

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Section 7

Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Cooper City

City Manager Candidate Report

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Cover Letter and Resume

ROB HERNANDEZ

3514 Northwest 23rd Street, Cape Coral, Florida 33993 | 954-940-1065 | robhernandez@comcast.net

February 23, 2023

Mr. Colin Baenziger
Colin Baenziger & Associates
2055 South Atlantic Avenue, Suite 504
Daytona Beach Shores, Florida 32118

Dear Mr. Baenziger:

Please accept the enclosed résumé for the position of City Manager for the City of Cooper City, Florida. I am confident that my organizational and leadership abilities, educational background, and diverse professional experience are well-suited to the specific requirements of the position.

As indicated in the enclosed résumé, my professional background includes more than 30 years of progressive and responsible local government management experience. As an ICMA Credentialed Manager, I most recently served as the city manager for the City of Cape Coral, Florida from August 2020 to February 2023. My other experience as a city manager includes serving with the City of Savannah, Georgia from 2016 until 2019. In that capacity, I reported to a nine-member city council, created a new strategic plan - SAVANNAH FORWARD, led a family of 2,513 exceptional employees, and implemented a lean operating budget of \$408 million and a capital improvement plan in excess of \$407 million.

My previous and extensive experience in local government within Broward County includes serving as the deputy city manager for the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida; deputy county administrator for Broward County Florida; assistant to the county administrator for Broward County, Florida; and several other key positions within Broward County government earlier in my career.

I am confident that I bring the right combination of skills, experience, and talents to the position. If you would like to schedule an interview or discuss my interest in the position, please contact me at (954) 940-1065 or at robhernandez@comcast.net. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Roberto Hernandez

Roberto Hernandez

Enclosure:
- Résumé

ROB HERNANDEZ

3514 Northwest 23rd Street; Cape Coral, Florida 33993 | 954-940-1065 | robhernandez@comcast.net

PROFILE

Proven, resourceful, and results-focused public administrator with more than 30 years of progressive local government management experience. ICMA-Credentialed Manager known for leadership, professionalism, and organizational abilities.

EXPERIENCE

City Manager **2020 - 2023**
City of Cape Coral, Florida

Reported to an eight-member governing body, served as the chief administrative officer supervising the operations of 10 departments, four business units and the community redevelopment agency. Cape Coral is Florida's eighth most populated city with more than 210,000 residents across 130 square miles. Responsible for 1,838 full-time equivalent employees and a total budget exceeding \$1 billion.

Accomplishments:

- Guided the City's response to, and recovery from, its largest natural disaster - Hurricane Ian.
- Launched a formal economic and business development program, "Cape Competes," including a dedicated funding source for business development programs and obtaining electorate approval of an economic development ad valorem property tax exemption for expanding or relocating businesses.
- Established a new strategic plan, "Cape Compass," to guide the city's direction through 2030.
- Insured the long-term financial sustainability of the City's charter school system.
- Created the Office of Communications to lead the City's public information and engagement efforts.

Deputy City Manager **2019 - 2020**
City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Appointed by a five-member commission, served as a member of the City's executive management team supporting the city manager. Fort Lauderdale is a coastal city of 186,220 residents occupying 36 square miles in the heart of the seventh largest metropolitan area in the United States, employing 2,700 with a \$739 million operating budget and \$883 million capital plan (FY20)

Key responsibilities:

- Assisted the city manager in overseeing municipal operations, specifically coordinating the activities of the Transportation and Mobility, Public Works, Sustainable Development and Parks and Recreation departments (FY20 operating budget of \$380 million and 1,527 full-time employees).
- Participated in the finalization of the agenda for upcoming city commission meetings.
- Worked closely with the city manager, elected officials and stakeholders in crafting solutions to issues.
- Served as the city manager during the city manager's absence.

City Manager **2016 - 2019**
City of Savannah, Georgia

Served as the chief executive officer for a dynamic coastal and historic community of 108 square miles, 143,000 residents, 14 million visitors and more than 25,000 thousand military personnel and students. Reported to nine-member city council and oversaw operating budget of \$408 million, led 2,513 employees and implemented \$407 million capital plan (FY19).

Notable accomplishments:

- Executed a strategically aligned organizational restructuring focused on the city council's five strategic priorities: Good Government, Public Safety, Neighborhood Revitalization, Infrastructure, and Economic Strength.
- Transformed a projected \$14 million budget deficit into a \$10.9 million budget surplus after the first full budget year and \$15 million surplus in second.
- Reestablished municipal police department following a 15-year absence.
- Increased Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) participation in city contracts from 18% to more than 30%.
- Launched targeted neighborhood investment program ("Savannah Shines") to address crime, blight, and infrastructure needs in residential neighborhoods.
- Realized an upgrade in the City's General Fund and Water and Sewer Fund bond ratings from Aa2 to Aa1 (Moody's).

**Deputy County Administrator
Broward County, Florida**

2013 - 2016

Part of the Miami-Fort Lauderdale metropolitan area, Broward County is the second most populous county in Florida (pop. 1.9 million).

Key duties and accomplishments:

- Maintained positive and effective relationships with a nine-member board of county commissioners.
- Exercised executive level leadership in assisting the county administrator in directing the operations of a large, diverse, urban county with 5,989 employees and a total budget of \$4.2 billion.
- Provided direct oversight of Public Works, Human Services, Environmental Protection and Growth Management departments; Parks and Recreation, Libraries, Cultural divisions; and offices of Economic and Small Business Development, Public Communications, Intergovernmental Affairs, and Medical Examiner and Trauma Services (3,003 FTEs and \$537.4 million operating budget (FY16)).
- Served as team leader during negotiations retaining a major league sports team.
- Acted as the county administrator during the county administrator's absence.

**Deputy City Manager
City of Coral Springs, Florida**

2011 - 2013

Served as one of two deputy city managers assisting the city manager in providing operational oversight of departments in a full-service municipality consisting of 24 square miles, population of 121,096, 767 employees, and \$152 million budget located in southeastern Florida.

Key duties and accomplishments:

- Worked closely and collaboratively with the city manager and a five-member city commission on a variety of projects, issues, and business plan initiatives.
- Led the City's initial efforts to build a new municipal complex including working with the public, the Urban Land Institute, city commission and key stakeholders.
- Completed a comprehensive assessment of the City's code enforcement agency leading to operational changes targeting efficiency and program effectiveness.
- Spearheaded the creation of an economic development strategic plan, ten-year update of the City's downtown redevelopment plan, downtown storm water study, and downtown parking study.
- Provided initial project leadership and oversight for a \$4.4 million project consisting of "Complete Streets" elements and development of an "Art Walk" as a link between the new municipal complex and adjacent dining and shopping areas.

**Deputy County Manager
Fulton County, Georgia****2008 - 2011**

Fulton County is the center of the Atlanta metropolitan area and the state's capital county (pop. 1.1 million, 5,557 FTEs (FY11) and FY11 total budget of \$1.09 billion). Served as deputy county manager principally responsible for unincorporated area services, public safety, public works, and coordination with judicial agencies.

Key duties and accomplishments:

- Interacted with a seven-member board of county commissioners.
- Provided strategic leadership and direction for various county services, including animal services, code enforcement, planning, permitting, zoning, economic development, emergency communications/911, emergency management, fire and emergency medical services, parks and recreation, police, and public works (including water and sewer).
- Oversaw municipal-level services within the unincorporated area known as South Fulton, an annual operating budget of \$208 million (FY11, all funds) and 751 full-time employees (all funds).
- Coordinated activities among the County Manager's Office and 12 constitutional and judicial agencies.
- Acted as the county manager during the county manager's absence.
- Guided the adoption of a redevelopment plan for the Fulton Industrial District, resulting in the reinvigoration of one of the largest industrial, warehousing and distribution areas east of the Mississippi River.
- Led a comprehensive review and reorganization of the County's emergency communications services.
- Planned and implemented infrastructure improvements including replacement and renovated fire stations, parks and recreation facilities, fleet replacement, new satellite government service center, courthouse security upgrades, and other improvements to County-owned facilities.
- Provided strategic direction to the Office of the Child Attorney leading to the termination of a federal consent decree relating to legal services provided to abused and neglected children.
- Coordinated efforts to emerge from a federal consent decree relating to jail crowding by participating in initiatives designed to improve the criminal justice system's performance, expand jail staffing, reduce criminal case processing time, replace the criminal justice information system, and complete extensive jail modernization and improvement projects.

**Assistant to the County Administrator
Broward County, Florida****2003 - 2008**

Served in an executive level position aiding the county administrator in managing the operations of a large urban county (1.8 million residents, \$3.1 billion total budget (FY08) and 7,000 employees (FY08)).

Key duties and accomplishments:

- Assisted in implementing the policies of a nine-member board of commissioners.
- Facilitated, tracked, and monitored the implementation of key policies, projects and initiatives in assigned agencies, including Aviation, Community Services, Emergency Management, Environmental Protection, Port Everglades, Public Works and Transportation (\$857 million FY08 operating budget and 3,124 employees).
- Completed special projects to improve services, efficiency or organizational performance, including a seaport physical security program upgrade and organizational improvements in emergency management operations.
- Chaired or served on organization-wide task forces on cost efficiencies in environmental protection, transportation, and public works services.
- Directed an internal investigative unit investigating complaints of misconduct by employees or contractors.

**Various Positions
Broward County, Florida****1994-2003**

Executive management positions assisting in directing the operations of two departments (human services and public safety) and coordinating the County's activities in affordable housing and economic development.

Key duties and accomplishments:

- Co-authored strategic plan for regional fire rescue services which secured \$18 million in capital funding, \$16 million in additional operating funds and \$33 million for regional public safety communications.
- Negotiated five intergovernmental agreements for fire and emergency medical services with a combined value of more than \$40 million including the expansion of contracted fire rescue services and the consolidation of municipal and county fire departments.
- Assisted in the placement, funding, and construction of a 200-bed full service homeless assistance center.
- Coordinated special projects and citizen advisory boards, such as the Homeless Initiative Partnership, Fire Rescue Advisory Board, and Affordable Housing Advisory Committee.
- Administered more than \$7 million in affordable housing financing, construction and rehabilitation programs for Broward County and four contract cities under the State Housing Initiative Partnership.

**Civil Affairs Specialist/Instructor/Course Writer
United States Army Reserve****1983 - 2008**

Served as a Civil Affairs soldier, team leader, platoon sergeant, instructor, and chief instructor. Identified critical requirements needed by local citizens in combat or crisis situations. Located civilian resources to support military operations, mitigate non-combatant injury, or minimize civilian interference with military operations. Established and maintained communication with civilian aid agencies and organizations. Notable accomplishments while on Active Duty:

- Supported operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom by training deploying forces to perform civil military operations, which involve establishing, maintaining, and influencing relations between military forces, governmental and nongovernmental civilian organizations, and the civilian populace.
- Following Hurricane Andrew, provided humanitarian assistance to civilians, and provided short-term support to stabilization and reconstruction efforts in the city of Homestead, Florida.
- Assisted in the reception, housing, and relocation of Cuban migrants during Operation Safe Haven in the Republic of Panama.
- Provided technical expertise, advice, and assistance in restoring local government services and facilities in the Republic of Panama during Operation Just Cause, including public safety, jail facilities, refuse collection, restoration of freight rail service, repair of local housing stock, and the re-establishment of the national government.

EDUCATION

Essentials of Firefighting
Broward Fire Academy; Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Master of Public Administration
Nova Southeastern University; Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Army Instructor Training Course
U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School; Fort Bragg, North Carolina

Bachelor of Public Administration
Florida International University; Miami, Florida

Civil Affairs Course (Civil-Military Operations)
U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School; Fort Bragg, North Carolina

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

International City / County Management Association (ICMA) – Credentialed Manager
Florida City / County Management Association
United Way of Lee, Hendry, and Glades Counties’ Board of Directors
Urban Land Institute
Florida Redevelopment Association
Broward City / County Management Association (past member)
Georgia City / County Management Association (past member)
Savannah Employees’ Retirement System Board of Trustees (past member)
Georgia Public Pension Trustees Association (past member)
Chatham Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (past member)
Savannah International Trade and Maritime Center (Convention Center Board of Directors – past member)
Resource Recovery Development Authority for the City of Savannah (past chair)
City of Tamarac, Florida Firefighters’ Pension Board of Trustees (past member)
Florida Public Pension Trustees Association (past member)

Candidate Introduction

Rob Hernandez

EDUCATION

- Master of Public Administration, Nova Southeastern University
- Bachelor of Public Administration, Florida International University

EXPERIENCE

- City Manager; City of Cape Coral, FL 2020 – 2023
- Deputy City Manager; City of Fort Lauderdale, FL 2019 – 2020
- City Manager; City of Savannah: GA 2016 – 2019
- Deputy County Administrator; Broward County, FL 2013 – 2016
- Deputy City Manager; Coral Springs, FL 2011 – 2013
- Deputy County Manager; Fulton County, GA 2008 – 2011

BACKGROUND

Cape Coral is the largest municipality in Southwest Florida and the eighth most populated city in Florida (University of Florida’s Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR)). Significantly larger than Cooper City in geographic area, the city encompasses about 110 square miles in land area and another 10 square miles of water with a population of 208,053 (BEBR, 2022). The city continues to be among the fastest growing communities in the nation. Unlike a built-out community like Cooper City, Cape Coral is about 50 percent developed and has the potential to grow to almost 440,000 residents at full-build out, which may occur by 2033 at this rate of growth.

The City of Cape Coral is a full-service municipal corporation that provides public safety, parks and recreation programs, potable drinking water, wastewater collection and treatment, one of the largest reclaimed water distribution systems in the country, sanitation services, development regulation, parking, and street maintenance. Its Fiscal Year 2023 adopted general fund budget is \$249.1 million or \$944.5 million in total. With the recent adoption of the first budget amendment, its total budget now exceeds \$1 billion.

As the City’s chief executive officer, I supervised the operations of 10 departments, four business units and the city’s community redevelopment agency. Collectively, the city employs 1,876 full-time equivalent employees.

The three most critical issues facing the city are:

- Infrastructure Expansion
- Revenue Diversification
- Economic and Business Development

Cape Coral's early development is very similar to that of Cooper City's. In 1958, the Rosen brothers of Baltimore purchased roughly 1,700 acres and began subdividing this land into homesites marketed to retirees from the Midwest and the Northeast. Until the 21st Century, growth in Cape Coral was consistent. The boom years of the early 2000s and today, witnessed explosive expansion of single family development throughout the geographic area of the City. The Rosen Brothers failed to apply modern community planning principles as they developed Cape Coral. Little effort was made to introduce centralized water and sewer and underground utilities. Today, only 50 percent of the city receives centralized water, wastewater, and reclaimed water services. For the last 25 years, the City has embarked on an ambitious plan called the Utilities Extension Project, or UEP for short, to extend centralized water and wastewater services to growing neighborhoods. As part of the UEP, the City also upgrades stormwater infrastructure and roadways. Prior to my separation from the City, the city council approved the latest Utilities Master Plan which contemplates full extension of services by the year 2045.

The City's efforts have met resistance from property owners. Unlike many utilities which build into its rate structure recurring expansion costs, decades ago the city council chose not to build in such costs into its rate structure. At the time, the belief was the "growth should pay for growth" and that existing rate payers should not bear any costs associated with new residential development. Consequently, the City imposes a special assessment in each UEP expansion area. Property owners in UEP areas experience "sticker shock" as current UEP assessments are in the range of \$35,000 excluding costs associated with hooking up water, sewer, and reclaimed water to the residential property itself.

The lack of utility infrastructure and the pre-platted residential nature of the Cape have limited non-residential development throughout the city. The City's tax base is roughly 92 percent residential which requires residential properties to bear most of the financial burden for city services. Without annexation, the likelihood of additional commercial development is low. Also, until the City extends utilities along its two most important high-growth corridors – Burnt Store Road and Pine Island Road, no significant commercial development will occur. Through aggressive economic and business attraction efforts, I am pleased that we were able to put projects in motion to coincide with the extension of utilities in these corridors.

The last two issues, revenue diversification and economic development, go together. Like Cooper City, the Cape is largely residential. Its dominant land use is single family residential. Large development tracts within the city are limited; however, there is the possibility of expanding its municipal boundaries to the north and to the east through annexation. Such annexation will be met with stiff resistance from the Lee County Board of County Commissioners. Until my tenure, the Cape's economic development efforts were minimal, at best. In fact, the City had a policy which limited the amount of economic assistance that could be provided to expanding or relocating businesses to \$200,000 annually.

Rob Hernandez

With so few commercial businesses within the city, the majority of working residents must commute into other communities for employment. This out migration of workers causes immense strain on the region's roads (Cape Coral is a peninsula which requires motorists to use one of three bridges – choke points during the morning and evening rush hours). In addition, the outflow of residents means that they are purchasing goods and services outside of the city, which limits economic growth (“Retail Leakage”). Similarly, Cooper City must continue its efforts to contain retail leakage and capture more local spending on goods and services. It shares the same challenges as Cape Coral in that most of its residents work elsewhere, little land is available for commercial activities, and residential land uses dominate the development fabric of the community.

With residential properties carrying most of the burden of funding municipal services and operations, this can lead to strain in the relationship between the city and its residents. While most of the younger residents are supportive of city government, the city's large retired population tends to oppose any effort to increase fees or taxes. While they take full advantage of the services the city offers, they are resistant to paying for them. This presents a serious dilemma to a growing city with deficiencies in infrastructure, parks, and public safety services. This is not dissimilar to Cooper City in that future revenue growth is constrained while operating and capital needs continue to grow.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE

Cooper City is fortunate to not have the socio-economic challenges many communities have. It has a prosperous residential base, low crime, lack of blight, and higher educational attainment rates. All pluses. I believe that the combination of my experience as a proven leader understanding local government in Florida and in Broward County, specifically; the ability to work with elected and appointed officials, and the ability to understand and solve problems will allow me to contribute to the City of Cooper City.

I believe it is more important to be a visionary leader rather than a manager. As leaders, we must communicate a clear vision, purpose and direction. We must demonstrate a passion for what we do – that is, to make a difference every day. For me, leadership is situational and requires flexibility. When time, resources, and skills permit, my leadership style is participatory and collaborative. In other circumstances, it must be directive. In others, my style can be coaching or mentoring.

Great leadership is infectious. People are your greatest assets. It is important to create an environment where people want to work hard by making things fun, challenging, and rewarding. I believe in building a positive work climate where people are appreciated and valued. I like to consider myself a “macromanager” rather than a micromanager. I view my role as explaining the project or task, the expected result and deadline, and monitoring performance on a regular basis. I track projects and assignments using a Sharepoint site and meet with staff on a routine basis to

Rob Hernandez

review progress. I meet with staff more frequently on an as-needed basis. I describe what needs to be done, provide them with the resources, get out of their way, and hold them accountable. So far, I think this approach has worked.

I am confident that staff and elected officials would describe me as professional, thorough, hard-working, ethical, honest, opinionated, and transparent. They would hopefully view me as engaged, participative and inclusive and valuing open communication and feedback, while also allowing for empowerment and accountability.

Two strengths that others will point to are my transparency and ability to make strategic decisions. In terms of weakness, I believe that my commitment to my organization and loyalty to my teammates has led others to conclude that I can be defensive at times.

Regarding performance measurement, I believe it starts at the top with the governing body establishing a clear strategic vision for the organization, and cascades downward. Once key strategic objectives are defined by the governing board, it is the manager's job to develop strategies to meet those strategic objectives. Business units then must identify those operational efforts and measures that are aligned with the strategies and long-term objectives. Those help form the basis for developing individual performance measures that are included in performance reviews. It is rewarding to know that Cooper City has a strategic plan with measurable tactics in place.

In terms of a significant professional achievement, the revitalization of the Fulton Industrial District (FID) in metro-Atlanta, containing more than 52 million square feet of industrial space and one the largest industrial, warehousing, and logistics centers in the eastern United States, is one that I am most proud of. In the fall of 2008, I toured FID as Fulton County's new deputy county manager. What was once a hub of economic activity was rife with rampant prostitution, open drug sales, shuttered buildings, neglect, and decay. FID was well into a state of decline that began in the 1980s as its warehouses were abandoned for taller and larger ones elsewhere and manufacturing disappeared overseas. I observed conditions that I had never seen in my career until that day. Families called extended stay motels home. A police detective explained how FID was the child prostitution hub for the entire metropolitan Atlanta region. After a woman was found locked in a dog crate in one of FID's many hotels, I was horrified and said: "not anymore – not on my watch."

For the next three years, we made it our mission to make FID better. We used every conceivable resource within county government and put together a team of county agencies that included everything from arts to zoning. We rolled up our sleeves and went to work. We attacked the issues from every angle: from health to human services to public safety. With the help of a dedicated team, we accomplished a remarkable turnaround that included:

- Adoption of the Fulton Industrial Redevelopment Framework
- Designation by the State as an "Opportunity Zone," providing needed economic incentives.

Rob Hernandez

- Establishment of the Fulton Industrial Community Improvement District, a self-taxing entity to take on area wide governance and improvements.
- Establishment of the South Fulton Service Center which relocated two county commissioners, police, fire, and all other unincorporated area services to FID.

Today, FID is healthy and vibrant. It is now a place where businesses invest rather than flee. South Fulton eventually incorporated as its own municipality.

My biggest disappointment thus far involves the establishment of a fire assessment fee in Savannah. As I tackled a funding imbalance, we recognized that we needed a long-term solution. Working with the city council, we agreed to a stopgap approach for Fiscal Year 2017 with the understanding that we would bring back long-term options the following year. Fiscal Year 2018 presented a \$12 million imbalance and to address it, I proposed a fire service assessment. After spending considerable time and effort creating such a fee, the city council adopted the budget with this fee. The fee provided financial stability, allowed us to lower the millage rate, and provided resources to address capital needs and service priorities. The fee was controversial and faced stiff public resistance. Continued opposition to the fee caused the city council to reverse its decision midway through the fiscal year, requiring us to identify more than \$16 million in new revenue and expenditure reductions. Rescinding a budget halfway through the fiscal year was disruptive to operations. In retrospect, I did not anticipate such stiff opposition since we held more than 60 community meetings and thought we had obtained community buy-in to the extent we could. Newspaper editorials supported our approach. In the end, the fire assessment was reversed, the equivalent of two engine companies eliminated from the fire department's budget, and the millage rate increased. The painful lesson I learned throughout all of this is that local government must do a better job educating the public on how well it is performing and safeguarding the public's resources. It was a painful lesson – it still hurts to sit to this day.

Employee terminations are always an unfortunate aspect of what we do as leaders. Unfortunately, I have had to dismiss employees throughout my career for poor performance or poor leadership. While it is never an encounter that brings pleasure or satisfaction, these separations were not a surprise to the affected individual. In every instance the individual was counseled and made aware of performance deficiencies beforehand, corrective actions identified, and the consequences of not meeting the performance standards explained. I hope that in every instance, I treated the employee with respect and dignity. I allowed them to “write their final chapter” with the organization and allowed them to leave at the top of their game with a celebration of their accomplishments to the organization.

The issues and challenges facing Cooper City's next city manager are:

- Matching service level expectations with financial realities;
- Improving the City's ability to connect and share information across all demographic groups;
- Strengthening the relationship between the city manager, the city commission, and the professional staff.

Rob Hernandez

If selected for the position, during my first six months I will:

- Listen, listen, and listen to understand issues, challenges, and desires of all stakeholders: elected officials, neighborhood groups, labor, business community, education representatives, the local media, and others;
- Forge a close relationship with the city commission;
- Review goals and objectives for the organization with the city commission;
- Reach out to department directors and learn about their challenges, priorities, and programs;
- Establish trust and credibility with all stakeholders; and.
- Become familiar with the community and its culture.

As for media relations, the media can be a great asset if managed properly and cultivated. Being open and honest with them is important. Integrity is an essential part of the relationship with the media. As I city manager in Savannah and Cape Coral, I practiced an open-door policy with the media and reserved a better part of Tuesdays to meet with them.

Social media is an effective tool in keeping the public informed and is changing how government communicates with its various constituencies. I have used social media, primarily twitter, and Facebook to keep interested individuals informed with short briefs on an issue. This helped us shape our story and put us in leading the community conversation rather than delegating that role to media. I have used social media to help sustain interest in an issue and to keep the public informed on upcoming discussions or significant events.

I am honestly not aware of anything in my professional or personal life that could be viewed negatively or embarrassing to a potential employer. However, there has been considerable media attention surrounding the recent decision of the Cape Coral city council to (1) not renew my contract and (2) terminate the agreement without cause or explanation shortly thereafter. Also, while serving as the city manager of Savannah, there were a few individuals who were not supportive of my efforts or views. You may find some blogs critical of my opinions on a variety of issues. Regardless, I always conducted myself professionally and never brought any negative attention to the elected officials or the organization I worked for.

My personal interests include the outdoors and pursuing home improvement projects.

ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES THAT DESCRIBE ME:

Driven, Professional, Focused, Disciplined, Organized, Thorough

Rob Hernandez

REASONS FOR CONSIDERING LEAVING CURRENT POSITION:

The new Cape Coral City Council recently opted to not renew my contract effective August 12, 2023. However, on February 15th, the Council reversed its decision and voted 5-3 to terminate my agreement without cause and without any explanation.

I am looking forward to sharing my 40 years of public service in a progressive community with an eye toward the opportunities, wonders, and challenges of the future. I believe I can have a great impact on an organization and a community by serving in the top leadership role.

MOST RECENT SALARY

+/- \$259,000 plus \$7,800 auto allowance and \$1,200 cell phone allowance.

CB&A Background Checks

**Background Check Summary for
ROBERTO "ROB" HERNANDEZ**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Lee County, FL	No Records Found
Broward County, FL	No Records Found
Chatham County, GA	No Records Found
Fulton County, GA	No Records Found
State	
Florida	No Records Found
Georgia	No Records Found

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Lee County, FL	No Records Found
Broward County, FL	No Records Found
Chatham County, GA	No Records Found
Fulton County, GA	No Records Found
Federal	
Florida	Results Pending
Georgia	No Records Found

Motor Vehicle

Florida	No Records Found
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Credit

Excellent

Personal Bankruptcy

No Records Found

Sex Offender Registry

Not Listed

Education

Confirmed

Employment

Confirmed

Social Media

Nothing of Concern Found

**Background Check Summary for
ROBERTO "ROB" HERNANDEZ**

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
ROBERTO "ROB" HERNANDEZ
Personal Disclosure**

Personal Disclosure Questionnaire

Name of Applicant: ROBERTO HERNANDEZ

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. N/A
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 *NOTE: PUBLICITY ASSOCIATED WITH RECENT SEPARATION FROM ONE CORP
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: 
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 5:00 PM MST 03/03/2023.
(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
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

CB&A Notes:

The events surrounding the termination of Mr. Hernandez’s contract with the City of Cape Coral, FL, can be a bit confusing. Consequently, we have put together a brief summary of the key events that occurred during his last three months as Cape Coral’s City Manager.

11/09/2022: Two new Council Members are elected.

11/16/2022: During the afternoon, the existing City Council evaluates Mr. Hernandez’s performance, and he receives a 3.8 on a 5 point scale – almost an above average rating. He also received a 6.25 pay increase.

At the evening meeting of the City Council, the new Council Members are sworn in and take their seats.

02/01/2023: In the morning, Mr. Hernandez has surgery that requires him staying in the hospital until the next evening.

In the evening, the City Council holds a special meeting to discuss Mr. Hernandez’s contract and whether it should be renewed for another year. The contract had a provision that stated the City Council had to notify Mr. Hernandez six months in advance of the contract’s expiration (August 11, 2023) that it would not be renewed. Otherwise, it renewed automatically for one year. That meant the City had to make a decision concerning contract renewal prior to February 12th.

2/14/2023: Mr. Hernandez’s attorney notifies the City that Mr. Hernandez believes the action to terminate him was the result of him hiring an African American female to the position of Economic Development Manager and because he declined to take any actions that violated the civil rights of LGBTQ individuals employed by the city and also by placing special conditions on the annual PRIDE parade that would not apply to other events. See next page.

2/15/2023: At the City Council meeting that evening, Mr. Hernandez’s contract is terminated without cause. Voting to terminate were the two new council members as well as three others.

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**



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February 14, 2023

*Proudly admitted
to practice in:*

United States
Supreme Court

Eleventh Circuit
Court Of Appeals

First Circuit
Court Of Appeals

U.S. District Court
Middle District Of Florida

U.S. District Court
Southern District Of Florida

Florida Supreme Court

Massachusetts Supreme
Judicial Court

Ms. Dolores D. Menendez, Esq.
City Attorney, City of Cape Coral
1015 Cultural Park Boulevard
Cape Coral, FL 33990

Via Email: dmenendez@capecoral.net

Re: Hernandez v. City of Cape Coral, Florida

Dear Ms. Menendez:

I am writing regarding the recent adverse employment action taken against Mr. Roberto Hernandez, City Manager. I have been retained to represent Mr. Hernandez with respect to his claims against the City of Cape Coral, Florida ("City") for (1) retaliation in violation of Florida's Private Whistleblower Act ("FWA"), and (2) retaliation in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VII") and Florida Civil Rights Act ("FCRA").

Background

1. Mr. Hernandez's Background.

Mr. Hernandez became the Cape Coral City Manager on August 12, 2020, following a national search conducted by an executive search firm. His pedigree is exemplary. He served as Deputy City Manager of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, from April 2019 until being hired by Cape Coral City Council. He also served as city manager in Savannah, Georgia, from 2016-2019. In Savannah, he reported to a nine-member city council and led 2,513 employees. He is a 23-year veteran of the U.S. Army Reserve, retiring as senior instructor in civil-military operations.

His extensive career in public service includes serving as deputy county administrator for Broward County, Florida, deputy county manager for Fulton County, Georgia, and assistant to the county administrator of Broward County. He holds a Master of Public Administration degree from Nova Southeastern University and a Bachelor of Public Administration degree from Florida International University. He is an International City Management Association (ICMA) credentialed manager and a Florida City/County Management Association member.

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In short, Mr. Hernandez was an excellent choice to become the City Manager for the City of Cape Coral.

As the City Manager, Mr. Hernandez was responsible for maintaining the management functions of the city government and administering the day-to-day operations of most facets of city government. He works closely with the City Council to establish long-term strategic plans, as well as short-term targets. These plans and targets guide the operation of city government as it focuses on high-quality customer service and ongoing community growth and improvement.

On November 16, 2022, less than 90 days ago, City Council met to discuss Mr. Hernandez's job performance. The scoring scale lists a 3-rating as being "average" and a 4-rating as being "above average." Each council member submitted a performance evaluation and the rating averaged to a score of 3.8 out of 5, just two tenths short of being "above average." In consideration of Mr. Hernandez's exemplary performance, City Council voted unanimously to provide Mr. Hernandez with a 6.25% raise, which included a discretionary 3.25% merit increase for his performance.

2. Mr. Hernandez Observes & Objects to Illegal Conduct.

Pursuant to the City Charter, Mr. Hernandez appoints the directors of 13 City agencies: Capital Improvement Projects, City Clerk, Development Services, Financial Services, Fire, Human Resources, Information Technology, Parks and Recreation, Police, Public Works, Utilities; and the offices of Communications and Business and Economic Development. However, one of those appointments has led to discriminatory employment practices, which Mr. Hernandez objected to vociferously.

