



Duane “Mike” Smith

Groveland City Council Member, District 4



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Contents

District Map Link

Pardon our Dust

Promises Made –
Promises Kept

- Model City Indicators

Livewell Foundation Grant

Traffic Lights Coming

Home Rule

Lake Catherine Blueberries

Upcoming Events

- Centennial 1922-1972
- Farmer’s Mkt

Got a Question

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E-mail: [mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov](mailto:mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov)

Phone:  
352-251-6048

Volume 3 - Issue #1

This is going to be an exciting year for the City of Groveland as we celebrate our 100<sup>th</sup> birthday! We began our **Centennial Celebration** with the recent Cultural Food Festival at Lake David Park. To see what will be happening in the coming months look on the city’s website at <http://www.groveland-fl.gov/> and the Future Events section of this Newsletter.

### District Maps

In my last newsletter I referenced the city had redrawn its district maps and provided a link to those maps. I must apologize that the link did not work and so I am including the actual URL for the maps here. Please take some time to see in which district you currently reside. Click on the link then select City Council Districts.

<https://www.groveland-fl.gov/135/Maps>

### Pardon Our Dust

Last month I mentioned that the city was migrating to an enterprise resource planning software system. This system, when fully implemented will allow the city to continue to grow and align functions within the city. One of these functions is utility billing. As with most of you, I found the city’s migration to this new system to be somewhat lacking.

Recently, residents of the city had a rude awakening when they viewed, or attempted to view their utility bill. There was a myriad of issues from bad meter readings, delayed billings and some technical glitches that produced inaccurate bills. Unfortunately, there was some communication that left people with more questions than answers. Recognizing all the various ways it may have impacted a resident’s billing, the city elected to make amends. We adjusted the utility bills of all residents in a manner that was intended to ensure all were made whole. In addition, there was a monetary allowance made for the inconvenience and angst our mistake made over the Christmas and New Year holiday season.

Hopefully the city has learned from this not so smooth transition. That said, the city is making changes as it moves forward. I ask that you recognize that the staff is working really hard to make sure the transitions are seamless but may not always reach that goal. So, if you find a glitch in the future, please let us know. I ask that you also please have patience and pardon our dust.

## Promises Made – Promises Kept

When I first ran for office, I stated that there were five areas that I believed could make the city a better place. These areas were:

- Transparency
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Model City
- Improve Public Services
- Position Groveland for Smart Growth

So how are we doing? Over the next few newsletters, I will refer to each of these areas. In this issue I examine how Groveland is becoming a Model City.

### ***Model City Indicators***

1. **Accreditation of The Groveland Police Department.** According to the U. S. Department of Justice, less than 5% of the police agencies in the United States are accredited.

2. **Awards of Recognition.** The city has also received a number of awards testifying to the fact that it is implementing policies and procedures that are improving our governance, fiscal responsibility and support of business. These awards include the:

- Prestigious 2021 **Regional Deal of the Year Award** from the Florida Economic Development Council.
- Government Finance Officers Association **Distinguished Budget Presentation Award** for our Annual Budget for fiscal year October 2021.
- **Heritage Award** from the South Lake Chamber of Commerce recognizing Groveland's consistent commitment to businesses.

3. On behalf of the city, I was invited to speak to the **Lake 100 Economic Development Team** on how Groveland has leveraged public-private partnerships to grow business within the city.

4. Groveland's adoption of a new **Land Development Code** has many other municipalities, including Lake County, examining Groveland's code as a model. They will look to see how they might adopt the code to help manage growth within the region.

### **Livewell Foundation Grant**

I am happy to announce that the Livewell Foundation has awarded a grant to the city in the amount of \$6.2M. The vision of the Livewell Foundation is for a community of South Lake County to experience a better quality of life through improved health and wellness. To achieve this vision, the foundation provides grants to develop and support sustainable initiatives that enhance the health and wellness of the South Lake community.

