

McKinlay Memo - District 6 Update

Commissioner Melissa McKinlay <district6+pbcgov.org@ccsend.com>

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To: Updates <updates@gladesinitiative.org>



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Accomplishments As County Commissioner

This week, I'm continuing to share highlights of accomplishments during my time as the District 6 Commissioner:

Improving Unsafe Conditions in Pahokee: Shortly after being elected to office, I brought the unsafe road conditions near the Track Store in Pahokee - that crazy intersection of Lake, State Market and Muck City Roads - to the attention of the Florida Department of Transportation urging them to take a look. They agreed and conducted a safety study. It confirmed that improvements were warranted. Those improvements were budgeted and the sidewalks are now under construction!

In addition, the County moved the PalmTran bus stop away from the railroad tracks, the School District made changes to its bus stop, and US Sugar trimmed back overgrowth along its tracks. The County worked to get an old building demolished near there. And we're working to figure out who is responsible for

trimming back overgrowth along the canal bank.

We worked with the City, the State and our local businesses to create solutions. Many thanks to Pahokee Vice Mayor Tasha Murvin for staying on it with me and to former Vice Mayor Regina Bohlen. Get three women determined to fix something and it gets done.

Additionally, I also worked with FDOT to bring about improvements to US441 heading north from Canal Point into Martin & Okeechobee counties, US 27 from South Bay to the Broward County line, and US27 near Lake Harbor at the Hendry County line, and with US Sugar to relocate a part of their train track that made the intersection safer at SR80 at US27.

Paid Parental Leave: It was important to me that those beginning their families had time to bond after the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child. As it becomes a more competitive environment to recruit and retain employees, providing benefits that meet modern times was important to me. I remember depleting my entire leave time bank after the birth of my first two children. By the time I went back to work after maternity leave, I had no sick time for their doctor appointments or when they got sick at daycare. Alleviating that worry by covering a few weeks of maternity/paternity leave makes for a healthier child, a happier parent and a more productive employee. Win win.

Student Aces in Belle Glade: When Bank of America's team came to me announcing they were vacating their Belle Glade building, they asked me if I could think of a county use for it. I immediately thought of Student Aces, a life skills nonprofit for student athletes across South Florida that wanted to expand its reach into Belle Glade. The partnership was successful and a newly remodeled & expanded student center now occupies the old bank building. And, a few years ago we wrapped the Glades Youth Empowerment Center into this location so not only do student athletes have access to this program, but so do all students in the Glades Region. A huge public-private partnership improving the future for our kids.

Supporting Wellington Tourism: Wellington is the Winter Equestrian Capitol of the World and it is my home. I am proud to have had the opportunity to raise my family here. And to work with one of the hardest working constituents, Mark Bellissimo. I recently presented Mark with a proclamation declaring November 1, 2022, Mark Bellissimo Appreciation Day.

When I first got elected, our tourism marketing materials and staff focus was coastal community heavy. My office worked to change that by supporting efforts to increase support for the equestrian community. We even worked with agencies in Tallahassee to make sure we received a fair share of state tourism dollars to market the equestrian festivals and polo to domestic & international markets.

Mark and his family have been leaders in this effort. Additionally, they've given

back nearly \$18 million to local charities through the Great Charity Challenge, which his daughter (pictured below) helps run.

Thanks for all you do, Mark. It's been an honor to work with you and I loved declaring it Mark Bellissimo Appreciation Day today! I can't wait to see how you & Paige change the world next...exciting stuff on the horizon!



Glades Luncheon

On October 28th, I experienced one of the most surprising, touching afternoons of my life. I thought I was giving welcome remarks at the Octoberfest Luncheon at Torry Island in Belle Glade. I expected it to be bittersweet to see many Glades folks for what might be the last time as their County Commissioner. But what I wasn't expecting was that the Tri-Cities would come together to dedicate this luncheon to me for my efforts representing them over the past eight years. I cannot believe the amazing work of The City of Belle Glade and my staff to organize this and keep it secret from me.

It has been the honor of my life representing the Glades, and no matter what comes next for me I promise that I will always, always be there for this incredible community. Thank you all for this wonderful afternoon. I will never forget it.



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Big News for Okeechobee and Osceola Centers!

At the November 1, 2022 Board of County Commissioner's Meeting, \$2.5M in Infrastructure Sales Tax funding was approved for the Belle Glade Housing Authority. The Infrastructure Sales Tax Program, where \$25.5M was designated for homeless, extremely low and low income housing, was approved by voters through a ballot referendum in November 2016. Anticipated sources of funding for this \$16.8M project includes \$10.6M from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), \$2.5M from the Belle Glade Housing Authority and other sources.

This \$16.8M project will fund the repair and improvement of the remaining 534 affordable farm labor housing units in the Okeechobee and Osceola Centers, including the restoration of 116 vacant units, 31 uninhabitable units, conversion of 24 handicap accessible units, and gap funding for the cost of completing the renovation of 363 occupied units.

Repairs to approximately 178 of the 712 total residences began in 2020 when the Okeechobee and Osceola Centers came under new management. In 2019, the self-managed Belle Glade Housing Authority was brought under scrutiny after reports of unsanitary living conditions. In January 2020, the USDA approved Nelson & Associates, Inc. to manage the Okeechobee and Osceola Centers under the purview of the Belle Glade Housing Authority. Other overall improvements include complete street and parking area resurfacing, replacement of asphalt pathways to the unit entries, installation of speed humps and the replacement of roofs, windows and aging HVAC systems.

District Commissioner Melissa McKinlay stated, “This approval today will help close a disturbing chapter for farmworker housing at the Okeechobee Center in Belle Glade that came to light in 2019. I thank the brave young Mom who shared her story so we could fix it. This county funding combined with a proposed USDA grant will allow for the renovation of all remaining units! Thank you to the Belle Glade Housing Authority, USDA, Senator Rubio and the late Congressman Alcee Hastings for helping us get this started at the largest farmworker housing complex in the nation. All families deserve healthy housing. This will make that a reality.”

Lyon's Road/Sansbury's Way Bike Lane Project

On October 28th, I attended the ribbon cutting for the Lyons Rd/Sansbury's Way Bike Lane Project. The County Commission allocated \$5.86 million to widen this stretch from Forest Hill Blvd to Okeechobee Blvd, creating a nearly 3-mile long bike lane on either side of the roadway. This project received a grant from the Florida Department of Transportation through the Transportation Planning Agency in the amount of over \$4.2 million. Work is expected to begin in early 2023.





Transportation Planning Agency Executive Director Valerie Nielson, Commissioner McKinlay, Deputy County Engineer Joanne Keller

World Polo Championship

On October 29th, I attended the opening ceremony of the World Polo Championship at the National Polo Center in Wellington. This exciting day saw the United States defeat Australia 9-4. Another amazing sports tourism event in District 6!



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