

Walter Duke Announces Candidacy For Dania Beach City Commission

By Walter Duke
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Let me begin by saying thanks to all that that have traveled from far and wide to stop by and show your support today. It so nice to see so many familiar faces and it is also very exciting to have had the opportunity to meet some of you for the first time.

I would like to extend particular thanks to, Mayor Albert Jones, Vice-Mayor Anne Castro, Josh Schrager of Lauren David Design, Paul Whalen of Whalen Capital, John de Olazarra of Properties Group, Lisa Young, Dave Yon of Gourmet-Up, Jeff Aaron of Aaron Studios, The Dave Nuby Band and all of our volunteers that have worked so hard to make this evening possible.

We all came here today for a reason. It's humbling, but in my heart I know that you didn't come here just for me, you also came here because you believe what this city can be.

And that is why, on this hot summer day, I stand before you to publicly announce my candidacy for the Dania Beach City Commission.

I recognize that there is certain presumptuousness, a certain audacity – to this announcement.

I know that I am not a “political insider” or “political veteran”, but I have been around this City long enough to know that I think that we can do better and that the residents and business owners of this city deserve better.

The greatness of our founding fathers is that they designed a system of government that can be changed. Over the history of our country, a new generation of leaders have risen up and done what's needed to be done.

I believe that that time has come in Dania Beach.

As I have toured around the city and the county talking to government leaders, long-time residents, business owners and others, they all ask me the same question: What happened to Dania Beach? It has such a great location and so much potential but in many ways time seems to have passed it by.

Now we know the challenges that we face today; we've heard them and we've talked about them for years.

- Unify our neighborhoods
- Develop our downtown
- Revitalize our local economy
- Strongly support and promote our marine industry
- Revive our antique and retail district
- Modernize our infrastructure
- Support our law enforcement in order to help rid our neighborhoods of persistent crime
- Change our image as a town that is wrought with small town politics

What stopped us from meeting those challenges is not the lack of solid policies or reasonable plans. What stopped us in the past has been flawed leadership, the smallness of politics, the repeated avoidance of tough decisions, and, in many instances, the preference of scoring political favors instead of rolling up our sleeves and building a working consensus to tackle big issues.

Now, I am happy to say that with the creation of new leadership in the past elections, we have made some progress already:

I am proud to be part of the work that the CRA is doing under the direction of Director Jeremy Earle to provide a blueprint for positive change that will set the course for planned development in our City.

Our public works department is undertaking to modernize our infrastructure and we are unifying our zoning code to account for the very important annexed areas of our City.

Our Parks and Recreation Department has upgraded our public parks.

Some of our more progressive leadership has pushed through the purchase of land for a new development project adjacent to City Hall in a project known as 109 Park.

But as I like to say in my business, "It is what it is", and frankly, Dania Beach has a long way to go and it won't be easy. There is so much work to be done. We need to:

- Support our seniors by providing them with the amenities and security that they need and deserve as well recognizing them as valuable assets to our community;
- Provide superior municipal services at a reasonable cost including consistent code enforcement and adequate public safety for ALL areas of our city;
- Provide and/or promote quality workforce housing solutions;
- Provide inducements to commercial property owners to upgrade their properties;
- Provide suitable infrastructure and utilities to our residents and business owners at a reasonable cost;

- Improve our public areas and clean up our neighborhoods; and, of course,
- Maintain the small town charm that our residents say that they like best.

So what is our campaign about? To borrow a quote from my campaign manager, "It's very simple".

We are about BETTER LOCAL GOVERNMENT. Local government that gets it right. Local government that:

- Is responsive to the needs of all of its residents and business owners, not just a select few;
- Is fiscally responsible and takes its job seriously as the landlord of City owned lands and properties;
- Acts in a professional manner with integrity and honesty;
- Provides its employees and contract professionals with the best possible working environment in order to give them every opportunity to be the best that they can be;
- Provides superior services to its residents and business owners at a reasonable cost;
- Identifies and promotes our assets – Strategic oceanfront location with a beautiful beach, pier and marina; a global address as an art and design destination, a marine Industry that is so vital to our local economy; proximity to major employment and tourism generators; and charm and character of our neighborhoods.

That is why we'll have to set priorities. We'll have to make tough choices. Although local government will play a critical role in bringing about the changes we need; each of us, in our own lives, will have to accept responsibility for instilling a sense of accomplishment in our residents and business owners, for adapting to a more competitive local economy, for unifying our neighborhoods and sharing some measure of sacrifice.

So let us begin this hard work together. Help us transform this great old city to a shining example of modern redevelopment and revitalization that all of our residents, business owners and city employees can be proud of.

So that is why this campaign can't be only about me.

It must be about all of us here today and what we can do together along with the thousands of concerned residents and business owners who are clamoring for positive change in our city.

It will take some time, a lot of positive energy and your input and advice to help us keep pushing forward on the right track, and to let us know when we're not.

This grassroots campaign is about reclaiming our city, restoring our sense of common purpose, and realizing that few obstacles can withstand the power of our residents and business owners calling for change.

That is why I am in this race. Not just to hold office, but to gather with you to transform this great old city.

But I am not here as a politician; a politician simply thinks of the next election – NO, I am here more as a statesmen thinking of the next generation and how to make our city better and we need your support to help get our message out.

It is in that vein that I graciously thank you for your support here today and humbly ask you for your continued support to help make our vision a reality.

Thank you for coming tonight.