

State of the City Address
Mayor Jeri Muoio, City of West Palm Beach
January 24, 2018

In December 2011, the Houston Astros were, according to the New York Times, the “worst team in baseball.” That’s when they decided to hire a new general manager. Not only had he never led a team before but he wasn’t even a traditional baseball guy. Before his last job, he had been an engineer, a management consultant and even the head of marketing for an online pet store. Jeff Luhnow was called a “mad scientist” by one team blogger. However, over the past six years, he has never been afraid to take a risk. He took a team in America’s oldest, professional sport and reinvented it by using new ideas and by focusing on new priorities. Yet today, six years later, the Houston Astros can claim one of the most coveted and prestigious titles in all of sports: World Champions for the first time ever!

How does that happen? How can any organization have such a dramatic transformation in just six years? They did it by thinking beyond the conventional. They did it by trying things that critics said were huge mistakes at the time but later proved highly successful. They did it by sticking to their vision and weathering the storm of short term skepticism. Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down and talk about leadership with Astros General Manager Jeff Luhnow and team manager A.J. Hinch at the Major League Baseball Winter Meetings here in Florida.

[PAUSE FOR VIDEO]

I am honored that the Houston Astros are sharing their success with us here today by showcasing the World Series trophy at this morning’s breakfast. Please join me in congratulating the Houston Astros on their tremendous accomplishment and thanking them for sharing the trophy with their extended family here in West Palm Beach. We also tip our cap to our friends, the Washington Nationals, who at the end of the 2017 season were at the top of the National League East.

The Astros are world champions, because they dared to challenge the traditional thinking. They embraced a 21st century approach to a 19th century sport. That is exactly what we are doing here in

West Palm Beach, as we work to preserve and enhance the quality of life, through an extraordinary focus on building a **City for People**.

I come to work every day focused on how our West Palm Beach team can make our City a world class city where people want to be ...to live, work and play. It is the driving force behind my desire to try new things and to push West Palm Beach—often excitedly, but sometimes kicking and screaming—in the direction of a modern, successful, vibrant urban future. A future that puts people at the forefront of its design and mobility, a future of greater economic opportunity for all, a future that cherishes our diverse history, and a future that creates a sustainable and resilient West Palm Beach.

Before going further, I wish to acknowledge my partners. Like baseball, governing is also a true team effort: Commission President Cory Neering, Commissioner Keith James, Commissioner Shannon Materio, Commissioner Paula Ryan, and Commissioner Sylvia Moffett. Commissioner Moffett, we appreciate you and your dedication to your constituents. Thank you for being such a great partner. We will miss you.

Of course, no success is possible without a strong home team. In this case, I mean my family: my husband Charles, my daughter Dr. Jessica Muoio, her husband Kem and my three grandchildren, Jordan, Jada and Julian Alexander.

And, as always, I want to thank Dennis Grady, the Chamber and the sponsors of today's breakfast. And a special shout out to Keith Spina, the Chamber's new chair.

I am proud to say that our vision of a world class city is becoming a reality. West Palm Beach has, indeed, made a name for itself-- evolving into a city in the true sense of what a city is: a modern, creative, sophisticated, urban engine that powers the region, a City where anyone hoping for a brighter future can find opportunity and realize their dreams.

West Palm Beach's economy is the strongest it's been since emerging from the economic downturn. In fact, West Palm Beach's unemployment rate is 3-point-6 percent, down from the almost

10- percent when I first became Mayor. Our City's tax base has gone up consistently, almost 43-percent in the last four years alone, to nearly 12 billion dollars. As a sign that even more businesses are moving to West Palm Beach, our business tax receipts have gone up five years in a row. And right now, with over \$2-billion of projects in our pipeline, we can safely say that our tax base should continue to grow over the next few years. Broadstone and Brightline are injecting new energy into an area of our city that, for years, was called the "doughnut hole," the underdeveloped area sandwiched between Clematis and CityPlace. And City Place is embarking on a bold new redesign they are calling City Place 2.0. In the last year, we also saw the opening of the Alexander, the beginning of the new Canopy Hotel, and the demolition of the old City Hall making way for a new destination waterfront hotel and residence. We are currently negotiating with developers to redesign our municipal golf course, and we are about to open bids on our tent site. Meanwhile, the new Warehouse District, a complex of vintage buildings, located right behind us off of Old Okeechobee, has become the new area to watch. Just two months ago, one magazine described it as "abuzz with boutiques, beer and booze, as well as fun food finds". If you haven't been there, I encourage you to check it out. It is the kind of quality of life revival that will fuel our city's continued growth.

