

# Mayor's Memo

By Ken Jones

Happy New Year. As we settle down after the sharing season of Christmas, we can pause for a few minutes to review the past year, but, more importantly, look ahead and plan for the coming year. Every minute of every day is a chance to start anew, but the first of a New Year is a common measuring point in time.

We write these articles about a month before they get distributed after going to press. The night before I penned this article, we had our Pine Knoll Shores flotilla. A special thanks to the captains and their first mates and crews who decorated their boats and participated in this annual festive event. I know the folks up and down the canal really enjoyed it. And thanks go to Natalie Gible for service as our staff lead on the flotilla. Also as I write this, our Christmas parade is yet to come and promises to be fun for all.

You may have heard about our annual Christmas party at town hall for our staff and volunteer teams. This is a very rewarding event that builds community and brings all of our teams together. This event alone is reason enough to get involved and start your 2017 volunteering for the betterment of our town.

This next year will be exciting as always. Our newest stretch of sidewalk will be ready for your exercise and transportation. You will be able to go from town hall to the Food Lion in Atlantic Beach by just crossing the highway twice and never walking or riding on Salter Path Road. As far as connectivity and safety, this is a huge step forward.

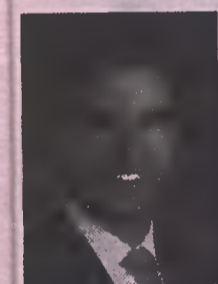
We will have our dinner with the mayor in a metropolitan area to our west right out of the gate in the new year. Date, time and location will be confirmed soon. I always look forward to this meeting because it helps include the more than 70% of our citizens who are not here year round—yet.

Our strategic plan has been our guiding light since it was approved. We rarely make a move or decision without consulting this valuable living document. It is a road map that includes your input and a way to measure our team's performance. Recently we reviewed some emerging issues with our Strategic Planning Committee and discussed some topics, such as the existence and impact of our declining year-round population and water issues such as sea level rise and the water quality in our canals—all very important to the future of Pine Knoll Shores. I know we're doing this right; we get asked by other municipalities and organizations that want to copy our methods. I want to extend a thank you to this amazing group of concerned and forward-looking citizens, which includes two former commissioners, John Halada and Vince Larson. I mention these two gentlemen by name, but there are many more citizens and town staff involved, like Town Planner Scott Sherrill, who also deserve a handshake and thank you.

As we start our new year, our number one goal will continue to be communication. We want to make sure we are communicating with you, and that we are available to listen and hear you. We are all in this together, and the future looks bright. Thank you for a great 2016, and all the best to you and your family for a rewarding 2017.

## Get on Track to Start the New Year

By Greg Patterson



Do you ever wonder where your money goes each month? Does it seem like you're never able to get ahead? Do you know how much you spend on a monthly basis? Whether you have had a budget for years or never done one before, the start of a new year is a great time to establish a budget or revise an existing one to help you keep track of how you spend your money and help you reach your financial goals.

### Examine your financial goals

Before you establish a budget, you should examine your financial goals. Start by making a list of your short-term goals (e.g., new car, vacation) and your long-term goals (e.g., your child's college education, retirement). Next, ask yourself: How important is it for me to achieve this goal? How much will I need to save? Armed with a clear picture of your goals, you can work toward establishing a budget that can help you reach them.

### Identify your current monthly income and expenses

To develop a budget that is appropriate for your lifestyle, you will need to identify your current monthly income and expenses. You can jot the information down with a pen and paper, or you can use one of the many software programs available that are designed specifically for this purpose.

Start by adding up all of your income. In addition to your regular salary and wages, be sure to include other types of income, such as dividends, interest and child support. Next, add up all of your expenses. To see where you have a choice in your spending, it helps to divide them into two categories: fixed expenses (e.g., housing, food, clothing, transportation) and discretionary expenses (e.g., entertainment, vacations, hobbies). You will also want to make sure that you have identified any out-of-pattern expenses, such as holiday gifts, car maintenance, home repair, etc. To make sure that you are not forgetting anything, it may help to look through canceled checks, credit card bills and other receipts from the past year. Finally, as you list your expenses, it is important to remember your financial goals. Whenever possible, treat your goals as expenses and contribute toward them regularly.

### Evaluate your budget

Once you have added up all of your income and expenses, compare the two totals. To get ahead, you should be spending less than you earn. If this is the case, you're on the right track, and you need to look at how well you use your extra income. If you find yourself spending more than you earn, you will need to make some adjustments. Look at your expenses closely and cut down on your discretionary spending. And remember, if you do find yourself coming up short, don't worry. All it will take is some determination and a little self-discipline, and you will eventually get it right.

### Monitor your budget

You will need to monitor your budget periodically and make changes when necessary. But keep in mind that you do not have to keep track of every penny that you spend. In fact, the less record keeping you have to do, the easier it will be to stick to your budget. Above all, be flexible. Any budget that is too rigid is likely to fail, so be prepared for the unexpected (e.g., leaky roof, failed car transmission).

### Tips to help you stay on track

- Involve the entire family: Agree on a budget up front and meet regularly to check your progress.
- Stay disciplined: Try to make budgeting a part of your daily routine.
- Start your new budget at a time when it will be easy to follow and stick with the plan (e.g., the beginning of the year, as opposed to right before the holidays).
- Find a budgeting system that fits your needs (e.g., budgeting software).
- Distinguish between expenses that are "wants" (e.g., designer shoes) and expenses that are "needs" (e.g., groceries).
- Build rewards into your budget (e.g., eat out every other week).
- Avoid using credit cards to pay for everyday expenses: It may seem like you are spending less, but your credit card debt will continue to increase.

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