



From the desk of Commissioner Robert S. Weinroth

Annual Recap

As we usher in 2020, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the many positive things that are happening in Palm Beach County.

Palm Beach County boasts the third largest population in the state with over 1.4 million residents. More than 20,000 new residents are calling our county home every year, property values and home sales are up, and unemployment is down.

The national unemployment rate remains at a 50-year low and the news in Palm Beach County is equally positive with unemployment now at 3.7 percent (slightly down from the same time last year 3.8 percent). There are actually more countywide job openings than applicants!

Tourism remains one the county's most important industries with a \$7.5 billion economic impact; creating 94,000 jobs and generating over \$54 million in bed-tax revenue. Area hotels are booking at record levels. Additionally, agriculture, biotechnology and transportation continue to drive our economic engine.

Over the past twelve months, 34 companies relocated or expanded in Palm Beach County creating over 2,700 new jobs while occupying over a million square feet of office/commercial space with over \$12 million in capital investment.

Local job gains were led by the manufacturing sector with an increase of 5.5 percent, nearly double the statewide rate. The county also had the fastest statewide growth rate in the financial services sector. Other job growth sectors include education/health services (3,800), professional and business services (3,400), financial activities (2,100), leisure and hospitality (1,900), construction (1,800) and government (1,500).

Additionally, wages in Palm Beach County are up 3.1 percent, eclipsing the national wage growth of 2.8 percent. The county ranks fourth in the state in per capita income at \$74,754 compared to the statewide average of \$47,600.

The county is also experiencing a diversity shift in area industries such as aviation, aerospace and engineering, corporate headquarters, business and finance, IT/telecommunications, logistics/distribution, life science and healthcare, green energy and manufacturing.

In South County, Boca Raton remains one of the county's top growth areas receiving more than \$642,000 in incentives from the county for expansions creating over 1,000 jobs with salaries ranging from \$53,000 to \$77,000. These businesses include ORBCOMM, MobileHelp and Modernizing Medicine. They also received state and city incentives of over \$5 million.

As a former Boca Raton elected official, I understand the importance of working closely with local municipalities. During my first few months in office, I visited each of the district's twelve municipalities to formally introduce myself and provide my support as their county representative. I have also held meetings with the district mayors and managers to address any concerns and provide county updates on numerous issues.

Working on the county's \$5.2 billion budget is a considerable responsibility for all the commissioners. This significant budget reflects the enormity of the county's operations that include solid waste disposal, public transportation, three airports including PBI, water treatment plants, 3,500 miles of roads and 214 bridges, 8,000 acres of parks and so much more.

Additionally, there are over half-million residents living in unincorporated Palm Beach County who are served by the county. We were successful as a board this year in maintaining the current tax rate which has not been increased in nine years. Saving taxpayers' money will remain a priority for me.

Keeping our roads and bridges in good repair and filling potholes are also top priorities! The county successfully completed major repairs on the Camino Real Bridge this past year (after several unexpected delays). Among the hundreds of road miles that were resurfaced in 2019 included Jog Road/Clint Moore Rd and Palmetto Circle North and South/Powerline Road. Expect to see road crews in South County throughout 2020 working on Old Dixie Hwy and Yamato Road, just to name a few.

No annual recap would be complete without mentioning Hurricane Dorian. With a Category 5 storm heading right toward us, we were extremely lucky at the last minute, and a major disaster was avoided. However, the county was ready! The Emergency Operations Center was fully activated and your county commissioners worked with emergency officials as efforts were coordinated with local, state and federal agencies to disseminate critical information.

All nine shelters were open and provided housing for over 3,000 residents including those with special needs and pets. Over 8,000 calls were handled by emergency workers and hundreds of social media posts were made and shared continuously. Palm Beach County is proud of its dedicated emergency professionals who play significant roles during emergencies. The dedication of our county employees is essential to ensuring the safety of our residents.

Everyone should be extremely proud of the outpouring of support for our neighbors in the Bahamas who sustained horrendous damage with a direct hit. The collaboration of resources countywide was incredible and kudos to all who responded. I cannot stress the importance of

preparedness and urge everyone to take future storms very seriously! It can make the difference between life and death.

Challenges Moving Forward

The county is facing some significant challenges, such as homelessness and the lack of affordable workforce housing.

In June, the Board authorized a project to establish a second county homeless resource center. It will be built on a five-acre parcel on Lake Worth Road next door to the Mid-County Senior Center. This center will be in addition to the services offered at the Senator Philip D. Lewis Resource Center in West Palm Beach.

Since opening in 2012, the Lewis Center has provided guidance and the needed services to over 17,000 individuals and families, sheltered approximately 6,000 people, and placed more than 2,100 clients into permanent housing.

The new homeless resource center will be a 74-bed, 19,000-square-foot facility and will include a sheriff's substation. The projected cost of the center is \$8 million. The funding breakdown will include \$7 million from the one-cent infrastructure surtax and \$1 million from ad valorem revenue.

Meeting the housing needs of our workforce is also a county priority. In September, the median sale price of a single-family home in the county was \$355,000 which is up 3 percent from the year before. The median sales price of a townhouse or condo was \$188,500, up nearly 8 percent from a year ago. Renting isn't inexpensive either with a median rental rate of approximately \$2,100 per month.

