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# CONSUMER SERVICES Department Business Plan

**Fiscal Years: 2009 and 2010**  
(10/1/08 through 9/30/10)

Plan Date: November 21, 2008

Approved by:

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Cathy Grimes Peel, Department Director

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Susanne Torriente, Assistant County Manager

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEPARTMENT PURPOSE/MISSION</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND TARGETS</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>3 to 5 YEAR OUTLOOK</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
<b>Attachment 1</b>	
<b>DEPARTMENTAL PROFILE</b>	
Table of Organization	
Financial Summary	
Capital Budget Summary	
Business Environment	
<b>Attachment 2</b>	
<b>BUSINESS PLAN REPORT</b>	

## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name:

Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10

### DEPARTMENT PURPOSE/MISSION

The Consumer Services Department (CSD) is the County's consumer protection arm. CSD licenses and regulates specific industries, conducts consumer, youth, family, and business education, and mediates consumer disputes against private businesses.

#### Vision Statement

A community of educated consumers and sustainable businesses prospering in a fair and equitable marketplace.

#### Mission Statement

Enhancing the quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses through education, licensing and regulation, and the investigation and mediation of consumer complaints.

Additional departmental information can be found in the Departmental Profile (Attachment 1).

### STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

1. The Department's efforts align with the following Miami-Dade County Strategic Plan Goals:

- *Lead the coordination of economic development activities throughout Miami-Dade County (ED2)*
- *Expand entrepreneurial development opportunities within Miami-Dade County (ED3)*
- *Create a more business-friendly environment in Miami-Dade County (ED4)*
- *Improve the future of Miami-Dade County's children and youth(HH3)*
- *Promote independent living through early intervention and support services (HH4)*
- *Empower the community by increasing communications and coordination with local, state, and federal entities (NU2)*
- *Promote responsible stewardship of natural resources and unique community environments (NU3)*
- *Use consistent, fair and effective means to achieve code compliance (NU4)*

## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name:

Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10

### II. Department-related Strategic Plan Outcomes, Departmental Objectives, and Programs & Initiatives:

#### 1.1 *Better informed clients served by various assistance programs (ED2-3)*

##### 1.1.a. *Resolve disputes between consumers and businesses*

- *Number of consumer complaints per month*
- *Close consumer complaints expeditiously*
- *Obtain consumer refunds or credits due to mediation efforts*

##### 1.1.b. *Provide educational opportunities for consumers*

- *Conduct educational and outreach programs on consumer protection laws and conduct small claims clinics*
- *Publish quarterly "Consumer Wise" newsletter covering a wide range of consumer related subjects for Miami-Dade County's residents and visitors*
- *Encourage financial literacy through money management programs*

#### 2.1. *Organizations empowered with the technical and management capacity to succeed (ED3-1)*

- *Conduct educational programs for agricultural, commercial, and public sector employees about plant selection and maintenance, resource management, and using pesticides*

#### 3.1 *Customer friendly environment for regulated businesses (ED4-2)*

- *Customer satisfaction survey ratings*
- *Expedite the accreditation of the chauffeur training curriculum and implementation of testing software*
- *Expedient licensing, registration and inspection processes*

#### 4.1 *Young adults with basic education, skills and values (HH3-3)*

- *Develop citizenship and leadership skills through the 4-H program*

#### 5.1 *Promote Healthy Communities (HH4-1)*

- *Improve wheelchair accessible taxicab services through additional vehicles and technology upgrades*
- *Conduct food and family nutrition education*

#### 6.1 *Improved community access to information and services (NU2-2)*

- *Implement on-line access to licensing and business complaint information*
- *Track unique visitors and downloads to department websites*

#### 7.1 *Well-trained, customer-friendly County government workforce (NU2-3)*

- *Customer satisfaction survey ratings*
- *Cultivate and recognize employee excellence through the employee recognition*
- *Encourage participation in professional development training*
- *Development of future leaders through the Consumer Services Department succession plan*
- *Publish quarterly employee newsletter*
- *Conduct new employee orientation sessions*

## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name:

Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10

- *Celebrate employee achievements at group recognition ceremonies*

### 8.1 *Promote responsible stewardship of natural resources (NU3-1)*

- *Homeowner participation in the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Landscape Irrigation Efficiency Project*
- *Implement the Urban Conservation Unit*
- *Conduct rain barrel workshops*

