



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

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# Major issues await next City Commission

Aging infrastructure, city finances and traffic gridlock loom as 2018 approaches

Some five months from now, a new City Commission will take office in Fort Lauderdale.

The occasion will mark the first major change in city government in nine years. A new commission hopefully will bring fresh ideas and solutions to the city. This is a great opportunity for the community to come together and to fulfill the vision that has been defined in the many meetings and conferences over the recent years.

As we look toward this transition, there are some issues that I believe must be paramount.

## The city budget

We need to go back to living within our means and to stop raiding enterprise funds that were intended to pay for specific needs.

For example, the city began draining its water and sewer utility accounts to cover other city expenses in 2011. The amount siphoned started small – \$7.4 million that first year – but has grown immensely. This year alone, over my objections, the City Commission withdrew more than \$16 million!!

Our utilities have suffered greatly, with total cash withdrawals of over \$106 million. Worse, it has occurred while the utilities desperately needed the cash.

As we well know, old pipes have been breaking across the city and key parts of the water and sewer system are on the brink of failure. Every call

to stop the madness went unheeded.

In the meantime, the impact on water bills is clear. The average resident pays \$63.11 a month, \$20 more than in 2011. Some say our rates remain low compared to other cities in Broward County. But an independent rate study last year showed ours are higher than other places like Pembroke Pines, Tampa and Boca Raton.

## Infrastructure

The state of our water, sewer and stormwater systems is beyond belief.

More than 20 million gallons of sewage has spilled into our streets, yards and waterways over two years. City Hall is actually trucking sewage around town to re-dump it because of a broken main pipe. We talk a lot about climate change philosophies, but many streets flood with

the seasonal high tides or heavy rain. Consultants also warn there is a “very real risk of a calamitous failure” at the Fiveash Water Treatment Plant.

Ironically, tens of millions of dollars earmarked for improvements has gone unspent.

In the meantime, the spills keep occurring. People were recently warned to avoid waterways in the Las Olas area after 150,000 gallons of sewage burst from a pipe. The state Department of



Environmental Protection is so concerned that it has ordered us to undertake a specific set of repairs and will fine us for future mishaps.

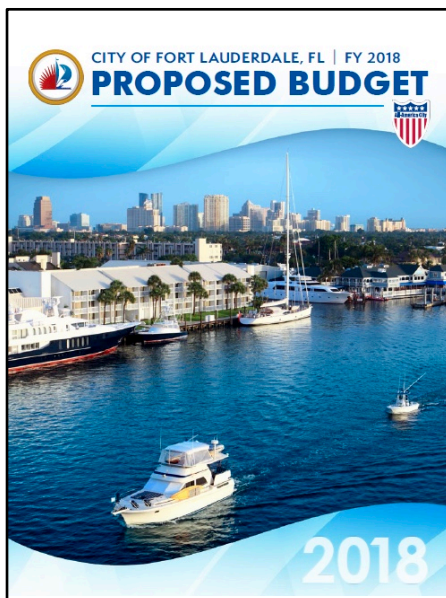
We have so much potential, yet we hold ourselves back with bad choices. Since the end of the recession, a bounty of investment has been making its way into our city. We, in return, cannot falter by failing to provide the infrastructure to support the growth.

## Transportation

Not a day goes by when I don’t hear complaints about gridlock on our streets.

We need credible traffic solutions, and we need to stop denying that we are a car-oriented society. We allow developers to reduce their parking requirements, we spend tens of millions of dollars to subsidize failing mass transit methods, and we require drivers to share travel lanes with bicyclists. Let’s stop trying to engage in social engineering. Rather, we should address the needs of our community and not try to dictate them.

Regarding the Wave streetcar, it’s too late to stop the project so the next commission must tackle concerns about its overhead wires and ensure it expands to



places people would take it – like the airport and seaport, as well as along Sistrunk Boulevard. Otherwise, it will be a novelty ride designed to lure more residential construction downtown.

**Development, housing and quality of life**

This past year, the commission rejected a citizen-led initiative that would have imposed a moratorium on development in much of the city while we examined infrastructure and quality of life issues. The commission didn't want to hear about it and came up with a flimsy excuse to reject it.

If we seek to be an enlightened community, rejecting the voices of our neighbors is not a good sign. The collective wisdom of the many is far greater than the pronouncements of the few. That leaves critical quality of life questions for the next commission and the goals to achieve in the years ahead.

Let's talk about affordable housing as one example. In allowing the city to build more downtown, Broward County required we set aside a certain percentage of units that lower- and middle-income workers like teachers, secretaries, waiters and nurses can afford.

That has yet to occur. The commission has approved more high-rises with no units in them reserved as affordable housing. We soon will be at the county's deadline without a meaningful plan to keep our city

center a place where people of diverse incomes can live.

A second quality of life issue is ensuring adequate park and open space.

We must continue to support the Riverwalk and Huizenga Plaza. And as our consultant agreed, we need to look for new open spaces. We cannot capitulate over the preservation of the city's old One Stop Shop on Andrews Avenue. The city once promised this to be a park for the growing downtown population, yet some now covet it for development or see it as land that could be sold to fill the city's coffers.

Another quality of life topic is our retail needs.

Amid all the residential construction, little has occurred regarding the amenities that people also need. Only recently have some downtown developers begun to heed warnings that we need grocery stores, pharmacies, dry cleaners and such to serve residents and not just bars and restaurants.

And why can't we have a mall that befits our bettering quality of life?

Galleria Mall is faltering, and its owners seem more concerned about converting parking lots into condos than filling vacant shops.

And worse, the city recently created a potential parking problem for Las Olas Boulevard merchants by placing tight limits on on-street parking in the neighborhoods around the shopping district. Are we slowly choking our retail

selves to death?

The city has yet to meaningfully address its homeless crisis. Ordinances passed a couple years ago have either not been enforced, proven ineffective or remain tied up in litigation. We need real solutions to providing food and shelter to the most unfortunate in our community.

The final aspect of quality of life that I'll mention is historic preservation. This is important because it brings context to our existence, and it preserves the uniqueness of our seaside resort.

The city has hired a historic preservation officer, yet the real work lies ahead. We need to create a registry of historic properties that are too important to be torn down and then decide how we can protect them. One way I've advocated is something called "transfer of development rights." Developers could purchase the right to expand their project if they contribute to preserving a historic property.

The next commission will have a lot on its plate right away regarding Fort Lauderdale's future. We can all work together to make great changes that benefit those who live here, work here, or who are just here to visit. I look forward to helping shape that direction.

Sincerely,






Commissioner Trantalis recognizes Steven LoBue for winning the Men's 27 Meter Gold Medal in the high dive competition at the FINA World Championships.



Commissioner Trantalis poses with John Weaver and his wife, Elizabeth King, at a Central Beach Alliance meeting where Weaver announced he was resigning as president.



Commissioner Trantalis joins other city officials and representatives of the Sister Cities program to greet the Turkish consul general, Burc Ceylan.



Commissioner Trantalis joins other officials and business leaders as a waiter at the Eat Your Heart Out dinner to raise money for the Heart Gallery foster children program.



Commissioner Trantalis honors Bob Oelke for his service to the Fort Lauderdale community at a recent meeting of the Victoria Park Civic Association.



Commissioner Trantalis joins other officials and Marianne Winfield of the Sister Cities program in greeting Tomas Abreu, Monaco's consul in Miami.