

City of Pembroke Pines

A Short History

Pembroke Pines is one of the many post-World War II cities that were created primarily to accommodate ex-servicemen who had trained in South Florida and wanted to return after the war.

The open expanses of land west of the older coastal cities, occupied primarily by large dairy farms, offered inexpensive acreage for housing development. In the midst of Henry Perry's dairy was North Perry Field, a WW II satellite of Miami Naval Air Station. Between the eastern border of the airport, SW 72 Avenue, and the first section of the Florida Turnpike, the first two tiny Pembroke Pines #1 and #2 subdivisions were created in 1954.

The "Village of Pembroke Pines" was incorporated in 1959. Some builders contested this, and the village was dissolved on a legal decision that the boundaries were incorrectly stated on the ballot. In January 1960, a second election was held, and the village became the City. The residents then incorporated to protect themselves from annexation and to preserve and enhance their community.

Unlike many of the post-WW II, new Broward County towns created and run by the developers, Pembroke Pines grew from citizen involvement. World travelers Dr. Walter Seth Kipnis and his wife, Estelle, were the leading players in the incorporation and were supported by the town's first organized citizens' group, the Pembroke Pines Civic Association. This group started what was intended to be a youth center on donated property next to the turnpike on 13th Street. When it was partially completed, City government meetings were held there, having moved from the patio of the first mayor, Dr. Kipnis. In 1976, the building was finished with primarily donated materials and labor and was used until City offices were moved to the former showrooms of the Pembroke Lakes subdivision on Taft Street and Palm Avenue. On October 22, 1988, the City completed the three-building governmental center complex at Pines Boulevard and Palm Avenue. The center houses City offices and the Commission Chambers. The lobby is the home of the "Glass Gallery," where art exhibits are displayed.

The first elected officials were called Aldermen. There were seven officials plus the mayor, who was not allowed to vote. Eventually, the officials became councilmen (or women), and the mayor was permitted to vote. From the early years, a City Commission/City Manager form of government was adopted. The voters also approved a City Charter. One attempt was made to change to a strong mayor form of government, but the attempt was defeated.

In 1984, a major change was approved to have four City districts with one commissioner elected from each district. The mayor was now elected by a citywide vote. As the population expanded westward, the districts were redrawn consistent with almost every other Broward County community. Completion of the Century Village condominiums provided the impetus for redistricting. With a projected population in excess of 15,000, they could conceivably have elected all the City Commissioners.

The devastating Hurricane Andrew of 1992 drove hundreds of residents of south Dade County north to Broward County, especially Pembroke Pines. This gave a huge boost to the City's population as owners of destroyed homes took their insurance money and used it to buy in the City, far from the coast.

Growing with the City's residential areas and influx of young families was the need for schools. With the Broward County School Board unable to keep up with the demand, Mayor Alex Fekete and City Manager Charles Dodge originated a charter school system. In August 1998, the City began its charter school system to alleviate the classroom shortage. The City now has the largest Charter School system in the nation, with four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school, serving an estimated 5,599 students in 2011-12. Flanagan High School was overpopulated for the school year 2011-12 with an enrollment of 3,241, making it one of the largest high schools in the state.

A student may progress from kindergarten through community college and take university-level courses within City boundaries. In addition to the Charter Schools, the Broward County school system and private schools start the students' early education. Pembroke Pines Charter High School and Flanagan High School offer secondary classes, and Broward College South Campus and Academic Village Campus offer two-year AA degrees. Florida International University has a facility at the Academic Village, with plans for the expansion of courses.

As the City grew, so did the need for leisure and recreation services. Currently, there are 50 baseball diamonds, 19 football/soccer fields, 25 paddleball courts, 6 indoor racquetball courts and 11 in-line hockey rinks. Tennis programs and lessons are available on the 50 lighted courts throughout the City. The community centers offer a wide variety of classes and activities and serve as a meeting place for over 70 non-profit civic organizations. Two theatres provide plays and entertainment throughout the year. Three full-service Broward County library branches are located within the City.

Following recognition of the need to provide services for senior residents, the 52,000 square-foot Southwest Focal Point Senior Center was constructed in 1996 for residents over 55 years of age. The facility includes a library, gym, billiard room, classrooms, computer labs, and a main hall as well as over 5,000 square feet dedicated to Adult Day Care and Alzheimer's Day Care Programs.

In 1997, Pines Point was built. Pines Point is a 190-apartment complex adjacent to the Southwest Focal Point Senior Center. The complex offers affordable housing to seniors over 55 years of age who are capable of independent living.

Additionally, during a period of three years (2005-2008), Pines Place Senior Residences was constructed. Pines Place consists of three towers with a combined total of 614 affordable apartments. These apartments were available originally only to seniors over 55 years of age. However, in the summer of 2008, City Commission lowered the age minimum to 18.

Pembroke Pines now has an area of 34.25 square miles. It is a full-service City with its own Police and Fire Departments. While providing above average services and amenities to 154,508 residents (2012, source: OEDR), this year's City expenditure budget, including an expected transfer of funds to the City's Charter Schools, stands at \$319.0 million, and the City's Ad Valorem tax rate remains one of the lowest in the county. Pembroke Pines continues to be a progressive City with the well being of its residents the City's primary concern.