

**State of the City
Mayor Dean Trantalis
Feb. 28, 2019
NSU Art Museum**

Thank you so much for being here tonight for this very special event. Not only do we gather for my first State of City speech as mayor, we also are here to recognize several individuals for their service to our community. It's the first time we've combined these two important occasions. And we do so at such a wonderful location — the NSU Art Museum.

Let's give a round of applause to Bonnie Clearwater and the museum staff. I invite everyone to check out their great programming. Also, my thanks go out to the Gay Men's Chorus of South Florida, the Police Honor Guard, the Florida Children's Theatre and Father Grady. Finally, a special thanks to the South Florida Pride Wind Ensemble for the music during our reception.

It is a privilege for me to recognize the other members of the City Commission — Vice Mayor Ben Sorensen and commissioners Heather Moraitis, Steve Glassman and Robert McKinzie. Commissioner Moraitis unfortunately cannot join us tonight.

In our short time together, we have built bonds that make us a great team, a team that is both collaborative and energetic. This is the most diverse commission the city has had in its 108-year history.

We have brought an attitude of new ideas and new opportunities to improve the city and to make Fort Lauderdale truly world class.

Commissioners, it is a privilege to serve with each one of you.

I ask everyone to welcome two new leaders at the city's helm — City Manager Chris Lagerbloom and City Attorney Alain Boileau. Please also join me in thanking the other charter officers for their continued service — City Clerk Jeff Modarelli and City Auditor John Herbst, who could not be here tonight.

A little less than a year ago, I stood before you at Parker Playhouse and made my inaugural address as mayor.

I spoke about how this City Commission had a mandate to get things done, about how we were starting a new day in Fort Lauderdale, and about how we are a city poised for greatness.

What a year it has been.

We have accomplished so much in such a short time. We laid the path toward great things ahead. And we are tackling issues that once seemed intractable.

When this commission came to office, our city was reeling from the embarrassment of sewage spilling into our streets. The state forced our hand as a result of the years of our failure to maintain our infrastructure.

Today, new 30-inch mains have been installed downtown to replace ones that were breaking. New lift stations have been built, and old ones rehabilitated. Projects are underway to reduce stormwater from entering the sewer system and overwhelming it.

In addition, this commission ended the practice of raiding our utility reserves to balance the budget. That money will now be spent where intended.

But that's not enough. This commission told staff that we must look beyond the initial improvements.

Major projects ahead include major water main construction in Victoria Park and Croissant Park.

Particularly, we need to make a decision soon about the Fiveash Water Treatment Plant. As many of you may remember, experts told us that the plant is at significant risk of failure. A study is underway of whether it would be better to repair it or build a new plant.

Our progress is not going unnoticed.

A year ago, Erin Brockovich was vowing to target Fort Lauderdale with one of her famous environmental campaigns because of concern about our water system.

I recently met with her associates and can report that they are thrilled with our new direction. In fact, they want to make us an example of a community that is responding properly to its challenges.

Climate change is another of those troublesome issues we're tackling. Sea-level rise is real, and many of our neighborhoods increasingly flood during high tides or heavy rain. We must take immediate action.

In April, the commission will receive a rate plan to pay for needed improvements to our stormwater system. Projects have been designed and are ready to go to make upgrades in seven neighborhoods experiencing the worst flooding.

But at the same time, we must begin planning the next phase of work. And, we must investigate other long-term solutions to protect our community.

One of the most difficult issues for the city has been homelessness. I'm happy to report that tremendous progress is being made.

In December, the city launched a major initiative in cooperation with Broward County, the business community and non-profits. We closed the encampment next to the main library without incident.

The success was the result of following the nationally recognized housing-first approach. We obtained housing for the individuals who lived there and provided them assistance to find work, recover from substance abuse, or overcome medical and mental health issues.

We then began a second phase: a community court to deal with homeless individuals who are charged with minor offenses.

This court is addressing the root causes of homelessness by offering alternative sentencing. Instead of going to jail, these men and women are connected with essential services and housing. And it's working.

These initiatives marked a rare collaboration between the city and county. Egos and agendas were set aside, and we worked hand in hand for the greater good.

Yet, we cannot rest on our success. We vowed to end homelessness in Fort Lauderdale, and we still have a long way to go.

We now are creating day respite centers and food-sharing programs. We need more money to pay for permanent and temporary housing.

To that end, I hope more business leaders follow the example set by the likes of Mike Jackson at AutoNation — who will be honored later tonight — and James Donnelly of the Castle Group. They stepped to the plate financially.

This is our city, and we all share a responsibility to help resolve the tragic circumstances of the hundreds of homeless living here.

