

Ormond Beach residents gathered for a presentation during the OB Life series.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF ORMOND BEACH

FLORIDA CITIZENSHIP AWARD

Strengthening Relationships

The City of Ormond Beach focuses on civic engagement

by **Jenn Elston**
City of Ormond Beach



There was a time when citizen engagement meant simply encouraging residents to walk into city hall to ask questions or file their paperwork. These days, it looks much more robust. Efficient government needs to nurture public discourse, leverage technology to make information-sharing more collaborative and streamlined, and gather opinions that result in actionable goals, not just data collection.

This route is the one taken by the **City of Ormond Beach**. Like many cities in Florida, Ormond Beach faces significant challenges balancing recent growth with the unique small-town charm that attracted many residents to the area. With thriving local and national economies, Ormond Beach recently encountered a planned development project that was seen by many citizens as a threat to this way of life.

As in many Florida cities, land zoned for development in Ormond Beach sat idle during the economic downturn. With a stronger economy, those parcels were now being developed. Although the developments included buffers and conservation areas as required by the city's land development code, residents

driving by simply saw trees coming down to make way for new development. Some residents were even calling for a moratorium on all development and an end to "clear-cutting," and some were rallying fellow residents to vote out all commissioners facing re-election in the fall.

Ormond Beach has a long history of community workshops where citizens were invited to give their input and share their goals and aspirations for the city. These "community conversations" were an important part in developing Ormond Beach's strategic plan every year, but it became clear to city officials that even greater

community engagement was needed in light of these concerns. The effort would need to be innovative, personal, reflective of what residents and businesses saw as important and demonstrate clearly the city's role in listening to its residents and creating active dialogue.

The **City Commission** asked staff to update the "community conversations" format with increased communication, transparency and engagement in preparation for the next strategic



plan scheduled in spring 2019. The goal was to fully engage the community, on multiple levels, to help determine the future of the City of Ormond Beach. The result was The OB Life initiative.

Staff recommended a series of six community engagement meetings, with a follow-up report to the community. Based on community feedback, a theme for each meeting would center on a community issue, such as community and economic development, transportation, environment, public safety or leisure services.

Each meeting would include presentations by subject matter experts, group discussions at round tables, opportunities to submit questions verbally and in writing, as well as interactive polling questions.

Ormond Beach wanted as many voices as possible to shape future strategic plans for the city so that all participants knew their voices were being heard and valued. Invitations to these meetings were distributed through all available city lists (parks, city manager updates, police academy attendees, business contacts, etc.). Other publicity included flyers sent through the utility billing system, personal letters from **Mayor Bill Partington**, staff phone calls to neighborhood and business leaders, special signage in high-traffic areas, support from local and regional news outlets, and ads placed in key publications.

As a result of these efforts, there were 650 total attendees over the six meetings. More than 700 questions were received online and at meetings. Responses to every question were posted on the city’s website along with the agenda, presentations, polling questions and responses, and meeting summaries for each meeting,

plus a video of the meeting. At the last meeting, residents gave The OB Life initiative a 4.3 rating out of 5, signaling a positive experience from those in attendance, and the city’s Facebook page saw a 23 percent increase in “likes” and “followers.” All incumbents for office were re-elected in November 2018.

The new website platform, OpenGov, is now used regularly by Ormond Beach to provide information and garner citizen input, with recent surveys on subjects such as recycling and a water quality initiative. At the wrap-up meeting for The OB Life, the city also debuted a financial transparency tool that citizens can use to have full access to a searchable database of all expenditures and revenues of the city.

At the wrap-up meeting, Partington shared a binder with 500 pages of information gathered through The OB Life. “This is the voice of the people,” he said, pledging its impact on the Strategic Plan.

The OB Life has redefined how Ormond Beach communicates with its residents to a multi-modal approach of in-person and online platforms, with an emphasis on in-depth, interactive communication. An editorial in *The Daytona Beach News-Journal* summarized the outcome of The OB Life by saying, “These sessions don’t cost much, but the information they produce is valuable – and the power generated when hundreds of residents come together to focus on the future can be priceless.”

Jenn Elston is public information officer for the City of Ormond Beach. 



The OB Life kickoff meeting.



The City of Ormond Beach is presented with the Florida Citizenship Award.



During an OB Life meeting, a resident speaks with Mayor Bill Partington (center) and Economic Development Director Brian Rademacher (right).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF ORMOND BEACH

The Modern Movement Dance Group from the Pembroke Pines Charter School West Campus performed at the “Raising Positive Children Parenting on Purpose” forum.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF PEMBROKE PINES

CITY SPIRIT AWARD

Raising Positive Children

Pembroke Pines targets solutions for youth challenges

by Marianne Wohlert
City of Pembroke Pines



PEMBROKE PINES
Broward County
Pop. 165,352

The **City of Pembroke Pines** has a mission: to address and find solutions for critical issues, such as cyberbullying, youth suicide, depression, stress, peer pressure and digital addiction, that are affecting youth and their families. The mission began several years ago with the creation of an Education Roundtable that included Pembroke Pines school principals and city staff members. The roundtable was led by **Pembroke Pines Commissioner Iris A. Siple** and **Principal Michael Castellano, Pembroke Pines Charter School – West Campus**.

