

Mayor Demings
2020 State of the County Address

Thank you for that wonderful introduction! Let me begin by saying that I am honored to serve as the Orange County Mayor.

Orange County has been on a solid path upward for decades and as we entered the year 2020, the year of vision, our destination was clear.

We were on course towards becoming – the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow envisioned by Walt Disney.

Let us review where we started the journey. In 1845, Orange County was 190 miles long and 60 miles wide encompassing 10 counties from Volusia to Palm Beach County. According to US records, Orange County’s population was less than 1000. In January, we celebrated the 175-year anniversary of when Mosquito County became Orange County. We now have a population of nearly 1.4 million and we are Florida’s fifth largest County.

During my first State of the County in 2019, Orange County’s economy was firing on all cylinders and we were booming. It has been an unbelievable year.

Our county and the region was lifting off. We had a record-setting 75 million visitors coming to Orange County with a \$70B economic impact.

This made Orange County the most visited destination in North America. With the growth in tourism and convention business, we moved forward with a \$605 million dollar expansion project at the Convention Center.

As the county continues to grow, the Building Division has permitted \$781 million in new residential construction and \$390 million in new commercial construction totaling \$1.2 billion.

To aid in this growth, we reduced our turnaround times for residential construction permits to an average of five days and commercial permits to an average of 10 days.

We launched the “Customer First Development Series” to identify gaps in service and opportunities for improvement.

As we proactively address growth and housing challenges, I empaneled a 38-member Housing for All Task Force that delivered a 10-Year Action Plan creating the first Housing Trust Fund. The Board of County Commission allocated \$10M a year for the next 10 years.

This will allow the county to create and preserve more than 30,000 affordable and attainable housing units by 2030.

In an effort to get us to that goal, Universal Orlando made a commitment to DEVELOP 23 acres of land for workforce housing that would be located near a multi-modal transit center in the International Drive corridor. This is a great indication of the potential for future public/private partnerships to develop workforce housing.

In addition, we worked with community partners to break ground on Emerald Villas Phase II last year, which is a \$19M housing development for low and very low-income seniors. We are proud to give you the first look at “The Preserve” at Emerald Villas that will come online in July.

As housing and transportation challenges are inextricably tied together, I launched the Transportation Sales Tax Initiative last year.

The goal of the initiative was to develop a funding plan to address the present and long-term needs of our failing roads, reduce traffic congestion, improve pedestrian and bicycle safety infrastructure, and build a mass transportation system. The plan also included input from over 200 community meetings, feedback from our municipalities, and we received nearly 11,000 resident surveys submitted to the county.

Looking to future innovative transportation solutions, we shared in Virgin Trains’ Groundbreaking of a privately funded infrastructure project that would expand its passenger rail service from South Florida to the Orlando International

Airport. We are excited for its potential to also connect Orlando to Tampa.

We remain committed to building and attracting new business headquarters to Orange County. To that end, we celebrated the grand opening of IAAPA, the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions \$14 million, 22,000-square-foot international headquarters.

As our economy thrived, we also celebrated our vibrant community and the diversity, inclusion and collaboration that makes us who we are.

From the Dragon Parade, to Fusion Fest, to Black History Month to Hispanic Heritage Month, we recognize the contributions and the rich culture of our community.

Another milestone for our community was the creation of the first Orange County Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Initiative. It is a diverse board of 31 community members commemorating Dr. King's legacy of non-violence while promoting unity, diversity and connectivity in unincorporated areas of Orange County.

As we strengthen our social bonds, we continue to bolster our financial position. Orange County's fiscal health remains strong as evidenced by a \$4.8 billion dollar budget, healthy reserves and excellent AAA bond ratings.

Property taxes, our largest source of revenue, brought in \$636 million dollars, which is 10% higher than the prior year.

In 2019, we collected \$197 million in sales tax and \$284 million in tourist development tax.

We ended 2019 in a full orbit, heading to a destination not seen before. We would not have this progress without the vision and support of our Orange County Board of County Commissioners. They are all passionate and committed to the constituents we serve.

I would like to acknowledge a few of the initiatives championed by our commissioners.

In District 1, Commissioner Betsy VanderLey has been working with the Boys & Girls Club organization and the community to build a new facility on the county's property in East Winter Garden.

This new building will enable the Boys and Girls club to offer services to older teens that they are currently unable to serve due to space Constraints. With the advent of the new building, it will allow our existing community center to increase programming for our seniors.

In District 2, Commissioner Christine Moore endeavored to bring all segments of the Lockhart community together with the creation of a beautifully painted mural on Lake Lockhart

Drive at Edgewater Drive. The mural created by artist and historian Lisa Mikler with Commissioner Moore's guidance features the early beginnings of Lockhart as a lumber community started by namesake David Lockhart.

The mural's multiple panels show the community's progression through the years despite floods, fire, and economic downturns. Lockhart persevered to become an area, which is home to Hardworking and Caring residents and business owners.

