

**State of the City  
Mayor Dean Trantalis  
October 4, 2023  
The Parker**

Good evening and thank you for joining us.

At this time, I'd like to ask you to please rise for the presentation of colors by the Fort Lauderdale Police Department Honor Guard.

Please remain standing and welcome Amber Cabrera, who is assistant to the city manager, to the stage for the singing of the National Anthem.

Wasn't that a great rendition of the National Anthem. Thank you, Amber.

Honor Guard, you may now be dismissed.

I now invite the Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins of The Sunshine Cathedral to the stage for the invocation.

Thank you, Rev. Watkins.

And, please join me in thanking The Parker for the use of this beautiful facility again tonight. They have graciously been our commission home for the past several months. I invite everyone to return for some of their wonderful performances.

It's my privilege to recognize the other members of the City Commission and city administration who are here tonight – Vice Mayor Pamela Beasley-Pittman; commissioners John Herbst, Steven Glassman and Warren Sturman; City Manager Greg Chavarria, Interim City Attorney D'Wayne Spence, City Clerk David Soloman and City Auditor Patrick Reilly.

Let's give them a round of applause.

The past year has been one of great challenges and great successes. We overcame unexpected adversities, while the accomplishments we've made will help ensure Fort Lauderdale is a resilient community for decades to come and a city known internationally as a tremendous place to live, work or visit. It's the city you never want to leave.

The massive rainstorm in April and ensuing flooding tested us. In the face of tragedy and suffering, a can-do attitude showed through. This indomitable spirit was there

during the early rescue efforts, continued through the clean-up and lasted into the rebuilding stage.

Neighbor helped neighbor. Other cities, agencies and charities lent assistance. And, our partners in federal and state government quickly provided relief for residents and businesses.

The scope of this sudden disaster was without precedent.

We were inundated with 26 inches of rain in about five hours — something that is considered a once-in-a-thousand-year occurrence. That's 88 billion gallons of rain — more water than there is in 134,000 Olympic-size swimming pools! No community anywhere in the world is prepared to face something of that magnitude. However, Fort Lauderdale is resilient.

During the storm and the hours shortly afterward, the city responded to some 10,000 calls for service. Our emergency response teams rescued or relocated more than 900 people. There was no loss of life thanks to their heroic efforts.

A monumental cleanup effort ensued. At the peak, we had 36 vacuum and pump trucks clearing flooded streets. We used our own equipment as well as assets from private contractors and 13 nearby cities.

We put the focus on those most in need — the low-lying areas that were extremely flooded. This included Edgewood, River Oaks, Melrose Manors, Melrose Park, Durrs and Dorsey-Riverbend.

I want to thank our city staff who put in long hours during that time in the service of the residents of Fort Lauderdale. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I'd also like to acknowledge all the residents who stepped up.

One remarkable instance of neighborly help stands out. Will John, Daniel, Jennifer and Sarah of the Forman family; Tony and Maggie Schreiber; Max Henriquez; Tiago Lima and Kian Billings please come to the stage.

During the storm, John and his family had left the Edgewood neighborhood early but decided to return to help others. Using high-water vehicles and canoes and with the assistance of other family members and friends, they rescued some 20 people, including an 80-year-old woman and a couple in their 70s. In recognition for your community-spirited actions, I'm presenting you with proclamations of appreciation.

Thank you again.

The city manager and I knew that we had to quickly obtain disaster assistance so people could rebuild. He and I flew to Washington, D.C., and persuaded the Biden

administration to expedite the president signing a disaster declaration. What normally would have taken weeks for a FEMA response, we achieved that day.

As a result of a highly coordinated effort between the city and FEMA, more than 5,500 households received \$31 million in individual federal assistance.

With the help of the American Red Cross, we sheltered those left homeless. We also opened comfort stations where people could obtain water and food or use a restroom and shower.

The city stepped forward to provide financial relief as well. We started a program that lowered the cost of repair work by covering construction permit fees.

It was our duty to offer a helping hand when so many of our residents faced an uncertain future. That's what being a compassionate community is about.

While the events of April were unprecedented, such natural disasters are becoming all too common as our global climate changes and tests us. Fort Lauderdale is on the front lines as a low-lying coastal community in the tropics.

