



# GALT MILE NEWS

AUGUST 2009

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GMCA

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# NEW BUDGET IS ON THE MONEY

By Eric Berkowitz

A few months ago, City Manager George Gretsas was considering life in other cities. As a rule, City Managers don't experience long and prosperous careers in one location. They bounce from town to town, where they are usually presented with the mess created by the previous City Manager. If they enjoy some success in correcting the problem that was likely responsible for their predecessor's demise – while publicly crediting the ruling junta for their achievement – they buy a few more years. If not, they pack and move to the next town. There are, however, exceptions that prove the rule. Not surprisingly, those cities and towns that suffer the least turnover are among the nation's most stable, well run communities – a fate that most of us covet for the "Venice of America."

In 2004, George Demetrios Gretsas was going about his business as the Mayor of White Plains' strong right arm when a colleague handed him an advertisement taken from the New York Times. The "ad" described a nightmare employment opportunity in Fort Lauderdale – the City Manager position. "Come to sunny South Florida – Fort Lauderdale verges on bankruptcy – low employee morale – contract disputes – budget crisis – scapegoats welcome...etc." He immediately applied for the job for which he was ultimately chosen. This vague chestnut illustrates the City Commission's rationale for selecting Mr. Gretsas over candidates that were academically and experientially more qualified. Gretsas thrives on challenges. Nonetheless, it didn't disappoint the Commission when he remarked that his primary loyalty would be to "the elected officials" as opposed to any particular constituency or city staff. Despite his lack of hard

credentials as a City Manager, the City Commission's gamble on what former Mayor Naugle characterized as "the fire in his belly" is still paying off.

The City's journey from the brink of bankruptcy in 2003 to glowing fiscal health today is largely the handiwork of Gretsas and an evolving management team that he continuously populated with talented and motivated personnel. A review of the City's fiscal statistics offers a mini-portrait of Fort Lauderdale's remarkable recovery during the past 6 years. The 2003 \$21 million insurance deficit metamorphosed into a \$10 million surplus. The 2003 reserves were funded with a meager \$875,000. Last year, the City featured a \$78 million reserve fund, the largest in City history. Fort Lauderdale's water & sewage rates are the fourth lowest of the 31 Broward municipalities. Of the County's 27 different municipal Fire Assessment Fees, Fort Lauderdale's is number 15 – safely in the lower half of represented cities and towns. The municipal tax rate was cut during each of the past three years with record 10-year lows in 2005 and 2007. To draw a comparative perspective, 22 of the County's 31 municipalities had higher millage rates than Broward's most populated City. Moody's and Standard & Poor's ratings for the city's general obligation bonds, which were unceremoniously interred in Boot Hill in 2003, turned from negative to positive in 2005. By 2008, Moody's conferred a strong "Aa2" rating on the City's bonds while Standard & Poor's rated them a solid "AA".

It is nearly impossible to engineer the kind of changes required to ameliorate the City's dysfunctional 2003 fiscal pathology without disaffecting some ambitious political interests and alienating long-ensconced bureaucrats. For five years, Gretsas closely followed directions handed down by the City Commission. Since his arrival, residents addicted to channel 38 and later channel 78 watched Commissioners describe visions for certain neighborhoods or voice concerns about departmental deficiencies and charge the City Manager with finding a viable resolution. After witnessing an annual parade of municipal improvements and successful outcomes, they came to appreciate his no-nonsense management style. Prior to the March 10th election, the vast majority of Commission criticism was limited to one source and lacked specificity. Commenting on Commissioner Rodstrom's repeated attempts to fault Gretsas for fiscal problems fostered by the economic downturn, the Sun Sentinel Editorial Board exclaimed that Commissioner Rodstrom's criticism "unfairly puts much of the blame on his (Gretsas') shoulders."

In 2008, when voters replaced 4 of the 5 City Commissioners, Gretsas' critics mounted a campaign to oust the work-a-holic City Manager. When former Sun Sentinel political writer Buddy Nevins asked Broward County Commissioner John Rodstrom if he was backing then candidate Bruce Roberts in hopes of supporting his wife's efforts to replace Gretsas, Rodstrom said, "She wants to fire City Manager George Gretsas and so does Roberts." However, once elected, her new peers appropriately stated that they would each judge for themselves whether Gretsas is a liability or an asset. Newly elected Mayor Jack Seiler and Vice Mayor Bruce Roberts both acknowledged Gretsas' manifold municipal contributions and extraordinary fiscal skills, clarifying that their concerns were "with his style, not his substance."

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# CHEPO MOVES GALT LANDSCAPING INTO HIGH GEAR

By Eric Berkowitz



Beach Foreman Mark Almy, Pio, Chepo, Vice Mayor Bruce Roberts and Operations Superintendent Brian Hopper Tour Galt Mile Landscaping

Late last year, the Galt Mile Community Association Advisory Board charged Commodore resident Jose "Chepo" Vega with overseeing the city's landscaping activities along the Galt Mile, a project for which he expressed both aptitude and a passionate interest. Congruent with an understanding brokered by former Commissioner Christine Teel between the Parks Administration and the GMCA, Parks Director Phil Thornburg assigned a Parks official to hammer out an improvement plan and timetable with Chepo. In mid-December, Chepo began working with Park Operations Superintendent Brian Hopper, his counterpart in City government. Over the next few months, City crews under Hopper began staking unstable trees, trimming low-hanging branches that posed a threat to inattentive pedestrians and rehabilitating the grates that frame trees along the sidewalk. The successful project kickoff served to mold Chepo and Hopper into a productive team.

During the April 6th Presidents Council meeting, Chepo was introduced to newly elected District 1 Commissioner Bruce Roberts, who agreed to seamlessly step into his predecessor's shoes and move the project along. Five days later, Chepo sent Roberts a courtesy email explaining "It was a pleasure meeting you at the Galt Ocean Mile meeting last Monday. I am sure that with you and the many hard working people on your team, we can look forward to a continuous and productive time during your administration. As promised, I will keep you posted about the Galt Mile safety and landscape project I have been working on for the last few months. I appreciate your interest in them."

