



Islamorada, Village of Islands

Village Manager's Weekly Update *December 20, 2024*

Year in Review

As the year draws to a close and we embrace the festive spirit of the holiday season, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the journey we've shared together in our Village. This has been a year of progress, challenges, and triumphs, and it is with great pride that I look back on all we have accomplished as a municipal organization and community.

A Snapshot of Completed Projects

While it is nearly impossible to recognize all the amazing projects and initiatives that our staff have completed this year, I'll take this opportunity to highlight a few.

Founders Park Splashpad

Our Parks and Recreation team secured grant funding to resurface the splash pad at Founders Park. The pad's new non-porous rubber surface, repainted features, and lounge chairs have created a safe and visually appealing environment.

Solar Fixtures

Collaborating with Parks and Recreation, our Public Works team worked diligently to replace the solar light fixtures around Founders Park and Village Hall. This project included the installation of 77 state-of-the-art LED light fixtures, working towards our overall commitment to sustainability and enhanced safety for all.

Breakwater Restoration

This fully grant-funded project at Founders Park ensures that the marina is better protected from some of the anticipated impacts associated with climate change, including the increased frequency and severity of weather events, storm surge, sea level rise, and erosion. The breakwater stayed within the existing footprint and is currently closed to the public while we monitor mangrove restoration along its borders.

Public Safety Enhancements

Islamorada Fire Rescue has worked diligently to integrate new technologies to support enhanced public safety, including continuity of operations during major weather events and recovery thereafter. Ranging from the purchase of electric vehicle (EV) blankets to such projects as

launching a new Marine Emergency Response Team, and efforts to provide ample, protected generator capacity to support post-storm recovery operations, the team has not only handled day-to-day life safety activities, but also continues to build expertise and capacity to be more prepared and effective in executing on their public safety mission.

Helping Make Flood Data More Accessible

Our Building Department has implemented new software to increase public access to FEMA flood data by implementing a new software program, Forerunner. The software allows Islamorada to store all FEMA flood data in *one location*. Each property in our community has a unique public profile that can be used by homeowners, contractors, insurance agents, realtors, and others to review the property's available flood data. Forerunner enables applicants to search for a property on the homepage by address to determine its Flood Zone, Base Flood Elevation (BFE), and Design Flood Elevation (DFE), as well as view related documents, such as an elevation certificate, flood compliance-related warnings, and more.

Improving our Cybersecurity Posture

The cybersecurity threat landscape is ever-evolving and our cybersecurity posture – how we defend against threats, manage attacks, and plan for recovery – has grown increasingly important through the years. Our IT team is at the forefront of using the most cost-effective measures for keeping our data and systems safe. Recently, we underwent an email migration project to facilitate cybersecurity, operational, and fiscal stewardship goals.

Planning for the Future

- *Watershed Management Plan.* The Watershed Management Plan, completed this year, was spearheaded by the Building department, and will allow staff to characterize exposure and risk, build datasets, and improve our participation in FEMA's Community Rating System (CRS) program. The Plan is also a prerequisite for a Class 4 rating in CRS, which will provide 30% premium reductions to NFIP policy holders throughout the Village.
- *Comprehensive Plan.* The enormously important update to our Comprehensive Plan will be underway this year and will feature abundant and varied public engagement opportunities. As this document forms the foundation for our land development regulations and provides the underlying justification for the public policies we develop and public investments we make, it is critical that we cultivate broad public participation. The benefits or impacts of our decisions made during the process will influence all dimensions of Islamorada life for many years to come. There was a staff kickoff meeting recently to provide input into the anticipated schedule, including discussion about how to maximize public participation. Look for more information and opportunities to participate – we'll be sure to put in extra effort to keep everyone informed and engaged.
- *Stormwater Master Plan.* We are gearing up to initiate and complete the Stormwater Master Plan in 2025, with the predatory work having been completed this year. This Plan

will identify and help prioritize investments necessary to address existing stormwater problems and also suggest projects or initiatives to avoid or minimize exposure to anticipated future conditions.