Experts expect sea levels will rise between 21 and 40 inches in less than a half-century. Tides already flood some of the lowest parts of our city monthly. Areas once considered safe from flooding are increasingly vulnerable.

That is why I think it is incumbent on us to redouble our commitment to build and maintain a strong and long-lasting infrastructure.

Tonight, I'm pleased to announce a new initiative to do just that. After multiple conversations with myself and the rest of the City Commission, the city manager has developed a plan that greatly accelerates critical infrastructure work to make us more resilient to flooding and the impacts of climate change.

We're calling it Fortify Lauderdale.

Over the next decade, Fortify Lauderdale will invest up to a half-billion dollars in stormwater infrastructure construction in 17 neighborhoods. This is more than twice the number we planned to do, and we will finish design and construction of these improvements in less than 10 years. This is the most aggressive resiliency effort underway in our state, maybe our nation. It is what we need to do to protect our residents.

Public Works engineers are engaged in a vulnerability assessment to identify and prioritize our greatest risks in this new program. The construction will be supplemented by a companion program that will assist residents with information on how they can better protect their homes and property.

Fortify Lauderdale will be in addition to the extensive work already underway in which we are investing \$200 million in eight neighborhoods to address tidal flooding and stormwater runoff.

Allow me a moment to update you about those efforts.

We're installing more tidal-control valves and drainage pipes, building new outfall connections and drainage structures, creating new catch basins, raising seawalls, rebuilding swales and constructing stormwater reserves.

In the Edgewood and River Oaks areas, construction work is almost complete. The last piece, the pump stations, will be completed at the end of 2024. The River Oaks stormwater preserve, for instance, has already opened.

In the Melrose Manors and Riverland neighborhoods, the city is fast-tracking a drainage network designed to reduce the duration and intensity of flooding.

Another part of the ongoing resiliency work is the improvement to city seawalls.

We've built new seawalls on Hendricks Isle and have embarked on similar projects in Merle Fogg Park, Southeast 10 Street and East Las Olas Boulevard. Some of these seawalls were 50 years old and in poor condition. The new ones are higher and stronger and will reduce flooding in low-lying areas.

We also have asked property owners to do their part. The commission adopted new standards for the minimum height of seawalls. This will broaden our protection against flooding.

Resiliency is important, but it can't break the banks for our residents.

The city is doing its part. Our infrastructure resiliency program would have cost residents more if not for the sound financial management of the city. The AAA credit rating that we achieved is saving us millions of dollars through lower interest rates.

But we need to see action from the state. Those in state government keep talking about property insurance reform, but the bills for our residents continue to increase. I call on the governor and the Legislature to take action.

With communities investing significantly in measures to better protect property, the state needs to make sure insurance companies reflect that in their rates because our actions are lowering the risk that insurers face.

In addition to improved resiliency, the city also is committed to a long-term plan to improve our water and sewer infrastructure.

Like many American cities, Fort Lauderdale for too long failed to invest adequately in repairing or replacing aging pipes and infrastructure systems. We suffered the consequences and have spent the last several years catching up. We will continue that course with a commitment to issue another \$200 million in infrastructure bonds this fiscal year.

Projects underway include a new wastewater pump station in Flagler Village and a new pump station south of the New River downtown. We are improving our sewer system to prevent groundwater infiltration. In January, we finish construction of a critical new processing system at the George T. Lohmeyer Wastewater Treatment Plant. We are in the process of procuring contractors to rehabilitate the 54-inch main between the Lohmeyer Plant and our well field as well as wastewater mains in the Coral Ridge Country Club neighborhood.

The largest project in the works is the new water treatment plant. We expect to break ground within the month and be operational by late 2026.

The plant is of critical importance. The current Fiveash plant has reached the end of its lifespan after 70 years of use. It required extensive upgrades, would not withstand the impact of a major hurricane and could not provide our community with the clear drinking water that residents demanded.

We did not enter this decision rashly. The city diligently researched options of repairing Fiveash and investigated what type of treatment system made the most sense.

We landed on a public-private partnership. Through this remarkable arrangement, we are harnessing the talent of world-renown experts to handle construction and operations. What we are doing is so innovative that the project is in line for a national award as one of the best P3 projects of the year.

I can't wait to cut the ribbon and bring our drinking water system into the 21st century.

Climate change and infrastructure are not the only challenges we face as a city. As a community that is rapidly growing, one significant issue is our transportation system. We need to find ways to reduce congestion.

