorney Lynn Dannheisser, who in 1997 was Sunny Isles's first employee, hired by a city charter committee soon after the area's incorporation. Dannheisser resigned to return to private practice as a land-use attorney in Broward County. Mayor Norman Edelcup said he will open a discussion on finding **Russo**'s replacement at the September 8 City Commission meeting. "I think we should probably attempt a national search, but there may be people in South Florida that are familiar with local municipal issues," he said. "But I don't want to rule anything out; it will be up to the full commission." Edelcup said he has mixed feelings about **Russo**'s resignation. "We are saddened by his departure, but we wish him well in his new venture. He did a lot to improve the quality of administration in the city."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
September 8, 2005

TAXPAYERS MAY GET A TAX BREAK

Author/Byline: Ben Torter

A tax break is up for discussion at the Sunny Isles Beach budget hearing tonight. Rapid development and double-digit increases in assessed property value are being touted by Mayor Norman Edelcup as the reason why tax relief is the "right thing to do." Even with a lower tax rate, rising property values mean property owners probably won't pay less taxes and the city will take in more money than last year. City officials say bigger coffers mean infrastructure upgrades and regular city services will not be cut back.

Over the past year the total assessed property value in Sunny Isles Beach increased from \$3.23 billion to \$3.9 billion. A 40-cent decrease in the tax rate is being proposed, meaning the amount a typical homeowner would pay per \$1,000 of assessed value would be lowered from \$3.35 to \$2.95. If the lower tax rate is adopted a resident with a homestead exempted home valued at \$200,000 would pay \$516.25 in property taxes to Sunny Isles Beach. Under the current tax rate the same home would be taxed \$586.25. Even if the tax rate is reduced, property owners may see higher taxes because of increases in property values. But the increases may be tempered - under state law, a property's taxable value can only go up by 3 percent over the previous year's value if the property was homesteaded before Jan. 1. Properties that were purchased or homesteaded this year are appraised at current market levels. Through the increased tax base from the higher assessments, the city will still have a growth in its tax base, which leaves money for infrastructure upgrades and regular services, according to City Manager **Christopher Russo**.

The city's operating budget will increase from \$17.9 million in 2004-05 to \$20 million. One of the budgeted city projects is the \$6 million central island drainage project. Officials said it is necessary to stop flooding in the area bounded by 183rd Street to the north, 174th Street to the south, Collins Avenue and the Intracoastal Waterway. The Active Park is set to begin construction during the 2005-06 budget year and should be open by spring 2007. Located at 18115 North Bay Rd., it will include a baseball diamond, playground, a 12,000-square-foot community center and an 8,000-square-foot gymnasium.

The city also will continue street beautification projects such as the undergrounding of utilities, decorative streetlighting, tree planting and purchasing new bus shelters. "It's something that's certainly doable with the amount of growth," **Russo** said. "If there was ever a year for a tax break this is it."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Community Newspapers (FL)
September 5, 2005

SIB will Miss City Manager Christopher Russo

Author: Bari Auerbach

After five years of dedicated service, Sunny Isles Beach City Manager **Christopher Russo** recently submitted a letter of resignation to the Mayor and City Commission, stating he intends to embark on a new career in the private sector and will be leaving his position as of Oct. 31, 2005. **Russo** relocated from Rye Brook, New York and officially took the helm as City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach on August 21, 2000. The late Mayor David Samson and members of the City Commission unanimously voted to hire **Russo** following the departure of the city's first manager Jim DiPietro.

Russo had originally been one of the primary choices for city manager back in 1997 when Sunny Isles Beach incorporated, but financial concerns at the time dissuaded the Commission from offering him the position. **Russo's** letter of resignation, dated August 24, 2005, provides the following explanation for his reasons to move on:

“This letter is to inform you of my resignation as City Manager of the City of Sunny Isles Beach effective October 31, 2005. “This is clearly a bittersweet moment for me. After 25 years in government, with the last five years as City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach, it is difficult to leave public service. In recent months I have entertained several offers to join the private sector. After carefully considering these offers, I have decided to work for myself and get involved with Governmental Consulting, Land Development, Project Management and Public Relations. This, coupled with the desire to spend more time with my children, has led to this decision.

“We have achieved a great deal on behalf of Sunny Isles Beach over the past five years, such as the new Government Center, installation of storm water drainage projects throughout the City (no small undertaking), the upgraded and expanded parks, implementation of all the streetscape and beautification programs, and the ongoing planning for a new school. All of this has been accomplished with our tax rate and burden remaining the envy of South Florida.

“I am exceedingly grateful to the citizens of Sunny Isles Beach for their support and cooperation and to our many elected and appointed officials and staff for their commitment and vision. With continued excellence in management, the City of Sunny Isles Beach is well positioned for the future and I am sure it will continue to be the Jewel of South Florida. “I hold fond memories of my five years of service to Sunny Isles Beach. And since I plan to remain and continue to live in Sunny Isles Beach as a private citizen, I also hope to continue my many valuable friendships for years to come. “Please be assured that I will assist and cooperate with you fully in every way possible as you transition to a new City Manager. “Thank you for the opportunity to serve the people of Sunny Isles Beach.

‘Goals Achieved’

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

When **Russo** became City Manager in 2000, he outlined specific goals he intended to help Sunny Isles Beach achieve. Now five years later, these “proactive action items” plus many more have been accomplished:

- Restore a renewed sense of enthusiasm and confidence in city management;
- Gain an understanding of city finances and formulate an appropriate budget process;
- Identify and assess long-term financial needs;
- Create an on-going formal pending agenda of projects and capital budget plan;
- Ensure the completion of current projects including parks, drainage improvements, road resurfacing as well as supporting beach renourishment in cooperation with county and state agencies.
- Foster teamwork, a clearer sense of responsibility and structure at City Hall ‘Mayor’s Message’

“Along with fellow members of the Commission, I’m saddened by the news but want to wish **Chris Russo** well in his decision to leave government,” Mayor Norman Edelcup said. “After 25 years in government with the last five years as City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach, **Chris Russo** wishes to start a new career by working for himself and specializing in Government Consulting, Land Development, Project Management and Public Relations.”

Commending **Russo**’s performance, Edelcup noted he has “made the City’s administration stronger during his five-year service and that the City staff is in great condition to continue the strong growth and redevelopment of the City.” Edelcup also stated the Sept. 8 City Commission meeting would feature a discussion regarding the process of searching for a new City Manager so that the vacancy could be filled as quickly as possible. “In the interim, I feel confident our team of city staff personnel are well-qualified to take care of the day-to-day operations of the City,” Edelcup said. “On Monday, August 29, along with fellow Commission members, I met with city staff to assure them we’re here to help out in any way until such time as a new City Manager is appointed.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
April 3, 2005

CITY WINS BATTLE FOR COVETED LAND

Author/Byline: Carli Teproff

Sunny Isles Beach's two-year struggle to own an acre of property to the north of the government center came to an end Tuesday, when a Miami-Dade County Circuit Court judge ruled in its favor. "The city is very pleased with the judge's decision, in so far as the city needed this property for city operations," City Attorney Lynn Dannheisser said.

Judge Margarita Esquiroz ruled that RK Associates must sell the property at 18080 Collins Ave. to the city for \$2.25 million, Dannheisser said. The property will be turned into a storage facility to house city vehicles and equipment. The site is currently home to branches of Alamo and National car rental agencies and is owned by RK Associates. "We are a growing, new city that needs space for municipal services," City Manager **Christopher J. Russo**. "That land made the most sense because it is near our government center."

Raanan Katz, owner of RK Associates, said that "justice wasn't served," and that he was going to appeal the decision. "I was very disappointed in the decision," he said. "The city doesn't need the property; they are taking it out of greed."

The quest for the property began in early 2003 when the city made a purchase offer to then-owner Mitsubishi Motors. The offer was turned down and the city filed to take it through eminent domain. That's when city officials learned Mitsubishi Motors had sold the property to RK Associates, which owns about five million square feet of commercial space in New England and South Florida. The city began eminent domain proceedings against RK Associates.

In February 2004, rather than continue with eminent domain proceedings, the commission voted to allow Katz to donate the land to the city in exchange for transferable development rights. The city says that Katz could have gotten about \$7 million for the development rights. But, Katz says that is not true. "The document said that I had to turn the deed over to the city manager," he said. "The manager would control to whom I sell the [rights]."