One of Mr. Hernandez's appointments was for the position of Economic and Business Development Officer, a highly visible position on the City Manager's Executive Leadership Team. The Economic and Business Development Officer leads the City's efforts to expand, diversify and improve the city's tax base and employment opportunities.

On March 30, 2022, following a national search, Mr. Hernandez extended an employment offer to Ms. T. Sharon Woodberry to fill a vacancy in that position. Mr. Hernandez concluded Ms. Woodberry was the most qualified applicant for the position. City Council members provided positive feedback on the selection of Ms. Woodberry. Ms. Woodberry started employment on May 31, 2022. Shortly thereafter, once certain council members learned she was African-American, council members began questioning Mr. Hernandez as to her selection and in doing so, implied racial stereotypes as to her appearance, demeanor and aptitude for the job. This questioning continued up to and including February 1, 2023, the date in which the City Council held a special meeting, without Mr. Hernandez present, to discuss whether his employment contract with the City would be continued.

It is worth mentioning that under the City Charter the City Council has no role in hiring decisions for employees under the administrative supervision of the City Manager. Until Ms. Woodberry's appointment, City Council members had never inquired of, or questioned, any of Mr. Hernandez's hiring decisions. To the opposite, Mr. Hernandez's personnel decisions up to Ms. Woodberry's selection were widely applauded.

On several occasions since Ms. Woodberry's arrival, Mayor John Gunter inquired into Ms. Woodberry's background and performance. He expressed to Mr. Hernandez that Ms. Woodberry was

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not qualified for the job, despite serving in a similar capacity for 15 years for the City of Youngstown, Ohio. Ms. Woodberry had also served as that city's director of community planning and economic development. Mayor Gunter repeatedly stated that Ms. Woodberry "did not have the right personality" for the job and often inquired about her probationary status. Mayor Gunter has never inquired about any other employee's probationary status or commented on their "personality."

It is important to note that Ms. Woodberry was interviewed by a panel of city employees and given a numerical rating as part of a formal evaluation process. She was one of two finalists for the position and was ultimately selected by Mr. Hernandez because of her extensive experience in municipal government, which the other candidate lacked. City Council members did not participate in reviewing her background or in interviewing the candidates.

Additionally, Mr. Hernandez was questioned by council members Hayden, Sheppard, Steinke of the decision to hire Ms. Woodberry. Once Mr. Hernandez advised Councilmember Hayden of the hiring process and of Ms. Woodberry's background, he inquired no further. Councilmembers Steinke and Sheppard continued their questioning through February 1, 2023.

Mr. Hernandez was also asked to justify by councilmembers Steinke and Sheppard as to why the position was not offered to a lower-level white female employee, Ms. Nita Whaley, who scored significantly lower in the evaluation process and did not possess experience comparable to Ms. Woodberry. Mr. Hernandez was told over and over by councilmembers how failing to appoint Ms. Whaley was a major blow to the City's economic development efforts and not appointing her would result in the City's efforts sliding backwards. Ms. Whaley played no role in developing economic or business development strategies, policies or procedures. As recent as February 1, 2023, councilmembers' Steinke, Sheppard and Cummings questioned either the process used in appointing Ms. Woodberry or why Ms. Whaley was not promoted into the position. Furthermore, Councilmember Cummings incorrectly stated on February 1, 2023, that Mr. Hernandez terminated Ms. Whaley's employment, which is false. Ms. Whaley resigned from her position.

The level of inquiry into Ms. Woodberry's appointment to a second-tier position is unprecedented and interfered with Mr. Hernandez's ability to professionally carry out his duties.

But more importantly, the actions were a violation of Title VII and the FCRA and Mr. Hernandez *immediately* objected and communicated that there was no place for such racial stereotyping and that her selection was proper because she was clearly the best qualified applicant for the position. Mr. Hernandez also advised councilmembers similar comments were made about Ms. Woodberry's predecessor, Mr. Ricardo Noguera, a Black Hispanic male. Specifically, comments were made that Mr. Noguera did not present the "right image" for the City of Cape Coral. Mr. Hernandez's decision to appoint an African American to the role drew the ire of councilmembers Cummings, Sheppard and Gunter, as well the attention of Councilmember Steinke.

In addition to racial bias, the intolerance of certain councilmembers toward members of the LGBT community and employees was quite evident during Mr. Hernandez's tenure. In particular, Mayor Gunter objected to a lesbian employee's recent promotion to customer service representative. This employee's expressive lifestyle and appearance clearly bothered Mayor Gunter to the point of him telling Mr. Hernandez that the City should "not hire people like that for positions that come into contact

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with the public.” He also expressed to Mr. Hernandez how his interaction with this employee less than a month ago made him uncomfortable. Mayor Gunter essentially demanded that Mr. Hernandez remove her from having any contact with the public, which would have been a violation of the City Charter, Title VII and the FCRA.

The pattern of stereotypical and discriminatory behavior of councilmembers Gunter and Sheppard toward an employee’s sexual orientation was also evident during Mr. Hernandez’s attempt to correct pay inequities surrounding members of the Executive Leadership Team. When Mr. Hernandez expressed his desire to correct pay inequities for the position of Fire Chief and Utilities Director (both white males), all councilmembers agreed. When it came to Assistant City Manager Connie Barron, a white female lesbian, only councilmembers Gunter and Sheppard objected, stating they felt she was unqualified for the position and her performance did not warrant a pay adjustment despite the fact that several of her subordinates were paid a higher salary than she. Ms. Barron, who was appointed by Mr. Hernandez’s predecessor, has served effectively as the Assistant City Manager for about five years and Mr. Hernandez views her performance as more than satisfactory.

Councilmember Sheppard also began criticizing Mr. Hernandez for allowing an in-kind donation to the Cape Coral Gay Pride Parade in 2022. To this day, both Gunter and Sheppard have continued questioning the City’s participation in the parade by providing “in-kind” financial support. The in-kind donation was merely providing security and traffic details through the City’s police department – no cash funding was provided directly to the event organizer. Nevertheless, Councilmember Sheppard voiced repeatedly to Mr. Hernandez that he felt the City should not be providing support to “those people,” and promoting their lifestyle, despite the fact the City provides the same in-kind donations for a vast array of non-LGBT events. Following the 2022 parade, Councilmember Sheppard provided Mr. Hernandez with photographs that allegedly portrayed individuals engaging in sexual acts with a dog and what he considered obscene behavior. The allegations were investigated and proven false. Councilmember Sheppard also demanded that Mr. Hernandez develop and enforce rules of decorum that would apply only during the Pride Parade. Mr. Hernandez made clear that the City was not permitted to discriminate against the LGBT community as doing so would be a violation of their constitutional rights. This response was met with anger that continued through February 1, 2023 with Sheppard alleging Mr. Hernandez lied about the City’s participation.

Mayor Gunter continues his persistent inquiry into City funding support for the Pride Parade.

Finally, in a discussion with Councilmember Sheppard about the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), a world renown professional association of more than 12,000 professional city, town and county managers across the globe, Mr. Sheppard expressed to Mr. Hernandez that he felt ICMA membership and credentialing was not important since this organization was a “Woke” organization and allowed gay, lesbian and transgender individuals into its membership. Such expression demonstrates Sheppard’s discriminatory views and made Mr. Hernandez’s ability to carry out his duties increasingly difficult.

Ultimately, Mr. Hernandez’s resistance to the discriminatory views of certain members of City Council contributed to the City Council’s decision not to renew Mr. Hernandez’s contract. On February 1, 2023, City Council voted not to renew Mr. Hernandez’s contract despite a more than favorable performance evaluation less than 90 days earlier, and one of the chief reasons given were his “poor decisions and

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performance.” As seen above, what was being referred to as “poor decisions and performance” was really Mr. Hernandez’s continued refusal to engage in discrimination against African-Americans, LGBT employees and LGBT citizens of Cape Coral. In sum, because Mr. Hernandez opposed and refused to participate in such illegal conduct, City Council retaliated by nonrenewing his contract.

Legal Analysis

1. Title VII & FCRA Retaliation.

The law on Title VII claims applies equally to their FCRA counterparts, both are therefore analyzed together. *Alvarez v. Royal Atl. Devs., Inc.*, 610 F.3d 1253, 1271 (11th Cir. 2010).

Title VII prohibits retaliation by an employer because an employee opposed an unlawful employment practice. 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3(a). To state a Title VII retaliation claim, a plaintiff must show that: (1) he engaged in an activity protected under Title VII; (2) he suffered an adverse employment action; and (3) there was a causal connection between the protected activity and the adverse employment action. *Crawford v. Carroll*, 529 F.3d 961, 970 (11th Cir. 2008) (citation omitted); *see also Matamoros v. Broward Sheriff’s Off.*, 2 F.4th 1329, 1336 (11th Cir. 2021).

Here, Mr. Hernandez engaged in statutorily protected activity several times over by refusing to discriminate against African-Americans, LGBT employees and LGBT citizens of Cape Coral. Furthermore, there is no dispute that Mr. Hernandez suffered adverse employment action, and that this occurred in close temporal proximity to his objections to and refusal to discriminate against African-Americans, LGBT employees and LGBT citizens of Cape Coral.. *See Perry v. Pediatrx Med. Grp. of Ga.*, 841 F. App’x 174, 179 (11th Cir. 2021) *citing Farley v. Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co.*, 197 F.3d 1322, 1337 (11th Cir. 1999) (finding seven-week gap between reporting and termination sufficiently close to establish a causal connection); *see also Curtis v. Broward Cty.*, 292 F. App’x 882, 885 (11th Cir. 2008) (same). Each of the factors under a 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3(a) analysis are met here.¹

2. Issues of Pretext.

To the extent the City will claim it had a legitimate business reason for nonrenewing Mr. Hernandez, pretext abounds here. There is no dispute that Mr. Hernandez did not suffer a termination for cause even though Mr. Hernandez’s contract gave the City the authority to terminate Mr. Hernandez’s employment if such cause existed. In other words, if the City had cause to terminate Mr. Hernandez, it surely would have done so. The City’s action evinces there being no legitimate cause to nonrenew Mr. Hernandez’s employment contract.

Instead, the City’s conduct has been held to be sufficient evidence of pretext of unlawful termination. In *Mock v. Bell Helicopter Textron, Inc.*, No. 06-11161 (11th Cir. 2006), the court held that Mock created a genuine issue of material fact as to whether Bell’s reason for termination was a pretext for age discrimination reasoning that the mere failure to articulate a reason for termination at the time of termination when the employer later proffered a reason was found to be sufficient evidence of pretext. *See also, Bechtel Constr. Co. v. Sec’y of Labor*, 50 F.3d 926, 935 (11th Cir. 1995); *Cleveland v. Home Shopping*

¹ These are the same elements necessary for a prima facie case under the PWA too.

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Network, Inc., 369 F.3d 1189, 1194 (11th Cir. 2004); *Hurlbert v. St. Mary's Health Care Sys., Inc.*, 439 F.3d 1286, 1298 (11th Cir. 2006); *Wascura v. City of South Miami*, 257 F.3d 1238, 1245-46 (11th Cir. 2001); *Donnellon v. Fruehauf Corp.*, 794 F.2d 598, 601-02 (11th Cir. 1986); see also *Weiss v. JPMorgan Chase & Co.*, 332 Fed. Appx. 659 (2nd Cir. 2009). With not an instance of discipline and instead only accolades and positive reviews, Mr. Hernandez's nonrenewal is merely pretext. See *Wascura*, 257 F.3d 1238, 1245.

Damages & Settlement Demand

Title VII, FCRA and PWA all require the employer to pay an aggrieved employee their backpay. Here, Mr. Hernandez's pay was \$22,900 per month.

Comparable job opportunities in Southwest Florida are nonexistent. While a plaintiff usually has a duty to mitigate their damages, that does *not* include any requirement that they relocate. See *Carl v. Fulton Cty.*, No. 1:07-CV-1812-AJB, 2013 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 206731, at *26-27 (N.D. Ga. Mar. 31, 2013); *NLRB v. Madison Currier, Inc.*, 472 F.2d 1307, 1319 (D.C. Cir.1972); see also *Naekel v. Dept. of Transp., F.A.A.*, 850 F.2d 682, 685 (Fed. Cir. 1988); *Rasimas v. Mich. Dept. of Mental Health*, 714 F.2d 614, 624-25 (6th Cir. 1983); *Moore v. Univ. of Notre Dame*, 22 F. Supp. 2d 896, 906-07 (N.D. Ind. 1998). Mr. Hernandez now has solid roots here in Southwest Florida, and finding jobs at the same pay will be nearly impossible. Accordingly, and since trials are presently running in excess of two years, back pay could easily be in excess of \$550,000.

Furthermore, noneconomic damages are also available under Title VII, FCRA and PWA. While Title VII and the FCRA contain a damage cap, none exists under the PWA. As such, Mr. Hernandez may well be entitled to \$500,000 each in noneconomic damages.

Finally, upon prevailing at trial, Mr. Hernandez will be entitled to an award of his reasonable attorney's fees and costs, which are estimated to be in excess of \$115,000.

All told, damages as to Mr. Hernandez could be in excess of \$1,165,000.

While my client is resolute, he wishes to afford the City the opportunity to discuss a private, more amicable resolution. Accordingly, Mr. Hernandez will release all claims against the City in exchange for the sum of \$550,000, which sum is inclusive of attorney's fees and costs, together with a neutral job reference, a public apology for professionally disparaging remarks made by councilmembers Cummings, Gunter and Sheppard, mutual nondisparagement and a non-assistance provision.

Please respond to this correspondence on or before February 24, 2023 if the City would like to discuss resolving this matter amicably. Should we receive no response by that date, legal action will be initiated.

Demand for Production of Insurance Policies

Pursuant to F.S. §627.4137(1), we demand disclosure of all liability insurance coverage that you possess, including prenuses liability policies. Be advised that F.S. §627.4137(1) provides:

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...the insured, or her or his insurance agent, upon written request of the claimant or the claimant's attorney, shall disclose the name and coverage of each known insurer to the claimant and shall forward such request for information as required by this subsection to all affected insurers. The insurer shall then supply the information required in this subsection to the claimant within 30 days of receipt of such request.

(Emphasis added).

As such, we request you provide the following information with regard to each known policy of insurance, including excess or umbrella insurance within 30-days:

- (a) The name of the insurer.
- (b) The name of each insured.
- (c) The limits of the liability coverage.
- (d) A statement of any policy or coverage defense which such insurer reasonably believes is available to such insurer at the time of filing such statement.
- (e) A copy of the policy.

Demand for Preservation of Electronically Stored Information (ESI)

Furthermore, you are aware of the facts alleged in the attached federal lawsuit, which will be confirmed by the electronically stored information (ESI) present on computers, smartphones and other electronic media. These include the devices of council members.

Consider this correspondence a demand you and your company preserve all documents, evidence, and information, tangible things and ESI regarding the allegations contained in the federal lawsuit, including but not limited to all emails, records of incorporation, records of tickets purchased, tickets listed for sale, income records and communications with ticket resale outlets such as Vivid Tickets.

Your failure to comply with these obligations can result in severe sanctions being imposed by the Court and liability in Court for spoliation of evidence or potential evidence. To avoid spoliation, you must be prepared to provide the data on the original media. Preservation means taking reasonable steps to:

- (a) Ensure that any communication (including electronically stored information, including, without limitation, text messages, voicemails, emails, and any other type of communication) remain accessible and that no smartphones or like devices are disposed of in any manner.
- (b) Ensure that potentially relevant documents are not destroyed, lost or relinquished to others, either intentionally, or inadvertently such as through the implementation of an ordinary course document retention/destruction policy of a carrier service;
- (c) Ensure that potentially relevant documents (including electronically stored information) are not modified;
- (d) Ensure that potentially relevant documents (including electronically stored information) remain accessible.

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The term “documents” as used herein, is extremely broad and includes not only the paper or hard copy files in your client's possession, but also any materials that are stored electronically. These materials are commonly referred to as electronically stored information or “ESI”. ESI includes but is not limited to email, voicemail, text messaging files, instant messaging files, word processing documents, spreadsheets, databases, calendars, image files (i.e. jpeg's, .pdf's, .tiff's), CAD files, and any other file type that is generally stored electronically.

With respect to your ESI, you also have an obligation to preserve any metadata associated with your electronic files. Metadata, commonly referred to as "information about information" or "data about data", is the information embedded in an electronic file that reflects such information as: the file creation date; when the file was last accessed or edited and by whom; and, sometimes, previous versions or editorial changes.

ESI may be located in myriad places, such as on your computers, servers, archive systems, backup tapes, continuous data protection devices, image servers, disks, external hard drives, flash/thumb/USB drives, memory cards, CD's/DVD's/Blu-Ray disks, laptops, internet records, “cloud” storage, third party storage vendors, third party document management companies, document management systems, data bases, data stores, offsite storage devices, disaster recovery devices and systems, laptops, web pages (including various iterations of them), Blackberry/iPhone/Android and other “smart phones” personal digital/data assistants, mobile phones, iPods, iPads and other tablet devices, instant messaging services, digital cameras, personal e-mail accounts, personal or home computers, data stored or shared on social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.), and even data stored in automobile computer systems. ESI may even be located in out-of-service or retired systems that are no longer in use but that may still be accessible.

With respect to ESI stored on personal and company issued wireless phones, smartphones or other similar devices (such as Android, iPhone, iPad, iPod, and other telephone, mobile, or tablet devices) capable of creating or receiving text messages, instant messages and emails, and/or capable of installation and utilization of non-native system messaging applications, including but not limited to text or instant messaging and email applications, both company and personal, your client has an obligation to preserve the messages, text messages, emails, as well as these items metadata. Please identify these devices and ensure that the data residing on these devices, as well as the data residing on, and accessible through any carrier server or system (e.g. AT&T, Sprint, Verizon, etc.) or third-party application provider is preserved as well, and immediately provide to us the carrier names, account numbers and account holder names so that we may issue subpoenas directly to the carriers.

It is essential to ensure that potentially relevant electronic records are preserved intact and unmodified in their original electronic form. Keep in mind, the lists contained herein should be viewed as representative lists only. Please ensure that the relevant electronically stored information is preserved on each of the above devices, and any other devices as they may exist in your network or in your possession. This includes ensuring that you do not delete any electronic records, including text messages and emails, and that steps are taken to capture and preserve all of those records, including their accompanying metadata. Relevant electronically stored information can be easily destroyed or damaged through routine IT maintenance generally carried out by a carrier service and individuals, or use of the computer(s) or other electronic storage devices in the parties' possession, corporate or

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personal. Therefore, it is necessary to take immediate steps to preserve this electronically stored information.

With respect to iPhone/Android or similar multi-functional devices, text messages, voicemail, digital cameras and USB drives, please ensure that those devices are immediately imaged by an IT professional. Since these devices often have limited memory, delay may result in relevant electronically stored information being destroyed.

You should anticipate that much of the information subject to disclosure or responsive to discovery in this matter is stored on your current or former computer systems and other media and devices (including personal desktop computers, personal digital assistants, voice-messaging systems, online repositories and cell phones).

ESI resides not only in areas of electronic, magnetic and optical storage media reasonably accessible to you, but also in areas you may deem *not* reasonably accessible. You are obliged to *preserve* potentially relevant evidence from *all* sources of ESI, even if you do not anticipate *producing* such ESI.

The demand that you preserve both accessible and inaccessible ESI is reasonable and necessary. Further, you must identify all sources of ESI you decline to produce and demonstrate to the court why such sources are not reasonably accessible. For good cause shown, the court may then order production of the ESI, even if it finds that it is not reasonably accessible. Accordingly, even ESI that you deem reasonably inaccessible *must be preserved in the interim* so as not to deprive my clients of their right to secure the evidence or the Court of its right to adjudicate the issue.

Adequate preservation of ESI requires more than simply refraining from efforts to destroy or dispose of such evidence. You must also intervene to prevent loss due to routine operations and employ proper techniques and protocols suited to protection of ESI. *Be advised that sources of ESI are altered and erased by continued use of your computers and other devices.* Booting a drive, examining its contents or running any application will irretrievably alter the evidence it contains and may constitute unlawful spoliation of evidence. Consequently, alteration and erasure may result from your failure to act diligently and responsibly to prevent loss or corruption of ESI.²

You are directed to immediately initiate a litigation hold for potentially relevant ESI, documents and tangible things, and to act diligently and in good faith to secure and audit compliance with such litigation hold. You are further directed to immediately identify and modify or suspend features of your information systems and devices that, in routine operation, operate to cause the loss of potentially relevant ESI.

As hard copies do not preserve electronic searchability or metadata, they are not an adequate substitute for electronically stored versions. If information exists in both electronic and paper forms, you should preserve both forms. Your preservation obligation extends beyond ESI in your care, possession or custody and includes ESI in the custody of others that is subject to your direction or control. Accordingly, you must notify any current or former agent, attorney, employee, custodian or contractor

² Nothing in this demand for preservation of ESI should be understood to diminish your concurrent obligation to preserve document, tangible things and other potentially relevant evidence.

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in possession of potentially relevant ESI to preserve such ESI to the full extent of your obligation to do so, and you must take reasonable steps to secure their compliance.

Your failure to preserve documents or electronic data could have dire consequences in litigation. In addition to significant monetary sanctions, you may be precluded from using certain evidence at trial or the court may draw negative inferences against you. You must retain and preserve all records, including paper documents and electronic data in your possession, custody or control relating to the above referenced action. We will be relying upon this letter in court to evidence our request and notification of your preservation obligations. Please confirm by February 24, 2023 at 5:00 P.M. (EST), that you have taken the steps outlined in this letter to preserve ESI and tangible documents potentially relevant to this action. If you have not undertaken the steps outlined above, or have taken other actions, please describe what you have done to preserve potentially relevant evidence.

We look forward to your prompt and positive response. Should you have any questions, or wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours very truly,

/s/ Benjamin H. Yormak
Benjamin H. Yormak

Encl.

cc: Client
Mayor John Gunter (jgunter@capecoral.gov)

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WINK News
February 22, 2023

Attorney for former Cape Coral city manager speaks out after firing

Author: Samantha Jones

Days ago, the City of Cape Coral fired City Manager **Rob Hernandez** and, in his place, put Michael Ilczyszyn. Last week, **Hernandez** sent a letter detailing that he felt discrimination occurred within the Cape Coral City Council. For a week now, the mayor and members of city council have had **Hernandez's** bombshell letter in their possession.

Hernandez accused a handful of city leaders of discriminatory practices toward LGBTQ and Black employees. “He was terminated the very next day for not cause,” said Benjamin Yormak, who is representing **Hernandez**. “We were concerned when **Mr. Hernandez** was non-renewed and believed that there was discrimination and retaliation that he was the victim of at that point in time,” Yormak said.

Not surprisingly, Yormak believes in **Hernandez**, and he went to great lengths and, in great detail, mapped out the allegations in the letter, naming names. Yormak said **Hernandez** first tried to solve their issues when Cape’s city council decided not to renew his contract. He said all **Hernandez** asked for was for the council to obey the law. “It’s always very problematic when some of the wrongdoing is coming at the very top of the food chain,” Yormak said.

Yormak added that when the wrongdoing is possibly being committed by elected officials, “your options are very difficult in trying to combat it.” Yormak told WINK News **Hernandez** saw the wrongdoing for months but stayed quiet because he believed staying inside City Hall gave minority employees at least one high-ranking ally. “He was a champion for equality within an organization that has had its challenges,” Yormak said.

The letter asks for a response from the city by Friday. Yormak said as of Wednesday, no one from the city has reached out. He says they plan to move forward with a lawsuit if they hear nothing from the city.

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NBC-2
February 20, 2023

City of Cape Coral taking action against allegations made by former city manager
Author: Elisia Alonso

CAPE CORAL, Fla. — City leaders in Cape Coral are taking action to defend themselves after misconduct allegations were made by a former city manager.

On Friday, city council voted to approve the entry of a third party that would investigate claims made by former city manager **Rob Hernandez**, as well as **Hernandez's** conduct in the weeks prior to his termination.

On February 1 council voted not to renew **Hernandez's** contract, which would have ended in August. **Hernandez** was removed from his position on Wednesday in a 5-3 vote.

Mayor John Gunter said **Hernandez** was terminated after several staff complained about his behavior. “On February 1 through February 15, **Mr. Hernandez's** conduct was sometimes less than professional in his actions, statements, and demeanor made some employees uncomfortable,” said Mayor Gunter.

An attorney representing **Hernandez** said his contract was not renewed out of retaliation. **Hernandez** accuses several council members of making racist and homophobic comments, which he opposed. **Hernandez** is seeking \$550,000 in damages. The city has already spent \$100,000 on removing **Hernandez** from office.

Gunter said a pending lawsuit is all but certain. “In my opinion, the outcome of this investigation will determine that it is clearly a disgruntled employee making false accusations to benefit on monetary reason due to the council’s decision on his employment,” said Gunter.

Gunter and all council members named in **Hernandez's** letter deny the claims and say the accusations are false. Public Works Director, Mike Ilcyszyn, was appointed as interim city manager on Friday.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News-Press (FL)
February 15, 2023

Cape Coral fires city manager, two weeks after not renewing contract.

Author: Luis Zambrano

Cape Coral City Council fired City Manager **Rob Hernandez** on Wednesday in a split vote. What started out as a regular Cape Coral city government meeting, quickly changed as more and more people filled the room with the sound of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" playing at one point -- signaling the end of **Hernandez's** tenure as city manager.

The former city manager, who was at the meeting, declined to comment. "Council made the wrong decision," said Councilmember Jessica Cosden. Councilmembers Cosden, Tom Hayden, and Robert Welsh voted against his termination in a 5-3 vote.

Councilmember Keith Long started the motion to terminate without cause the city manager two weeks after a majority of the council voted not to renew his contract on Feb. 1. No discussions were held, and Hayden said all he wanted to say at **Hernandez's** contract extension meeting.

Welsh said he would not comment further in the event of potential litigation. "I don't want to say anything that's going to cost the city more money than what it already is by getting rid of the city manager," Welsh said.

Hernandez is now owed 20 weeks of pay. He's paid \$259,129.60 annually, so the city will pay almost \$100,000 to buy out his contract.

The agenda item also was added last minute on Tuesday by Long and approved by Mayor John Gunter, according to City Spokeswoman Melissa Mickey. Gunter said he thought it was in the city's best interest to move on from **Hernandez**, especially since budget sessions will start for the city. "I know we are going into the budget cycle and budget season, and I know that the city manager would be working with staff during that time period," Gunter said.

Hernandez began his duties in Cape Coral during the week of Aug. 11, 2020, and his contract was set to expire on Aug. 11, 2023. He previously served as deputy city manager in Fort Lauderdale from April 2019 to August 2020 and as city manager in Savannah, Georgia, between 2016 and 2019. **Hernandez** received a 6.25% pay increase at a special meeting on Nov. 16, where he also received an overall average score of 3.8 out of 5 from the city council's evaluations of him.

The search for a new city manager begins:

An interim city manager will be chosen at 8 a.m. Friday at city hall in room 220A. Gunter said next week's committee of the whole meeting will discuss searching for a new city manager and begin putting out requests for firms. "I can see it taking probably four to six months before a decision on a new city manager is made," Gunter said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

WINK News
February 2, 2023

Cape Coral’s mayor explains why the city manager’s contract won’t be renewed

Author: Samantha Jones

The city manager for Southwest Florida’s largest city is out after scoring only slightly above average on the yearly evaluation. Cape Coral City Council voted against extending **Rob Hernandez’s** contract on Wednesday.

Cape Coral Mayor John Gunter wanted someone exceptional for the city manager role. After **Hernandez** received a 3.8 out of 5 during his yearly evaluation last year, the mayor started to have doubts **Hernandez** wasn’t the right man for the job.

During a special meeting called by Gunter on Wednesday, council members voted 5-3 against renewing **Hernandez’s** contract. “I’m wanting to make sure that our city’s exceptional, and it all starts at the top and trickles down from there. So that’s that was my personal belief that we want to make sure that we have an exceptional person. And that’s why I made the decision that I did,” said Gunter.

Hernandez took over the city manager role back in 2020. He signed a three-year deal with a starting salary of almost \$240,000. The contract was set to expire on August 12 and required a minimum of six months’ notice of non-renewal.

Councilman Tom Hayden, one of the three votes to keep **Hernandez**, said he was disappointed to see the outcome. “It was a surprise to me, mainly because what was shared was, they were unsubstantiated allegations, you know, to me, most of them were baseless facts. And there really wasn’t enough there for me for to justify him losing his job.”

The decision comes just months after **Hernandez** was given a 6.25% raise after a yearly evaluation. It happened in November when the council gave him a 3.8 out of 5. “He was meeting his expectations, exceeding some. He knew there were things that he had to work on, and he was prepared to do that before his next evaluation,” Hayden said.

Hernandez won’t get the chance to do that. While it’s still uncertain if he’ll fulfill the rest of his contract, Mayor Gunter hopes he will. “Council’s decision last night was not to renew the contract, not to terminate. So I think there’s a clear distinction between the two,” said Gunter. “The fact that two council members that have only been on council for two months voted to not renew his contract, without really having to spend a whole lot of time, you know, it wasn’t really fair to him,” said Hayden.

Hayden believes the city’s making a mistake. He said **Hernandez** requested a public hearing Thursday morning to fight the decision, but Mayor Gunter is already preparing for the future. “We will probably end up doing a national search like we have done in the past, which most

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

organizations do. We will interview those candidates. And we will narrow it down to a particular person,” said Gunter. WINK News asked the mayor if he had a specific candidate already in mind. “That’s not my decision. It’s not a decision maybe on a particular person that I’m looking for, but it’s who we all, as a council, are looking for.”

Hayden said the city’s letting a good man go, and he fears what the decision will do to the morale of city employees. “Rob had built relationships with all of his administrative heads with other staff members. So all that changes now for them because there is going to be the fear of the unknown and who might come in,” said Hayden.

As the search for a new city manager begins, the mayor promises no gaps in leadership will be felt.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Cape Coral Breeze
December 9, 2022

City moving out of crisis mode with EnerGov permitting

Author: Chuck Ballaro

In April, residents and contractors were wondering if the city of Cape Coral would ever be able to issue permits, with the way the city's new permitting system, EnerGov, was, or wasn't, working. It seems that the city has slowly, but surely been weathering that storm, as well as the real storm created by Hurricane Ian that produced a rash of emergency permits.

On Wednesday, at the regular City Council meeting at City Hall, Matt Grambow, special projects manager, briefed council on just how far the city has come in making EnerGov easier to use to the city and for those seeking permits. Grambow said that by Monday, all disaster-related permit toggles will be live, meaning that customers would be able to apply for any of the emergency permits and not pay permit fees. Also going live would be push-button permits for residential air conditioning, emergency electric, residential fencing, garage doors and roofing.

The city has continued its work flow restructuring and finally hired an administrator for the system after a lengthy search. Also changing in the new year will be at the permitting counter. Starting Tuesday, Jan. 3, the counter will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Thursday. The purpose is to address an unbalanced allocation of staff resources, 83 percent of permits are being applied for through EnerGov, and half the permit technician hours are dedicated to the remaining permits applied for at the counter.

In 2022, through Nov. 30, more than 48,000 permits were issued, with the busiest times being early May, when the city was getting through the backlog of permits caused by the launch of EnerGov, and November with all the emergency permits being sought. Seven of the 10 busiest days this year happened after Nov. 14, Grambow said.

