



# WEST PALM BEACH

State of the City Address  
Mayor Jeri Muoio  
January 27, 2017

Thank you to the Chamber of Commerce, the host of our State of the City every year since 1998. I have come to appreciate the opportunity this provides for all of us to take time to reflect upon our City.

Thank you, Dennis, Joe and the entire Chamber of Commerce.

I would like to thank Good Samaritan Medical Center for their ongoing support of this event. A special note of appreciation to Mark Nosacka and his team at Good Sam.

Thanks also to Mr. Trombone and Soul Flow who helped “jazz” up our event this morning. It is just one of the incredible bands helping us breathe new life into the Sunset Lounge, following in the footsteps of legends like Count Basie and Ella Fitzgerald.

And I also want to thank my husband, Charles Muoio, without his support I would be unable to do the work I do. Special thanks to my daughter Dr. Jessica Muoio my 3 grandchildren, Jordan, Jada and Julian Alexander for sharing this morning with me.

Thanks too to my partners on the City Commission who like me, get to see first-hand all the amazing things taking place city-wide on a daily basis. Commission President Shannon Materio; Commissioner Keith James; Commissioner Sylvia Moffet; Commissioner Corey Neering, and Commissioner Paula Ryan. Thank you for your dedication and passion for West Palm Beach.

This morning, I'm going to begin with something I borrowed from a leadership expert, Simon Sinek. All of us here are leaders of one kind or another. Some are business owners. Some are CEO's. We hold positions of importance and authority in various organizations. Some of us are elected officials.

We should have no trouble turning to the person next to us and explaining what we do. We should also be able to tell our neighbor how we do it. But telling people what you do does not convey your passion, purpose, or beliefs. How do we communicate the passion that drives our work? We do it by being very clear

about our why. Simon Sinek uses Apple as an example of a company that is very clear about its why.

The power of “why” far exceeds the power of what, or how. This morning, I am taking a few minutes to explain our why. An organization that’s clear about why it does what it does is also clear about its strategic direction and its goals.

Here’s an example. Last summer, we closed several lanes of Flagler Drive to create a temporary bike lane. Before we did it, had I come to you and said: “We are going to put up barricades, and reduce the number of car lanes to make room for bikers,” what would your reaction have been?

What if instead of telling you what we wanted to do, I told you why we wanted to do it. What if I said: “I believe in a city that helps break our dependence on cars, that encourages cleaner, more environmentally friendly transportation, and that transforms our downtown into a pedestrian-friendly urban center.”

And because of that belief, we must undergo a fundamental shift in the way we view urban mobility. We must shift away from how to move cars, and towards more innovative methods of moving people. To that end, we have commissioned a mobility study. The goal is to develop a transportation system that balances bicycle, pedestrian, transit and car travel in an affordable and sustainable manner.

Why are we doing what we are doing?

We do it because we believe in a city that respects its glorious, diversified history...that celebrates the foundations upon which it is built, and that wants to encourage the rebirth of portions of our city. The renovation of the Sunset Lounge is more than just a restoration project.

It is a spark that will bring to life our residents’ vision for the Historic Northwest. It will be the tipping point to new economic redevelopment. And if you think we are overstating its importance, consider this: The renowned Knight Foundation has picked the Sunset Lounge as one of a select few projects worthy of its involvement. Together with our CRA, the Foundation is working to encourage community participation because it also sees the life-changing potential.

Last month, many of you attended the launch of our national campaign highlighting the Flagler Financial District. We already have a major concentration of financial firms in the District. But if we are to grow...if we are to thrive, we need more.

We believe in a vision for West Palm Beach where our economic growth is unlimited; Where CEO's from across the nation look at our city, and see as much prestige in the Flagler Financial District as they see in Wall Street.

Why do 1,600 city employees do what they do every day? Even after six years, I continue to be inspired by their personal dedication. Here's just a small sample.

Please join me in recognizing the individuals in the video. And while we're at it, join me in thanking all the men and women who are the heart and soul of our city: our employees. I ask all the city employees here this morning to please stand up.

We all share a vision of improved services, informed decision-making and engaged residents. These are the three pillars upon which the "What Works Cities" movement is based. It is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies and works with Harvard's Kennedy School and Johns Hopkins' Center for Government Excellence. The "What Works Cities" initiative helps cities use real data to improve services. This morning I am pleased to announce West Palm Beach has been selected as one of the newest "What Works Cities" and will be learning how to best use data to improve how we serve you, our customers. We will open up that data to the public so we can all work to keep our city running smoothly.