If Katz had accepted the city's offer, the city would have been unable to build on the land because its development rights would have been severed. Instead the city went back to court. Eminent domain proceedings, which is a process by which a municipality can force a land owner to sell property to the municipality at fair market value if needed for public use, ended March 8. Under the rules of a quick take, the city immediately takes possession of the deed to the property. "Instead of working with the city, [RK Associates] worked against every step of the way," **Russo** said. "The unfortunate part is that it was totally unnecessary to go through this long condemnation process."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
August 5, 2004

TAX RATE UNCHANGED IN BUDGET

Author/Byline: Ben Torter

A tentative \$17.9 million preliminary budget for 2004-05 will allow the city of Sunny Isles Beach to keep up with its rapid growth by upgrading its police, building and parking departments, adding lifeguards and helping to pay for projects such as the new city hall, upgrades to Sunny Isles Boulevard and an improved central drainage system. In all, the preliminary budget calls for an increase in spending for the fiscal year 2004-05 of about \$2.7 million over the current year's budget of \$15.2 million, according to city manager **Christopher Russo**.

Even so, the city's tax rate will remain the same, at \$3.35 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. But taxpayers will pay more because of rising property values. According to the Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser's Office, the average assessed value of property in Sunny Isles Beach rose from \$174,213 in 2003 to \$205,916 in 2004, an increase of about 18 percent. Under the proposed 2004-05 rate, a property assessed at \$205,916, taking the standard \$25,000 exemption, would pay \$606 in taxes to the city. That doesn't include school district taxes and other items that appear on the property owner's tax bill. Among highlights, the new budget includes an extra \$400,000 to increase staffing in the police department. "We've budgeted about five more police officers, added a captain to be second in command to the chief, upgraded corporals to sergeants, added a civilian management analyst position and full-time dispatchers," said **Russo**.

The building department continues to undergo a major overhaul in order to meet the demands of the many major high-rise development projects as well as making it easier for residents doing minor work to pull permits, **Russo** said. "We're trying to stay ahead of the curve," said **Russo**. With that in mind, **Russo** said the building department has doubled in size and gone through significant reorganization, including adding full-time chiefs in mechanical, plumbing, electrical, as well as a chief building inspector and full-time structural engineering plan review chief. "We went from having mostly part-time inspectors to full-time chiefs in each discipline," said **Russo**.

In all the building department's proposed budget for next year is just over \$2 million, an increase of about \$450,000. Also, the city has taken control of lifeguard services, so more money is budgeted for that. **Russo** said that in 2004-05 the city plans to purchase three new lifeguard stands and hire about seven full-time and up to five part-time intermittent lifeguards. Previously Sunny Isles Beach contracted lifeguard services from the Newport Beachside Hotel.

About \$2 million of the budget will go toward the new city hall, which should be completed by the end of 2004, according to **Russo**. Operating costs for the new city hall are estimated to be about \$430,000 a year. About half of that will be paid for by Tony Roma's, which will rent space in a building next to city hall. Under the terms of that rental agreement, the restaurant will pay

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

the city \$240,000 a year or 8 percent of its profits, whichever is greater. Another \$1 million will go toward a project to upgrade the appearance of Sunny Isles Beach Boulevard, which officials view as the "entrance of the city." The project will cost about \$4 million, \$3 million of which will be coming from an FDOT state grant. "We will be adding date palms, new decorative street signs and increasing the width of the sidewalks from six to 14 feet," said **Russo**.

Also in the next fiscal year to fix a problem with "constant roadway flooding," **Russo** said the city will start a \$3.5 million dollar central drainage system upgrade between 174th and 183rd Streets west of Collins Avenue.

A budget workshop will be held at 9 a.m. Tuesday at City Hall, 17070 Collins Ave. Public hearings on the 2004-05 budget will be held at 7 p.m. Sept. 9 and 23.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Christopher J. Russo** is listed below.]

Miami Herald, The (FL)
July 18, 2004

TRAFFIC PLAN PROPOSAL WOULD BE A DISASTER

Author/Byline: Herald Staff

SUNNY ISLES BEACH

WE'RE WORKING TO FIX

BEACH TRASH PROBLEM

Editor,

Recently, concerns have been aired about litter on Sunny Isles Beach in letters to local newspapers. As city manager of Sunny Isles Beach, I feel compelled to respond.

First, we certainly concur with her concerns over litter on the beach and the disrespect some people show toward this great natural resource - our ocean. However, our city, which has no jurisdiction over the beach other than where we have a city park, has probably more than 30 signs concerning litter, patrol the beach constantly seven days a week for about 12-15 hours a day, through the efforts of our police department, code enforcement officers and lifeguards.

Unfortunately, from my observations, Miami-Dade County cannot collect trash other than in the early morning due to the amount of people on the beach during the day (the county uses bulky, mechanical equipment). The only alternative would be to send manpower out on foot to empty the trash containers in the mid-afternoon each day. This would help, but may be cost-prohibitive.

In any event, we will brainstorm with our public works department and then speak with Miami-Dade County.

CHRISTOPHER J.

RUSSO

City Manager,

Sunny Isles Beach

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
May 1, 2003

COMMISSION APPROVES CONTRACTS FOR STREET WORK

Author/Byline: Charles Urstadt

The city commission approved more than \$160,000 in contracts April 24 as it looks to further develop plans to improve the safety and appearance of the city's streets and sidewalks. In a meeting that lasted less than an hour, the commission moved through an agenda that focused on the city's main thoroughfares. The largest contract approved was for \$128,500 to Marlin Engineering to prepare a design to help "calm" the traffic on Sunny Isles Boulevard/State Road 826. A Florida Department of Transportation study of the road calls for reducing the traffic lanes from five to four and increasing the size of the sidewalk from five feet to 14 feet. The one-year contract with Marlin requires the firm to provide road design, lighting and landscaping plans, traffic signal analysis, and construction and utility coordination.

Referring to Marlin representatives who attended the meeting, Commissioner Danny Iglesias called the workers "pros." "They know what they are doing. We are in good hands," he said. During a discussion of the project, Iglesias suggested the firm consider the hanging "tear drop" street lighting instead of the "cobra head" lights that are common in the area. "They have a nice look," he said.

The commission also approved landscaping on Collins Avenue that will cost \$31,600. City Manager **Christopher Russo** said that despite his efforts to discourage jaywalking on Collins Avenue, plants in the median of Collins are being damaged by foot traffic and need to be replaced. In addition, the city must create a median and plant palm trees at the crosswalk recently built in front of the Pinnacle condominium at 175th Street and Collins Avenue. "We are continuing the jaywalking program and it is having an effect. It will take time though," **Russo** said.

As work progresses on the city's new park at 181st Street and North Bay Drive, the commission discussed the need for parking in the area for residents. Preliminary plans for 145 new on-street parking spaces were presented by **Russo** and his staff. City officials said they are working on a decal system to allow residents to use the new spaces once they are created.

The final item discussed was the need to comply with federal weight limits for the little stone bridge on Atlantic Isle. While cars and small trucks are safe to drive over the bridge, **Russo** said regulations prohibit large trucks on the structure. Rather than replacing the bridge, **Russo** said shrubbery would be placed at the sides of the bridge to narrow the roadway to 10 feet. He said that would allow smaller vehicles to pass over the bridge, but would prevent the larger vehicles from using it.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
May 16, 2002

PARK'S DESIGN RAISES QUESTIONS ON PARKING

Author/Byline: Michael Vasquez

The Sunny Isles Beach Commission last week moved forward with plans for the city's first "active park," despite complaints that parking for the two-acre parcel is woefully inadequate. Mayor David Samson suggested holding the May 7 special meeting so the commission could receive more feedback regarding the park's design. Residents spoke of a growing need for such a park in Sunny Isles Beach, a city that has long been known as a haven for retirees, but has recently seen an influx of younger families.

The commission unanimously approved the park's preliminary plans, which are still less than 50 percent complete. That decision allows Miller Legg and Associates, the company drawing up the plans, to continue its work and come up with a final park plan. City officials hope to have the park, east of North Bay Road between 181st Street and 182nd Drive, completed by spring 2003. But with only 14 planned parking spaces proposed for the park, some residents wondered if they would ever be able to use its youth baseball field, recreation center and other amenities. Public parking in the city is often scarce, with tourists and beachgoers snatching up many of the available spaces.

Resident Lewis Thaler said the only people who would end up using the park would be those who lived close enough to walk to it. "I truly believe you're creating a park for three or four blocks," Thaler said to applause. "Not for the city of Sunny Isles Beach." Commission members suggested parkgoers could use the city's bus service to get to the park, thereby avoiding the need for parking. Pointing to her 6-year-old daughter Faith, resident Jacqueline Rosenfeld doubted that solution. "I don't know if I can send my little one in a bus," Rosenfeld said.

City Commissioner Gerry Goodman said the city's parking mess is largely the result of development decisions by county officials before the area incorporated. The city is basically out of land, he said, which makes it difficult to build additional parking lots. "With the bay on one side and the ocean on the other . . . where do you put cars?" Goodman asked. But Samson did propose one solution: He suggested the city consider purchasing 1 1/2 acres adjacent to the park that could be used to satisfy the public's demand for parking and could also accommodate tennis courts, a feature not included in the current park plans. However, 1 1/2 acres in Sunny Isles Beach - a city with soaring property values - will not come cheap. Samson warned expanding the park could cause an increase in taxes, which he said would infuriate many residents. "If we have to raise taxes, even minimally, the cry will be like we stabbed everybody," Samson said.