To adequately coordinate the next step, the principals planned a diagnostic tour of the target area for May 14th. On May 8th, Commissioner Roberts' assistant Robbi Uptegrove notified Parks Director Phil Thornburg that Roberts - who was recently seated as Vice Mayor by the City Commission - would be unavailable until after June 12th and requested an alternate date for the walk-through. By contacting each of the participants, Uptegrove was able to organize the event for Monday, June

22nd at 10 a.m.

Early that morning, the Vice Mayor accompanied Chepo, Hopper, GMCA President Pioreraci, Beach Foreman Mark Almy and Commodore residents Jack Friedman and Bill Fleckenstein on an area tour to identify landscaping deficiencies and prepare a realistic performance schedule. Starting at the Greek Islands Taverna Restaurant, the group worked their way north. In addition to documenting the requisite rehabilitation and ascertaining which City Department was best adapted to address each task, they noted problems specific to certain associations and vendors - for which they may carry some liability.

The next day, a flurry of correspondences between the principals defined how they would proceed. Not surprisingly, Chepo got the ball rolling, asking Brian Hopper when he would "have the schedule for the bald spot planting, pruning and any other work to be done." Hopper answered "I'll write up a punch list of the things we discussed. Included in that will be to do an assessment of gaps (or bald spots) in the landscaping that will list how many and what type of plants we would need to obtain. You should receive that this week. Once I get approval to buy the plants I will have Maria contact you to say when the work will be done." Maria Torres is a Parks employee whose longtime assignment to the Galt Mile has endeared her to countless Galt Mile residents.

Since the project will draw on resources from several municipal departments, Hopper sent Julie Richards (Assistant to the City Manager) a version of the walk-through "punch list" that sorted the various responsibilities by department. He asked that the information be appropriately routed and promised to keep her apprised of progress made by his Parks personnel. Copies of Hopper's punch list were also sent to Vice Mayor Roberts and GMCA President Pioreraci. In turn, Pioreraci forwarded copies to Chepo and GMCA Vice President Eric Berkowitz. Hopper's summary is as follows:

Per our walk-through of the Galt with Commissioner Roberts yesterday (6/22), the following items will be addressed:

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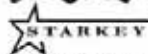


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Seiler and Roberts also characterized as "non-negotiable" the need for Gretsas to adapt his management style to better address the new commission's priorities. At a GMCA Advisory Board meeting, Seiler said, "It's up to George. If he can change his style to fit the new commission's needs, we will all benefit from his contributions." During separate interviews, rookie Commissioners Bobby B. DuBose and Romney Rogers expressed their intentions to base any judgment of Gretsas on his future performance.

When asked about the new Commissioners' expectations, Gretsas exclaimed, "They're right! It's incumbent on any City Manager to adjust to a new administration. It's my job to help them realize their vision for the City, not mine." The City Manager explained that he did the same thing for the previous administration. "The improvements I helped deliver were either conceived or approved by the City Commission. Since the City Manager is a high profile position in Fort Lauderdale's form of Government, I would often mistakenly receive the credit for successful policies or the blame for those that failed." Gretsas explained that his success or failure is more accurately measured by how effectively the Commission's policies are implemented. As to his budgetary marching orders, five priorities required by the new City Commission are enumerated in his "Budget Message". They are (1) no property tax increase; (2) no increase in fire assessment fee; (3) maintenance of adequate reserve funds; (4) no reductions in vital City services; and (5) no layoffs. While this is a tough bill to fill, Gretsas has repeatedly demonstrated a special talent for budget challenges. Last year's handiwork snagged a Government Finance Officers Association (GOFA) "Distinguished Budget Presentation Award" for the City. *Continued on page 10*



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### Parks Division Responsibilities

1. Allow groundcover and hedge plant materials to grow in to the edge of sidewalk
2. Broken irrigation head on east side of road, across from Sly Fox
3. Indian Hawthorn (shrub) replacement to fill in gaps in all areas of Galt, most were on South end
4. Remove smaller branches sprouting from base of Seagrape tree near the Greek restaurant
5. Remove Sabal Palm growing amongst thae Seagrape tree (sabal in poor condition)
6. Remove remnants of palm-like tree near Greek restaurant; consider replanting of a palm in its place
7. Inspect all tree grates for stability (mulch was underneath some, causing them to see-saw just a tiny bit)
8. Directional prune all Silver Buttonwood trees to allow for greater pedestrian clearance
9. Confirm that Winn Dixie owns seagrape trees to the rear of store, if so; ask them to lift the trees to eliminate hiding spot
10. Place soil and rat bait station at one silver buttonwood tree grate

I will let you know when the above items are addressed. However, some of them (like pruning issues) will be a gradual process.

### Public Services

11. Section of sidewalk higher than curb, suggest shaving down sidewalk to avoid edge/trip hazard. On east side of road, across from Wachovia and Amtrust banks.
12. Minor breaks in concrete on edge of tree grate, near Playa Del Mar
13. Regrade section of raised sidewalk that was previously graded, needs more gradual slope. (exact location will be sent)

### HOA

- Contact AT&T regarding abandoned utility boxes
- Obtain info on entryway landscaping at sign (part of development agreement)

True to his word, Hopper loosed his minions on the Galt Mile sidewalk beds a few days later. Pleased with the expeditious progress, Chepo dashed off emails to Pio Ieraci and Eric Berkowitz, stating "I must say that I am flying high with the landscape progress! The palm trees are being trimmed, the Winn Dixie Sea grape trees have been pruned, the sprinklers heads are being taken care of, etc. I just spent over an hour with the tree trimmers at the Greek Isle restaurant and the pruning result is just fantastic. Everything looks clean and inviting. The palm trees that were being strangled by the sea grape trees are free and can see the day light again. Will keep you posted."

Given Chepo's propensity for detail, he contacted Hopper and enumerated some of the punch list's shortcomings. Although delighted with the impressive results, Chepo asked that the following items abet Hopper's work product:

1. Fill in hedge areas with Silver Buttonwood as needed.
2. Sly Fox Sabal Palm pruning.
3. New planting is needed on 34th Street next to the synagogue and next to Nick's restaurant. Nothing has been planted there for few years.
4. New planting in front of the Galt monuments on 34th & 35th Streets.
5. Finish planting area in front of public parking, next to Bank Atlantic.