City Manager **Rob Hernandez** praised city staff for being able to get through the significant challenges the city faced this year with EnerGov, from the system itself to the customers.

“Our employees worked really hard and their numbers matched and surpassed those of the county even though they had more resources,” **Hernandez** said. “These people have taken a lot of abuse from the industry. I’m troubled by what they have to take every day at the front counter.”

Mayor John Gunter said the difference between February and now are like night and day. “The industry standard is how long it takes to get a permit. That’s all they’re talking about. At the end, we’ll be better off than we’ve ever been in the 15 years I’ve been involved in that department. I’m very optimistic and I see light at the end of the tunnel,” Gunter said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Cape Coral Breeze
November 17, 2022

Cape Council rates manager’s performance; awards 6.25% raise

Author: Chuck Ballaro

Fiscal Year 2022 was in many ways the year of Murphy’s Law. Anything that could possibly go wrong, did. That is what City Manager **Rob Hernandez** told the Cape Coral City Council during a special meeting Wednesday in Conference Room 200A regarding his evaluation, which had been delayed several times due to the hurricane, evaluations of other personnel, and the city election. However, Council as a whole believed that leadership from the city manager helped the city through a myriad of problems, resulting in an overall favorable evaluation.

Hernandez was given a 6.25 percent pay increase and earned an average evaluation score of 3.8 out of a possible 5. A score of 3 is average — generally meets the performance standard. A 4 is above average — generally exceeds the performance standard.

That score did not come easy as from beginning to end, the city was faced with serious issues. The year started with the city still enduring the COVID pandemic, which resulted in many people having to take time off from work. This was followed by the garbage pickup crisis as Waste Pro had problems with collections due to a lack of drivers, with the EnerGov permitting system problems happening at about the same time.

Hernandez said the system was purchased under the old regime, but took responsibility for the poor rollout and the countless issues that resulted. There also were permitting delays for projects they were taking on, such as the bubble curtains in the canals and for the Cape Coral Yacht Club renovations. To top it all off, Hurricane Ian capped a challenging year, something it will take years for the city to fully recover from.

Hernandez also stressed his accomplishments, of which he listed many in the city’s annual report. The North 2 UEP was completed, with the design of North 1 and 3 being done. Several parks from the \$60 million GO Bond are being built, the police and fire training facilities are being worked on, along with Fire Station 12 complete and 13 design in progress. There was also the introduction of CapeCompetes, which hopes to bring more business into the city, and created five incentive programs to stimulate private investment, expand and diversify the tax base, encourage the creation of new businesses and retain/ expand existing businesses.

Among those who gave **Hernandez** high grades were council members Gloria Tate and Jessica Cosden. Dan Sheppard did not evaluate him as high. The pay increase that was approved unanimously was 3 percent, with a 3.25 percent merit increase for a total of 6.25 percent, effective Oct. 1. The city council also unanimously approved an amendment to the city manager’s contract for the evaluation to be based on the fiscal year (not on the beginning date of service).

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

CITY MANAGER REVIEW

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

COPY

Name: Rob Hernandez Title: City Manager
Department: City Manager's Office Division City Manager Employee #: 20208854
Last Review: 08/21/2022 Hired: _____ Next Review: 08/12/2022
Date: 11/16/2022 Purpose of Evaluation: Regular Probationary

PERFORMANCE FACTORS Rate one factor at a time and check the performance level which you believe is most appropriate.	Average Totals
1. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS	3.9
2. PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND STATUS	3.8
3. RELATIONS WITH ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING BODY	3.8
4. POLICY EXECUTION	4
5. REPORTING	3.9
6. CITIZEN RELATIONS	4
7. STAFFING	3.4
8. SUPERVISION	3.7
9. FISCAL MANAGEMENT	4
10. COMMUNITY	3.9

OVERALL EVALUATION

Poor _____
Below Average _____
Average 3.8
Above Average _____
Excellent _____

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News-Press (FL)
October 6, 2022

Cape Coral damage assessment and recovery update: Q&A with City Manager Rob Hernandez

Author: Luis Zambrano

The News-Press spoke with Cape Coral City Manager **Rob Hernandez** to discuss Hurricane Ian and how Cape Coral's recovery effort is going. Here's what **Hernandez** had to say about damages, the progress with electricity, infrastructure, and water and sewer.

Q: What is the extent of damage in Cape Coral?

A: So the damage is quite extensive. It kind of varies throughout the city. What I have seen throughout the city is wind damage all over. In the northwest and northeast predominantly missing shingles, fence damage, and damage to home water treatment systems. But rather than, for the residential homes, complete loss of the roof covering, I'm just seeing sporadic tiles missing. Whereas when you go down into the southwest and southeast part of the city, I'm seeing complete roof losses. Some of the commercial structures throughout the city have taken significant damage to the roofs, schools for example. The one right next door to Cape Tech, that roof is shot. I think the roof at Cape Coral High School is shot. A couple of businesses in the industrial park buildings are shot. When you factor in the water damage that you see mostly in the southwest, in the southeast, it's bad. We didn't have all of those structural collapses that you might find out on the barrier islands because I think our construction is newer, but we have damage. It's a lot. A lot of damage. I spent most of the day today concentrating on about a half-square-mile, half-square-mile grid, there's tons of debris just in those eight or nine blocks that I was in today. Just tons and tons and a lot of roof damage and people's furniture got damaged, so it's extensive.

Q: Has a damage assessment been made? When will this information be ready?

A: The first focus was on the initial assessment, that's like a windshield survey, and that was completed two days ago, and we were I believe at 100%. That requires people driving around their pre-assigned zones and going out and doing what's called a windshield survey because they're eyeballing, they're visualizing. I can tell that building right there lost its roof and its significant damage, so we grade it as no damage, minor damage, and major damage. We do have that information and then our folks are going out and doing more comprehensive inspections and those aren't done yet. And that won't be done for a while. I don't know if that information is subject to disclosure.

Q: What is the status of traffic lights working? Who is working on this? What is being done?

A: It's getting better, getting much better. I would say if I had to give, put a percentage on it, and this is just a guess, I would say that we're probably between 65% and 70% back online. And so it's a combination of city employees, Lee County, and our out-of-town contractors. We're doing a variety of things including powering signals on generators and replacing signals, the county has replaced several of them along Del Prado Boulevard that was destroyed during the storm, so

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

those are up and running. Veterans (Parkway signals), I believe, are now completely up and running. I know FDOT replaced or repaired all the signals along Pine Island Road, so that's a bright spot. We're almost at the finish line in terms of immediate restoration, and then you can tell they're coming back. These are interim steps to get the signals working, and then they'll be coming back with permanent replacements.

Q: What is the status of power outages and what is the city doing to speed up the restoration process?

A: As of this morning (Oct. 6), we have 25,758 customers with power restored out of about 94,000. A little less than 30%. I was out there today in the field, they have armies of crews out there working. You'll have to get an actual number from LCEC, but whatever we can do to facilitate LCEC's work we're assisting them. We provide their convoys escorts every morning, so they don't have to get tied up in traffic because they're based out of Lee Civic Center, and so we go out there at 6 o'clock every morning and we escort the crews in, and that's the extent of our work with them. I mean, they're their standalone entity. They don't need a whole lot from us. We're also working with FPL, and we've provided FPL with a staging area. They have a mini-city built there, and then when FPL is done with the work they're doing in Fort Myers, those crews are going to be available to assist LCEC.

Q: What is the snag in rescinding boil water notices? Other jurisdictions have done so by now, why not the Cape? What is the city doing to get the water distribution system up and running?

A: The health department is requiring us to do a month's worth of sampling in a day. That's 120 samples a day, and we have to have two samples, meaning we do a sample today, a sample tomorrow, and then we have to wait until the test results come back. So then the earliest would be sometime late tomorrow, and if all of them come back clean, meaning that there's no bacteria or whatever, then we can lift it.

Q: What is the status of the city's reverse osmosis plants? What is the city doing to get them working at 100%?

A: They are not at 100% quite yet. The north R/O plant as of this morning was partially energized. We're producing about 6,000 gallons per minute, but the north R/O is not fully restored. It does not have 100% power, and so it does not have all of its what they call treatment trains up and running, due to lack of power. Now the south R/O, though it sustained damage, seems to me to be fully operational. We are producing more water than is being demanded.

Q: What is the status of the city's sewer lift stations? How many are still without power? How many sewage overflows has the city had? What is the city doing to get them back online?

A: About 10% right now are without power. That's a huge improvement over where we were yesterday, so as of this morning (Oct. 6), 90% are either on power or on generators. We have requested generators. We have been receiving generators every day.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

NBC News
September 28, 2022

Cape Coral Hit By Storm Surge, Residents Trapped In Homes And Vehicles
Author: Tom Llamas, NBC News Digital Staff

CB&A Note: There was no script available for the video interview with NBC News during Hurricane Ian. Below is the video description and link with the video on YouTube.

Cape Coral City Manager **Rob Hernandez** describes the situation after the city took a hard hit from Hurricane Ian, including residents trapped and emergency services struggling to reach them.

Youtube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xReRh7-UY0g>

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

WGCU PBS & NPR
September 14, 2022

Cape Coral officials knew drinking water was susceptible to E. coli days before informing residents

Author: Tom Bayles

Cape Coral officials knew a sample from the city's drinking water system tested positive for a marker for E. coli four days before informing the city's 200,000 residents and issuing a mandatory boil water notice.

E. coli was, in fact, discovered in subsequent testing, and the public was alerted to the dangerous pathogen in their drinking water on the evening of Sept. 12. A mandatory boil water alert was issued.

Residents swarmed supermarkets clearing the shelves of bottled water, restaurants stopped serving certain items made with tap water, and Lee County Schools said students would be given bottled water and water fountains shut off.

Escherichia coli is a bacteria found in the environment, certain foods, and the intestines of people and animals. The germs kill about 100 people every year nationwide, but, more commonly, people infected with the pathogen become ill and can have bloody diarrhea, cramps, vomiting and headaches.

Cape Coral City Manager **Rob Hernandez** said in a press conference Monday that word of possible E. coli in the drinking water was not disseminated because the first positive test on Sept. 7 found total coliform. That is a bacteria that indicates E. coli might be present, but the test was not positive for E. coli itself.

Hernandez consistently downplayed the positive E. coli testing throughout the press conference, and said the city's hand was forced to issue the mandatory boil water alert by Lee County's office of the Florida Department of Health.

“We had some concerns about the validity of one of the tests,” **Hernandez** said in a press conference Monday night about the positive E. coli tests and the citywide boil water alert. “However, the Lee County Health Department instructed us that because we received two positive tests that they were going to require us to institute a mandatory boil water notice for all customers, all residents and business, receiving water through the city’s water system.

“I have no information right now to indicate that there is a problem of any kind with the quality and safety with the city of Cape Coral’s water treatment system.”

The Centers for Disease Control says the presence of total coliform bacteria in tap water is a serious matter and repeat sampling must be done within 24 hours of the initial test results.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

That’s because the CDC says the presence of total coliform in a drinking water systems “suggests that there could be a problem with existing equipment or treatment systems, contamination of the source water or a breach in the distribution system that could introduce E. coli contamination.”

If several days from the finding of total coliform and the announcement of the E. coli and the boil water advisory in Cape Coral was excessive, the opposite is true for the 18 hours from when the boil water advisory was issued to when it was cancelled and the all-clear was given.

The Florida Department of Health says boil-water advisories due to dangerous microbes like E. coli in drinking water last at least one day. “A boil water event typically lasts 24 to 48 hours, but it can be longer and may last several days,” the department says on its website. “How long depends on what caused the need to boil, how quickly the problem can be corrected, and how long it takes for laboratory results to confirm your water is again ready to drink.”

Florida law gives the state health department decision-making power for what rules are to be followed when boil water advisories must be issued, what information must be in the notices, and when they can be rescinded.

In Cape Coral, the presence of E. coli in the drinking water and the boil water advisory was announced at 5 p.m. on Monday and the boil water advisory was rescinded at about noon on Tuesday.

The DOH guidelines say water samples must be free of pathogens for “one day” before an advisory can be lifted, but does not define whether “one day” means 24 hours or one calendar day turning to the next. WGPU contacted the state health department’s drinking water program twice for clarification but did not receive a reply.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

WINK News
September 14, 2022

Proposal for use of temporary signs in Cape Coral

Author: Zach Oliveri & Paul Doaln

Everywhere you go in Cape Coral you see campaign and real estate signs, but the city might be cracking down on signs soon. The city council is talking about making new rules for where you can put signs. Neither realtors nor some members of the city council like it. And the city manager knows any ordinance on the location of temporary signs is tough to enforce, especially around election season.

Driving around Cape Coral it's not hard to tell that election season is heating up. Campaign signs for local and state elections line the road and on lawns in front of homes. However, too many signs are not where they are supposed to be.

Rob Hernandez, the Cape Coral city manager shared some thoughts about the signs with WINK News. "We are actively out there on a daily basis removing signs that are improperly placed in the right of way," **Hernandez** said. "Unfortunately just as soon as we pick them up they somebody comes back out and plops them in the right of way."

Signs became the top agenda item in the city council's committee of the whole meeting on Wednesday. But, how can Cape Coral regulate campaign, real estate, construction signs, and more? The proposal says to install 'temporary' signs, which would require approval from the property owner and signed written permission from the owner filed with the city clerk for vacant land.

Kevin Besserer, the director of public policy for the Royal Palm Coast realtor association spoke to WINK News about this. "If we had to put in with the city's clerk's office, any kind of registration I believe that we would overwhelm them," Besserer said.

Councilmember Keith Long proposed a solution to that point raised by Besserer. "We have the authority to request written authorization, showing they have approval for the specific site. And then we would deal with the enforcement at that point in time," responded Long.

The proposal also prohibits temporary signs in any public right of way, visibility triangle, and within five feet of another temporary freestanding sign. Council will continue to discuss the ordinance at a future committee of the whole meeting.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Cape Coral Breeze
September 1, 2022

Cape, Waste Pro reach agreement to end lawsuit

Author: Chuck Ballaro

The city of Cape Coral and Waste Pro have come to an agreement, ending a lawsuit over funds withheld by the city in a garbage and trash collections dispute. The city and its solid waste collections vendor came to an agreement that allows the city to retain \$1.1 million in cash and other valuation while remitting \$1.7 million owed to Waste Pro. Cape Coral City Councilmember Jennifer Nelson pulled the item from the consent agenda to respond to misinformation she says has been out there regarding the agreement.

City Attorney Dolores Menendez said while City Manager **Rob Hernandez** signed the memorandum of understanding for the purpose of mediation, the document did not bind the city to an agreement. City Council held the final say. “I heard one resident say that this was a done deal and signed and that is not the case,” Menendez said. “We’re in mediation because when the city withheld the funds, Waste Pro filed suit against the city, with that came costs. The council needs to determine if this is the most cost effective and judicious means of resolving this.”

Hernandez said there was \$2.6 million held in dispute when the two parties entered into mediation. The money was comprised of administration charges imposed on Waste Pro for performance issues and for reimbursement for using city labor to assist Waste Pro in removing yard waste, as well as franchise fees. “The city is being reimbursed in full for its services for \$308,000 and being made whole regarding franchise fees for short of \$184,000,” **Hernandez** said. “The actual retained value to the city will be \$1.1 million.”

In the agreement, Waste Pro agrees:

n That the city shall retain \$308,069.81 the city is currently holding, representing costs incurred by the city for staff and equipment expenses while assisting in removing horticultural waste,

n That the city shall retain \$183,727.50 from amounts the city is currently holding from payments due to Waste Pro set off from the 8.5 percent franchise fees on full invoice amounts,

n That the city shall retain \$416,394 from amounts the city is currently holding, as a customer service rebate, that will be applied to the solid waste assessment.

To continue to provide bulk hauling services to the pilot bulk waste drop off site for the city until Sept. 30, 2024. Waste Pro will not charge for these services for the 2023 fiscal year, which has a value to the city of \$240,334.

For the following budget year, the city will pay Waste Pro \$240,334 for bulk hauling services at the pilot bulk waste drop off site in monthly installments of \$20,027.83. The city agrees to

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

release the \$1,732,628.54, which is currently being withheld by the city, to Waste Pro within 30 calendar days. Within three business days of the release of the money, the parties will file a Joint Stipulation for Dismissal with Prejudice, ending the lawsuit.

Waste Pro has provided solid waste removal services for the city since 2010. The contract was renewed in 2020. Since the renewal, however, there were issues with Waste Pro failing to pick up trash, and horticultural and bulk waste, some of which sat on the curb for weeks. Waste Pro said it was from a lack of drivers as the company was unable to employ enough of them to do their routes.

In the wake of resident complaints, the city started fining Waste Pro \$250 per day per incident, which soon ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Waste Pro then sued the city for breach of contract.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

WINK News
August 16, 2022

Possible property taxes shift in Cape Coral

Author: Zach Oliveri & Paul Dolan

Lowering property taxes in Cape Coral is the goal for people living there since the city is working on two versions of a new budget as inflation raises prices. It's unknown whether property owners will save money because the continued growth of Cape Coral has raised property value.

Cape Coral resident Wanda Corbett and others are doing double takes when they look at their bills. "You see your grocery bill and you go what," said Corbett. That forces people to make decisions to save as much as they can on everything they can. "I did travel but not the cruises I used to do," said Corbett. "Now it's traveling and seeing the important things: grandchildren and family."

Cape Coral resident Damian Piquera shared his thoughts on ways to save money. "Checking different products that you would normally buy," said Piquera. "See if you can you know a little savings here and there to help out."

Piquera considers himself lucky that inflation hasn't forced him to drastically change his habits. But, the recent rise in his electric bill has him a bit more aware. "It's been 40-50 bucks extra every month," said Piquera. "So it's just sadly we have to be more mindful if I'm leaving the lights on. You know is the AC staying on when we're not home."

Cape Coral leaders know people in their city are struggling and that is part of their 2023 budget discussions reducing the property tax rate to ease the stress.

Rob Hernandez is the Cape Coral city manager and he shared some thoughts with WINK News. "We're not deaf to it," said **Hernandez**. "And so we felt it was very important working with city council to ensure that we propose a budget that provides some property tax relief to our taxpayers."

People will see annual savings anywhere between \$104 to \$146 for a home assessed at \$279,000. "It would be helpful," said Piquera. "So I mean lower the taxes the better."

So if the assessed value of your home goes up higher than any proposed property tax rate cut, you'll still pay more in property taxes. Cape Coral city council is split on how much the tax rate reduction will be and the city council will vote on the budget on Sept. 22.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Cape Coral Breeze
August 5, 2022

Cape eyes remedies for its permitting program

Author: Chuck Ballaro

Cape Coral City Manager **Rob Hernandez** said that while the city’s new permitting system has been nothing short of a nightmare thus far, it will make things easier for residents and city employees in the long run. **Hernandez** told city council Wednesday that the city has begun to catch up with the backlog of permits caused by a record-breaking demand.

The plan now is to close the customer service counter to walk-in traffic on Fridays beginning Aug. 19. Customers still will be able to process their permit requests online with EnerGov and come in person Monday through Thursday. “We feel we need a day to catch up to process the volume of activity that comes in. Friday is the best day to do that,” **Hernandez** said. “We found that while the pause (around Easter) worked for a time, but it caused a lot of inconvenience for the customers and I don’t want to repeat that.”

The city has considered the Friday closure for some time not only for EnerGov, but allow for staff training, **Hernandez** said. “We’ve heard complaints that sometimes we lack consistency in the permitting process. For that, we need time to make sure everyone is properly trained,” **Hernandez** said. “We considered that before EnerGov became an issue.”

Hernandez said the city is continuing its practice of paying city workers overtime to help process the backlog, with some 165 employees volunteering for that, and that some members of staff went to Des Moines, Iowa to see how they handled their problems with the EnerGov system during their transition.

The likely solution is to move to the latest version of EnerGov, **Hernandez** said. The city is currently on the 2020 system and the 2021 version is said to be more stable. Des Moines opted to upgrade.

“We’ve seen it work. More than 500 communities, some much larger than us, use it. Our employees are just going to have to be patient. We will get it fixed,” **Hernandez** said. “Trust me. They will get used to EnerGov. People are resistant to change. And every time we get an upgrade we always complain because we were used to the old way. EnerGov is with us and it’ll be here for a long time”

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

WINK News
May 20, 2022

Cape Coral growth speed exceeding expectations

Author: Zach Oliveri & Paul Dolan

The fastest-growing city in Southwest Florida is growing faster than we thought. A new study suggests Cape Coral can be built out in the next 11 to 18 years. Which prompts more urgency from city leaders to address the needs and concerns of the city.

More public access to the waterfront, more pedestrian safety, and more hospitals. These are some of the priorities revealed in a study by the Urban Land Institute. To address those needs city leaders need to move fast. We all know Cape Coral is growing and growing fast but city leaders learned Friday it's growing even faster than they thought.

Rob Hernandez the Cape Coral City Manager shared some thoughts. "We've always been thinking about 2045 2050, but just eleven years it could be possible at this rate that we're completely built out," **Hernandez** says.

Researchers with ULI say commercial and residential development will absorb 500 acres of real estate every year. We see it now, lots of construction especially in the northwest of Cape Coral. But, ULI wants to see more variety of homes that meet a variety of budgets. That's another way of saying Cape Coral needs more affordable housing.

U.L.I. Panel Chair, Leigh Ferguson, explains, "everyone who lives, everyone who works in this community should have the opportunity to live in this community so that it's convenient. There's nothing wrong with commuting in and out of the city. But it needs to be a place for everyone."

"We're missing what they call the missing middle right? And that is there are more opportunities for townhomes villas flats work live type of buildings" says **Hernandez**.

The city council doesn't have the luxury of time to come up with a plan to accommodate the growing number of people. Mayor John Gunter knows that. "The wave is coming. To me, it's better off to be prepared for that wave versus just letting it come and see what happens," Mayor Gunter says. The purpose of the study is to create a vision for the city's strategic plan. ULI gave a lot of recommendations to the council.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Business Observer FL
November 18, 2021

Could three projects boost a sleepy commercial district?

Author: Louis Llovio

A trio of projects planned for Cape Coral’s sleepy shopping district are seen as the first stage to transforming the city from Cape Coma to Cape Cool.

Those are the words of Cape Coral City Manager **Rob Hernandez** — a sentiment shared by city and business leaders who see these three planned developments for the South Cape area as a huge step forward.

The projects are seen as a way to infuse energy into the area and to create a nightlife that will keep people — and their dollars — from having to leave the city to search for fine dining or a place to hang out in the evening. This change, leaders say, will help attract young people to the area as well as companies that will bring jobs and give people already there a reason not to leave town.

“I think the themes I heard today are cool, fun, things like that,” **Hernandez** says. “I think you see that our private investors are coming to the plate and are investing heavily in this great city. But the city is investing heavily as well.”

Hernandez was speaking Nov. 9 at Cape Coral’s Catch the Vision event, a gathering aimed at showcasing projects across the city either under construction or in the pipeline. The event highlighted workforce, affordable and senior housing projects, as well industrial expansions, health care projects and retail additions.

But the biggest buzz centered on the projects coming to South Cape, including:

- The Cove at 47th, which will include 290 apartments, about 19,000 square feet of commercial space and a 525-space parking garage, with 125 public spaces. The development will also bring a three-story restaurant with a lounge and a rooftop bar.
- Bimini Square, a five-story development planned for 225 apartments, a parking garage with about 500 spaces, a medical office building, a marina and two restaurants, including a full-service waterfront eatery.
- Bacino Vista on Coronado Parkway, a condominium complex that will include one building with 16 units and a second with 14 units. Each has main floor parking and deeded boat slips. Prices will run in the mid- to high- \$500,000 range.

South Cape, according to the South Cape Community Redevelopment Agency, “encompasses an area bounded by Del Prado Boulevard westward to Palm Tree Boulevard (about 1 mile in length)

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Roberto Hernandez
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and north-south from S.E. 46th Street southward to Miramar Boulevard.” (Cape Coral is in southwest Lee County.)

The agency paints the area as bustling with restaurants featuring all-star chefs, shops and festivals. And that may be partially true. But to many locals and outsiders, particularly those who've spent time in places like downtown Fort Myers or Sarasota, it seems more like a traditional shopping district in desperate need of a spark and an identity.

The first sign that not much special is in the offing is as you drive into South Cape, coming off the Cape Coral Bridge across the Caloosahatchee River: the initial intersection you reach has two banks, a fast food restaurant and a Holiday Inn Express.

A little farther down Cape Coral Parkway you do run into a pocket of local establishments with a tiny bit of flare, including a café with a mid-morning crowd sitting outside and Ollie’s Pub — Records and Beer. But directly across the street is a shopping center with a Winn-Dixie, Panera Bread and Ace Hardware — identical to thousands across the nation.

It's the same along the entire strip, with fast food joints and chain stores alongside the occasional local restaurant or Realtor’s office. On one corner, a radio installation shop and a locksmith sit next to a cabinet maker.

As for those looking for a nightlife, the pickings are slim.

The hope, at least among most of those who spoke Nov. 9, is these three projects will begin, over time, to change the dull, tired scene one experiences walking down the street, the feeling you could be Anywhere, U.S.A. rather than somewhere special, with personality and individuality.

Bill Johnson, executive director of the Cape Coral Construction Industry Association, says a project like Cove at 47th “sets us alongside of a lot of your major cities — your Naples, your Coconut Point, your Mercato.”

“This is truly going to give us a mixed-use look that’s going to allow people to live downtown in an entertainment district and still bring additional businesses...and create jobs that will bring people into our area.”

But it's not just the tastemakers of Cape Coral who say change is needed. Andy D’Souza recently moved to Cape Coral from New Jersey. D’Souza, 47, lives on 46th Street, and likes that South Cape is quiet. But, he believes, a jolt is needed. “I think it would be nice. I think it would bring a lot of people down. It’s pretty great now, but it’ll bring more life to the area.”

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Roberto Hernandez
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Cape Coral Breeze
August 20, 2021

City manager addresses CCCIA

Author: Chuck Ballaro

When Cape Coral City Manager **Rob Hernandez** addressed the Cape Coral Construction Industry Association last October, he described the city as something out of the 1970s, a comment that members didn't seem to like. On Thursday, **Hernandez** again addressed the group to say that his views hadn't changed but the city is making progress. **Hernandez** attended the monthly CCCIA membership at the Palmetto Pines County Club to give what amounted to a combined State of the City address and Q & A session to let industry leaders know what has transpired over the last year.

Last year, **Hernandez**, who had just taken over as city manager, said the city looked old and tired and was stuck in the past. "Guess what folks. I still feel that way, whether you agree with me or not," **Hernandez** said. "I still feel we have to up our game. Despite the fact you're doing a great job selling houses, we have to improve the quality of our community and public spaces."

Hernandez said the city is moving in the right direction. The city was ready to award five contracts for parks as part of the city's \$60 million GO Bond passed by city residents in 2018. "People are coming here because we are a safe community, the weather and the value of the homes they are buying and the lifestyle they get to enjoy," **Hernandez** said. "But once they buy a home, I start to hear from them. They ask about why we don't have city parks and sidewalks and streetlights."

Hernandez said the new residents coming to the city are different from the ones who came here 20, 30 or 40 years ago. Today's customer is more discriminating, expecting more quality from the home they are buying and from the community to which they chose to come. "We have got to meet those expectations and we have to improve the quality of our services and experiences when we interact with the city," **Hernandez** said. "Over the last year, we're headed in the right direction." The parks are going to be the jewel of that improvement, **Hernandez** said, conceding that when all is said and done, the cost of the master plan projected at \$60 million would likely come in closer to \$80 million.

Hernandez discussed the city budget, saying he would ask for 15 new police officers and seek more over the next five years as residents grow concerned over the lack of police presence and people speeding on city roads. **Hernandez** said the biggest thing the city has to worry about now is the return of COVID, which has resulted in the city having 109 workers working from home and the reduction in the number of meetings held at city hall.

Hernandez requested that any of the contractors looking to have a pre-plan review that they do it virtually, if possible. He said the city is about to put the finishing touches on a new permitting system that will allow those looking to pull a permit to do so electronically. "I understand we are

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on the home stretch to be able to do a lot of the work with us electronically. I hope that makes all of us more efficient and helps you worry more about getting homes up and less about jumping through the various steps you go through in the city,” **Hernandez** said.

Bill Johnson Jr., executive director of the CCCIA, said he found the vision for the city to be refreshing. “I like that he wants to put funds into infrastructure, medians and city parks. These things are going to continue to beautify our city, which in turn will make it more desirable to build homes,” Johnson said.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Cape Coral Breeze
June 10, 2021

Guest Commentary: How the city of Cape Coral hires department heads
Author: **Rob Hernandez**

This is in response to a June 4, 2021 letter to the editor written by Lynn Rosko entitled “This is how the city hires department heads?”

Ms. Rosko questioned the City of Cape Coral’s process in selecting a new police chief along with the cost associated with hiring a search firm to recruit and assess applicants for the position. Under the council-manager form of government established by our City Charter, the city manager is responsible for the hiring of department directors and most city employees. In response to Ms. Rosko’s statement that simply picking an internal candidate for police chief was not good enough, she is absolutely right — it was not good enough. As the City Manager, it is my professional duty to conduct a fair and unbiased process when selecting individuals to fill positions with the City. Hiring decisions must be made on skills, abilities, qualifications, training, past performance, and organizational “fit.” My job is to pick the best person for the job whether they are already working for the City or not. Picking a new police chief was no different. All candidates for the job had to prove they were ready and the right fit for Cape Coral. Candidates went through several interviews and performance assessments conducted by former or currently serving police chiefs from across this state — at least 15 of them. Behavioral and leadership evaluations conducted by the search firm were also part of the process. Once the list of finalists was pared down to three, they were interviewed by the City’s leadership team. As it turns out, the person selected, Anthony Sizemore, proved he was the best individual for the position; he earned the title — it was not preordained nor was the job handed to him solely because he had worked for the City for a period of time.

Ms. Rosko then questioned the recent hiring of the director of Financial Services, Mark Mason (Mr. Mason previously served in that capacity several years ago). She brought up a 2006 audit conducted by the State’s Auditor General which covered a period of time prior to Mr. Mason’s previous tenure as the Financial Services Director with the City. It is important to note that the City disagreed with all but five of the audit’s findings. Ms. Rosko also believes that Mr. Mason intentionally misled the then City Council when adopting a budget amendment. I have reviewed the information relating to the situation she referenced and conclude there was no effort to mislead anyone. I believe some did not fully understand the information that was presented. It can be complicated.

We are required to follow strict budgeting and accounting standards that are complicated and different from non-governmental organizations. Our process to adopt and amend the budget is a lengthy and fully transparent one. A budget is a living document and it is amended periodically to account for changing economic conditions, unforeseen expenses and unanticipated revenue. An independent citizen’s review panel reviews the budget each year and makes recommendations to the City Council. There is a separate audit committee made up of residents

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that also overlooks the City’s finances and provides independent recommendations to the City Council. Our financials are audited each year by an independent financial auditor as required by law, the results published publicly and posted on our website. Following the end of the fiscal year we publish the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. Nothing is hidden.

Residents, businesses, and taxpayers should have every confidence in our City’s government, its financial processes, its transparency, and in its professional and dedicated employees.

As they say, let’s keep looking out of windshield rather than the rear view mirror.