City Manager **Christopher J. Russo** said such a move might be unnecessary. He said the city is planning to add 23 parking spaces on Atlantic Boulevard, less than two blocks away. "Any able-bodied person who's watching their kids can certainly park on Atlantic Boulevard and walk to that park," **Russo** said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Press of Atlantic City, The (NJ)
April 13, 2002

CUMBERLAND REGIONAL BOARD ACCUSED OF DISCRIMINATION

Author/Byline: Maricarmen Rivera

During a Cumberland Regional High School Board of Education meeting Thursday, the district's athletic trainer accused the board of racial discrimination and said he filed a charge with the New Jersey Division on Human Rights. John Bailey, who has been working with the district for 12 years, showed copies of discrimination charges filed against the school. Bailey's position was eliminated during a budget hearing last month. School administrators had said there was a need to reduce personnel and cut programs to deal with a budget crisis. Last month, the board approved a \$15 million budget that includes \$8.2 million in state aid. The district received a \$300,000 increase in state aid for the 2002-03 budget, but Business Administrator **Christopher Russo** said the additional money is already earmarked for school programs.

Russo said the district had to approve a 4.5-cent tax increase and abolish three positions in order to deal with budgetary problems. Besides the athletic trainer's position, the district abolished a language arts teacher's position and a history teacher's position. The district, **Russo** said, will contract a private company to provide athletic training for the district's students. The service, **Russo** said, would cost close to \$26,000 - a \$25,000 savings for the district. With benefits, Bailey's salary was around \$50,000, **Russo** said.

But according to Bailey, that is not the issue. During the public session of the meeting, he said the district has tried to terminate his contract several times. The charge of discrimination alleges he is being paid less than his counterparts and has been required to work more regular hours. During his 30-minute speech, Bailey said the board tried to terminate his position last year, but didn't because of an outpouring of support in his favor. He also criticized the board for terminating David Mendez, who is the current district's track coach. Mendez also filed discrimination charges. Administrators said Mendez was terminated because he is not a certified teacher. The district hired a certified teacher to fill Mendez's position.

Board Vice President William Whelan said the district could not afford keeping the three positions that were cut during the budget hearing. "I chair the Finance Committee," Whelan said. "This district spends 99.9 percent of its budget every year. We are confronted with a very difficult year. We cut three positions and being a responsible elected member, I didn't have a choice." During the meeting, some parents in the audience stood up and supported Bailey. Ken Wurtzel told the board how Bailey saved his son's life. His son, Wurtzel said, collapsed from heat exhaustion and it was Bailey who helped him stay alert until the ambulance arrived. Another parent, who did not give his name, said Bailey's termination is due to racial discrimination in the district. Superintendent Richard Bumpus said he has tried to deal with the racial problems in the district. "You know we want to make a difference," Bumpus said. "I don't believe there is another administrator who has taken the time to connect with minority communities."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
April 7, 2002

CITY HALL BUILDING CLOSER TO A REALITY

Author/Byline: Michael Vasquez

The Sunny Isles Beach City Commission concluded negotiations Thursday with a building contractor for construction of the city's long-awaited City Hall, which officials hope will be ready by December 2004. A final contract between the city and the West Palm Beach-based Weitz Co. will be presented to the commission at its next meeting April 18. The commission is expected to approve that contract. "This is a culmination of 25 years of work," Sunny Isles Beach Mayor David Samson said, referring to the city's long drive for incorporation that succeeded in 1997.

Sunny Isles Beach city government operates out of a small, second-story storefront located in a strip mall. The new City Hall will be a stand-alone structure at 18050 Collins Ave. on property it will share with Tony Roma's restaurant. The city settled on the Tony Roma's site after the Sunny Isles Beach Boulevard building first proposed in 1999 proved to be too expensive.

City Manager **Christopher J. Russo** described the old plans as "way over anything realistic." Weitz will join forces with Spillis Candela, the architectural firm that has been designing plans for the new headquarters. Spillis has been trying to salvage as much as possible from plans the city commissioned for the now-defunct Sunny Isles Beach Boulevard location. Weitz has worked on numerous other municipal projects, including the Port St. Lucie City Hall.

The exact cost of Sunny Isles Beach's new building has yet to be determined, as architectural plans are still being formulated. However, the contract language being hammered out between the city and the contractor deals with just about every other aspect of the project, such how the surplus will be divided if the building turns out to cost less than expected. In that scenario, the city would receive 65 percent of the surplus, with the rest going to the contractor.

The costs expectation will be based on what is called a Guaranteed Maximum Price - a sum of projected costs that Weitz will submit to the city before construction begins. Though no precise number is available, **Russo** used the ballpark figure of \$10 million in estimating what the GMP might be. Once Weitz comes up with a GMP, it will be responsible for any cost overruns that push the price higher.

Russo said the new facility will include a public library and extra space to accommodate government officials visiting Sunny Isles Beach from other areas. "It's going to function substantially better and provide many more services and features, the biggest of which will be the library," **Russo** said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
February 17, 2002

TAX HIKE CONSIDERED FOR FIXING STREET

Author/Byline: Michael Vasquez

In a subtle, almost imperceptible fashion, the Sunny Isles Beach City Commission decided at its Feb. 5 meeting to change its strategy for funding infrastructure improvements on Collins Avenue. For several years, city officials have been exploring the creation of a special assessment district to fund improvements to the city's main thoroughfare, an option that would impose a one-time fee on Collins Avenue homeowners and businesses. The money collected would be spent on street landscaping, improved lighting and other improvements.

But Mayor David Samson criticized the special assessment technique as unfair because it singles out certain segments of the population. He said everybody who lives in the city drives on Collins Avenue, and everyone would benefit from improvements to the thoroughfare. During the meeting, Samson talked about how far Sunny Isles Beach has come in the few short years since incorporation, with several new parks created and an increased police presence. But the beautification efforts, he said, have lagged behind.

Samson asked the council for permission to instruct City Manager **Christopher J. Russo** to come up with a 20-year plan for improvements to Collins Avenue and other areas of the city. "Do I have the right to tell that to the man and suggest to him to figure this plan out and figure his budget for the future?" Samson asked his fellow commissioners. A vote was taken, with every commissioner responding yes. But before the voting was concluded, City Attorney Lynn Dannheisser interrupted to ask for clarification. "Are you suggesting now to forget the special assessment and raise the millage [the property tax rate]?" Dannheisser asked the mayor. "If that's it, we need to say that on the record."

At that point, the mayor conceded that the project, which the city manager has estimated would cost about \$20 million, would be funded by an increase in taxes. Addressing the commission, resident Rosyln Brezin said the people of Sunny Isles Beach were promised a beautiful city during the incorporation movement of the mid 1990s, but they were also promised something else: "We said that we were going to keep the taxes down," Brezin said. Sunny Isles Beach has one of the lowest property tax rates in the county, less than a quarter of the rate charged by the city of Miami. Samson insisted taxes would remain low. He said the increase would likely be \$50 per year - only a dollar a week. After the mayor's reassurances, Brezin felt relieved. "I walked away from the meeting with a very good feeling," she said.

Russo will now begin a months-long study on the potential costs of the improvement project, which will refurbish not only Collins Avenue but also the city's parks. **Russo**, who characterized the improvements as "long overdue," said any potential tax increase would likely be discussed during the annual budgetary process in October.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Miami Herald (FL)
September 16, 2001

Commission OK's Budget, \$10,000 Raise for Manager

Author: Gariot Louisna

After a little more than a year on the job, Sunny Isles Beach City Manager **Christopher Russo** is getting a \$10,000 raise. His salary jumps from \$125,000 to \$135,000 in the 2001-2002 budget approved Thursday. **Russo** is one of a handful of employees scheduled for raises following the elimination of nine positions from the city budget in May to balance the books. **Russo** laid off four city employees and will not fill five other vacancies. The job cuts saved the city more than \$280,000, **Russo** said earlier this year. Assistant City Manager James DeCocq, Planning Development and Community Director Marla S. Dumas and Parks and Recreation Director Ed Smith were terminated May 23. All three were employed by the city for close to two years. A receptionist also was terminated shortly before the upper-level positions were eliminated. But Mayor David Samson said **Russo** is entitled to the pay raise. "Remember, I gave the city \$40,000 dollars," he added, indicating that some of the money he donated from his leftover campaign contributions can support the manager's salary. "I want to see that in future there will be a more balanced view when it comes to pay raises," said newly elected Commissioner Norman Edelcup.