6. Extend grass around all palm trees and trees close to the Galt Monument and the Greek Isle restaurant area to eliminate so much mulch around them.

While summarizing his observations in an email to Hopper, Chepo demonstrated a penchant for diplomacy. To officially recognize the Parks personnel actualizing the plan he developed with Hopper, Chepo credited them by name, adding "The work being done by Mauricio Sisterna, Larry Mathews and Ernesto Campisi is outstanding. I even learned new things about tree pruning today."

The list composed by Hopper distinguished the City's responsibilities from those of the neighborhood association. For instance, a sizable number of utility boxes suffering an advanced state of deterioration were located in front of several buildings. Thought to have been originally installed by BellSouth to service association residents, the neglected boxes appear to be abandoned. GMCA agreed to contact AT&T, further investigate their necessity and, if appropriate, arrange for their removal.

In addition to the official data collected to define the city's scope of work, the group documented problems attributable to individual associations and local vendors. Since the alleged perpetrators are members of the Galt Mile Community Association or the Galt Merchants Association, the City agreed to allow the neighborhood association to address these violations in a discreet manner. To protect four member associations and one vendor from embarrassing and potentially expensive violation notices, they will be contacted and informally asked to correct their respective problems. Since some of these "indiscretions" violate municipal ordinances, if an association or the vendor refuses to comply, the City can pursue legal alternatives, including fines and/or other penalties.

When you hit the street, check out Chepo's handiwork. The annual premium that summer confers on the block's landscaping has been unmistakably enhanced by his contributions. He promised to document future progress with pictures and a comprehensive report. Thanks. For pictures of improvements discussed in this article, go to the GMCA web site ([www.galtmile.com](http://www.galtmile.com)), scroll down to and click on the headline "Chepo's Galt Landscaping in High Gear." Chepo, we are all in your debt - big time!



Chepo Works with Parks Department Crew



# Broward Budget Battle

By Eric Berkowitz



Broward Sheriff Al Lomberti Refuses Broward Commission Demand To Cut Budget

In his April 2009 Newsletter, Commissioner Ken Keechl said, "For Fiscal Year 2008, I voted to lower property taxes and shrink the County's budget by approximately \$90 million dollars per year. My colleagues agreed by a 9-0 vote. For Fiscal Year 2009, I voted to lower property taxes and shrink the budget by approximately \$87 million dollars per year. My colleagues agreed by a 7-2 vote. Since these are recurring, yearly savings, the result of these two votes was to shrink the Broward County budget by almost \$177 million dollars per year."

Over the past two years, the cuts targeted questionable projects and irresponsible spending strategies, expunging programs that were underutilized, ineffective or otherwise unjustifiable. Programs that somehow survived obsolescence were terminated and projects imbued with an automatic annual refunding process were reviewed and squelched.

Simultaneously, the County Administration consolidated overlapping services, froze hiring, reduced capital projects, paid down debt and selectively raised fees to levels currently comparable with similar jurisdictions. While the cuts raised concerns among certain constituencies, they went predictably unnoticed by the greater public.

Fast forwarding to the current budget, Keechl said, "On February 17, 2009, the County Commission had its first Fiscal Year 2010 budget workshop. The good news: the majority of my colleagues agreed to lower property taxes for a third consecutive year. The bad news: we couldn't agree on how much to cut from the FY 2010 budget." Characterizing this as a major hurdle for the Commission, Keechl proceeded to diagnose the disagreement.

Some of Keechl's colleagues were considering an adjustment to the millage rate that would produce the same revenue as last year - characterized as the "rolled-back" rate. Since the Property Appraiser's 11% valua-

tion decline reflects a significantly lower tax base, only raising the millage would yield the same intake. While Keechl acknowledged that the strategy would cut another \$45 million from the budget and increase the cumulative 3-year recurring tax savings to \$222 million, he expressed a preference for matching last year's millage rate, thereby creating a deficit of \$135 million. The cumulative 3-year recurring tax savings would jump to \$312 million.

Having already trimmed away the high-visibility pork, the Commission's remaining budget reduction targets are fitted with political price tags. Pumping out politically correct sound bites in February and March, every commissioner openly advocated "making the tough decisions" and "living within our means." As described by County Administrator Bertha Henry, "The low-hanging fruit has been plucked, and this will be a very tough year." However, when confronted with raising the millage rate or cutting services, Commissioners began waffling - testing the merits of compromise and exhorting against "throwing out the baby with the bathwater."

At the early Budget Workshops, Budget and Management staff made cost-cutting recommendations ranging from the obvious to the ridiculous. Certain items were placed on the table for reasons other than saving money. Commissioner John Rodstrom has long wanted to repeal a law requiring county contractors to pay more than the minimum wage to workers. Including it in a cost cutting recommendation buys him a shot at wiping it from the books. He's also against building a new addiction recovery center in a location anathematic to constituents. Commissioner Josephus Eggelation has questioned if the county is duplicating children services with other agencies. Many of these items are admittedly on the block for primarily political purposes. By cynically identifying them as money saving opportunities, commissioners can potentially revise the outcome of appropriations battles that were previously lost.

While Keechl has consistently advocated spending cuts to balance the budget, Wexler, Eggelation, Rodstrom and Jacobs hinted empathy with a compromise. In late April, Jacobs insisted that a tax hike "isn't off the table," stating "We are bare bones now. We're talking about the quality of life." Citing improved cost projections for fuel, utilities, insurance and payroll, County Budget Director Kayla Olsen revised the shortfall from \$135 million to \$108.3 million before the June 4th Budget Workshop.