— **Rob Hernandez** is the city manager for the city of Cape Coral.

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Roberto Hernandez
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WINK News
June 9, 2021

Two developments planned for downtown Cape Coral area

Author: Melissa Montoya

Two new developments are now in the planning stages for downtown Cape Coral. An empty lot on Bimini Basin will turn into a \$50 million project set to bring 185 apartments, commercial space, a parking garage and a waterfront restaurant.

An empty lot between Cape Coral Parkway and SE 47th Terrace will turn into 280 apartments, retail, office space and another garage. That project is called the Cape at 47th.

Both projects will break ground next year. “Empty-nesters and millennials they’re looking for, it’s all about options, they’re looking for options when it comes to housing,” said Cape Coral City Manager **Rob Hernandez**.

Robin Iafrate, of Cape Coral, said the Bimini Basin project is good because there aren’t enough restaurants for the waterfront. “We do like the waterfront restaurant and everything else that’s developing. People are moving in, they need someplace to live,” said Barbara Salafia, also of Cape Coral.

The biggest worry for people is the traffic these projects might bring. “If they can come up with some new ways around that, I don’t know the answer but everyone here complains about that,” said Cape Coral resident Mike Salafia.

Hernandez said the city’s goal is to give people options. Not everyone wants to live in a typical house. “There are individuals that like to be in an urban setting,” **Hernandez** said. “They want to be able to walk to the coffee shop, they want to be able to walk to the place of employment and walk to entertainment venues.”

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Roberto Hernandez
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Cape Coral Breeze
March 18, 2021

Cape to require registration of rentals

Author: Chuck Ballaro

Residential property owners who rent out their homes soon will have to register with the city of Cape Coral. Cape Coral City Council on Wednesday unanimously approved an ordinance requiring the registration of all rental properties of four units or fewer so the city can reach a responsible party for each rental property. There will be a one-time fee of \$35 to register, which can be done online or in person at City Hall effective Oct. 1. The owner will have to inform the city of contact changes within 30 days and any ownership change will require a new registration by the owner. No inspection of the property is required. The objective is to protect neighborhoods from blighted conditions such as noise, litter, inadequate maintenance and even criminal activity, officials said.

Several people spoke in favor of the ordinance. Kevin Besserer, director of public policy for the Royal Palm Coast Realtor Association, which supported the ordinance. “This will help the city deal with the bad actors out there,” Besserer said. The no inspection clause was of importance to Genelle Bennett, of Real Property Management of Central Florida, who also expressed support of the ordinance. Resident Louis Navarra expressed support by relating his experiences with renters and their parties and trash, quoting singer Bobby Darin in the process. There was little discussion by the city council, who passed the ordinance 8-0.

The ordinance had been pulled last month by City Manager **Rob Hernandez** to address an issue with legal concerns as to whether multi-family buildings of five or more units can be captured under the same umbrella. That issue caused members of the real industry, including the Royal Palm Coast Realtor Association, to pulled their support previously.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Cape Coral Breeze
February 25, 2021

Cape city manager introduces new budget process

Author: Chuck Ballaro

The city of Cape Coral is changing the way it approaches its municipal budget, bringing City Council — and the public — into the loop a lot sooner. New City Manager **Rob Hernandez** on Wednesday laid the groundwork for how the budget process is going proceed going forward. The budget timetable is going to begin earlier, with the Budget Review Committee having a much bigger role in the process, including joint meetings with Council, as it did at Wednesday’s workshop session. **Hernandez** also will introduce a five-year budget, as compared to former city manager John Szerlag’s three-year outlook, which was considered a planning game changer when introduced.

In previous years, the BRC would come in when the budget was released by the city manager in August and attend the budget workshops to give its input, something **Hernandez** didn’t like, especially when he experienced it after coming in August to replace Szerlag in the middle of the budget process. “The budget seemed it was done in the dark, in isolation of the council, with the BRC only getting it at the end of the process,” **Hernandez** said. “By that time, the staff had wrapped it up and Council had to react.”

The point of Wednesday’s workshop was to see what Council considered important, if the board wanted to cut spending or raise taxes, to see where everyone stood at the beginning of the process. A look at the economy shows the challenges the city faces, even as it shows signs of improvement from its low point last year. Dr. Amir Leto of Florida Gulf Coast University said the area saw 10 years of growth following the Great Recession and presented graphs about how everything fell off a cliff last spring as pandemic regulations rolled out. However, with the way the region tends to recover quickly from crisis, construction gains, a new president with new policies, low interest rates and new local regulations such as the new minimum wage, there is hope on the horizon, officials said.

Hernandez said there also is lots of uncertainty that could impact the budget, and that ultimately, it will be based on an educated guess on the economy. Still, it is expected that the primary General Fund taxes will remain the same — the property tax rate at 6.375 mills, the fire service assessment at 62 percent cost-of-recovery and the public service tax on electric bills at 7 percent. One mill is equal to \$1 for every \$1,000 of taxable property valuation.

It is the property tax rate that typically becomes the main talking point on the BRC. Many don’t want to see an increase, especially since property values are expected to increase again, meaning even at the current level of taxation, property owners may see an increase in their tax bill.

Officials also were concerned with reserves, which are projected to dwindle down to nothing by the end of the five-year cycle using current projections. Two months of reserves is the minimum

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the city would like to see and would prefer to see three. Council members said they would like to see the millage remain the same, though their priorities differed. Councilmember Jennifer Nelson wanted to look at the charter schools and the level of services the city provides to the municipal system. Councilmember Dan Sheppard wanted to see anything spent have a return on investment, even little things like beautification.

Councilmember Tom Hayden said they could lower the millage by raising the PST and the FSA, creating more balance in the city's three-pronged revenue stream and concentrate on sidewalk infrastructure, which Councilmember Jessica Cosden supported.

"I'm not interested in lowering the millage. I want a return on investment because it will allow us to spend on the next project," Sheppard said. "It's the platform I ran on."

Mayor John Gunter liked the new process, saying it will help them be more prepared and informed when it's time to hold the workshops in August. "The BRC is part of the process and I think they should start at the beginning. You have to be proactive with a growing city. We have to keep up with the times," Gunter said. "I don't want to get 10 years down the road and realize we're behind."

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Roberto Hernandez
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Cape Coral Breeze
January 29, 2021

‘Be bold:’ New economic development strategy eyed

Author: Chuck Ballaro

The city of Cape Coral has struggled for decades, in its attempts to bring “big business” to this side of the river. Strategies used in past, though, have not been able to close the huge gap between ad valorem taxes paid collectively by residential and commercial property owners. When John Szerlag became city manager in 2012, the city had a tax base of 92-8 residential to commercial. When he retired last August, those percentages had not changed.

City Manager **Rob Hernandez** on Wednesday unveiled his economic development strategy, which basically was described in two words: Be Bold. “Economic development is the engine that keeps this city going, and for 50 years, it has been residential construction and it looks like that will continue for quite some time,” **Hernandez** said. “In order to meet the needs of our residents, it’s important to ensure that we have a diversified economy and a pool of well-paying jobs our residents can have access to.”

Hernandez asked the council at the workshop how they “sell” the city, how Cape Coral stands out from other communities –what makes it unique –and how do they brand the Cape. As it stands now, most Cape residents cross the bridge and go to work in Fort Myers and Naples. Cape Coral, with its limited infrastructure, proximity to I-75 and lack of office space inventory, continues to lag behind.

Hernandez said it’s time the city revisits its approach to economic development and to start thinking big, as opposed to the small businesses the city has traditionally sought to nurture. “The last thing we want is to have 95 percent of our residents drive 30, 90, 120 minutes to get to their job across the river in Fort Myers or Naples,” **Hernandez** said. “We’re in the business of selling our city. How do we stand out? What makes us different from Fort Myers?”

The city needs to replace the 2016 resolution that provided small economic incentives, update its economic development plan from 2014, establish a special council to advise the city council on business related issues, revise and expand economic incentives, complete a corridor plan for Burnt Store Road to maximize its potential and rezone the area east of Corbett Road to support light industrial, he said.

Among the target industries the city is looking to include are biotechnology, medical/ healthcare, technology, back office operations, light manufacturing and corporate headquarters. He suggested included an open container zone in the South Cape, which would likely be controversial, and the prioritization of utility expansion on Corbett Road, Pine Island and Burnt Store roads and the opportunity zone.

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Hernandez got rave reviews for his presentation due to the boldness of the plan, with the most coming from Councilmember Dan Sheppard who, after attending meetings for years and hearing all sorts of plans, said this one has potential.

“I was high-fiving myself reading this. Many businesses start here, get successful and leave. We want them to stay here. That’s part of being a successful city,” Sheppard said. “The difficult part will be to steer the ship on where to go first. Take the feelings out of it and ask where to target first.” Sheppard suggested looking at the South Cape first since it would provide the biggest bang for the buck.

However, Councilmember Rick Williams gave everyone a reality check, for there is a lot the city still needs. “The problem I see it is where do you put them? We have no utilities on Burnt Store Road. You need utilities or nobody will come,” Williams said. “We have the horse behind the cart.”

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Cape Coral Breeze
August 27, 2020

Public service drives new city manager

Author: Chuck Ballaro

Cape Coral's new city manager **Rob Hernandez** contrasts himself to that person in the beer commercials who is "the most interesting man in the world." "That's not me. I'm the complete opposite. I'm the most boring man alive," he said. That may not be a bad thing for someone who is tasked with running a city, especially one sometimes known for controversies that split along a sharp divide.

Since taking over as Cape Coral's top administrator on Aug. 12, **Hernandez** has begun to delve into the city's unique challenges such as the need to diversify its tax base and bring in more businesses. He also has started to get to know the people who live in the city he has visited since his early years when his sister was a resident, and has found they are very much engaged with the happenings in the city and at City Hall. "I love the environment, the waterways and the atmosphere. It's not crowded or congested so you can move around and not be in traffic," **Hernandez** said. "People are generally friendly."

Hernandez's life has been devoted to public service, from serving in the Army Reserves for 23 years to all his years in local government, which he said he still finds fascinating. "It sounds corny, but unlike the private sector, where you're making widgets, the public sector makes a difference in the community and that's important," **Hernandez** said. "I've always been driven to public employment."

Hernandez takes the administrative helm of a city in much better shape than when his predecessor, John Szerlag took the reins. He sees a city that has great potential, since it is only half built out, which gives it lots of room for growth. "I see a lot that we can do with redevelopment on the residential and commercial side, which is very promising and one of the things that made me want to come here," **Hernandez** said.

One of the things that may help him is tenure as a manager in Savannah, Ga. The municipality is similar in size to Cape Coral although there are many issues that differentiate the two. "It's difficult to compare them even though they are both coastal cities. Climate change and sea level rise and economic development are on the radar screen for both cities," **Hernandez** said. "But the economic conditions and base couldn't be more different."

While both municipalities have lots of room to grow, Savannah is a port city and a military and college town. On the down side, it also has more poverty and crime. Cape Coral is a safer city, but it may continue to struggle to bring in commercial companies because of its lack of proximity to interstate highways or an airport. "We're not going to be a cog in distribution on a large scale because we don't have quick direct connection to interstates, we have no rail and no port and two airports that are far away," **Hernandez** said. "The businesses we get will be

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connected to the rooftops that exist, like doctors and accountants. I'm having trouble finding a dry cleaner." **Hernandez** believes there needs to be a more direct connection to I-75 with a limited-access highway without traffic lights, like a spur. An I-575, so to speak. There has been talk for years about something like that, but it has only reached the drawing board stage, at best. "Whether it's that or upgrading the roads we have to become limited access, that's what we need," **Hernandez** said. "Veterans would be a logical choice as it has sort of been designed that way."

Hernandez said taking the handoff of the 2021 budget from Szerlag has not been difficult since Szerlag put together a good budget needing, perhaps, only some minor adjustments. "We're tweaking it based on the direction city council wants us to go in and based on revenues," **Hernandez** said. "Structurally, he left me with a budget I can work with." As city manager, **Hernandez** reports directly to City Council, which is the policy making body. As city manager, **Hernandez** is responsible for day-to-day operations.

Among the things the elected board has debated is whether to keep the property tax rate the same level as last year, or to go to the rollback rate, the rate at which the city would bring in the same amount of revenue from property taxes as the last. **Hernandez** outlined the consequences of each action and suggested maybe Council could meet in the middle of the current millage rate and the rollback. "As the board of directors of this corporate enterprise, they get to make that decision. My job is to provide options and illustrate to them the pros and cons of those courses of action," **Hernandez** said. "If that's what they want, it's my job to implement that, but we need to point out there are pros and cons and we will point them out. We can also always go in between."

Hernandez said he will continue to use a rolling three-year budget and has used five-year forecasts in other cities in which he has worked. State law requires municipalities to present budgets one year at a time; a three-year budget is an outline of what the city faces in the future with the decisions it makes in the present.

Hernandez said the bottom line is that a city is also a business, and that Cape Coral does need the three-legged approach to revenue diversification that Szerlag proposed and council then implemented in the wake of the real estate bust. "We need diversified revenue streams because if you put your eggs in one basket, you're likely to experience financial stress when the economy goes sour," said. "We always want to get that millage as low as we can possibly get it. We compete with other cities like car dealers compete with each other."

According to his bio, **Hernandez** served as deputy city manager of Fort Lauderdale, from April 2019 when he was hired by Cape Coral City Council. He holds a Master of Public Administration degree from Nova Southeastern University and a Bachelor of Public Administration degree from Florida International University. He is an International City Management Association (ICMA) credentialed manager and a Florida City/County Management Association member, the city's web site states.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Lehigh Acres Citizen
May 29, 2020

Hernandez named Cape’s top choice for city manager post

Author: Staff Writer

Cape Coral City Council has selected its candidate of choice for the city’s top administrative position. **Rob Hernandez**, deputy city manager for Fort Lauderdale, was named Council’s top choice on Friday to replace City Manager John Szerlag, who has announced that he will retire in November. **Hernandez** received six Council votes with candidate Rob Perry, who most recently worked for the city of Albuquerque, N.M., receiving two. Perry got five second place votes to **Hernandez’s** two Council decided that Mayor Joe Coviello will conduct the contract negotiations with **Hernandez**. Should those negotiations fail to come to fruition, the city will then enter into negotiations with Perry. The two were among five finalists selected for in-person interviews by Council. The other three were Anne Fritz, chief financial officer for the city of St. Petersburg; Leonard Sossamon, most recently county administrator for Hernando County and Kenny Young, who most recently worked for Loudoun County, Va. As advertised, the position will pay \$180,000-\$270,000 with benefits that are “reasonably generous.”

Hernandez is currently deputy city manager in Fort Lauderdale, and previously served as city manager in Savannah, Ga., from 2016 to 2019. “It was a tough decision. It boiled down to that he works in Fort Lauderdale, which is similar in size to us. He has the right credentials, he’s familiar with the fire service assessment and other things we’re doing here,” Coviello said. “He seems to have the right personality to meld well here.” On Thursday, the candidates met the councilmembers in one-on-one sessions. On Friday, they went in front of the dais to answer questions from council. Each candidate got about 40 minutes with Council, with each also getting a three-minute closing statement. The council members had certain questions to ask each candidate and did not deviate throughout the process. For Councilmember Lois Welsh, it was about the UEP. For Councilmember Jennifer Nelson, it was job training. Councilmember John Carioscia asked how a candidate would cut the budget 5 percent and the most important elements to serving residents. Customer service was the typical answer. Councilmember John Gunter asked about their top three qualities in being a leader. One of the takeaways about the interviews is that the candidates came well-prepared on topics regarding Cape Coral, with a knowledge of the city’s strengths and weaknesses. They also used their experiences elsewhere and wove them into what they could do for the city.

Hernandez stood out as he said local government’s role in developing workforce education is out of its realm and that the city’s location, which is not near airports or interstates, poses a real challenge in terms of bringing in high-tech jobs. **Hernandez** also said he has a unique management style. He is laid back and not big on wearing suits and likes to be out in the public instead of behind a desk. “Humor, humility and patience are the three big qualities of being a leader. Nobody wants to work for a tyrant. I want people to feel like it’s a family and make things fun. Show people you’re human,” **Hernandez** said. “You need to be more informal to be more nimble.”

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

WLRN News HD1 (FL)
February 21, 2020

Fort Lauderdale Officials Respond to \$1.8 Million State Fine for Sewage Spills

Author: Alexander Gonzalez & Tom Hudson

Pipes in Fort Lauderdale keep breaking--it's been an almost daily reality for many people living and working in the city. More than 200 million gallons of sewage have spilled from busted pipes in Fort Lauderdale since December. The state responded to the sewer spills this week. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection fined the city almost two million dollars. That amount is based in part on how much sewage has spilled. On the South Florida Roundup, host Tom Hudson talked about the issue with WLRN's Broward County reporter Caitie Switalski and Fort Lauderdale's deputy city manager **Rob Hernandez**.

Here's an excerpt of their conversation: Tom Hudson: What are the funding options if the city has to pay the state this \$1.8 million fine or any fine for that matter?

Rob Hernandez: Well, if we have to pay the fine, it's either going to have to come out of the Water and Sewer fund or the city's general fund. And again, we believe that \$1.8 million will best serve our local residents and our taxpayers by being reinvested into some of these projects rather than just going in and being deposited into a general fund at the state level. We're not being critical of the state. We understand that they were in the position where they felt that they had to take some sort of action. But we're hopeful that we'll be able to work something out that is slightly different than just the fine.

Caitie Switalski: When it comes to the punitive nature of the fine, \$1.4 million of the \$1.8 million is civil penalties based on how much sewage and how many days the sewage spill went on. I know the city is in the middle of weaning off trying to take money out of those funds [general or Water and Sewer funds] to balance the regular budget. That was a practice leftover from the last city administration. But if the city has to pay part of this fine out of those funds again, have you heard from any residents about that?

Hernandez: No, we haven't heard from any residents. And certainly I don't think it's going to change the practice. The city commission has made it abundantly clear that we were going to transition away from transferring funds from the Water and Sewer fund into the general fund. The city commission that's currently in office directed the city manager to transition us over a four-year period. They have since directed us to accelerate that transition. And that's something, going into next fiscal year, that we're certainly looking at. If there's an opportunity to return those funds at midyear this year, that's something that our city manager is looking at. But I don't think that the fine is going to derail us from making progress. And using your word, "weaning" ourselves off of that budget transfer. We're under clear direction that the funds that are generated by the Water and Sewer fund are going to go back into the necessary improvements that need to be made. And certainly we've been working in that direction for the last couple of years and we will continue to do so.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

South Florida Sun Sentinel (FL)
July 23, 2019

Fort Lauderdale: Contractor Who Broke Water Main Wasn't Digging Where it told us
Author: *Larry Barszewski*

Fort Lauderdale never warned a contractor that a critical water line lay buried where workers planned to dig last week, a report shows, but city officials say that's because the contractor supplied the wrong address. The misinformation led to a failure that ultimately dried up the city's water supply and led to days of boil-water orders. Taps ran dry hours after the contractor drilled into the water supply line July 17. Countless businesses were forced to close, and more than 200,000 people were left without water to drink or shower. The contractor, Florida Communication Concepts, used a service called Sunshine 811 to find out whether there were underground utilities it had to watch out for while doing work for Florida Power & Light Co. The statewide utility service is authorized under Florida law and is the state's official resource for companies and individuals planning underground work.

The report shows Fort Lauderdale never told the contractor that the site in the back of 2525 NW 55th Court contained a 42-inch pipe that supplied raw water to the main water treatment plant. Instead, the city indicated that it didn't provide service there, according to the report from Sunshine 811. Deputy City Manager **Rob Hernandez** said the city's water line isn't on that property; it's 75 feet north. The digging was being done to the north and east of the requested location, he said. "It appears that where the contractor was digging is not where they indicated on the 811 ticket," **Hernandez** said. "Our investigation is still ongoing." The owner of Florida Communication Concepts, Tim Hicks, said he couldn't comment, and FPL has declined to answer reporters' questions.

Contractors contact Sunshine 811 to alert agencies about the work they plan to do and to find out whether there are pipes or underground facilities they need to avoid when digging. The service then alerts the utilities, which are supposed to inform the contractor whether they have lines in the area and mark them if they do. Florida Communication Concepts filed a ticket with Sunshine 811 on June 25 to install conduit in July for FPL near Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport, records show. Sunshine 811 notified Fort Lauderdale and nine other entities, based on maps they submitted to Sunshine 811 that indicated it was possible they could have equipment near the work site. Tamarac and Crown Castle Fiber responded that they had no facilities there. Oakland Park, Teco People's Gas of South Florida and CenturyLink said their lines were outside of the work site.

Others said they did have equipment in the area. Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport, Comcast Cable, AT&T and FPL indicated that they marked the locations of their lines for the contractor. Fort Lauderdale responded as well, but it used a code indicating that no city utilities were present at that excavation site. The code it used said "another company provides the services at this location." That code typically is used by utilities that do not have services at that exact location, according to Sunshine 811's online site. **Hernandez** said that's because the city doesn't have any

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water lines at the property address the contractor listed. He also said Florida Communication Concepts said on its Sunshine 811 form that it would not be doing boring, but that's how the city's pipe was pierced. Fort Lauderdale receives dozens of requests each day from Sunshine 811 for underground line information. Sunshine 811 sent the city 20,501 notices last year and 12,635 so far this year, the service reported. The requests go to the city's distribution and collections chief for its water and wastewater services. A city police report filed at the time the line was punctured said the company had used the line-locating service. However, it cited Florida Communication Concepts for not having a permit for the work, violating city codes. It issued the contractor a "Notice to Appear" citation. City officials said a date has not been set for a hearing. It's not clear whether a permit was needed. **Hernandez** said last week that FPL has a franchise agreement with the city that does not require the utility to get a permit every time it digs.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Post Gazette (PA)
July 19, 2019

Fort Lauderdale gets ‘Temporary Relief’ While Crews Repair a Water Main Break

Author: *Dakin Andone & Emanuella Grinberg*

Officials in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, said a temporary fix water has running again after a main break left an estimated 220,000 customers without service Thursday. Water is flowing below normal pressure and is expected to return to "near normal" sometime Thursday night, Mayor Dean Trantalis said in an evening news conference. A subcontractor repairing electric lines on Wednesday struck a pipe that supplies water to a treatment plant, cutting off the city's water supply. No major incidents were reported as a result of the outage, the mayor said. A partial patch was placed on the hole, increasing water pressure, Mr. Trantalis said. Those involved in the repairs are "confident" that the patch will provide "temporary relief" while crews work to redirect the water flow through a backup line and replace the broken pipe, he said.

The installation could take through the weekend, Mr. Trantalis said. While repairs are underway, a boil water advisory is in effect until and water distribution sites will stay open until at least Saturday, Mr. Trantalis said. With repairs underway, he said the city's focus will shift to investigating the cause and seeking compensation for not only the city but hotels, restaurants and other businesses impacted by the service outage. "This was not just a minor incident, this impacted many hundreds of thousands of hundreds of people," Mr. Trantalis said. "It was clearly haphazard," he said. "It's clearly something that we're going to seek retribution for."

What the city is doing to fix the pipe

On Wednesday, a subcontractor working near the city's Executive Airport for Florida Power & Light damaged a 42-inch city pipe that supplies water from wellfields to the Fiveash Water Treatment Plant, the mayor said. The service outage impacted the city and surrounding municipalities that receive water through the city, including Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, Oakland Park, Wilton Manors and sections of Davie and Tamarac. An estimated 220,000 customers were impacted, Deputy City Manager **Rob Hernandez**. Crews are now building a concrete bunker around the broken pipe to seal the break and protect the pipe, Mr. Trantalis said. The bunker should be completed by 10 p.m. ET and the Fiveash Water Treatment Plant should be back to full and normal operation, he said. The temporary fix will give crews time to redirect the water flow through a backup line, Mr. Trantalis said. Once the backup line is in place, a replacement pipe for the primary main will be installed, likely over the course of the weekend, the mayor said.

Cause of outage under investigation

Earlier Thursday, Mr. Trantalis said crews responded immediately, but as they were working, the damaged pipe collapsed, forcing the city to turn off the water flow. During Thursday night's news conference, he suggested the subcontractor bore the brunt of the blame for "something they should not have done." The subcontractor has been cited and an enforcement action has been launched, the mayor said, although he was unable to identify the specific citation. When initially

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

asked if there was anything the city could have done better, the mayor responded "no," then added, "Yes -- we could have foreseen this but you can't foresee these types of things." Later in the press conference, the mayor maintained the incident an "accident" caused by "human error," but he also acknowledged that it put a spotlight on the city's redundancy systems.

Deputy City Manager **Rob Hernandez** said "difficulty" with at least one valve that was supposed to redirect water to the redundant system, leaving them unable to isolate the damaged section of pipe. "What [this] pointed out to us is that we need to pay more attention to our infrastructure needs and that we need to go back and make sure that these redundancies systems do work when they're supposed to work." Residents in need of bottled water can find it at the Beach Community Center on 33rd Avenue, Mills Pond Park on Northwest 9th Avenue and Riverland Park on Southwest 27th Avenue.

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Roberto Hernandez
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SavannahNow

Posted May 26, 2019 at 8:18 PM Updated May 27, 2019 at 12:29 AM

Savannah’s city manager out on medical leave

By DeAnn Komanecky and Eric Curl

Savannah City Manager **Rob Hernandez** is out on medical leave, with Patrick Monahan now serving as acting city manager. **Hernandez** tendered his resignation on April 12 with a last work day date of June 30. Whether **Hernandez**’s medical leave will change when he leaves his post is not known. City spokesperson Ken Slats said no other details are currently available. Monahan, a former Chatham County assistant manager, was hired in April as a consultant to work with **Hernandez**, starting in May. Monahan retired from the county in 2013 and has said he would only take the interim position temporarily, but is willing to stay long enough after this fall’s election for the new city council to hire the long-term manager next year. He will be paid \$20,000 a month for up to 12 months, under the agreement.

Hernandez’s resignation came after news broke of his pending departure for a job as deputy city manager of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. **Hernandez** declined interview requests regarding his resignation, but said in a subsequent press release that he and his wife decided to go back to south Florida to help their siblings care for their elderly mothers. He indicated there was more to the decision than just family reasons, however, in correspondence obtained by the Savannah Morning News. **Hernandez** said he intended to stay away from city manager positions for a while after being asked about his plans by Lake Wales, Florida, City Manager Kenneth Fields. “The last three years here have been tough as a (city manager),” **Hernandez** said. He responded in a similar manner to an April 12 email from Chatham County Engineer Leon Davenport. “Tough town,” **Hernandez** said. “Going back to Fort Lauderdale.”

The city council hired **Hernandez** as city manager Sept. 1, 2016, with a \$238,000 salary and \$600 monthly vehicle allowance, as well as a \$7,000 annual 457 retirement plan. After his arrival, **Hernandez** led the city through a major restructuring and successful development of a strategic plan. The city has also experienced two years of budget surpluses after **Hernandez** had implemented a hiring freeze and budget cuts. His impact was praised by some of his executive team following word of his departure.

City Management Coordinator Joe Shearouse Jr. wrote in response to his resignation notice that he thought a lot about the accomplishments **Hernandez** had made in Savannah. “Your impact on people is extensive and much more influential than a project or initiative,” Shearouse said. “Your openness and eagerness to provide us opportunities to grow and learn is lasting and far reaching.” Special Projects Coordinator Daphne Williams said in an email that it may be a long time before they get someone else comparable. “Our team was on fire,” Williams said.

Hernandez also experienced his share of criticism, which began shortly after his arrival when he proposed cuts, which were ultimately restored, to arts organizations and social programs. And he was widely panned by residents following the implementation of a fee for fire service.

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Hernandez had touted as a way to get all property owners — including those that are tax-exempt — to contribute to the rising costs of providing fire protection. Public indignation only grew when **Hernandez** presented the council with a spending plan for a budget surplus from 2017 of more than \$10 million about five months after the fee was adopted. The fee was ultimately repealed, but **Hernandez** later attributed some subsequent job searches to the widespread opposition he encountered following its implementation.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Savannah Morning News (GA)
April 29, 2019

Savannah Could Get More Affordable Housing Under These Proposed City Programs

Author: *Eric Curl*

About 44 percent of Savannah families cannot afford quality housing, according to city officials. In other words, almost 24,000 local households are cost burdened because they spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing, said Housing and Neighborhood Services Director Martin Fretty. To address the issue, the city is considering some new affordable housing initiatives that were presented to the Savannah City Council during a workshop Thursday. The initiatives include a \$20 million investment to acquire, redevelop and sell 1,000 blighted properties over a 10-year period. The investment would provide more affordable housing, while also reducing the number of abandoned properties that cost the city an average about \$1,300 a year each in lost tax revenue and expenses related to police, fire and code enforcement services, Fretty said.

The city is hoping to get \$10 million for the acquisition program included on the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum going before voters this fall. The eventual sale of the properties would go back into a revolving fund and help drive down costs for future investments, Fretty said. "After a couple of years you ought to be able to recover, we think, 80 percent of what we invested in the properties to acquire them," he said. The city is expected to meet with Chatham County officials next month to discuss the SPLOST project list and determine Savannah's distribution share of the sales-tax revenue. Savannah affordable housing presentation by savannahnow.com on Scribd.

Inclusionary zoning

The city is also contemplating the implementation of an inclusionary zoning policy, similar to one established in Atlanta last year. The policy would require developers of apartment projects to include a certain percentage of affordable units or pay a one-time fee into a city housing fund. In turn, the developer could select from a list of incentives that could allow for more units, reduced parking requirements and a streamlined permitting process. In Atlanta the program applies to areas where the city is experiencing the pressures of redevelopment, said Bridget Lidy, Savannah's director of planning and urban design. In Savannah, the Canal District, where the new arena is being built west of downtown, provides an opportunity for the program's launch, Lidy said. "It's ripe for this," she said. The proposal received general support from the council, although it is still early in the process. Lidy was encouraged to set up a meeting with Atlanta officials, who she said have expressed interest in helping Savannah establish their own initiative.

And City Manager **Rob Hernandez** said he thought the city would likely need to hire an outside consultant before they could develop an inclusionary zoning policy. "I think we need to bring in the resources from other communities that have gone through that process," **Hernandez** said. "We haven't and there is a lot of stakeholder involvement and a lot of legalities involved." In the meantime, the city has developed some proposed standards to reduce development costs and increase the amount of affordable housing, including the reduction of the minimum lot size and

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parking requirements in traditional neighborhoods. In addition, the city's proposed new zoning ordinance, NewZo, provides more flexibility for constructing accessory dwelling units, with no more than one bedroom, in some areas. City officials are planning for the new ordinance to be adopted in July after public hearings are held in June.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Savannah Morning News (GA)
April 13, 2019

Hernandez Formally Resigns Post

Author: *Savannah Morning News*

Savannah City Manager **Rob Hernandez** formally submitted his resignation letter Friday morning. "Such letters are never easy to write and I hope it conveys my appreciation to all of you and our great staff, especially those that sit around the table with me each Monday," **Hernandez** wrote in an email to the city council and city staff. "I know that I've made some mistakes along the way as I am far from perfect. Please know that I have always attempted to do what is in the best interest of the city in the long term, and endeavored to create a culture of fairness, professionalism, integrity, inclusion, diversity, opportunity and ingenuity. I'm fortunate to have been surrounded by a team of good people. I'm grateful to have known you. Together, we've gotten a lot done since October 11, 2016. I hope that I have served all of you well," he wrote. "Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your city manager."