Commission Gerald "Gerry" Goodman declined to comment. Vice Mayor Lila Kauffman did not return calls, and Commissioner Danny Iglesias was out of town. The City Commission passed a resolution Thursday accepting the \$11.8 million budget for 2001-2002. Along with the increase in **Russo's** salary comes a 6 percent property tax increase. The tax rate goes from \$2.50 to \$2.65 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Samson said he wants to increase **Russo's** salary because the manager has done much in a short period to "clean up the mess his predecessors left behind." Sunny Isles Beach has been through three managers in four years.

The city's first manager was James DiPietro who was hired when the city incorporated in 1997 and resigned in September 1999 and received a \$55,000 severance package. Jack Neustadt became the interim city manager but was fired in May 2000 and received \$46,377 in severance pay. DeCocq held the post until **Russo** was hired in August 2000. **Russo** would not comment on his salary increase. But he said the city's operating departments went through a major reorganization. And for the first time in its four-year history, **Russo** said, the city will have a comprehensive compensation plan that will go in effect in January.

Russo said he plans to outline a "logical, professional, and thought-out" system for pay increases. "The only areas where there is adjustment in salaries is the building department and the police department," **Russo** said. "For the first time ever we've set some parameters." In the building department, there are new salaries and new positions. In the police department, there is a new step system in place that regulates salary increases. "It's ridiculous how raises were given out in the past," **Russo** said, adding that some lower-ranking officers were getting paid more than their superiors.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
September 9, 2001

DEBT PAYMENTS FORCE CITY TO INCREASE PROPERTY TAXES

Author/Byline: Gariot Louisna

The Sunny Isles Beach City Commission passed on first reading Tuesday a proposed \$11.8 million budget for 2001-2002. Plans to increase the tax rate from \$2.50 to \$2.65 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation remain in place. Assuming a \$25,000 homestead exemption, a homeowner with property valued at \$122,000 - the city average, according to Miami-Dade County appraisers - will pay about \$257 in property taxes to the city, or \$35 more than this year, assuming an increase in property value of about 7 percent.

The single biggest increase in the budget is for payments on the city's \$10.5 million debt, City Manager **Christopher Russo** said. Most of that money was borrowed to pay for park acquisitions and a site for a proposed City Hall that was later abandoned and for a second site. **Russo** said the city is refinancing the loans and will pay \$800,000 in the coming fiscal year toward that debt.

A large chunk of the budget, about \$4.8 million, will go to the city's Police Department, **Russo** said. This amount includes salaries, administration and general upkeep of the department, said Jean Watson, director of finance. This year, the department's budget was \$5,034,938. The figure drops in the new budget because several positions were cut, **Russo** said.

City administration gets \$2.8 million in the new budget, and Zoning, Planning and Building gets \$1.2 million. City taxes account for 11 percent of the total property tax bill. Forty-three percent goes to the Miami-Dade School Board, and 29 percent goes to the county. The state gets 3 percent, and 14 percent goes to special taxing districts.

The second budget hearing is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. Thursday in the commission chambers, 17070 Collins Ave., Suite 250.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
June 24, 2001

FUTURE CITY HALL: YOU WANT RIBS WITH THAT?

Author/Byline: Walter Pacheco

Sunny Isles Beach residents could soon be requesting public records and a side order of barbecued baby-back ribs when they visit City Hall. The City Commission on Tuesday unanimously approved the purchase of a site that will house a popular restaurant chain along with City Hall. However, some foresee the combo becoming a sticky situation. "I've lived over restaurants and I see the problems that can come from that," resident Phillip Chernoff told commissioners Tuesday after they voted to approve purchasing a three-acre site to build a city hall that will be bundled with a Tony Roma's restaurant. "You can have problems with rats and possibly even fires from the kitchen."

In August, a grease-trap fire in the kitchen of the Rascal House, a popular local eatery, caused more than \$5,000 in damages. No one was injured, but the restaurant remained closed for months pending repairs. The \$2.4 million site at 18050 Collins Ave. is owned by the estate of Fred Kassner, a New Jersey businessman who bought many of the South Florida Tony Roma's restaurants in 1986. Kassner bought the land for \$2 million in October 1982. The entire property includes a 1.1-acre vacant lot behind the adjacent two-acre site on which the Tony Roma's currently operates. Since Tony Roma's has a 12-year lease on the property, the city has negotiated a deal to lease space to the restaurant in the same building or adjacent to the future City Hall.

Mayor Dave Samson told residents the purchase would yield the city more money. "We will receive 8 percent of their gross receipts with a minimum of \$240,000 annual rent," Samson said. The city offered the seller a \$50,000 nonrefundable deposit toward the purchase of the property. Despite the ongoing negotiations with the restaurant, others still questioned the purchase. "I fail to see why we need another site for City Hall," resident Cecile Sippin asked Samson. "We don't expect to see any tax revenues until two or three years."

Last year, plans to build a city hall on a city-owned 1.5-acre site on Sunny Isles Boulevard were dropped after City Manager **Christopher Russo** said the city could not afford the \$23 million-plus government building. "With the redevelopment of Sunny Isles Boulevard, we will get our money out of that site," **Russo** said. But resident Don Stewart accused the manager of speaking with "a forked tongue." "You fired three employees to save money and now you want to make a \$2.5 million investment," Stewart said.

Three city officials were laid off in May after **Russo** said staff cuts were a result of the city's financial crunch. ". . . the City Manager due to budgetary constraints has found it necessary to eliminate certain positions," the May separation contracts for Assistant Manager James DeCocq and Recreation Director Ed Smith stated. Community Planning and Development Director Marla S. Dumas has not signed any separation agreement pending legal advice. The staff cuts allegedly

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

saved the city \$300,000 but according to the separation agreements, the former employees will still receive four months salary until Sept. 30. The city's cost will be more than \$40,000. **Russo** assured residents Tuesday that the city is not under any financial burden. "I can tell you this: The city is in good shape," **Russo** said. "Those were all projected financial problems so we don't get into a bad situation." **Russo** said the purchase will be a bonus for the city. "Here's a piece of land that could get sopped up by the developers," **Russo** said. "If we don't keep the property, we could lose it."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Press of Atlantic City, The (NJ)
March 12, 1998

CUMBERLAND REGIONAL BUDGET DOESN'T INCREASE TAX RATE

Author/Byline: Doug Bergen

The Cumberland Regional School District introduced a proposed budget without tax increases. The district's Cumberland Regional High School serves the seven townships surrounding Bridgeton.

For the regional school district portion of tax bills, the owner of a \$100,000 home will pay according to the following amounts.

- Deerfield Township: \$440
- Fairfield Township: \$480
- Greenwich Township: \$420
- Hopewell Township: \$450
- Shiloh Borough: \$370
- Stow Creek Township: \$460
- Upper Deerfield Township: \$360

The new tax rates are identical to those of the previous fiscal year in Hopewell, Stow Creek and Upper Deerfield townships and Shiloh Borough. New rates fall by 2 percent in Deerfield Township, 11 percent in Fairfield Township and 10.6 percent in Greenwich Township. The total budget climbs by 2.56 percent, but changes in state funding and revenue from the sending districts leave the amount to be raised by taxes less than \$44,000 more than last year.

Business Administrator **Christopher J. Russo** said the district can cut taxes and still raise the extra \$44,000, because the school and township tax cycles are different. Small increases may come with new tax cycles in six months. Although administrative costs climb by 29 percent, they remain the lowest in the state among regional school districts, according to **Russo**. One new hire, employee raises and a stipend for an alternative school program account for the new spending, **Russo** said.

Lower salaries and fewer employees, particularly the lack of middle management, allow the district to keep administrative costs down, **Russo** said. He said a state audit determined that Cumberland Regional School District is the most efficient regional district in the state.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The New York Times (NY)
March 28, 1994

Whirlwind of a Manager Runs a Village's Daily Operations

Author: Jacques Steinberg

RYE BROOK, N.Y. - **Christopher Russo** likes to say that he learned how to run a village government during an after-school job as a delivery boy at a produce market in Scarsdale. "They wanted the best quality," he said of his customers. "They wanted efficiency. They wanted the best price. Who does that sound like?"

To Mr. **Russo**, it sounds a lot like the 7,800 residents of this Westchester community, whom he has served as village administrator since 1987 and who have been known to button-hole him with their concerns at any hour of the day or night. Sometimes, not even a Sunday morning is sacred. "It's like having a celebrity walk in the door," said Mr. **Russo's** wife, Josette, describing his arrival at their local church. "Everyone wants to get his ear and tell him what their situation is."

Number of Managers Grows

With the management of small communities becoming ever more complicated, the demands of local government are falling increasingly on the shoulders of people like Mr. **Russo**: professional managers who have inherited many of the tasks that used to be performed by part-time, largely untrained, elected officials.

While the concept of a village manager is far from new -- it dates back to the "good government" movement of the early 20th century -- experts have detected an increasing reliance on such officials in recent years. In 1993, the daily operations of 2,973 communities across the country were being overseen by professional managers, an increase of 12 percent since 1991 and 18 percent since 1984, according to the International City-County Management Association.

