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# A CITY OF WEALTH - A WORKFORCE IN STRUGGLE

A narrative report on blue-collar workers' challenges and resilience in the City of Boca Raton

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# A TALE OF TWO BOCAS

## Wealth VS those who serve the residents of Boca Raton

Boca Raton is known across the country for its glittering beaches, meticulously manicured lawns, and luxury lifestyle. From high-end shopping centers to multimillion-dollar homes, the city has built a reputation as one of Florida's wealthiest enclaves.

Yet beneath this polished image lies a stark and often invisible truth: **the workers who keep this city beautiful**, clean, and functioning—its blue-collar workforce—**struggle every day to afford to live in the very city they serve.**

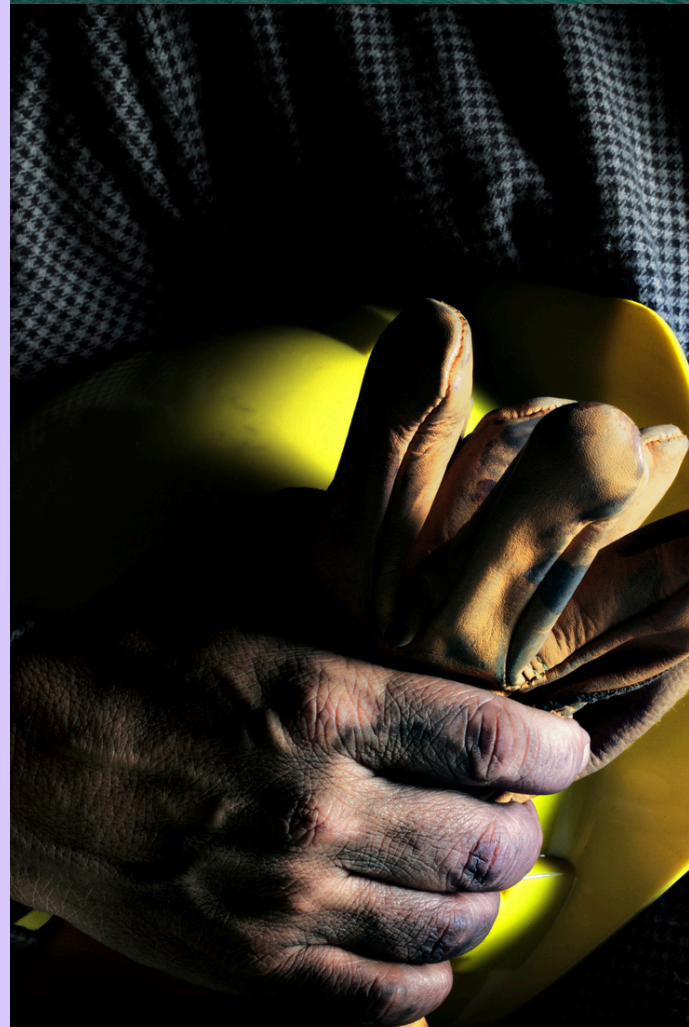
These are the sanitation workers collecting trash in 90-degree heat, the park and rec employees ensuring the safety of public spaces, the lifeguards protecting beachgoers, the electricians who keep the lights on, and the custodians who maintain public buildings.

Despite being essential to the daily operations of Boca Raton, these workers have long faced low wages, limited benefits, and a lack of respect from city leadership.

While city administrators and non-represented workers have received bonus payments year after year, the city's blue-collar workers have been left behind.

**This report is grounded in firsthand accounts from workers themselves.**

Based on recent bargaining surveys and stories shared by members, we aim to document the lived experiences, economic challenges, and collective demands of the people who make Boca Raton function.



# INEQUITY IN A CITY OF OPULENCE

## Those who work in the City - Can't afford to live there

Boca Raton's reputation as a wealthy city isn't just a perception—it's backed by data. With a median household income of nearly \$100,000 and home prices averaging over \$600,000, it is a place defined by privilege.

Yet, the majority of city workers—those responsible for public safety, sanitation, parks, utilities, and public buildings—cannot afford to live within city limits.

Survey after survey confirms the same painful truth: most blue-collar workers earn too little to live in the city they serve. Many are forced to commute long distances, adding extra time, expense, and strain to their already demanding workdays.

One long-time driver noted that despite nearly two decades of service, he still can't make ends meet without taking a second job.

Others shared that newer part-time workers were being paid more per hour than experienced full-time employees. The situation is not just unsustainable—it's demoralizing.

Meanwhile, city management has routinely excluded these workers from bonus distributions and other forms of recognition. In 2023, non-represented white-collar employees received either 5% of their base wages or a \$4,000 one-time lump sum payment, whichever was greater. In 2024, these same non-union employees received 4% of their base wages or a \$3,200 one-time lump sum payment.