At the roundtable, participants shared ideas on how to best help students and families tackle some very serious issues. These meetings resulted in the creation of a Raising Positive Children forum, which then became an ongoing series of forums. Parents, grandparents, guardians, educators, youth advocates and school-age children were invited to the forums to learn more and find solutions.

Life has changed in recent years, Siple said. “We didn’t have issues like cyberbullying or the rise in youth suicides like we do today.” There are correlations between those issues, she said. “It’s important that we don’t sweep these issues under a rug but rather bring them out into the light so changes can be made.”

Four forums have taken place, and thousands have attended. Invitations to attend were sent through the Pembroke Pines schools, social media and the city’s website. Feedback from parents who have attended has been overwhelmingly positive. They have described the forums as “extremely

valuable” and “insightful.”

As part of the forum series, local organizations and agencies such as United Way, Broward 211 and Florida Initiative for Suicide Prevention were available on-site to talk to parents, share resources and distribute helpful information. Members of the Pembroke Pines Fire Rescue and Police were also on one



of the panels as first responders who deal with the tragedies that result from the problems youth face.

“When a student in our city committed suicide, all of our hearts sank, and I think the realization that today’s youth really are living through a mental health crisis hit home,” Castellano said. “We don’t want another life lost, and so we are doing all in our power to help educate and provide the critical resources needed to prevent further tragedies.”

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, more than four million children suffer from anxiety, and one in five teens struggles with depression. The organization names suicide as the third most prevalent cause of death among people ages 10-24.

Each guest speaker at a Raising Positive Children forum has brought a unique perspective.

Scott Poland, Ed.D., a professor in the College of Psychology and co-director of the Suicide and Violence Prevention Office at Nova Southeastern University, explained common factors in youth suicide. He offered insight into how parents, school leaders and members of the community can be aware of clear warning signs that could help save a life.

Bob Barnes, Ph.D., the author of 10 books about families and CEO of Sheridan House Family Ministries, focused on “parenting on purpose.” Barnes addressed family dynamics, setting boundaries and creating meaningful and positive relationships between parents and their children.

At another forum, school principals and students shared their perspectives about what is really happening in schools, which issues are not necessarily in the headlines and what solutions are needed.

“These forums open the door for parents, grandparents, educators and all concerned to share, learn and know that they are not alone in dealing with serious issues,” Siple said. “If we save just one life through what we are doing, it is all worthwhile.” Future forums are planned with nationally recognized guest speakers and local panelists.

In a collaborative effort with the Raising Positive Children forums, the City of Pembroke Pines created a special section on the city website that provides mental health resources for youth and families. The resources can be located at ppines.com under “Living in Pines.”

As the city’s focus on helping youth with mental health and various other issues continues, the Florida Board of Education recently announced that all public schools in the state will be required to teach at least five hours of mental health classes annually beginning with students in sixth grade. The classes will help students identify signs and symptoms of mental illness, find resources if they are struggling with depression or other issues, and learn how to help peers who may need help.

“Each step being done to help our youth is a step in the right direction,” said Castellano. “They are our future and deserve to grow and thrive. I’m very proud that our city takes these issues seriously and is proactively helping our community.”

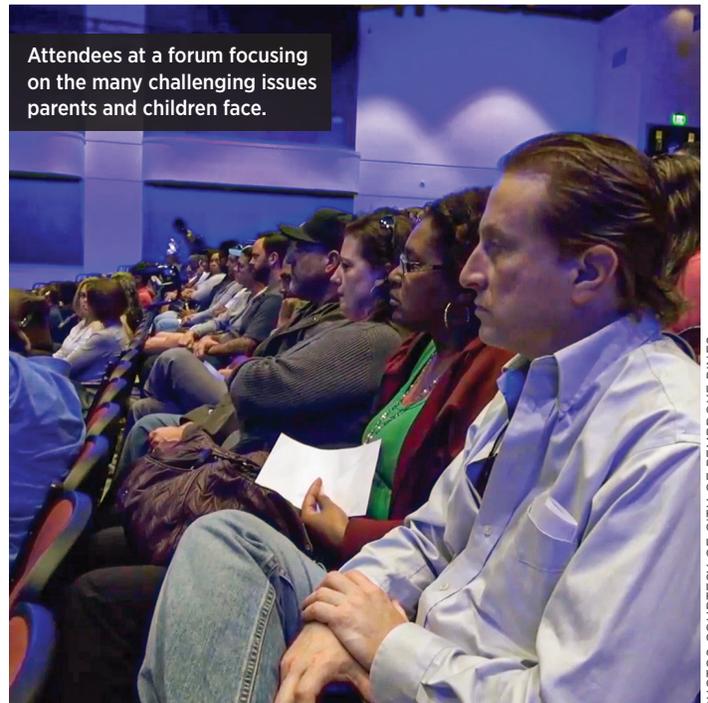
Marianne Wohlert is director of the Office of Communications for the City of Pembroke Pines. 