### 9.1 *Consistent interpretation and application of enforcement practices (NU4-3)*

- *Conduct enforcement operations and taxicab surveys at MIA*
- *Track complaints and citations originating at MIA and POM*
- *Monitor jitney operations*
- *Track Special Transportation Service (STS) vehicle and chauffeur contacts per month*
- *Provide enforcement services at the Port of Miami*
- *Track citations and warning issued*

## Department Programs and Initiatives

- *Conduct specialized for-hire enforcement services to ensure the success of important special events and work with the Super Bowl Host Committee to prepare for Super Bowl 2010*
- *Review and submit amendments to ordinances, as appropriate, in the following areas: taxicab meter rates; for-hire chauffeur eligibility standards; upgrades to taxicab technology; taxicab medallion inheritance restrictions; and passenger motor carriers, including jitneys*
- *Review and submit amendments to ordinances governing motor vehicle repair shops, towing companies, visitor information maps issued by rental car agencies, and other consumer protection provisions*
- *Conduct lotteries for new taxicab medallions and for additional Airport Region Taxicabs operating at Miami International Airport*
- *Evaluate alternative funding sources to minimize reliance on revenues derived from taxicab medallion lotteries*
- *Enable on-line access to information relating to businesses licensed by the department and consumer complaints*
- *Improve productivity and efficiency by deploying remote access and input of data by field enforcement officers and equip enforcement vehicles with GPS*
- *Expand consumer awareness programs to create better informed consumers and continue prior initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of mediation efforts*

## **Departmental Business Plan and Outlook**

**Department Name:**

**Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10**

- Enhance the Florida Yards and Neighborhood Program's Landscape Irrigation Efficiency Project by establishing an Urban Conservation Unit to conduct pre and post tests and expand the program to single family homes
- Conduct succession planning to include identification of key individuals to be provided with managerial opportunities geared toward developing leadership skills

## **PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND TARGETS**

For ease of reference, specific information regarding departmental objectives and performance measures including the targets for FY 2007-08 and FY 2008-09 can be found in Attachment 2 – Business Plan Report.

## **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS**

### **Department-wide Critical Success Factors**

- Sufficient staff resources, staffing levels and successful recruitment efforts
- Absence of adverse legislation that preempts or reduces of any regulatory programs or general consumer protection laws
- Absence of additional regulatory programs which are not self-supporting
- Maintaining constructive dialogue with industry groups in reviewing policies, ordinances, fee schedules and initiatives
- Procurement of field data terminals for use by enforcement personnel

### **Critical Success Factors for Specific Objectives**

- Regulatory fee schedules that fully support regulatory activities
- Continued commitment to the mediation of consumer complaints which resulted in the department exceeding consumer reimbursements goals
- General fund support of consumer mediation, extension services, and administration
- Continued financial support from the Seaport Department to enable starter service and for-hire enforcement activities at the Seaport
- On-going financial support from Miami-Dade Transit Agency for training of Non-emergency and Special Transportation Service providers

## **Departmental Business Plan and Outlook**

**Department Name:**

**Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10**

- Continuation of the partnership with the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences in support of Extension programs
- Continued support from the Department of Environmental Resources Management (DERM), the Solid Waste Management Department (SWMD), and the Water and Sewer Department (WASD) for the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program (FYN), and environmental education relating to natural resources protection and water conservation

### **Internal Support Requirements**

- Continued service level agreements with the Enterprise Technology Services Department for technology needs and improving CSD's web site

## **3 to 5 YEAR OUTLOOK**

CSD has been engaged in a review of business regulations relating to for-hire transportation with the intent of recommending changes to reflect the current business environment. A continuing goal is to expand the administrative authority to issue licenses that currently require Commission approval. This process will continue over a multiple year period.

The taxicab study accepted by the Board in 2007 contained a variety of recommendations. These recommendations include imposing standards for electronic GPS dispatch, two-way radio requirements, credit card processing, and other advances. Additional needs exist for driver security systems such as in-vehicle security cameras. The cost of implementation and who will be responsible for the expenses, expected to cost between \$2000 and \$3000 per taxicab, are unresolved issues.

Over the next five years, CSD plans to continue to update both regulatory and general consumer protection ordinances. The impact of resource reductions in support of general consumer protection activities that were made in FY 2009 will also be monitored to determine the impact on consumers. Board initiatives intended to protect consumers in the marketplace and ensure that all businesses adhere to the same standards are no longer supported.