I have been working hard in support of plans to build a commuter rail system linking communities between Miami and West Palm Beach. This would expand on the current Brightline service.

Commuter rail would be a true game-changer for the region, relieving congestion on Interstate 95 and other north-south roads. It would provide convenient and frequent service between many of our downtowns.

Miami-Dade and Broward counties are so far committed to building this system from downtown Miami to the southern edge of downtown Fort Lauderdale, near the Broward

Health hospital. As that occurs, we continue to narrow in on the best method for trains to cross the New River and extend service farther northward.

This is a complicated issue that not only involves ensuring the movement of passenger and freight trains, but also meeting the needs of maritime traffic on the New River and drivers who commute between western suburbs and downtown.

State and county officials have long favored building a high-rise bridge through our city, while the City Commission is on record in support of a tunnel. In the spirit of compromise, we've engaged in lengthy discussions in recent months with the other parties involved only to find fatal flaws in suggested alternatives.

A tunnel remains the only viable answer. It is the only option that makes sense for the city's long-term future and success.

Why?

Because so much has been invested in our downtown as more people move to our beautiful city. To build a train bridge through its middle would crush our best efforts at creating a downtown of the future. And, it would perpetuate long-standing racial divisions. We should not build a permanent divide separating communities, but rather find ways to heal differences of the past and bring communities together.

So, I have good news to share.

We've teamed up with a group of international firms to put plans together for a cost-efficient tunnel. And... we've received support in this endeavor from Brightline, Florida East Coast Industries and Fortress, their holding company. Those three firms largely control the rail corridor and are now at the table with us to help make a tunnel reality.

We are moving ahead fast.

We only have a short window in which we can obtain critical funding from the Biden Administration's infrastructure program. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and presidential adviser Mitch Landrieu have assured me that they will help us navigate the federal system for funding when we are ready.

I have other great news as well. The U.S. Department of Transportation even awarded the city this week almost \$1 million to advance studies that will show the benefits of constructing a tunnel.

Our transportation plans do not stop with commuter rail.

We eagerly await the county to begin construction of a bypass road through Port Everglades to relieve traffic on Southeast 17th Street. They promised this road when they sought city permission to build a convention center hotel.

We also are working with the state on plans to improve traffic flow on Sunrise between Searstown and the Gateway intersection. And, our idea of bringing congestion relief to downtown by building a loop of one-way streets using Andrews and 3rd is finally in the feasibility stage with the regional transportation agency.

With this one-way pairing, a lane could be dedicated for a 21<sup>st</sup> century people-mover, hopefully autonomous, to ease congestion downtown. No rails and no overhead wires like an old-fashioned streetcar, just pure convenience.

We also are expanding our micro-mobility initiative with Circuit to offer convenient door-to-door service, building on successful pilots downtown and on the beach. We are now serving residents in District 3 and north in District 1 as well.

Education is another challenge. It's a difficult one for us to address because classroom instruction falls under the authority of the county School Board.

The Broward County School District is a huge bureaucracy with interests spanning an area of almost 2 million residents. As city officials, we interact daily with our neighborhoods and hear of unaddressed concerns and overlooked needs. Too often, parents complain about the quality of education. And too often, prospective businesses raise the same issue.

I think the time has come for a frank discussion in Fort Lauderdale about the future of education. We should look at options that some once would have considered radical such as the city taking more of a leadership role in expanding school options.

I recently met with the leadership of Pembroke Pines, Broward's second largest city, to learn how they took a different direction on education.

Decades ago, they launched their own charter school system, starting first with an elementary school and then expanding to middle and high school. They now operate eight schools independent of the county and serve 6,000 students with another 6,000 on a wait list.

US News & World Report listed Pines' high school as one of the nation's best high schools. And the entire Pines system was named a School of Excellence by the Florida Department of Education.

They have managed to do this with no investment of city tax dollars. Rather, they have relied exclusively on education money that the state allows to be shifted to charter schools. And, recent changes in state law will allow more of that revenue to be spent on initiatives like Pines.

It's worth a conversation.

Within the current parameters, Fort Lauderdale is doing its utmost to improve education.

For the third consecutive year, the city implemented its summer enrichment program. The city has helped more than 2,000 children and teens master new skills in reading and math. In recognition of the city's success, the Florida Department of Education has committed \$700,000 to expand the program year-round.

