

March/April 2021 Newsletter

Fort Lauderdale Commissioner

Heather Moraitis

March marks the start of the Legislative Session in Tallahassee, and while my focus remains on good governance for District 1 of Fort Lauderdale, I am particularly interested in what's taking place in our State Capitol this year as it relates to home rule and local control.

In order for your City Commission to best serve you, we need to have the authority to take action on items that continually impact our neighbors and our spaces. When the county or state preempts us, our hands become tied, limiting our ability to make important changes.

This year in particular I am keeping an eye on two issues moving through Tallahassee: vacation rentals and smoking on our beaches. At our 2021 Commission Priorities Workshop, your Fort Lauderdale City Commission reaffirmed legislative priorities including the need for us to be able to regulate vacation rentals, as well as our desire to ban smoking at our public beaches and parks.

Senator Gruters and Representative Altman have sponsored companion bills (SB 334 and HB 239) that would authorize cities and counties to restrict smoking within the boundaries of any public beach or park they own. This would give local authorities the ability to protect our beautiful beaches and parks, which are often left littered with cigarette butts. It would also make our state a cleaner, safer, and healthier place to live and recreate. I support these efforts as they fall in line with the resolution our commission passed last December supporting this bill.

I am also following companion bills sponsored by Senator Diaz and Representative Fischer (SB 522 and HB 219) which would change current law on regulating vacation rentals, by giving the state the regulatory control, including licensure and inspections, and would undo any local registration, inspection or licensing requirements specific to short-term rentals adopted since 2014.

For any neighbors already having issues with “party houses,” this would only make conditions worse. I oppose these bills as they preempt local control and make it more difficult for local governments to regulate short term rentals when they wreak havoc in our neighborhoods, bring property values down, and in many cases, force residents to put their home on the market just to escape the noise and transient nature of short-term rentals.

I am calling on all of our neighbors to reach out to legislators state-wide who are voting on these two important items. Thankfully, our Representative Chip LaMarca already

stands with us on these issues and is doing his part in advocating for home rule and local control. Neighbors should also reach out to the Governor's office. Please watch for alerts from my office on NextDoor or my Facebook page (Commissioner Heather Moraitis) for action alerts and ways that you can lobby these issues.

Remember, your voice makes a difference and your personal stories on how you are impacted are the most powerful in the advocacy process. Together, we can enact change for our neighborhood and I'm thankful to have you working alongside me.