The City of Pembroke Pines is presented with the City Spirit Award.



Commissioner Iris A. Siple and Principal Michael Castellano speak to the “Raising Positive Children” forum audience.



Attendees at a forum focusing on the many challenging issues parents and children face.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF PEMBROKE PINES



SANIBEL COMMUNITIES
for CLEAN WATER

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Together, we can

BE THE DIFFERENCE

for Sanibel's
water and wildlife.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Sanibel Communities For Clean Water Program

An integral step for improving water quality

by Dana Dettmar
City of Sanibel



Stormwater runoff from urban landscapes is a major source of nutrients contributing to algae blooms and water quality impairments in Florida. Poor water quality not only impacts wildlife habitat and the quality of life for island residents, but it directly impacts Sanibel's local economy by reducing property values and the overall experience of visitors to the island. As a result, protecting Sanibel's water quality is of paramount concern to the City of Sanibel.

Sanibel has taken multiple measures to improve water quality throughout the island: acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands, mangrove protection, native plant protection and sod limitations, beach and dune protection, conversion from septic to central sewer, responsible development through reductions in impervious surfaces and onsite stormwater management, implementation of the National Pollutant and Discharge Elimination System program, islandwide

water quality monitoring, adoption of an urban fertilizer ordinance, and nutrient and lake management recommendations for golf courses.

Unfortunately, even with these remediation efforts, the city's Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (2017) showed a large majority of bodies of water in private communities and on public lands did not meet state water quality standards for nutrients. Sampling results of 72 waterbodies indicated 89 percent were impaired for total nitrogen, 89 percent were impaired for total phosphorus and 96 percent had Trophic State Index (TSI) scores that were eutrophic (nutrient-enriched) to hyper-eutrophic. The city determined it was necessary to take further steps to improve on-island water quality. In June 2017, the city launched the Sanibel Communities for Clean Water (SCCW) program.

The program ranked each sampling site (1-72) based on inorganic nitrogen, inorganic phosphorus, chlorophyll a concentrations and TSI scores, with the lowest scoring site (1) having the overall poorest water quality. The sampling results and data collected were integrated into an interactive website (*sanibelcleanwater.org*). Each community has a dedicated webpage where residents can view their community's water quality and ranking, and compare their water quality to other bodies of water on Sanibel Island and to the state standards.

Residents can also view the top five best management practices (BMPs) that are tailored to the needs of their community. In addition to the community pages, visitors to the site can learn more about BMPs on the "Solutions" page and find more in-depth information about BMPs on the "Resources" page. Website visitors can sign up to receive the latest news and receive alerts (e.g. algae blooms, fish kills, etc.) for their community.

This unique program allows residents to examine their role in protecting water quality and learn actions they can take in their own backyards. Through education and outreach, the city hopes to encourage homeowners to voluntarily implement BMPs to improve water quality.

Since the program's launch, the city has promoted the program with individuals and homeowners associations and provided technical assistance and guidance on appropriate BMPs for their community. The subdivision of single-family homes



known as Heron's Landing had the most impaired water quality based on the 2016 rankings. The lake is located adjacent to the discharge lagoons of a former wastewater package plant. The plant was decommissioned in 2008, but a high concentration of legacy nutrients is still in the soil and continues to plague the lake. The Heron's Landing lake has little to no dissolved oxygen, which makes it devoid of aquatic life. The oxygen-deprived environment promotes sulfur bacteria blooms that produce a rotten egg smell.

Homeowners from Heron's Landing approached the city and the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation for assistance in developing a lake management plan. The plan includes objectives to help achieve the homeowners' water quality goals, identifies potential BMPs and establishes performance measures for evaluating the success of the BMPs.

After determining that the first step in remediation would be to improve the dissolved oxygen concentrations, the city and the concerned homeowners are partnering on two pilot projects. First, an aeration system was installed in the lake and will determine the number of diffusers needed to thoroughly oxygenate the system. A second pilot project will involve the use of an adsorption media to remove nutrients from the column of water that runs from the surface to the bottom sediment.

The city continues to update the water quality data and add new features to the SCCW program. Sampling and re-evaluating rankings is conducted biennially, allowing residents to track water quality trends and assess if BMP implementations are having a positive effect on water quality.

In a time when water quality is a chief concern, small-scale community efforts are just as important as statewide efforts. The undertakings of individual communities can collectively add up to improvements that are far-reaching. The SCCW program shines a light on the individual's role and necessary tools, and it is an integral step in improving water quality on Sanibel.

Dana Dettmar is the environmental specialist for the City of Sanibel.

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The City of Sanibel is presented with the Environmental Stewardship Award.

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