

## OPINION

# West Palm needs to be more livable and walkable



**Your Turn**  
Nicholas Bixler  
Guest columnist

I work in an office building downtown and am fortunate to live roughly one mile from work — most days, I do not drive. To me, downtown West Palm Beach is a place I can live, work, and play.

As a land use and transportation attorney, the president of Connect West Palm Beach — a local, nonprofit civic organization focused on livability and connectivity — and a resident who serves on the city's Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, I have spent years thinking about how communities grow, what equitable growth looks like, and what happens when we do not plan for it wisely.

The proposed update to the Downtown Master Plan is one of the most important planning decisions our city will make in a generation. It warrants serious consideration — including the thought, discussion and civil discourse it has already begun to generate. This is our opportunity as residents to reflect on what we want our city to look like in the coming years, while guided by the expertise of the qualified professionals the city engaged to guide this process.

Palm Beach County is home to roughly 1,575,000 people. West Palm Beach — the county seat — holds only about 130,000 of them, just 8% of the total. Downtown itself houses fewer than 10,000 residents, less than 1% of the county population. That imbalance matters more than it might seem, because the county is projected to grow by approximately 100,000 people over the next five years. With nearly all available western land already built out to the edge of protected environmental and agriculture lands, that inevitable growth must occur somewhere. If we do not plan for it thoughtfully, we will face a deepening affordability crisis — and worse traffic.

The connection between sprawl and congestion is not theoretical. Decades of low-density development pushed residents further from economic cen-



Updates to the city's Downtown Master Plan could make West Palm Beach a more livable and walkable community.

GREG LOVETT/PALM BEACH POST

ters like downtown, forcing the vast majority of our workforce to commute in by car at the same peak hours every day. Downtown West Palm Beach supports over 30,000 jobs — roughly 39 jobs per acre, across its 767 acres. Yet it houses only about 13 dwelling units per acre, far below the city's highest-density threshold of 36 units per acre. The result: nearly three people work downtown for every one person who lives here, meaning more than two-thirds of the downtown workforce drives in daily. That is the traffic we all sit in.

The solution does not need to be complicated, even if it may be controversial.

Give more people who work downtown the opportunity to live downtown, and you reduce the number of cars mak-

ing that daily work trip. More housing choices in the urban core — at densities that actually support the way cities function — would make an impact on traffic while also easing pressure on affordability through increased housing supply. It is also the foundation that makes transit alternatives viable.

The city is already moving in this direction: I served on the City Bicycle Master Plan Steering Committee, which worked on planning low-stress cycling network throughout the city, and the city is in the process of implementing a new fixed-route transit system to give residents and workers enhanced mobility beyond the car. But transit only works when the density is there to support it. Thirteen dwelling units per acre is not enough.

Broader solutions — like the long-discussed Coastal Link commuter rail or rapid transit along Okeechobee Boulevard — are worth pursuing, but they require collaboration with the county and other municipalities and remain years away.

The Downtown Master Plan update is something we can act on now, from within our own city. It is a chance to improve traffic congestion and expand housing supply all while building upon the kind of walkable, livable waterfront downtown that makes West Palm Beach a place people do not just commute to — but choose to call home.

I already do. I hope more people will get that chance.

*Nicholas R. Bixler is an attorney who works and lives in West Palm Beach.*

# GOP may soon find Americans want no part of Trump



**Chris Brennan**  
Columnist  
USA TODAY

Imagine being a Republican in Congress right now, seeking another term in November's midterm elections as President Donald Trump drops like a stone in public opinion polling, dragging his party down with him.

Those Republicans were already going to face questions from voters about Trump's weird obsession with building a ballroom at the White House. And now they will have to also justify Trump creating a \$1.776 billion slush fund to enrich his allies, who had to face the indignity of being held accountable by law.

The war with Iran is at an expensive standstill. The price of gasoline is above \$4.50 a gallon. Inflation is surging again.

But Trump is focused only on what really matters to him — retribution and building monuments to himself.

First, let's get into the slush fund.

### Trump weaponizing government

A former contractor for the Internal Revenue Service leaked copies of Trump's tax returns to media outlets during his first term in office. That was illegal, and the contractor was sentenced in 2024 to five years in prison.

Trump created the curiosity about his tax returns because, despite routinely bragging about how rich he is, he is the first presidential candidate in 50 years to refuse to publicly release that information. So Trump sued the IRS in January, demanding a \$10 billion payoff from any agency he oversees as president.

If that sounds like unethical collusion to you, you're not alone. A federal judge in April questioned the constitutionality of Trump getting a payoff from the Trump administration. The case looked like it was going to get tossed out of court.



A New York Times/Sienna poll released May 18 showed 37% of those surveyed approved of President Donald Trump's performance. EVAN VUCCI/POOL VIA REUTERS

So, Trump on May 18 voluntarily dismissed his lawsuit against the IRS in a motion that pointedly said that action's effect "is to completely remove from the court's consideration the power" to rule on the case.

As part of an extraordinarily absurd and seemingly corrupt "settlement," Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche then announced the creation of an "Anti-Weaponization Fund to provide a systemic process to hear and redress claims of others who suffered weaponization and lawfare." That slush fund will pull \$1.776 billion from the U.S. Treasury within 60 days.

Let's pause here to examine the magnitude of Blanche's hypocrisy. His short tenure atop the Department of Justice has been narrowly focused on punishing Trump's perceived enemies, the very sort of "weaponization" he now

says he will "redress" with your tax dollars.

### Republicans will have to answer to voters in midterms

Speaking of your money, Trump hit a hurdle while trying to spend \$1 billion in American tax dollars on a ballroom to replace the East Wing of the White House, which he tore down last year.

Republicans in Congress were antsy about including that money in a so-called reconciliation package, a process being used for budgetary legislation that can avoid the Senate's 60-vote filibuster. That's not a good look for any politician looking to remain in office.

Then the Senate parliamentarian ruled on May 16 that the ballroom funding was not eligible for inclusion in the reconciliation package. I'd bet many

Senate Republicans felt relieved in that ruling.

But bye-bye ballroom? Probably not. There looks to be no chance that Trump's ballroom will clear a Senate filibuster. But there's also no chance that Trump will just let go of something he's so clearly obsessed with.

So Democrats, who have been using the ballroom money like a cudgel to beat on compliant Republicans, get to celebrate that procedural victory. And Republicans, who have abandoned any pretense of breaking with Trump, now must find a new way to write his billion-dollar ballroom into their budget.

Here's why that matters: Midterm elections almost always swing in the direction of the political party that does not control the White House. Democrats are eager to seize control of the House and maybe the Senate, too. Losing just one of those chambers will stymie Trump, and he knows it. Here's something else he knows: Americans want Trump to be stymied. Public polling since last year shows a strong majority of Americans oppose Trump's ballroom.

And a New York Times/Sienna poll released on May 18 showed Trump hitting a new low for his approval rating, with just 37% of those surveyed approving of his performance as president, a three-point drop since January. The war with Iran and its impact on America's economy are driving that.

Republicans in Congress are handcuffed to Trump and his troubles. The May 18 poll asked if elections for Congress were held today, which party the people surveyed would support. Fifty percent said a Democratic candidate, while 39% said a Republican candidate.

This so-called "generic ballot" question has been trending toward Democratic wins for months. The Democrats are on the upswing as Trump drags down the Republican Party and flaunts the many ways he is wasting your money.

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