



A look back at the last five years

My goal has been to listen to people, stand up for quality of life and improve our city.

Would you believe we are approaching the fifth anniversary of my current tenure on the City Commission? I thought it would be a good moment to reflect on some of our accomplishments and some of the things we've stood up for.

I've always tried to be a voice for the people at City Hall. Too often governments don't listen to their constituents, and instead, politicians pay more attention to special interests. I've sought to be an advocate for sensible growth, the preservation of our neighborhoods, the safety of our residents and the advancement of our economy.

Here are some of the things that I'm proudest of:

Bahia Mar. The decision to approve 651 residential units was tragic, and I refused to support it. The City Commission agreed to let developers build a massive housing complex on the site and to squeeze the economically important Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show inside a parking garage.

I spoke up loudly against this misuse of public property, joining the chorus of residents who viewed it as a classic case of overdevelopment and something that will create a traffic nightmare on the barrier island. We now hear that the developers want to change their lease. Let's work together to ensure that any changes benefit our community.

Police and fire union contracts. The commission recently approved very expensive contracts for the police and fire unions. I support paying employees a fair wage, but this deal was rushed through with no hearings to take public input or review the finer details. We will now have to raid our reserves in order to pay for it. I could not support it.

Perhaps in better times, we could do contracts like this. However, the city is facing an infrastructure crisis that carries

with it a big bill and we need to be more frugal.

Infrastructure.

When underground utility pipes began breaking around town and flooding people's yards with sewage, I demanded action and accountability.

Other officials literally called it hyperbole, and I was ignored. When

the commission received an 800-page report detailing how our infrastructure is crumbling, I wanted an immediate workshop. Nothing happened.

It wasn't until the state threatened to fine the city for creating health hazards, the city began getting serious. I was proud to be an early voice saying we had a problem that needed to be addressed.

Dixie Highway. Working with the state, we have been able to take the "highway" out of Dixie Highway. Work is currently being wrapped up to make it a neighborhood street rather than a thoroughfare. There will be narrower travel lanes, bike paths, sidewalks, wider swales and speed humps. It will be much safer for pedestrians and bicyclists and will enhance the neighborhood. We may need to make a few changes to the design, so let's continue to work together.

The aquatic center. Soon after I re-joined the commission in 2013, I became concerned about the direction of the project to redevelop the Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Center. I kept raising that the price was spiraling out of control. I finally convinced my colleagues to cancel it in favor of a more modest renovation. In the end, we will be proud of a new center that will host



not just international events, but allow our local citizens to benefit from it as well.

Vacation rentals. When residents from across the city complained that neighbors were renting their homes to weekend vacationers who were disturbing their quality of life with round-the-clock partying, I stood up.

City officials at first said there was little that could be done. Still, I pushed through regulations that allow well-managed vacation rentals that are sensitive to their surrounding community while holding rogue owners accountable for the problems they create.

Unpaved streets. Believe it or not, but when I was sworn into office in 2013, there were still unpaved streets in our city. City staff shrugged off residents who wanted more than dirt roads, telling them it would be at least a decade before the city could do something. I got the city to undertake the work immediately, and today, South Middle River is a prouder neighborhood.

Sistrunk Boulevard. When the Northwest community wanted to extend the name of Sistrunk Boulevard east to Federal Highway, I was proud to vote in favor of it. It was the right thing to do — it brought communities together and honored a great





protected homeowners' rights.

Police body cameras. When the nation was torn apart by debates over use of force by police officers, I stepped forward with a plan to ensure residents are protected from abuse and police officers aren't unfairly accused of excessive force. I pushed for the city to equip all officers with body cameras to document their interactions with the public. The city has now

started a pilot program to move in this direction.

Las Olas Boulevard. When city staff proposed a crazy quilt of plans to "remake" Las Olas Boulevard, including ripping up the tree-lined median, I said no. Unfortunately, the rest of the Commission is pressing forward on it. The city is worsening the traffic problems on the street. The Las Olas area needs to be designed to maintain its attractiveness, help boost business and ensure residents can travel safely between home, work and shopping. We also must have a steady path for emergency vehicles.

Homeless. When the city arrested a 90-year-old man for feeding the homeless and then bulldozed a homeless encampment with no warning, I stood up. The city shouldn't criminalize homelessness, so I've been working to find humane solutions including expanding the amount of temporary housing where people have a place to sleep and get help to



improve their lives.

Lutheran Church. When developers wanted to demolish the Lutheran Church downtown for another housing project, I negotiated with them and won a compromise that preserved the stone sanctuary as a key part of the city's history.

Guns in parks. When the nation was hit by a rash of gun violence, I wanted to see change in Fort Lauderdale. I don't think guns should be sold in parks where children play. So far, the rest of the commission has not budged on stopping the gun shows at War Memorial Auditorium, but we will keep fighting.

Puppy mills. Residents came to me concerned that pet stores in Fort Lauderdale could sell animals bred in shady puppy mills out of state. Many such dogs have serious health issues. After much debate, we now have a law that bans the sale of commercially bred dogs and cats at pet stores.

Education. When residents of Victoria Park complained that their children had to go across town to attend grade school, I brought together the neighborhood and School District to work out a solution for them to be educated closer to home. We increased neighborhood enrollment at Virginia Shuman Young, and we were able to open up classroom spaces in other, much closer schools.

Downtown amenities. When developers kept pitching high-rise after high-rise downtown with nothing but bars and restaurants, I said they needed to do better. I persuaded them to ensure there are grocery stores, drug stores, dry cleaners and other businesses for people to use close to their homes. We will have a thriving urban core in which people can walk to places instead of getting into cars. That's a city of the future.

It's been quite the five years. It's been a pleasure working with all of you on addressing these challenges. Together, we can make Fort Lauderdale a better place to live.

Sincerely,

civil rights leader.

Marriage equality. When the country was in the throes of a debate about whether same-sex couples should be allowed to marry, I wanted Fort Lauderdale to add its voice to the chorus of those favoring equality. It was a hard-fought vote, but in the end, I got the city to pass a resolution supporting marriage equality.

Crescent House. Residents around the state-run Crescent House youth group home had long complained that it was responsible for an unbelievable level of home break-ins, drug dealing and other crime in their neighborhood. I brought together city attorneys, law enforcement and code inspectors to force change. In the end, we finally closed Crescent House.

Beach Place. Beach Place was built to be an upscale center of commercial activity on the beach, but somewhere along the way, that went awry. When beach residents and other businesses complained it had become so run down that it was bringing seedier elements to the beach and causing crime, I demanded change, and the city cracked down. Crime has dropped, and new businesses are opening.

Home renovations. Many residents across the city were shocked when the city told them they would need to raise their home's elevation if they wanted to do basic remodeling projects like putting in new kitchen cabinets or replacing a roof. I investigated and found the city had gone overboard in applying new FEMA floodplain rules. I had the city make reasonable changes to the ordinance that