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Sheriff Offers to Close Aging Stockade Jail Facility on Commercial Boulevard

Since March, Fort Lauderdale residents have been following the Broward County budget process with an understandable degree of apprehension. Attempts to close the budget gap created when the Broward Commission decided to freeze last year's millage rate precipitated a civil war within County government. The Broward Sheriff is locked into a political iron man contest with the nine county commissioners over spending cuts. Threats to close local libraries created a state of perpetual apoplectic rage in the affected communities. Bus routes will be closed, children's and senior's programs will be defunded, parks will be open fewer days each week, classes and cultural programs will be cancelled, hospital support programs will be terminated, animal shelters will be closed, hundreds of county employees will be force furloughed and hundreds more will get the boot. However the conflict between the County Commission and the Sheriff plays out, certain jail facilities will be closed and the hit law enforcement will take prompted Sheriff Lamberti to red flag a public safety crisis. Anxious Fort Lauderdale residents, fearing a micro-replay of county events, have been nervously awaiting the new city budget. Would the City raise taxes to stabilize services? If not, would they be forced to close parks or community centers? How many employees would receive pink slips?

On July 17, 2009, when the City Manager released a first draft of the new city budget, city residents who missed the 2003 budget crisis learned why their neighbors who lived through it hold the City Manager in high esteem. The answers to the above concerns are "NO, NO and NONE". Property Taxes will not be increased. In summary, taxpayers will see an average savings of \$162.78 with homestead exemption and \$276.24 without homestead exemption on the City portion of their tax bills. A condominium with homestead exemption would pay an average \$213.10 less in FY 2010 compared to a non-homesteaded condominium, which would pay \$262.60 less on average. The Parks and Community centers will remain open. While the Fire Assessment Fee will be frozen, the average monthly water and sewer bill will increase by \$11.79. Remarkably, not one city employee will lose their job or suffer unpaid furlough days. In fact, general employees will receive \$2,985,216 for their 5% COLA raises and \$2,029,903 for their 7.5% merit raises – as negotiated in last year's contract. Since the Police and Fire-Rescue contract will expire on October 1st, any inflationary impact derived of their upcoming contract negotiations could require some manner of accommodation.

The difference between the FY2009 millage revenues of \$123.4 million and the \$112.1 million projected for the new budget is \$11.3 million or a 9.2% drop in property tax revenues. The City will also lose \$2 million in sales tax and half cent tax revenues, \$2.1 million in permit fees, \$600,000 in State shared revenue and \$1.8 million in lost interest income. Fort Lauderdale will suffer a \$17.5 million loss of key General Fund Revenues. Subtracting the \$288.7 million in anticipated expenses from the \$258.7 million in projected revenue yields a net shortfall of \$30 million.

To offset this gaping deficit, Gretsas' budget team first assembled a cost cutting package amounting to \$20 million. They saved \$3.9 million by freezing 68 already vacant positions, \$500,000 in reduced part-time funding and \$2.6 million in

reduced payroll funding (63 new vacancies that won't be filled). By pressing one more year of service from 71 of the city fleet's vehicles, a reduced Vehicle Purchase Plan (106 instead of 177) will serve up a savings of \$3.3 million. They saved \$300,000 by eliminating non-mandatory travel and conferences, \$3.6 million by retiring debt, \$2.9 million from Pension Reserve draw down (2nd Payment) and \$3.6 million in other operating expenses. The remaining \$10 million budget gap will be plugged from reserves. The budget also assumes receipt of certain other resources. Cameras installed at key intersections will record red light violations for which the vehicle owner will be ticketed by mail, prospectively adding \$1.8 million to city coffers. The bottom line should also be padded with \$900,000 in fleet auction revenues and \$165,000 from confiscation related litigation.

Fort Lauderdale's FY2009 millage rate was 4.1193 (\$4.1193 for every \$1000 in property valuation), a 23-year record low. The millage applied to finance city operations (excluding debt service) in the FY2010 budget is also 4.1193. The millage freeze featured in this budget is not a "technical" tax manipulation as permitted by statute, but the real deal. State law holds that if a jurisdiction collects the same amount of tax revenues as the previous year, they technically did not increase taxes. Of course, if the taxpayer base decreases or property valuations hit the skids, each taxpayer has to pay a higher tax rate – called the rolled-back rate – in order to match the previous year's collected revenues. Using this magical language, a jurisdiction can send every property owner a higher tax bill while cheerfully announcing that they didn't raise taxes! God bless Florida! Incidentally, the new "rolled-back" rate – which was NOT APPLIED – is 4.5995.

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**“Using this magical language, a jurisdiction can send every property owner a higher tax bill while cheerfully announcing that they didn't raise taxes! God bless Florida!”**



While the budget draft is good news for City residents, it represents only 22% of the total tax bill. The other taxing authorities account for almost 80% of the whole nut. The School Board cuts a 38.4% slice and Broward County gets 25.3%. The North Broward Hospital District gobbles 8.8%, the South Florida Water Management District gets 3.2%, Children's Services sees 1.9% and the Florida Inland Navigation District is in for .2%.

The City Manager has traditionally convened annual "Goals and Objectives" presentations to help deliver fiscal updates to the Commissioners, neighborhood associations, civic groups and business associations. The well organized PowerPoint audio-visual extravaganza reviews the City's fiscal and operational evolution from historical and statistical perspectives. Nested in the fiscal history is a plate demonstrating how the City's Reserve Fund evolved since just prior to his arrival. Gretsas' accompanying narrative elucidates "The national standard for a healthy reserve is roughly 5% to 15% of the annual expense budget." The City's Reserve Fund grew from a handful of marbles in 2003 to \$78 million in 2008.

In a testament to irony, a small yet vocal cadre of critics repeatedly reproached the City Manager throughout 2008 for locking away this money, demanding instead that it be used to address certain politically inconvenient operational shortfalls. One critic indignantly proclaimed "The money belongs to the City, not the City Manager," reasoning that Commissioners should be able to use those funds to help out their neighborhoods or pay salaries. Notwithstanding, Gretsas held his ground and repeated what became a mantra "It's inappropriate to use reserve funds for operating expenses, they are emergency funds that are socked away for a rainy day." Because the City Manager weathered the misguided rebukes and stuck to his guns, the City is now able to peel off the \$10 million needed to plug the shortfall and still feature a Reserve Fund that exceeds national standards. When Mayor Jack Seiler was asked about using the Reserve Fund to spare residents a tax increase, he quipped "With this current economic crisis, it's certainly raining."

