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From the desk of  
**DEAN TRANTALIS**  
Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner • District II

JULY-AUGUST 2017

# Infrastructure requires quick attention

## City faces crisis with water and sewer system, but answers are coming too slowly

The evidence is everywhere, whether you read about it, see it flowing before your eyes, or worse yet, have the misfortune of smelling it. It is abundantly clear that our water and sewer infrastructure systems have crumbled.

This is news to no one, and folks are wondering what the city is doing to correct the situation.

A couple years ago, the City Commission directed our staff to come up with a master plan to inform us as to our water and stormwater needs. Staff requested we hire an outside consultant, and a comprehensive report was promised to the commission by June 2016. Well, that month came and went, and it wasn't until May of this year that we finally received a report. It was 800-plus pages outlining in great detail the state of the city.

As you can imagine, the results were not pretty.

Let us take for example our capacity to provide residents and businesses with fresh drinking water.

We derive much of our water from treatment plants like the Fiveash Plant. The report states that: "The city's current water system has been underfunded for at least the last decade and now requires immediate attention."

As far back as 2007, a master plan for the Fiveash plant said we needed to invest \$63 million over the next decade. Only \$10 million was spent. The Peele-Dixie Plant and other water infrastructure needs bring

the total funding gap for water to \$190 million.

That begs the question as to our capacity to deal with wastewater.

News articles abound with stories of underground pipes breaking, sewage gurgling onto the streets through manholes, and rivers of sewage passing by while people take their children or pets for a walk. We're not talking Somalia. We're talking about Fort Lauderdale.

The report states that our pipe system is at least 50 years old. In some cases, the system consists of clay pipes supported by wooden beams. The report concludes that "the city has a five-year funding gap of \$151 million for wastewater."

What is particularly concerning is that one of the most fragile areas of underground infrastructure is downtown. The report states that we are already at full capacity, and yet the commission is being asked to approve hundreds of new units within the vicinity. The buildings may look pretty, but maybe the new owners shouldn't expect to flush their toilets very often.

The report goes on and on.

Scheduled maintenance going unfunded for years, pump stations long past their useful life, and a record of emergency repairs costing the city millions and millions that could have been avoided had we been on top of the problem. In the end, we find ourselves borrowing from Peter to pay Paul even though we know that putting a finger in the dike is no answer. This is not what people in our community deserve.

So how did we get here?

One problem is that money collected from your water bills has been diverted to pay for other budgetary needs. Just last year alone, more than \$20 million was taken out. And being totally tone-deaf, staff recommends in the next year's budget that we take out even more – more than \$23



million!

In addition, the commission has dragged its feet on moving forward with solutions.

Over two years ago, our Budget Advisory Board provided us with detailed alternatives on funding these and other infrastructure projects. The report has been sitting on the shelf collecting dust. Now, we convened yet another advisory board to provide us with infrastructure priorities and funding approaches. Yet, we've given the task force little direction. The commission itself doesn't plan to discuss the issue until early fall.

It's pretty clear what the commission needs to be doing.

First, we need to immediately meet to identify our most important present and future infrastructure needs. Then, we need to agree on how to pay for it, which will most likely require us to issue bonds. And finally, we need to put the brakes on further development. We cannot function as a community if the basic necessities of water and sewer capacity are not being fulfilled.

We have a beautiful beach into which many of us dig our feet and our elbows to feel its soothing warmth. But let's not bury our heads in it, too.

Sincerely,



# News updates from across District 2

## Pet store regulations

I'm pleased to announce that the city recently passed an ordinance that I sponsored to ban the sale of commercially bred dogs and cats at local pet stores. Fort Lauderdale joins Hollywood, Wilton Manors, Sunrise, Pompano Beach and several dozen other southern Florida cities in cracking down on what are commonly called puppy mills.

Many of these commercial operations keep animals in tiny cages under unsanitary conditions and with little human attention, breeding them over and over. Animals put up for sale from these pet factories are often prone to costly medical problems over their lifespan. Animal rights groups say some die within days of purchase.

Pet stores can still offer dogs and cats that come from animal shelters or rescue groups. And,

for those residents who want a purebred pet, this ordinance doesn't stop them from working directly with a reputable breeder.

Far too many dogs and cats continue to be euthanized in Broward County. Let's hope that this ordinance has an additional benefit of moving the county further toward its goal of operating a no-kill shelter system.

## Floodplain regulations

Earlier this spring, the City Commission loosened regulations at my behest to allow more residents seeking to renovate their homes to do so without meeting stringent floodplain regulations. Before we made this change, many who lived in low-lying areas were prevented from renovating unless they also raised the house so it set higher than the flood level.

The issue started in 2014 when the city approved a flood damage prevention ordinance to comply with directives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The gist of the ordinance was that new construction in flood-prone areas should be built in ways that lessen the chance of damage during a flood.