I am also excited to announce today we will be working with the organization "Great Place to Work." With their help, my goal is to have West Palm Beach become one of the first cities listed on Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For" list. Our focus will be on creating a high-performing city that benefits you, our residents and visitors. These programs represent a significant culture shift towards a standard of excellence usually seen in the private sector.

Why is this important? Because organizations with efficient, empowered and enthusiastic workforces produce great results. Because the better we run our city, the better the return on your taxpayer investment.

And speaking of taxpayer investment and a well-running city, I also want to announce this morning that Standard and Poors has once again raised the rating on our city. Our utility bonds were just raised to "double-A-plus." And what was one of the reasons cited by S&P? It was our strong operational management practices and policies.

We continue to strive for excellence across our city. Last month, the City Commission ratified my choice to replace retiring police chief Bryan Kummerlen. Assistant Chief Sarah Mooney will take over in February when Chief Kummerlen steps down. Chief Mooney will become the second woman to lead the West Palm Beach Police Department. Welcome Chief Mooney. I want to thank Chief Kummerlen for his decades of service to our city. His ascension

through our department and his most recent years of leadership deserve our praise and gratitude.

Over the past few years, in the midst of a gradually improving economy, I have preached fiscal discipline. As property values slowly rebounded, we couldn't get ahead of ourselves. But today, with several years of steady, measured growth behind us, this is now the time to address some long-needed improvements across our city.

Thanks to you, the voters, we will soon see the benefits of a new penny sales tax. Those funds are expected to provide the city \$60 million dollars over the next ten years. Combined with \$110 million dollars in new city bonds, we will have an unprecedented \$170 million dollars to spend on infrastructure. Parks and playgrounds will be repaired. Community centers will be renovated and expanded. Roads will be repaved. We have long talked about making significant improvements to Broadway and South Dixie Highway. Both will see real changes to encourage redevelopment.

Already underway are over \$100 million dollars in facility and safety improvements at our ECR wastewater plant. They will improve both efficiency and technology.

Also underway is a 21st century upgrade at the water plant to install a new ultra-violet filtration system. The new state-of-the-art system ensures we will meet the needs of our city for decades to come. And we will do it while keeping control over our water. No privatization. No outsourcing. We maintain control over our water, our rates and our future.

And while I am speaking of controlling our future, let me also mention a precedent setting court decision for **our** city, and for **all** cities that believe in the importance of self-determination and home rule. Just last month, an appellate court ended a two year legal dispute. The court ruled counties can not force cities to involuntarily pay for county-wide programs. The case was never just about West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, or the Inspector General. It was always about the greater importance of preserving the sovereignty of Florida cities, and ensuring all cities maintain the absolute right to control their budgets, and how they chose to spend their taxpayers' money.

Public safety remains a top priority. The addition of fire station nine has drastically reduced response times in the Haverhill area, and is directly responsible for saving several lives this past year.

I am proud to say we are also the first city in the county to have already outfitted all our uniformed police officers with body cameras. Seven years ago, while running for my first term, I promised our officers would have the safest, most reliable radio system backing them up. This morning, I am proud ... and maybe a

bit relieved ... to say our police department now has a radio system that is the envy of many, and the state-of-the-art technology setting the industry standard.

We continue to set the standard for forward thinking cities. It's not just about making sure the trolleys run on time. It's about having trolleys that run on propane instead of fossil fuels. It's about our new pledge to completely replace our city fleet of cars with non-fossil fuel vehicles by 2025. It is about working with the internationally recognized Van Alen Institute to design a new downtown garage that's more than just a place to park. It's part of an overall re-envisioning of the waterfront. It's about the equally respected Gehl Institute working with us on a study of all public spaces to make them inviting, vibrant pedestrian centers.

Why are Gehl, and Van Alen, and the Knight Foundation all here in our city? It is not because of what we are doing. Any city can renovate a jazz club, or rebuild a parking garage. It's because of "why" we are doing it. They see what I see. They see West Palm Beach is on the cusp of greatness.

They see our time is now, and we need to seize the opportunity to harness the excitement behind "Why West Palm Beach.