Continuing challenges exist for the agricultural industry related to production costs, invasive pests, foreign competition, and the regulatory environment, to remain competitive and retain viable acreage. Cooperative Extension agricultural programs must remain relevant and responsive to arising issues in the near term with adequate professional staffing to conduct training and provide appropriate technical assistance for the industry. As funds continue to be tight, additional sources of funding need to be evaluated.

Maintenance of the external funded Urban Conservation Unit, as part of the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program to fulfill water conservation plan goals, will be critical in assisting the County with the 5-year water conservation plan mandated by the South Florida Water Management District relating to the 20-year consumptive use permit.

*Attachment 1*

**DEPARTMENTAL PROFILE**

**Department Description**

The Consumer Services Department (CSD) is the County's consumer protection arm. CSD licenses and regulates specific industries, conducts consumer, youth, family, and business education, and mediates consumer disputes against private businesses. In addition to the Director's Office, the CSD accomplishes these responsibilities through the Consumer Protection Division, Passenger Transportation Regulatory Division, and the Cooperative Extension Service Division.

**Passenger Transportation Regulatory Division**

The Passenger Transportation Regulatory Division licenses and regulates taxicabs, limousines, passenger motor carriers (including jitneys and tour vans), special transportation service vehicles, non-emergency transportation services, for-hire chauffeurs, and ambulance services. For-hire vehicles, as well as private school buses, are inspected for safety and appearance at our vehicle inspection station. The Division maintains an extensive chauffeur training schedule for new and renewing for-hire chauffeurs.

**Consumer Protection Division**

The Consumer Protection Division licenses and regulates motor vehicle repair shops and mechanics, locksmith businesses and locksmiths, local moving companies, towing businesses, vehicle immobilization (booting) companies and employees, title loan lenders, water remetering companies, and registers telecommunications providers and domestic partnerships. The Division houses the Consumer Complaint Mediation Center which successfully negotiated over \$1.2 million dollars in refunds and credit in FY 2007/08.

**Cooperative Extension Division**

The Cooperative Extension Service Division is a partnership between the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS), the US Department of Agriculture, and the County. Extension Agents provide science-based educational programs in commercial agriculture and horticulture, home gardening and landscape maintenance, marine sciences, food safety and nutrition, and operate the 4-H youth development program.

**Office of the Director**

The Office of the Director provides policy direction, oversight, and centralized services such as personnel and information technology support. The office also houses shared positions that provide services throughout the department including collections, public information and legal support. The Consumer Advocate, provides consumer advocacy, education and outreach, and intervenes in legal and administrative proceedings on behalf of consumers in the public interest. An example of the educational programs conducted are small claims court

