

The Gibbons Plan for St. Petersburg

I. Priority One: Keeping You Safe

No criminal who lives in St. Pete, or preys on St. Pete, should ever feel comfortable. There is nothing more important to the health and prosperity of this city than keeping people safe.

It will be my top priority.

As Mayor, it will be my first priority to make sure that every citizen, in every neighborhood of the city, feels safe and secure. We can, and must, do this through strong leadership, streamlined management, and a renewed focus on partnerships which include all major stakeholders - the city, police and fire departments, community groups, neighborhood associations, and law enforcement agencies.

This paper focuses on the crime aspect of public safety.

To ensure everyone understands that keeping you safe is the top priority of a Gibbons Administration, I am prepared and committed to do the following:

1) **Conduct a thorough review of the existing police department and its leadership**

Chief Harmon, and the men and women of the city's police department, are doing solid work in a very tough environment and they have my support. However, that's not to say that the department is perfect or that things can't be done better; and we must not shy away from looking at ways we can continue to up our game.

As Mayor, I will allocate city resources to assure that the department has all of the tools it needs. In exchange, I will expect full accountability.

The City' police department was thoroughly reviewed at the request of the City Council in June, 2009, by Matrix Consulting Group. This study found that the department met all applicable national standards for optimal performance in the areas that were reviewed.

This year, the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., (CALEA®) reviewed the department as a part of the department's triennial accreditation process. CALEA not only determined that the department met **all** standards for accreditation, but that it was a "**Flagship**" department, a designation given to departments that meet the industry's best practices and that are believed to be those that CALEA would recommend share their best practices with other departments around the country.

As a part of implementing an accountability plan for the department, I will conduct a thorough review of the department, top to bottom.

I will assess the performance not only of Chief Harmon but also of his deputies, other sworn officers and non-sworn department staff. I will seek input from department management, sworn officers at every level, non-sworn department personnel, and the public to determine which elements of the department are operating at peak performance and which are not.

As a part of this process, I will ask each of these individual stakeholders what changes **they** believe are necessary to make the department more efficient and effective. Once that review has been completed, I will announce and initiate the changes necessary to assure peak performance, and to meet the metrics established as a part of the departments' accountability plan.

2) Bring residents together to jointly identify, and solve, our public safety needs

I hear all the time from people about broken or missing streetlights, better sidewalks to enhance pedestrian safety, and a host of other neighborhood-based problems that increase the level of concern for many in this city who ask to live in a city that's safe and secure. These are issues that don't make headlines, but are an integral part of any effective public safety program.

These kinds of concerns also highlight the importance of ongoing collaboration, a back-and-forth communication between law enforcement and the people they serve.

The department currently does annual community retreats to garner public input. As Mayor, I will build on this process by regularly bringing together community stakeholders, members of the public, community groups, neighborhood associations and law enforcement agencies to develop innovative solutions and measurable goals for the city's police department. I will seek federal, state and foundation funding to support this effort and, once complete, integrate this information into the accountability plan for the city and the department.

3) Raise the profile of our police officers in every corner of the city

Officers in St. Petersburg's police department simply need to be more visible to residents. To beat crime and deter it, police officers must be in our neighborhoods, near our businesses and accessible when we need them.

Under a Gibbons administration, **they will be**. To do this, I will refocus our community policing efforts, and reallocate services and priorities to assure that each city neighborhood, including downtown, has access to visible officers with a consistent community presence.

4) **Comprehensively address our homeless problem**

I believe that our homeless problem is much more than just a law enforcement issue. It's a much broader issue that includes housing, mental health, physical health, substance abuse, education, workforce training, and hunger issues.

Additionally, due to our current economy, we must recognize that there are some elements of homelessness the city will be able to manage; and others it will not.

I believe we have the tools at hand to address this problem but are not using them efficiently or effectively. For this reason, I believe we must approach the problem through a multi-pronged effort, including:

- a. As Mayor I will bring together the service providers in every sector to develop a comprehensive homelessness strategy that addresses these challenges. While I believe we should continue and build on our commitment to **"Pinellas Hope"**, we must remember they are not the only agency providing shelter services within the city, nor are they the only organization providing support services to people who are homeless.
- b. I believe there is a great deal of inefficiency and overlap in the current system serving St. Petersburg's homeless residents. While we undoubtedly need more shelter beds, shelter beds alone will not solve our problem. As Mayor, I will designate a single entity (either within city government or a private not-for-profit) as the city's point agency for homelessness. This agency will objectively identify the right provider delivering the right services to meet an individual's specific needs, and coordinate the activities of the many charities and agencies of the city, county and state that provide relevant services.
- c. Under a Gibbons administration, our police department will enforce applicable laws and ordinances recognizing that our homeless citizens possess the same first amendment right to freedom of assembly as any other citizen. As Mayor, I will work to balance the needs and rights of our businesses, our visitors and all of our residents, homeless or not.
- d. I will work with the city and county housing authorities as well as other interested agencies to ensure that there are appropriate types of housing within the city for homeless people based on their individual needs. We must be equipped to provide both temporary housing for those who are struggling but job-ready and longer-term housing and support services for those with greater needs.

5) Address gang violence...head-on

After the death of Paris Whitehead-Hamilton, no one can deny that gangs are a very real problem in St. Petersburg. As Mayor I am committed to carrying on the the fight against gang violence. To do this I will:

- a. Continue Mayor Baker's gun bounty program to get illegal, unpermitted guns off our streets, as well as those who use them.
- b. Work with the Boys & Girls Clubs and other community-based organizations working in this area to support their efforts in comprehensive gang awareness education; and expand that education to city schools and churches.
- c. Seek additional federal and state dollars to support the implementation of a comprehensive, citywide gang reduction program.

6) Improve youth services

I believe that kids who are bored and idle are more susceptible to moving down the wrong path; that those who are engaged and involved are far less likely to do so. As Mayor, I intend to be pro-active, focusing on enhanced youth services, as well as more prevention and intervention. To that end, I will

- a. Work with the city's Department of Parks & Recreation to make sure that the city's facilities are open when kids need them, and that they offer things those kids want to do. Even in this tight budget environment, I'm confident that this can be achieved by working with parents and schools to better understand the most desirable operating hours and activities, and by re-allocating Parks & Recreation resources to those times of the day when parents most need coverage for their children.
- b. Explore ways to expand the police department's grant forfeiture program to utilize the funding provided through that program on prevention and intervention programming.