To promote literacy, the city once again partnered with the Barbara Bush Foundation on the Book Explorers Reading program. The program expanded to three new sites this past year.

The city also has offered help to three underperforming schools through a pilot initiative called Community Action Partnerships for Education. The effort increased school-based volunteers, parental engagement, wrap-around family support and donation drives.

Finally, we've partnered with Broward College to expand access to post-secondary education and workforce training in underrepresented communities.

Let me next turn to public safety. Public safety is a primary and important responsibility of any city.

In June, we broke ground on a new police headquarters. It will have sufficient space for our police force and will be equipped with state-of-the-art technology and resources to help in crime-fighting efforts.

The old station was woefully out of date and in poor physical condition. Fortunately, voters recognized the need and approved a bond issue to build a new headquarters.

The construction schedule calls for it to open in 2025.

This City Commission well recognizes that crime, both nationally and locally, is a growing public concern. So, last month, the City Commission increased the size of the police force for the second year in a row. We have added a total of 35 officers — 14 officers in this new fiscal year and 21 last fiscal year.

Once hired, these recruits will allow us to add patrols, respond better to calls for help and ensure our streets are safe.

At the same time, we are expanding the coverage area of the ShotSpotter Program. This innovative technology detects the location of gunfire and directs response by officers.

We also are building a full-service police substation in the YMCA on Sistrunk Boulevard. And, we are advancing our partnership with other law enforcement agencies to increase



crime clearance rates by sharing violent crimes intelligence information through the processing of bullet shell casings into a national database.

Over the past year, we reassigned officers to create a new Community Support Unit to address neighborhood concerns. We also implemented a high-tech camera system that has enhanced the documentation of crime scenes so investigators and juries can virtually place themselves in the location. And, we placed tactical analysts in our Real Time Crime Center to better relay pertinent information to responding officers.

At the Fire Department, we are finally nearing the end of the long effort to upgrade our stations and add new ones.

We have built or replaced 11 stations. Only one station is left to be completed from the fire bond program.

Construction of a temporary Station 13 on the barrier island should be finished by the end of the year. The new station at Birch State Park is being designed, and construction will start early next year.

We also expect to complete the rehabilitation of Station 54 off Oakland Park Boulevard within the next couple weeks. The construction of Emergency Medical SubStation 88 south of the New River will be completed by 2025.

Work will start soon on the privately owned Heron Garage off Las Olas Boulevard with space for city EMS and fire services. This new facility will boost service to the east side of downtown, Victoria Park and Las Olas Isles.

As with the Police Department, we have been beefing up the staff of the Fire Rescue Department. We have increased the department's personnel by 26 positions over the last two years — 10 in this new fiscal year and 16 last fiscal year.

With this year's budget, we will be able to increase the number of rescue units staffed by three firefighters. This is important because it allows fire engines to operate separately from the rescue unit. As a result, a fire engine can respond to a fire call while the rescue unit is on another call.

Like many growing areas, South Florida is facing a crisis with the twin issues of housing affordability and homelessness.

Fort Lauderdale has long been committed to doing as much as possible to ensure we have a housing stock that supports families of all levels of income. Frankly, our city is leading the way in the region.

Just last month, Seven on Seventh opened with 72 units of affordable housing, having relied on the city to bridge a funding gap.

Over the past year, we approved financial incentives for affordable housing projects being built by New Hope Church, Broward Housing Solutions and Wright Dynasty. We also provided a combination of development waivers and financing to Gallery at FAT Village, a 16-story affordable housing project. We opened the Housing Authority's new Poinciana Crossing complex and broke ground on The Adderley, which was made possible by a \$12 million city loan.

We must do more. So, just this week, we adopted an innovative proposal that was suggested to us on how to incentivize even more projects.

The best approach to homelessness and the problems associated with it confounds every metro area. There are no easy solutions, and we need all levels of government to help.

Fort Lauderdale is leading.

Each day, the city's dedicated Homeless Outreach Team make it their mission to engage with the homeless population and encourage them to accept help. This help can include finding social services and housing opportunities. These teams focus attention on high-traffic areas such as the library and bus station downtown, the Galt, the Gateway section on Sunrise and the intersection at 17th and Federal.