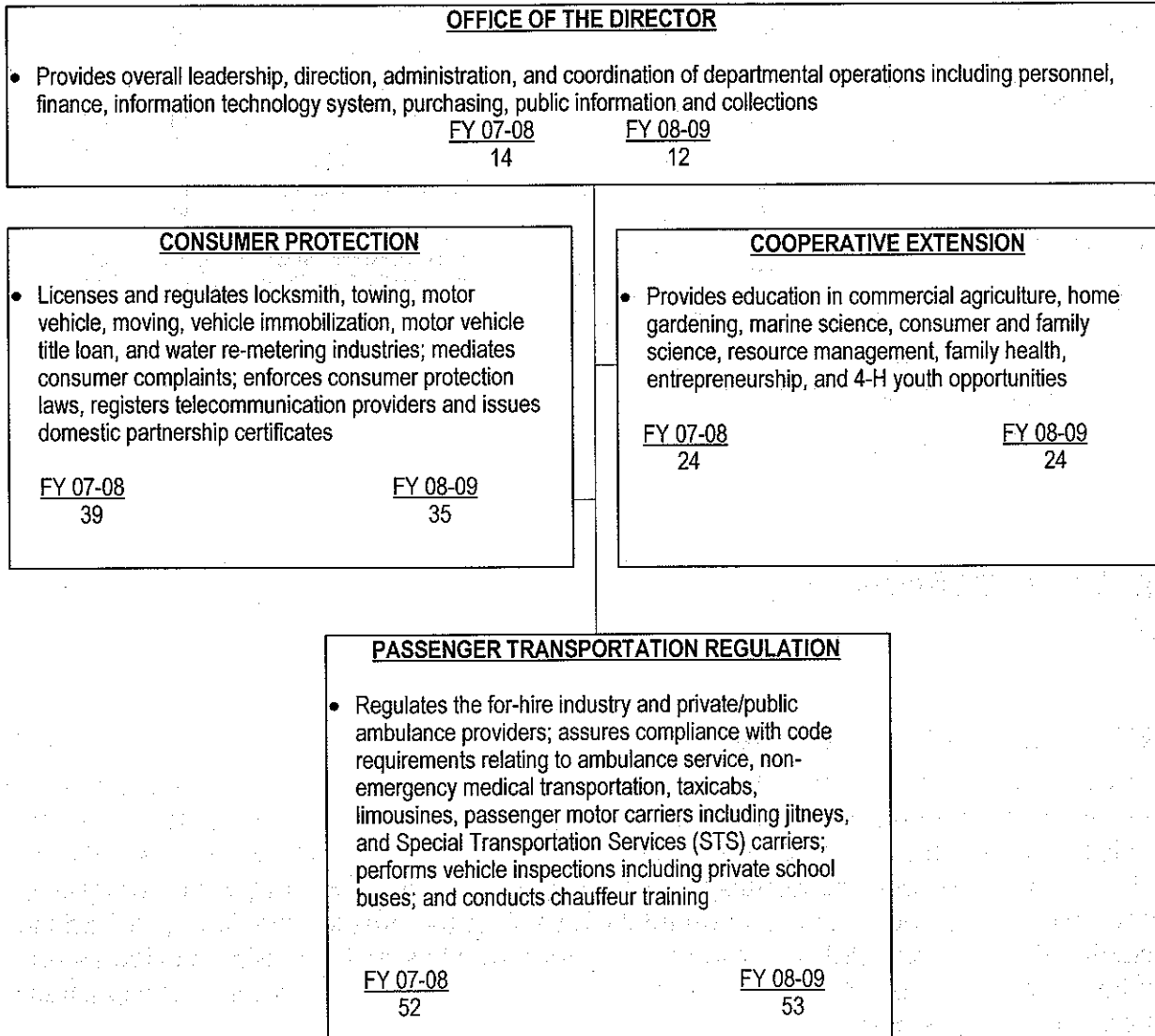
**Departmental Business Plan and Outlook**

**Department Name:**

**Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10**

clinics offered monthly throughout the County to teach consumers how to utilize the small claims court system.

**TABLE OF ORGANIZATION**



**Departmental Business Plan and Outlook**

**Department Name:**

**Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10**

**Financial Summary**

(dollars in thousands)	Actual FY 06-07	Budget FY 07-08	Adopted FY 08-09
<b>Revenue Summary</b>			
General Fund Countywide	2,322	2,045	1,035
Carryover	2,521	2,343	2,233
Code Fines / Lien Collections	1,137	826	856
Fees and Charges	7,227	6,432	7,876
Interest Earnings	27	0	0
Local Business Tax Receipt	471	471	471
Miscellaneous Non-Operating Revenue	0	0	405
Other Revenues	205	0	0
Interagency Transfers	159	187	441
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>14,069</b>	<b>12,304</b>	<b>13,317</b>
<b>Operating Expenditures Summary</b>			
Salary	6,444	7,295	7,307
Fringe Benefits	1,977	2,235	2,499
Other Operating	2,231	2,714	3,067
Capital	45	60	39
<b>Total Operating Expenditures</b>	<b>10,697</b>	<b>12,304</b>	<b>12,912</b>
<b>Non-Operating Expenditures Summary</b>			
Other Non-Operating Adjustments	0	0	405
<b>Total Non-Operating Expenditures</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>405</b>

(dollars in thousands) Expenditure By Program	Total Funding		Total Positions	
	Budget FY 07-08	Adopted FY 08-09	Budget FY 07-08	Adopted FY 08-09
<b>Strategic Area: Transportation</b>				
Administration	735	579	7	5
Passenger Transportation	5,649	6,052	52	53
Regulatory Division				
<b>Strategic Area: Economic Development</b>				
Administration	903	920	7	7
Consumer Protection - Cable	140	0	0	0
TV Access Programming				
Consumer Protection Division	2,361	3,394	22	26
Consumer Protection Division - General	1,294	654	17	9
Cooperative Extension Division	1,222	1,313	24	24
<b>Total Operating Expenditures</b>	<b>12,304</b>	<b>12,912</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>124</b>

**Capital Budget Summary**

N/A

**Current Business Environment**

The Consumer Services Department (CSD) provides countywide services without regard to municipality to a wide range of clientele. Incorporations and annexations do not affect the services of the department. CSD's customers are consumers and businesses generally, as well as businesses and individuals that specifically fall under CSD regulatory programs. CSD works closely with the business community in each of the areas it regulates, related industries including the local hospitality and tourism sectors, retail establishments, individuals and entities involved in commercial agriculture, horticulture and aquaculture, municipalities, and other County departments.

