

## **To the Citizens of the Town of Eatonville:**

Serving you as Mayor is one of the greatest honors I have received. As we enter the 2023 – 2024 fiscal year, this budget will outline a spending pattern that will reflect the connectivity between the town's current challenges to that of a better future. It is also worth noting that this budget will include the most aggressive grant acquisition plan in the history of the Town.

A year and a half ago I asked you for the opportunity to “do better” because I knew that it could be done. I spoke to you about the importance of the right development at the right time, strategic planning, impact fees and stronger fiscal responsibility. Youth activities, sports, and a sub-station for Jerry Frances Park were stated as priorities. With the average age of municipal infrastructure being 50-100 years, shoring up our water and sewage systems has always been met with an urgency. Getting all of this done, without a higher tax rate to the citizens was key. This budget includes a multi-year capital improvement and grant plan that will help these initiatives be accomplished.

I am satisfied to say that in this year and a half as your mayor, with the focus staying on a better place to live, work, and play in this town, we are on our way to the stability and sustainability that is needed to protect this town's future. Your needs and desire are at the heart of every decision I make and support.

To the Town's Council, I appreciate your support of those elements that help move the town forward. This budget proposal being presented today, reflects the beginning of this Town's journey to improved living for our residents. It outlines increased funding to help deliver enhanced services for the safety and protection of the Town. It provides a map for capital improvement projects that offer a plan to meet the maintenance and repair needs of the Town's infrastructure and water facilities. Through this budget/CIP/Grants plan, the residents can be better assured that stormwater, wastewater, trash pick-up and other health and safety functions are expanded and strengthened. It underscores the salient position that our youth hold in the future of this town, by bringing back youth sports and the explorer program.

With key personnel in place, the Town can begin to breathe again, knowing that challenges will be addressed in a professional and efficient manner. With I.T. updates in progress, departments will be better able to manage their day-to-day operations and attend to the needs of residents within a more reasonable time. Services to the citizens have been improved through upgraded utility billing, online permitting systems, an upgraded website, and stronger systems of standard operating procedures. After school programs now include 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning that includes S.T.E.A.M. activities that will support the education of our school-aged children.

With recent grant funds received, law enforcement obtained two new vehicles that have been fully equipped. The \$2 million in grant funds received will help the town purchase land to expand the town's offering of affordable housing. Recently, we have received notification that an additional \$1 million dollars is being approved for community policing. Once awarded and approved by the council, these dollars will help construct a sub-station in Catalina Park that will include bathrooms and meeting space. It will allow the town to purchase an ADA compliant van to help expand the programs being offered. Finally, this grant will allow funding for youth basketball, baseball, and

explorer program. Overall, it involves the community in the policing programming for the town. Other grants allow for the renovation of the KOHA nightclub into a café-museum space that will combine historical education with entertainment in the town. By utilizing the opportunity to boost our town's development through grant opportunities such as these, value is added to the daily lives of citizens, without additional costs to the residents.

Our Town remains one of the best places to live, not just because of the historical presence it offers, but because of the people that live here.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you as mayor in this great town called Eatonville, FL.

Respectfully,

Mayor Gardner