One of my primary campaign promises in 2011 was to create a business district to spur economic development. In 2014, we announced plans to create the Flagler Financial District and, in 2016, officially inaugurated it. Today, the Flagler Financial District has become one of the most powerful recruiting tools for business investment that this City has ever seen. To date, 232 firms call the Flagler Financial District their business home. In addition we are committed to incubating new businesses. This year we received a grant of \$180 thousand from the Knight Foundation to grow 12 businesses for 12 months. We are calling it the "Thoroughfare". It will be located at 314 Clematis St. I am pleased to announce that, next week, we will begin to take applications from businesses interested in becoming one of the 12 and expect the Thoroughfare to open in October.

But, to convince CEOs that West Palm Beach is their best business move, we need more Class-A office space. Given the strong desire by many to relocate their business to West Palm Beach and what I suspect will be the impact of the new tax laws, there will be an increased demand for this highly sought after space. I am hopeful that there will be future opportunities for the Commission to consider the development of Class-A office space. So, today, I call on my fellow leaders: Let's work together to bring Class-A office space to our city, because to truly reach our potential of a city, where people can work where they live, we must bring more businesses to our urban core.

While West Palm Beach undergoes an economic revival as a result of outside investment, I am pleased to share that the City is also investing in itself. No world class city would be complete without superior infrastructure. So over the next few years, we are undertaking 157-capital improvement projects totaling \$230 million. If you are interested in what is happening in your neighborhood, you can track projects on the CIP portal on the City's website.

Last year, I told you about our involvement in Bloomberg's What Works Cities. As a result of that involvement, today, I am unveiling our new performance dashboard "West Palm Working". You can now go to our website, wpb.org, and track our progress on key performance indicators in our strategic plan, providing transparency by sharing data as to where we stand in meeting our goals.

More good tech news, this is for you trolley riders. In two weeks, you'll be able to download an app to check on our trolley schedule. Use the "Trolley Tracker" to know when the trolley will be at your stop.

It's the people who live and work here who make our city great. We have made a commitment to invest in our employees by working with the Great Place to Work (GPTW) organization. Last March, we administered the GPTW survey, and 1000 of our 1600 employees responded. While the majority of our employees feel that West Palm Beach is a great place to work, it was not enough for us to earn the designation. We learned a great deal about our workforce from the survey. We learned that the people

who work for the City are very proud of the work they do to serve our community and that they appreciate the opportunities given them to learn and grow. We also learned that they would like to be more involved in decision making. We are currently working with the GPTW consultants to help us get to that threshold number that will allow us to be among the first cities in the US to make the list and raise the bar for other cities.

We are also investing in the people who live in our city. WPB-TV's Sheryl Kahn reports on one of the many ways the City is doing this.

[PAUSE FOR VIDEO ON THE SQUARE ONE PROGRAM]

Square One is an example of how our City touches the lives of our citizens each and every day. Our library, the Mandel Public Library of West Palm Beach, has become an educational, social, and recreational hub for our city.

In addition to maintaining and improving our public parks and recreation facilities, the Department of Parks and Recreation administers aftercare and sports programs for close to 1100 children a year, and more than 4700 children attend our library's after school programming. Combined, the Parks Department and Mandel Public Library of West Palm Beach fed close to 14,000 snacks and meals to children in our community last year.

Our Housing and Community Development—or HCD-- team continues to help residents realize the dream of home ownership, helping 19-households with purchase assistance in the last year alone. HCD continues to work with the Lord's Place and other organizations to help the homeless get a home, with 39-people diverted from homelessness last year. As a matter of fact, just a few weeks ago we were able to place four people who were living in the City Hall courtyard into homes of their own.

And special thanks to the Urban League for working with us to prepare young men from our city for work. Some of these young men will be working with Hedrick Brothers, Cooper Construction and D.

Stephenson, as they build our 2 new fire stations. Thank you, Dale Hedrick, Jackie Cooper and Joe Sanches for giving these young men a chance to learn from the best.

I mentioned that the City of West Palm Beach is only as great as its people. I wish to acknowledge my team: the 1600 City employees who, when faced with Hurricane Irma, continued working for you to ensure our City was operational and safe. Thanks to the West Palm Beach Police and Fire Rescue departments, our life savers, for rescuing families from homes with compromised roofs and ensuring good quality of care for residents in assisted living and nursing facilities. The very dedicated Public Works Department worked around the clock for weeks to clear our streets in the aftermath of the storm. Our city's rapid recovery was due in no small measure to their efforts. Please join me in saying thank you to them and to the rest of our City employees.

Today, I could not be prouder of the leadership team that guides our city. When I look out during senior staff meetings, I see half of my team is made up of women and five of the City's largest departments are led by women. I've made each of these hiring decisions individually. But together, a team has been assembled that sets the example for other cities to follow.