Spend a day or two with Mr. **Russo**, a 35-year-old whirlwind of a man who sometimes works from 7:30 in the morning until 11 at night, and it becomes readily apparent that running a village has become a lot like managing a small corporation; in the case of Rye Brook, a company with an operating budget of \$7.5 million last year.

Consider a two-hour stretch during a morning earlier this week:

There he is at 9 A.M., racing around the village with the recreation director, examining several ice-covered ball fields to determine whether softball season will start on time early next month. Forty-five minutes later he is poring over a map with the village public works director, readying a plan to repair a ruptured sewer line that was discovered over the weekend after part of a major roadway collapsed.

Soon after that, joined by the chairwoman of the council for environmental conservation, he has put on knee-length black rubber boots, slung a camera over his shoulder and hiked out to

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

examine a parcel of property that abuts a wetlands. And don't even ask him about an unrelated lawsuit against the village filed a day earlier by a disgruntled developer. "It's not like a company that has an assembly line running from 9 to 5," he said, catching his breath over a lunch of Caesar salad at a local restaurant. "It's going constantly." "The water coming out of that sewer pipe," he added, "it was running 24 hours a day, believe me."

While often called on to act in emergencies, Mr. **Russo**, like any other village manager, must tread a fine line. He was appointed by the five-member board of trustees to oversee the village's day-to-day operations, but he was not elected by their constituents. As a result, many of his decisions must be approved by the board. Among other checks and balances, his contract, which pays him an annual salary of \$84,000, comes up for renewal once a year.

"The democracy lies in the people that hire me," Mr. **Russo** said. "If they really don't like something going on, they don't have to wait until the next election." Quality but Low Costs To the village's part-time mayor, Salvatore Cresenzi, 46, who was trained as an architect but runs a bird-importing business in the Bronx, Mr. **Russo** can devote hours to the village's problems that other officials cannot spare. Mr. **Russo** also brings to the government a set of management skills that he honed in a master's program in public administration at Pace University and during the six years he worked for the dean of Westchester village managers, Lowell Tooley, who has served in Scarsdale since 1956. "I'm trained in business but I'm not a trained municipal administrator," Mr. Cresenzi said. "You can't always run a government like a business."

Anthony Cupaiuolo, the director of the Michaelian Institute for Public Policy and Management at Pace, was among those who encouraged Rye Brook to add a professional administrator to its roster in 1987, five years after it incorporated itself as a village within the town of Rye. "There are pressures on the villages to maintain a high quality of services and at the same time keep costs down," Dr. Cupaiuolo said. "That's difficult to do for a part-time person who may be well-intentioned and well-committed but doesn't have the time, the expertise or the experience."

Dr. Cupaiuolo said the strains on small communities have been aggravated by the Federal and state governments, which have ordered municipalities to meet a host of regulatory requirements - to clean up the environment, for example, or improve access for the disabled -- but do not always provide the money to make those changes. The fines for failing to comply can be even more expensive.

It's no wonder then that Mr. **Russo** has shed 30 pounds since last fall, a loss that seems as attributable to stress as the new exercise regimen that he follows three days a week at a nearby gym. By some miracle, he has managed to maintain a thick head of dark, wavy hair, a virtually unlined face and a warm, if not always relaxed, disposition. Still, his wife and 2 1/2-year-old daughter, Tracy, are constantly clamoring that he spend more hours at home and less time grappling with the machinations of the village. "Out of 17 snowstorms, he's gone out and plowed with his staff 15 times," said Mrs. Russo, 31, who was laid off in October from her job as a human resources manager at an insurance company. "At the same time, **Chris** thrives on it," she added a moment later. "He likes being responsible and responsive."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Christopher J. Russo
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The New York Times (NY)
May 12, 1991

You're Thinking of Living in: Rye Brook

Author: Mary McAleer Vizard

The Village of Rye Brook is Westchester County's newest municipality, formed in 1982 from what had been the unincorporated section of the Town of Rye. Since its creation, it has worked hard to establish its own identity. "The first thing we did was put 'Welcome to Rye Brook' signs all over the place," said Jack L. Kabcenell, the village's first Mayor, until 1988. "But it took the state three years to get a sign up on the Hutchinson River Parkway."

Long before becoming a municipality, Rye Brook was an established residential community. Most homes there were built in the 50's and 60's and streets are landscaped and tree-lined. Before World War II, Rye Brook was farmland and estates, whose old manor homes are scattered throughout the village. One is a 13-bedroom Southern colonial mansion that sits incongruously amid a development of homes in newer styles. The village also has a sprinkling of farmhouses and Victorian-era structures.

The history of Rye Brook before its incorporation was tied to the Town of Rye, which was settled in 1660 by a group from Greenwich, Conn. They negotiated a treaty with Shenarockwell, a Mohican chief, for all the land along Long Island Sound between the Mamaroneck and Byram Rivers. It is supposed that the town was named after Rye, in Sussex, England, the former home of some of the settlers.

Communities within the town eventually established themselves as separate municipalities. In 1865, the section called Rye Neck became part of the Village of Mamaroneck. Three years later, the Village of Port Chester was established. The Village of Rye was incorporated in 1904, only to secede in 1942 to become a city. This left Rye Brook as the town's only unincorporated section. "We represented only one-fifth of the town's voting block," Mr. Kabcenell said. "It became clear that the people who were being voted into office were not the ones we would have chosen. And they were making decisions on important issues like area zoning and development, things we were going to have to live with for a long time."

In 1980, a citizens' committee was formed to begin the work of turning Rye Brook into a village. "We had to create an entire administration, establish zoning and codify all the laws," said Mr. Kabcenell. Sandy Cortese and her husband, Joseph, watched the village take shape. They were living in Port Chester and commuting to Rye Brook to Mr. Cortese's accounting firm, where both work. "We watched Rye Brook grow and develop," Mrs. Cortese said, "so that by the time we moved here three years ago we knew what we were getting: a nice, clean, extraordinarily well-run village."

Christopher J. Russo, the village administrator, believes a lack of tradition helps streamline the village's operation. "Because we're so new, there's no historic way of doing things -- we just look

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

for the most efficient way," he said. "We've formed consortiums with neighboring areas to provide ambulance service and fire protection. Being Westchester's newest municipality allows us to do this, because we have no history of antagonism with our neighbors."

All Town of Rye municipalities get their water from the New York American Water Company, a private firm. "We probably have the highest water rates in Westchester," Mr. **Russo** said. "But we also have among the lowest taxes." The village's tax base is bolstered by a mix of commercial and residential development. There are three condominium developments, with prices ranging from \$150,000 for a one-bedroom unit to \$350,000 for a three-bedroom town house with amenities.

More prevalent are ranches, newly built colonials and contemporaries. "Houses here start at \$225,000 and go all the way to \$850,000," said Jean Saffir Smith, an associate broker for Prudential Suburban Properties. "But most are in the \$300,000's." "There's also been steady growth in commercial and residential construction projects," Mr. **Russo** said. One new development, called Deer Run, has 17 contemporary homes. All are about 3,000 square feet with at least four bedrooms. Prices range from \$695,000 to \$800,000. Sixteen houses have already been built and all the lots have been sold.

Another ongoing construction project is the building of 138 town houses around a nine-hole golf course. The course, owned by Doral Hotels and Resorts, is being redesigned to accommodate the construction. Several other large parcels of open land are now on the market, including the 140-acre High Point Hospital and the 22.5-acre Red Roof farm, realtors say. "Rye Brook is definitely still growing," Ms. Smith said.

One reason for that growth is Rye Brook's proximity to the Westchester County Airport, part of which is in the village, and to several major highways, including Interstates 95, 287 and 684 and the Hutchinson River Parkway. This accessibility has led to a substantial corporate presence, including Philip Morris, I.B.M. and M.C.I. In addition, the village is home to two resorts, the 114-acre Arrowwood and the 40-acre Rye Town Hilton, both known primarily as corporate conference centers.

Unlike older municipalities, Rye Brook has no downtown district where shoppers can stroll. The village center consists of two shopping complexes, Rye Ridge and Washington Park Plaza, each with a supermarket anchor. Rye Ridge also has a two-screen movie theater. Residents can dine at Provare, a trattoria in Arrowwood, and Par's Restaurant for continental cuisine. More extensive shopping, dining and entertainment are a few minutes away in surrounding communities.

When Marsha Diamond and her husband, Jeff, were shopping for their first home, Rye Brook did not immediately come to mind. They looked "long and hard in Westchester," Mrs. Diamond said, before moving here in September. The couple had been renting an apartment in Mount Vernon. "We wanted a new house with property, a community with young families and a good school system," she said. "Everything we wanted was here. And although Rye Brook isn't inexpensive, I

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Christopher J. Russo

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

think you can get more for your money than in other communities." An added bonus, Mrs. Diamond added, is that her two children, aged 7 and 10, can walk to school.

