

FROM VICE-MAYOR BRUCE G. ROBERTS SEPTEMBER 2013



FY 2014 PROPOSED BUDGET/FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: Although the information below is located on the City's web page, I felt it was important to add to the newsletter in order to keep everyone informed of the process. I would also refer you to our previous newsletter which provided additional information and the basis for the 2014 budget: *Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale: Vision 2035, Five-Year Strategic Plan, Annual Action Plan, Neighborhood Survey and Town Hall Meetings.*

1. What has the City done to reduce expenses in the last few years? The City has implemented numerous cost saving measures including reducing the workforce, re-organizing departments for efficiency, cutting discretionary spending, and deferring maintenance, vehicle replacements, and capital projects. The City has cut more than \$83 million in expenses since FY 2008.

2. How many positions have been eliminated? The City has eliminated 254 positions since FY 2007. We have reduced our workforce from 2,682 full-time equivalent positions (FTE) to our current level of 2,428 FTEs.

3. When was the last time the City increased property taxes? The proposed budget for FY 2014 keeps the City's low property tax of 4.1193 unchanged. This will be the seventh consecutive fiscal year that our property tax rate has not increased. In fact, you would have to go back 27 years – to 1986 -- to find a time when Fort Lauderdale had a lower tax rate than 4.1193.

4. How was the City impacted by the downturn in the economy? The economic downturn significantly impacted property tax revenue. The City received \$129 million in property taxes in FY 2007 and will receive an estimated \$93.9 million in FY 2013. Fort Lauderdale neighbors have paid \$144 million less in property taxes since FY 2007. This decrease in revenue to the City was exacerbated by unfunded mandates and substantial decreases in intergovernmental revenues.

5. When was the last time the City increased the Fire Assessment Fee? The City's Fire Assessment Fee has not increased since 2008. Since then, fuel costs have escalated dramatically, the number of responses to emergencies has increased, and we have opened seven new fire stations! Our response times have also improved. Last year, Fort Lauderdale Fire-Rescue responded to more than 42,900 calls for service with an outstanding average first unit response time of four minutes and thirty-eight seconds.

6. How have service levels to neighbors been impacted? Despite the significant reduction in the workforce and shrinking revenues, the City has preserved vital service levels for our neighbors and has continued to enhance quality of life through the acquisition of four (4) new parks, the opening of seven (7) new Fire-Rescue stations, and the implementation of new programs and events throughout the City. We are committed to maintaining the quality of life in Fort Lauderdale; our neighbors deserve it!

7. With such a significant reduction in revenue, how have we managed to balance the budget in recent years? In order to keep taxes low during the most difficult economic times, while at the same time preserving service levels and maintaining quality of life, the City used a portion of its General Fund reserves to help balance past budgets. The FY 2014 Proposed Budget does not include the use of any reserves. It is a structurally balanced budget that will serve as the foundation for a fiscally sound and sustainable future.

8. How can I provide input on the proposed budget? The City's budget process is both transparent and inclusive. Public hearings on the FY 2014 Proposed Budget will take place on Tuesday, September 3rd and Thursday, September 12th at 6 pm in the Commission Chambers, located in City Hall at 100 N. Andrews Avenue. The Fire Assessment public hearing will take place as part of the September 12th meeting. We invite you to review the proposed budget on our website at www.fortlauderdale.gov and encourage you to attend the public hearings to provide input on the proposed budget.

CITY TURNS SEAWEED INTO SAVINGS ON PLANTING SOIL: It may not be quite as lucrative as spinning straw into gold, but Fort Lauderdale, unique among South Florida coastal cities, has come upon a means of turning tons of seaweed into modest savings on soil. Every morning, city crews haul away an average of 5 to 6 tons of the ocean's

cast off vegetation, ship it to Snyder Park, and add it to a huge compost pile. The decaying seaweed brews rich soil, which is harvested for use in city planting projects. We save about \$180,000 annually in costs — about \$500 a load — it formerly incurred to transport the seaweed to a county landfill. The City parks and recreation crews descend upon the beach like pre-dawn raiders attacking the previous day's assault of litter and seaweed. After turtle inspectors survey the beach during the March to October egg-laying season, teams on ATVs clear litter by hand. Then sand sifting machines rake the sand, clearing off the remaining trash. The seaweed is loaded by hopper into dump trucks, and then sent to the compost heap to transform itself into soil. Every three months, the City dedicates about 200 yards of soil to landscape projects. Plantings along State Road 84 and the entrance to The Landings on Federal Highway have benefited from the reclaimed soil. Fort Lauderdale is the only South Florida city that composts seaweed. Boca Raton, Delray Beach and Hollywood, for example, bury the biodegradable seaweed at the high water line. As City Parks Supervisor Mark Almy states — "We use it, and it's free!"

CALLS MADE TO OUR OFFICE: We receive many calls during the day relating to different concerns our neighbors have throughout District 1. With all of the rain these past few months, the issue of **clogged drains** was dominant. Many times the calls are made late in the evening, early in the morning or on weekends when we are not in the office. We recommend that calls be made directly to 954-828-8000. Recordings made on this line are checked on an on-going basis 24/7 and logged in for service. Calls which pertain to police issues and not requiring a police response can be made to 954-828-5590 – Chief's office; code complaints which include hedge height, foreclosed homes, stagnant pools, trash, unkempt yards, etc. can be reported to 954-828-5207; parking ticket questions can be handled at 954-828-3700; and lastly, 211 provides a myriad of services, referrals and advice for families needing assistance! We are always glad to help in any way we can, but because we are not here at certain times, we want you to have an option of going directly to the source. When in doubt – just call our office!