The following provides an overview of the county's workforce housing initiatives:

- 1,418 affordable units have been set aside in 61 residential projects. That's about 12 percent of the total number of 12,290 units approved.
- Developers have paid \$7.7 million, in lieu of required set-asides at 20 residential projects; a portion of these funds is used for workforce housing down-payment assistance.
- Nearly 78 percent of builders' workforce housing obligations are met by providing rental units. To date, 915 rental units have been completed or are under construction; another 185 have been approved.
- There are 167 for-sale units in completed or under-construction projects; another 23 units that are approved but unbuilt.
- To date, 43 units have been sold with another 31 under contract.

Palm Beach County has taken an active role in promoting workforce housing to help essential workers such as police officers, firefighters, teachers, medical professionals, engineers and public servants find suitable housing.

County Prepares for Super Bowl LIV

In case you haven't heard, Super Bowl LIV is coming to Miami on February 2, 2020! The county, as a member of the Super Bowl Host Committee, is working closely with its neighbors to the south in preparing for this momentous occasion. The game will have a major economic impact on the entire South Florida region and Palm Beach County has coordinated a number of events for our residents and visitors to celebrate Super Bowl LIV.

- 1/27: Super Bowl Football Camps at Lake Lytal Park in West Palm Beach and Orange Bowl Field at Glades Pioneer Park
- 1/28: NFL Alumni Hospital Visits to St Mary's Medical Center and Palms West Hospital
- 1/29: Delray Beach SUPER Fashion Week (Jan 29 – Feb 2); and Super Bowl Community Celebration at Juno Beach Park
- 1/30: Super Clematis by Night
- 1/31: Super Bowl Rally at Old School Square Park in Delray Beach
- 2/2: Super Bowl Party throughout Downtown Delray Beach with game viewing screens; and Super Bowl Party at Sea on Bahama Paradise Cruise Lines.

For more information, visit www.palmbeachsports.com/superbowl.

As I continue to serve, I welcome your comments and/or concerns. Please know my staff, Lucia Bonavita and Alexandria Ayala and I are available to provide assistance and we look forward to a productive 2020. Best wishes to everyone for a safe and prosperous New Year.

BCC Briefs

At the December 17, 2019, Board of County Commissioners meeting, the board took the following action:

Vehicles for hire – approved an amendment to the Palm Beach County Vehicle for Hire Ordinance expanding the regulatory framework by creating a special event reciprocity provision. The amendment is necessary to ensure that adequate processes are in place to accommodate anticipated regulatory demands in the tri-county region during special events such as Super Bowl LIV in Miami.

Westwood Road – adopted a resolution abandoning public interest in a 30-foot-wide right of way south of Westwood Road to eliminate conflicts with future redevelopment plans by D.R. Horton, Inc. The abandonment site located south of Purdy Lane and west of Haverhill Road is surplus and serves no present or future public purpose.

Palm Beach Farms – adopted a resolution abandoning public interest in portions of several platted right of ways associated with the Palm Beach Farms Company plat and a 12-foot-wide utility easement in the Cam Estates plat. This eliminates the public dedications that are in conflict with future redevelopment

plans by the Palm Beach County Facilities Development and Operations Department. The abandonment sites are located east of Jog Road and north of Belvedere Road.

Roads – approved the annual update of the county’s five-year road program, which is required to be considered each year by the program ordinance. Included in the adoption is authorization for the hiring of professionals to design, appraise and assist in the acquisition of lands, rights of way and easements necessary to undertake the projects identified in the program.

BDB – approved an amendment to the agreement with the Business Development Board of Palm Beach County (BDB), revising the scope of services. Changes include requiring BCC appointees to the BDB Board of Directors to be private business leaders, adding standard contract language regarding the Office of the Inspector General, and adding general manufacturing to new company recruitment efforts.

Opioids – ratified the mayor’s signature on the 2019 U.S. Department of Justice Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Site-Based Program award of \$1.2 million for the period October 1, 2019, through September 30, 2022. This funding will support development of a comprehensive, locally driven response to the opioid epidemic. A full-time equivalent planner II position for the length of the grant was also approved. The position is 50 percent funded from the grant and 50 percent from previously allocated opioid response funding, and will be eliminated if grant funding is discontinued. No additional county funding is required.

Stadium – approved an updated term sheet with Jupiter Stadium Limited (JSL) identifying key provisions of new developer and sports facility use agreements with JSL to facilitate renovation of Roger Dean Chevrolet Stadium and extend JSL’s use rights through April 2, 2048. The amended term sheet 1) reduces the total project cost to \$108 million; 2) reduces county contributions in years 1 through 10; 3) requires the county to issue a portion of the bonds as tax exempt to maximize construction proceeds; 4) authorizes the county administrator or designee to commence negotiations of the new agreements, and; 5) places a condition in the terms allowing either party to terminate the agreement if additional parking for the stadium is not acquired.

Climate change – approved an interlocal agreement with Boca Raton, Boynton Beach, Delray Beach, Highland Beach, Lake Worth Beach, Lantana and Ocean Ridge to conduct a joint climate change vulnerability assessment. The Florida Resilient Coastlines Program has awarded two grants totaling \$147,000 to fund this work. Palm Beach County will contribute \$20,000, an amount approved for the FY 2020 supplemental request. Participating municipalities will cover the remaining costs according to an agreed upon cost-sharing methodology.

Interns – recognized and thanked the approximately 160 college students currently working as interns in 15 different county departments.