Homelessness is in part a symptom of a larger issue we face as a city — affordable housing. The core of our workforce — whether they are bank tellers or waiters or school teachers — cannot be priced out of living here. That is not OK in a sustainable, well-rounded community.

The commission has told staff that we want to encourage more affordable housing — whether through changes to our code or public-private collaboration. There are ways to do it, and we will.

Now, let me discuss another challenge being addressed by this commission: traffic.

Solutions to the congestion on our streets and roads do not come fast, nor are they easy. But we are determined to find ways to ease the pain.

The first thing that this commission and I did regarding transportation planning was to stop a boondoggle ... literally ... in its tracks.

The Wave streetcar would not have eased congestion and had grown excessively expensive. Next month, we will begin refunding the money that property owners paid.

In place of the Wave, we are working to create a rapid-transit circulator downtown.

By turning Andrews and Third avenues into one-way streets between Sunrise Boulevard and 17th Street, we can dedicate a lane to rapid-transit shuttles. Sidewalks can be widened, bike paths added, and streetscape enhanced.

It would work better than the Wave and cost much less.

With our partners at Broward County, we also are in the final stages of formulating a bypass road through Port Everglades to relieve traffic on 17th Street. We expect soon to receive recommendations from a working group led by Vice Mayor Sorensen and Commissioner Glassman regarding improvements to Las Olas Boulevard. Another study is underway of how to improve traffic through the Gateway intersection at Federal and Sunrise.

We have long sought better traffic light synchronization, and the opportunity is upon us because of the transportation surtax recently approved by voters countywide.

We want money to be directed toward smart traffic signals and improved synchronization of traffic lights. We also will assign staff to work closely with the county on timing traffic signals.

We need to think big if we are to truly impact traffic.

Tunnels. Bridges. Flyovers. Reversible lanes. More commuter rail service. On-demand shuttles. Express buses.

All ideas must be on the table. And, we must work more collaboratively with our partners at the county, the MPO and the state.

Traffic congestion is the top complaint we receive from our residents, so we cannot write off any possibility as a solution. Out-of-the-box thinking that looks long term is necessary, and we are committed to that.

It's important to remember that not all solutions to traffic involve road work and infrastructure.

I constantly press developers downtown to include commercial elements in their projects other than bars and restaurants. It is only by adding grocery stores, pharmacies, dry cleaners and businesses catering to other daily needs that we create a walkable urban core.

To that end, I want to thank Stiles Corp. for incorporating a grocery store in its Main Las Olas project. It shows that we can develop downtown in a more sustainable way.

Now, if you would allow me to shift gears and discuss some exciting possibilities on the horizon.

The doors of City Hall are open to creativity and private partnerships that benefit our community. It's a fresh, welcoming attitude.

This is a commission that is looking long term at a vision of the city's future. We have an eye not just on the next year or two, but rather the next decade or two.

We want to ensure that we not only have the infrastructure but also the amenities and services to meet the needs of our population. It is only by doing so that we ensure we have an exciting, connected, resilient and healthy community.

Consider the interest that arose recently among private investors to improve Lockhart Stadium and War Memorial Auditorium.

At least two investment groups want to rebuild the Lockhart site to accommodate professional and community soccer. One group is headed by soccer superstar David Beckham.

This location could be home to a professional soccer training facility, a youth soccer academy, a new minor league soccer team and community fields.

Meanwhile, the Florida Panthers hockey team is going to renovate War Memorial Auditorium. There will be indoor soccer and lacrosse fields and adjacent ice rinks for hockey.

Just think, in the span of a year, we've gone from debating whether to continue to host divisive and dangerous gun shows at the auditorium to a major overhaul with the help of private investment, expanding its use for kids and families.

Another incredible opportunity before us is that of a new government campus downtown.

Last spring, Congress allocated \$190 million to replace our deteriorating and outdated federal courthouse. The General Services Administration is now selecting a site.

At the same time, we are working with Broward County on plans to construct a building to efficiently house both county and city government operations. Our City Hall and Broward's Governmental Center are each at the end of their lifespan and need replacement.

It is one of those rare opportunities to re-imagine a key component of downtown and create a true sense of place. It's exciting, isn't it?

Speaking of opportunities, on March 12, voters will have a chance to weigh in on two initiatives that are part of our concept of building a better community.

We are seeking approval to build a new police station and to improve our parks. Public safety and quality parks are cornerstones of ensuring we provide a great quality of life.

Our police headquarters was built in the 1950s and is obsolete. It can't accommodate today's larger police force and does not meet modern standards of what a police station needs.

The building is in such poor condition that it was evacuated during Hurricane Irma because we feared it could not withstand such strong winds. And, frequent water and sewer leaks raise a concern about mold.

