



2016's tragic summer of violence

This has not been the proudest summer in America.

We have seen it before, sadly. Gun death has become a staple of the American culture. Life has come to imitate art. For years, we watched movies and television shows portray shootings and even unbridled massacres of peoples and nations. It was usually in the context of fantasy, in another world, in another time. Unfortunately, this violence is increasingly part of real life as well and we don't know where it will be next.

I'm no psychologist. Heck, I'm just trying to be a good City Commissioner. But somewhere in the psyche of America, gun violence and death have become too acceptable.

As was the case with the shooting deaths of 49 people in the early morning hours of June 12 at an Orlando gay nightclub, the victims often are from groups that have been marginalized historically by the broader society.

I believed it important to bring Fort Lauderdale together in mourning after that weekend. Hundreds of people filled Parker Playhouse for the city's memorial service.

When I grew up, I was taught that it was important to love one another, to embrace new thinking and to consider the rights of others. We are a country built on the labors of the poor as well as the rich, the foreign as well as those who were born here. We came to understand the diversity of the human condition and how it enriches us all.

Yet, today, there are those who feel they can sit in judgment over others and proclaim their culture or their rights to be superior to the denigration and marginalization of others.

I'm not sure where that started. When did America pivot from being a place that identified itself as a country of freedom and equal rights for all?

When we judge others, it gives license to those who act out their murderous fantasies. When a demented killer storms into a nightclub of gay youth, they believe they won't be faulted for their heinous conduct.

But Orlando was just a prelude to an increasingly deadly summer.

Twice since then, we've watched shocking video of people killed in interactions with police. One of these tragedies started as a routine traffic stop for a broken tail light. And then, a peaceful demonstration regarding those tragedies turned into its own nightmare as five police officers were senselessly murdered in Dallas.

I joined Black Lives Matter at their recent rally in Stranahan Park as they expressed concern about police violence. I also grieve for the families of those officers slain by a deranged man who apparently held a warped view that he was seeking vengeance.

How can we help end this horror?

One step is we need to ensure a basic level of trust between the public and officers. Regular citizens going about their lives shouldn't be afraid of law enforcement. Our Police Department in Fort Lauderdale has been working to strengthen its relationship with the black community.

I've talked in the past about the need to provide police officers with body cameras. These cameras can create transparency by documenting the interactions between officers and civilians. We need to continue to push Fort Lauderdale to start a pilot project for the Police Department just as Sheriff Scott Israel has done for the county.

We also need to look at the availability of guns. Assault-style weapons were used by the killers in both Orlando and Dallas.

The motivations for hate may be many, but we do know one thing: assault weapons are the tool of choice for these killers. No other civilized country in the world allows citizens to own weapons designed for warfare.

Assault weapons are meant to kill multitudes of people, not squirrels or deer. Those who hunt for sport know that it takes only one shot to kill an animal. If you need another, then maybe you should put the gun down.

We need to urge our federal and state governments to take action. I know our local members of Congress – Debbie Wasserman



Schultz, Alcee Hastings, Ted Deutch and Lois Frankel – all agree and have been fighting this very difficult battle.

The state Legislature banned local governments from having any say in regulating guns several years ago. But I still think Fort Lauderdale has a role to play.

The city rents War Memorial Auditorium to gun shows year-round. And yes, assault weapons are sold there. While I would like to end the gun shows, the rest of the City Commission has not been supportive.

So, my second idea is to rewrite our lease with the gun show operators and say they can't sell assault weapons. This should not run afoul of state law. It's a lease amendment, not a change to a law or an administrative ruling.

Sadly, this has already been met with threats from the National Rifle Association.

Rather than work together to find solutions to this national crisis, the NRA threatened to sue the city and take personal action against me and my colleagues if we try to take this simple step of managing the use of a public building.

That's too bad. A change in the lease to eliminate the sale of assault weapons wouldn't hurt anyone. In fact, it might just save a life. Maybe yours.

Sincerely,

ORLANDO MEMORIAL SERVICE
JUNE 17 AT PARKER PLAYHOUSE



Rev. Ron Perkins provides the invocation at the memorial service after the Fort Lauderdale Police Department's honor guard presented the colors.



The Fort Lauderdale City Commission pays its respects to the victims of the Orlando nightclub shooting that occurred in the early morning hours of June 12.



The Gay Men's Chorus of South Florida performs "Seasons of Love" from the musical "Rent" and "Home" from the musical "The Wiz" in remembrance of those who died.



U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz joined other members of Congress -- Ted Deutch, Lois Frankel and Patrick Murphy -- in addressing the memorial service.



Dr. Rosalind Osgood, chair of the county School Board and pastor at New Mount Olive Baptist Church, speaks about the importance of tolerance and diversity.



The city's public affairs director, Chaz Adams, presents the memorial scroll that people signed at the service to Terry DeCarlo of the Orlando's LGBT community center.

News updates from across District 2

Bahia Mar plans

After continuing outcry from the public, developers have withdrawn their proposal to build two 29-story condo towers and a massive parking garage wrapped in shops and townhouses at Bahia Mar.

Hopefully, this is not the end of the conversation about the property's future. The Bahia Mar is sorely in need of renovation. We also must ensure the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show can continue to be held there well into the future.