While Gretsas' budget denizens (Office of Management and Budget staffers) performed much of the heavy lifting in developing the budget, the groundwork had previously been laid by the City Commission. During their first meetings following the March 10th elections, the City Commission froze existing vacancies and current year fiscal expenditures. In early April, Vice Mayor Bruce Roberts explained to the GMCA Advisory Board that the new Commission wouldn't exclude legacy expenses from scrutiny. He said "The current recessionary environment demands that every project and program be reviewed and prioritized. Except for items impacting public safety, everything must be placed on the table." When Mayor Seiler addressed the board, he exclaimed "The key to managing the City's resources in this tough economy is 'Zero-based Budgeting'. By dispensing with any preconceived fiscal assumptions, no expense can be approved without first being justified." He diplomatically added "With all due respect, we can only use budget decisions made by the previous administration as a general guide; we will not approve anything that we don't consider necessary." By first sifting through the voluminous list of prospective expenses and applying a needs-based standard, the Mayor and Commissioners eliminated capricious disbursements, obsolete programs and pork-laden projects before the City Manager began surgically dissecting the remaining liabilities.

Although Broward County and Fort Lauderdale share the objective of freezing the millage rate for the third consecutive year, the County is so enmeshed in conflict that Governor Crist specifically warned the parties against bringing their bloodletting to the State Capitol. While Broward County Government Center has deteriorated into a budget battlefield, in Fort Lauderdale, some municipal wheels will turn at a marginally slower pace and 71 city employees will have to tough out one more year before upgrading to new city vehicles. Despite Mayor Seiler's admonition that residents would "feel these cuts," this budget draft will gratefully be a poor stimulus for local sales of aspirin, Mylanta or Valium.

This is the first draft of the municipal budget. It will be squashed, stretched, seasoned and tenderized over the summer. The City Commission will likely use their September Regular Meeting venue – the first and third Tuesday at the 1st floor Commission Chambers of City Hall (100 N. Andrews Avenue) – to invite public input, criticism and/or accolades. Unless the Public Meeting dates are altered, those of us nursing relevant contributions must wait until September 1st and September 15th at 6 PM. Bring a snack... and perhaps some Tylenol.

Although we clearly owe a debt of gratitude to Mayor Seiler, Vice Mayor Roberts and the other Commissioners, without Gretsas' five-year rehabilitation of the city's fiscal underpinnings, this proposed budget would be a fairy tale and City Hall would be consumed in the same controversy plaguing its Broward counterpart. Inasmuch – thanks, George!

To read the FY2009/FY2010 Draft City Budget, the FY2008/FY2009 Adopted Operating Budget and other relevant data, go to the GMCA web site ([www.galtmile.com](http://www.galtmile.com)), scroll down to and click on the headline "New City Budget is on the Money," then scroll down to Ft Lauderdale budget links. ■

‘Despite Mayor Seiler’s admonition that residents would “feel these cuts,” this budget draft will gratefully be a poor stimulus for local sales of aspirin, Mylanta or Valium.’

In mid-May, Josephus Eggleston insisted that he wouldn't vote for any budget that lays off a county employee. Commissioners had to measure the anticipated backlash from deep service cuts versus raising taxes during a recession.

To protect certain governmental agencies from direct exposure to unhealthy political influence, Constitutional officers are afforded virtual independence from Commission fiscal control. The Supervisor of Elections, the Public Defender, the Broward State Attorney, our Legislative Delegation, the Property Appraiser, the Sheriff's Office, the Clerk of the Courts, etc. are constitutionally immunized to the County Commission's budgetary machinations. While the Property Appraiser and the Supervisor of Elections split about \$30 million, or about 4% of the overall budget, the Broward County Sheriff gets about 50 cents of every dollar collected by the County.

Asked to proportionately shoulder half the \$108 million deficit, Broward Sheriff Al Lamberti offered to lay off 177 employees, close the old stockade jail and end an inmate drug rehabilitation program. While the gesture initially appeared to confirm Lamberti's intention to cooperate, the sheriff's concessions were seeded with poison pills that actually increased costs. The \$722.1 million budget plan submitted by Lamberti exceeds last year's budget. Of the 177 positions Lamberti offered to cut, nearly 77 of them are currently vacant, or filled by secretarial staff, administrative personnel or inexperienced trainees. Since redistributing roughly 430 inmates to Broward's four other facilities will create a state of severe overcrowding, Lamberti expects the Commission to decline his offer to close the 1950s-era, low-security stockade. The resulting unsafe conditions could provoke Federal fines and/or a mandate to build additional facilities - functionally cancelling the \$9.4 million savings. Circuit Court Judge Marcia Beach, who heads the Drug Court Program, called Lamberti's offer to discontinue jailhouse drug treatment "penny wise and pound foolish." Since drug treatment reduces recidi-

vism, it reduces the Sheriff's greatest expense - the size of the inmate population.

Following the June 4th Budget Workshop, Lamberti made clear that he would rather have the money than the Commission's respect. To mollify a vociferous "pro-spending cuts" constituency, Lamberti played his "public safety" card, equating unsafe streets and fires burning out of control with any adulteration of his budget. Dispelling misconceptions about his willingness to play hardball, Lamberti openly engaged in a war of nerves with the all-Democrat Broward Commission, complete with a planned partisan endgame in Republican Tallahassee.

The first stage of Lamberti's strategy was to completely circumvent every commissioner by appealing directly to their constituents and democratic political organizations. Playing verbal ping pong in the media, when Commissioner Ilene Lieberman said, "I would hope he'd understand we're all in this together and that in this time of financial crisis, we all have the same obligation to limit the burden on the taxpayer," the sheriff retorted "Just when people want to feel more safe, the commission's asking me to make them feel less safe." After spreading his message at a June 7th event sponsored by the gay political club Dolphin Democrats, on June 8th, Lamberti attended a community forum sponsored by the Democratic Party's Black Caucus of Broward County, where he admonished the County Commission to tap some of the county's \$232 million in reserves. "They say it's the rainy day fund. Well guess what? It's raining outside," said Lamberti.

Simultaneously, The Sun-Sentinel investigated Commission allegations that the Sheriff doled out 12% raises in a union contract and huge overtime allocations to BSO employees. The newspaper reported that Lamberti spent \$28.7 million last year on overtime and 800 BSO employees - about 15 percent of the 5,664 total - received at least \$10,000 in overtime in 2008. Only 332 of the 7,305 county employees answerable to the County Commission broke \$10,000 in over time.