The parks bond would represent the first major investment in our parks system in 25 years.

We would modernize all park buildings, upgrade lighting throughout our parks, make enhancements to signage and landscaping, strengthen resiliency and combat flooding.

Nearly every park would see upgrades and enhancements such as new playgrounds, pools, fitness equipment, athletic fields and more. Four signature projects are planned: Tunnel Top Park next to Las Olas, the redevelopment of Lockhart Stadium and major upgrades to Joseph C. Carter Park and Holiday Park.

I'm committed to accomplishing all this as efficiently as possible. You can have faith that this commission will be good stewards of your tax dollars.

Please help educate your neighbors. And, please remember to vote. It's important.

From the economy to public safety, I can report that the state of our city is very good.

Look at the accolades that we've received recently.

- Top city for job growth in South Florida by the US Census Bureau
- One of the happiest cities for young professionals by Forbes
- One of the best cities for small business in America by Biz2Credit
- One of the best cities in America for art lovers by ApartmentGuide
- One of the top small American cities of the future by FDI Magazine
- One of the top 21 destinations worldwide that should be on everyone's travel bucket list by Bloomberg News Service

Wow! Isn't that absolutely amazing? Fort Lauderdale is truly arriving on the world stage -- and for more than just our beautiful beaches and waterways.

Our unemployment rate stands at 3.1 percent, which is near full employment. That also is lower than the national, state and regional averages.

To ensure our economic vitality, I want to see city government over the next year begin to take a more active role in economic development. By this, I mean the attraction and retention of business and creation of jobs, particularly higher-earning jobs.

I'd like to see us market ourselves internationally as a great place for business. Our diverse, multilingual population, our local network of colleges, our great transportation hubs and our central location between the Americas and Caribbean give us a strong advantage.

I know. I heard it from the CEO of Kemet. He told me he moved his headquarters here for those very reasons.

Our bedrock industries of tourism and yachting continue to flourish. The Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show continues to be recognized as the largest in-water boat show in the world. A record number of mega yachts were displayed at last year's event.

We will ensure the Boat Show continues to prosper. This fall, I will start a mayor's reception to personally welcome yachting manufacturers and other industry representatives so I can encourage them to expand their presence locally.

In the area of tourism, some 13 million people visited greater Fort Lauderdale last year. The latest numbers from the Convention & Visitors Bureau show we have higher hotel occupancy rates than the rest of the state and that our average daily room rate is rising.

Our tourism brand is evolving as our community does. The CVB is now marketing Fort Lauderdale as cultured and cool, fresh and surprising, and proudly diverse.

Across our city, a transformation is occurring that cements those ideals.

Our downtown is becoming a vibrant urban core that once seemed but a dream — exciting, walkable with numerous opportunities to live, work and play all right at hand.

In addition to the residential building underway, we are witnessing the construction of the first Class A office space in downtown in a decade and the construction of several hotels when not long ago the area had only two.

Downtown is becoming a favorable environment for the co-working industry with its young demographics. I earlier mentioned the grocery store coming to Main Las Olas development, but there are more in the way of new

amenities. A wide variety of new restaurants have opened, new shop space has been built on Las Olas, and an iPic theater is under construction in Flagler Village.

On our beach, the Auberge Beach Residences and Spa has opened. Construction of the Four Seasons Hotel and Residences has also begun, adding to the beach's cachet for high-end hotels.

More lies ahead. We worked out a development agreement with the international investment group Tavistock in which they plan to undertake a major reimagining of Pier 66. Joe Lewis and his team are committed to working with the community to create a bright future for this important venue.

At the same time, the city is doing its part to improve the beach.

We completed construction of a parking garage, which now allows us to build the Oceanfront Park and Plaza at Las Olas and A1A and another park along the Intracoastal. The parks should be completed this fall and will provide residents and visitors alike great waterfront gathering places.

This spring, we will begin the renovation of the aquatic center. And, in the third quarter of this year, we will start work to improve the streetscape along A1A.

Nearby, in North Beach Village, the city is set to augment the renaissance occurring there. We are updating the city code to ensure the area is a quaint, sophisticated destination. Plans are moving ahead to renovate Breakers Avenue.

Further north in the North Beach Shoppes, we have completed a final concept with residents and businesses to enhance parking, lighting and streetscape.

But there is more!

In the Uptown, consultants have completed the first draft of a master plan that seeks to transform the area into a transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly destination with a mix of office, residential, retail, parks and plazas.

And continued revitalization of the Northwest is also underway.

We committed \$7 million to assist the mixed-use, workforce housing development called Six13. The developer is securing permits and financing to begin construction.