The city uses local tax dollars as well as federal and state aid to place individuals in temporary housing and provide them with services to address the root causes of their homelessness. We also have a highly regarded community court program that diverts homeless individuals charged with minor offenses into temporary housing and services.

The city is increasing the number of police officers assigned full time to homeless outreach. And, in the new budget, we doubled the money for our housing navigation program. This is a unique collaboration with the TaskForce For Ending Homelessness to reduce the number of displaced individuals. In its first three months, it achieved a 60 percent success rate at individuals accepting housing placement.

Our efforts don't stop there.

After a long court delay, we have begun enforcement of our new ordinance that prohibits individuals from standing in the streets and obstructing traffic, a move that should finally respond to public concerns about unsafe and aggressive panhandling. The court system declared our old ordinance unconstitutional, bringing enforcement to a lengthy but albeit temporary halt.

The city manager and I also have been meeting with regional judicial and law enforcement officials about certain court issues that contribute to those living on our

streets. Matters like how inmates are released from jail are complicated and require regional solutions, but we hope the conversations will bear fruit.

Let's now turn to our environment.

One of the main reasons people are drawn to South Florida is the environment — our tropical climate, our beautiful beaches, our charming waterways and the Everglades. We must be good stewards of our surroundings so future generations can enjoy what we have.

This is why we have encouraged initiatives to ensure clean waterways.

Over the past year, we completed dredging projects in the Tarpon River and Himmarshee Canal to address sediment from the 2019-2020 sewer breaks. We also have installed aerators to improve water quality, and we have increased waterway patrols by code enforcement officers.

This coming fiscal year, we're undertaking a comprehensive assessment of impaired waterways and will spend almost \$400,000 on canal cleaning. 2024 will also mark the third year of our program to monitor and publicize the level of any contaminants in the waterways.

The city's commitment to the environment showed through this past year when we were awarded the LEED for Cities Gold certification. We are one of only a few cities in Florida to accomplish this.

We achieved this as a result of programs such as those to protect sea turtles, find natural solutions for the abundance of sargassum seaweed, provide access to green and natural spaces, and reduce the city's carbon footprint.

There is another challenge that we should discuss, and that is we no longer have a City Hall.

Even before the April flooding, we were exploring the idea of building a new one in light of the high costs of needed renovations and the money spent on overflow office space. The flood ended any debate as it destroyed the building's electrical, HVAC and elevator systems.

We have moved to temporary space as we plan for the future. But we need neighbor input, so we have asked the Infrastructure Task Force to take the lead and begin a community discussion about what type of building we need and its footprint.

We need to be deliberate and think wisely as we plan for a City Hall that will last for generations. While no one wants a Taj Mahal, we also should remember that City Halls

are a testament to the community and should be something more than merely functional.

While every city has its challenges, most cities do not have the track record of successes that has blessed us in Fort Lauderdale. We are truly becoming one of the most desirable places in the nation to live, work and visit.

Did you know that Livability ranked us among the best places to live? Miami, Tampa, West Palm Beach and Jacksonville didn't even make the list. We were ahead of Orlando and cities such as Charleston, South Carolina, and Asheville, North Carolina that have long been considered excellent choices.

To quote Livability: "With a motto of 'live where you vacation,' Fort Lauderdale, Florida, has a knack for turning tourists into residents. As one of the best places to live in the U.S., Fort Lauderdale is a diverse and cosmopolitan city with a 24-mile stretch of golden sand along the Atlantic Ocean, world-class restaurants and bars, plus 31 distinct neighborhoods."

What a glowing report.

We also were inducted this year into the All-America City Hall of Fame, topping off our previous prestigious recognition by the National Civic League as an All-America City in 2014. They particularly cited our degree of community collaboration to get things done, noting the community effort to build the L.A. Lee YMCA/Mizell Community Center.

One factor in our city's rise in prominence is the incredible success of our downtown.

Downtown has become one of the three leading economic engines of Broward County, ranking alongside the port and airport. It has an annual impact on the economy of \$35.7 billion a year, up \$6 billion in just four years.

It's become a destination unto its own. More than 1,000 hotel rooms have been added downtown in five years, tripling the inventory and bringing a record number of visitors to our urban core. There are more new restaurants per mile in downtown Fort Lauderdale than in downtown Nashville, Atlanta or Tampa.