CSD's organizational structure emphasizes direct services. On an annual basis, CSD issues approximately 23,000 licenses or permits, conducts 95,000 field inspections or consultations, delivers training to 83,000 educational program attendees, and assists 25,000 office visitors, in addition to 178,000 contacts via telephone. CSD has increased information available on its website ([www.miamidade.gov/csd](http://www.miamidade.gov/csd)) to afford customers the ability to obtain information on their own and during non-traditional business hours. Popular downloads on the website are application forms and training schedules. This trend toward on-line services will continue.

A new enterprise operating system was launched in January 2008 and has enhanced the ability of the department to process licenses, track complaints and field inspections, and

## **Departmental Business Plan and Outlook**

**Department Name:**

**Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10**

manage data. Field access to data, remote entry of inspection results, work flow processing and electronic ticketing will be phased into the new system. It is anticipated that licensing and complaint information will be available to the public via the Internet in mid 2009. Over time, this system will change the way the department does business by improving service delivery and internal accountability.

CSD's focus on consumer dispute resolution continues to provide positive results in the monetary value of recoveries for consumers while providing a level playing field between businesses and contributing to a better quality of life. In FY 2008 \$1.254 million was recovered to consumers as a result of Consumer Protection Division efforts. Outreach and education are important components of this effort. Educational programs covering identity theft, credit and finance, and the 2009 digital television conversion are among the educational efforts underway.

A significant factor in department operations is the increasing demand of business-specific regulatory programs. Resources dedicated to these programs are great and challenge the department's ability to keep up with demands requiring extensive administrative involvement. This is especially true in the for-hire transportation area. CSD has two department appointed advisory groups dealing with the taxicab and limousine industries that meet on a quarterly basis. Opposing viewpoints exist between and within these industries on many policy issues.

Invasive pests, such as the fig whitefly, pink hibiscus mealy bug, and more recent issues of the Ambrosia beetle/laurel wilt impacting both home owner and commercial avocado groves, and the economic and environmental impacts are serious concerns. The whitefly, for example, has defoliated ficus hedges and trees throughout the County. Research and educational programs of the Cooperative Extension are assisting homeowners and growers to minimize damage and utilize correct treatment methods. Information and Awareness campaigns on new and emerging pests in urban areas can assist in an early warning for the pest prior to approaching commercial groves. Extension collaborates with the County's Agricultural Manager on these and other issues by providing science-based technical information and educational programming on matters impacting the agricultural community. Additional responses on such issues as the Africanized Honey Bee are areas that Cooperative Extension provides technical support and training for various industry and county agencies on.

CSD monitors state and federal legislation that may impact consumer protection laws or preempt our ability to regulate local businesses and battles state preemption challenges each legislative session. Continued efforts to preempt consumer protection and regulatory programs are expected to continue. These preemptions are detrimental to consumers because State agencies do not have local resources to monitor businesses and intervene on behalf of consumers. The department works closely with the County's intergovernmental staff in identifying and addressing preemptive challenges.

CSD collaborates with its South Florida consumer agency counterparts and meets with them on a bi-monthly basis. This collaboration is being expanded to include agencies in other geographic areas of Florida with a Florida Association of Consumer Protection Agencies in the development stages. This network of agencies provides an opportunity to share ideas

## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name:

Fiscal Years: 2008-09 & 2009-10

and common problems, respond to issues as a collective body, and explore standardization of various processes.

The CSD conducts customer feedback using a variety of measurement tools. The Feedback Plan consists of:

- Surveys – provided to businesses, consumers, and industry workgroups to solicit satisfaction with licensing, mediation, and other services. CSD seeks to obtain a rating of no less than four on a five point scale and consistently exceeds this target.
- Business Inspection Program – regulated businesses receive after the fact contacts to gauge the thoroughness of recent inspections and determine quality of inspection, employee conduct, and educational materials received.
- Educational/Seminar Feedback – surveys are provided to educational program attendees to assess satisfaction with program effectiveness and usefulness. Results are used to fine tune programs and curriculums.