Another \$1.4 million incentive was awarded to Sistrunk Market, a food hall with a brewery and kiosks for artisan food, art and craft. Its construction is underway.

We also provided responsible incentives to a variety of new restaurants and retail-office space along Sistrunk Boulevard and committed money to improving pedestrian safety on the street. Jack and Jill Children's Center plans to open an elementary in the area with our help, and a new YMCA that we assisted expects to break ground by mid-year.

This commission is firmly committed to ensuring Fort Lauderdale is a livable and safe city.

The incidence of major crime in Fort Lauderdale is down 9 percent. And, we have a Police Department that is almost fully staffed after experiencing a period of a high number of vacancies.

I'm particularly pleased to say that we have now equipped every police officer with body cameras. I wanted cameras on all officers in light of the increased scrutiny that police actions receive nationally.

I'm also proud of how the Police Department stepped up at the start of the school year.

Safety needed to be increased at our schools in light of the tragic shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, yet the School District was not ready to staff every school with its own security force. Our officers worked countless hours of overtime to fill the gap.

This past year, we have also made sure our city is better protected regarding fire and medical emergencies.

Fire Rescue responded to more than 50,000 calls last year and has long been in need of more and better stations. We broke ground on Station 8 to

decrease response times in Rio Vista and adjacent neighborhoods. We also opened Station 54 just north of Oakland Park Boulevard and A1A.

As we have improved safety, we also have improved livability.

We completed the re-imagining of Dixie Highway with bike lanes, better sidewalks, an improved streetscape and traffic-calming. Cross your fingers, but the quiet zone along the FEC Railroad should go into effect soon and eliminate those annoying train whistles. It took a while, but each railroad crossing needed significant improvements in order for this to happen.

We imposed regulations on sober homes, and we created a nighttime economy team that monitors special events, addresses noise complaints and deals with other matters such as abuse of short-term vacation rentals.

We banned the distribution of plastic straws in an effort to help the environment. We also created a citizen group to design LauderTrail, a network of walking and biking trails that will cross the city.

And, this commission is taking a more responsible approach regarding development by focusing on smart-growth strategies.

We want to ensure new development is compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods, that projects take into account the burden placed on the city's utility infrastructure and streets, and that the public has its voice heard and a level playing field is maintained.

To that extent, we plan to update the land development code and find new ways to reduce impacts while encouraging sustainable investment in our community. We can do that if we work together.

If there is one thing that I take the most delight and pride in, it's the diversity and culture of Fort Lauderdale.

Last week, for the third consecutive year, Pride Fort Lauderdale held its annual festival on the beach. This year's event included the first ever parade along A1A. Some 30,000 people watched the parade and more went to the festival, making it the largest attended event in years. I look forward to hosting Pride of the Americas here in 2020.

This past year, the Broward Center for the Performing Arts stood out nationally as a great venue for the arts, being the first theater in the region to host the touring performance of Hamilton. Parker Playhouse is set to undergo a major facelift. Exciting things lie ahead at the Museum of Discovery and Science considering its recent addition and new CEO, Joe Cox. And, this place where we are tonight, the NSU Art Museum, recently celebrated its 60th year and received national acclaim for its exhibits.

The burgeoning arts scene in FAT Village and the MASS District is so powerful that I think it is surpassing Miami's Wynwood district.

We continue to offer a great calendar of events for people — the St. Patrick's Parade, the Sistrunk Parade, the New Year's Eve Downtown Countdown, the Tortuga Music Festival, the Ford Lauderdale Air Show, the Great American Beach Party, Christmas on Las Olas, the Day of the Dead festival, and of course, the Winterfest Boat Parade. That's just to name a few.

Before I close, I want to take a moment to remember some of the community leaders we lost this past year: Wayne Huizenga, Jack Ireland, John Weaver, Ron Centamore, Merrillyn Rathbun, Birch Wiley Arnold Abbott. May they rest in peace. Their contributions helped make Fort Lauderdale a great place to live.

Who would have thought Fort Lauderdale would be what it is today?

We've gone from a trading post operated by the Stranahans through the ebb and flow of Spring Break to the boundless potential that now exists.

To my fellow commissioners, I so appreciate the hard work that you've put in over the past year to make the progress we have.

We could not have done it alone. Some 2,600 employees working across our government agencies turning our vision into reality. We also are blessed with a wealth of volunteer talent serving on our advisory boards and committees.

Join me in thanking all of our employees and volunteers for their service and dedication.

I look forward with anticipation to the coming year and continuing to work toward making us a world-class city with wonderful neighborhoods, a thriving economy and a vast array of amenities for both residents and visitors.

Let's not dream small. Let's dream big and bold.

Thank you.