Continued on page 13

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Launching a retaliatory strike, Lamberti requested records demonstrating overtime statistics in Commission administered county agencies. Compared with Lamberti's \$28.7 million 2008 overtime expenditure, county government paid \$11.9 million for overtime even though the county has almost 1,700 more employees. The average employee working for County Commission-controlled agencies earned \$1,632 in overtime while the average Sheriff's Office employee earned \$5,072. Realizing that his overtime stats reflected poorly on his administrative skills, the Sheriff blamed the disproportionate overtime on the Fire-Rescue unit he inherited from the Commission, who previously froze hiring and promotions for 10 years.

As the June 16th Budget Workshop approached, the Commissioners leaned toward supporting the \$108 million spending reduction. On June 13th, Commissioner Suzanne Gunzburger said, "People are hurting because times are tough and we need to live within our means just like families must do." 7 of 9 commissioners declared that they were not prepared to raise taxes. Four of the nine commissioners that are up for re-election next year are actively dodging a potential backlash over raising tax rates.

To force a decision from Commissioners whose stated public and private preferences were contradictory, County Administrator Bertha Henry formulated an experiment. At the June 16th Budget Workshop, she offered a compromise that entailed raising the millage rate from last year's \$4.89 per \$1,000 in property value to \$5.43 per \$1,000 in value (just shy of the \$5.53 rolled-back rate), cutting \$28.1 million and laying off 81 county employees. Henry's proposal would avoid shutting down libraries and parks as well as substantial reductions to bus routes and social services. The plan went over like a lead balloon.

After warning that the Sheriff may successfully dodge the \$55 million in departmental cuts by soliciting support in Republican

Tallahassee, John Rodstrom demanded that Mayor Stacy Ritter adjourn the agenda and summon Lamberti to the Budget Workshop to discuss cuts. Rodstrom summed up, "We have a sheriff refusing to be here, refusing to negotiate with us and we are put in a really bad position." Commissioner Josephus Eggelton added "This is not a place for the faint-hearted. If you believe we're doomed, then we are." When Mayor Stacy Ritter sent for Lamberti, he declined, exclaiming, "What they (county commissioners) want me to do is to negotiate in front of the cameras and I'm not about to do that."

The 4-hour Workshop ended as it started, with a \$55 million donut hole in the county budget. Visibly angry at having been shunned by Lamberti, Mayor Stacy Ritter said "The sheriff has drawn a line in the sand and he has dared us to cut his budget. He will appeal to the governor and I say go ahead and let him go. He will not like the amount of money we give him and he will appeal to the governor and the Cabinet." Refuting the Sheriff's contention that cutting his budget would cripple public safety, Ritter argued "We have some ideas on how to cut that budget without cutting public safety." She asked why his budget funds an office of recruitment since the sheriff is laying off people and not hiring. To fill the Sheriff's budget entry for a "general purpose message board" costing \$24,000 for law enforcement management, Ritter offered to go to Office Depot to buy a cork board for \$10. She reminds the Sheriff that spending \$28.7 million on overtime is not a prerequisite for public safety.

Following Ritter's post-June 16th Budget Workshop observation that "The discourse with the sheriff has gotten pretty heated, and probably will get more heated as we go through the budget process," Lamberti responded "I disagree that it's gotten heated. I have never disrespected them. I have always been respectful toward them and yet they have called me names."

Continued on page 18



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<b>23</b>  Urban Gourmet Market 1201 E. Las Olas Blvd. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Info.: 954-462-4166	<b>24</b>  Special Magistrate Hearing - WaterWorks 2011 City Hall 10 a.m. Info.: 954-828-5225	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>30</b>  Urban Gourmet Market 1201 E. Las Olas Blvd. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Info.: 954-462-4166	<b>31</b>	<b>1</b> Labor Day	<b>2</b>
<b>6</b> Urban Gourmet Market 1201 E. Las Olas Blvd. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Info.: 954-462-4166  <b>Sunday Jazz Brunch</b> Riverwalk, Downtown FL 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Info.: 954-828-5985	<b>7</b>  Commissioner Bruce Roberts: Pre-Agenda Meeting Cardinal Gibbons High School, Media Room 6 p.m. Info.: 954-828-5033	<b>8</b>  Fort Lauderdale City Commission Meeting City Hall 6 p.m.	<b>9</b>  Broward County Budget Hearing #1 Broward County Governmental Center (Room 422) 5:01 p.m. Info.: 954-357-7350
<b>13</b>  Urban Gourmet Market 1201 E. Las Olas Blvd. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Info.: 954-462-4166	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>





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<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> Jazz on the Square The Village Grille Commercial Blvd. & A1A 7 p.m. Info.: 954-776-5092	<b>22</b>
<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> Jazz on the Square The Village Grille Commercial Blvd. & A1A 7 p.m. Info.: 954-776-5092	<b>29</b>   Jamie Fox BankAtlantic Center Tix.: 954-523-3309
<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> Jazz on the Square The Village Grille Commercial Blvd. & A1A 7 p.m. Info.: 954-776-5092  International Gem and Jewelry Show (Through 9/6) War Memorial Auditorium	<b>5</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> Jazz on the Square The Village Grille Commercial Blvd. & A1A 7 p.m.	<b>12</b>
<b>17</b> Disney on Ice (Through 9/20) BankAtlantic Center Tix.: 954-835-7000  G.M.C.A. Advisory Board Meeting Nick's Italian Restaurant 11 a.m.	<b>18</b> Jazz on the Square The Village Grille Commercial Blvd. & A1A 7 p.m.  Erev Rosh Hashana	<b>19</b>   Aroid Show & Sale (Through 9/20) Fairchild Tropical Garden 9:30 to 4:30 <b>\$5 OFF COUPON:</b> <a href="http://www.fairchild.org">www.fairchild.org</a>

## UPCOMING EVENTS IN OUR AREA

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16th Annual Hollywood Beach Latin Festival  
Beach Theatre & Tyler St, Hollywood  
10 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
Info.: 954-534-3500