Fort Lauderdale City Manager Chris Lagerbloom informed the Savannah Morning News on Thursday that **Hernandez** will be joining the city as deputy city manager later this summer. In a formal resignation letter addressed to the mayor and alderman, **Hernandez** touted the team's accomplishments, from upgrading the city's bond rating to launching the design of the new arena. "I have been honored with the privilege of serving as Savannah's eighth city manager since adoption of the council-manager form of government in 1951. I joined the City on the heels of Hurricane Matthew on October 11, 2016, and since then we've weathered literal and figurative storms and overcame numerous obstacles in providing exceptional municipal services," **Hernandez** wrote. "We accomplished much during this time while simultaneously creating an organizational spirit focused on one simple concept: Forward. Forward is a fanatical passion for momentum, progress and achievement. It is an obsession with what is possible rather than the status quo. It is the driver behind our biggest accomplishment - SAVANNAH FORWARD, our guide to strategic policy-making and investments through 2025."

Hernandez said in a press statement issued later that he and his wife decided to go back to south Florida to help their siblings care for their elderly mothers. His resignation is effective June 30. Savannah Mayor Eddie DeLoach has recommended that former assistant Chatham County Manager Pat Monahan serve as interim city manager, but he is awaiting support for that decision from the rest of the city council. A special meeting has been called for 6 p.m. Monday in the Media Room on the second floor of City Hall for the council to consider an interim city manager. The next city manager is not expected to be hired until after the new city council is sworn in next year following this fall's election.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
January 9, 2019

Savannah City Manager Rob Hernandez: Government Leadership Backs Savannah Fire Department

Author: *Rob Hernandez*

There has been much discussion in recent days about staffing levels within Savannah's Fire Department. I would like to take this opportunity to address misinformation circulating in social and regular media outlets.

First, what the city government has not done:

- We have not closed any fire stations.
- We have not laid off any fire personnel.
- We have not left any neighborhood in Savannah unprotected.
- We have not taken steps that will delay Savannah Fire's response time to an emergency.

What we have done is eliminate vacant positions in Savannah Fire over the past two years. To put those reductions in context, I would like to take you back to 2014. For the first time that year, Savannah Fire was granted an ISO Class 1 rating — an insurance classification that evaluates a community's fire operations and water infrastructure. Less than 1 percent of fire departments in the nation are rated Class 1. The following year, in 2015, Savannah received a three-year, \$3.5 million FEMA grant designed to increase staffing levels in Savannah Fire. We did just that. In 2015, we added 15 firefighter positions. In 2016, we added another 15 firefighter positions. And in 2017, we grew by 10 more firefighter positions. Add it all up and over a three-year period we added 40 new firefighters to our payroll — a 12.6 percent staffing increase. At 366 total positions, including 341 firefighters, this was the highest staffing level in Savannah Fire's history.

That grant ended in 2017, and with it we faced a difficult decision: Do we ask Savannah taxpayers to continue funding this increased staffing level, or do we make reductions? We were facing flat revenues that year, and direction from city council to continue making investments in the police department. To balance the 2018 budget, we eliminated 45 vacant positions across the city government organization, including 18 within Savannah Fire. Council directed that those cuts come from Engine 16/Marine 1 — a specialized unit that operates the fire boat and a backup pumper truck at fire department headquarters on Oglethorpe Avenue. That same budget authorized a permanent funding solution for fire operations: the fire fee. That fee was rejected over the summer, and during months of public discussion we heard repeatedly from property owners that they preferred a smaller fire department over paying a new fee to fund fire services.

We contracted with the University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute of Government to analyze Savannah Fire operations and make recommendations on better use of resources. I expect those recommendations within the month, but preliminary discussions with the report authors identified options for increased efficiency and reducing costs. The 2019 budget was balanced

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with the elimination of another 15 vacant positions. The UGA recommendations will drive where those reductions are made. It is important to note that even with the elimination of these 33 vacancies over the past two years, Savannah still has seven more firefighter positions today than we did in 2014, when we received our ISO-1 rating. And we are still well-staffed compared with communities our size; Charleston, for instance, has one fewer firefighter position than Savannah, and 24 percent more territory to cover.

As a resident or business owner in this city, you are served not just by the fire station located in your neighborhood, but a fire protection system consisting of 15 stations and 22 emergency response vehicles. The city government also maintains agreements with our adjacent cities, which provide us access to more than 20 other fire stations, firefighters, and equipment should they be needed in the unlikely event all of our resources are unavailable. No area of the city will ever be left without a response to a fire. We are fortunate to have one of the best fire departments in the nation. Savannah Fire will continue to be, even with these adjustments.

Rob Hernandez is Savannah's city government manager.

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WTOC 11

April 9, 2019 at 11:21 PM EDT - Updated April 11 at 10:36 AM

City of Fort Lauderdale extends offer to Savannah city manager

By Sean Evans

SAVANNAH, GA (WTOC) - Several sources have confirmed that Savannah City Manager **Rob Hernandez** is leaving his job. "The city is losing a very smart and talented individual," Savannah Alderman John Hall said. "I wish Mr. **Hernandez** the best wherever he goes. Our loss is another city's gain." **Hernandez** said that he has not officially tendered his resignation or discussed this with all of city council as a group. He said he will not release a statement until he felt it was the appropriate time. We've reached out to the mayor's office and the city spokesperson for comment.

Hernandez came to Savannah from Broward County, FL in 2016. "He inherited a virtual mess. Remember, he came in in the middle of a hurricane. The first hurricane we'd had in what, 27 years," said District 4 Alderman, Julian Miller. In addition to dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew, **Hernandez** was tasked with completing a budget and coming up with a blueprint that would carry Savannah years into the future. "He has come up with the city's first strategic plan and gotten it going. He has refined our logo so we have the same logo everywhere. There's an awful lot he has done, most of which the public will never see," Alderman Miller said. Several things spear-headed by **Hernandez** have been very public, like re-establishing a Savannah Police Department after the de-merger with the county, the search for a new police chief, and the fire fee proposal.

Less than a year after the fire fee proposal was dropped by city council after public backlash, **Hernandez** referenced it in a moment of levity during his speech at a firefighter award ceremony Wednesday afternoon. "Believe it or not, the city actually imposed a fire fee way back in the early 1800's to provide fire protection services to all property owners of the city. I wish I would've known that a year-and-a-half ago. That could have helped us sell what we were trying to do a little easier to those that were opposed to what we were trying to do," he said.

If **Hernandez** is in fact out the door like sources tell us, city leaders know they need a similar leader to take the helm. "When you run a city, there are so many moving wheels and so many gears going in different directions. There's always going to be hundreds of things that have to be addressed. That's why it's going to take someone who really knows what they're doing to pick up the mantle and go forward," Miller said.

Hernandez's previous attempts to change jobs have been publicized. In August of 2018, it was announced that **Hernandez** did not get a county administrator position in Pinellas County, FL. The city of Savannah confirmed he was a finalist for the position. **Hernandez** was also on the shortlist for a city manager position in Brownsville, TX. At the time, **Hernandez** said he wasn't sure if the Savannah community wanted to work with him. "Criticism of government is healthy and important, and comes with the territory," he said in a statement in August of 2018. "I don't

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take it personally, even if some of the attacks on me have been very personal. What I do want is to work in a community that wants to work with me. I am not sure that is currently the case. Amid a sustained level of criticism and uncertainty, I have considered opportunities outside Savannah. While I have no desire to leave, I did feel it was a prudent move for me and my family.” **Hernandez** was a key architect of a proposed fire fee in Savannah that drew the ire of many in the city. The city council withdrew the fee from consideration after a tortured fine-tuning process. The mayor proposed to halve the fee weeks before it was withdrawn.

Chaz Adams with the city’s strategic communications office says **Hernandez** has received an offer as Deputy City Manager for the City of Fort Lauderdale Florida. “The City of Fort Lauderdale has extended an offer to Roberto “Rob” **Hernandez** for the position of Deputy City Manager. The offer is contingent upon approval from the Fort Lauderdale City Commission. The commission plans to consider the item at their next meeting, which will take place on Tuesday, April 16,” Adams said. City council will hold its regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday. We’ll be following this closely to see if anything is announced regarding a resignation, as well as what’s next if the Savannah city manager position becomes vacant.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
December 20, 2018

Savannah City Council Oks \$1M Fire Station Sale Despite Buyer's History of Code Violations

Author: *Eric Curl*

The Savannah City Council on Thursday approved the sale of a former fire station, despite the buyer's history of being cited for code and maintenance violations at multiple properties throughout downtown. The \$1.05 million sale to Inman Park Properties came after three proposals were submitted to the city and evaluated by a five-person staff committee. Inman received the highest score after proposing to preserve and restore the 72-year-old building at 6 W. Henry St. for use as a cafe and office space. Rajesh Patel had proposed paying \$525,000 for the property, while Lynch Associates Architects offered \$455,000. The sale was quickly approved without discussion by the city council, with the exception of Alderman Bill Durrence, who had stepped out of the chambers to speak with someone who was leaving.

Durrence, who represents the area where the building is located, said he probably would have voted for the sale also. It was his understanding that most of the property maintenance issues have been addressed and he was hoping to see something done with the building, Durrence said. "The bottom line for me is that it didn't matter how I voted because the majority of council made up their mind that for that price point, they were going to sell it," he said. Inman's proposal is expected to activate the "somewhat stagnant" block and generate 75 full-time jobs in the neighborhood, according to the developer's proposal. Inman reported that construction was expected to begin 120 days after closing and take one year to complete.

Staff had delayed consideration of the sale in October following inquiries from the Savannah Morning News into the buyer's past code and property maintenance issues. From 2012 through 2016, the city instigated 16 Chatham County Recorder's Court cases against Inman's owner, Jeff Notrica, for 14 downtown properties. Charges related to overgrown vegetation, maintaining a clean and sanitary property, safety, defacement of property, accumulation of garbage, and an unsafe building. The pending sale comes after the approved sale this year of multiple downtown city properties. City Manager **Rob Hernandez** has touted the sales as a way to return outdated properties to the tax rolls and raise revenue for the construction of a new municipal center west of the Historic District, where the city is building a new arena.

However, **Hernandez** said during an interview Tuesday that the sales revenue may instead go toward construction of the arena. The amount of current voter-approved Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax is expected to raise \$120 million, while about \$22 million was raised during previous tax periods. Still, the city expects to need an additional \$20 million to \$40 million to cover the estimated \$140 million to \$160 million costs of the arena's construction, as well as relocating public works from the arena site and building a new complex for that department, **Hernandez** said. The city does not plan on adding the arena to the next SPLOST referendum going before voters this fall, he said.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
November 16, 2018

Savannah Proposing Slight Property Tax Cut, Employee Wage Hike

Author: *Eric Curl*

The owner of a home valued at \$100,000 will save about \$8 a year under a proposal to reduce the property tax rate in 2019, according to city estimates. The reduction from 13.40 mills to 13.20 mills was requested by the Savannah City Council on Friday, the second day of a two-day budget retreat, after staff had initially proposed retaining the existing rate. Alderman Brian Foster advocated for the reduction to provide some relief to taxpayers after the rate was increased from 12.48 mills this year following the elimination of the widely opposed fire fee. "It's a start," Foster said. The council also directed staff to incorporate a 3.5 percent wage increase for employees next year. The proposed increase was agreed to as a compromise after Alderman Van Johnson had initially sought to bump staff's recommended 3 percent wage increase to 4 percent. "The fight for the best and the brightest is real and people ultimately go where they will be paid," Johnson said.

To maintain a balanced budget, while accommodating the council's wishes, staff said they increased their "conservative" projections for property tax revenue growth next year from 3 percent to 4 percent. In addition, staff plans to cut another \$1 million from the proposed budget to cover the remaining costs, said City Manager **Rob Hernandez**. The 2019 budget is expected to be presented to the city council for adoption next month. Since **Hernandez** arrived in late 2016, he has touted the need to address what he described as a structural imbalance resulting from expenses exceeding revenue. The fire fee adopted this year was an attempt to address that imbalance, but the council voted to repeal that new revenue source after facing widespread opposition from property owners.

Hernandez said he believes the city has made progress, but noted the concerns raised by the council during the retreat that funding was lacking for infrastructure and service improvements. "We're still imbalanced in that this budget is not able to adequately address those needs," he said. "We are addressing them, but the need really outstrips our ability to fund them." The next Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, which goes before voters next fall, has been touted by the council and staff as a way to fund needed infrastructure improvements, but **Hernandez** said the city cannot rely on the tax to resolve the issue. The city will also be looking at more models to fund municipal services, including a potential stormwater fee to cover the cost of drainage projects, **Hernandez** said. In July 2017, the city council unanimously approved a \$49,651 contract with Atlanta-based Stantec Consulting Services to study the feasibility of such a fee and how it would be implemented, but the study's findings have never been presented. "We continue to look at that and we will be bringing that back to City Council at the appropriate time," **Hernandez** said.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
August 31, 2018

\$3.9M Mistake Mucks Up Arena Contract

Author: *Eric Curl*

The Savannah City Council on Thursday delayed by two weeks consideration of an \$11.2 million contract with AECOM Hunt to manage the construction of the new \$140 million arena, after learning the contract amount is actually about \$3.9 million more than city staff had initially reported. The vote for the delay came after staff explained during the morning workshop that a misreading of the fee proposal had led staff to initially report that the contract was \$7.3 million - the amount that was on the meeting agenda until Wednesday. The originally reported amount should have been a red flag since it was so much lower than the amounts submitted by the other two finalists for the contract, said Alderman Bill Durrence. Turner Construction had proposed serving as construction manager at a cost of about \$13.6 million, while JE Dunn's proposed cost amounted to almost \$12.7 million. "I'm very nervous," Durrence said. "I never spent \$140 million before." Pete Shonka, executive director of arena development, said that AECOM Hunt still had the lowest price and highest evaluation score after the error was corrected.

City Manager **Rob Hernandez** also said he felt confident in moving forward with the recommended contractor after determining the company had followed the process correctly, while acknowledging the error should not have occurred in the first place. "That reflects poorly on me and I apologize," **Hernandez** said. "We will double down to prevent circumstances like this in the future." Council members said they wanted more time to see how the error occurred before taking a vote. "The severity of it should not be lost," said Alderman Julian Miller. "We are going to be doing an awful lot of contracts and we need to have confidence on that." Walter Murphy, vice president at JE Dunn, had also spoken out against the contract being awarded to AECOM during the meeting and had informed the council that he had notified the city manager of the issue. "We were told it was a scrivener's error," Murphy said "I don't think so. I think the bid was non-responsive."

In other council news, city council approved the \$14 million sale of two downtown buildings. Mayor Eddie DeLoach joined Aldermen Carol Bell, Durrence, Brian Foster, John Hall and Miller in approving the sale of the historic Gamble Building next to City Hall for \$8.5 million, while Aldermen Van Johnson, Estella Shabazz and Tony Thomas cast the opposing votes. The buyer, Foram Development, plans to convert the building into a condo complex with rooftop gardens. Staff had recommended the sale as a way to rid itself of a building that requires extensive repairs and generate ongoing revenue by putting it back on the tax rolls. But Thomas said he disagreed with staff's assertion that the historic building was not adequate for city use. "I'm a little bit more of a sentimentalist," he said. "I believe the city is giving up its imprint on the riverfront."

The vote was similarly split with the council's approval of the sale of the former Catholic Diocese building at East Broad and Liberty streets for \$5.9 million to Standard Companies,

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

which plans to develop the property as an apartment complex with commercial space. Johnson said he was afraid residents were being priced out of living in the city. "This was in my mind a wonderful opportunity to provide affordable and workforce housing for people to live downtown," he said. The approved sales come two weeks after the city council's vote to sell the Broughton Municipal Building to Columbia Ventures for \$4.5 million. The buyer intends to convert the mid-century building into a hotel with retail on the ground level. And in April 2017 the council approved the \$5 million sale of a 1.2 acre lot on Oglethorpe Avenue, where a developer plans to construct a mixed-use residential complex.

Hernandez said the funding from the sales is being invested into a reserve account for a modern municipal center he is considering building west of downtown near the arena to consolidate city departments. The total costs of that project, which would include a public safety complex, have not been determined, **Hernandez** said. "We still have a lot of work to do on that," he said. "We still have to flesh that concept out with city council." In the meantime, the city has been relocating staff into 36,538 square feet of leased office space on Chatham Parkway at an annual cost of about \$785,000.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
July 11, 2018

City: Funding Problems not Over
Savannah May be Facing Tough Budget Process for 2019, Hernandez Warns
Author: *Eric Curl*

The recent repeal of the controversial fire fee may have been welcomed by property owners concerned about the additional expense, but city officials are not breathing easy as they look toward Savannah's financial future. With the elimination of the dedicated fee, which would have freed up millions in general funds, the city may be facing a difficult budget process for 2019, according to City Manager **Rob Hernandez**. **Hernandez** warned the Savannah City Council last week that their plan to increase the property tax rate by 0.92 mills, or 7.4 percent, will not resolve long-standing financial challenges that the fee was meant to help address. Almost a third of city parcels pay little or no property taxes due to being exempt or having low value, and tax digest growth has not kept pace with expenses, **Hernandez** said. "I don't want anyone leaving here today with a rosy picture of 2019's budget process," he said. "We are structurally imbalanced."

The mayor and aldermen are expected to adopt the tax increase on July 19 to restore almost \$10 million of the \$16.5 million in revenue lost with the elimination of the fire fee. The city also implemented a hiring freeze and cut expenses, including \$1 million Mayor Eddie DeLoach had sought for an early childhood learning center being planned by the Savannah-Chatham School Board. With the proposed tax increase, the city will be able to preserve funding for some priorities that included software upgrades, enhanced right of way maintenance, Waters Avenue streetscape improvements, increased city reserves, and the Savannah Shines neighborhood revitalization initiative that has already begun in Edgemere/Sackville, said Alderman Julian Miller. "I'm not sure if everyone understands how deplorable the city's computer system is," Miller said. "We're still running programs that most people have abandoned 20 years ago."

Alderman Brian Foster said the city will also maintain the full staffing levels of the police department after adding more than 120 officers to patrol the city following the department's split with Chatham County in February. "We are fully staffed and have been for a while in the first time in over a decade," Foster said. "That's what the public asked for and we have successfully done that." Savannah's property tax rate has been decreased or remained the same every year since 1994, aside from a six-month half-mill increase in 2010 that was dropped back to the previous rate the following year. The current rate of 12.48 mills has been in place since 2013. For the owner of a home with a fair market value of \$150,000, the proposed increase amounts to \$55.20 annually or \$4.60 per month.

Alderman Tony Thomas said that every effort would be made to reduce the rate in 2019, but **Hernandez** responded by casting doubt on that scenario. "I don't know at this point in time because it's still too early in the process for FY19 to determine, in fact, whether we are going to have a smooth budget process or we're going to have a rocky budget process like we've had the

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last couple years," **Hernandez** said. "So please do not leave here today thinking that budget process for FY19 is going to be a smooth one because I can't guarantee that." Savannah Alderman Van Johnson suggested that the city meet with residents before the budgeting process begins to reconcile what they want and what the city can afford. "We have a region that takes advantage of many of the services that we provide that they do not pay for," Johnson said. "So I think part of this discussion is educating individuals that we can give everybody what they want, but there is a cost to it." **Hernandez** said that the city's budget director, Melissa Carter, has already proposed holding several citizen engagement panels to walk residents through the budget process, "allowing them to see how difficult it is to put together a \$400 million budget for an enterprise the size of the city of Savannah." The council will hold two additional hearings at 9:45 a.m. and 2 p.m. July 19 before a making a final vote on the tax rate increase.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Savannah Morning News (GA)
June 8, 2018

City to Consider \$11M in Cuts
Council Approves Adding Sunday ‘Brunch Bill’ to November Ballot
Author: *Eric Curl*

With less than six months left to go, City Manager **Rob Hernandez** has been charged with cutting more than \$11 million from this year's budget. On Thursday, the Savannah City Council directed **Hernandez** to figure out over the next week what cuts can be made to make up for the anticipated loss in revenue, as the mayor and aldermen prepare to reduce the controversial fire fee by more than half in the face of widespread opposition. "We're just asking the city manager to go back and modify the numbers and bring us something forward that people can feel better about," said Mayor Eddie DeLoach. As proposed by the council, a property tax increase is not an option and the city would retain the one mill tax rate decrease that was approved in conjunction with the fire fee as part of the 2018 budget. The council's vote came after DeLoach announced on Wednesday a proposal to reduce the fee by 53 percent, which would bring the fee to \$120 for residential properties. The city is also offering discounts of up to 20 percent until June 15, which would bring the total to \$96.

Mayor Pro Tem Carol Bell also suggested that **Hernandez** present an alternative option to cover the costs of eliminating the fire fee entirely. "As a council, let us determine if that's the way we want to go," Bell said. Previous attempts last month by Aldermen Van Johnson, Estella Shabazz and Tony Thomas to repeal or lower the fee were voted down by the remaining members of the city council during deliberations on how to spend \$10 million surplus from last year. On Thursday, Thomas said he was staunchly opposed to the fire fee, but was concerned the council was being unfair to **Hernandez** by not making the \$11 million reduction request when the surplus was presented. "I don't know if the city manager has truly analyzed that plan to see if he could reach that number," Thomas said. "And I don't know either what other options are completely out there."

The surplus spending plan, which left the full fire fee intact, included funding to pay off the purchase of the Coastal Empire Fair site; complete the Cultural Arts Center; install computer security upgrades following a malware attack; fund a staff compensation study; and assist the Savannah-Chatham School Board in establishing an early learning center touted by DeLoach as an anti-poverty initiative. **Hernandez** said Thursday he did not recommend using the surplus funds to make up fire fee cuts because the savings and unexpected revenue from 2017 were going toward one-time expenses and that the fire fee was meant to free up general funds for ongoing operational costs. "It would come back to bite us at some point in the future," he said.

The proposed budget cuts are expected to be presented for the council's consideration during a budget workshop June 18. The tax rate has to be formally adopted by the end of the month and the council is expected to vote on the revised budget at their meeting June 21. Prior to the regular meeting, the council got a briefing on a hardship program the city is developing for low-income

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property owners who are unable to afford the fee. The city is now seeking a nonprofit social service provider to administer the program so applicants can also have an opportunity to get assistance with additional needs, said Tafanye Young, Chief Community Services Officer. "We're hoping that people will take advantage of this and see rewards beyond just the fire fee being waived," Young said.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Savannah Morning News (GA)
April 12, 2018

The Sense in the City's Spare Cents

Author: *Eric Curl*

Savannah had a better year, financially, than expected, according to city officials. Now, the city is planning on providing \$2 million in funding needed to complete the new Cultural Arts Center, paying for security upgrades following a recent computer malware attack, and covering the full costs of a 3-percent performance-based pay increases for employees, after recently closing out the 2017 budget with a \$10 million surplus. The surplus stemmed from a combination of about \$5.2 million in revenue coming in higher than anticipated, in addition to expenses coming in about \$4.7 million below budgeted amounts after the city implemented a hiring freeze last year, said City Manager **Rob Hernandez**.

Most of the growth was from elastic revenues, such as lodging and sales taxes, that expand and contract with strength of economy, **Hernandez** said. "We have a general idea how the economy is going to perform but it's a guess and science at the same time," he said. "So in 2018 our budgeting numbers are a bit more optimistic than they were when we put together the '17 budget, but something could happen tomorrow." The funding plan going before the Savannah City Council Thursday will also increase reserve funds, pay a debt owed for purchasing the Coastal Empire Fairgrounds site, and cover costs associated with converting a section of Montgomery Street for two-way traffic. In addition, staff is recommending that the revenue go towards staff relocation costs related to the planned sale of two downtown buildings and a compensation study to address pay inequities.

"We also did a reorganization this year and created new job titles," **Hernandez** said. "We think we slotted them in the right place, but it's time that we do a real in-depth review of our pay and compensation practices." Almost 100 positions were eliminated as part of the reorganization, with about 40 of them vacant, but dozens of new positions were added and impacted employees were given the opportunity to apply for the jobs. Seven employees ended up not being placed either because there was nothing available or they did not accept the position offered, according to city officials. And after the city council voted to add 24 new positions to the police department this year, there ended up being a total net reduction of one position.

Hernandez said the surplus does not negate the need for the city's new fire services fee, which was implemented to correct a structural imbalance the city has faced for years. "If we didn't have the hiring freeze and agencies spent every dime we got budgeted, we would have only \$5.2 million in extra revenue," he said. "The fire fee provides us an opportunity to take \$21 million of pressure off of the general fund." The city council recently approved an ordinance that offers up to a 20 percent discount on the fee for installing safety equipment, developing emergency plans and participating in fire training programs. Property have between April 15 and June 1 to apply for the reduction before bills are sent out in the fall.

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Meanwhile, the city also plans to spend about \$500,000 on new technology and services to boost security measures after a malware attack discovered in February impacted some city services. The malware appears to have been eliminated, but the city is still not accepting email attachments as a precaution, said city spokesperson Michelle Gavin. "We think that we've gotten it," Gavin said. "We've taken all the measures to wipe computers and have taken some extreme measures, but it's an ongoing thing."

Proposed surplus expenditures

Transfer to Reserves/General Fund Balance: \$2.5 million
Performance-based 1-percent employee pay increase: \$600,000
Cultural Arts Center Overrun: \$2 million
Montgomery Street redirection project: \$1 million
MPO agreement amendment: \$200,000
Revenue dept. relocation: \$500,000
Fairgrounds - Pay off Debt Service: \$1.4 million
IT/Malware Equipment Recovery: \$500,000
Relocation Contingency: \$100,000
Compensation study: \$300,000
Facility repairs and improvements: \$800,000
Rental of backhoe - Cemeteries: \$100,000
Total: \$10 million

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
February 18, 2018

Savannah Restructures Government Operations
Officials Tout Plan as Way to Make City Operations More Efficient

Author: *Eric Curl*

New titles and responsibilities, along with salary increases in some cases, have been issued to a number of Savannah's department heads and top administrators as part of a government reorganization implemented by City Manager **Rob Hernandez**. Touted as a way to make city operations more efficient and achieve the Savannah City Council's priorities in a recently adopted strategic plan, new departments and positions have also been created, while others have been eliminated or modified. The restructuring consolidates two assistant city manager positions, one deputy to the assistant city manager position and five bureau chief positions into three executive officers. The employees selected for the new positions have the experience and personality to lead and get things done, **Hernandez** said. "That's what differentiates managers from leaders," he said. "I need leaders more than I need managers."

Paying for quality

Marty Johnston, formerly a deputy assistant to the city manager, was selected to fill the chief operating officer position, charged with asset management, customer service, special events coordination and oversight of the financial and internal service functions of the city. The move bumps her salary up from \$125,827 to \$148,000. Heath Lloyd was selected as Chief Infrastructure and Development Officer, after previously working as the public works and water resources operations director. Lloyd's responsibilities include ensuring the safety of the city's infrastructure, producing safe drinking water, protecting buildings and streets from flooding, and improving the development process. Lloyd's new salary amounts to \$148,000, up from his previous salary of \$109,414. Taffanye Young was hired as the city's Chief Community Services Officer after previously serving as the Community and Economic Development Bureau chief. Young is charged with unifying initiatives and programs focused on improving the lives of residents and providing them with clean, safe neighborhoods and access to quality housing, recreational facilities, leisure opportunities and supportive services. Her salary increased from \$132,282 to \$148,000.

The city's former budget director, Melissa Carter, also received a pay increase from \$89,400 to \$115,000 after being promoted to head the new Office of Management and Budget, which is responsible for preparing the city's yearly and long-term fiscal plans, as well as taking on an expanded role in grants development. And David Keating, who previously worked as a real property director, had his salary increased from \$84,025 to \$90,327 after being put in charge of a revamped Real Estate Services Department that now oversees property acquisitions, facilities maintenance, cemeteries, and the Civic Center. Pay was only increased for employees who have taken on additional responsibilities so that they are being fairly compensated, **Hernandez** said. "We want to keep the good ones," he said. "And also we have key positions we have to fill and we need to be able to compete and attract a quality workforce." Cutting grass and dysfunction

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Roberto Hernandez
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After years of complaints about property maintenance issues and delays in completing planned projects, departments that never talked to one another were merged and new offices were launched as a way to eliminate government bureaucracy and improve focus, according to officials. To improve property maintenance, quality of life and tourism impacts, a new Code Compliance department was created. Previously, code-related activities were handled by multiple departments, prompting situations in which a property maintenance enforcement officer could not handle a zoning violation, or vice versa. In addition, property maintenance was only citing code violations on residential properties and letting violations on commercial properties go or referring them to the building department, **Hernandez** said. "So we said time out ... we're bringing all that in house," he said. "We're going to do cross-training and we're going to have commonality in how our code enforcement is handled and prosecuted."

Kevin Milton, a new employee with the city, has been hired as director of the department, with a salary of \$115,000. Former Property Maintenance Director Kimberly Corbin is now working as Code Compliance Assistant Director, with her salary remaining at \$80,368. Similar issues led to the consolidation of the city's landscape maintenance functions, including squares and monuments, into a new Greenscapes department. Prior to the consolidation, **Hernandez** said one team would cut an overgrown lot and then a different unit would come back a week later and cut the adjacent canal bank. And in some cases, **Hernandez** said, small equipment such as weed wackers would not be brought in until days after the larger mowers had cut down some city right-of-way. Now, work areas have been divided into grids that are maintained by regional teams responsible for basically anything that grows, **Hernandez** said. "They work a grid and don't leave that grid until everything is finished," he said.

Former Park & Tree Director Gordon Denney now heads the new department. His salary remains \$80,368. The reorganization also included the formation of the Capital Projects Management office, which **Hernandez** said put five full-time positions in charge of overseeing \$726 million in budgeted projects. That move was praised by Alderman Julian Miller recently when the council was given an update on the projects being funded by the voter-approved special purpose local option sales tax. Often-repeated concerns were raised about the time it has taken to complete some projects, and Miller noted that the department was created to address the issue. "This is one of those things going on behind the scenes that the public won't see that is really going to make a big difference," Miller said.

Staffing impacts

The restructuring came after the city imposed a hiring freeze upon **Hernandez's** arrival in October 2016, and at his direction only critical positions were filled for more than a year in anticipation of the changes. Almost 100 positions ended up being eliminated as part of the process, with about 40 of those vacant. Dozens of new positions were added, however, and impacted employees were given the opportunity to apply for those jobs. "In certain instances we were very lean in operations, and I think that was hurting us," **Hernandez** said. Seven employees ended up not being placed either because there was nothing available or they did not accept the position offered, according to city officials. And after the city council voted to add 24 new

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positions to the police department this year, there ended up being a total net reduction of one position, **Hernandez** said.

Not all employees' pay went up after getting a new position. One former assistant city manager, Peter Shonka, ended up having his pay reduced by \$15,624 to \$140,619 after he became head of a new arena development district office - the office focused exclusively on developing the new arena and stimulating private and public investment in the surrounding redevelopment area. Such pay reductions were unfortunate, but in some cases could not be avoided, **Hernandez** said. "There may have been several, although not widespread, due to reduction in responsibilities," he said. A number of other staffers retained the same salary, while taking on new roles. Bridget Lidy, former Tourism and Ambassadorship director, was hired as the new Planning and Urban Design director after her department was eliminated. Her salary remains \$85,703.

