



AUGUST 2013

Fort Lauderdale unveils budget plan for 2014

Property tax rate to remain level, but increase proposed in fire assessment fee

In early July, the city manager presented his proposed budget for next fiscal year to the City Commission. I wanted to take a moment to lay out some of its highlights and to encourage all who are interested to attend the budget hearings in September.

The property tax rate for city operations would remain unchanged for the seventh consecutive year. However, during these years, this occurred only because the City Commission withdrew money from its reserve account. So, while there were staffing reductions and cost-cutting efforts, the city spent more than it took in.

It is being suggested that to avoid withdrawing money from our reserve account again this year, we raise the fee that homeowners pay for fire suppression from \$135 to \$225.

The city manager says the budget proposal addresses a number of key priorities, including downtown walkability, sidewalk repair, street resurfacing, streetscape enhancements and improvements to the wastewater collection/water distribution system. With this increase, the argument is that these efforts will now be funded.

Here are some examples of how District 2 will be impacted by these projects. The budget plan contains:

- \$3.7 million to continue improvements slated for the central beach area.
- \$764,000 to begin dredging work around the Las Olas Marina, the Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Center and Bahia Mar. This will coincide with regional plans to deepen the Intracoastal Waterway.
- \$424,100 to pave Northwest 14th Street and Northwest 15th Street from Powerline Road east to Andrews Avenue in South Middle River. These are the last unpaved roads in the city.
- \$295,000 to begin street enhancements to Northwest 1st Avenue and Northwest 5th Street in

the growing Flagler Arts and Technology Village.

- \$200,000 to explore drainage improvements needed in the Progresso Village neighborhood.

But let's get real.

None of these projects is funded from general revenue sources, which come from property taxes and the fire assessment fee. Rather, these projects tap redevelopment monies and enterprise funds that are collected separately.

In essence, the city wants more money to pay its way. Citizens wouldn't be happy about a millage rate increase so a higher fire assessment fee is suggested as the answer. There are several reasons why this approach is questionable.

First, it's a tax increase no matter what you want to call it.

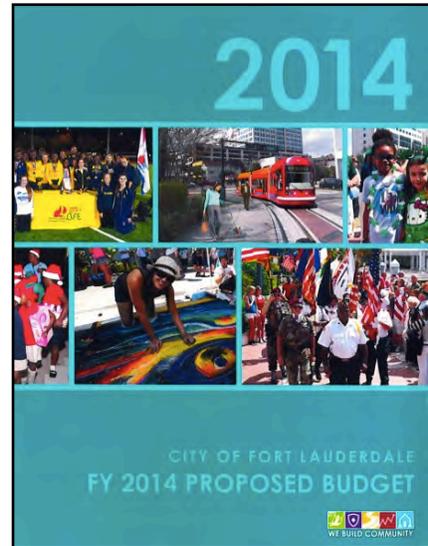
Second, a flat fee paid equally by everyone has a greater impact on lower- and middle-income homeowners than it does on those who are well-off.

Finally, as we enter critical negotiations with the police and fire unions, we would essentially be confessing that we accept things the way they are and we will raise more revenue to meet their demands. That does not bode well for progress on pension reform and city perks such as take-home police cars.

This approach is totally unacceptable because the status quo is totally unacceptable.

Do you know that we pay on average more than \$40,000 per union employee *every year* just to cover our pension obligations? Do you know we cover the cost of giving a take-home car to each police officer that lives anywhere in Broward County. That includes all gas, oil and repairs.

Our own consultants have stated that this level of funding is "unsustainable." If we keep going this



direction for long, the city will be broke.

So I ask this – why would we feed this machine with additional tax revenue when we should find ways to incentivize our union negotiations and create a city government that is financially sustainable?

I believe that the men and women who work for our community respect their role and want to do the right thing. We can accomplish this if we work together to make this happen.

At this point, there is no legitimate reason to increase our taxes, and we need more input from residents about the city manager's proposed increase in the fire assessment.

Public hearings on the budget are scheduled for 6 p.m. on Sept. 3 and Sept. 12 in the commission chambers at City Hall. A hearing on the fire assessment fee will be held during the Sept. 12 meeting.

Sincerely,

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Summer news updates for District 2

The City Commission will be on its summer recess until Aug. 20, but work continues at City Hall on issues important to you.

South Middle River crime:

Following recent meetings with the neighborhood, the Police Department has increased its activity in South Middle River.

More officers are assigned to the area, drug sweeps have been conducted and undercover operations organized.

The agency also set up a checkpoint on the evening of July 19 on Northeast 13th Street.

Police report 55 arrests and 146 traffic citations as a result of their stepped-up efforts.

Speeding on Andrews Avenue:

Broward County has agreed in principle to allow the city to test 3D designs in the pavement as a way to slow down traffic. This idea has been tried in other major

cities, but represents the first time it would be done in Broward.

Quiet zones along the FEC railroad:

In mid-June, city leaders participated in a discussion with the Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization about eliminating the need for trains to blow their whistles at railroad crossings.

Each crossing would need to be renovated with extra safety features to avoid the possibility of collisions between trains and cars in the new quiet zones.

Discussions will continue in advance of the planned addition of commuter rail service.

Flood insurance discounts:

The city has obtained a better rating from the Federal Emergency Management Agency that will allow residents to save money on their flood insurance.

This is the result of new flood mitigation measures, including higher regulatory standards, open space preservation and drainage system maintenance.

Property owners and renters who renew or purchase flood insurance policies are eligible for a 20 percent discount. This should save residents almost \$1 million annually.

Federal Highway resurfacing:

The Florida Department of Transportation recently told the city of plans to resurface Federal Highway from Broward Boulevard to Northeast 17th Way. In addition to repaving, FDOT plans to make drainage and pedestrian improvements.

The work should begin in October 2014. We should have more precise information later this summer.



Commissioner Trantalis participates in a community peace rally held after the jury verdict in the George Zimmerman case involving Trayvon Martin's death.



Commissioner Trantalis joins other officials at a National Night Out Against Crime event on Northeast 13th Street in the Middle River Terrace community.

District meetings restart

Commissioner Trantalis will host his first agenda review meeting after the city's summer recess on Aug. 19. It will take place at 5:30 p.m. in the 7th floor conference room of City Hall. The purpose is to receive input from residents and answer questions about the agenda for the City Commission meeting on Aug. 20.

Because of the Labor Day holiday, the following agenda review meeting for District 2 will be held on Sept. 16 at the same time and location. Typically, they are the first and third Mondays of the month.