That is just amazing. It's only getting better as we make major investments to create new public spaces for the entire community to enjoy. It will be a network of downtown parks that will rival any other city in the country.

We expect Tunnel Top Park to be completed by the end of the year. We will then begin installing artwork we are purchasing to make the park a unique feature for the city. We were fortunate to receive a \$5 million bequest from James Laird, a man who deeply loved our city and wanted to help beautify it.

Our partners in the transformation of the old One Stop Shop site expect to begin the planning approval process for their project at the end of the year. When completed, this arts park will be home to a cultural center and European-style marketplace.

At the same time, the city is collaborating with the Downtown Development Authority to reimagine Huizenga Park. The park has been a special gathering place for decades, but it will become more spectacular with an updated Spirit of Fort Lauderdale Fountain, a river overlook, a lush shade canopy and civic lawn, a dog run and a waterfront restaurant. We hope to break ground early next year.

One thing that I'm most proud of is the incredible array of new amenities that we have. Residents have exciting new options for recreation and entertainment. These wonderful and amazing additions are helping brand the city as a great place to live.

At the beginning of this year, we opened the renovated aquatic center.

We built state-of-the-art competition pools and one of the tallest dive towers in the world. In fact, the city was recognized by the American Institute of Architects for the unique design of the tower. We also built new grandstands and locker rooms, and we just finalized a deal with the International Swimming Hall of Fame to reimagine its part of the property.

Prince Albert and Princess Charlene of Monaco were among the first people to see the new facility. Since then, the aquatic center has reclaimed its place as a destination for international and national swimming and diving competitions. We hosted the World Aquatics High Diving World Cup and the Pan American Artistic Swimming Championship. More such events are on the horizon.

This beautiful new aquatic center keeps winning awards. Just today, we were recognized with the 2023 SportsTravel Award for Best or New Renovated Sports Venue. That's the fifth award this project has won. It truly is a triumph for the city.

Since this summer, one name has been mentioned worldwide over and over again in conjunction with our city — Fort Lauderdale's newest resident, Leo Messi. This Argentine soccer great joined the Inter Miami team and has been drawing huge crowds to our new DRV PNK Stadium.

The throngs of fans and worldwide publicity have proven just how successful the deal was that the city struck in 2019 with David Beckham and a group led by Jorge Mas to build the stadium. Leo Messi has ignited an unprecedented buzz about our city, and that will lead to an abundance of new economic opportunities and tourism business.

Please remember just how good a deal we made. Inter Miami built a stadium, corporate headquarters, training facility and youth camp at no cost to taxpayers. Rather, they invested \$165 million and took the risk. Meanwhile, we still own the property and will reap the benefits for years to come.

Yes, there have been some loose ends remaining from the deal.

For example, they have now paid the permit fees that they owed the city. And, together, the team and city are moving ahead with plans for a public park on the site. Design work is underway, and we can soon look forward to a beautiful public space.

For Fort Lauderdale, the new aquatic center and new soccer stadium are the beginning of a transformative process, not the end.

Just two months from now, we will open a state-of-the-art sports facility featuring a pair of indoor ice rinks. The Florida Panthers hockey team has been building this incredible addition to our community in Holiday Park under a public-private partnership deal with the city. One rink will cater to the public, while the other will be used for team practice.

At the same time, the Panthers are underwriting a full-scale renovation of War Memorial Auditorium that should be completed by mid-2024. The Panthers will operate it in conjunction with Live Nation and will return this venerable venue to its glory days with family-oriented shows and concerts. But the best part is the Panthers assume the operational expense, saving taxpayers \$1 million a year.

We also have inked a public-private partnership that will answer demands for more pickleball courts.

This sport has dramatically taken off, and the city has been eager to keep up with the interest. A group called My Park Initiative stepped forward and agreed to build a pickleball center in an underused section of Snyder Park. When constructed, the site will have 42 courts as well as a restaurant and lakefront beach area. This is being done without touching the native growth section of the park that we all so value and at no cost to the city.

Finally, plans are underway to build a major movie studio operation on top of an old landfill site. This unique use of a brownfield will bring hundreds of jobs to our community, not just on the screen, but trade jobs. And there will be training opportunities on site to provide future career opportunities, particularly to those from our underserved communities. Hopefully, this will revive South Florida as a destination for the production of film and TV programming.

Look for announcements soon.