And Bret Bell, newly titled assistant to the city manager rather than deputy assistant, is now charged with handling legislative priorities, preparing the council's agenda, and working to ensure residents' concerns brought to the attention of aldermen are addressed. His salary remains \$107,205. In addition, former Economic Development Department Director Manuel Dominguez's salary of \$80,368 was left unchanged after he became head of what is now the Office of Business Opportunity, which is responsible for administering and coordinating the city's economic and small business development program. After being delayed for about two months as they attempted to find suitable jobs for all of the impacted employees, the reorganization became effective Feb. 1, said **Hernandez**, whose salary remains \$238,000. "One thing I want to stress to folks is patience," he said. "We just put this new organizational alignment into play."

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Roberto Hernandez
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Savannah Morning News (GA)
December 30, 2017

City Manager Talks ‘Funkification,’ Ferris Wheels in Savannah
Opinions Expressed on Preserving Historic Structures Modernizing Others
Author: *Eric Curl*

A modern looking arena could be in play, but a proposed Ferris wheel on River Street is out of bounds. City Manager **Rob Hernandez** recently shared his thoughts on architecture, historic preservation and development in Savannah, as the guest speaker at the Historic District Board of Review's recent retreat. During the hour-long discussion earlier this month, **Hernandez** also took time to describe one of his architectural "pet peeves." "I hate red brick," **Hernandez** said. "We seem to have this tremendous love affair with red brick." He said he would like the new arena the city plans to build west of the Historic District to have a more modern look, perhaps with stainless steel and glass, while still paying homage to history. "But it doesn't have to be rooted in red brick," he said.

The arena site is outside the board's jurisdiction, but Chairman Stephen Merriman Jr. later said he is not necessarily opposed to a more modern looking building being built at the site. "I would be more opposed to build an arena that appears like it was built in the 1850s," Merriman said. "It gives a false sense of history." **Hernandez** also made it clear that he believes City Hall is no longer an efficient place for himself and other city staffers to work or for the Savannah City Council to hold their meetings. He talked about his plan to build a modern municipal complex in order to consolidate the city's workforce, while possibly converting City Hall into a "working museum" where the mayor and aldermen could have offices. "We're going to preserve City Hall," **Hernandez** said. "We have to preserve it, but the day-to-day stuff can go somewhere else." The 111-year-old building is in serious need of repairs, and funds for the structure's restoration will need to be raised, possibly by including the project in the 2019 special purpose local option sales tax referendum, he said.

Hernandez got some pushback from board members when he said he was considering replacing City Hall's deteriorating wooden windows with modern faux-wood frames to make them more efficient and hurricane-resistant. Board members were concerned the move would ruin the building's historic integrity and lead to private developers also wanting to bypass ordinance requirements. They suggested the city install exterior wood windows with interior storm windows to achieve the results he is seeking. Otherwise, the historic protections in place would crumble, Merriman said. "That's one of the biggest things Savannah has going for it, is our ordinance," he said. There are some buildings that seem ripe for "funkification," such as the old East Side Theater on the corner of East Broad and East Gwinnett streets, **Hernandez** said.

The historic theater with the words "Hungry World" across the old marquee has sat vacant for decades. "Not to be disrespectful of its character, but you can do cool things with it," **Hernandez** said. "That building has a lot of potential." In a similar vein, he would like to "funkify" Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard around the Interstate 16 flyover, which he considers an eyesore. There

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have been plans proposed to demolish the ramp into downtown, but **Hernandez** said he does not see the structure going anywhere anytime soon. But the city is too busy trying to put out daily fires and has little time to be creative, **Hernandez** said. "You're the folks that need to come up with those ideas and we'll support it when we can," he said. **Hernandez** also made it clear that some proposals will not fly as the city tries to balance the demands of tourism with preservation efforts and residential needs. Board members thanked him after **Hernandez** said he and the city council recently rejected a request to install a Ferris wheel on River Street.

The 137-foot-tall observation wheel would have been installed on a city parking lot along the water between the Abercorn and Lincoln street ramps at an initial rate of \$17,000 a month, under the lease agreement proposed by Missouri-based SkyStar Wheel. "When I looked at that request, I said no way," **Hernandez** said. **Hernandez**, who previously worked as the deputy county administrator of Broward County, Fla., became Savannah's city manager in October 2016.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Savannah Morning News (GA)
December 1, 2017

City Considers Budget Cuts, Fees to Cover its Shortfall
Hernandez: \$187 Million Proposal a Starting Point

Author: *Eric Curl*

Savannah staffers are proposing a variety of revenue generating options and expense cuts for the 2018 budget to determine whether the Savannah City Council wants to implement service enhancements or reductions in the face of projected funding shortfalls. The preliminary spending plan presented during the first day of a two-day budget retreat on Thursday amounts to a "bare bones, no frills and somewhat painful" general fund budget of \$187 million that includes almost \$13 million in cuts to personnel, services and capital project investment, said City Manager **Rob Hernandez**. "It's not even a recommended budget or a proposed budget," **Hernandez** said. "It's just a starting point for our conversation."

The second budget option of almost \$200 million would sustain existing services, as well provide funding for performance-based wage increases and increase reserve funds for unforeseen expenses. The third spending plan would be an "enhanced budget" of about \$213 million to cover expenses related to council priorities, such as additional police officers recommended by a consultant to improve emergency response times. Among the funding options staff presented was a proposed fee charged to all properties to cover the cost of fire department services and eliminate that department's dependence on tax revenue. Implementing a fee to cover the full cost of fire services would amount to \$370 per household and raise an estimated \$31.5 million, according to the budget report.

A consultant, Ecological Planning Group, also presented reduced rates as an option that would cover between 50 percent and 75 percent of fire service costs and raise about \$15.7 million to \$23.6 million. Property tax increases and decreases of between half a mill and two mills were also proposed, with revenue impacts ranging between \$2.5 million and \$10 million. "Anything you decide today for this budget is going to play out and have an effect for the next few years," said Erick van Malssen, who was working with the fire fee consultant. A hardship fund to assist low-income property owners is now being considered as part of the fire fee proposal, if it is adopted.

Savannah Alderman Van Johnson said he is still concerned about the fee's impact since renters would not be eligible to receive payments from the fund, even if the fee's cost was passed onto them by landlords. But Alderman Julian Miller said rental rates are established by the market and he does not expect tenants to be adversely affected as a result of the fee. Alderman Tony Thomas said renters would be impacted, but that the more than 5,800 tax-exempt property owners benefiting from fire services need to contribute to those costs. "Those folks have got to participate," Thomas said. "It's going to be tough for some people, but some people have been riding this system for decades."

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The \$12.7 million in spending cuts are being proposed, despite projected increases in property tax revenue and other tax revenue streams this year and next. The shortfall is due to a combination of factors, including an increase of tax exemptions, operating costs and growing debt payments related to property purchases, infrastructure improvements and public safety purchases, **Hernandez** said. "We have a lot of needs in the city that far exceed the revenues available to us," he said. A surplus of about \$3.8 million is actually anticipated for 2017, due to higher than projected tax growth and salary savings from a hiring freeze. Those funds are proposed to be used to offset a budgeted use of reserve funds for 2017 and help cover expenses related to hurricane damages and capital project overruns.

The city is also anticipating some employee payouts due to some officers joining the county police department, following the split of Savannah-Chatham police. Planned civilian staff cuts stemming from a government restructuring should only result in a "handful" of employees actually leaving the organization since those impacted will have the opportunity to fill other positions, **Hernandez** said. The second day of the budget retreat is scheduled to begin at 8:30 a.m. Friday. During the workshop staff will need the council to make a decision on what type of funding options or cuts they want to move ahead with, **Hernandez** said. "I have to get some clarification on what they want to do because I have to put together a final budget," he said.

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Savannah Now – Savannah Morning News (GA)
February 11, 2017

Poverty Persists in Savannah, Despite City Programs

Author: *Eric Curl*

Austin Spell, 20, wants to be a pipe-fitter or EMT. That is why he was recently sitting in a classroom at the Moses Jackson Advancement Center, where he and six others were registering for a GED program put on by Savannah Tech. Spell said he was pulled out of school by his stepfather in eighth grade and he does not have the educational background he needs to meet his career goals. “I’m planning on getting my bachelor’s degree and see what I can make out of myself,” he said. The GED program is one of many programs at the city-supported advancement center that are meant to help Savannah residents find employment. Still, Savannah’s high poverty level persists. The percentage of Savannah’s population living below the poverty level was almost 27 percent in 2015 — up from almost 22 percent in 2000, according to the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. The increase occurred as the city invested \$2.7 million in general funds in anti-poverty programs between 2011 and 2016, including \$642,600 to support the advancement center, according to a recent report presented by city staffers. During that time, another \$1.1 million was spent supporting Step Up Savannah’s job training and anti-poverty initiatives, and \$981,304 went toward various social service agencies.

About a million dollars in federal funds supported the advancement center and social services offered by America’s Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia, Union Mission and Lutheran Services of Coastal Georgia. Taffanye Young, Community and Economic Development Bureau chief, recently attributed the increased poverty rate to the recession when she presented the report to the Savannah City Council during an economic mobility workshop. “You had a lot of jobs that were lost,” Young said. “A lot of people with higher incomes and higher skills ended up taking some of the lower skilled jobs.” And job training is no “magic bullet” when residents have child care, transportation, substance abuse and criminal background issues to deal with, Young said. Only 17 percent of the 507 individuals who received job training through the city-funded programs since 2011 ended up becoming employed, according to the staff report. Those type of results are not satisfactory, City Manager **Rob Hernandez** told the council. “We may have to do something entirely different with some of these populations that have drastic barriers,” **Hernandez** said.

Hospitality programs

Other programs have fared better, however. The US Department of Labor’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act only employed 34 percent of the 1,256 Chatham County participants since 2011, although many of those participants are still engaged in the program, according to the staff report. And since 2014, 316 adults received job training through the Step Up’s Chatham Apprentice Program, with 59 percent becoming employed. Another 159 jobs have been created or retained since 2011 for low- to moderate-income residents through a city-supported loan program administered by the Small Business Assistance Corporation. Goodwill of Southeast Georgia is helping residents find work with the launch this year of a hospitality

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training program at the advancement center. Rashena Platt, one of the six-week program's participants, said that after three months of being unemployed, the program helped "get her foot in the door" and find a job as a housekeeper.

Whether hospitality-based jobs will help Savannah reduce the poverty rate has been a matter of local debate. The growing number of hotels has drawn some criticism from residents, who are concerned about the city becoming too dependent on what they contend are low paying jobs. But Borish Jenkins, a Goodwill Career Center assistant who conducts the training course, said the hospitality industry does offer opportunities for advancement and better pay. Hotel employees, for instance, can start as a housekeeper, go to front desk, then become a supervisor and from supervisor become a general manager, said Jenkins, a former hotel employee himself. "I know it can be lucrative," he said. And some hotels, such as developer Richard Kessler's Plant Riverside \$270 million hotel project being built along West River Street, are going to be offering higher pay, Jenkins said.

The Plant Riverside project is located in a state opportunity zone, which makes Kessler eligible for job tax credits for providing employment in an impoverished area. The hotel is supposed to create 700 full-time permanent positions with benefits, including health insurance, and Kessler is required to pay at least \$10.25 as part of the tax credit agreement, but he has said beginning wages could reach as high as \$15 an hour. As for Platt's plans, she said she plans on working her way up to be a manager. "You always have an opportunity for advancement," she said. "So just take your time and move up."

'Outside the box'

City staffers said that they plan on improving coordination among service providers, identify new revenue sources, aggressively promote programs, and think "outside the box" to reduce the poverty rate and provide more employment opportunities. Young said that the city may want to try to re-implement a partnership with a local church that had retirees provide training, such as brick laying, for residents seeking job skills. Staff is also working on a proposal that will hopefully address some of the hard to hire issues with respect to city contracts and city employment, **Hernandez** said.

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<https://www.wsav.com/news/savannahs-city-manager-on-his-first-3-weeks/>
Nov 9, 2016

Savannah’s City Manager on His First 3 Weeks

by: Andrew Davis

He was the choice of the council to lead the city of Savannah. In just three weeks on the job, City Manager **Rob Hernandez** has already been through a hurricane and multiple murders. But what does Savannah’s City Manager think the next three weeks, months, even years may hold. “Making decisions without having all the appropriate facts or knowing all the different facets of the community that could be dangerous,” said **Hernandez**. That’s why **Rob Hernandez** says he is in “listen, learn and observe” mode. Observing the community he now helps shape.

Shaping with a community and a staff he has already seen deal with a hurricane, and thrive under pressure. ‘The reverse would be that i’m here 6 months or a year and we would have a crisis and what would be going through my mind would be, well i don’t know who I would rely on, I don’t know how this team is going to perform, I now know that,” explained the City Manager. He also knows is that crime in Savannah is a problem. “The community is very concerned about it, the community expects us to take proactive measures and we have,” said **Hernandez**.

But the same community also may be too focused on each and every criminal act. “When we have an instance of crime that happens here its unfortunate,” explains **Hernandez**. “But it stands out more i think in the community mindset because its out there its closer to them it gets publicized more in the city of Savannah.” But he is not ready to rubber stamp the high cost of putting more officers on the streets. Stressing Fiscal responsibility, he hopes to find “progressive” ways to get police what they want in 2017. “My job is to balance all the competing needs in the community and to try to make a fiscally sound and operationally sound recommendation to the nine that eventually have to make the decisions,” explained the City Manager.

The decisions about growth of our city is foremost on **Hernandez**’s mind. “We cant afford to be as methodical as we have been in the past again because the world is moving at a breakneck speed, and we have to keep up with the world,” said **Hernandez**. “Are we behind?” “I’m not saying we are behind. But we have to pick up the pace.” Pace of life, and pace of drawing businesses to Savannah. “Make sure they know Savannah more than just a great place to visit. A great place to relocate your business,” said **Hernandez**. “Oh and by the way they have a really great local government as well.”

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Roberto Hernandez
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Sun Sentinel
SEP 21, 2016

Deputy Broward administrator leaving for Savannah
By Brittany Wallman

The No. 2 official in Broward County government has resigned, after accepting a job in Georgia. Roberto "Rob" **Hernandez**, deputy county administrator, said in a letter to County Administrator Bertha Henry earlier this month that it was with "great sorrow" he submits his resignation. **Hernandez** was responsible for a large portion of county government, and also brokered the deal with the Florida Panthers that increased the hockey club's public subsidy but helped ensure the team would stay. In a handwritten note on the resignation letter, he thanked Henry for mentoring him, and giving him "the tough tasks to take on, like the arena."

Besides the deputy position, Henry has two assistant county administrators, Monica Cepero and Alphonso Jefferson, and two assistants to the county administrator, Gretchen Cassini and Alan Cohen.

Hernandez has been the deputy in Coral Springs and in Atlanta's Fulton County. But he said his professional goal was to be in the top position. "I'm not getting any younger and the years are just flying by, so this was the right time and the right community," the 50-year-old **Hernandez** said in an email recently. "I did not want to take any city manager or county manager job just for the sake of it, unless the community was right. Savannah is a nice town with lots of positive attributes and challenges, too." **Hernandez's** resignation is effective Oct. 9.

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WTOC 11 (GA)
August 11, 2016

City of Savannah Names Roberto Hernandez as Sole Finalist for City Manager

Author: *Sean Evans*

The City of Savannah held a news conference on Thursday to discuss updates in the search for the new city manager. After a nationwide search, and in a unanimous consensus and recommendation, **Roberto Hernandez**, deputy county administrator of Broward County, Florida, has been named the sole finalist for the position of City Manager of Savannah. Choosing **Hernandez** was a unanimous decision by city council members, and **Hernandez** has accepted the offer pending contractual negotiations according to Mayor Eddie DeLoach. DeLoach said **Hernandez's** hands-on approach, experience in government and energy are some of the qualities that separated him from the other candidates.

According to the Broward County Government website:

Hernandez is an ICMA-Credentialed Manager with more than twenty years of progressive and responsible local government management experience. He re-joined Broward County in July 2013 as Deputy County Administrator. Previously, he served as Deputy City Manager for the City of Coral Springs overseeing various city functions as well as the city's community redevelopment agency. Prior to Coral Springs, he served as Deputy County Manager for Fulton County, Ga., where he oversaw public safety agencies, unincorporated area services, the Office of the Child Attorney, offender reentry program, and coordinated with the County's constitutional and judicial agencies. He previously served Broward County in a variety of capacities from 1994 through 2008, including serving as an Assistant to the County Administrator from November 2003 to June 2008. **Rob** retired from the U.S. Army Reserves in 2008 after a 23-year career, most recently serving as a senior instructor in civil-military operations.

Hernandez was a finalist for two other jobs previously. He was a finalist for the El Paso County, TX County Administrator position earlier this year, and was a finalist for the Delray Beach City Manager position in 2014. **Hernandez** talked about the advantages the region presents, with the ports, travel opportunities with Savannah-Hilton Head International Airport and the proximity to the beach and overall rich history, as well as the military presence. "I was very impressed by the passion from the city council in terms of what they see happening in the city over time, and their strong dedication to the community. That really, that really sold me," said **Hernandez**. While in Fulton County, **Hernandez** oversaw multiple departments including police, fire and rescue and also served as the county manager's liaison with judicial agencies.

Mayor DeLoach says he believes **Hernandez** could come in and start working right away with the police department and judicial services in Savannah to address crime. Alderwoman Carol Bell says she was impressed with how much **Mr. Hernandez** knew about the city and its operations already. So WTOC asked the front-runner what he's observed so far and hopes to achieve as the next city manager. "The need for continued re-investment in certain communities,

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a progressive strategy for bringing new investment for the community, for growing jobs. For fixing and updating the condition of the infrastructure. Those are the things that everybody goes through, it's very common. But that's certainly something that I'm going to have to tackle once I get there," said **Hernandez**. Savannah City Council members met on Wednesday to hear from the search committee about where they are on the final candidates up for the position. The council and search committee then met behind closed doors in an executive session.

Current City Manager Stephanie Cutter announced her retirement at the beginning of the year, setting into motion a nationwide search for her replacement. So, what exactly was the city looking for when they put out the posting for a new city manager? It's an important question given that at least the last two city managers were not what the respective city councils eventually wanted in the role. First of all, for those who forgot or perhaps never knew, ours is a Council/City manager form of government. Meaning while the council appoints a city manager, the city manager runs the city and some might argue, the city council itself.

First and foremost council was looking for a person who had worked with and understood the challenges of a diverse community, not just racially but economically. Someone who could bring new ideas for breaking the cycle of poverty among those living in certain neglected parts of Savannah. And, of course, someone who bring new ideas to the table when it comes to fighting violent crime, in particular, gun violence. Here's an interesting role they want this person to fill: possible ax-man. Council, at least the newest members, want this new city manager to review city government top to bottom and start cutting if Savannah's City Hall has gotten too big, and taxpayers are paying too much for something that could be done with fewer people and resources.

For filling this role, our new city manager will receive the city's benefits package and a salary between \$210,000 and \$300,000. That's yet to be negotiated if **Roberto Hernandez** is our man. We mention briefly where this candidate has been and what positions he's held in the past. You may be thinking of all his deputy roles that this guy has always been the groomsman and never the groom. And **Hernandez** anticipated that issue in his actual resume' saying, "...I've resisted the temptation to 'chase' city manager positions solely for the sake of becoming a city manager at any cost. Instead, I've judiciously and patiently served in deputy roles in great organizations and exceptional communities."

Hernandez considers himself a pretty simply, straight-forward guy. He says his management style is fluid. It adapts to the specific situation. Not that we're looking yet, but **Hernandez** will tell you he is clean. This is what he told recruiters before tossing his hat in the ring: "...There is 'no dirt' on me. I live a clean, simple life, prefer to tell things as I see it, and sleep well at night." We will continue to follow those negotiations and let you know exactly what the city decides when it comes to salary, contract length, start time and other allowances.

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Tribune Content Agency News Service (USA)
May 20, 2016

Is Broward ready for a hurricane hit? Drill shows how rescue would work

Author: *David Fleshler*

May 20--After raking the Florida Keys and Miami-Dade County, Hurricane Kimo reached Miramar as a lethal Category 3 storm, with sustained winds of 129 mph, and tore a diagonal corridor to Deerfield Beach. The slow-moving storm bore into the county for seven hours. A tornado struck Pembroke Pines, Cooper City, Davie and Fort Lauderdale. An eight-foot storm surge trapped people on barrier islands. With cell towers damaged, many smart phones became useless. This was the scenario Thursday as Broward County conducted a full-scale hurricane drill at the Emergency Operations Center in Plantation to prepare for the June 1 opening of hurricane season. About 300 people gathered on the operations center's vast open second floor to practice receiving calls for help, coordinating responses and dealing with the countless challenges of a natural disaster.

"We've got to get it right the first time," **Rob Hernandez**, deputy county administrator, told the group. "The public expects that we'll get it right the first time. We can't offer them excuses. There are no alibis, there are no mulligans." The scenario began seven hours after the all-clear, as the county lay damaged, darkened by power outages and full of a untold crises, with fatalities reported, residents trapped by floodwaters and many situations requiring immediate attention. Like much of contemporary life, the response to the crisis would be coordinated largely through a computer software program, in this case WebEOC 8.0, a crisis-management system developed by Intermedix Corp. of Fort Lauderdale.

As calls for help and reports of problems such as power outages came in, it was up to those in the room to route them to the right agency or issue the correct orders to deal with them. The group included representatives of law enforcement agencies, fire departments, the county government, Florida Power & Light Co., city governments, the Red Cross and many other organizations. A call to rescue four people trapped on a roof in Oakland Park was routed to the Broward Sheriff's Office, said Major Kevin Shults, who headed the Sheriff's Office group at the emergency operations center. But the law enforcement agency's helicopters didn't have the sort of basket-and-line system required for such an endeavor. They asked the Coast Guard to do it instead. A call for water came from Pompano Beach, where the storm damaged the treatment plant, reducing its output by half. Alan Garcia, director of the county's division of water and wastewater services, ordered emergency interconnects from a county water plant that would temporarily provide the city with sufficient water.

In the pressroom, public communications specialist Cindy Malin scrawled occasional updates on a white board: "Flooding and tornado damage throughout county. Exact location TBD." "Drones being used to assess damage." As the various reports, crises and calls for help came in, evaluators in green vests observed the work in each area. They will prepare written reports. The Red Cross, which operates shelters, faced a crisis when 2,500 people showed up at a Coconut

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Creek shelter that was already full. The issue was "escalated" to a high-ranking group of decision-makers, who authorized the opening of an additional shelter. "The exercise is to test our abilities to collaborate, communicate and respond," said Roberto Baltodano, the Red Cross' regional communications manager. "These are things that could happen during a real hurricane. We've had these hurricane scenarios." The county has not seen a direct hit from a hurricane since Wilma in 2005. "It's been 11 years since we had one," County Mayor Marty Kiar said to the group before the drill began. "Hopefully this will be another year that we're hurricane-free. But eventually we're going to get hit."

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Roberto Hernandez
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South Florida Sun Sentinel (FL)
Dec 8, 2015

Deal helps Panthers, helps Broward more

The Broward County Commission should approve a new agreement today with the Florida Panthers because the deal would better protect the public's investment in the BB&T Center. One can argue persuasively the county was wrong to make that investment of tourist tax revenue 20 years ago, when the Panthers wanted out of the old Miami Arena. A National Hockey League team draws fewer tourists than Broward's beaches and the convention center. The county, however, can't back out of that commitment. With that in mind, county administrators make their more persuasive case for the front-loaded \$86 million deal that would run through 2028.

One argument against the deal is the public shouldn't subsidize the rich owners of the Panthers. Deputy County Administrator **Roberto Hernandez** responds that the money -- none of it property tax revenue -- would go toward the arena, not the Panthers. The team owners also run the company that manages the BB&T Center. They would have to spend the \$86 million on improving, operating and promoting the arena, of which the team is the main tenant. The county would have to sign off on the improvements. The team also would continue to pay \$5.3 million per year toward the arena's debt, which will be paid off in 2028. So the county's investment would go to the county's facility.

The other main argument against the deal is the county should spend the money on projects that better play to Broward's tourism strengths -- such as beaches. Two other key priorities are an expanded convention center and a convention center hotel. The arena is far from the county's major tourism hubs. **Hernandez** acknowledged, "We are very sensitive to that." He believes, however, the county can "meet all of our obligations" regarding tourism promotion, especially beach renourishment. County officials, **Hernandez** said, routinely have made conservative estimates of 3 percent for increases in tourist tax revenue. In fact, annual increases have been more like 5 percent.

The county has put much of that balance in reserve, **Hernandez** said. A recent study of the tourist tax questioned the amount of money held in reserve. Doing so, **Hernandez** said, means the county can use that money for one-time projects like beach renourishment and still pay the recurring expenses of the Panthers deal. Part of this story is the coming debate over raising the tourist tax from 5 percent to 6 percent, even though none of that potential revenue is part of the Panthers deal. It is generally agreed money from the sixth cent would go toward convention center expansion.

Hernandez said the county is waiting for bids on the expansion. When administrators have an idea of the cost, the county will start discussions on raising the tax. Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties have raised their tourist taxes to 6 percent. +The deal would cut the county in for a share of profits if the money-losing Panthers became big winners on the ice and financially. The arena would have a better chance of getting an all-star game, and the team would continue to help

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youth hockey in Broward. All are nice points, but the focus of the deal, correctly, would remain on the BB&T Center. The healthier it is, the better for the county. Losing the Panthers would mean losing 40 dates, and the BB&T Center has lots of regional competitors. So the arena is healthier with the Panthers, and with the team having a better chance to succeed.

Having studied the financials, **Hernandez** said, "We came to the conclusion that it would cost the county almost as much if the team stayed as if the team left. It's almost an economic wash. So if we would pay with or without them, it's better to have them." The deal would allow the Panthers to leave after eight years, but the team would have to repay the \$72 million in tourist tax revenue it had received. If the team left after eight years, the county would have enough money to repay the arena debt. As long as the Panthers stay, **Hernandez** said, "We transfer a lot of the responsibility to the team." The county also would get development rights to land around the arena. One other point in the deal is worth noting. Two decades ago, the county committed to spending two cents of tourist tax revenue on the arena. The county hasn't met that obligation. Under the deal, **Hernandez** said, the Panthers would drop all claims to any unspent money. There might be emotional reasons to reject the Panthers deal. There are better business reasons to approve it.

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Roberto Hernandez
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Capital Gazette (PA)
March 3, 2015

Broward Commission Brainstorms Ways to Help Struggling Center Pocket of County

Author: *Brittany Wallman*

In the heart of Broward County is a zone of economic depression that even the most dramatic real estate boom didn't lift out of poverty. The unincorporated neighborhoods in the 33311 zip code — roughly between Interstate 95 and U.S. 441, north of Broward Boulevard — were left behind by the cities around them. No city will take them. County commissioners are their only local government. Commissioners met Tuesday to talk about the central county community — four mostly African-American neighborhoods of about 7,000 people — and agree on a host of small efforts to help. Only \$4.8 million is allotted for economic development there — a sliver of the county's overall \$4.1 billion budget. County Commissioner Dale Holness, the area's only direct local representative, said it's the first economic development money the county has spent there since the 1980s. About \$30 million has been spent on improvements of roadways, bus shelters, drainage and the like. The moves commissioners endorsed Tuesday are hardly dramatic: Relocating a Boys and Girls Club to Delevoe Park, continuing building homes on 144 lots the county owns, working with small businesses to improve properties by offering loans or grants, giving a makeover to some of the roadways, improving parks, and banking land for future redevelopment. No one promised an immediate turnaround. "It doesn't happen overnight," county Economic Development Director Sandy-Michael McDonald warned. But county leaders said they support a renewed focus. "I'm glad to see we're moving forward with some planning," Holness said, "because the community desperately needs it." While the rest of Broward enjoys a rebound from the Great Recession, with three years now of positive economic growth, the central county zone remains stagnant. "These communities look to us to guide them along the way to economic prosperity in their neighborhoods," Deputy County Administrator **Rob Hernandez** said.

Joblessness is down to about 5 percent countywide. But in Central Broward, it ranges from 21 percent in Boulevard Gardens, to 22 percent in Roosevelt Gardens, to 32 percent in Washington Park, to an astounding 44 percent in Franklin Park. Holness said many residents there lack transportation and job skills, and some have criminal backgrounds — all obstacles to employment. Countywide, the median household income is \$51,251. In the central county area, it's significantly lower, at \$33,432, Assistant County Administrator Alphonso Jefferson said. Crime is down there, county officials said. Still, the number of rapes, burglaries, car thefts and assaults are relatively high in such a small area, county leaders said, and residents complain they regularly witness drug deals and prostitution, as well as assaults. Broward County Administrator Bertha Henry said she would begin implementing the economic development ideas discussed Tuesday. McDonald said he hoped to leverage the money to spark private investment from business owners. Each project will return to a County Commission agenda for approvals. Across downtown, at the Fort Lauderdale City Commission, Commissioner Robert McKinzie asked that the city take another look at annexing the unincorporated areas. The city will move in that direction.

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Broward New Times (FL)
March 18, 2014

Florida Panthers Asking for Public Money, but Proposal Seems to Benefit Only the Team
Author: *Chris Joseph*

Looks like the Florida Panthers' latest proposal to Broward County has altered language that would basically screw over the county while they make the big dough, according to a rundown of the proposal by the Sun Sentinel. The first proposal the Panthers made at the beginning of the year had asked the county for something around \$70 million, claiming that they had been losing \$20 million and that they need public funds to keep from being dissolved from the NHL. This latest proposal asks for \$80 million or more. The Panthers also want to develop 22 acres north of the BB&T Center for a casino-hotel that the county is also supposed to pay for. The Panthers turned over the 57-page proposal to Broward County commissioners and, according to the Sentinel's findings, it boils down to more money for the team while the county gets the shaft. Those wishes are not far off from when the team asked for county money originally back in January. The team's original proposal included taking \$4.5 million of its annual payment off the books and having it picked up by Broward County. The team also asked the county to contribute \$500,000 a year toward maintenance.

The latest proposal says the Panthers need a hotel-tax subsidy package worth \$80 million over the next 14 years to keep them from losing money. But the overall deal would seem to benefit only the Panthers. "As currently written in their proposal," Deputy County Administrator **Rob Hernandez** told the Sun-Sentinel, "it would definitely have an impact on our ability to share in any of the profits." County officials say they won't support the proposal without a better return for Broward's taxpayers. Back in September, the Panthers were bought for \$240 million by Cliff Viner and Sunrise Sports & Entertainment to a group led by New York businessman Vincent Viola. The Panthers have had an operating loss of \$12 million for the 2011-12 season and were worth \$170 million, according to Forbes. As for Panther and hockey fans' reaction to this, they took to Twitter with the usual vitriol.