Most residents send their children to the Blind Brook School District. It includes the Ridge Street Elementary School and the Blind Brook Middle and High School (7-12). There are fewer than 1,000 students in the district, and class size is "usually under 20 students," said the Superintendent of Schools, Donald R. Kusel. "That allows us to give our students a lot of individual attention." The district offers a broad curriculum, including Latin in the fifth grade and advance placement courses in calculus, French and American history in the 11th and 12th grades. Mr. Kusel said "virtually 100 percent" of the graduating seniors last June went on to higher education.

A few residents live in the Port Chester/Rye Union Free School District, which has over 2,500 students, who attend four elementary schools and the Port Chester Middle and High Schools. The village Recreation Department runs 50 year-round programs for all ages. There are several parks, including the 35-acre Crawford Park and the 10-acre Rich Manor Park, a forest preserve. The village also has nine tennis courts, several ball fields and pockets of open space near most housing developments. "Over the years, developers had to agree to donate a parcel of open space to get their projects approved," Ms. Smith said. "Some of the land isn't very accessible now, but it's still nice to have." There is also the 18-hole Blind Brook Country Club, of which President Dwight D. Eisenhower was once a member.

Research Compiled by: Shannon Farr and Amanda Dillabough
 Colin Baenziger & Associates

Section 11

CB&A Reference Notes

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Jeanette Gatto – Former Commissioner, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL 305-409-2577

Ms. Gatto was serving as a commissioner when Mr. Russo began his second term as City Manager in 2012. He is the poster-boy of city managers. She knows of nobody else with more knowledge and experience in running a city. He possesses a broad understanding of all aspects of city management, from public works to cultural appreciation. He has excellent financial skills and strives to accomplish tasks in a timely manner.

Mr. Russo helped the City of Sunny Isles Beach mature in a relatively short period time. When he began his first term as City Manager in 2000, Sunny Isles Beach was only three years old and little more than a sleepy tourist town. The City has an area of only 1.78 square miles, which poses a unique challenge for development. Mr. Russo and other city officials met the challenge by promoting the use of tall, narrow buildings. During the installation of luxury high rise buildings along the waterfront, he recruited intelligent people to the building department with expertise in working with developers and contractors. He demonstrated active leadership during the project, working alongside his staff in the field. Developments such as these have attracted a great number of people to the area. The City now has a population of over 22,000.

Mr. Russo has proposed other innovative solutions to ease the City's growing pains. When traffic became a problem due to the increased population, Mr. Russo worked with the Mayor to install pedestrian bridges leading to the beach. He negotiated with the Florida Department of Transportation for a grant which helped fund the project.

Mr. Russo demonstrates skill in hiring. In addition to staffing the building department, he hired and trained an exceptional deputy city manager who later left his position but returned to the City because the new Mayor valued his expertise.

Mr. Russo adapts quickly to unfamiliar situations. When members of the City's police force desired to join the Florida Police Benevolent Association, he negotiated a contract to facilitate the process. He rapidly learned how to effectively manage a police force that is part of an association. On two other occasions, he helped the City recover from hurricane damage, working day and night to assist citizens and restore city services.

Mr. Russo skillfully works with elected officials of a variety of personalities and leadership styles. He can work behind the scenes in an administration that is very involved, but he can also take a more active leadership role when the need arises. He is patient when the Commission takes a long time in making decisions, but he puts himself in a position to move things forward. He keeps elected officials informed through monthly planning meetings as a group and makes himself available to meet with them individually to discuss ideas.

Mr. Russo stays involved in his community. He attends police events and meetings. He frequents Aventura Marketing Council meetings in Sunny Isles Beach's neighboring city. He is an active member of the League of Cities, a statewide association that assists municipalities with legal matters and obtaining resources. Residents of the City know him by his first name and feel

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Christopher J. Russo

comfortable going to him for help. After one of the hurricanes, he personally assisted an elderly woman in need.

Mr. Russo was involved in one situation that some people might consider controversial. When one of his employees was accused of harassment, Mr. Russo dismissed him but did not record the harassment as the reason. The man had recently suffered a personal loss and Mr. Russo wished to make it easier for him to find employment in the future. Ms. Gatto feels he should have adhered to procedure.

Ms. Gatto knows of nothing else in his conduct or background that would cause concern to an employer or citizen. She highly recommends him for a position in government.

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher J. Russo:

- Knowledgeable,
- Anticipates problems,
- Easy to work with,
- Prompt,
- Ambitious, and
- Well-rounded.

Strengths: Broad knowledge, good financial skills, a people person.

Weaknesses: Dislikes firing employees. He has given second chances to employees when he probably should have dismissed them.

George “Bud” Scholl – Former Mayor, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL 954-557-4325

Mr. Scholl has known Mr. Russo since 2002. He served as a commissioner and as mayor for 15 years while Mr. Russo was the City Manager in Sunny Isles Beach. Of the eight different city managers Mr. Scholl has worked with during his 25 years in city government, Mr. Russo was the best.

Mr. Russo has a great deal of experience in city management, which allows him to effectively prioritize his time and efforts. He knows when to propose changes and when to maintain procedures that work. He is not afraid to innovate and manages changes well.

Mr. Russo has a talent for hiring intelligent and effective workers. He builds a team and then relies on them to perform. He has an active leadership style, working alongside his staff to execute the Commission’s vision for the City. When the Commission approved the installation of underground power lines, Mr. Russo oversaw the project. He assembled a team of municipal

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Christopher J. Russo

employees and consultants. They worked with the contractor and developed a plan for rerouting traffic and working during the night to minimize disruptions.

Mr. Russo is fiscally responsible. He oversees the process of creating a budget and then follows it, managing capital projects with skill. He has helped the City of Sunny Isles Beach build reserves.

When dealing with elected officials, Mr. Russo communicates frequently about all aspects of city management. Mr. Scholl felt he sometimes communicated too much information for his liking. However, he acknowledges that many mayors would appreciate receiving that level of information.

Mr. Russo is dedicated to his community. He lives in the area, so he understands residents' wants and needs. He works evenings and weekends and attends community meetings. If a condominium association has a problem, he attends their meeting to offer help and guidance. When residents call him with problems, he responds promptly. He is comfortable talking to the public individually as well as presenting to a group.

Mr. Russo performs well during a crisis. When a hurricane forced the City to shut down, he organized and coordinated the effort to clean up and reestablish city services. He helped mobilize municipal employees and the police force. He directed communications with the public. His leadership helped the City reopen in just 36 hours, long before neighboring cities.

Mr. Russo effectively manages the stress of the City Manager position. He remains calm while dealing with time constraints and satisfying the demands of elected officials. Mr. Scholl notes that sometimes Mr. Russo could demonstrate a greater sense of urgency in some situations, but overall, his ability to handle stress is an asset.

Mr. Scholl knows of nothing in Mr. Russo's background or conduct that would concern an employee or citizen. On one occasion, an employee raised an investigation about his management style, but the Commission found no evidence of inappropriate behavior or wrongdoing from Mr. Russo. They quickly dismissed the charges.

Mr. Russo left his position as City Manager for Sunny Isles Beach in 2021. When Mr. Scholl stepped down as Mayor, the new Mayor only saw Mr. Russo as belonging to an administration she disliked. She had someone else in mind for the position, so she asked him to resign.

Mr. Scholl thinks highly of Mr. Russo and would recommend him for a position in city or county government.

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Competent,
- Responsive,
- Professional,
- Experienced,
- Motivational, and
- Smart.

Strengths: Hard worker, takes his job seriously, has wisdom and experience.

Weaknesses: Micromanages his employees at times. Sometimes it is better to dismiss an employee than micromanage them.

Danny Iglesias – Former Commissioner, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL 305-505-9809

Mr. Iglesias has known Mr. Russo since he applied for the position of City Manager for the City of Sunny Isles Beach in 2000. Mr. Iglesias was serving as a City Commissioner at the time. Mr. Russo was the best Manager the City had during its 25 years of existence. Mr. Russo is a respected, intelligent, active manager with a great deal of experience in local government.

Mr. Russo has participated in many innovative efforts to develop and improve the City of Sunny Isles Beach. Because every road leading into the City of Sunny Isles Beach is a state road under the management of the Florida Board of Transportation, Mr. Russo worked closely with them on several road maintenance and improvement projects. When jaywalking became a problem as the City grew, Mr. Russo approached the Board with a proposal to install landscaping and fencing in the medians to deter illegal crossings. As an engineer for the Board of Transportation, Mr. Iglesias collaborated closely with Mr. Russo throughout the project.

