



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

FEBRUARY 2018

Challenges ahead for next commission

Three major issues facing the city where the commission had made some bad decisions.

Bahia Mar, the Wave and infrastructure.

Those are three incredibly important matters facing Fort Lauderdale, and I'm concerned the city has headed in the wrong direction on each. The city should have done better listening to its residents.

Take Bahia Mar. We recently learned some very disturbing new information regarding the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show and its relationship with Bahia Mar. This news really supports my view that the Bahia Mar redevelopment plans were scandalous and a terrible move for the city's future.

One of the main arguments that supporters of the redevelopment made was that it would ensure the Boat Show prospers for decades to come. I saw it differently. How could the Boat Show survive when it was being squeezed into a parking garage surrounding by a massive apartment complex?

Our newly revealed information adds serious doubt to claims that the Boat Show is better off.

According to records from the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Boat Show has asked to be subsidized with tax money. The operators want \$2 million a year in hotel taxes to underwrite marketing of the show.

The Boat Show has been around for 60 years. Why does it suddenly need a government handout if the new arrangement with Bahia Mar is so great?

It smells, doesn't it? Now, we know why the City Commission was denied any insight regarding the new relationship between the Bahia Mar and the Boat Show when the redevelopment was before us for approval.

The new lease between the Bahia and the Boat Show was not given to us. Although it was central to the redevelopment deal and involves public

land, Bahia Mar and the Boat Show claimed it was a private matter and the public didn't have the right to see the terms.

Just as the Bahia Mar-Boat Show lease was kept from the City Commission so was the fact that the Boat Show wanted this subsidy.

The request was made more than a month before our vote on the redevelopment deal. The city has a representative on the Tourism Development Council who should have been aware of this and informed the commission.

Again, the secrecy is palpable.

After I revealed the request for the tax subsidy, a local activist filed a public records request with the city clerk demanding the release of the secret deal between Bahia Mar and the Boat Show. He alleges the city is violating the state's Government-in-the-Sunshine law by not providing it. I agree and have joined in the records request.

If the secret deal is so great, let everyone see it and judge for themselves. I suspect that the Bahia Mar developers will soon be coming to the city asking for a

sweeter deal. When they do, they should expect some tough



questions regarding these matters.

We need to know because the Boat Show is so vital to our maritime economy. The Bahia Mar deal was bad on so many fronts — from overdevelopment to misuse of public land to traffic congestion — and this makes it that much worse.

The Wave streetcar

Like with Bahia Mar, the public has spoken loud and clear in opposition the Wave. The result unfortunately was the same.

Despite public demand that the city scuttle the streetcar, the City Commission recently voted to proceed with the project and may have ensnared us in an agreement that will be all but impossible to unwind



without significant legal and financial risk.

I opposed the Wave and grilled the transportation planners and power-brokers regarding my chief concerns. I think the project has grown too expensive, is based on outdated technology and has become a route to nowhere.

When the Sun Sentinel first reported the idea of the Wave 14 years ago, the cost was to be \$38 million. Yet, when bids were opened a couple months back, the price tag of the 2.8-mile loop had ballooned to \$270 million. That's \$100 million a mile! And, the history of public works projects in the United States over the last 50 years indicates that the cost will continue to skyrocket.

Wave advocates say we risk not only having to repay the costs incurred so far, but we risk future federal funding. That's simply not true.

Providence, Rhode Island, persuaded the federal government to re-purpose a grant it received for a streetcar so they could spend it on a better bus system. We could have done similar.

Supporters of the Wave try to tell you that modern American streetcars use overhead wires and tracks laid in the roadbed. But this really is 19th century technology that is obsolete elsewhere in the world.

The Chinese have developed streetcars that don't require overhead wires or tracks or even drivers. Overhead wires seem very problematic in a locale subject to hurricanes. Supporters say the system can be upgraded over time, but they can't forecast what the extra cost would be. Also, once you lay tracks in the road, you can't easily change that part of the system to something else.

Finally, this streetcar would in essence run in a loop from about City Hall on the north to the hospital on the south. Who would ride this? The supporters say millennials going from their studio apartment to a restaurant would pile on

board. But here is the truth: Less than 300 people ride the same route aboard the current Sun Trolley.

Further, Broward County recently said the Wave didn't meet federal guidelines to expand to the airport. A true streetcar/light-rail system must go to places where people want to go — the airport, the seaport, the

infrastructure. We've had pipes burst all over town spilling sewage into streets and people's yards. An in-depth analysis noted most of our water and sewer system is so old that it is on the brink of failure, including our water treatment plant. The problem is so bad that the state has threatened to fine us if improvements aren't made.

We certainly need to solve the problem. But the commission majority voted to use utility fees to immediately borrow \$200 million. This decision comes just before the next commission takes office. They should have been the ones to decide how such a long-term cost should be covered because they will be the ones having to cope with how to repay it.

There are several other problems here. First, the commission left in place the management team that failed to properly maintain our

infrastructure. The commission also did not stop the raiding of utility reserves to cover other city expenses. But then, some of them have described the infrastructure crisis as an exaggeration.

If I had my way, we would have tapped excess reserves to fix immediate issues and allowed the public to have a voice through the incoming commission in setting long-term priorities. Any funding decision on infrastructure should involve changing management, ending the raid on utility reserves and imposing strong financial controls to prevent the type of overspending we've seen on other projects.

The city can do better than the decisions that have been made regarding Bahia Mar, the Wave and infrastructure. As elected officials, we really need to strive more to listen to the voice of the people who care about the community they live and work in.

Sincerely,




convention center, the higher education campuses. There are only the slightest hints that the Wave would ever expand to any of these destinations.

The commission majority has placed the city in a real bind. The county attorney has said the city would face legal consequences for backing out after making the agreement, and our own city attorney advised us not to sign the agreement but take time to work out better conditions. The county had given us a way out — not signing the agreement — but we failed to take that course.

When the next commission comes into office in March, I hope there is a majority there that finds a way to back out of this horrible deal. We have more pressing issues like our aging infrastructure to deal with.

Infrastructure

Regarding our infrastructure, I was disturbed by yet another decision of the current City Commission majority.

We all know the state of the city's



Commissioner Trantalis accepts an Achievements in Excellence Award from Norm Kent, the publisher of the South Florida Gay News .



Commissioner Trantalis helps open Giardino's Gourmet Salads, a new restaurant that is located at 1527 N. Federal Highway.



Commissioner Trantalis presents a proclamation to longtime tourism publisher Ina Lee in honor of the 50th anniversary of TravelHost Greater Fort Lauderdale.



Commissioner Trantalis joins other city officials in the grand opening of the renovated South Side School as part of the annual State of City event.



Commissioner Trantalis joins other officials and regional consul general for Israel in planting a tree in Holiday Park in honor of the Jewish holiday Tu B'Shevat.



Commissioner Trantalis helps open Olivier Salon in a shopping center at 2410 N. Federal Highway along with other local officials and business executives.