But the ordinance also applied to homes undergoing "substantial renovation." The city decided to define that as any renovations completed over the previous decade that

totaled more than half the home's value.

That was particularly onerous in neighborhoods where people have been buying small, older homes and putting a lot of money into fixing them up. The rules threatened to stymie this work. The fact that a prior owner replaced the roof nine years ago could mean that the current owner couldn't install new kitchen cabinets without raising the home's base.

The rest of the commission agreed with me that this 10-year look-back was just too stringent. It was something few other communities required. We cut it to only apply to work done in the past two years.

## Flagler's Lutheran Church

The City Commission recently unanimously agreed to designate the stone structure of the First Evangelical Lutheran

Church as historic so that it will be preserved despite development plans for the surrounding block in Flagler Village.

The 1921 Romanesque-style structure

was the façade of the original St. Anthony's Catholic Church. When a larger St. Anthony's was built, the structure was sold to the Lutherans and moved to its current location.

The developer, TAHO Investments, intends to repurpose the church as part of its 16-story mixed-use project. TAHO has acquired the church's stained glass windows and will re-install them. It also plans to create a courtyard and garden between the church and the rest of the project.

## Lu Deaner Park

The city recently honored longtime civic activist Lu Deaner by renaming Dolphin Isles Park for her shortly after her death.

Lu served as president of the Dolphin Isles Civic Association and was a strong proponent of creating the park. Her advocacy helped lead to the joint financial effort by the city and Broward County to purchase and develop the park, which opened in 2011.

Lu also served for many years on the city's Education Advisory Board and volunteered

with Broward County Schools, the Museum of Discovery and Science, Child Care Connection and Family Central. She had a generous spirit and touched the lives of an incredible number of people through her good deeds.

## Stormwater improvements

The city is continuing its work to protect low-lying neighborhoods better from flooding caused by high tides and heavy rain storms.

Public works officials recently met with residents of both Victoria Park and the island neighborhoods off Las Olas Boulevard to discuss upcoming improvements.

Heavy flooding has occurred in the Isles in recent years as a result of higher and higher king tide events prompted by global climate change. Construction crews have been installing storm catch basins, drainage pipes and tidal valves. Our staff proposes to continue that work.

The next phase will add another 46 tidal valves to the 74 currently in place. These prevent water in the adjacent canals from backing up into yards and streets through the drainage system. Of the 46 new ones, 13 are planned for the Nurmi Isles community, 13 for Idlewyld and 15 for Seven Isles. Hendricks Isle, Isle of Venice, Las Olas Isles and Riviera Isles were addressed in the earlier phase of valve installation.

The city also will address its seawalls in the area, just as it has begun asking private property owners to do. The public works staff is recommending higher seawalls for Mola Avenue, Isle of Palms Drive, Seven Isles Drive at Del Mar Place, Barcelona Drive, Solar Plaza Drive, and at Marco Drive and Las Olas Boulevard. High tides frequently top the existing seawalls.

Two new pump stations would be installed along Las Olas. One would be east of Isle of Capri Drive and the other near Poinciana Drive.

In Victoria Park, public works officials are looking at how to deal both tidal flooding near the Middle River and rain-driven flooding caused in the western part of the



neighborhood by limited drainage infrastructure and overbuilt swales.

With the western section, the city would replace undersized drainage pipe, restore swales, add storage in an exfiltration trench and connect independent drainage networks. In the low-lying east, drainage systems would be extended, new drainage inlet structures built and better stormwater runoff collection installed. City seawalls would also be improved.

The city is looking at how to pay for this work in the Isles and Victoria Park as well as future projects in other neighborhoods. We expect to have design plans finished next year and start construction in 2019.

In the meantime, certain critical issues are being addressed.

The Florida Department of Transportation

is undertaking work to prevent flooding on Las Olas Boulevard. The agency began in June cleaning drainage pipes along the street and installing 11 tidal valves between Isle of Capri and the Intracoastal Waterway.

And, work has been completed to correct the extreme flooding that occurred at the intersection of Sunrise Boulevard and Northeast 15th Avenue following rain storms. The city and FDOT discovered that construction crews in the recent road resurfacing project unintentionally terminated the stormwater connection at this location.

### Underground utilities

A long time has passed since the city agreed to let individual neighborhoods explore whether to bury their utility lines underground and pay for the work through a special assessment. Unfortunately, the design process at FPL took much longer than anyone imagined.

However, we are almost ready for the first neighborhood vote. The city manager tells us that the design plans to bury utility lines in the Idlewyld and Riviera Isles neighborhoods should be completed and construction bids



taken by the end of the year. Once those cost estimates are in hand, we will schedule a vote.

If 70 percent of those voting agree, the commission would then decide whether to move forward with the work. There will be extensive outreach efforts for individuals to express their views.

