



December 2024

I hope that everyone's holidays are off to a great start and that you find time to cherish the spirit of the season and gather with family and friends. Wherever I go in our city, I see the sense of joy, celebration and togetherness.

Allow me to share some end-of-the-year updates on issues of importance to our community.

First, the newly elected City Commission has toughened Fort Lauderdale's stance regarding commuter rail service and the New River crossing. At our Dec. 17 meeting, we went on record that construction of a tunnel is the only option acceptable to the city.

This contrasts with the city's last official position set a year ago that said we preferred a tunnel but would accept a high-rise train bridge if Broward County commissioners chose to build that instead. The county is currently advocating the construction of not just a 48-foot-high bridge for passenger service, but new water-level bridges for freight service.

I firmly believe the decision on the New River crossing is of fundamental importance for the future of our downtown.

The area is undergoing a renaissance with new housing, offices and amenities, maturing into one of the most vibrant and active downtowns in the country. A bridge would not only jeopardize this transformation by slicing through the city center, but it could destroy our maritime economy by making upriver boatyards all but inaccessible.

Commuter rail is clearly important to the region as a way to relieve traffic congestion, but it cannot ... and should not ... come at the expense of our city.

Soon after the start of the new year, I expect to see some developments in support of the city's position.

Our engineering experts have been analyzing the county's bridge plans and should soon have a report completed. Preliminary conversations indicate that they have uncovered serious design issues and that the cost of the bridges is significantly higher than the county has portrayed.

Also, we are continuing conversations with world-renown firms that may be interested in putting forth a proposal to build a tunnel.

The arrival of the new year also puts into full effect a state law requiring local governments to be more assertive in dealing with homeless individuals who camp on public property.

The city has already adopted stronger ordinances prohibiting aggressive panhandling and public camping and is working with the county and non-profit entities to increase shelter space. At our

last meeting of 2025, the commission agreed to create an online complaint system where the public can report violations of the camping laws.

We will use our FixItFTL app as the platform. People reporting a violation will need to note the time and date, provide a written description or photograph of the situation and leave their name and contact information for follow-up.

Our goal is to continue to help those who want help, but we will not tolerate behavior that harms our community and threatens neighbors and businesses.

The city has continued to make major infrastructure improvements.

We have completed the construction of the River Oaks pump station. This follows on the heels of improvements to the underground stormwater system and the creation of the River Oaks Stormwater Preserve. Together, these projects will help improve drainage in the River Oaks and Edgewood neighborhoods and prevent extreme flooding.

A stormwater improvement project on Galt Ocean Drive will start in January. Construction of the new South Ocean Drive bridge continues, and design of a new bridge for Castle Harbor Isle Drive has begun in the Bermuda Riviera/Galt Mile neighborhoods. We are also finalizing the design for a seawall replacement project along the Riverwalk, which will improve its resiliency.

City contractors continue their work to locate defects in the sewer system that would allow stormwater and groundwater to enter the pipes.

Smoke tests were conducted on pipes in Victoria Park earlier this month and are now underway in Knoll Ridge, North Golf Estates, The Landings, and Coral Ridge Country Club Estates. In mid-January, work will move to other parts of the Coral Ridge Country Club Estates and Coral Ridge area.

Please join me in thanking the dedicated work of our public works crews in maintaining our infrastructure as well. Did you know that they inspect and clean nearly 10,000 catch basins? Each catch basin is inspected on average twice a year.

This work plays a vital role in protecting our neighborhoods from flooding and maintaining clean waterways. It's not a small task considering there are nearly 200 miles of stormwater pipes to manage.

2024 has been a year of progress and resilience, I'm proud of what we've accomplished together — from enhancing our neighborhoods to building a more sustainable and vibrant future for generations to come.

I wish you and your family a season filled with peace, joy, and laughter. May the New Year bring even more opportunities to thrive as a community.

Sincerely,

Dean