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Roberto Hernandez
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US Fed News (USA)
August 11, 2013

Broward County Names New Deputy County Administrator

Author: *Staff*

Broward County has issued the following news release:

Broward County Administrator Bertha Henry has announced the appointment of **Roberto "Rob" Hernandez** as the new Deputy County Administrator. **Hernandez** is an experienced public servant who served as deputy county manager for Fulton County, Georgia, and most recently as deputy city manager for Coral Springs in Broward County. He is returning to County Government, where he first began serving the County in 1994 and most recently served as an assistant to the county administrator from 2003 to 2008. As deputy county administrator, **Hernandez** will assist the administrator in managing the day-to-day operations of the County, and oversee the activities of several large departments, including Public Works, Human Services and Environmental Protection and Growth Management, as well as the Parks and Recreation, Libraries and Cultural divisions. Also reporting to **Hernandez** will be the Office of Economic and Small Business Development, Office of Public Communications, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Professional Standards, and the Office of the Medical Examiner and Trauma Services.

Henry said, "We are excited to have **Rob** back with Broward County. He has dedicated much of his professional life to public service and has a keen understanding of how county government programs and services help meet the needs of our residents, businesses and visitors. He will be a valuable asset to the County and the community." **Hernandez** has a bachelor's degree in public administration from Florida International University, and a master's degree in public administration from Nova Southeastern University. He is a graduate of the Broward Fire Academy and the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. He retired from the U.S. Army Reserves in 2008 after a 23-year career, most recently serving as a senior instructor in civil-military operations.

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McClatchy-Tribune Regional News (USA)
February 6, 2013

Brief: Coral Springs Offers Incentive to Company

Author: *Lisa J. Huriash*

Taxpayers will be handing over cash to a new business considering coming to town, although they don't know yet who is getting the check. City officials said the business, described as a "pharmaceutical manufacturing, research and development" company, is a coup for the city. The company is expected to bring 108 jobs and a new source of tax revenue to the city.

Dubbed "Project Rock Solid," the business will receive \$540,000 in state, county and city money in incentives through the state's qualified target industry tax refund program. In addition to the city's portion of \$54,000, city commissioners agreed Tuesday to allow \$825,000 in credits that would normally be paid for fees such as building permits.

"The bottom line is if we don't offer incentives, somebody else will," said **Rob Hernandez**, deputy city manager. "It's the cost of doing business." The company is allowed by state law to remain unknown to the public while it's in this process of receiving incentive money. **Hernandez** said the company asked to remain anonymous for competitive reasons.

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

McClatchy-Tribune Regional News (USA)
December 13, 2012

Coral Springs to Consider building New City Hall

Author: *Lisa J. Huriash*

City commissioners said Tuesday they were open to the idea of spending millions of dollars to construct a brand new City Hall. "To me, the short answer is yes," said Commissioner Claudette Bruck. "We should proceed and we should proceed now." City leaders must now decide if they really want the new building, where it will go and how to pay for the estimated \$25 million cost. It will eventually be a "financial decision," said Vice Mayor Tom Powers. "There's way too many questions." For about a year, former Mayor Roy Gold had proposed closing both City Hall buildings on the north and south sides of Sample Road to construct one large facility.

But while some commissioners had previously said the project could become unwieldy and too expensive and they doubted there would be public support, the majority now seem open to at least further discussion. Deputy City Manager **Rob Hernandez** said the 45-year-old building was "outdated and functionally obsolete." "You can go anywhere and hear conversations in the next office," he said. And, the current building is "not a source of civic pride." "That's depressing," Bruck said. **Hernandez** also said the current building is expensive to keep up, with \$1 million alone needed to retrofit the building to accommodate a new telephone system.

"If we're pouring money into a facility that is no longer worth pouring money into," the commission should consider a new building, said Commissioner Dan Daley. City Manager Erdal Donmez said the city staff will come back with "more refined numbers" in late January with the projected costs to build a new City Hall at various spots, which include the current location, Mullins Park, and the area envisioned to be built as a downtown.

Several South Florida cities have recently built new City Hall complexes. Doral earlier this year spent \$22 million on its new building and Wellington built its new building last year for \$10.5 million. In Coral Springs, officials said municipal bonds would be the best way to cover the expense Commissioner Larry Vignola said he has always opposed the plan and still does. "Is it a top priority to spend more than \$20 million on? Not in my opinion, and not in the opinion of the majority of our residents. I don't why we're still talking about this. I don't think now is the time for a project like that."

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Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

South Florida Sun Sentinel (FL)
November 24, 2011

Springs Gets New Deputy City Manager

Author: *Arun Sivasankaran*

Roberto Hernandez, who has over 20 years of progressive and responsible local government management experience, has been appointed Coral Springs Deputy City Manager. "I look forward to leveraging **Rob's** operational expertise to continue delivering exceptional services to our community with the best possible level of service," City Manager Erdal Donmez said. Prior to joining Coral Springs, **Hernandez** was the Deputy County Manager for Fulton County since 2008. **Hernandez** also served as an Assistant to the County Administrator for Broward County. Before that, **Hernandez** served in a number of key roles with local government.

His professional experience includes key positions in public safety, housing and community development, and social services. In addition, his military service includes more than 23 years in the U.S. Army Reserves. He has held several leadership positions and has served on Active Duty in support of several military operations. **Hernandez** holds a Master of Public Administration degree from Nova Southeastern University and a Bachelor of Public Administration from Florida International University. **Hernandez** also obtained his certification in firefighting from the Broward Fire Academy.

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Roberto Hernandez
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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)
May 25, 2011

Illegal Dumping
Putting the Brakes on Tire Dumping
It's no Easy Task as Illegal Activity Stealthily Spreads Across State
Author: *Ernie Suggs*

Over 10 days last fall, someone made three trips to the Arts Exchange and dumped more than 1,000 old, dirty tires onto the property. The location was ideal. Easy access off I-20 in southeast Atlanta. A dead-end road. A wide-open space. Across Georgia, there are hundreds of examples of illegal tire dumping such as this, on public and private lands, creating a problem that is as much health hazard as it is eyesore. Of 10 million scrap tires generated in the state annually, an estimated 1.5 million are discarded illegally, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division said. And Atlanta finds itself at the center of this rubberized abandonment, with its city council compelled this week to form a separate tire commission to combat the violators. The city annually deals with 450,000 scrap tires, nearly 70,000 of them dumped illegally, said Winthrop Brown, Georgia EPD program manager.

Not surprisingly, money is at the heart of this problem: Tire salvagers get paid to collect tires but many of them won't pay for recycling. So they dump the tires. Everywhere they can. "It is a very significant problem in the state, because of the expense and because these tires are breeding spots for mosquitoes and vectors," said Brown, noting that Newton County last year collected 67,000 dumped tires. "Dumping is bad in metro Atlanta because of the population, but dumping is increasing in rural areas because of the distance they have to travel to get rid of tires."

As part of his job, the EPD's Brown regulates how tires are disposed from car dealerships and tire shops, among others. Businesses must pay for a carrier to pick up truckloads of old tires. Otherwise, there is little concentrated enforcement. Tire dumping is a felony, but there are just five criminal cases currently pursued by the state, though several people previously have served prison time for this offense, Brown said. "If nobody calls it in, we have a hard time prosecuting," Brown said, adding there are only a few local jurisdictions, such as Columbus and Macon, that have their own laws on the books, though state regulations exist. In April, Atlanta Councilwoman Joyce Sheperd, who pushed for the tire commission, led a clean-up in District 12 in which 2,000 tossed tires were collected. In southeast Atlanta, she has overseen the retrieval of 4,711 tires this year, and more than 10,000 over the past five years.

Fulton County Deputy Manager **Rob Hernandez** said south Fulton has the same problem as Atlanta with illegal tire dumping and no ready solution. The county has considered putting a deposit price on used tires, similar to glass bottles, to encourage residents to take them to a landfill. "It's difficult to prosecute offenders unless they're caught in the act," **Hernandez** said, "and Fulton lacks the staff to try to trace tires back to suppliers and find out who they were sold to." Last summer, the Fulton County health department spent \$23,000 on a tire drive that netted 2,100 tires. The public works department pays \$50,000 per year to dispose of old tires. "This has

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been a real problem for us," said Cheryl Odeleye of the Arts Exchange, surveying the endless and unwanted black mountain left near the center. "It is a health hazard. And it is a morale downer for someone to come in and be so disrespectful to us."

Piles of old tires don't necessarily present toxic health issues, rather they serve as nesting places for rats, snakes and mosquitoes, little consolation to those left with this mess. Across metro Atlanta, jurisdictions vary in how to deal with dump sites. DeKalb County officials said they defer to state law in dealing with tire dumping. In Clayton County, illegal dumping can land someone in jail for six months. Cobb County claimed it hasn't had much of an issue with discarded tires, outside of a few isolated incidents. "What a lot of people don't understand is that there are a lot of expenses involved in tire disposal," Dewey Grantham of Liberty Tire Recycling said.

If operating lawfully, a carrier takes used tires to a recycler, where in Georgia there is a 90 percent chance these tires will be converted to fuel. A carrier typically charges \$2 per tire, but has to pay the recycler \$1 for each, cutting into the profit. An illegal carrier might charge \$1.50 per tire on pick-ups, bypass the recycler and leave the tires at an isolated place like the Arts Exchange. There also have been cases in which people have rented trucks and abandoned them filled with old tires. Bolder criminals have stocked empty warehouses with worn tires. The state lacks funding to properly monitor tire disposal. For every new tire larger than 12 inches and sold in Georgia, a consumer pays a \$1 fee, which was supposed to go to a solid waste fund. Yet for two years, state lawmakers have diverted the funds elsewhere, covering other needs. Limited state spending also has resulted in fewer inspectors, making it harder to monitor and clean up tire dump sites.

The Arts Exchange, even with more than 1,000 tires, had what was considered a small clean-up. Liberty Tire Recycling volunteered to remove the tires, employing four workers. The tires were loaded in less than two hours. Grantham said his company processes 25,000 tires daily. "What is unfortunate is that illegal tire dumping gives tire recycling a bad name," Grantham said.

Tire disposal

Number of scrap tires generated in Georgia annually: 10 million

Number of those that are disposed of illegally: 1.5 million

Fulton public works department's expense each year for tire disposal: \$50,000

State fee charged on each new tire larger than 12 inches that is supposed to fund a solid waste fund, but has been diverted for the past two years for other purposes: \$1

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)
May 16, 2011

Your Tax Dollars
Grumbling Greet Amphitheater
Supporters See Boon for South Fulton; Opponents Question Use of Funds
Author: *Johnny Edwards*

South Fulton has a lot to brag about these days. After last week's announcement that Porsche would leave Sandy Springs to build its North American headquarters near Hapeville, Fulton County officials will open the new 5,200-seat Wolf Creek Amphitheater. Supporters are counting on the venue becoming another Chastain Park, a regional draw where picnicking music fans take in classy, intimate concerts. Fulton County Commissioner William "Bill" Edwards, who has championed the \$6.1 million project for the past decade, predicts it will draw the spending power of concertgoers from throughout the metro area to nearby stores and restaurants, bolstering a local economy hit hard by the recession.

But the amphitheater is a sore subject for north Fulton residents who say it's another case of the county government using their tax money for projects that don't benefit them. State Rep. Lynne Riley, R-Johns Creek, who opposed the amphitheater when she was a Fulton commissioner, said the \$6.1 million shouldn't have come from the county's general fund. "Every citizen of Fulton County, regardless of where they live, top to bottom, is underwriting the cost of operating that facility," she said, "whether it's a gain or a loss."

Edwards said south Fulton residents pay county taxes, too. "South Fulton needs to be able to live, work and play right where they are," he said. Business owners between the amphitheater, which is off Camp Creek Parkway, and I-285 expect a boost. Anwar Noorali, owner of Camp Creek World of Beverage, predicts a 15 percent to 20 percent increase in business on concert days from wine shoppers. "Any economic activity, and concerts that bring in a lot of people, will definitely be good for the local economy," Noorali said.

But some point to the location -- in the flight path of the world's busiest airport -- as an issue. Michael Fitzgerald, a Johns Creek resident and member of the Milton County Legislative Advisory Committee, said he can't fathom making a 45-mile drive to attend a show there, not with the constant roar of jet planes overhead. "One of the problems with Fulton County is it's too big, and that's a long way," he said.

The Wolf Creek Amphitheater has stirred tensions along the way. When the construction contract was approved in 2008, Riley and Commissioner Tom Lowe were outvoted 4-2. Riley contended that figures from a 2005 feasibility study -- which predicted the amphitheater would be profitable after three years -- needed to be updated. Edwards fired back that she and Lowe were trying to sabotage a revenue-generating project that south Fulton wanted. Edwards also brought up that the county spent \$1 million on Alpharetta's Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre, which was privately built. The county's contribution came through a trade-off for north Fulton

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not having garbage service at the time. Gary Bongiovanni, editor-in-chief of Pollstar Magazine, said a 5,200-seat venue will have a tough time up against the 6,500-seat Chastain Park in Buckhead, the 12,000-seat Verizon amphitheater, and the 19,000-seat Aaron's Amphitheatre at Lakewood in southeast Atlanta. The proximity to Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport won't help, Bongiovanni said. "Especially if you're talking about doing any acoustic acts," he said.

Fulton County Arts Council interim Director Michael Simanga, whose department will run the amphitheater, said he isn't worried about planes. Before construction began, the county held free concerts at the site, including Atlanta Symphony Orchestra performances. "You can't really hear it, once the music is playing," Simanga said. Grammy-winning soul/R&B singer India Arie will perform a free concert June 4 for the grand opening. No shows have been booked after that, he said, though he's in negotiations for some. Riley questions whether Wolf Creek will cover its operating costs.

The county doesn't have a detailed operating budget yet. Deputy County Manager **Rob Hernandez** said planners didn't expect the facility to be finished this soon, so the upcoming concert season will be something of a trial run, with 10 shows at the most. The plan is to recoup costs through concert bookings, and the County Commission has approved a fee schedule. Expenses should be limited to electricity, water, janitorial maintenance and groundskeeping, like any public park, **Hernandez** said.

Wolf Creek was the shooting venue for the 1996 Olympics, and it currently houses a police training center. A new library is in the works, and other plans include a sports complex, walking trails, horse trails, and an arts, cultural and events center, which also could generate revenue through bookings, Edwards said. Alre Alston, owner of the Ultimate Bar and Grille in Camp Creek Pointe shopping center, expects the amphitheater to bring him customers before and after shows. "I think it will be a good thing, as long as they bring in the quality clientele, not the rough clientele," he said.

Edwards said the county won't allow hard-core rap acts. He's looking for shows that appeal to south Fulton residents, citing performers that played free concerts -- R&B groups such as the Manhattans, the Spinners, the Dells and the O'Jays. However, he said, north Fulton residents are welcome to book shows, too. The amphitheater also can be used for church functions and graduations. On a recent visit, Edwards showed off the massive stage, the pristine dressing rooms for stars and the 4 feet of legroom between the rows of seats. He said he has no doubt the project will pay for itself. "It isn't about being sustaining," Edwards said. "Let me tell you what we want to pay: lights and water. This is for the people, for people to come out here and have a good time."

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Roberto Hernandez
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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)
January 22, 2011

Fulton Hikes Club Fees Despite Suit
Judge Declared Adult Ordinance Invalid after Free Speech Dispute
Strip Joints' Attorneys Debating Next Step

Author: *Johnny Edwards*

Fulton County will raise fees on strip clubs by hundreds of dollars this year and double them for nude dancers, even though the county remains locked in litigation over the fees after a federal judge recently declared the adult entertainment ordinance unconstitutional. With no discussion, the commission voted 5-1 this week to raise a list of fees on businesses and residents in unincorporated south Fulton expected to generate an extra \$303,601 per year. Amid new and increased rates for false alarms, fire safety inspections, escort services and door-to-door salesmen were several license and permit hikes on the county's three nude bars off Fulton Industrial Boulevard.

Attorneys for the clubs say they are considering what to do: whether to seek an injunction or pay the fees and hope to recoup them as damages. "I don't know what right they have to increase them when the case is still being litigated," said Jim Cline, who represents Riley's Showbar. "I guess they can do whatever they want. I guess we can argue about it when we get to the end." **Rob Hernandez**, the deputy county manager for the South Fulton Special Services District, said the county attorney advised officials that since the lawsuit is still pending, Fulton is justified in raising the fees. If a club refuses to pay, it could have its license revoked and would face closure, he said. "There was an injunction ordered on certain aspects of the ordinance, but not all aspects of the ordinance," **Hernandez** said.

County Attorney R. David Ware did not return messages from The Atlanta Journal-Constitution inquiring about the issue. The judge's ruling arose from a First Amendment lawsuit filed by a group of clubs in 2001 that challenged the county's revved-up regulation of nude dancing as a prior restraint on free speech, part of a larger battle being waged throughout metro in both state and federal courts. The clubs won the 2001 case in U.S. District Court. It was reversed on appeal, and then it was sent back to District Court. In November 2010, Senior U.S. District Judge Robert Vining ruled that the code illegally put the clubs through a bureaucratic wringer, making them wait indefinitely for approval from police, fire and building departments. While Vining withheld judgment on whether the fees were too high, he did say that if sections of the ordinance don't hold up, none of it can stand. "Judge Vining has said that we don't have an ordinance," Cline said. "Unless they appeal, then there's no ordinance unless they go back and pass one."

But starting Feb. 1, the county will raise the cost of an adult entertainment license from \$6,000 to \$6,400 and annual license renewal from \$4,000 to \$4,300. Employee permits will rise from \$300 to \$325, permit renewals from \$50 to \$100, employee background checks from \$50 to \$55 and fire inspections from \$30 to \$75. The increases are expected to generate an additional \$11,590 per year. Cary Wiggins, an attorney for Fannie's Cabaret, said that since nude dancing is

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protected speech, a county's licensing fees can be no more than the cost of regulation. He said there is no evidence that nude bars cause any more problems for police than regular bars, and he doesn't see how Fulton can charge \$4,000 to renew a license, much less \$4,300. "I'm just unaware of any evidence justifying a rate hike," Wiggins said.

The third club off Fulton Industrial, Club Babe's, isn't taking part in the lawsuit. Managers at all three declined interview requests. Wiggins also represents two Sandy Springs clubs that, while no longer in unincorporated Fulton, are seeking back compensation from the period before Sandy Springs became a city. As with the state government and other local jurisdictions, the Fulton fee hikes are part of a strategy to make up for declining revenue without burdening property-tax payers. **Hernandez** said he is also trying to recover costs and adjust an array of charges, many of which haven't changed in five years, for inflation. North Fulton Commissioner Liz Hausmann cast the sole dissenting vote Wednesday. She told the AJC that she opposes raising any fees or taxes in this economy without reducing spending. She said she wasn't aware of the strip club issue.

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Roberto Hernandez
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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)
May 17, 2010

County Targets Image Change
Campaign is to Clean up Fulton Industrial
Code Enforcers, Police Start out Cracking Down on Boulevard's Motels
Author: *Steve Visse*

Fulton County has an image problem with its huge warehouse district: Its legitimate economic opportunities sometimes have been overshadowed by its undesirable qualities. This has caused companies to bypass it and take their business across the Chattahoochee River to Cobb and Douglas counties, or get out of Fulton and relocate. "We have had tenants who have been there for years and years and who decided to move across the river," said Tom Flanigan, ING Clarion asset manager. "I don't think it was taxes." To attract new business and keep what it has, Fulton is pushing a campaign designed to clean up what it says is the 10 percent of Fulton Industrial Boulevard that gives the rest of it a bad name. For starters, code enforcers and police have targeted motels that allegedly were centers for sex and drug trades; three were closed for health and safety violations, and a fourth was sold to a new owner, who refurbished the property and secured a Days Inn franchise.

The new motel has posted rules in the lobby banning unregistered guests from rooms and requiring identification to reserve a room as a customer. "We got rid of a hub of criminal activity," said Tom Phillips, county code enforcement administrator. "You can walk in there now and say, 'I can stay here.' Two years ago you wouldn't have said that. You might not even have walked in there." At its last meeting, the County Commission banned truck drivers from parking their big rigs in vacant lots off the boulevard and using them as unofficial truck stops. "Truck stops, as you know, have a link to prostitution," Phillips said. Even strip clubs such as Fannies' Cabaret are seeking a more orderly boulevard. Fannies' is trying to distance itself from prostitution, specifically the hookers who regularly have solicited the club's clientele when arriving and leaving. The club hired security to run them off. "It didn't used to be this way 15 years ago," said Thomas Madden, Fannies' Cabaret general manager.

Police have cracked down, making 107 prostitution arrests in the past two years compared to 41 in the three previous years, according to county statistics. The county is committed to restoring a clean-cut image to the boulevard's seven-mile roadway that runs from Fulton County Airport at Charlie Brown Field to Campbellton Road in south Fulton, according to Deputy County Manager **Rob Hernandez**.

The area has 89 million square feet of warehouse and commercial space but a county study released in March showed that several buildings and warehouses, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, are practically unusable. Seven properties are listed on the Georgia Hazardous Site Inventory, including five for the presence of cancer-causing vinyl chloride. Noting its potential, the study described the boulevard as potentially one of the largest and most prestigious warehousing and transportation hubs east of the Mississippi River. "Today it may still be the

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largest, but it has lost much of its prestige," the report concluded. Last month, the county used the area blight and vacant warehouses to have the district reclassified as an opportunity zone urban redevelopment area. That allows it to borrow \$26 million from a federal bond program and give employers a \$3,500 tax credit for each new job for 10 years. **Hernandez** said the county wants to use the bond money to install crime surveillance cameras in the area. A \$100,000 federal grant already was secured to increase police patrols and hire seven officers specific for south Fulton. "We're serious about this," **Hernandez** said. "We have put together everything we have available in our tool box to assist Fulton Industrial."

Satellite offices for county services and commissioners Emma Darnell and Bill Edwards have been set up to show the county is committed to improving the area. People have noticed. Companies recently either bought or leased separate industrial properties that cover a combined 260,000 square feet. With upgrades, the area should be able to sell itself. It is located in the center of a metro area that promotes itself as a national transportation hub. Fulton Industrial offers a regional airport and is close to Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. I-20 is located nearby, as is the Norfolk Southern Intermodal container shipping yard in Austell, an industrial area crisscrossed by railroad tracks.

A next step would be to develop a Community Improvement District, which has happened elsewhere in Fulton and in Cobb, DeKalb and Gwinnett counties. CIDs require commercial property owners to tax themselves to pay for development plans, transportation alternatives and security. Boulevard activists so far have been unable to obtain 51 percent approval of the property owners to install a CID, which increases tax bills by 3 or 4 mills. Yet one man on board with this idea is Madden, the strip club manager, who recognizes that even the adult entertainment business needs better security. "We have to keep it clean here," he said.

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Roberto Hernandez
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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)
October 9, 2008

Fulton Begins Taking Steps to Aid 911 Center

Author: *D. L. Bennett*

Fulton County has begun making changes that officials hope will improve a 911 center beset by chronic understaffing and dangerous operator errors. By filling 12 vacancies and promising reforms to reduce job-related stress, county officials say they should be able to boost both work quality and employee retention. "We are adamant when we say we are going to solve the problems in the center," said **Roberto Hernandez**, deputy county manager. "Once we know all the facts, we will address it immediately. We will fix it."

Problems at the center that takes emergency calls and dispatches aid were discovered in August when an operator mistakenly sent help to the wrong location for a Johns Creek woman who later died. An Atlanta Journal-Constitution investigation found more than 1,000 write-ups of employees during the past five years for everything from fighting, dispatching mistakes and chronic tardiness to falling asleep on the job. Current and former employees complained that understaffing leads to workers being routinely forced to work 12- and 16-hour days, straining family life and causing conflicts in the center, dispatching and call-taking errors. The inquiry found mistakes that endangered not only callers seeking help but the emergency crews sent to provide aid.

Fulton also has launched three of its own investigations -- one by an outside consultant reviewing center operations, another by police of the incident on Aug. 2 and a third by **Hernandez** and others looking at employee satisfaction issues. Rather than wait for those all to be complete, County Manager Zachary Williams has filled 12 of 33 openings for communications officers and supervisors by reassigning operators who previously provided service for the city of Milton under contract. Milton dispatching is now handled by Alpharetta.

"This definitely should add value and reduce stress on the staff," said Commissioner Lynne Riley, who represents the city of Johns Creek, where Darlene Dukes died Aug. 2. Fulton also has in process two classes of trainees who should be able to fill all the remaining spots, a move he hopes will cut down on stress at the center and reduce conflict and mistakes. Everyone should be on the job within six months, **Hernandez** said.

"We remain committed to excellence in all public safety services, and recognize that 911 operators are the first link in the chain of emergency response," said Williams. "These men and women save lives each day." The auditor's report is now due Nov. 10. The internal probe by police should wrap up this week. **Hernandez** said the committee's work on employee issues is ongoing and its plans address issues like child care for employees who work odd hours and stress management.

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Roberto Hernandez
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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)
October 5, 2008

Not Enough Workers and a lot of Slack

Author: *Heather Vogell & D. L. Bennett*

A supervisor told 911 worker JoLynn Griffin she didn't have any days left for vacation. The Fulton County emergency center had barely enough workers to cover shifts. But Griffin went on a cruise anyway. She returned to find her job waiting, her personnel file shows, just as it had been when she'd missed work before. Chronic absenteeism and tardiness are among the center's most vexing problems, records and interviews suggest, accounting for roughly a quarter of all personnel infractions and aggravating a staffing shortage that can mean marathon shifts for the dispatchers who do show up. Griffin is one of scores of Fulton 911 employees who racked up roughly 280 sanctions for arriving late or not at all -- often on multiple days -- a database of personnel actions since January 2004 reveals. The problem is likely worse; officials say their data is not comprehensive.

No-shows were counseled, warned and occasionally suspended. But they were rarely fired, data show. Some workers accumulated long disciplinary histories that included 911 call errors as well as absences, and they weren't terminated, according to personnel files. "It appears that certain violations of performance were tolerated or forgiven, for lack of a better word, in order to maintain the staffing required to operate the center," said Lynne Riley, a Fulton commissioner. Losing trained employees wasn't an attractive option for the 911 center. In recent weeks, as many as a third of the center's total positions have sat vacant. Deputy County Manager **Rob Hernandez** said staffing shortages are common at 911 centers, but Fulton's center needs to train more new workers and improve retention. A county consultant should address discipline problems such as absenteeism, he said. "In general, discipline was used like a tool -- a management tool -- rather than as a last resort," he said. "It may have lost its intended effect."

Data show at least eight 911 workers have been sanctioned 10 or more times for playing hooky or walking in late since 2004. Migraines, oversleeping and not feeling well were regular excuses, files say. Employees also blamed a pet illness, panic attack, traffic, getting back in town late, driving a child to school, car problems and a broken toilet. Even current center director Crystal Williams has filed her share of tardy slips, records show, citing late starts, trouble finding parking, feeling ill and, on at least three days, alarm clock malfunctions. Reached by phone, she declined to comment. Former 911 center employees said chronic tardiness and absenteeism led to feuding among staffers. Cassandra Eloi said that during her year at the center it was common to be held over for extra work because others failed to show. Those who did come in often worked 12 to 16 hours straight, she said. "You are running a 911 center on minimal staffing every day," said Eloi, who was fired for being rude to callers. "You have calls holding. You have calls dropping, every day."

Griffin left without permission for the cruise and two other short vacations between September 2003 and March 2004 -- in addition to taking dozens of sick days and showing up late at least 14

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times, records show. Alfred "Rocky" Moore, the center's director at the time, wrote in a March 2004 letter that he was considering dismissing her. "Your personal vacation [cruise] did not justify an emergency vacation," he wrote. But Griffin hung on, volunteering for a demotion instead. Her tardiness continued. One night in January 2006, the call center sent a Fulton sheriff's car to pick her up for work because she had car trouble, records show. Later that year, she was suspended after supervisors said an error she made delayed response to a fire call. She took disability retirement in mid-2007.

Griffin, a 23-year center veteran who was called "an excellent supervisor" in a 1995 job review, said in an interview she disputes that she caused a delay on the fire call, or that her unpaid leave resulted in a staffing shortage that couldn't be covered. She said she was singled out for infractions that others -- including supervisors -- also committed. She felt Moore had a grudge against her. "There was no reason to deny me," Griffin said of her vacation requests. "It's not like I didn't do my share of covering for people, either."

Other workers also complained discipline was not handed out evenly. "There are subjects who manage to be sick every payday weekend and never receive any type of discipline from your same staff," communications officer Francesca Pearson wrote in an April memo to Moore. Pearson could not be reached for comment for this article. Morale was low. After a supervisor threatened one employee with suspension for tardiness, she responded: "go ahead and suspend me that's one less day that I have to work here," a note in her personnel file said. Moore, who was reassigned, did not return three phone messages seeking comment.

The 911 center hasn't lacked the money to fill vacancies. For the past three years, the center -- funded by fees tacked onto phone bills -- has ended the year with excess cash in its salary account, records show. In 2007, it finished nearly \$1 million richer than it started. Instead, **Hernandez** said the center appears unable to keep up with attrition. Some drop out during the intense six-month training period. Others start but find the pressure and night shifts unworkable. Child care and worries about job security as some cities encroach on Fulton's call territory are also factors, he said. He said he does not want to second-guess center managers on their handling of absent employees. But it is a serious problem. "I know my boss would consider that to be job abandonment," he said.

Data analysts John Perry and Megan Clarke and staff writer Cameron McWhirter contributed to this article. 32 emergency calls delayed. Six of those calls were delayed more than 20 minutes.* 23 instances of employees being orally abusive, fighting, being unprofessional or disruptive in the call center. 34 write-ups for poor customer service. 9 instances of dispatchers sleeping on duty. 280 write-ups of not showing up to work or showing up late. 147 write-ups for not meeting monthly standards for speed and safety by the department.

* Numbers based on a review of the incomplete database of disciplinary actions against employees at Fulton County's 911 center.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Sun Sentinel - Fort Lauderdale (FL)
April 29, 1997

Conditions for Planned Shelter don's Allay Fears

Author: *Robin Benedick*

No matter how many conditions the city puts on the proposed homeless shelter on West Sunrise Boulevard, they won't appease nearby property owners who worry about transients congregating near their homes, businesses and public parks. "Those conditions won't keep vagrants from wandering around the neighborhoods," said Fort Lauderdale Vice Mayor Tim Smith, who is among the shelter's harshest critics. "Unless there are incredibly stringent rules that you can only go in by vehicle and leave by bus, that neighborhood is going to be overrun."

Smith and neighborhood leaders are hoping to derail Broward County's plans for a \$7.7 million shelter at 600 W. Sunrise Blvd. Their first chance comes at a special meeting of the city Planning and Zoning Board at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall, 100 N. Andrews Ave. The board's recommendation goes to city commissioners for hearings. One of the conditions the city wants to put on the proposed 200-bed homeless assistance center is that it accept no walk-ins - only tenants who are referred there by an agency or police. That means homeless people now accustomed to staying the night at Tent City, the dingy open-air camp in a downtown parking lot, won't get into the new shelter without referrals.

Opponents are pushing the planning board to delay approval until Broward hires a not-for-profit group to run the center and community leaders raise \$3 million in private donations for the project. The shelter is expected to be completed in 18 months once city approvals are granted. Broward County's architect, Edward Seymour, has designed a two-story shelter patterned after one in Miami. The building would face Sunrise Boulevard, but entrances and parking would be at Northwest Sixth and Seventh avenues. The fenced campus would have separate men's and women's dormitories with room for families, classrooms, a medical clinic, day-care center, dining hall and courtyard.

