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I appreciate the opportunity to clarify the misinformation that continues to be reported about this issue.

Feeding the homeless is not banned in the City of Fort Lauderdale. Our ordinance expands the number of locations where feedings can take place and establishes guidelines to ensure they are carried out under safe, sanitary, and healthy conditions.

Unfortunately, at recent food distributions, citations were rightly issued when organizations failed to comply with the process in place to ensure public health and safety. Contrary to almost every media report, a 90-year old man was never taken into custody. In fact, the City offered him two alternative feeding locations within blocks of his current site that met all of the requirements of the ordinance. Disappointingly, he rejected both of our offers.

But let's not lose sight of the bigger picture. Experts agree that the homeless need more than just food. To get back on their feet, the homeless need shelter, clothing, medical and social services.

Fort Lauderdale's compassion for the homeless compelled us to develop a comprehensive homeless assistance strategy. Working with numerous agencies, non-profit, charitable and faith-based organizations, we are making a difference in the lives of the homeless through initiatives that include:

- Fort Lauderdale was the first city in South Florida to establish a Police Homeless Outreach Unit, which currently makes 8,000 referrals a year providing access to housing, critical medical care, and social services. The award-winning initiative has been replicated by law enforcement agencies across the country.
- Since 1999, Fort Lauderdale has been home to the only full service comprehensive Homeless Assistance Center in Broward County. The City recently approved expanding the center's size and scope of services.
- The City maintains an active partnership with Mission United, a program dedicated to providing housing and social services to homeless Veterans.

- The City supports Broward County, the Broward Partnership for the Homeless, Housing Authority of the City of Fort Lauderdale, Salvation Army of Broward County, United Way of Broward County, Hope South Florida, the Task Force for Ending Homelessness, and many others.
- The City is part of Broward County's Continuum of Care, a partnership that allocates over \$20 million in our community for homeless assistance.
- Fort Lauderdale is the only city in South Florida and one of only 235 communities nationwide participating in the 100,000 Homes Campaign, also known as Housing First, to move disabled and chronically homeless people into permanent housing.
- Our Housing First initiative was recently re-funded for a second year, giving us an additional \$455,000 to continue to operate and expand this effort to serve even more homeless.

Our quality of life and economic viability are directly linked to the stewardship of our public spaces. As a City, we have a responsibility to ensure that our parks and public spaces can be safely enjoyed by everyone – families, children, residents, visitors, and the homeless. However, we also need to ensure that the conduct and activities of a single group do not impede or exclude others from using those same spaces.

At the end of the day, we all want the same thing – to help the homeless. But we need to find a balance between meeting the needs of the homeless and meeting the needs of everyone else who lives in, works in, and visits our great City. The only way that this can be accomplished is through cooperation.

By working together we can share resources and leverage strengths in a unified effort to help the homeless so that enforcing the laws will no longer be an issue; so that every hungry person can be fed; so that everyone can enjoy our parks; and so that we can all get back to refocusing our efforts toward a long-term solution to this important and complex issue.

In the meantime, we encourage those groups that are feeding the homeless to partner with agencies and organizations that, like Fort Lauderdale, are taking a comprehensive approach to this issue so that we can begin to make real progress addressing the needs of our homeless neighbors.

John P. "Jack" Seiler  
Mayor, City of Fort Lauderdale

