

State of the City – Holmes Beach

This year, we celebrate a remarkable milestone—**75 years of the City of Holmes Beach**. It's an honor to reflect on how a small island community became the vibrant, resilient coastal city we are today.

As a lifelong resident, I can say there is truly no better place to live, raise a family, or visit. People from around the world come for our beaches, small-town charm, and the character protected by our height and density limits. Those choices matter—they are why Holmes Beach remains one of the world's most treasured destinations.

Holmes Beach was founded in 1950 by my grandfather, **John E. Holmes, Sr.**, and his partners, who envisioned a modest tropical community for families and retirees. At incorporation, we had 65 residents and property valued under \$500,000. Today, that value exceeds **\$3.2 billion**, reflecting decades of thoughtful planning and community pride.

Balancing residents, visitors, and the environment has never been easy—but it is essential. Holmes Beach now generates roughly **25% of Manatee County's tourist development tax revenue**, about **\$70 million**, while maintaining minimum length-of-stay protections that preserve our neighborhoods. When development pressures threatened our identity, we acted—passing legislation to protect the coastal charm that defines us.

Since becoming Mayor in 2018, I've helped lead Holmes Beach into a modern, resilient city. What was once a paper-based operation is now a **digital, transparent, one-stop service center** for residents and businesses.

Key Accomplishments

- Achieved a **CRS Class 5 flood rating**, saving residents **25% on flood insurance**
- Expanded permitting from **500 to over 2,000 permits annually**, improving turnaround and communication
- Built a fully integrated **in-house Public Works department** improving public safety with investments in bike lanes, sidewalks, multi-use paths, crosswalks, and storm infrastructure.
- Reduced major crime from over **200 incidents a year to fewer than 35**, despite increased visitation.
- Expanded parks with **pickleball courts, and a new skate park, dog parks, and baseball field**
- Strengthened water protection through the **Clean Water Advisory Board** and **Islanders 4 Clean Water**
- Led recovery from two catastrophic hurricanes—removing **127,000 cubic yards of debris**, documenting **\$350 million in damage**, securing **\$6 million in FEMA reimbursements**, and pursuing **\$25 million** in mitigation grants

Our proudest moment came in the aftermath of these two devastating hurricanes. In the face of destruction, residents, businesses, and city staff came together—and together, we restored Holmes Beach. I am deeply grateful to everyone who played a role in that recovery.

This year, we unveiled our **new city flag**, a symbol of unity, resilience, and coastal heritage. The sea turtle at its center reflects our responsibility to protect what makes this island special.

Today, Holmes Beach is supported by an exceptional team across administration, finance, planning, engineering, public safety, and emergency management. Through technology, training, and strong partnerships, we've become a **model for resilient coastal governance** in Florida. Our relationship with the county has never been stronger, and Holmes Beach remains a vital contributor to the region's economy and identity.

Looking ahead, cities across Florida face growing challenges to home rule and limited tools to address quality-of-life impacts from growth and tourism. Growth will continue—but **capacity is not unlimited**. When roads, bridges, and ecosystems are pushed beyond their limits, we must have the courage to ask: *when is enough, enough?*

Florida's coastal ecosystems—from beaches and dunes to wetlands, estuaries, seagrass, and oyster reefs—have already suffered from **growth exceeding capacity**. These systems are interconnected, highly productive, and essential to both our environment and our economy.

Protecting them will take all of us—through mangrove preservation, native landscaping, cleaner stormwater, reduced plastic use, and a shared commitment to responsible growth. Environmental resilience will remain a top priority in the year ahead.

I am confident that with informed citizens and principled leadership, Holmes Beach can meet the demands of tourism while preserving its character, quality of life, and environment. My hope is that future leaders will continue to honor the city's vision and comprehensive plan, just as our founders did 75 years ago.

Leadership requires courage—the courage to protect not just growth, but the **soul of a community**. I thank all past and present leaders, residents, and staff for doing exactly that—yesterday, today, and into the future.