



October 2024

2024 has been a year of remarkable progress for the city of Fort Lauderdale. I recently gave my annual State of the City address and discussed what has been accomplished.

In January, we broke ground on the construction of a new water treatment plant. This state-of-the-art facility will provide clean, clear, high-quality drinking water to our community for generations to come.

As we near the end of the year, we are opening the renovated War Memorial Auditorium through a partnership with the Florida Panthers.

In many ways, it surpasses its original luster. It will be home to graduations, concerts, garden shows and other family-friendly programming for decades to come. This follows on the heels of the Panthers building the Baptist Health IcePlex next door to house their training facility along with two ice rinks that are available to the public. Since the start of summer, the popularity of the center has been beyond our imagination.

In October, we opened the new Las Olas Marina. The new facility doubles the dockage capacity, allowing more and larger vessels to dock there. There will also be restaurants and other features to attract yachters from around the world. We accomplished this by a unique plan to dredge out an old city parking lot, making room for expansion.

Also in October, we unveiled our completely transformed D.C. Alexander Park. With the assistance of world-class designers and an amazing construction team, the park will host an iconic structure that is intended to be an observatory overlooking our beautiful beach. Let me tell you – it will be a real head-turner.

Did you know that in the past six years, we've committed an investment of more than \$1.6 billion directly to infrastructure upgrades? We listened to our neighbors. Our utility systems and flood controls are being rapidly modernized to bring the best level of service possible to our neighborhoods and businesses.

In fact, in just the past 12 months, since my last State of the City address, we have launched more than \$321 million in water and sewer improvements and \$70 million in stormwater improvements alone.

We have added over the past five years 37 more police officers and 47 more firefighters. We just received a federal grant to hire another 28 firefighters. A new police station is under construction, as are several additional fire stations.

And get this. We accomplished all of this without any increase to our property tax rate, now going on 18 years in a row.

These are serious investments to deal with serious challenges – challenges we will meet and beat.

Did you know that Fort Lauderdale has led the way in Broward County in addressing home affordability and homelessness? Or that our efforts to maintain clean waterways surpass any nearby community? It's true.

On homelessness, I share the public's frustration with the aggressive panhandling and the number of people camping on the streets, bus benches and outside businesses. No one wants to criminalize homelessness, but a get-tough approach is necessary.

The city of Fort Lauderdale has made substantial progress on a bold new initiative in recent weeks. The state has mandated municipalities across Florida to become more assertive in dealing with this national crisis, and we are determined to lead the way.

Let it be known that we will help those who want help. But... we will not tolerate behavior that harms our overall community and threatens neighbors and businesses.

Our approach combines an elevated effort to provide assistance with an increased power of law enforcement. Along these lines, we have passed new ordinances prohibiting aggressive panhandling and camping on public property.

Affordable housing? We have built more affordable housing in the last six years than all the other cities in the county combined!

We have offered financial and development incentives to the creation of thousands of affordable housing units, among them the recently opened Seven on Seventh. The Adderley, Arcadian, Gallery at FAT Village and Mount Hermon Apartments are under construction, while the New Hope, Wright Dynasty, Aldridge and Laramore projects are in permitting.

In the past year, incentives have been approved for other projects, including 1435 Art Xchange, a senior rental project by HOMES Inc. and an affordable townhouse project by Habitat for Humanity.

One of the ways that Fort Lauderdale is leading is that we created new and innovative funding incentives to encourage workforce housing. One example is Jeff Burns' The Era project on South Andrews near Broward Health. It is a first-of-its-kind partnership where we give tax breaks for the construction of affordable housing. We are the only city in the county offering this approach.

When I meet municipal leaders from around the country, I'm often asked what our secret is.

We've been successful because of a shared vision for our community. Also, we have neighbors and businesses who care and get involved. You've helped chart this forward-looking course for Fort Lauderdale. And we have had a dedicated city staff and private partners who expedited work and helped find the best solutions — getting projects done faster than anyone thought possible.

More exciting initiatives are underway.

We've entered an agreement with the Orange Bowl Committee to upgrade the Jimmy Evert Tennis Center in Holiday Park. Their financial support combined with money from our parks bond program

will build a stadium court with seating, upgrade other tennis courts, install LED lighting and add an electronic scoreboard.

The next phase of the aquatic center renovation is set to begin. A new International Swimming Hall of Fame museum will complement the award-winning, world-class Aquatic Center and bookend the peninsula in stunning fashion.

Construction has commenced on a re-imagining of Huizenga Park. This will be a distinctive gathering place used from morning through the evening. There will be a civic lawn, a picturesque fountain, terraces and a river overlook. Huizenga Park Reimagined will be downtown's signature park — for everyone, forever.

We are making strides to expand and protect our beloved tree canopy. We have been recognized by Tree City USA for 43 years for our commitment to community forestry and have obtained the Tree City USA Growth Award nine times. We just passed an ordinance to better preserve our canopy. And, I have challenged us to plant 10,000 net new trees over the next decade.

Too often, we don't pause and recognize the extraordinary successes being made.

The accomplishments can become lost among everyone's busy schedules or they don't fit the current mold of media sensationalism. And sometimes, they unfairly fall victim to the increasingly divisive world of gotcha politics.

Let's celebrate the improvements that have occurred and the accelerated pace at which we've addressed challenges. We are FTL. We have become known as a can-do community. Let's keep up the great work and tremendous progress!

Look at how the world envisions us — we're listed among the best cities to retire, the most fiscally fit cities, the best places to live and the top 18-hour cities ... just to name a few. We are a vibrant, diverse and growing city.

Together, we have overcome challenges, celebrated successes, and built a community that stands as a testament to our collective effort and determination. The road ahead is filled with opportunities. With your continued support and involvement, I am confident that we will achieve even greater heights.

Sincerely,

Dean