In District 3, Commissioner Mayra Uribe recognized the tremendous need of school supplies for the second half of the school year. Keeping that in mind, Commissioner Uribe organized District 3's first "Mid-year Repack your Back Pack" school supply giveaway. This program was to alleviate the stress and related cost for families in her district. In order to keep kids motivated, Commissioner Uribe provided free haircuts, backpacks, and all the supplies needed to finish the school year strong!

In District 4, Commissioner MARIBEL Gomez Cordero worked alongside the Orange County Fire Department and the County Real Estate Division to acquire property for FIRE Station 87 from the Orange County School Board.

The 1.3-acre parcel located at Avalon Park and Crown Hill boulevards offers an optimum site for fire service delivery for surrounding communities.

In District 5, Commissioner Emily Bonilla, her office staff, ALONG WITH COUNTY STAFF WERE selected to participate in the National Association of Counties Housing and Health Cohort.

The Cohort seeks to support counties in their exploration, learning, and action in understanding the impact of housing quality, stability, affordability, and neighborhoods on county health outcomes.

In this Cohort, our Orange County team with Commissioner Bonilla as their team captain has created an Action Plan to incorporate healthy outcomes in our housing initiatives.

In District 6, Commissioner Victoria Siplin has been committed to improving public safety in her district. She worked with FDOT since 2015 to install high-intensity flashing signals at three (3) mid-block crosswalks from North Holden Avenue to 36th Street to improve pedestrian safety in the area. The beacons are in place and will soon be operational.

In addition, the 3-Way stop signs were installed at North Hastings Street and Sarazen Drive to improve traffic flow within the Robinswood community.

As you have heard, our commissioners have been busy. Thank you Commissioners for the work you are doing.

As we rocketed into 2020, little did we know that an insidious virus was on the horizon and the entire world would pay attention.

The nation began hearing a word that would become part of our permanent vocabulary – coronavirus.

This global pandemic has claimed over 100 thousand lives in the United States and affected more than 2 million people and its presence continues to be felt locally.

-<video of news segments mentioning coronavirus>-

This immediately received my attention and as time passed the projections on the spread of the virus and its lethality grew worse.

Drastic measures were needed to reverse the surge of the virus on our community. As Mayor and as the County Charter designated lead emergency manager during a crisis, I declared a countywide State of Emergency and enacted executive orders to include a Stay At Home Order to prevent and slow the spread of the virus.

The pandemic resulted in 10s of thousands of Orange County residents being laid off with unemployment spiking at 16.5%. Our theme parks closed their doors for the longest period in their history. Our professional sports teams cancelled their games, hotels shut down across the region, and 30

conventions cancelled at the Orange County Convention Center.

The economic impact from this loss of revenue is projected to be billions of dollars.

Since March, we have seen a continual decline in the collections of tourist development taxes to historic a low of a nearly 97% reduction year-over-year for the month of April 2020. However, we believe both sales tax and tourist development tax revenues will rebound as businesses reopen and the economy recovers in the coming months.

With thousands relocating to Central Florida weekly and millions visiting our excellent destinations, I firmly believe that the transportation sales tax was the best solution to address our current and future transportation challenges. Unfortunately, given the downturn in our economy caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to suspend efforts to advance the ballot initiative planned for the November 2020 elections. We will explore options for the future.

In the immortal words spoken during the Apollo 13 mission to the moon: “Houston, we have a problem”; Orange County encountered a global problem with the COVID-19 pandemic. Our high-octane jet engines decelerated due to an economic slowdown shared around the world. We are in temporary propulsion with turbulence ahead.

The coronavirus pandemic fueled uncertainty and our mission as County leaders was to mitigate this temporary disruption and keep our engines firing.

With my four decades of experience in crisis management and having a team of seasoned county officials, we are perfectly positioned to address the COVID-19 crisis head on.

The Emergency Operations Center was activated on March 13th to coordinate a countywide response to the coronavirus pandemic.

As COVID began to spread, calls were made not only to our health care and public safety leaders---but weekly virtual conference calls were held between the leaders of Central Florida counties to come up with a unified response to protect ALL residents.

I am grateful for the collaboration between Orange, Seminole, Osceola, and Lake County leaders whose forward thinking crossed county lines so that we could have a regional response.

We also had virtual meetings with the Large Urban Florida counties to discuss coordinated efforts and best practices to combat the virus.

We faced the unavoidable, while hundreds of Orange County businesses and restaurants shut down or provided limited service.

Through it all, Orange County Government went into overdrive, to help our residents who lost their jobs.

As more families found themselves out of work, Orange County was the first to offer Crisis Assistance to residents to bridge the gap until state or federal assistance was available.

We did not stop there. Orange County was among the first counties in Florida to receive \$243 million dollars from the federal “Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act” or CARES Act.

We allocated \$142 million of this funding to provide much needed assistance to individuals, families and businesses hit hard by the pandemic.

We are distributing \$10,000 grants to 6500 eligible small businesses and plan on assisting 30,000 eligible households with \$1000 to help with rent, mortgage, utility and medical expenses.

To smooth out our bumpy economic ride, Orange County reengaged our engines to propel our county out of the crisis.

The CARES Act funds allowed us to be one of the first counties in Florida to distribute free Personal Protective Equipment to help stop the spread of COVID.

