**Swearing-in speech**

**Mayor Dean Trantalis**

**Dec. 2, 2020**

**Broward Center for the Performing Arts**

I would like to thank the voters of Fort Lauderdale for returning me to office for a second term as mayor.

On Nov. 5, we witnessed the tremendous success of this City Commission’s decision to change the charter and move our elections from the spring. A record turnout of people voted in the municipal races last month. In all, more than 85,000 people cast ballots. At a time in our nation when faith in democracy has been tested, our city showed how democracy works.

The message of the election was clear and resounding. Voters overwhelmingly supported our shared vision for the city’s future. The state of our city is strong and our future bright.

We have been tested this past year like no city administration before us has been as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing this deadly and contagious virus has been our top priority. We put the health of our residents first and led the way with responsible and reasonable measures to control the spread so businesses and services could reopen, and people could get back to work.

We truly have been a leader in these endeavors – from avoiding a Spring Break super-spreader event to helping struggling families survive. We have worked with our business community to ensure safe practices, and for those in real need, we partnered with our neighboring cities and have distributed thousands of food boxes, a practice that continues every week at Mills Pond Park.

With recent announcements that vaccines will soon be available, hope lies ahead. We will work closely with our regional and state partners to distribute vaccines quickly and efficiently with a focus first on frontline workers and those who are most vulnerable. At the same time, we must do all we can to ensure our economy regains the robustness that existed before the virus appeared.

Until those vaccines are widely available, though, we must maintain our vigilance. We have seen too many examples lately of residents letting their guard down and not wearing masks and not practicing social-distancing. We must continue to maintain these common-sense rules a little while longer.

We also have been tested as a community by the immediate need to upgrade an aging and rapidly deteriorating infrastructure. We have proven ourselves up to the challenge.

Under a very aggressive schedule set by this commission, there are more than 150 projects underway to bring our water and sewer systems up to date.

Old pipes are being replaced, and others reinforced. The replacement of the 50-year-old sewer main in our city’s core has passed the midway point. Two contractors have been working simultaneously to get this job done as fast as possible — and with as little neighborhood disruption as possible.

New lift stations are being built, and we also are working on plans to build a bigger and better water treatment plant.

So, what lies ahead in the post-COVID world? What is important in our city?

We must ensure these infrastructure improvements are completed. Nothing is more critical to our city remaining a great place to live, a great place to work and a great place to visit.

But I think we also need to return to the fundamentals of what makes us such a wonderful community.

First, we are the Venice of America. It is our beaches and waterways that make us so attractive. That’s why it pained me to see the impact of the repeated sewer line breaks.

We must clean up our rivers and canals. And, we need to fulfill our promise to undertake regular testing of waterway cleanliness.

As a coastal community, we must step up our efforts to address climate change. Tropical Storm Eta and recent king tides have clearly demonstrated the need for significant improvement to our stormwater infrastructure.

Construction is commencing to better protect low-lying neighborhoods by adding tidal control valves, storm drain systems, pump stations and catch basins. And, we are building new seawalls. Still, we must also remain nimble and ensure that work is advanced as quickly as possible in the neighborhoods most impacted by flooding.

We also pride ourselves as being a community that embraces diversity. As such, we need to find resolutions to the difficult issues surrounding race and law enforcement. I am proud of the men and women who work hard each day to keep our community safe, but that doesn’t mean we cannot do better.

I anticipate the city manager will soon finish the process of installing permanent leadership in the Police Department. We also need to engage the Citizen Police Review Board, national experts, our police officers and our community in a meaningful discussion of reform so we can ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equally and with full transparency.

Another matter facing our city in this coming term is that we have the ability to forge a new vision for our downtown. It’s a rare opportunity that many communities wish they could have. Let’s look boldly to the future and create a walkable, vibrant downtown that speaks strongly to who we are as a community.

Recent private development has created an urban core that most could not have foreseen even a decade ago. Now, our job is to ensure this becomes truly an urban village and craft an exciting public realm for the area.

The renovation of the historic Parker Playhouse will be completed soon, and, thanks to the overwhelming approval by the voters on the Parks Bond, we can continue to enhance the downtown and neighborhood experience, such as moving forward to complete the work on the Tunnel Top Park on Las Olas Blvd. and setting aside new open spaces such as our recent vote to purchase land along the Tarpon River.

