



**2019 State of the Town
Presented by Mayor Kathy Stark**

Welcome

Introductions

Why are we doing a State of the Town

This is an opportunity to update you on what we are currently doing here in town and more importantly to discuss the process for the vision and strategy that we have for our future. I recognize that you may already be aware of some of this information, so I thank you for being patient if that is the case.

Summary

Oakland has a colorful and long history. Railroad Town, shipping point for vegetables and later citrus, early leading community in Orange County, home of magnificent Oak trees, a Tree City USA, community between the lakes, friend of the environment, home to scenic byways, historical – these are all descriptors of this quaint community. While Oakland has grown and is growing, it is important to us to maintain our identity and preserve our history while serving our residents.

Background

Oakland operates with a Commission/Manager form of government through a Charter approved by the residents via a referendum. The Charter provides the rules by which the Town is operated and can only be changed by an election. The Commission is composed of a Mayor and four Commissioners who serve four-year staggered terms. The Commission sets policy, approves budgets and major contracts and employs a Town Manager. The Town Manager is tasked with presenting the Commission with these policies, budgets and audits and has authority to employ staff and conduct the Town's business. All of this is by Charter. All meetings are governed by Florida Sunshine laws and are open to the public. All agendas and minutes of the meetings are posted on the town website and notice of meetings are posted at the post office.

The commission is required to take four hours of ethics training each year and must file financial disclosures with the state every year.

Historically, besides general governmental functions – police, planning, maintenance, etc.- the Town operates one utility which is water. We contract with Orange County for fire services and Clermont for wastewater.

For approximately the past 15 years, the Town has owned and operated a K-5 elementary school with approximately

530 students. Unlike Orange County Schools our attendance is capped, and the school is not over-crowded. Entry to the Charter school is by lottery with preference given to Oakland resident students first. Even with the projected growth we should have enough capacity to ensure Oakland families who want their children to attend the Charter School will have the opportunity. The school is chartered through Orange County Public Schools and funded by the state.

Our vision for the town is to serve the citizens of Oakland with a government that provides a high level of service while keeping our identity as Oakland – a place where we maintain and preserve natural beauty and history while being friendly and respectful of each other. Careful and pragmatic growth that fits into the fabric of our town and a prudent fiscal approach. We want to mix modern, 21st Century techniques with old-fashioned neighborly communication and involvement.

With the above in mind we have set out to provide improvements and infrastructure as needed for the town.

Accomplishments

Healthy West Orange Arts and Heritage Center at Oakland

We received a \$225,000 matching grant from Orange County's Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs and recently a 1-million-dollar grant from the West Orange Healthcare District for construction of this building. In

addition, we have received donations from generous businesses and residents, including the Ramos family. Orange County Parks and Recreation is contributing \$182,000 for public restrooms that Orange County will maintain and are adjacent to the Center. In addition to the historical exhibits, arts, music and health programs there is space for concessions. Construction will be complete early next year, and the building is coming along nicely, and we are very much looking forward to the grand opening.

Communication

The town maintains a website at oaklandfl.gov. You can sign up for auto alerts by going to the Notify Me area on the website. The town also maintains an official FB page titled Town of Oakland. Any other FB pages are not supported by the town and will not be responded to. We encourage residents to reach out to us on either one of our official sites, by phone or just swing by Town Hall. We welcome the opportunity to answer your questions and address any concerns you may have.

All public meetings and agendas are posted five days in advance on the website and at the post office. Commission meetings are held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at 7pm. We welcome your participation in these meetings.

Habitat for Humanity

We currently have 15 Habitat for Humanity homes in the Town of Oakland.

Home at Last

We are the proud home to all eight Home at Last homes for wounded war veterans.

Oakland Nature Preserve

I believe this is one of the finest legacies we will leave to generations to come.

