

City	Sunny Isles Beach, Florida
Incorporated	June 16, 1997
Population	18,747
Area	Less than 2 Square Miles
County	Miami-Dade



Background

Although the city of Sunny Isles Beach is only eleven years old, this area has been a popular tourist destination since after World War II and into the '80s when themed motels, such as: the 'Dunes,' 'Driftwood,' and 'Waikiki' – all built in the '50s and '60s' – attracted tourists from the Northeast, Europe, Canada and South America to 'Motel Row.'

By the late '80s and '90s however, the motels were attracting a different crowd – one that contributed to a rise in violent crime. Motivated to improve their community and control their own destiny, a major effort by community leaders and concerned citizens resulted in the city of Sunny Isles Beach incorporating on June 16, 1997.

With precision focus on the goal of establishing a world-class city with a small-town feel, community leaders, city staff and residents have transformed Sunny Isles Beach, *florida's riviera*, into a place named by TripAdvisor® the #1 Tourist Destination in the US for 2008.

Governance/Administration

Following its comprehensive plan, the council/manager form of government has excelled in accomplishing its mission of providing safety and public services. The city developed a detailed capital improvement plan and, through a series of budget workshops, established long-term priorities and short-term goals that include:

- Undergrounding utilities.
- Improving stormwater drainage.
- Improving street lighting and signage.
- Installing traffic-calming and pedestrian-safety devices
- Beautifying medians and parks.
- Establishing a land bank for green space and parks.
- Preparing an emergency/disaster/communications plan including an off-island command center, backup computer system (operating in a virtual environment) and backup generators.
- Purchasing electric vehicles.

City Leadership

The city has consistently maintained a culture of cooperation when working with developers of ocean-front luxury hi-rises to provide citizens with beach access. Mayor Advisory Committees, made up of community member volunteers, provide a forum for informal discussion regarding initiatives and serve as incubators for future leadership. Accessibility to elected officials, who are in their offices daily, fosters ad hoc collaboration with citizens and staff making the city function efficiently.

In 2008, two city administrators were recognized: City Attorney Hans Ottinot by the Florida Trend Business Magazine (*Florida Legal Elite*) as one of the top government attorneys in the state of Florida, and Chief Fred Maas by the Police Benevolent Association with the *Fred Maas Law Enforcement Leadership Award*. Chief Maas leads an award-winning police department that recently helped solve a Federal drug case bringing in \$7 million in forfeiture funds. The department has also:

- Lowered violent crime by 67% in its first two years.
- Reduced its response time to less than two minutes.
- Received 13 Law Enforcement Officer Awards since 2000, the Top Cop Award in the US in 2002, and Rookie-of-the-Year award for all agencies in the county for 2008.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Upon incorporation, the city formed agreements with the county for Fire Rescue Services and the city of North Miami Beach for potable water. This spirit of cooperation continued when the city opened its Government Center in 2005 that included a US Post Office and county public library; other examples include:

- Working cooperatively with the county to build a K–8 public school opening in 2008.
- Providing space for the state’s Mini-FLOW Program where residents have easy access to Drivers' License Services.
- Coordinating traffic issues with the Florida Department of Transportation.
- Hosting the county’s Government-on-the-Go-Bus where residents can sign up for county services.
- Establishing a Bus-2-Bus Program that synchronizes bus schedules and stops with neighboring cities.
- Working with the county to update the city’s website to reflect the city’s recent branding of *florida’s riviera*; a redesign for ease of use; and reconfiguration for city staff to update daily the city calendar and beach conditions.

Citizen Outreach and Involvement

A sense of cityhood is encouraged by offering programs and events for all residents and providing citizens forums at commission meetings. The city participates with numerous community groups including the Citizens of Northeast Dade and Chamber of Commerce.

Through its cable access channel (SIB TV), the Sunny Isles Beach Sun Community Newspaper, mailings and the city's website, residents are informed and invited to participate. Citizen surveys ensure appropriate program and event offerings that include:

- Family-friendly concerts, an annual anniversary party and holiday events such as Boogie-by-the-Beach.
- Summer camp and sports programs.
- Jr. Lifeguard camp on the beach.
- Trips to cultural events, AARP Driver Safety Courses, Tax preparation assistance and dinner cruises.
- Free transportation services to Mount Sinai Hospital, Medical Lecture Series, blood pressure testing and yearly flu shots.
- Generator rentals to gas stations during emergencies.
- Free community shuttle service.
- An annual city calendar photo contest.

Technology

The positive impact of technology is reflected in the city implementing the following:

- Wireless Island project providing free Internet access in all city facilities and parks.
- *Ask City Hall* on the city's website allowing residents to search for answers, report problems and submit questions.
- Laptops for police officers reducing the time for generating incident reports and accessing vehicle registrations, suspect information and location history.
- Laptops for building inspectors and code enforcement officers enhancing the administration and tracking of permits and inspections.
- Website providing agendas, budget, articles, calendar of events, requests for inspections, daily beach conditions, etc.
- Digitized commission meetings agendas and minutes.
- Improved internal tracking capabilities through a GIS system.

Innovative Programs and Services

Innovative programs specific to community needs (change in demographics, major redevelopment, need for green space, etc.) have resulted in the following projects:

- City's major financial contribution for a county K-8 public school opening in 2008 that includes a scheduled joint usage agreement with the city's newest park facility and community center.
- Creation of Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) for property owners to deed land to the city for public parks/green space in exchange for transferring development rights to better-suited sites has resulted in opening three new city parks since 2005.
- A partnership with the Sunny Isles Beach Resort Association to market the city has resulted in a city/hotels-approved policy for weddings on the beach and increased tourism.
- To honor its past, the city commissioned the book, *From Sandbar to Sophistication, The Story of Sunny Isles Beach* and established History Hall in the Government Center for a walk down memory lane.
- A private/public partnership will rebuild the historic Newport Fishing Pier (circa 1936).

Fiscal Management

The city received its first Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) and is proudly the youngest recipient of the award to a Florida municipality. The budget displays proficiency as a communications device – simple structure, easy-to-read and understandable format, and glossary of terms – a key criteria during evaluation.

To assure long-term stability and maintain growth, the city adopted financial policies for debt service levels and minimum general fund reserves. Additionally the city has:

- Initiated special assessment districts to fund specific enhanced benefit projects.
- Acquired more than \$7 million in grant funding.
- Maintained emergency financial reserves.
- Estimated the impact of capital projects on the operating budget.

The city is in full compliance with last year's tax reform measures resulting in a 19% millage rate reduction.