Orange County has handed out more than 5.5 million masks and 1.1 million bottles of hand sanitizers free.

So far, we have helped 30,000 small businesses, social service groups like Second Harvest Food Bank and faith-based organizations.

(break)

Teamwork and partnerships are essential in facing the economic turbulence and uncertainty ahead for our community.

We formed the Orange County Economic Recovery Task Force to help us sharpen our focus as we planned to reopen businesses.

Fifty of the best and brightest minds in our community began meeting almost daily to come up with guidelines and a plan to reopen our county that was both sensible and safe.

Many of our Task Force members are experienced leaders.

We also had local small business owners to balance the conversation about the needs of the community.

The work of the Task Force was astonishing.

- **They created seven guidelines for businesses to follow as they reopened.**
- **Members came up with an online Consumer Confidence Survey to gauge the emotional readiness of our community for reopening. Over 15,000 people responded to the survey.**
- **They heard from the Orange County Convention Center on their plan to safeguard clients, attendees and employees.**
- **Task Force members also reviewed the re-opening plans for Universal Orlando, Walt Disney World and SeaWorld and 15 smaller amusement attractions.**

Perhaps the biggest achievement of the Task Force was the key role they played in the statewide reopening of barbershops, hair salons and nail salons.

With input from the Task Force, I sent a letter to Governor DeSantis pushing for the reopening of personal care businesses.

The Governor listened and flew to Orlando for an in-person meeting. He heard directly from Task Force members about the hardships they faced under the constraints of a pandemic.

Shortly afterwards, the Governor lifted the ban on personal care businesses. This was a direct result of the hard work done by Orange County's Economic Recovery. Well done!

Today we are launching a regional public relations campaign, embraced by Central Florida Counties, to provide a clear, consistent message for our community as we unite for safety. Visit Orlando and the Orlando Economic Partnership will spearhead campaign efforts.

As part of the process, we consulted with an advisory team of over 100 local media, business, healthcare and county leaders. The campaign called "Safer, Stronger, Together" will be a call to action for each resident and business to do their part in making our community safer from COVID-19.

Campaign messages and resources will be in English, Spanish and Creole to reflect the diversity of the region. We are launching a new website – DoYourPartCFL.com to include public service announcements AND OTHER CAMPAIGN MATERIALS.

Thanks goes to our local media who donated advertising space to share this message on channels throughout Central Florida. I would like to share a few examples of what you will begin to see in local media ads.

Thank you Clear Channel for supporting the campaign through donated billboard space.

Thank you to WFTV for producing a 30-second PSA at no cost to the public. Let us look!

[PSA video plays]

Again, thank you to these community partners for your support.

We have been able to hold hundreds of virtual meetings, dozens of news conferences and town halls because of the efforts of an award winning staff at Orange TV.

Within the past few months, Orange TV has played an instrumental role in televising numerous commission meetings, TRANSPORTATION Initiative town halls, other governmental meetings, and COVID-19 related meetings on topics such as:

- **“MLK Initiative and Candid Conversations on Police Reform” – This became necessary as America and our community grappled with demands for police reform.**

Countless demonstrations have occurred that were born out of the outrage over recent bad police shootings throughout America. Much more dialogue is required to transform racial injustice into justice.

I know that Orange County and its residents are poised to be part of the solution as we endeavor to change discriminatory laws and practices. Stay tuned!

While all of this was going on, Orange County Government employees continued to serve the citizens of Orange County through traditional service means and by teleworking.

Jane Watrel has a firsthand look at teamwork among our Orange County Government employees.

As you have just seen in that segment, our employees are passionate in helping to inform and protect our most vulnerable residents.

A shining example of teamwork.

We reignited our rocket boosters in May and engaged our target locator.

Although these past four months have been a time of great challenge, as Despina McLaughlin reviewed with us, we are fortunate to live in a resilient community.

The COVID-19 virus continues to live among us and we are learning how to cope and live with it.

Testing of our residents remains a priority as Orange County Health Services works closely with the Florida Department of Health in Orange County and our hospitals to increase access to testing for our residents.

As our economy rebounds, I know that our tourism and business industries will recover. We have already seen 32 of the conventions and shows reschedule meetings at the Orange County Convention Center.

WE are excited that Walt Disney World's ESPN Wide World of Sports will host the NBA as they resume their games and Major League Soccer as they gear up for competition.

Now that we have reignited our engines to propel us back into orbit for destination EPCOT, I want you to know that Orange County is thriving and together our future is bright!

We will not allow a pandemic to knock us off course forever.

Instead, we are destined for greatness!

We have 175 years of history to prove that:

We are a community that makes sacrifices for the well-being of our residents

We are a community that embraces collaboration across the region

We are a community that cares for one another

We are a community that lifts up our local businesses

We are a community that recognizes our frontline workers and first responders

We are a community that applauds our healthcare professionals

We are a community that stands against racism and bigotry

Finally, we are a community that stands up to a challenge and comes back safer- stronger – together

Yes, Orange County is that community!

May God bless Orange County and our great nation!