We expect to reach the same stage for Las Olas Isles in mid- to late-2018. Design efforts for Seven Isles will start once the Idlewyld-Riviera Isles plans are finished.

### Sistrunk development

The city has agreed to provide a \$7 million incentive through its Northwest Community Redevelopment Agency to entice

a developer to build a major mixed-use apartment project west of the railroad tracks on Sistrunk Boulevard.

The SIX13 project, located at 613 NW 3 Ave., will

include 148 apartments priced in a range affordable to teachers, nurses and other workers currently being priced out of living downtown. The 11-story building will also include 8,300 square feet of retail space.

The developer, Affiliated Development, has an emphasis on high-density development in urban markets and has used public financing to help with projects in Miami's Overtown and Liberty City neighborhoods.

This is the first major housing development on the historic Sistrunk corridor since the city invested heavily in updating its streetscape. We hope that it serves as a catalyst to more economic development in area, linking with the rapidly growing Flagler Village neighborhood next door.

### Canal dredging

The City Commission recently rejected a staff proposal to levy a special assessment against waterfront property owners to pay for dredging navigable canals. Many property owners objected to being singled out for the assessment when they already pay some of the highest property taxes in the city.

The city owns 57 miles of canals that require periodic dredging to remain navigable. Staff was recommending the city start a seven-year cycle of dredging rather than continue to do the work on an as-needed basis. We will continue to ensure canals remain open for navigation, but the cost will not come through a special assessment on waterfront property.

### Police body cameras

In early June, the commission signed contracts to start a pilot program in the Police Department that will equip select officers with body cameras.

Over the next year, the city will evaluate the use of the cameras and decide whether to roll out body cameras to the entire force.

This is something that I've advocated for some time. In light of the increased scrutiny that police actions are receiving nationally, I believe cameras should be standard issue for all of our officers.

They would document the interactions between officers and the public and thus can be turned to for review when questions arise. Cameras would also be useful in the collection of evidence and witness statements.

### Broward Boulevard

The Florida Department of Transportation is midway into a major overhaul of Broward Boulevard between downtown and Interstate 95.

The project includes building a new bridge over the north fork of the New River, resurfacing the road, upgrading crosswalks, improving bus shelters, adding street lighting, installing additional drainage structures, adding bike lanes in each direction, reconstructing sidewalks and upgrading the traffic signalization to mast arms.

Improved sidewalks linking to Broward Boulevard will also be built in the Sailboat Bend neighborhood. These include Southwest 12th Avenue north of Southwest 4th Street, Southwest 11 Avenue north of Waverly Road and Southwest 8th Avenue north of Southwest 2nd Street.

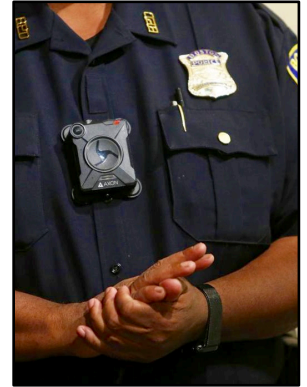
The \$16 million project is expected to be completed in summer 2018.

### Budget hearings

Please make sure to mark your calendars for the City Commission's upcoming hearings regarding the proposed 2017-2018 budget.

The first budget hearing will be at 6 p.m. Sept. 6 in the commission chambers at City Hall. The second hearing will be a week later, at 6 p.m. Sept. 13.

Sincerely,



# Reminder: Prepare for hurricane season

Remember that hurricane season began at the start of June and runs through November.

Please don't be complacent just because we have not been significantly hit by a storm in a while. Forecasters predict a busier than normal season with 11 to 17 named storms.

As the season reaches its peak, everyone should review their family emergency plan and assemble a hurricane supply kit.

The city of Fort Lauderdale offers detailed information about hurricane preparedness on its web site. Please visit [www.fortlauderdale.gov/hurricane](http://www.fortlauderdale.gov/hurricane).

Everyone should have emergency supplies for at least three days. Those supplies should include at least one gallon of water per person per day, non-perishable food that is ready to eat, a battery-powered flashlight, a battery-powered radio, a first-aid kit and a reserve of prescription medicine.

As part of your family action plan, you should determine if you live in an evacuation zone and where you would go if ordered to evacuate. It's also prudent to inventory your possessions, assess your home for vulnerable spots, trim trees and check the condition of shutters and back-up generators.



Commissioner Trantalis joins Mayor Jack Seiler and County Commissioner Dale Holness in helping open the new offices of the Kelley Ustala law firm.



Commissioner Trantalis introduces U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings at a downtown rally for equal rights that also commemorated the anniversary of the Orlando shooting.



Commissioner Trantalis presents a proclamation in honor of LGBT Pride Month to Chris Rudisill, the executive director of the Stonewall National Museum & Archives.



Commissioner Trantalis gives the keynote address to about 150 people from three dozen countries who received U.S. citizenship at a ceremony in late June.