September 22  
Broward County Budget Hearing #2  
Broward County Governmental Center (Room 422)  
5:01 p.m.  
Info.: 954-357-7350

September 24  
FIFF Poster Unveiling Party  
Courtyard Marriot - Fort Lauderdale Beach  
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September 26 - 27  
Fort Lauderdale Antiques & Collectors Faire  
War Memorial Auditorium  
Info.: 954-563-6747

October 29 - November 2  
Fort Lauderdale Int'l Boat Show  
Info.: 954-764-7642



# GALT OCEAN MILE READING CENTER

## REMAINS UNDER BUDGET GUN

*Ancillary to the politics surrounding the Broward Budget Controversy, seven local libraries are threatened with impending closure, including the Galt Ocean Mile Reading Center. Despite incorrect local media postings intimating otherwise, the Galt Library is still on the budget block and will remain there until the September 22nd County Budget Meeting, where its fate will finally be decided. (The insertion of a six-month escape clause into the recently executed lease was no accident!) As per Broward Vice Mayor Ken Keechl, who is spearheading the effort to rescue the Center, its future hinges on a supportive community response to the County Commissioners through that final Budget Meeting.*

*Every Association has a Library Petition site where contact info for the nine Broward Commissioners is also available.*

*Please sign the petition and notify the Commissioners of your support for the Galt Ocean Mile Reading Center.*

*Strapped for time? Go to the Galt Mile web site ([www.galtmile.com](http://www.galtmile.com)), scroll down and click on headline "Neighborhood Fights to Save Galt Library". Below the article are contact data and links to each of the Broward County Commissioners including one useful for sending one email to all nine Commission members. That one click and 20 seconds of your time is the cost for continuing to enjoy this precious local resource. (Other links to the article and the Commissioners' contact data are located on the home page right sidebar, just below the weekly Candle Lighting Times link.)*

*Thank you!*

*To read about the controversial Reading Room issue, go to this web address:  
<http://www.galtmile.com/broward.html#galtread>*

*For County Commissioners contact data and email links (including one-click email access to all nine Broward Commissioners), go to this web address:  
<http://www.galtmile.com/broward.html#galtreadaction>*

**FACT:** *Did you know that Galt Mile residents checked out 88,140 items in 2008 – during the course of 124,280 documented resident visits to the Galt Mile Reading Center? The Galt Library is the only dedicated asset we receive in exchange for sending Broward County 26% of our tax dollars!*





# VICE MAYOR KEN KEECHL'S CORNER

*"Broward Commissioner and Vice Mayor Ken Keechl's January 2009 Newsletter illustrated the quandary posed by Broward's deteriorating Courthouse. Characterizing the mold-ridden structure as 'antiquated and in a serious state*

*of disrepair,' Keechl advocated a cost efficient renovation in preference to funding new construction. His recommendation echoed an earlier disclosure to the Galt Mile Community Association Advisory Board while addressing their December 18, 2008 meeting.*

*Intimately familiar with courthouse functionality, our fiscally conservative District 4 Commissioner acknowledged the need to thoroughly investigate the issues surrounding this important and expensive undertaking. As such, he supported Broward Mayor Stacy Ritter's December 8, 2008, resolution creating the "Courthouse Task Force Advisory Committee." True to his policy of documenting our tax dollars' planned itinerary and ultimate destination, Commissioner Keechl's June 2009 Newsletter summarizes the Task Force findings to date.*

*Chaired by Broward Commissioner Ilene Lieberman, the committee officially became the "Broward County Courthouse Task Force" and featured Broward County Public Defender Howard Finkelstein, Clerk of Courts Howard Forman, Lauderdale Commissioner (and former Broward League of Cities President) Margaret Bates, Chief Assistant State Attorney Chuck Morton, Broward County Court Administrator Carol Lee Ortman, 17th Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Vic Tobin, Circuit Court Judge Peter Weinstein and other local illuminati from the legal and business communities. During their January 1, 2009 through June 30, 2009 operational term, the task force met on January 23rd, February 27th, April 3rd and concluded business on June 19th.*

*In "Part I" of his Courthouse Recommendations update, Commissioner Keechl enumerates the alternatives considered by the Task Force, including a renovation of the existing facility, adapting some reasonably proximal commercial space or decentralizing functionality to satellite courthouses. Ultimately, they recommended building a new scaled-down courthouse for approximately \$328 million. After narrowing potential locations to a site on the New River and the site currently occupied by the judicial garage, they opted for the garage site, citing its superior accessibility and connectivity. Expansion enabled by demolition of the West and Central Wings of the existing complex will be easily accommodated by the functionally flexible new structure. Implementing new technology and innovative courtroom design will diminish space and parking requirements – further lowering costs.*

*The Task Force developed some extremely creative financing options that doubtless appeal to our "Blue Dog" Commissioner. Vice Mayor Keechl has consistently been the Broward Commission's primary standard bearer and most vocal advocate for holding the line on taxes via judicious spending cuts and administrative efficiencies. Inasmuch, Commissioner Keechl wraps up his Spring Newsletter with a tickler, advising us to tune in next – for*

*Part II – and learn how the Courthouse can be built without increasing property taxes (... you're going to love this!) Devout skeptics might consider temporarily suspending any "glass eye" cynicism... Keechl has a habit of delivering on his promises. – [editor]"*

## "Broward County Courthouse Task Force Recommendations, Part I"

By Broward County Commissioner and Vice Mayor, Ken Keechl

In previous articles, I have discussed the continuing problems plaguing our Broward County courthouse in downtown Fort Lauderdale. As a result of bursting pipes, increasing mold, broken elevators, security issues, and a chronic shortage of courtrooms and parking, judges, jurors, litigants, and employees are suffering. In fact, the County has recently been sued by several court employees alleging that the courthouse is dangerous and unfit for occupancy.

Recognizing that the current situation is unacceptable, last December the Broward County Commission established a Broward County Courthouse Task Force ("Task Force") to make recommendations to the County Commission "regarding alternatives for financing, development, construction, improvement and other matters" relating to the downtown courthouse. The Task Force recently submitted its Report to the County Commission. I would like to devote this month's article to summarizing its findings regarding the need to build a new Courthouse. And I would like to devote next month's article to discussing financing issues.