- *Climate Vulnerability Assessment.* This report was completed in 2024 and constitutes a comprehensive analysis of Islamorada's critical assets run through scenarios of flooding and flood events, including compound flooding events (sea level rise, rainfall events, tidal flooding). The report highlights the gravity of climate change's embrace on our coastal village, and the pivotal strides we are making towards resilience. Please take time to [review the report](#), if you have not already.
- *Founders Park Master Plan.* The Parks department continues to seek input into the ongoing effort to produce the [Founders Park Master Plan](#). Focus group meetings were conducted earlier this year with residents, youth sports, and community organizations to obtain feedback. Surveys have already been mailed to randomly selected households as part of a statistically valid sampling. Additionally, the survey will be made available online in mid-January for all interested parties to participate. Upon completion in 2025, the plan will be presented to the Village Council during a public meeting for final adoption.

Organization Effectiveness and Continuous Improvement

Public faith and trust in government rests on a foundation of transparent, ethical, and accountable governance. Maintaining legal and procedural compliance, embracing and promoting municipal best practices, and honoring our organizational and community values are essential commitments that our staff have been encouraged to embrace and reflect in executing their many public service roles and responsibilities. Included below are examples of our efforts to cultivate organizational excellence and public trust and confidence in this regard.

- *Enhanced public records access.* The Clerk's Office implemented JustFOIA public records request software, which has empowered staff to complete public records requests within an average of three days, with over 500 requests completed to-date.
- *Village Council Candidate and Councilmember Orientations.* Helping to prepare new elected officials to step into their important new role is important to their future success and enables more effective and efficient public meetings. The Clerk's Office led our effort this year, thereby supporting the intended purpose while also helping to educate interested members of the public about community leadership roles and responsibilities.
- *Enhanced Budget Process and Presentation.* Our Finance team made great strides during the FY 2024-25 budget process to enable improved understanding of our needs, the specific trade-offs involved in reducing the budget, and the financial implications of our choices from a taxpayer's perspective. Ultimately, our team is pursuing a Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association. Achieving this recognition will require that we meet a series of [rigorous best practice standards](#).

- *Personnel Policy Manual Update.* As time progresses, an organization’s personnel manual sometimes fails to keep pace in each of the areas that it should. Recognizing the opportunity to improve our suite of personnel policies, the Human Resources Department is undertaking a comprehensive review and update of our manual to make sure that any gaps in our current portfolio of policies and procedures are closed and that any dated content receives appropriate update to be responsive to the dynamic employment landscape and current best practices. All revisions to the Employee Manual are subject to Village Council review and approval at a public meeting, of course.

Valuing and Engaging our Team

- Our employees are tremendous assets and tapping into their individual and collective knowledge and experience to effectuate positive changes can help improve employee morale, realize operational and service delivery gains, and help establish and maintain a culture of continuous improvement and sound fiscal stewardship. To that end, new employee teams were organized in 2024 and will begin pursuing their associated missions in 2025 and beyond. I owe a debt of gratitude to each employee having volunteered to participate on one of our new employee teams in service to the Islamorada community. The teams are:
 - **Safety Committee.** A Safety Committee has been established to recommend improvements to workplace safety programs and to identify corrective measures needed to eliminate or control recognized safety and health hazards. The Safety Committee consists of one representative from each department/division, the Safety Coordinator, and the Alternate Coordinator.
 - **Employee Experience Team.** Employee engagement is a measure of how invested and passionate employees are about their work. Engaged employees are more productive, committed, and contribute positively to the culture. The team will focus on developing pathways for managing engagement initiatives, fun activities, and perhaps surveys seeking feedback and suggestions for enhancing and maintaining the quality of employee experiences working for the Village.
 - **Process Improvement Team.** Process improvement employs quality assurance tools and techniques for identifying, understanding, and effectively addressing organizational challenges, targeting improved outcomes spanning many areas of organizational excellence, including such examples as fiscal stewardship, service delivery, and others. The team is charged with identifying and assisting in implementing and monitoring both practical and innovative responses to capture such benefits. We will also consider pathways for rewarding employee success in achieving verifiable savings arising from recommended enhancements being implemented.