Making equality a priority extends not only to gender but also to gender identification, minority hiring, embracing diversity and helping those who need our help most. As a City, we have a special role in setting the right example for the treatment of all who live in our community. That is why I am proud to say West Palm Beach has earned a perfect score for the second year in a row on the Human Rights Campaign's "Municipal Equality Index". I am also proud to say that 53-percent of our workforce is minority. This year we have raised the minimum wage for City employees to \$15 an hour. And just last week the City Commission passed a living wage ordinance, which means if you work for a company doing business with our city, your minimum wage will be \$15 an hour by October.

For seven years, I have tried to steer West Palm Beach in the direction of being a more vibrant, healthy, and equitable community. According to 8-80 cities, “If our City is as great for an 8-year-old as it is for an 80-year old, then it will be great for all people.” To realize this vision of an improved quality of life for everyone in our City, we must enhance our mobility and public spaces. As we design our urban spaces, we must put people first. Walking, bicycling, parks and public spaces build healthier, happier, and more equitable communities.

2018 will be a groundbreaking year for quality of life improvements in our City. I am pleased to announce that we have created the City’s first Office of Public Life, the first in the country. The Office of Public Life will ensure all of our decisions are evaluated on their effects on public health, sustainability, pedestrian-friendliness, and the creation of safe and comfortable connections for all our neighborhoods. Public life will be a priority in government planning and investment.

Today, I would like to introduce you to our new Public Life Director, Wendy Morse. You may know her as Captain Morse, recently retired from the West Palm Beach Police Department. Here she joins Matthew Lister of Gehl Studios, our partner in creating a city for people, to talk about what this will mean for West Palm Beach.

[PAUSE FOR VIDEO INTERVIEW OF WENDY MORSE & MATTHEW LISTER]

We have taken a number of steps in this direction. For example, we are working with Gehl to “Dance into the Sunset” and “Complete Clematis”. We have developed an initiative with Van Alen and Ecosystema Urbana that looks at our City as a model waterfront city and asks how we can create more vibrant spaces that are intelligent, flexible and responsive.

This year, you will begin to see the results of our detailed mobility study come to life, results that will provide you, residents and visitors with better options for moving throughout our City—especially along the Okeechobee Corridor. Your safety on our streets and sidewalks—whether you are walking, biking or driving a vehicle—is paramount.

We continue to move forward with a citywide bike master plan, to lay out a network of convenient and comfortable bike lanes, cycle tracks, off-road trails and bike boulevards that connect people of all ages and from all of our neighborhoods to the places where they live, learn, work and play.

But there's more. Our efforts to create the kind of quality of life that will make West Palm Beach an even more desirable place in which to live, work or visit don't end there!

Today I am excited to announce **WPB-City For People**, a vision of more than a dozen projects that will transform our city by redesigning key areas in our city while putting people and quality of life at the forefront.

- “Banyan Street Transformation” will bridge the currently divided downtown and the northwest neighborhoods in a safer, more pedestrian and bike friendly manner.
- The “Banyan Hub,” a public-private partnership that will create a social hub with amenities like public meeting space, hip micro apartments, and flexible parking where the Old Banyan garage now sits.
- “Clematis Streetscape” for the first phase, we are investing 2 million dollars to spruce up Clematis St.
- The Datura-Evernia Plaza project will reconfigure the roadway along the 3-to-4 hundred blocks, to create a public plaza, an open space that will accommodate outdoor dining, recreation, and a tree canopy.
- Our Alleys: We will re envision our downtown alleyways into activated pedestrian malls
- Our Waterfront Promenade: We will move forward with the redesign of our waterfront to make it more people friendly.
- Northwood: We will redevelop the anchor site at the western end of Northwood Rd.
- Currie Park: We will reimagine Currie Park, making it a hub in our north end.

- South Dixie Hwy: I am pleased to say that FDOT has given us the go ahead for the re- design of South Dixie Hwy.

These projects will usher in an urban renaissance in our City, bringing about positive residual effects in areas of economic development, public health, sustainability and more.

As I enter the ninth inning of my time as Mayor--for which, I am sad to say, there will be no "extra innings"-- I ask each of you and especially our City Commissioners to join me on this stretch of our journey to building a better **City for People**. Become a part of the process. Come to our public meetings. Bring an open mind. Share your ideas, your feedback.

West Palm Beach is where it is today, because we have worked our plan, never lost sight of our goals and remained focused on the big picture. Success lies in our ability to embrace new ideas and new ways of thinking.

Before I end today, I hope you will allow me to leave you with one small piece of advice. It's the same advice I share with so many others to inspire our next generation of leaders. It is simple, but it is critically important, whatever you do remember to have fun.