City planners are recommending approval with these conditions:

- Availability: Center must give priority to Fort Lauderdale's homeless who are within two miles of the center.
- Security: Center must pay for 24-hour security inside and outside the campus.
- Curfew: Center must require tenants to be inside from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m. daily. Exceptions would be made for school or work.
- No walk-ins: Center must not accept people without a referral. Center also must establish a no-loitering policy on the property and post signs.
- Citizen board: Center must set up a neighborhood advisory board.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

County officials said they were designing a shelter that wouldn't be a magnet for uninvited homeless people. "The word will quickly get out among the homeless that this facility does not accept walk-ins," said **Rob Hernandez**, Broward County's assistant director of Human Services. With more than 5,000 homeless people in Broward, the shelter is billed as the first of several to address a growing problem that could get worse under new federal and state welfare reforms. Homeless advocates worry that police will enforce trespassing and other city laws too eagerly to chase transients from public places. "Being homeless is not a crime and it shouldn't be that they go to jail for that," said Dianne Sepielli, a member of the county's homeless advisory board.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Sun Sentinel - Fort Lauderdale (FL)
March 13, 1994

New Refugees like Broward Cuban Immigrants Find more Opportunities, Less Congestion
Author: *Lyda Longa*

When Geovanny Montes de Oca and 11 of his friends set sail from Havana for the United States aboard a rubber raft in October, Montes de Oca's friends couldn't stop talking about Miami. But after the men were rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard and taken to Key West, Montes de Oca set his sights on a different place: Broward County. His relatives had described Broward as an area where plenty of opportunities could be found. "I like Miami, but up here, there's less congestion and life is more relaxed," Montes de Oca said in Spanish. "I love it here because I'm learning English, I have a job and I even got a car," he said. Montes de Oca works at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport's catering service. Montes de Oca, who lives with friends in west Hollywood, is not alone. In the past six months, a colony of about 50 or 60 Cuban rafters has taken root in Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale.

The reason is simple: The rafters believe that employment and housing are easier to get in Broward than in Dade County. Historically, rafters have flocked to Dade County because they felt more comfortable among their Cuban countrymen, said **Roberto Hernandez**, executive director of Hispanic Unity of Florida. But that's changing. "Lately, the rafters have learned that in Broward there is less congestion and a better chance of finding a job," **Hernandez** said. "Many of them also have friends and family in the area who have told them that Broward County has less Hispanics and less competition for work."

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, there were roughly 109,000 Hispanics in Broward County compared to almost 1 million in Dade. Of those, there were 24,000 Cubans in Broward and almost 570,000 Cubans in Dade. Hector Nodarse, 29, heard about Broward County when he was still in Havana earlier this year. Nodarse was a sound technician with El Ballet Nacional de Cuba - the Cuban National Ballet. "I like the hustle and bustle of Miami because it reminds me of Havana, but I already have a job here {in Broward}," Nodarse said. "Broward is a little too quiet for me, but I'll get used to it."

Brothers Roberto and Raydel Rivera of Dania are two more Cuban rafters who ended up in Broward. The Riveras arrived in Miami aboard a rubber raft in December; they came from the Cuban port town of Mariel. Both are learning English at a night school in Hollywood. "I lived in Miami for about a month before I came to Dania, and I tell you life is better here," Roberto Rivera, 22, said in Spanish. "I'm learning English, I just got my driver's license and soon, I know I'll have a job. Once I get that I'll get my own apartment. Life is good here."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Roberto Hernandez
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Sun Sentinel - Fort Lauderdale (FL)
February 22, 1994

Planned Center may Help Elderly Hispanics

Author: *Lyda Longa*

Inez Carrascillo is an elderly Hispanic woman who wants somebody to talk to. When you're 76 and the only language you speak is Spanish, it's hard to make friends in a neighborhood filled mostly with young working Anglos. Soon, Carrascillo, who is Cuban, and other elderly Hispanics in Broward County could have a place to spend time together, working on arts and crafts and chatting in Spanish.

Roberto Hernandez, director of Hispanic Unity of Broward, said he hopes to open the county's first senior center for Hispanics in the next few months. The proposed center, which would be in Hollywood, would provide activities, meals, transportation and companionship for Broward Hispanics over 60. The 1990 U.S. Census estimated there were 11,891 elderly Hispanics in the county. "There is no single place in Broward County where elderly Hispanic people can go just to talk and relax with their peers," **Hernandez** said. "When you reach a certain age, you want to be with other people who share a similar culture and can understand you."

Hernandez, 27, has applied for a \$100,000 county grant that would pay for four full-time employees for the planned center. Last year he purchased a 7,000-square-foot building at 5840 Johnson St. for the center with the help of a grant from the city of Hollywood. Edith Lederberg, executive director of the Area Agency on Aging, said she has promised **Hernandez** that her organization would provide meals for the center once it opens.

Although there are a handful of senior centers scattered throughout the county, Lederberg and other social service officials agree that none cater specifically to Broward's Hispanic elderly. "We have several senior centers throughout the county, but elderly Hispanic people won't go there because they feel uncomfortable and out of place," Lederberg said.

That feeling is not limited to elderly Hispanic people. Gema **Hernandez**, a sociologist and associate professor at Nova University's School of Business, said the sentiment is shared by most elderly people of varying ethnic backgrounds. "As we age, most of us have a need to return to our ethnic roots," **Hernandez** said. Carrascillo, who stays alone during the day in her west Hollywood home while her daughter and grandchildren go to work and school, said she needs someone to interact with during those long hours.

Research Compiled by: Amanda Dillabough
 Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Reference Notes

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Jennifer Nelson – Former Councilperson, Cape Coral, FL (239) 826-0556

Ms. Nelson has known and worked with Mr. Hernandez since 2020, when he was appointed to the City Manager role. She enjoyed working with him during his tenure as the City Manager. She believes that he was an excellent Manager. He was always professional with her.

Mr. Hernandez did an outstanding job hiring people for the positions that were open. He had an innate ability to judge where people would do the best job. He moved the Public Information Officer into the Assistant Manager position, the Public Works Manager to the Urban and Environmental Policy Director and he promoted the Assistant Public Works Manager to the Manager position. They have all bloomed in their new roles.

Generally, Mr. Hernandez decisions were sound. He was in charge when Hurricane Ian hit. He did an excellent job leading all departments to handle the emergency efficiently. He kept the public informed. To do this, he relied on all formats of communication including press conferences, radio ads and social media.

Mr. Hernandez was someone that was innovative and tried to bring the City Council into a new age. He developed a new strategic plan called Cape Compass for the city, and it was outstanding. The plan took the city leaps and bounds from where they were. Unfortunately, some on the City Council did not want to move in that direction.

Mr. Hernandez was someone who cared about the community and worked with the public to enhance the City. He was very adept at dealing with the public, not only in groups, but one-on-one. He was very customer service oriented in his planning and how he approached his duties. He rallied the public around the City Council’s plans.

Mr. Hernandez kept not only his team involved and knowledgeable about his strategic plan, but he also kept the City Council apprised of all information so they could make appropriate policy decisions. He was a problem solver and a change agent when necessary. For the most part, his projects came in on time.

Ms. Nelson is not aware of anything, besides Mr. Hernandez’s contract not being renewed, that would be considered controversial. She was very saddened by his departure and if she were in a position to hire him again, she would. She believes that others on the Council had political reasons for not supporting Mr. Hernandez in his bid to renew.

Words and phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Efficient,
- Innovative,
- Professional,
- Solution oriented, and
- Openness to hear other’s ideas.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Strengths: Innovation, forethought, communication, leadership, ability to assemble a cohesive team.

Weaknesses: Learning to be flexible when it comes to elected officials.

Gloria Tate – City Councilperson, Cape Coral, FL (239) 851-6324

Gloria Tate has known Mr. Hernandez since 2020, when he became the City Manager. She believes he has made a capable City Manager and would be excellent as a Manager for any community.

Mr. Hernandez was very inventive when trying to resolve problems and for the most part, projects were resolved in a timely manner. Because of his ability to look at the entire situation and gauge the necessary things to be done quickly, he was an asset to the City Council. He brought innovative ideas to them for economic growth, strategic planning and financial sustainability.

Mr. Hernandez made good hiring decisions and overall, most decisions he made were done in order to maintain a high-performance level. The City benefitted by his guidance. He kept the City Council informed of all issues, including when they were not advantageous to himself.

Mr. Hernandez handled the public very well, listening to their needs, explaining situations to them and trying to rally them around the City’s vision. He attended many functions including community meetings.

Mr. Hernandez’s leadership was shown in a variety of ways. In the Energov project, there were many breakdowns in implementing the software. He formed teams from different groups to work together to understand the issues and then find solutions to resolve them. Unfortunately, this project was not completed on time.

If she could, Ms. Tate would hire Mr. Hernandez again. She did not find anything controversial about him and felt there were mitigating circumstances in his contract not being renewed.

Words or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Professional,
- Collaborative,
- Hard worker,
- Innovative,
- Active, and
- Sees whole picture.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Strengths: Leadership, creativeness, wanted everything he did to benefit the city.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Elizabeth Taschereau – Director of Developmental Services, City of Margate, FL
954-884-3686 954-218-9798

Ms. Taschereau has known Mr. Hernandez since 2011 when he was hired as the Deputy City Manager for Coral Springs. She was the Community Redevelopment Agency Coordinator and reported to him. She later followed him from Coral Springs to Savannah when he became the City Manager. She had enjoyed working for him and wanted to continue learning from him so much, she willingly commuted between her home in Florida to her job in Georgia. After he left Savannah to go to Fort Lauderdale, she also left.

Mr. Hernandez was a successful and professional leader. He had strong project and time management skills. Ms. Taschereau especially admired how well he kept track of numerous project deadlines on his calendar, which she had access to when working under him. He worked well with team and delegated excellently. The only possible weakness he had was his high expectations. He strove to accomplish much, and he expected his staff to perform similarly. Such expectations may have been overwhelming for some who were unsure of their abilities to accomplish their tasks. However, staff members were able to look back and be amazed by how much and how well they accomplished those tasks. Though his high expectations were a challenge for some, many cities turned around for the better because of his drive.

Mr. Hernandez worked on numerous high-profile projects, such as building a new city hall for Savannah. The old city hall was built in 1905. It was very much out of date and far too small for a city of Savannah’s size. Building a new city hall spurred a great deal of controversy over architecture and location. Recognizing it as a critical need, Mr. Hernandez took charge of the project and eventually achieved community acceptance of the building’s location downtown and of the architecture. It all came about in approximately a year and a half and the new city hall celebrated its grand opening in 2018. Another significant project he worked on as upgrading the City’s arena while working with a management company. He was able to renovate the facility while negotiating a contract was eventually approved by the County Commissioner. It was a huge accomplishment.

Mr. Hernandez was very inclusive of employees in projects, meetings, emails, status reports, memos, and other forms of communication. He communicated in a way they easily understood, and he expected his staff to communicate with him. Such an inclusive mindset was different for staff from the Cities of Coral Springs and Savannah, where the culture was less inclusive.

Mr. Hernandez managed several internal and external projects involved multiple people across different divisions. Many commented how they had not enjoyed such high communication levels before Mr. Hernandez came. Previously, little communication occurred between divisions. As

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

such, decisions were delayed and less efficient. When he effectively included different groups to integrate on multi-division projects. He helped projects move forward.

Mr. Hernandez also generally made good decisions. He had high integrity. He made the best recommendations and decisions possible for the whole community. He did consider the input of groups with special interests, but he strove to make the best possible decision. He also made good decisions with staff members. For example, he reorganized the Savannah City staff, which composed of approximately 2,400 employees. This momentous change created openings, which he filled with sharp and high performing individuals. The new employees immediately began planning and establishing standard procedures. The City began to change, and consequently, so did the community. Furthermore, Mr. Hernandez greatly believed in committees. He formed several committees with the Human Resource Department and with staff, sometimes even bringing in external panel members if necessary. He wanted people in high-level positions to make decisions together.

As a great public speaker, Mr. Hernandez worked well with the public. He always remained composed and professional. He had excellent presentation skills. People were generally perceptive to his ideas when he spoke, and he communicated well when invited to speak for different organizations. Even if some people at those meetings were exceedingly unprofessional toward him, he managed himself well. He performed well despite those difficulties. In addition, Mr. Hernandez worked well with individuals. He educated others, providing recommendations on what the Mayor and others needed to vote on. Because of these interpersonal abilities, Mayor and Councilmembers voted on multiple successful projects.

Moreover, Mr. Hernandez had good financial skills. He used a hands-on approach with the city budget and worked closely with chief financial officers and the Budget Director. He wanted to ensure he understood the budget accurately.

Though a change agent, Mr. Hernandez did not seek change for the sake of change. He carefully evaluated a City’s situation, whether involving technology, processes, or even City culture. He observed how others managed tasks before he made necessary changes to keep the City moving forward. Ms. Taschereau has done her best to incorporate this valuable lesson into her own leadership skills. Also, Mr. Hernandez is an effective problem solver. He solved numerous issues which existed for long periods of time. Some problems required many changes and more money, which made certain solutions difficult to implement. He attempted to solve these, and then he put plans into place to initiate these necessary changes once enough resources were available. Other problems were out of his realm of influence. As such, Mr. Hernandez made good recommendations, even if people did not follow his advice.

Ms. Taschereau is unaware of anything in Mr. Hernandez’ personal or professional background that will concern a future employer. She would definitely hire him if possible. As someone who has worked for him, she knows how good he is at overcoming challenges and managing a city. Mr. Hernandez is passionate about municipal work. He wants his employers to be high-performing organizations. He has been and will continue to be a very good Manager.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Words or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Successful,
- Professional,
- Collaborative,
- Inclusive,
- High integrity,
- Good speaker, and
- Influential.

Strengths: Project management, leadership and staff management, presentation abilities, financial understanding.

Weaknesses: His high expectations can be daunting at time, but his expectations drive people to accomplish goals they previously thought they were incapable of achieving.

Vincent Cautero – Development Service Director, Cape Coral, FL (239) 574-0600

Mr. Cautero worked for Mr. Hernandez in Cape Coral from 2020 to 2023. During this time, they established a good relationship. Mr. Hernandez is a consummate professional and a superior mentor. His performance was well above average as their City Manager.

Mr. Hernandez is very detail oriented. He asks questions to help further his understanding of issues or how things are worked or managed. He tries to consider many different factors before making decisions, so he is prepared to make recommendations to the City Council. Because of his ability to understand things quickly it takes little time to bring him up to speed. He also is an excellent multitasker.

Even though Mr. Hernandez held weekly round table meetings for his Directors and proficiently used phone calls and emails to keep his staff informed, there were some breakdowns in communication. He made outstanding hires for his departments overall. The Finance Director and the Specialist Project Coordinator were great add-ins to their departments. Generally, he made exceptional decisions.

Mr. Hernandez is very innovative. He brought many recommendations for change to the Council. He offered ideas on how to improve the economy of Cape Coral. He also established a Communications Office to help with Public information and engagement for the City.

Mr. Hernandez was someone who could be found out in the public or behind his desk helping people. He had excellent customer service ability. He also attended meetings of several organizations representing the city. He is someone who rallies his employees and the community around the decisions of the City Council.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

A very angry business owner was trying to expand his business but needed improvements from the City such as widening the sidewalk and other issues related to infrastructure. Mr. Hernandez worked with him, and they developed a plan to complete the improvements in phases. Mr. Hernandez also found money which would help accommodate this business owner’s needs.

During Mr. Hernandez’s tenure, they faced a problem with the implementation of Energov, a software system to help with City permitting and licensing. He brought together employees from various departments to work together, and this team worked with two consulting firms on plan improvements and implementation. During Hurricane Ian he worked to get help and assistance to those in need, but the Council was a bit impatient with the process.

The only controversy in Mr. Hernandez’s tenure had been his involvement with the Energov project which did not go as planned. However, Mr. Caetero would not hesitate to hire Mr. Hernandez for a position.

Words or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Energetic,
- Savvy,
- Intelligent,
- Organized,
- Business like, and
- Warm Hearted.

Strengths: Very competent, tried innovative ways to improve processes, detail oriented, inquisitive, considers variety of factors, takes little time to bring up to speed.

Weaknesses: Time to time there were breakdowns in communication.

Anthony Sizemore – Police Chief, Cape Coral, FL (239) 574-0623

Mr. Sizemore has known Mr. Hernandez since 2020 when Mr. Sizemore was brought on as the Police Chief for Cape Coral. Mr. Hernandez was personable, perceptive, pioneering, and powerful. He was a great City Manager for Cape Coral, and he will be successful anywhere he goes. Mr. Sizemore was very sorry to see Mr. Hernandez leave.

More than a leader, Mr. Hernandez was a mentor. The City had personnel problems and he was able to shift people around to get the right people in the correct positions which helped the City function much more efficiently.

Mr. Hernandez has weekly meetings with his staff to discuss the priorities of the City. He tried to keep them informed of all issues relating to their effectiveness as City employees. He also had an

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

open-door policy for his direct reports. Allowing them to visit him to discuss emerging issues and addressing the issue before it turned into a larger problem.

Mr. Hernandez made excellent hiring choices. Overall, his decisions for most things were spot on. He was a change agent and innovator. These traits helped him in developing several programs to benefit the City.

Mr. Hernandez was often out in the community. He attended a variety of community organization meetings. He dealt well with the public in groups and one-on-one situations. He was able to communicate with them well. He was able to take the City’s vision and not only get employees to rally behind it, but also get the community to rally behind.

Mr. Hernandez accomplished most tasks in a timely manner. The only task not accomplished on time was the Energov project and it became somewhat controversial.

If Mr. Hernandez ever showed stress, it may have been a closed-door session with someone he could trust, but he never let challenges or difficulties affect his working behavior. He was always very personable.

Word or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Collaborative,
- Intelligent,
- Inclusive,
- Energetic,
- Leader, and
- Influential.

Strengths: Personable, intuitive, innovative, industrious, leads as a mentor.

Weaknesses: None identified

Dolores Menendez – City Attorney, Cape Coral, FL (239) 574-0408

Ms. Menendez has known Mr. Hernandez since 2019. He was the City Manager for Cape Coral, and she was the City Attorney. She found him competent and personable.

Ms. Menendez interacted with him only on a professional level when he needed to speak to the City Attorney, or she needed to speak with him. She did not really have the knowledge of his day-to-day operations to judge his job performance or his strengths and weaknesses.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Ms. Menendez believed he was a very proficient City Manager who maintained the city at a high-performance level. He dealt well with the public, his staff and for most of the time, with the City Council.

During emergencies like Hurricane Ian all city staff is under the leadership of the Manager. Mr. Hernandez dealt well with this and did a good job at managing emergencies and natural disasters.

Words or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Professional,
- Dedicated,
- Collaborative,
- Capable,
- Competent, and
- Personable.

Strengths: Professional, competent, personable.

Weaknesses: Sometimes communication broken down with the City Attorney’s office.

**Skye Patrick – Former Director of Libraries, Broward County, FL 562-940-8400
562-659-1155**

Ms. Patrick has known Mr. Hernandez since 2014. She really enjoyed working with him and learned much from him.

Public Administration was Mr. Hernandez’s strong suit. He was thoughtful and he understood County policy and procedures very well, which meant he navigated in a way which was very helpful to his department. He did not know much about the library system when he was hired, but he studied and learned about how they operated and developed a good understanding.

The Directors hired by Mr. Hernandez were very good selections. He sat on the hiring panel for the Finance and Business Administrator, and helped with the searches for the Aviation Director and Human Services. When making decisions in general he was very thoughtful and took the time to gather information.

In general, Mr. Hernandez maintained the organization at a high level and had learned from his department heads to be innovative and creative. They had a monthly meeting where Mr. Hernandez provided information on organizational changes. Ms. Patrick headed a very large organization with many issues. He was always available and responsive.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Some community members were very aggressive. Mr. Hernandez took the time to attend both scheduled and off-the-cuff meetings with individuals who had concerns about an issue. His openness and willingness to address an issue immediately, without any delay, was impressive.

In his capacity Mr. Hernandez really tried to lead the organization and was creative and thoughtful in meeting goals. He worked very well with the Board, which consisted of nine voices with sometimes conflicting concerns. He protected the department heads when necessary and did a great job balancing the administration and the politics, which is no small feat.

Several major personnel issues involving union members were escalated to upper management. Mr. Hernandez was not required to attend the meetings, but he came to help negotiations. The union had between 500 and 600 members. He helped navigate the very rocky road between the union relationship and County protocol. He showed great initiative in addressing problems existing prior to his arrival. He helped resolve long-standing issues in only 2 to 3 meetings.

Mr. Hernandez was given directives to create a business plan for the new Panther Stadium. The process took several months, and he worked with numerous departments to create the business model. He also worked on a new transportation plan which was very complex. The process has spanned for several years and involves 15 of the 31 cities in Broward County.

They were short 800k in a capital budget of \$5 million dollars. Mr. Hernandez worked with the staff to review the overall budget and prioritize projects. Several of the big-ticket items related to technology were prioritized, and he found a way to upgrade their enterprise software.

They only knew each other for a few years, but Ms. Patrick does not know anything controversial involving Mr. Hernandez.

Broward County has a \$6.5 million dollar budget with 31 cities plus some incorporated areas. Ms. Patrick would hire Mr. Hernandez and felt he was well suited to run a community the size of Broward County or slightly larger. Every department head he worked with had a positive opinion of his management and leadership qualities. Employees were comfortable working with him and felt very supported by him. He ensured Ms. Patrick had the financial resources she needed. She confidently recommends him for a Manager position.

Words or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Extremely thoughtful,
- Very intelligent,
- Incredible business mind,
- Perfectly capable administrator,
- Incredible leadership qualities, and
- Shows initiative and foresight to present quantifiable outcomes.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Strengths: Thoughtful; understands policy and procedures; public administration; learns what he needs to know.

Weaknesses: He could have a greater understanding of the different lines of work for which each department head was responsible.

Donna Germain – Executive Directory, Chamber of Commerce, Cape Coral, FL
(239) 549-6900 x107

Ms. Germain has known Mr. Hernandez since 2020. She worked with him on many City projects to bring more economic agility to the community. Together they launched “Cape Competes,” a funding mechanism for business development.

Ms. Germain found Mr. Hernandez quite capable of managing the City. He hired acceptable candidates for City positions. He also was very professional and knowledgeable to work with. In general, he made good decisions when creating plans for the City and working on issues.

Mr. Hernandez dealt well with the public. He had good customer service skills and worked well with differing groups in the City. Overall, he is someone who maintains a high-performance level. He expects not only it from himself but those with whom he works.

Mr. Hernandez kept Ms. Germain informed of the most important things she should be expecting when working with him. She was not privy to all things in his departments. But she was informed when it would impact her and the community she served.

Mr. Hernandez seemed very adept at solving difficult to understand issues and resolve them. He tried very hard to understand the different communities in the City and what their needs were. This seemed, for the most part, easy for him to do.

The only controversy during Mr. Hernandez’s tenure was the Energov situation. This situation was dealt with the best it could be, but there were still several issues.

Word or phrases use to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Professional,
- Collaborative,
- Passionate,
- Capable,
- Innovative, and
- Strong-willed.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Strengths: Business like, wants the best for the community, high energy.

Weaknesses: Managing the fall-out for Energov.

Ed Ramos – Former President of Contractor’s Association, Cape Coral, FL (239) 540-3566

Mr. Ramos has known Mr. Hernandez since 2020. Mr. Ramos worked with Mr. Hernandez when Mr. Ramos was the President of the Contractor’s Association. They worked well together. Mr. Hernandez was very adept at being the City Manager. However, Mr. Ramos did not work with Mr. Hernandez daily. Mr. Ramos can only attest to things he witnessed from afar most of the time.

Mr. Hernandez was very capable. He helped resolve many economic issues for the City of Cape Coral. He managed his time well and for the most part, came in on time with projects. He was a person who maintained the City at a high-performance level.

Mr. Hernandez was often out in the community and attended different community meetings. Mr. Ramos could not comment on his ability to work with the public in one-on-one situations. However, Mr. Hernandez seemed to work well with the public in groups.

Mr. Hernandez worked very hard. He seemed capable of hiring quality staff. Mr. Ramos and Mr. Hernandez interacted with one another on a professional basis only. They were not out in the community together. Thus, there was a lack of communication at times and more communication could have helped resolve some of the issues.

As far as controversial situations, the Energov situation and Mr. Hernandez’s contract not being renewed are the highest profile issues of which Mr. Ramos is aware. Mr. Ramos could not comment on these topics as he was not privy to why the renewal was not made.

Words or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Intelligent,
- Capable,
- Leadership,
- Personable,
- Outgoing, and
- Engaged.

Strengths: Learns quickly, has knowledge of multiple areas of government management, hard working.

Weaknesses: Not able to accomplish all things in a timely manner.

**Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez**

Van Johnson – Mayor, City of Savannah, GA 912-651-5988 912-651-6444

Mr. Johnson worked with Mr. Hernandez between 2016 and 2019 when Mr. Hernandez became the Savannah City Manager. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Hernandez had a good relationship.

Mr. Hernandez performed decently as City Manager. He was smart, strong-willed, and a hard worker. He was a workhorse who innovatively tried to find solutions to problems. He was always quite professional, cordial, and direct. At times, his passion and directness may have caused people to think Mr. Hernandez was emotional or overly direct. However, these traits were a function of his military background.

Mr. Hernandez had good communication skills. He kept Mr. Johnson informed via email, phone, and personal communication when appropriate. Mr. Hernandez generally made good decisions and usually made good decisions when hiring personnel. He was customer service oriented. He accomplished tasks in a timely manner.

Additionally, Mr. Hernandez tried to make the City into a high-performing organization. He recognized several structural financial issues within the City and put the City on track. He was both a leader who rallied employees around the organization’s vision and a manager who oversaw processes behind a desk. He worked hard to effectively solve problems to the best of his abilities. For example, he brought about a strategic plan for the City, which had not existed prior to Mr. Hernandez’s arrival. He led the Council and the organization to determine a goals and priorities. The Savannah Forward strategic plan is still currently used.

One of the largest criticisms against Mr. Hernandez was, he was less social than the public expected their Manager to be. Certainly, he was kind and polite. He had experience working with the public and sometimes was out in the public attending community meetings to represent the organization. However, he often worked more than he socialized.

At times, Mr. Hernandez experienced some difficulties wading through the City’s Council-Manager form of government. These hardships were not entirely his fault because some councilmembers violated these lines at times. Usually, Mr. Hernandez persevered. Eventually, these challenges became too much for him to bear. For example, he proposed instituting a City fire fee similar to what Florida cities used to address the City’s structural deficits. The Council accepted the idea. However, when the public became upset with the fee, the Council blamed him for the failure. Furthermore, the previous Mayor needed a scapegoat for some of his poor decisions and blamed Mr. Hernandez – even though the City Manager only carried out decisions made by the City Council.

Mr. Johnson is unaware of anything in Mr. Hernandez’s background to concern a future employer. If given the opportunity to rehire Mr. Hernandez, Mr. Johnson would consider him as a candidate. Given the difficult circumstances in Savannah, Mr. Hernandez was a very good Manager.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

Words or phrases used to describe Rob Hernandez:

- Smart,
- Strong-willed,
- Hard worker,
- Good work ethic,
- Innovative, and
- Professional.

Strengths: Work ethic, innovative solution finding.

Weaknesses: Mr. Hernandez’s passion and directness may have been misconstrued as being emotional or overly direct.

Claudette Bruck – Former Commissioner, City of Coral Springs, FL 954-562-2526

Ms. Bruck has known Mr. Hernandez since 2011. He was their Deputy City Manager for all too short of a time. They were sad to see him leave and would love to have him back.

Mr. Hernandez was extremely bright, very diligent and focused. When he first came to the city he first stood back and analyzed the organization. When it was his turn to speak, he impressed everyone. His presentations are flawless but factual. Everything he said was entirely trustworthy; he presented information he could stand behind.

Their interactions were all professional. Mr. Hernandez was very respectful. He listened and was prompt in responding to inquiries. His decisions when hiring personnel were very good. He was innovative and operated at a high-performance level. He listened, assessed a situation, and then came forward with an excellent recommendation. He was very experienced and innovative.

Mr. Hernandez frequently gave presentations at workshops, commission meetings and community meetings and always did an excellent job. He had good rapport with the audience and a demeanor inviting trust.

Mr. Hernandez kept the Commissioners informed as appropriate. The Manager’s office operated independently of the Commission. Rather than reporting on a daily basis, they did so at special meetings or as needed.

Mr. Hernandez did not have the opportunity to work one-on-one with residents, but he did present information about projects to the community. He was always prepared and answered questions on the spot.

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

The Commission received much information from varying sources, and the information was not always accurate. They felt very fortunate to have Mr. Hernandez on staff and trusted his accuracy. He led the organization well because he earned the trust of employees.

Mr. Hernandez played a significant role in pension discussions. He responded to questions at community and commission meetings. He followed through and was customer service oriented. He always did what was said to do. He was not directly involved in the finance department or the creation of the budget, but he had a good understanding of the numbers.

Ms. Bruck is unaware of any controversy involving Mr. Hernandez. She would hire him and feels he would be a great Manager. He was knowledgeable, experienced, task oriented, focused, and could always be trusted. His departure was a tremendous loss to Coral Springs.

Words or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Trustworthy,
- Bright,
- Quick study,
- Serious about his position,
- Honorable, and
- Innovative.

Strengths: Very thorough; brought an idea forward only after it had been thorough researched; good at identifying problems and determining solutions.

Weaknesses: None identified.

John Hearn – City Attorney, Coral Springs, FL 954-344-1011

Mr. Hearn has known Mr. Hernandez since 2011. In terms of job performance, Mr. Hernandez was very energetic and a go-getter. He really moved projects along and stayed on top of them. He was a change agent.

City Hall was in an office built by General Electric for selling homes. The City had been trying to build a City Hall since 1993. Mr. Hernandez really energized those involved, and the new City Hall was finally under construction.

Mr. Hernandez was always very involved in the community, and he attended community meetings. He had a very good relationship with the public. He was customer service oriented.

Mr. Hernandez led staff to fulfill the vision of the Board. Employees did not have much appetite for moving forward with the downtown development, which included the new City Hall. He took

Reference Notes
Roberto “Rob” Hernandez

the bull by the horns and made a very detailed PowerPoint presentation showing all the issues their current City Hall had. He demonstrated how having a vibrant downtown area would benefit the City and residents. He did a nice job leading the project.

Mr. Hearn was not directly involved with the budget and finances, but in the course of their conversations, he came to believe Mr. Hernandez had good financial skills. Mr. Hernandez completed tasks by the deadline given.

Mr. Hernandez had not been involved in anything personally or professionally controversial. He left Fulton County because his family wanted to return to Florida. When an opportunity opened in Broward County, he embraced it. He moved forward when doing so made sense.

Mr. Hearn would hire Mr. Hernandez and had a positive experience working with him. Mr. Hernandez would be a good City or County Manager. The five Commissioners and City Manager in Coral Springs loved working with Mr. Hernandez.

Words or phrases used to describe Roberto Hernandez:

- Energetic,
- Outgoing,
- Positive,
- Change agent,
- Engaged, and
- Active.

Strengths: Energetic; very much wanted to make decisions; could shepherd a project from A to Z very well.

Weaknesses: People’s greatest strengths are often their greatest weaknesses. Because he moves projects along so well, Mr. Hearn had to slow him down a little and occasionally reminded Mr. Hernandez of a step needing to be taken in the process.

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