We continue to provide programming that links science education between the Charter School and the Nature Preserve on Wednesdays that began originally as a pilot project with the Florida Department of Education. This has resulted in greatly improved student testing scores in science as well as knowledge of environmental education for our teachers. ONP's Summer Camp program is thriving and its educational programs to other schools and groups is increasing. Environmental Tours and Presentations have grown, and a Kayaking Experience on Lake Apopka and other local water bodies has been instituted.

Recently approximately 25 acres have been added to the preserve on the Hull Island side. A small park has also been added with a dock and the preserve will eventually add this area onto the ONP Red Trail.

Our visitor numbers are steadily increasing every year!

Heritage Day is October 26th in Speer Park with all proceeds going to the Preserve, come out and join us for this event that has been taking place for 22 years.

Police

We continue to provide the Oakland Partners program, which is designed to ensure contact each day between the PD and those residents who sign up. If the PD doesn't hear from the resident by noon, they call them. If there is no answer, the PD responds to their residence to check on them. There is no cost to the participating residents. This is a great example of our small-town character.

The Police department also performs vacation house checks for residents when are away from home. Just like Oakland Partners, you can sign up to have this done on the town web site or at the police department.

Last year the police department held their 8th annual Christmas toy drive, collecting hundreds of toys, which were distributed to families in need. Toys are being collected for this year's drive and can be dropped off at the Police Station or Town Hall.

Our officers provide proactive patrol on every street in town at least twice per day. As mandated, we have a police resource officer assigned to the school.

The town continues to enjoy one of the lowest numbers of criminal incidents in our area.

Budget

As matter of law our budgets must be balanced every year and are also audited yearly for compliance, accuracy and approved financial processes both in town and at the school.

Our Budgeting process increasingly requires rigorous involvement of Department Heads in development and monitoring to insure maximum efficiency and positive impact to citizens.

We have an 'enterprise fund' approach for our rental facilities to provide their maintenance and operation through funds from rental revenues rather than from the Town General Fund. This applies to the Town Meeting Hall, Post Office, Historic Town Hall, Parks and the Oakland Nature Preserve Environmental Education Center and soon the Healthy West Orange Arts and Heritage Center.

Our current budget just approved in September included a reduction in the ad valorem tax rate for the second year to 6.50 mils. This is part of our continuing commitment to lower the ad valorem rates year over year.

Additionally, we are very proud to say that all our full-time employees are paid a minimum \$15.00 per hour effective with this budget.

Oakland Avenue Charter School

We pride ourselves in operating a school that is progressive and offers parents an alternative to public or private schools. In addition to adding a school resource officer we have also hardened school security. As I mentioned before, resident Oakland students are given priority in school lottery for student placement and we have forecasted capacity for Oakland resident student into the future.

The year launched on August 11, 2019 with enrollment of 538 and a very healthy wait list. Our staff welcomed in several new teachers this year that have already added tremendous value both academically and culturally to our community.

Our PTO welcomed in a new President this year, Kacie Hough along with a few new board members. Over the past 9 years PTO has contributed \$201,914.23 back to OACS, which is an average of OVER \$22,000 per year! This is in addition to \$12,000 - \$15,000 per year given back to the teachers/staff through various teacher appreciation initiatives and classroom supply support gifts. Last year, the PTO helped raise over \$40,000 between our fall and spring

fundraisers and our 1st Annual Gala. The \$40,000 was used to purchase new playground equipment.

OACS continues to strive for high academics while embracing the idea of community. For the past 3 years, every grade level has participated in a community outreach project that has benefited a community partner in some way. In addition, OACS hosts a non-uniform day each month in which students bring \$1.00 to wear non-uniform attire. This donation supports a different cause each month. Last year, we gave close to \$2,000 to organizations such as St. Jude's, Susan. B Komen, Police Unity Tour, Autism Speaks, and Oakland Nature Preserve to name a few. OACS collected for UNICEF as well as raised over \$7,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Organization.