Neighborhoods are a cornerstone of what makes Fort Lauderdale a great place to live. We continue to take steps to improve their quality of life.

As you may remember, voters approved a \$200 million parks improvement program in 2019. So far, \$140 million in bonds have been issued and projects are underway in

parks throughout the city. Also, in the new budget, the City Commission agreed to step up spending on new sidewalks to improve walkability.

We continue to replace older bridges. And, we've toughened the standards for vacation rentals in response to continued exasperation from our residents. We also hope to soon receive recommendations from a blue-ribbon committee regarding how to better regulate late-night noise, a concern of residents who live near our entertainment districts. We also banned smoking on the beach after the state gave us authority to do so.

Before we close, I wanted to discuss two significant initiatives that have been underway for decades but now are coming to an end.

Through multiple mayors, City Commissions and city managers, we have worked diligently to redevelop the beach front and the Northwest area. We've witnessed remarkable success with both endeavors.

Fueled by our redevelopment initiatives, the beach transformed from a tawdry seasonal Spring Break haven to a world-class location that attracts a wide variety of visitors year-round with many of the top hotel brands operating there.

With the establishment of the beach redevelopment district, funds were invested into redefining the beach. Early work involved the realignment of A1A, the relocation of parking, and the construction of the wave wall and beachside promenade.

Since then, redevelopment funds have paid for such major projects as the construction of the picturesque Oceanside Park and the renovation of the aquatic center that I mentioned earlier. While the CRA has sunsetted, its final projects are underway.

D.C. Alexander Park is undergoing a transformation to offer a signature playground, elevated ocean overlook, terraced walls with landscaping, walking paths and bathrooms. We expect it to open the middle of next year.

We are also improving the streetscape on A1A. There will be better pedestrian lighting and an enhanced hardscape at the iconic intersection of A1A and Las Olas. That should be done by the end of the year.

The city-funded improvements have not only attracted new hotels and more tourists, but has helped generate other projects.

We long wanted to enhance the Las Olas Marina to attract larger and more yachts. Work should be completed early next year on the state-of-the-art mega-yacht facility that will include fine dining and boutique retail space. All of that is thanks to a partnership with Suntex Marina.

And then there is Bahia Mar.

This gem of the barrier island and home to the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show lost its luster long ago. But over the past year, the commission has worked out terms with the developers who hold a long-term lease to create something that speaks to the Fort Lauderdale of the future.

We persuaded them to drop an aggressive overdevelopment of the property that a prior commission approved. The revised plan builds a new hotel, a marina village and an Intercoastal park with a waterfront promenade while drastically reducing the number of residential units included.

We also worked out much better lease terms. The project is expected to bring about \$1 billion to city coffers over the life of the deal.

Along with the beach, the city's twin focus for decades has been the revitalization of the historic heart of the black community. This redevelopment agency there is about to sunset.

In 1995, the city created a redevelopment area that encompasses the Northwest as well as Progresso Village and Flagler Village and has been spending specially designated funds ever since to make improvements. Our strategic plans have focused on expanding economic opportunities and fostering a vibrant environment for businesses and residents.

The healthy growth of Flagler Village has brought additional tax revenue that has allowed the city to pick up the pace of work in the Northwest and we have many successes to show for it.

One area of significance has been to nurture affordable housing. The redevelopment agency also has worked with home builders to construct and sell new single-family homes around the Sistrunk area.

Another major undertaking has been to improve existing homes and businesses. The city also has been helping expand commercial and office opportunities in the area.

We've improved lighting and landscaping and transformed the corridor from a busy thoroughfare to a street more associated with a business district. And most significantly, we built the new L.A. Lee YMCA/Mizell Community Center and have helped activate it to provide a host of services including educational opportunities.

With the city-financed improvements, Sistrunk has begun to experience a rebirth as a bustling and exciting place for people to live and work while remaining true to its rich and important heritage.

This is such an incredible time to live in Fort Lauderdale.



We are a city on the move — a growing and maturing city, a city that is taking its place on the world stage as a vibrant, diverse and exciting community. We have built upon our best qualities and our history to become a truly remarkable place to call home.

All cities have challenges, but we are meeting them head on as we move boldly forward. Let us continue to work together, to listen to one another, and to share with one another our hopes and dreams for a better future.

We are FTL.

God bless you all. And may God bless America.