VALUES OF COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY (CRA) AND THEIR MISSION: When a CRA is established, the community is invited to share its input and help create the redevelopment plan, or the blueprint for progress. This transparent and wholly public process includes a statutory requirement for the CRA to prioritize the timing of the projects in the plan. Before implementation, a CRA's master plan must be adopted by the local city and/or county. They have been proven historically to provide distressed communities with a better economy through improved infrastructure, job opportunities and housing. Their mission is to make housing and urban areas safer for residents, to preserve and grow business and provide a sense of place for all who live there. Citizens benefit from the efforts of their local CRA and its ultimate goal to improve blighted conditions within the community. Redevelopment is a wise strategic investment, especially during tough economic times. Floridians should recognize that CRAs work in the communities' best interests, creating unity and ensuring the overall vitality of the City. Fort Lauderdale has three CRA's: The Beach Redevelopment (which sunsets in 2019); the Northwest-Progresso-Flagler Heights Redevelopment (which sunsets in 2025); and the newly created Central City Redevelopment.

FIREFIGHTERS HELP DOUBLE AMPUTEE GET NEW BIKE AFTER THEFT: This story was run in the Sun-Sentinel (online) a few months back, and though his trek is completed, it was so touching I thought I would share it with you. He is actually from District 1 which makes it even better! *The City's firefighters made a generous donation to a double amputee who cycles for charity after his bike was stolen in May. Hector Picard was presented a check to support his ride for charity. He lost both of his arms in a work accident years ago, but it hasn't slowed him down. Next month he will travel 3,200 miles on a bicycle, from Florida to Washington, to raise money for 1-year-old Jameson Davis, who was born without hands or forearms. Picard said, "I just want to show him two things: I want to raise money for prosthetics they are having difficulty with. That and also show him that anything is possible." Picard suffered a small set back when his specially-equipped bicycle was stolen in May, but thanks to the generous donation from the firefighters, the tri-athlete and cyclist received a customized bike from Trek Bicycle Company. Fort Lauderdale firefighters who heard Picard's story donated more than \$3,000 for his ride. "It's been a big progress, collecting the money, getting everything out there, and it has been a huge success for us. We are very happy," said Scott Bayne, who is part of the Fort Lauderdale Firefighter Professionals. Picard said the funds will help him change the little boy's life and show him anything is possible. "I can do anything, and the little boy is going to be able to do anything he wants, as well," said Picard. He began his bike ride on June 8 in Miami and will end the middle of July in Spokane, Washington. Picard's website is www.dontstopliving.org.*

CITY PROJECTS UPDATE:

Imperial Point Large Water Main Replacement Project (NE 56th St. between N. Andrews Ave and NE 15th Ave): Construction started in June and is expected to be completed in May 2014. This Community Investment Project is being implemented to improve water transmission in the City of Fort Lauderdale, as well as in the City of Oakland Park. Upon completion of the project, the roadway will be restored, which includes installing new asphalt and restriping the traffic lanes. Most of this current work will actually occur in the City of Oakland Park.

Las Olas Isles and Sunrise Key Bridges Replacement Project: The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) awarded an \$8 million design-build contract to MCM Corp. and Gannett Fleming to demolish and replace the low level bridges off Las Olas Boulevard to Royal Palm Drive, Nurmi Drive, Fiesta Way and Isle of Venice and the low level Sunrise Key Bridge off NE 6th Court in Fort Lauderdale. Design of the bridges is underway. The contractor anticipates working on two, non-adjacent bridges at a time. Construction is expected to begin in fall 2013. All five bridges are expected to be completed by late 2016. Also, utility lines that are on or near the bridges must be moved. Utility relocation is scheduled by the individual utility.

Federal Highway Resurfacing: The Florida Department of Transportation recently told the City of plans to resurface Federal Highway from Broward Boulevard to Northeast 17th Way. In addition to repaving, FDOT plans to make drainage and pedestrian improvements. The work should begin in October 2014. We should have more precise information later this year.

In the near future, we will bring you more updates on projects slated for North Ocean Boulevard between Oakland Park Boulevard and Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, and the Middle River Bridge on East Sunrise Boulevard.

IMPORTANT DATES FOR CALENDAR:

- 9.12.13: 2nd Budget Public Hearing; 6p.m., Commission Chambers, City Hall
- 9.16.13: Pre-Agenda Meeting, District 1, 6p.m., Imperial Point Hospital, South Entrance
- 9.17.13: Commission Meetings (conference and regular)
- 9.30.13: Pre-agenda Meeting at the Beach Community Center
- 10.1.13: Commission Meetings (conference and regular)

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In addition to hosting two pre-agenda meetings twice a month, I am also available to attend your HOA meetings to update your neighborhood on what is going on in the City as well as answer any questions/concerns you may have. Please contact Robbi to schedule.