Moreover, the city’s arrangement with the Florida Panthers hockey team is moving forward to renovate War Memorial Auditorium. The Panthers are making a multimillion-dollar investment to add rinks for ice skating and hockey and to restore the existing interior for concerts and family-friendly programming.

I’m also extremely pleased that the federal courthouse will remain downtown.

This has been a dicey subject for more than a decade. There was a point at which the court could have closed with local cases assigned to judges in West Palm and Miami. But I can say that I am very confident that the federal government is close to choosing a site downtown for a new courthouse.

But we can go further.

There is the future of the old One Stop Shop site. We all agree that more park space is needed downtown, and there is no more ideal place than there. The question is what form that park space takes and how best to activate the entire site.

Fort Lauderdale is the seat of government for Broward County, and a key piece of shaping the vibrancy and appeal of our downtown for the coming decades is what happens to our government buildings.

Both City Hall and the Broward County Governmental Center have outlived their lifespan and face serious and costly structural issues. We have been working for a couple years now on the concept of a joint government campus. This could be a real jewel, an anchor to the urban core that signifies the area’s transformation.

This process must be expedited. And whether we work together with the county or go our own way, we must think boldly in designing any new building as well as in repurposing the existing properties.

Another critical component of a new downtown is commuter rail.

COVID-19 brought at least a temporary end to the Brightline service between Miami and West Palm. But the pause has allowed us to discuss more in-depth what the future looks like for public transportation. Given the traffic congestion in South Florida, we need to move ahead with a more localized commuter rail than Brightline previously offered.

Miami-Dade County has led the way with a recent agreement that would create multiple local stops along the Florida East Coast Railroad tracks in its jurisdiction. We need to follow suit. The Brightline station downtown should be a hub of a service within Broward of stops at the international airport and communities to our north and south and then beyond to Palm Beach and Miami.

This is, though, where decision-making becomes complex. And again, we must act with vision for the long term. A choke point exists with the commuter rail — the crossing at the New River. We simply cannot have increased rail traffic over this old bridge as the impact on our important maritime industry would just be too great.

The designs for a new bridge that I’ve seen are horrendous.

I do not want to cleave our community in half. Nor do I want our efforts at create an upscale downtown marred and a new government campus left oddly out of place against a high-raise train trestle..

That’s why I’ve advocated a tunnel. It would be the best solution with the long-term view of downtown in mind. We need a better examination of the feasibility and cost of such an undertaking than the back-of-a-napkin thoughts we are working from today.

And, if it is truly proven that a tunnel is impractical or too costly, we at least need to make sure the bridge design is truly extraordinary in nature and befits its surroundings better than almost any other bridge does.

There are other initiatives ahead of us.

Let’s look forward to finally having a grand opening of the soccer stadium at Lockhart. Our aquatic center renovation is moving ahead nicely and will feature a 27-meter dive tower – the highest in the hemisphere.

The community also voted to rebuild our police headquarters. Let’s move forward and begin to design its replacement and ensure we that we build the best station for the least cost.

And we need to intensify our efforts to confront the persistent issues of homelessness and affordable housing. With the pandemic forcing so many out of work and onto the streets, we have a special responsibility to help those in need, especially folks with children. I call upon our fellow cities and our county government to reach out and lend us a hand in this task. We owe it to our commitment to humanity.

We also need to lobby the county to ensure the one-cent transportation sales tax is spent to resolve significant transportation issues, including the synchronization of traffic lights. Traffic is a concern that never seems to go away. The popularity of our city continues to grow, but so does the congestion. We can no longer sit on our hands and do nothing. It’s time to act, and to act now.

Despite the setbacks dealt by COVID, Fort Lauderdale is a city on the move. We have so much to be proud of — great neighborhoods, the distinction as a world renown tourist destination, our beautiful beaches and waterways, our thriving marine industry and our incredible nightlife. We accomplished a lot recently, and more progress lies ahead.

I want to thank my fellow members on the city commission as well as our staff. Let 2021 be the year that we expected 2020 to be, and grab onto those stars that this year escaped our reach. I look forward to our working together to make these things happen. God bless you all, and God bless the United States of America.