Mr. Russo helped create city codes requiring developers to set aside land for beach access walkways. Through these efforts, the City increased the number of beach access points from six to thirty. Mr. Russo came up with recommendations to combine projects to more efficiently use leftover land to create miniature parks along the beach access walkways.

Mr. Russo does not impose his will upon elected officials but cooperates with their vision. When the City Commission proposes an idea, he gives an informative report on how to accomplish their plans. He keeps them well-informed on the progress of City projects and any obstacles his staff has encountered.

When the City Commission asks Mr. Russo to lead a project, he excels in assembling a capable team to complete it. He hires personnel with the knowledge and skills they need. He is willing to take suggestions and recommendations from his colleagues when hiring, but only after

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

thoroughly researching the candidate. Many of the staff members he hired still work for the City after many years.

Management is one of Mr. Russo's greatest strengths. He leads his team effectively by making sure all his staff are well-informed. He educates himself about projects he leads so he can educate his team and offer suggestions and assistance when needed. He takes the time to make sure new employees are well-trained.

Mr. Russo has excellent financial skills. He participated with the Commission in the creation of the City budget every year. The Commissioners appreciated his helpful suggestions on how to use funds efficiently and adopted many of his ideas.

Mr. Russo accomplishes tasks in a timely manner. He stays calm under the pressure of meeting deadlines. Mr. Iglesias has never seen him show stress. Mr. Russo lives in the City of Sunny Isles Beach and stays involved in the community. He participates in local events with his family as well as in his official capacity as City Manager.

The City Manager position occasionally requires the making of unpopular decisions. One controversial situation in Sunny Isles Beach involved a gay bar. This establishment housed exotic dancers, which would require the business to be classified as a cabaret instead of a bar. Because of this violation of city code, Mr. Russo and his team closed the bar. Residents protested the decision, calling Mr. Russo and other city officials anti-gay. However, Mr. Iglesias maintains that they were simply enforcing regulations and the decision was in no way influenced by homophobic sentiments. Mr. Iglesias knows of nothing else in Mr. Russo's conduct or background that would concern an employer or citizen.

Mr. Russo resigned from his position as City Manager in 2021. When the mayor he had previously worked with resigned, the City held a special election to elect a new mayor. Mr. Russo had supported the opponent of the candidate who won the election. When she took office, he decided to leave the tense political atmosphere and make a new start somewhere else.

Mr. Iglesias was disappointed when Mr. Russo resigned. He would hire Mr. Russo again without hesitation. Whoever hires him will not regret their decision.

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Hard worker,
- Diligent,
- Hands-on,
- Experienced,
- Knowledgeable, and
- Always available.

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Strengths: Knowledgeable manager, offers suggestions and assistance to his employees.

Weaknesses: Micromanages a little, especially new employees.

Bob Welsh – Community Activist, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL 305-607-5706

Mr. Welsh has known Mr. Russo since 2000 when he accepted the position of City Manager for the City of Sunny Isles Beach. Mr. Welsh served on the committee appointed to gather information on the legal aspects of making Sunny Isles Beach a new city, and he has been a community leader ever since. When he created a nonprofit organization to earn money for the local school, Mr. Russo introduced him to businessmen who could contribute money to the cause. Mr. Welsh appreciates Mr. Russo as a problem-solver with a unique approach to public relations.

Mr. Russo has an innate ability to go beyond the requirements of the position to help the residents he serves. He listens to their concerns and works to resolve complaints. He also empowers citizens to come up with their own solutions. On one occasion, he gathered a small group of residents with similar complaints and asked them to work together on a possible solution and helped them reach out to the state with their idea.

Being a good listener is one of Mr. Russo's greatest strengths. His talent for networking helps him gather information to make good decisions. He spends time in the community talking to people, learning their needs and wants, and navigating conflicting points of view. During conversations, he waits for people to finish talking. He examines and absorbs their perspectives so he can offer an intelligent, well-thought plan as a response. He does not automatically say yes to requests from the public, but he works to find solutions that will satisfy them.

Mr. Russo appreciates innovation, but he does not make changes hastily. He gathers input from as many colleagues as possible, including the City Attorney, the Mayor, and the Commissioners. He ensures that any changes comply with State and County regulations.

Mr. Russo performs well in a crisis. When a hurricane caused a lot of destruction, City Hall was closed by order of the State. Mr. Russo personally called every city employee and offered them double salary to work overtime and help with the clean up and recovery efforts. Their efforts helped Sunny Isles Beach reopen before any other city in Dade County.

Mr. Russo is an effective manager. He sets goals for his staff and follows up on their progress. He assigns tasks to the people most qualified and willing to accomplish them. He offers help and advice when needed. He dedicates time to training his employees well. Each time he hired an Assistant City Manager, he dedicated an hour or two each day to training them. He showed them what it means to be a City Manager, which enabled them to take over for him when needed. Each assistant moved on to become the city manager of a neighboring city.

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Mr. Welsh knows of nothing in Mr. Russo's past or conduct that would concern a reasonable person. He would seek out Mr. Russo for any job. He highly recommends him for a position in government.

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Big planner,
- Likes to establish objectives,
- Delegates tasks effectively,
- Follows up with assignments,
- Good sense of humor, and
- Well-liked.

Strengths: Good listener, helps people compromise and find solutions.

Weaknesses: Takes a long time to make decisions because he gathers input from so many people. Inflexible once he has arrived at a decision.

Esmond Scott - Manager, Miami Shores Village, FL 305-924-3113

Mr. Scott has known Mr. Russo personally since he began his second term as City Manager for Sunny Isles Beach in 2012, but he learned of his reputation even earlier. Mr. Scott is the Manager for the neighboring Miami Shores Village. He values Mr. Russo's help and advice as a fellow city manager. He hears nothing but positive comments about Mr. Russo's accomplishments and management style.

Mr. Russo reaches out to his fellow city managers for their opinions and offers his assistance in return. He sat on a panel to hire a new police chief for Miami Shores Village. When Mr. Scott was the Manager of North Miami Beach, Mr. Russo worked with him to negotiate terms for Sunny Isles Beach to use their drinking water. Mr. Russo serves as the Treasurer for the executive board for the Miami-Dade City and County Management Association. He is also involved in a subgroup for coastal city managers and helps schedule their meetings. During these meetings, he freely shares information and ideas.

Mr. Russo has a talent for hiring skilled employees. When he resigned from his position in Sunny Isles Beach, Mr. Scott hastened to hire his former City Planner. He knew Mr. Russo had trained her and that she had accomplished great things as part of his team. Mr. Russo leads his team with a personal touch, establishing a relationship with each employee. One project he worked on with his team was planning and building a center for multi-use, which has been a great success.

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Mr. Russo manages the stress of his position well. He remains calm while navigating the many conflicting opinions of the Commissioners and the public. Though he has dealt with controversial situations as a City Manager, he handles each matter legally and ethically. Mr. Scott knows of nothing in his background or conduct that would concern an employer or cause concern to a citizen.

Mr. Scott would hire Mr. Russo without hesitation if he could afford him. Mr. Russo is highly regarded and respected in Dade County.

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Engaging,
- Present,
- Innovative,
- Approachable,
- Team-oriented, and
- Fiscally responsible.

Strengths: Good communicator, has a good relationship with his council, well-respected.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Ron Wasson – City Manager, Aventura, FL 516-764-1120

Mr. Wasson has known Mr. Russo since 2012. He was the City Manager of the neighboring city of Bay Harbor Islands when Mr. Russo returned for his second term as the City Manager of Sunny Isles Beach. Mr. Wasson values Mr. Russo's advice as a fellow city manager.

When Mr. Wasson has a problem, he feels comfortable asking Mr. Russo for help. They worked together on a project to extend a path for bikers and pedestrians over Lehman Causeway, the road that connects Aventura with Sunny Isles Beach. They also negotiated an agreement to share street sweeping services between the two cities. After a hurricane struck in the area, Mr. Russo coordinated with neighboring cities on recovery efforts.

One of Mr. Russo's greatest strengths is his ability to get along with people of all classes and situations. He works with individual residents one-on-one, but he also feels comfortable making presentations to a large group. He lives in Sunny Isles Beach because he considers it important to belong to the community he serves. As a resident himself, he understands the public's needs and their hopes for the City.

Mr. Russo uses technology to benefit his community. He helped create a city website to keep the public informed. He also utilizes social media to gather and distribute information.

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Mr. Russo participates in the creation of the city budget. He poses ideas to bring development to the City to increase their financial reserves. He uses the revenue to improve and beautify the community, which in turn attracts more business to the area.

Mr. Russo has made many excellent hiring decisions. The police chiefs he hired have done great work. Mr. Wasson enjoys his interactions with Mr. Russo's former Assistant City Manager. Mr. Russo hired many staff members for the building department who are knowledgeable and helpful. When Mr. Wasson's Building Department Chief for the City of Bay Harbor Islands went out of town, Mr. Russo sent his chief to take over temporarily. Mr. Wasson enjoyed their time working together during these occasions. Mr. Russo is an active manager who prefers to gather information in the field over desk work, though he can also work behind the scenes when needed.