Not surprisingly, the Task Force concluded that the current courthouse is in critical condition. All building systems have exceeded their useful lives and in the event of a Hurricane Category 2 or above, the structure will sustain significant damages, if not total destruction. Moreover, the current layout of the building is not conducive to a modern courthouse; there is not enough space for all judicial and court-related activities; and there is no room for expansion.

In contrast to building an entirely new structure, the Task Force considered a renovation of the current courthouse. The Task Force concluded that renovation would not be cost effective. If the County Commission decided to renovate the downtown courthouse instead of building a new structure, the Task Force and its experts believe that the courthouse would need to be totally gutted and the structure would have to be hurricane hardened. Moreover, renovation would inevitably require that the entire building be brought up to the current building code. Lastly, the County would incur additional costs to lease space for employees displaced during the renovations. Obviously, these costs would not be incurred with new construction.

Continued on page 18

The Task Force also evaluated the possibility of acquiring and remodeling an existing office building, such as the 110 Tower. The Task Force and its experts concluded that it would be difficult to achieve courtroom height requirements in a standard office building and it would also be very difficult to achieve adequate separation of the public, inmates, and judges.

The Task Force also looked at the feasibility of moving functions off-site and how to maximize the use of our satellite courthouses. The possibility of moving the downtown courthouse to another location in Broward County was also considered. In the end, the Task Force recommended keeping the main courthouse downtown due to the proximity to the Main Jail; the County's investment in the salvageable East and North Wings of the current downtown courthouse; and the need to continue to provide all judicial services in one location. Moreover, due to land and parking limitations, the West and South satellite courthouses could not be expanded.

In the end, the Task Force recommended that a new scaled-down courthouse should be constructed on the site of the current judicial garage. By building on County-owned land, the overall cost of the project would be lessened.

In the past, the County Commission had suggested building a new courthouse at a cost of approximately \$510 million; the Task Force's new scaled down courthouse would cost approximately \$328 million. Similarly, previous County Commissions envisioned a new courthouse comprising nearly 900,000 square feet; the Task Force's new scaled down courthouse would comprise approximately 675,000 square feet. The Task Force also recommended additional parking to meet existing and future courthouse needs.

Lastly, and importantly, the Task Force also recognized that the funding for any new courthouse should avoid an increase in the property tax burden on Broward's residents.

I have previously acknowledged the need for a new or renovated courthouse. However, I have made it clear that I will not vote to increase the property tax burden on you in the process. Next month's article will look at the feasibility of building a new courthouse without

increasing your property taxes. As always, the devil is in the details.

Until then, my best to you and your families.  
Broward County Commissioner  
and Vice Mayor Ken Keechl  
954 357 7004  
[www.broward.org/kkeechl](http://www.broward.org/kkeechl)

**\*\*PS - For additional information, check the GMCA web site home page ([www.galtmile.com](http://www.galtmile.com)), scroll down and click the headline "Keechl on Courthouse Task Force" for links to the Courthouse members**

**Task Force web site, the original studies considered by its members and the official reports analyzing the data and substantiating their recommendations. - [editor]\*\***



Deteriorating Broward Judicial Complex Due for a Facelift

Broward residents are becoming disgusted with the political burlesque staged daily by their public officials. The Budget process has been supplanted with Schoolyard Theater, with both sides postulating feverishly to undermine the other's credibility. While admittedly fearful of alienating voters, the players seem to share the opinion that budget decisions are too important to be left to the public.

Since the Sheriff can appeal any Commission decision to the Governor and the Florida Cabinet if it affects his budget, the issue will be decided in Tallahassee if the Sheriff so chooses. Given that three of the four Cabinet members are Republicans and three of the four are also candidates for statewide office, it will be a longshot for the nine-Democrat Broward Commission to salvage an apolitical non-partisan decision when pitted against a Republican Sheriff spinning public safety. We recently witnessed how Crist's handlers advise the Governor regarding Public Safety issues when he vetoed the Sprinkler Retrofit Extension Bill (SB 714) - despite its near unanimous passage by the legislature.

The constitutional protections available to the Sheriff were designed to insulate elected county officials from partisan politics. They weren't conceived to disenfranchise the county's residents. Whether provoked by perceived slurs or part of a cleverly devised and executed political plan, the Sheriff's Tallahassee option will deprive Broward taxpayers of input into their own fiscal future. By exporting the decision to the State Capitol, Lamberti can ignore the County Commission, override the preference for spending cuts expressed by the people of Broward County and force a tax increase. Whatever the outcome, Sheriff Lamberti has convincingly shed any component of his public persona reminiscent of Andy of Mayberry. Broward's top law enforcement official has proven politically equal to high-powered BSO predecessors and the Broward Board of County Commissioners. With the cat out of the bag, Lamberti can no longer rely on the element of surprise as the process heads into the summer months. Commissioners will never again display that "Deer caught in the headlights" expression that earmarked countless early June news videos.

The next official venue for undertaking budget issues will be the 1st of two budget meetings, scheduled for 5:01 PM on September 10th in Room 422 at the Broward Governmental Center (115 S. Andrews Avenue in Fort Lauderdale, Florida). The 2nd budget meeting will take place on September 22nd at the same time and location. The new budget's effective date is October 1, 2009.

Until then, it's in the Sheriff's best interests to "burn time." Having stated "There is no line in the sand as far as I'm concerned," Lamberti's play is to keep talking with Commission negotiators while actually agreeing to nothing. Simultaneously, the Sheriff is sharpening the teeth of his questionable exhortation that further cuts to his budget will endanger public safety. After recently addressing 200 angry residents at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center, Lamberti warned how the prospective loss of resources would impact Broward's burgeoning reputation as the "hate crime capital of Florida." In the words of Publisher R. I. Fitzhenry, "Timing, degree and conviction are the three wise men in this life." For additional information about the Broward County Budget Dilemma, including links to the original source material, go to the GMCA web site ([www.galtmile.com](http://www.galtmile.com)), scroll down to and click on "New Battlefield for Broward Budget War." ♦





# GALT MILE NEWS

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