- This year involved some difficult, yet important, discussions focused on making sure that employee benefits are properly authorized and documented in our policies and procedures, and that the requirements established in such compliance documents are adhered to. During that process, we also found a long-standing need exists to examine employee compensation and benefits from a competitive landscape perspective. As all forms of Florida Keys enterprises are keenly aware, attracting and retaining quality employment candidates is challenging; many of the Village's recruitment efforts have been delayed by efforts to expand our reach in that regard.

To be sure that our benefits and compensation remain competitive, enabling us to successfully retain our excellent staff and recruit new qualified personnel, a compensation and benefits study is now underway; it will be completed over the coming months. The effort will research any internal or external pay inequities, create clear and concise career paths, and help to address any recruitment and retention needs. Any wage or benefit adjustments recommended would be subject to Village Council consideration at a public meeting, of course.

- *Staff Development and Performance Appraisals.* Initial work has been completed in 2024 to develop and launch a formal system. Being launched in 2025, the effort will include necessary training to ensure consistent methods and practices, as well as be informed by alignment with our mission, vision, and values. Employee efforts linked to the outcomes cultivated within their respective areas or responsibility and sphere of influence will be recognized and rewarded, and opportunities for professional development will continue to be supported.

Moving on to Other Topics – Toys for Keys Kids Success

The Toys for Keys Kids toy drive was an overwhelming success. Thanks to community efforts, our team was able to collect over 2,000 gifts for kids in need. Unwrapped presents were sorted by staff and distributed based on community requested to Plantation Key School, the Children's Shelter, Island Child Care, and Burton Memorial Church.

Special thanks to Mayor Sharon Mahoney, Chief Terry Abel, Assistant Chief Jason Lyman, and all our fire personnel for helping with the collection and sorting of gifts for children across the Upper Keys.

Emergency Medical Services Compliance Monitoring

As part of safety measures, the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) Emergency Medical Services team undergoes compliance monitoring with fire departments to ensure proper protocols are being followed. Earlier this month, our fire department underwent an inspection by FDOH in which they received outstanding accolades. No deficiencies were reported by FDOH and our department was deemed "a role model of excellence as an EMS provider in the state."

Special thanks to Assistant Fire Chief Jason Lyman for his work and ensuring our community receives the highest level of service available.



Staff Participate in 16th Annual Climate Leadership Summit

The 16th Annual Climate Leadership Summit, organized by the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact and hosted by Monroe County, is a key regional gathering aimed at exchanging knowledge, highlighting climate initiatives, involving leaders from various sectors, and fostering the necessary collaboration to address the climate crisis on a large scale.

During the Florida Keys Municipal Collaborative session, panelists gave a collaborative update on efforts across the Keys. Panelists included representatives from Monroe County, the City of Layton, the City of Key Colony Beach, the City of Marathon, and our own Sustainability and Resiliency Coordinator, Alyssa Panzer. The group discussed their sustainability efforts, including statutorily compliant vulnerability assessments, grant application for a multi-jurisdictional adaptation plan, completing mobile LIDAR elevation data collection and incorporating it in a roads vulnerability analysis and adaptation plan, and awaiting results of a collaborative grant application for electric vehicle charging stations along US 1 (including 2 proposed locations in Islamorada). We're all on this road together!

You can learn more about the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact [here](#). Established in 2009, the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact is a partnership between Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties to work collaboratively to reduce regional greenhouse gas emissions, implement adaptation strategies, and build climate resilience across the Southeast Florida region.

Island Disposal Changes in Service – December Holidays

Attention residents, there will be no waste services on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Please note adjustments to scheduled pick-ups on our [website](#). For more information, please call Island Disposal at 305-393-3300.

Village Facility Hours – December Holidays

Please note, Village facility hours will be adjusted during the holiday season. A full schedule can be found on our [website](#).

As we celebrate the holidays with family and friends, it's a time to also celebrate the sense of unity and pride that makes our village a wonderful place to call home. Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to another year of growth and shared success. Wishing you all a joyful holiday season and a prosperous New Year!