What sets us apart from other midsize cities is our extraordinary quality of life. Did you know an average U.S. city has only 12 acres of parks for every 1,000 residents? West Palm Beach has 129! While some cities are trying to cut twenty percent of the energy used by their government buildings over a decade, West Palm Beach has already done it, and we did it in half the time.

This morning, I am proud to announce that these, and other quality of life measures have earned our city a 4-STAR rating from the STAR Community Rating System. STAR is the nation's leading program for evaluating local sustainability, using social, economic and environmental performance measures. West Palm Beach is the only city in Florida to earn a four-star certification.

But we're not finished yet! Our city has also pledged to "all but eliminate" greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050. And this morning, I am asking you to join us. Leave your business card with our Sustainability staff at the exits and learn what you can do as a business owner, and as a homeowner.

Improving our quality of life is a **group** project and requires many partners. Partners like FPL. You may have noticed the solar tree here in the ballroom. It is part of an FPL project to generate more solar energy across our city. FPL is a leader in encouraging clean energy. We are excited to see these solar trees join our existing solar installations and other sustainability projects that FPL has helped make possible in our city. Another important partner has always been the National League of Cities. Thanks to a grant from the League, we are continuing to pursue our ongoing goal to become a more resilient city. The National League of Cities is a valued partner. We thank the League for its continued support. As I

said, it's about shifting our thinking and embracing new ways to propel us forward.

Moving forward means as much about supporting our community as it does rebuilding our infrastructure. It means continuing to support important programs like our Youth Empowerment Center, where the high school graduation rate among seniors last year was 100 percent. It means celebrating the incredible jewel that is our Mandel Public Library, where the adult education program "Incremental U" won two national awards this past year. And it means expanding the success of the Mayor's Village Initiative, including the Neighborhood Accountability Board. First-time school-age offenders who commit minor crimes are given a chance to avoid the criminal justice system and make up for their actions. The program has an incredible 95-percent success rate.

Together with the Urban League, we are also teaching our residents. With a grant from the city, the Urban League is working with young African American men from the North End to provide training and help find them jobs. The Urban League is also using city dollars to fund a "Clean Team." Young African American men are given uniforms, a paycheck and the responsibility to keep our city clean. More importantly, they are given self-respect and pride. These programs don't get a lot of press, but they are just a few examples of how we are working with community partners to support our people while building our city.

Our Housing and Community Development Department is another one of our city's untold success stories. The help they offered this past year to our residents was both diverse and necessary. Having a **house** doesn't always mean you have a **home**. That was the case for Marjory Powell. Her home was falling down around her until our HCD department stepped in.

Despite the conditions, Marjory is among the fortunate. She still had her home. Others, like Brenda Moore, lost hers...until our HCD department offered help. Her story was captured in a video put together by the Florida Realtor's Association.

Thanks to Lisa Kemp, and staff at our Vicker's House, Brenda was given the support she needed. Both Brenda and Lisa are here. Please join me in recognizing them this morning.

When I stood here two years ago, the city's tax base was valued at \$8.8 billion dollars. Today, just two years later, that number has jumped 25-percent to over \$11 billion dollars. In the last year alone, several significant projects have been completed, including the hotel next door, the first phases of Loftin Place and Charleston Commons, Tara Cove, Cameron Estates, and major renovations to the three shopping centers at Village Commons, Westward and Belmart.

The ballpark is almost finished. Next month we will throw out the first pitch. Several major projects are well underway including the Brightline train station and residences, the Alexander, Broadstone City Center, and Restoration Hardware. Also Banyan Cay, Okeechobee Commons and the Norton renovation.

Part of my job is being our city's "cheerleader" in chief. But it's your job as well. You are the best spokespeople we have. You understand the heart and soul of our city because you live it every day. You are excellent at sharing what we do as a city, and even how we do it. But this morning, I challenge you. I want you to be our best ambassadors of "Why."

Why do we do what we do? We share a joint vision of a world-class city that honors its history, diversity and environment. A city that lifts up its citizens, and encourages economic growth. A place where baby boomers and millennials alike share in the excitement and opportunity. Where what we do isn't nearly as important as why we do it. I believe in West Palm Beach. I know you believe in West Palm Beach. Join me in making sure the world knows not only what we do, but why we do it. Why West Palm Beach.

Thank you.