

# CLOUD, AI, AND A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

By: **James F. Twigger**, Chief Information Officer, City of Tamarac

*James Twigger, CGCIO, is a seasoned IT leader with 27+ years experience, specializing in strategic planning, IT service management, and business intelligence. He drives large-scale initiatives and leverages innovative technologies to build smart, connected, and customer-focused organizations.*

In an exclusive interview with Govt CIO Outlook, Twigger shared his views on digital transformation while fostering a culture of innovation.

## Career-Defining Experiences and Projects

With more than 27 years in information technology, including 19 years in government, I've had the privilege of seeing technology evolve from on-premises mainframes to today's AI-driven cloud solutions. My early career in the private sector taught me the importance of scalability and customer service.

Transitioning into local government allowed me to apply those lessons in a civic context, where technology directly impacts residents' quality of life.

At Tamarac, pivotal projects include building a cloud-first strategy, implementing Amazon Connect's Omni-Channel Call Center, and piloting Amazon Q as an AI-powered knowledge assistant for staff. These initiatives have not only modernized City operations but also prepared me to lead through innovation while ensuring stability, security, and accessibility for all residents.

## Award-Winning Digital Strategy Insights

Tamarac's strategy is grounded in three principles: cloud-first modernization, AI integration, and a culture of innovation. While many cities pursue digital projects, Tamarac embeds innovation into its operational DNA. Our IT Strategic Plan is a living document, updated dynamically as new technologies emerge.

What sets us apart is our openness to proof-of-concept pilots, ranging from Smart Parks with IoT to a Metaverse, virtual reality prototype, along with the executive team's support for flexibility and calculated risk. This allows Tamarac to stay ahead of change rather than react to it, ensuring our residents benefit from new technology as soon as it's viable.

## Defining and Delivering Government IT Service

We define customer service through reliability, accessibility, and personalization. Standards such as ITIL service management practices and NIST cybersecurity frameworks underpin our operations. Methods include:



- Omni-Channel communication: voice, text, web chat, video, and even smart home integration via Alexa Skills.
- AI-powered support: Amazon Bedrock Virtual Agent for residents, Amazon Q for staff.
- Dedicated training hours for IT staff to stay ahead of evolving platforms.

These methods ensure service is not only reliable but also adaptive to the diverse needs of residents and employees.

## Strategic Digital Investment Decisions

We prioritize scalability and sustainability. Every investment is measured against a 10-year horizon while acknowledging the pace of change. Our cloud migrations reduce long-term capital costs, while SaaS applications provide scalable, citizen-facing value.

By leveraging multi-year capital planning, inter-local cost-sharing agreements with neighboring municipalities, and continuous vendor benchmarking, we maximize impact while minimizing the risk of obsolescence. The guiding principle is

flexibility where technology must adapt to the City's needs, not lock us in.

## Aligning IT Strategy with Technology Trends

We treat the Strategic Plan as a living document. Rather than rigid cycles, it is updated in real time as we adopt new technologies or identify emerging priorities. This adaptive model blends scenario planning with continuous review, allowing us to anticipate disruption.

Engagement across the executive team ensures IT priorities are directly tied to Citywide goals, while resident feedback loops from engagement and CRM platforms help align investments with constituent needs. The result is a plan that looks 10 years ahead while staying agile in the present.

## Leading Beyond IT Maintenance

My advice is to cultivate a culture of innovation. Technology leaders must create space for experimentation through proofs of concept, while ensuring governance frameworks safeguard security and privacy. Start with a cloud-first approach to free your team from maintenance burdens, then reinvest that capacity into digital transformation projects.

Equally important is executive and community engagement, as technology cannot succeed in isolation. Finally, invest in your people: provide dedicated training time, foster cross-departmental learning, and offer platforms like our AI Playground where staff can safely experiment with new tools. Transformation isn't just about technology; it's about empowering people to use it effectively.

## Cloud-First Modernization

At Tamarac, innovation is not a buzzword; it is embedded into operations. Under Twigger's leadership, the City has embraced a cloud-first strategy, systematically migrating systems to Cloud-based Environments and SaaS platforms. This approach reduces legacy risk, improves scalability, and enhances resilience. Major milestones include the launch of the cloud-based Amazon Connect Omni-Channel Call Center, a cloud-based Electronic Plan Review system, and SkyNav, an AI-powered mixed-reality tourism platform, which brings residents and visitors immersive virtual tours powered by AI trip planning. These initiatives reflect Tamarac's commitment to blending cloud and AI to deliver practical benefits.

## AI in Action

Twigger has positioned Tamarac at the forefront of artificial intelligence in government. The Amazon Connect Call Center integrates AI to power a 24/7 Virtual Assistant, providing real-time, multilingual, and accessible support to residents. Internally, Amazon Q serves as an intranet-based digital assistant, enabling natural language searches of City policies and procedures to boost staff productivity. These initiatives reflect Twigger's vision that AI should both enhance constituent service and empower employees.

## Culture of Innovation

Tamarac's success lies not only in technology but also in its internal culture and leadership support. Twigger emphasizes building relationships, learning from peers, testing proofs of concept, and embracing flexibility. The City's executive team plays a key role in fostering this environment by encouraging IT to take calculated risks and remain open to change. By continually researching new technologies and updating Tamarac's living IT Strategic Plan, Twigger ensures the City adapts in real time as innovations emerge.

## Regional Collaboration

Twigger has also advanced Tamarac's role as a regional technology partner. Through Inter-Local Agreements, the City provides turnkey IT support to the Town of Southwest Ranches, hosts online government solutions for Dania Beach, Lauderdale Lakes, and Lauderhill, and delivers technical infrastructure for the Broward Sheriff's Office. These collaborations save costs, expand digital equity, and strengthen collective resilience across South Florida.

## Workforce Development

Innovation requires talent. Tamarac invests heavily in training and workforce development. Training is more than optional... it's prioritized. Staff are given protected work hours to complete certifications and training modules, reflecting the City's commitment to continuous professional growth without adding to personal time demands. Beyond IT, Tamarac created an AI Playground for all employees, allowing them to experiment with generative AI and develop comfort with emerging tools. The City is now expanding AI/GenAI training to its Executive Team and managers to align digital innovation with leadership vision.

## Responsible Governance

Balancing innovation with responsibility, Twigger led the adoption of a Centralized Data Governance Framework, covering classification, privacy, and stewardship. This ensures that emerging tools like IoT, AI, and Digital Twins are deployed with accountability, transparency, and public trust.

## A Vision for the Future

Tamarac's innovation pipeline includes a Digital Twin proof-of-concept and IoT-enabled Smart Parks, as well as a Metaverse pilot project. These forward-looking initiatives showcase Twigger's ability to prepare Tamarac for the next generation of civic technology.

## Conclusion

James Twigger's career reflects a balance of experience, vision, and leadership. With over 27 years in IT, 19 in government, and a record of driving responsible digital transformation, he continues to shape Tamarac's future while influencing the broader South Florida tech community. His leadership shows that when culture, vision, and technology align, local government can truly become a model for innovation. **GC**