OACS supports the sense of community through character education with our guidance counselor and the creation of our NEST program. Our NEST program is a house system, inspired by the Harry Potter Series, where our school is divided up into four houses we call "NESTs." Each of our NESTs are made up of a class (or two) from every grade level. This structure allows for student to engage positively with students in other grades. Classes are assigned to a NEST through our Hatching Ceremony. Each classroom's EGG incubates a few days before hatching to reveal the nest they have been assigned. Our four NESTs are titled

Integrity, Perseverance, Trustworthiness, and Generosity.

The students in each NEST earn points for positive behavior that collectively add up to earn special recognitions for their NEST. This year, our NESTs will be doing community outreach together versus by grade level.

In July, OACS learned it received a school grade of a B. We earned 60% of the total possible points; 62% would have earned OACS an A.

Infrastructure – Hardware and Software and Utilities

Infrastructure of various kinds is necessary to ensure that operations and services are provided as required to meet citizen and customer needs. These provide direct services to residents and include:

Water

This year the town upgraded our water system to allow for more efficient billing processes that include a post card bill or electronic delivery.

Conservation of our drinking water supply is extremely important to us. In the past few years the Town has taken several measures that will further conserve this precious resource. We enacted a tiered water rate structure in an effort to reduce wasteful practices. We have provided educational material to our customers through direct mailings, public events, and our website. But I believe the

biggest “bang” in conserving our drinking water is yet to come. Right now, we have also taken the first steps for developing alternative sources of irrigation with more to come on that in the next 2-3 years.

Wastewater/ Economic Development/Growth

The state requires that we have a comprehensive plan filed with them and any changes to property use must be approved at the state level. We are also required to provide for different land uses within the town. These uses must all be compatible with the overall plan.

Growth is inevitable and we knew that without wastewater on HWY 50 we would never attract the kinds of businesses that would be desirable, and we would in fact attract businesses that would not fit into Oakland’s identity without a wastewater system. Wastewater is better for the environment and we strongly believe that this will be a mandate by the state in the future, and most mandates from the state are unfunded. With this in mind, we:

- Conducted visioning sessions with Oakland residents for feedback on a vision of HWY 50; five major development sites were identified with proposed and compatible land uses for each area.
- Crafted and passed design district ordinances to support the vision.

- Updated both the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Code to ensure quality development.
- An opportunity study has been commissioned and is almost complete. This study will give us better direction on developmental opportunities on Hwy 50.
- Secured \$2,350,000.00 in funding from the State legislature to assist in constructing the main lift station and force main. We will continue to pursue funding from the state this year. Our request for the upcoming legislative session has already been introduced with a request for 1 million dollars and is HB 2291.
- Wastewater is required for all new building and we now have more than 200 new wastewater customers on the system.
- We have received a CDBG grant of \$600,000 for wastewater to 46 homes in Oakland. There will be more information to come on this project next year as it is put in place.
- Conducted a mobility study for transportation, particularly in the SR 50 corridor, to ensure maintenance of levels of service with development. As part of this study we committed to maintaining Oakland Ave as a scenic byway. There are some provisions for center turning but not for a four-lane road. We are also in the middle of securing approval to lower the speed limit on Oakland Avenue to 35mph all the way to Hwy 50.

- Secured the right of way for Catherine Ross Road (formerly Motamassek Road) and secured transfer of the Remington Road right of way from Orange County and the Turnpike Authority.
- Coming improvements for traffic will include a connecting roadway between Oakland Avenue and Hwy 50 at Catherine Ross Road, paving of Starr Street and construction of a traffic roundabout at Oakland Avenue and old Hwy 50. The roundabout is funded by development fees, Orange County, and by Metro Plan Orlando (1.2 million dollars) with construction beginning in middle 2020.
- We have received four electric car charging stations from Duke Energy which are in front of town hall and at ONP.
- Other projects under study include a sidewalk connecting Oakland Ave and Tubb to Hwy 50 and design work on Oakland Ave to create a further sense of place.

