



NOVEMBER 2014

New homeless ordinances take effect

Reflections on what the city is doing to help the homeless and protect our quality of life

As Halloween passed and downtown's Day of the Dead festivities made its final turn around the end of the Riverwalk, November began with much promise. The election period finally ended. Many of us felt good about the success of our candidates and wished well to those who came up short. Yet, as the first week of the month progressed, who knew what awaited us.

No sooner had our new ordinances regarding the homeless taken effect than our city became national news. Feedings in the parks and along sidewalks resumed, police action ensued and suddenly we were fodder for the pundits both left and right.

It was not a shining moment for the city of Fort Lauderdale. So let's see how we got there.

The most important duty of the City Commission is to ensure the quality of life of our residents and to create an inviting place for visitors. Our city has become one of the many places in this country that attracts homeless people. Some say it is the good weather. Others say it is the many assistance programs we offer. We hear this from the homeless themselves.

We have numerous shelters, addiction treatment centers and free medical facilities. Our Homeless Assistance Center is one of many that even provide help to whole families. I

have always believed cities have a moral obligation to help those who cannot help themselves.

As the homeless population has grown so has their visibility. While many of us continue to give \$5 or \$10 to someone who could use a good meal, that is never enough. As a result, feeding distribution sites have popped up throughout the city. Moreover, some homeless people feel that relieving themselves in public is OK. Well, it's not OK. Nor is OK that some put their belongings on sidewalks or other areas shared by the public, as if they have staked out the area of their own.

Our visitors and residents continued to complain about what they see and experience. In response, the city proactively found new housing opportunities for the homeless and worked with other governments and agencies to redouble our efforts to help those in need.

This included passing a law that realized the indignity of feeding people on the street. We want feeding to take place indoors where people can wash up and use toilet facilities, where we can avoid litter on the streets, and where the food is less likely to be spoiled by the elements.

I know that tradition is hard to break. Those kind souls who have distributed food in the downtown and on the beach over the years feel that their rights have been infringed upon

because we have asked them to modify their practices. One such person is both elderly and well known. We cited him for violating the new law, and he went to the press.

Really? Are we now using our homeless as pawns in a battle of wills? In the end, has this tactic helped the homeless or has it only guaranteed these individuals a spot on The Today Show?

I will agree that our city should have made a better effort in reaching out to providers in the community as we formulated these laws and worked more closely together so that we all took ownership of these new approaches to help our homeless population.

We ignored that opportunity, so it's no wonder people are rebelling. We should never exclude the very people who are closest to the population we are seeking to serve.

Let this be a lesson learned and let's take this as an opportunity to come together. Let's work as a community to find the best ways to help the very people who need us the most.

Sincerely,

Dean Trantalis



Reserve your seat for the 14th annual Broward Partnership Breakfast for Champions of the Homeless. The event is from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. Dec. 5 at the Broward Partnership's Huizenga campus at 920 NW 7 Ave. For further information, please contact Berne Teeple at 954-832-7037 or email him at bteeple@bphi.org.

City news updates

- The City Commission has extended the planned Wave streetcar to include a northern loop. Rather than ending at the intersection of Northeast 3rd Avenue and Sistrunk Boulevard, the Wave will go west on Sistrunk and then connect into the main line by turning on south on Andrews and east on Northeast 4th Street. The city is also studying the feasibility of extending the line west on Sistrunk to the city limits.
- We've launched a new Riverwalk Water Trolley. The boat will make six stops on both banks of the New River, including at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, Riverfront Plaza and the plaza by near the Stranahan House off Las Olas Boulevard.
- Construction has begun on a major storm drainage project in Victoria Park. Work is taking place along 6th Court between Northeast 18th Avenue and Northeast 19th Avenue and also on Northeast 20th Avenue from Northeast 7th Court to Sunrise Boulevard. The project includes the installation of new catch basins, manholes and flood-control valves. The existing basins and outfalls will be cleaned. Work should be completed in early January.
- The city has begun the second phase of the Flagler Drive Greenway. This phase will include the installation of pedestrian solar lighting, curbing, landscaping and a bioswale that will improve drainage. Construction should be completed in five months.
- This summer, we told you the city received a \$700,000 grant to help alleviate flooding in neighborhoods including the isles off Las Olas Boulevard. City officials drew federal attention to the problem last month, touring low-lying areas during the seasonal high tides with U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island. Whitehouse is co-chair of a congressional task force on climate change.
- Several initiatives are underway on the beach. The city and state are working to improve pedestrian crosswalks on State Road A1A. The Florida parks system has agreed to allow residents with beach parking passes to park in Hugh Taylor Birch State Park because of the A1A reconstruction project. This will help with the limited parking currently available. And, the city is starting a program to allow beach area restaurants and hotels to provide food and non-alcoholic beverage service to people on the beach.



Commissioner Trantalis joins Mayor Jack Seiler and leaders of the South Middle River community to officially open the newly paved Northwest 14th Street between Andrews Avenue and Powerline Road.



Commissioner Trantalis joins Mayor Jack Seiler and other city and county officials to break ground on the downtown train station for the All Aboard Florida line.



Commissioner Trantalis and Mayor Jack Seiler mark the opening of the new Little Free Library in the Lauderdale Beach neighborhood.