The proposal was simply too immense and lacked support from much of the community. The city prohibited such towering developments on the barrier island more than a decade ago, and the north tower would have created a canyon effect along Seabreeze Boulevard as it stretched 1½ football fields parallel to the road. Public concern was well founded about future traffic gridlock and whether condos should be built on public land.

The debate exposed the city planning process as broken.

An ordinance designed to allow builders to be creative and iconic instead became a tool for overly aggressive development. City staff proved too eager to back developer demands. Also, residents deserved more input because the Bahia Mar was purchased by the city in 1947 to preserve for public use.

When the dust settles, I hope the developers agree to meet and work hand in hand to find reasonable solutions that can garner wide support from the community. The City Commission recently received an independent appraisal of the Bahia Mar property that can be helpful in such discussions.

13th Street upgrades

Construction work to enhance the commercial district along Northeast 13th Street is expected to begin this fall.

The city manager recently informed the City Commission that he has put the project out for bid and intends to propose an expedited construction package for the low bidder when we return from our summer recess in mid-August. Work would



commence a month later and take between eight and 10 months to complete.

The final design plans call for repurposing two traffic lanes for bikes and parking improvements. Pedestrian street-lighting will be installed along with new crosswalks, landscaping and wider sidewalks. There also will be intersection and stormwater improvements.

The city received a \$1.5 million grant from Broward County's redevelopment program in 2014 to pay for the work. The Broward Community Foundation provided an additional \$75,000 grant to install public art complementing the street improvements.

Flooding prevention

As part of the city's continuing work to decrease flooding from large storms and high tides, work is underway on Isle of Venice.

Construction crews are installing storm catch basins, drainage pipes and seven tidal valves. The work should be completed by September.

Along with the Las Olas Isles and Rio Vista neighborhoods, Isle of Venice is part of this year's storm water improvement program. Tidal valves are being installed on the 65 stormwater outfalls serving the neighborhoods. The valves have proven effective in reducing flooding for other neighborhoods, such as Hendricks Isle and the Riviera Isles.

Earlier this year, the Public Works Department also submitted a grant proposal to the Florida Department of Transportation to address flooding on roads on the south side of Las Olas Boulevard.

If approved, the \$2 million project would elevate the roads approximately 200 feet in from Las Olas. This would alleviate traffic congestion due to flooded roadways by high tides and heavy rain events. The project also would elevate seawalls, sidewalks and stormwater catchbasins along these roads.

A1A improvements

Two improvement projects are underway along State Road A1A.

FDOT has started a \$4.4 million resurfacing project between Southeast 17th Street and Sunrise Boulevard. An important aspect of the project is to make the road safer for pedestrians at night.

Embedded lights will be installed at 11 pedestrian crosswalks between Bahia Mar and the Bonnet House. They will flash when someone pushes the crosswalk button to cross the street. The lights will be similar to those in the crosswalk at Las Olas and Southeast 13th Avenue.



In addition to the embedded lights and new pavement, the FDOT project includes better lighting of overhead street signs and countdown timers for pedestrian crossings at signalized intersections.

The city is also in the process of re-landscaping the medians of A1A between North Atlantic and Oakland Park boulevards.

The project includes the removal of both damaged trees and trees that have outgrown the median. The medians are being replanted with palms and Florida-friendly plantings that evoke a tropical feel. These plantings include a silver buttonwood hedge, 1,500 green island ficus and 1,000 bromeliads.

The city received a Florida Highway Beautification Council grant of \$100,000 to help pay for the work.

Sober home rules

Some relief could be on the way for neighborhoods concerned about alcohol and drug abuse programs operating recovery homes nearby.

U.S. Rep. Lois Frankel recently held a meeting between city leaders from throughout the region and a senior official from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. At the end of the meeting, the HUD official promised to work with the Department of Justice and develop some guidelines for cities that want to enact ordinances to regulate the proliferation of sober homes.

Fort Lauderdale and other cities have viewed fair housing and disability laws as greatly restricting their oversight of sober homes. Under the current understanding of the laws, neighborhood homes could be used as housing for individuals undergoing treatment as long as the treatment services are provided off-site.

The new guidelines could be issued later this summer.

Sincerely,

Youth leadership program wins honor

The city's Neighbor Support Division recently won a national award for a program it created to teach leadership skills to high school students.

Neighborhoods USA announced Fort Lauderdale's Show Up, Step Up, Stand Out Inter-generational Youth Leadership program won first place for best social revitalization program in the country. The honor was one of the Best Neighborhood Program Awards presented at the group's

annual conference in Memphis.

Last year, the city created the four-month program to empower high school students to learn and practice leadership skills and encourage greater personal, civic and professional success. Students learned to be adaptable, accountable and action-oriented through the program.

Congratulations to Hal Barnes and his Neighbor Support staff for creating this special program.



Vice Mayor Trantalis marches with U.S. Rep. Ted Deutch in Wilton Manors' annual Stonewall Festival & Parade that occurred on June 18.



Vice Mayor Trantalis tours a portable toilet and shower facility for the homeless with Richard Campillo during a presentation at St. Anthony Catholic Church.



Vice Mayor Trantalis discusses crime and development matters with residents during a recent meeting of the South Middle River Civic Association.



Vice Mayor Trantalis joins Mayor Jack Seiler in opening the Stompers boot store on Northeast Fourth Avenue, a new business in the South Middle River neighborhood.