The grant will provide funds for the rebuilding and expansion of the Elese Tomlin Empowerment Center and funding to Hope International Church for the development of recreational facilities that will serve the community. The city will administer both elements of the grant.

The **Elese Tomlin Empowerment Center** is an initiative and partnership between the City of Groveland and the nonprofit organization Anointed Community Services International (ACSI). The new community center will provide a larger place to accommodate more children, adults, and seniors to receive various services and activities. The Center provides access to food, technology, learning, basic needs, school supplies, workforce development and business development. It also offers a safe haven for youth to congregate as they learn, are mentored, and receive guidance and support. The Center provides children with a safe place during the peak hours that juveniles are typically victims of crime or engage in criminal activities themselves.

**Hope International Church** is in the process of completing the construction of a gymnasium on their property. This will serve as a venue for hosting city programs and events. Additionally, the city is partnering with Hope on the development of approximately 4.8 acres of property located adjacent to the gymnasium that will be developed into multi-purpose athletic fields. Through this grant and by partnering with Hope, the city will be able to utilize the church's gymnasium, classrooms, music room, art room, as well as the multi-purpose athletic fields. All of this will allow the city to expand its offering of enrichment programs to the community with a particular focus on the city's youth.

### **Ambulances Come to Groveland**

The city is now home to two Lake County EMS ambulances. One is stationed at Fire Station 1 in the new Public Safety building near downtown. Just recently, because of the great rapport between Groveland Fire Department and Lake County EMS, a second ambulance is now stationed at Fire Station 2 on Cherry Valley Trail, near the new Cherry Lake Park. It is our hope that these two ambulances at the city's fire stations will allow our residents to be transported to the closest appropriate hospital more expeditiously.

### **Traffic Lights Coming To Key Intersections**

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) staff has confirmed that two intersections are in the engineering and planning stages for the addition of a traffic signal. The first of these is the intersection at US 27 and Wilson Lake Pkwy. The city has continuously worked with FDOT for a number of years about the need for this traffic signal.

The second intersection that FDOT has determined warrants a traffic signal is the intersection of Montevista Road and SR 50. We will continue to work with the state for a signal at Waterside Pointe and SR 50 as well as Cherry Lake Road and SR 19.

### **Home Rule**

So, what is Home Rule? In 1973 it was implemented after a constitutional amendment was passed by the Florida voters. The Florida League of Cities describes it as "Local voices making local choices. Self-government. Citizen-centered solutions. The flexibility to address unique local needs with local solutions." In a nutshell, it is the ability for people to make a determination as to the quality of life they would like to have in their own community.

Unfortunately, our state legislature does not seem to believe that they should shrink state government and let local governments be responsive to the will of its citizens. The actions by the state legislature have, for over five years, sought to remove the ability of local governments to govern locally. The

attacks on Home Rule seem especially aggressive this year with two major bills, SB 620 and SB 280, working their way through the legislature. Both of these bills were passed by the Senate and are now in the House awaiting action. A companion House bill for each has been introduced.

SB 620 provides for businesses to sue a city for damages if they believe that a city ordinance or charter change (a charter change must be passed by a majority vote of the city's citizens) caused a loss of 15% of a business's profits. Additionally, if a business alleges it was impacted by filing a suit against the city, that ordinance cannot be enforced until the courts rule on whether the ordinance did impact the business in a manner that caused a loss of 15% or more of that business' profits.

An example of a business who may have taken action under this proposed law is one where the city was required to pretreat their waste so it would not cause the city's wastewater plant to have to shut down. The city was receiving high concentrations of substances harmful to the plant, causing shutdowns and **increasing the costs to city residents**. Please take a moment to write your State Senator and State Representative urging them to let local government deal with local issues. Below are the names and email addresses of your state senators and representatives.