Our Newest Plans Guide our Growth and Development of Projects. The Design District regulations guide the architecture of each and every new building, from commercial to residential. Traditional architecture utilizes historic patterns and design.

In addition to the Town's Comprehensive Plan, our Mobility Plan and Design Districts implement the vision.

The Town's Mobility Plan ensures that we maintain and expand the Town's traditional grid street network and block plan. The Mobility Plan also provides the basis to ask Metroplan Orlando for transportation funding.

The Appearance Review Board reviews architecture based on the Design Districts. The ARB has been fully functioning for the past three years. Member makeup of the board includes residents at large, and residents with a required background in architecture, construction and engineering. The purpose of this board is to look at proposed commercial and residential development to ensure it meets the look and feel of Oakland.

New projects follow the Mobility Plan and the Design District standards which cover the entire Town.

Some of our requirements include:

- Traditional architectural details that fit in to the fabric of our town
- Tree preservation and replanting
- Native plantings in the landscape design
- Connectivity of trails and roads to the West Orange Bike trail and ONP
- Improvements to roads and parks

Staff and our Designer work with the requestor until the project meets our ordinances and requirements-all property

owners have rights to improve their property based on zoning and ordinances. This is the law.

Planning and Zoning then meets to consider the project's site plan and site design and then decides on the request. If approved, it moves to the Town Commission.

Town Commission considers the final request for the project. Town Commission does not discuss our point of view on projects outside of public meetings

All the above is subject to Sunshine law, public records law and advertisement law.

Partnering

As you have heard throughout this presentation, we have been fortunate to partner with many organizations, governmental entities and elected officials to find resources for our needs. This does not come without work by staff and the commission. There is considerable time spent serving on boards and meeting with these partners to advocate for our upcoming needs.

There is a long list of those we work with including:

- Orange County and Betsy Vanderley, Orange County Commissioner District One
- The Orange County School Board
- The West Orange Healthcare District
- The Winter Garden Heritage Foundation

- U.S. Representative Val Demings
- Florida Senator Randolph Bracy
- Florida Representative Geraldine Thompson
- Friends of Lake Apopka
- The Bond Foundation
- Metro Plan
- Tri County League of Cities
- The West Orange Chamber

We owe all of the above a great deal of thanks for the support we have received over the years.

Preparing for the Future

We will continue to pursue fulfillment of the objectives noted in the opening summary we expect to be able to make even more gains in our community. This will include:

Continued investment in services such as the establishment of a more robust recreation function (including the Arts), the improvement plan for Speer Park, and more connectivity to our eco offerings. Increased utilization of technology for providing information and participation for residents, elected officials and staff.

I know that some of the change that has begun to come to Oakland is hard for all of us that are so proud and protective of this town. I will also tell you that there is no one working harder to do the right things for this town than all the

residents that serve on boards including the Commission and our staff. The time and the talents we have here are just amazing to me. I encourage all of you to take the time to become educated on the facts of what is happening, attend meetings, volunteer your time and participate effectively to help ensure that we consider all our options and respect each other as we move forward towards the future. The good news of this is that we are living in a vibrant community that people want to be a part of. Our property values rose 24% last year.

As you can tell I have love and pride for this small town I have called home for more than 30 years. Again, it is the residents here who make this town what it is by volunteering their time and talents. We have many to thank for that, the Commission, the ARB Board, the Planning and Zoning board, Steve's "Kitchen Cabinet" which is the town manager's advisory group, the naming committee, the Arts and Heritage Center Advisory Committee, and the Light Up Oakland/Santa Day Committee. Additionally, at the school we have the School Advisory Committee and the PTO. The town staff that includes everyone at the Charter School, Police Department, Public Works, Oakland Nature Preserve, and Town Hall they are a hardworking, dedicated professional group of people!

I appreciate your time and attention and thank you for your support of the town!