Public safety is the most important function of a local government, and the City Council and I consider safety and security with every decision we make. Two topics residents ask me about most often are streetlights and sidewalks. The City installs streetlights and pedestrian pathways (large sidewalks) whenever we tackle new projects such as road widenings. Some years back we started erecting streetlights on our major roadways. But when the recession hit, revenues dropped and we had to cut the budget.

In the past year, with the economy much improved, the City Council resurrected our Continuous Roadway Lighting Program. The No. 1 priority was Lakeview Boulevard, and I’m pleased to report that we’ve just completed a new 1-mile pathway on Lakeview, and Florida Power & Light is putting up 43 streetlights now. The City Council has adopted a new Master Plan to install streetlights on all our major roadways in the coming years. The order is based on factors such as nighttime crash rates, traffic volume and the distance to destinations such as a school.

Our next priority is finishing Belle Terre Parkway, which will be lit up in phases over the coming year. Lights will be installed on the segment from Palm Coast Parkway to Pine Lakes Parkway first, and then two more phases will yield streetlights all the way to U.S. 1.

The City has no up-front capital costs for streetlights, but we do pay a monthly fee for each light once they’re operational. Our annual streetlight bill is $731,000, and that will grow as we expand the system.

If you’re curious about your own street, I encourage you to go to the City website for the criteria to request a streetlight at an intersection or bus stop. And if you want to help us plan for the future, you are invited to take our Streetlight Survey.

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Palm Coast’s stormwater drainage system was built by ITT in the 1970s and ’80s, when the population was a 1/10th of its current size. Now, after years of growth, an aging infrastructure and two hurricanes that put a spotlight on drainage issues, the City has embarked on an enhanced, more aggressive stormwater management plan.

“Up until now, much of our focus has been on short-term solutions, such as addressing swales,” said Don Schrager, the City’s Construction Site Supervisor. “But swales are a very small portion of the whole system.”

“It comes down to being able to move the water,” Schrager said. “The benefits of swale work are localized to the properties where the work is performed. If we devote those same resources to improving the entire system’s ditches and canals, allowing the water to move better, the benefits will be seen across neighborhoods everywhere. It’s a much better return on investment.”

The new approach will take a big-picture look at the swales, ditches, canals, water control structures, pipes, and drainage basins and how they work together to protect homes and businesses from flooding. The City is currently developing a City-wide Master Plan that will consider all aspects of the drainage system and focus more on the ditches and freshwater canals. These new solutions will have a greater long-term impact on improving the drainage system across Palm Coast.

LiDAR, a high-resolution surveying and mapping technology, and the latest stormwater computer modeling technology are being used to help develop the Master Plan. The City’s consultant and our staff will submit a comprehensive report to City Council by August. Recommendations will likely include freshwater canal dredging and improvements for conveyance, storage and water quality. Projected costs will be provided, and the computer modeling will identify the most cost-effective options. The enhanced stormwater management program will be funded by revenues from the stormwater fee, which was increased last fall.

To jumpstart the planned improvements, this spring the City will begin operations to better manage excessive aquatic vegetation in the freshwater ditches. Cleaning the ditches will allow stormwater to flow more easily from swales to ditches to canals. The City also will quickly address some immediate localized flooding issues in the E, W, F, and R sections, as well as reassess the swale maintenance program.

For more information on the stormwater system and how you can keep the swale in your yard working efficiently, go to www.palmcoastgov.com/stormwater.

Did you know?
If every Palm Coast resident spends $25 at a local business or restaurant just one time, it infuses $1,462 million into our local economy! That’s called the ‘multiplier effect.’

Contact Information
Mayor Milissa Holland
mhlolland@palmcoastgov.com
Vice Mayor Nick Klufas
nklufas@palmcoastgov.com
Council Members
Robert Cuff
rcuff@palmcoastgov.com
Col. Jack Howell
jhowell@palmcoastgov.com
Eddie Branquinho
ebranquinho@palmcoastgov.com
City Manager’s Office
386-986-3702
Beau Falgout
interim CITY MANAGER
bfgout@palmcoastgov.com
Customer Service
386-986-2360
Utility billing, garbage pick-up, streets, maintenance for city signs, street lights, sidewalks, potholes; swales and drainage, driveways/Culverts, resurfacing; Code Enforcement, moving, tree/site mitigation, property maintenance, vehicle parking, trash on private property, irrigation ordinance, noise/pet issues.
Community Development
Planning . . . . . . . 386-986-3736
Building Permits . . . 386-986-3780
Fire & Rescue . . . . 386-986-2300
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Finance/Budget . . . . . 386-986-3723
City Clerk . . . . . . . . . 386-986-3713
Communications/Newsletter . . . . 386-986-3708
www.palmcoastgov.com
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This Animal Tale Will Warm Your HEART
The injured pit bull was sprawled on the shoulder of I-95 with what turned out to be a leg fracture, broken elbow and a BB gun pellet lodged into her frame. One day last December, fate must have stopped a car that was driven by a Palm Coast resident along the highway near the weigh station. She spotted the frightened dog and pulled over to call for emergency support. Palm Coast Animal Control Officer Kasey Hogan rushed over for assistance. Recognizing the urgency at the scene, she cautiously trapped the dog for transport to the Flagler Animal Hospital.

Unfortunately, the diagnosis was poor. Hospital staff medicated the pit bull, but she needed immediate surgery by an animal orthopedic specialist at a cost of $5,000. The Flagler Humane Society tried desperately to find donations to help, so they put out a call on Facebook for a GoFundMe campaign. But efforts took too long, and the dog was in terrible pain and needed immediate surgery to survive.

Miraculously at the same time, a local family was scanning the Humane Society Facebook pages, looking for a dog topossibly adopt. The injured pit bull story instantly touched their hearts, so they raced to see the dog and immediately fell in love with her. Just 15 minutes before she was scheduled to be euthanized, guardian angels Doris and Julian adopted little ‘Josie’ and offered to pay all of the vet bills to heal her.

Today, Josie is peacefully recovering alongside her brand new mom and dad. This story reminds us how our pets bring us such joy, optimism and happiness. It also tells us that the City’s Animal Control Division is persistent when assisting our community with mistreated or abandoned animals. So often they manage precarious situations to protect citizens, enforce laws and statutes which protect both people and animals, with a goal to encourage adoption of strays that need loving homes.

With the team of the Flagler Animal Hospital, the City of Palm Coast, Flagler Humane Society, and the love from a new family, Josie gets the new start on a life she so deserves. The family shares a happy home together now, including a newly adopted cat, Freya. And remember: when you are looking for a pet, giving a home to an abandoned animal means so much. Adopt, don’t shop.