- [Keith.Truenow@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Keith.Truenow@myfloridahouse.gov), Florida House District 31
- [Anthony.Sabatini@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Anthony.Sabatini@myfloridahouse.gov), Florida House District 32
- [stargel.kelli.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:stargel.kelli.web@flsenate.gov), Florida Senate District 22
- [Chris.Sprows@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Chris.Sprows@myfloridahouse.gov), Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives
- [simpson.wilton.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:simpson.wilton.web@flsenate.gov), Florida Senate President.

### **Lake Catherine Blueberries Celebrates 100 Years**

Lake Catherine Blueberries is celebrating 100 years of operation as a family farm. In 1920 Ewin and Selma Mattson moved to the Groveland area and two years later bought land and built their home on the east side of Lake Catherine. They farmed ferns, raised chickens and citrus trees. Their farming efforts assisted the sawmill and turpentine workers with meat and eggs. Through their many challenges including the Great Depression, their strong faith led them to help establish the Swedish Church which later became known as the Zion Lutheran Church.

The farm, known as Mattson Groves, continued with their citrus expansion and became a part of the Winter Garden Citrus Cooperative in the 1950's. Sadly, Edwin, Sr. passed away in 1966, but his wife Selma continued to run the groves till her passing in 1974. In 1978, the family sold the vacant family home to Clinton and Ann (Mattson) Lowe. The Mattson brothers along with Clinton and Ann Lowe continued farming the citrus groves, but after several devastating freezes in the 70's and 80's the Mattson brothers made the difficult decision to exit the citrus business. They sold their share of the lands to Clinton and Ann Lowe in 1987.

The Lowes, along with their son Dustin and daughter Heather, pruned and replanted the grove. After facing more freezes in 1987 and 1989 as well as continuing issues with citrus farming, such as diaprepes (citrus root weevil) and greening (produces fruits that are green, misshapen and bitter), the Lowe's undertook to transition the farm to blueberries.

In 2007 Lake Catherine Blueberries emerged as a fledgling agritourism industry. Through all the years, the farm has remained a prominent part of the city and community. The City joins the Lowes as they celebrate their centennial as a family farm. We look forward to continuing to have them as an integral part of the city for the next 100 years.

## Upcoming Events

### ***Centennial Celebration***

The city's Centennial Celebration is in full swing following the Cultural Food Festival on February 5<sup>th</sup> at Lake David Park. The next event for the Centennial Celebration is the **Sock Hop at Lake David Center** on Feb 25<sup>th</sup> from 6 – 10 pm in the Lake David Center. It is hosted by the Groveland Historical Society.

**Remembering Groveland 1922-1972** – Lake David Park – Saturday, Feb 26 from 11 am – 8 pm and on Sunday, Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> from 11 am – 6 pm. There will be a car show, live music, vendors, food trucks, a kid's zone and more to celebrate Groveland's first fifty years.

### ***Farmers Market***

The city hosts a Farmer's Market on the second Friday of each month at Lake David Park in downtown Groveland. The market runs from 5:00 – 9:00 pm. In addition to fresh produce from local farms, there are home-made crafts, live music and food trucks. Come down and enjoy a great evening at our beautiful park.

## Got a Question?

While this newsletter comes out multiple times during the year and I try to pass on information that I believe most residents would find of interest, I also realize this newsletter may not be answering all your questions. So, if you have a question about something going on in the city, please feel free to email it to me at [mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov](mailto:mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov). I will not only answer your email, but I may add your issue to a future edition of the newsletter.

## Subscribe

If you would like to receive future copies of this newsletter, please subscribe for notifications by going to the Notify Me page on the city website at <http://groveland-fl.gov/list.aspx>. When you get to the website, enter your email address in the box and click "Sign In". Next click the envelope icon next to Councilman Smith's Newsletter. You will get a verification email and then a confirmation email after you have subscribed. Once subscribed you will get notification any new newsletters or news bulletins I post. The current and past newsletters are also available online at <http://groveland-fl.gov/468/Councilman-Smiths-Newsletter>.

**Thank you for your interest in the city**

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This newsletter was created by G. L. Coleman