

From the Desk of Mayor Weinroth

2021 Wrap Up

I am honored to have been selected by my fellow commissioners as the county mayor this past November. As the mayor, I will preside over commission meetings and serve as the ceremonial head of county government.

Economic Development

Palm Beach County (PBC) is experiencing a historic economic recovery! The county's unemployment rate was reported at 4.1%, below the national and state averages, and there are more jobs than applicants.

PBC was recently identified as the #1 county in the state for growth. This past year, more than 30 companies have relocated or expanded in PBC creating over 3,000 high salary jobs and \$150 million in capital investment.

South County remains a top growth area with incentives provided for business expansions including ESports Play LLC and MPLT Healthcare LLC, with a projected economic impact of \$98 million. Another new project includes NewDay USA, one of the nation's leading mortgage lenders, which is set to create 600 new jobs.

Infrastructure

Keeping our roads and bridges in good repair and filling potholes remains a priority. To date, approximately \$40 million has been invested with the penny sales tax on infrastructure, including the resurfacing of 1,000 lane miles and replacement or rehabilitation of 27 bridges.

During the next few years, over \$17.9 million will be spent on major road projects in District 4 including resurfacing, intersection and road safety improvements. Expect to see road crews on South County roads including Federal Highway, Yamato Road, Palmetto Park Road, Military Trail and Linton Boulevard.

Housing and Homelessness

Meeting the housing needs of our workforce is a top priority, especially in response to the increased costs of housing. To date, 2,574 workforce housing units have been acquired. Of the 2,574 units, 60% are rentals, 13% are for-sale units and 14% will be met through in-lieu fees.

As of September 2021, there are 273 for-sale units and 1,000 rental units completed or under construction throughout the county.

In addition, the county continues to collaborate with local agencies to address homelessness providing services such as interim housing, rapid re-housing and job training. The Board of County Commissioners (BCC) has also approved \$8 million in funding for a second mid-county Homeless Resource Center.

Budget

For the past 11 years, the BCC has not increased the property tax rate and saving taxpayers money remains a priority for me. With the approved \$5.9 billion budget for 2022, priorities will include housing, economic development, hunger relief and public safety.

Additionally, the BCC recently set the funding allocations for the \$290 million in federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds with a focus on water and sewer, broadband and cybersecurity, infrastructure and affordable/workforce housing.

Hunger Relief

In 2021, the BCC invested over \$39 million from the CARES Act funds to support our local food system by supporting farmers, pantries and food banks.

The budget allocation for 2022 addressing food shortages is \$10 million (federal ARP funds) in conjunction with a comprehensive Hunger Relief Plan for seniors and individuals experiencing homelessness.

Substance Abuse/Mental Health

Substance abuse and mental health remain a priority with over \$15 million allocated for programs in 2022. Some initiatives include a diversion program that provides treatment and support services to participants and helps them to swiftly return to the community.

Other programs include supportive housing services to adults with severe mental health disorders and outpatient services to children and families. Another example is the ParksRx program which offers over 540 in-person and virtual activities/programs addressing substance use and mental wellness.

Transportation

As a transportation advocate and chair of the Transportation Planning Agency (TPA), one of our primary concerns is keeping our roads safe for all users. In response to an uptick in pedestrian and bicyclist deaths, the TPA has implemented a number of programs including unified planning, performance and safety measures for pathways and bicycle lanes such as improved signage.

Additionally, I am working to install additional electric vehicle chargers in more county facilities including the courthouses, Governmental Center and the Palm Beach County Convention Center.

Agriculture

Agriculture remains one of the county's leading industries generating over \$1.4 billion a year in agricultural sales. PBC leads the nation in the production of sugar cane and sweet corn. It also leads the state in the production of sweet peppers, lettuce, specialty leaf, rice, radishes, cucumbers, eggplants and sod.

I would like to extend my best wishes for the holidays and a happy and healthy New Year!

Food Resources

More than 49 million Americans have trouble regularly putting nutritious food on the table. Sadly, Palm Beach County has more than 200,000 residents who struggle with hunger.

The county is committed to taking steps to raise awareness and provide resources including the following.

- **Food Assistance Pre-Paid Debit Card:** Palm Beach County issues pre-paid debit cards to approved residents to purchase food. To apply, call 561-355-4792.
- **Drop and Go Meals:** Volunteers deliver meals directly to your door. Contact the Elder Helpline at (866) 684-5885 or 2-1-1 for assistance.
- **Meals on Wheels of the Palm Beaches, Inc. (MOWPB):** MOWPB serves hot meals three days a week and fresh frozen meals on the remaining days. To set up service please call (561) 802-6979, extension 6.

There are many ways to help this holiday season including donating items such as boxed stuffing, canned vegetables with pop tops, instant mashed potatoes, gravy and other holiday favorites.

Nonprofit Highlight: The Kind Kitchen Palm Beach

Since 1987, The Kind Kitchen of Palm Beach (Kind Kitchen) has served our community by providing homemade glatt kosher meals to any resident in need including homebound seniors and single moms. Volunteers deliver over 2,100 meals monthly and will continue to deliver meals throughout December.

Kind Kitchen is always in need of volunteers and donations for its food pantry. For more information, please call (561) 624 7004.

If you require assistance, please contact our office at 561-355-2204 or email me at RWeinroth@pbcgov.org.