



# Recovery efforts underway for Irma

## Residents shouldn't lose focus on city's critical water, wastewater infrastructure needs

I hope that everyone came through Hurricane Irma with few problems.

While many of us spent more than a week without power, we still should feel fortunate to have escaped the greater fury of the storm that devastated parts of the Florida Keys and the Caribbean. With a slight shift in Irma's direction, we would have been dealing with more than broken fences and damaged landscaping.

Much attention is focused on FPL and whether the company could have restored electrical service faster. Let's remember that power was out much longer in 2005 after Hurricane Wilma. But Wilma struck in late October and was followed by cooler, dry weather, and Irma came amid South Florida's steamy summer humidity.

In the coming months, I expect there will be discussions between state and local agencies and the utilities on how to improve recovery efforts when we are hit by the next storm.

Wilma led to critical changes – the replacement of many old wooden utility poles, the installation of mast arms for traffic signals at key intersections and the requirement for generators at major gas stations. A similar conversation is needed this time about how better to restore power and how the process can be communicated more thoroughly to residents.

There must be more focus on our vulnerable populations. The deaths at the nursing home in Hollywood were horrible. We need to ensure places that care for the elderly and disabled are a priority in future recovery plans.

I would urge everyone to be patient with the cleanup that is now beginning. There is about 1 million cubic yards of debris that must be collected.

The city had contractors on standby ahead of the storm and deployed them immediately. Still, the amount of debris is overwhelming – the equivalent of the cargo

of 13,500 moving vans. Over the next 60 days, the city crews will pass through each neighborhood several times to collect the waste.

While Irma barreled through the Caribbean, the City Commission proceeded with the approval of the 2018 budget. The budget contains several new initiatives:

- \$1.4 million for a new centralized roadway maintenance and repair crew with an additional \$500,000 allocated to road resurfacing
- \$350,000 to expand our code compliance and vacation rental programs
- \$500,000 to help renovate the Parker Playhouse
- \$3.5 million to fund a new emergency medical services station
- \$800,000 to add 10 firefighters and paramedics to improve response times
- \$8.8 million to upgrade city seawalls in light of rising sea levels
- \$70,000 for public wi-fi in city parks
- \$180,000 to start a program for police officers to wear body cameras.

I ended up voting against the budget. I believed it failed to meet the most pressing problem facing the city – our failing infrastructure. Despite a scathing 800-page report from a city-hired consultant and sanctions from the state's environmental agency, the budget failed to provide the necessary funds to confront the crisis.

We keep kicking the can down the road. Some other commissioners have begun to acknowledge the issue, but the time to act is now rather than six months from today.

Before voting on the budget, we could have decided to stop taking millions of dollars from the water and sewer utilities to cover other city costs. That money should



go to improving our utility infrastructure, but the city manager terms these annual raids as a "return on investment." What company would pay a dividend to its stockholders if it knew it had big bills coming up?

In our last newsletter, I detailed the conclusions of the consultant's report. The city's water and sewer system needs \$1.5 billion in work over the next 20 years to repair existing infrastructure and meet expected growth. Yet, we have deferred needed upgrades for years.

We now have further proof of the sorry state of our infrastructure as we are now subject to a Consent Order from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The agency is requiring the city to make significant improvements to the wastewater system and will impose penalties if we continue to have large discharges of sewage onto our streets.

This is the most important issue facing the city. I urge everyone to follow the discussions closely as the city discusses what infrastructure improvements are needed and how we will pay for them.

Sincerely,







## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO!

The City of Fort Lauderdale is excited to launch **LauderStreet**, a searchable mobile-friendly map that provides location-specific information about current and upcoming road and sidewalk closures in the City.

Try out **LauderStreet** today at [gis.fortlauderdale.gov/LauderStreet](http://gis.fortlauderdale.gov/LauderStreet) and learn about closures near your home, work, or other favorite places so you can avoid traffic congestion and reach your destination safer and sooner.



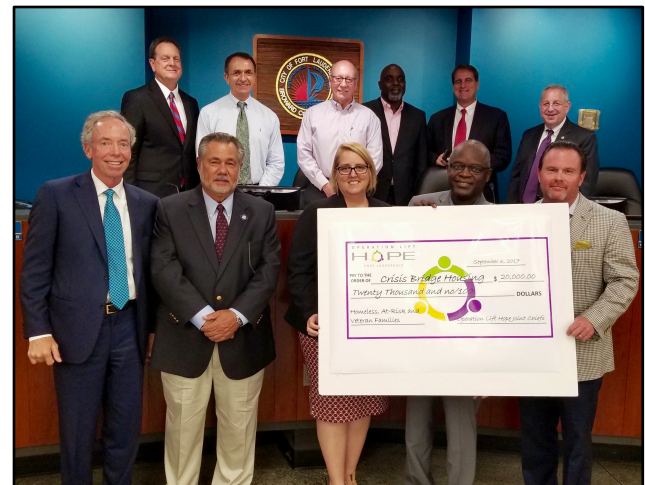
Commissioner Trantalis joins other city officials and some costumed characters at the National Night Out Against Crime event held in August at the Carter Park gym.



Commissioner Trantalis speaks to Middle River Terrace residents concerned about plans by a church to use Fort Lauderdale High School for Sunday services.



Commissioner Trantalis helps other officials break ground for the city's newest Fire Rescue Station, which will be located at 3211 NE 32 St. near Oakland Park Boulevard.



Commissioner Trantalis joins other officials in accepting a \$20,000 donation from the Broward Workshop to assist with a crisis housing pilot project for the homeless.