Mr. Russo has helped the City of Sunny Isles Beach mature from a tourist town with a single-story hotel to a large, modern, wealthy city. He has worked to create new parks and beautified existing areas. He has made these improvements despite the City's limited building space. He was instrumental in bringing a high school to the City of Sunny Isles Beach. He coordinated with officials from multiple counties to make plans and find funding. Mr. Wasson later used Mr. Russo's methods as a model for bringing a school to his own city.

Mr. Wasson is not aware of anything in Mr. Russo's background or conduct that would cause an employer concern. He knows of no controversies involving Mr. Russo. The Aventura City Commission would be eager to recruit him if Mr. Wasson resigned. Mr. Wasson highly recommends him as a municipal manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Dedicated,
- Friendly,
- Sense of humor,
- Can be serious,
- Loyal, and
- Truthful.

Strengths: A strong manager, good knowledge of construction and planning, good organizational skills.

Weaknesses: None identified.

**Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo**

Derrick Arias – Chief Information Officer, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL 786-202-1127

Mr. Arias has known Mr. Russo since 2002 when Mr. Russo hired him as the Chief Information Officer for the City of Sunny Isles Beach. When Mr. Russo returned to the City in 2012, he invited Mr. Arias to work with him again. They worked together on several technology-savvy projects, such as implementing free public wi-fi on the beach and installing outdoor kiosks and smart benches in parks.

Mr. Russo has excellent financial skills. He manages resources wisely and effectively oversees capital projects. He helped create a Transfer of Development Rights program, which brought over 20 million dollars of revenue to the City. He then reinvested the money into the community, adding new facilities and services. He helped establish the Cultural and Community Services department, which organizes family events monthly and offers after school classes and childcare options.

Mr. Russo is a strong and involved manager. He likes to interact with his employees. He takes pride in interviewing every municipal employee hired in Sunny Isles Beach. He plans team building events to motivate and educate his staff. He rallies his team around realizing the Commissioners' vision for the City.

On one occasion, he worked with his staff and Mr. Arias to address security concerns in a government building. Mr. Russo assembled a team of employees, police officers, and representatives from the public works department to brainstorm solutions. They installed a secure gate at the parking garage and stationed professional security guards at the front desk.

During stressful situations, Mr. Russo remains calm and works through problems logically. He does not allow stress from his personal life affect his performance at work. He does not become flustered.

When a new mayor took office, she wished to change the entire administration, the City Manager. She asked him to step down, so Mr. Russo resigned. His job performance was not a factor in her decision.

Mr. Arias is not aware of anything in Mr. Russo's background or conduct that would prevent him from honorable service in city or county government. He recommends him for the position.

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Knowledgeable,
- Respectful,
- Professional,
- Friendly,
- Innovative, and
- High level of integrity.

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Strengths: Experienced in public works and capital projects.

Weaknesses: Not strong in technical knowledge. Relies heavily on his Chief Information Officer.

Elaine Adler – Executive Director, Aventura Marketing Council, FL 305-725-5334

Ms. Adler has known Mr. Russo since 2002. Ms. Adler serves as the Executive Director for the Marketing Council in Aventura, a neighboring city to Sunny Isles Beach. She has worked with Mr. Russo on various occasions, coordinating business efforts or arranging transportation to local festivals. They communicate often through phone calls, emails, texts, and in-person meetings.

Mr. Russo excels in financial management. He has supervised the finance department from the city's beginnings. He has helped the City of Sunny Isles Beach become a successful organization.

Mr. Russo does not settle for low quality work. During the recovery efforts after a hurricane, Mr. Russo worked with the State to replace the trees along the main road, which is maintained by the State. When they completed the work, Mr. Russo and his colleagues were disappointed with the trees the State workers had installed. They looked sick and unappealing. Mr. Russo went back to the Board of Transportation to arrange for the planting of new, healthy trees.

Mr. Russo responds to stress with humor. He thinks through problems and talks to his colleagues about possible solutions. He makes a decision based on the best possible outcome, and then moves forward. He does not allow stress to paralyze him.

Mr. Russo has strong leadership skills. He uses his excellent interpersonal skills to build a team atmosphere among his staff. He works alongside his employees, doing his share of the work. He follows up with his team on their progress. Mr. Russo makes good hiring decisions. Many of the people he hired still work for the City of Sunny Isles Beach after many years. There is very little employee turnover among his staff, much less than many city governments.

When working with elected officials, he adapts to a variety of personalities and leadership styles. He offers strong guidance but lets them lead. When he proposes an idea, he presents it in such a way that others adopt it as their own. In this manner, he provides leadership from behind the scenes.

Ms. Adler wishes Mr. Russo would stay in Sunny Isles Beach. She appreciated the ease of working with him. If she could, she would pay a great deal of money to hire him. She knows of nothing in his conduct or background that would concern a citizen or employer. She does not believe he has been involved in anything controversial. She cannot think of anyone who would have a negative opinion of him. She recommends Mr. Russo for any position in government.

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Smart,
- Funny,
- Follows through,
- Detail oriented,
- Visionary, and
- Productive.

Strengths: Able to get along with many different people.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Arie Steiger – Community Activist, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL 305-710-1230

Mr. Steiger has known Mr. Russo since 2000, when Mr. Russo took the position of City Manager in Sunny Isles Beach. They have worked together during Mr. Steiger's service on various city committees, including the historic board, the city advisory committee, and the traffic committee.

Mr. Russo has demonstrated the ability to adapt to conditions under two very different administrations. During his first term as City Manager, he served under a strong mayor and commission. He worked behind the scenes to implement this administration's vision for the City. For the last seven years, he has taken a more active leadership role. He essentially performed the role of Mayor while Mayor Scholl and his commission took a more passive approach to government and only worked at the city part-time.

Mr. Russo is a good listener. He listens to concerns from members of the public and takes input from his colleagues. He regularly attends meetings for the City's various boards and committees. He recognizes good ideas and has approved and implemented many of their recommendations.

Mr. Russo is a problem-solver. When the police chief announced his retirement, the City Commissioners advocated for bringing in an outside candidate to fill the position. This idea was unpopular among residents, who felt a local candidate would better serve the community. Mr. Russo resolved the conflict by persuading the police chief to remain in his position for another four years. He managed the stress of this contentious issue very well.

Mr. Russo has excellent financial skills. During his time in Sunny Isles Beach, he oversaw the city budget. He kept track of expenses to ensure proper management of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Russo stepped down as City Manager when a new Mayor took office in 2021. Mayor Goldman disliked Mayor Scholl and his administration, including Mr. Russo. Mr. Steiger wishes Mr. Russo would stay in Sunny Isles Beach. Under his direction, the City ran like a well-oiled

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

machine. Without him, the new administration has begun to overspend and mismanage the budget.

Mr. Steiger knows of no major controversies during Mr. Russo's time in Sunny Isles Beach. He does not believe there is anything in Mr. Russo's conduct or background that would hinder his ability to serve in local government. Mr. Steiger would hire him any time he needed a City Manager. He recommends him for a position in government.

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Capable,
- Good manager,
- Good at budgeting, and
- Good at crisis management.

Strengths: A good financial manager, adaptable, and a leader.

Weaknesses: None identified.

**Dana Goldman – Former Commissioner/Current Mayor, City of Sunny Isles Beach, FL
786-512-6364**

Ms. Goldman has known Mr. Russo since 2014 when she became an elected official for the City of Sunny Isles Beach. They worked on multiple projects together. She appreciates him as an intelligent individual and a capable City Manager. He has done excellent work.

Mr. Russo brings many skills to the position of City Manager. He is innovative. He is involved in the community and good at dealing with the public. He has excellent financial skills. He accomplishes tasks in a timely manner and handles stress well.

Mr. Russo has good leadership skills. He makes good decisions when hiring personnel, and he takes an active approach to managing his staff. On one occasion, Mr. Russo led his team in solving problems with storm water drainage. They improved the City's infrastructure to reduce flooding.

Ms. Goldman prefers not to comment on whether Mr. Russo has been involved in anything controversial. However, she knows of nothing in his conduct or background that would embarrass or concern an employer or citizen. She prefers not to discuss Mr. Russo's reasons for leaving his position in Sunny Isles Beach.

Ms. Goldman recommends Mr. Russo as a good choice for a municipal manager position. He is talented, smart, and capable.

Reference Notes
Christopher J. Russo

Words or phrases used to describe Christopher Russo:

- Intelligent,
- Forward-thinking,
- Responsive to the community,
- Engaged,
- Personable, and
- Amiable.

Strengths: Self-sufficient and knowledgeable with a take-charge attitude.

Weaknesses: Needs to communicate better with elected officials and be more responsive to them.

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