The blue-collar workers who power the city were granted nothing. This exclusion sends a clear message about whose labor is valued and whose is ignored.



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**Anonymous Worker:** "I've been with the city nearly 20 years. I take pride in my work, but it hurts to know that I'll likely never afford to live here. I start work before the sun rises and still have to work weekends just to get by."

**Anonymous Worker:** "We're the ones who make the city clean and safe, but we're treated like we don't belong. I drive an hour to work because I can't afford rent in Boca."





# DISRESPECT ON THE JOB

## A Pattern of Neglect

Blue-collar workers across departments—from sanitation to parks to utilities—report a consistent pattern of mistreatment by supervisors and management. Numerous respondents noted unfair treatment, lack of transparency, and blatant disregard for seniority.

Workers shared that they are expected to work over 40 hours a week regularly, without compensation that reflects the toll this takes on their health and families.

For example, some custodians are expected to clean up after animals, cover multiple sites in a single day, and perform duties outside their job description without additional pay.

Lifeguards described being excluded from fair compensation and time-off policies, even as they carry the critical responsibility of saving lives.

Wastewater operators highlighted the health risks they face while making sure the city's infrastructure functions safely.

In sanitation, multiple workers reported suffering from heat exhaustion, dehydration, and dangerous conditions while being short-staffed.

There is no hazard pay or additional assistance, only a growing sense that their contributions are invisible to those in power.

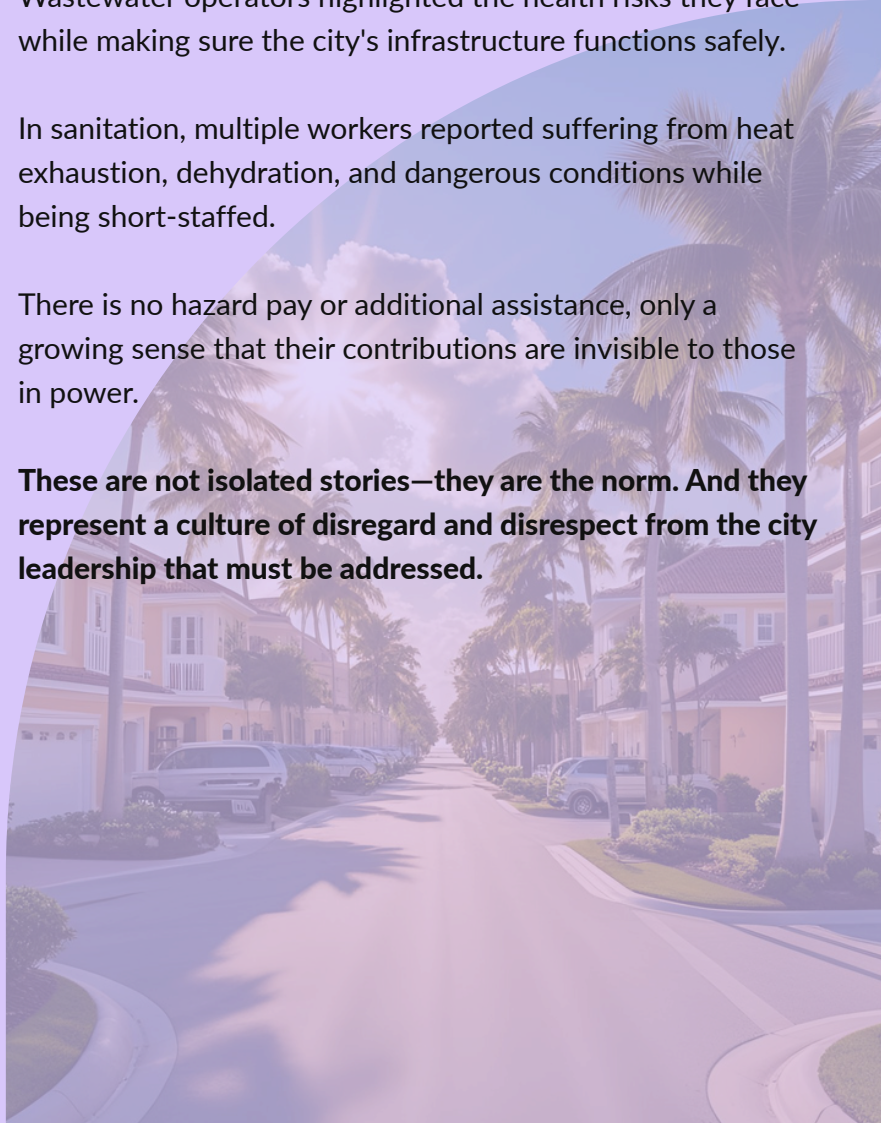
**These are not isolated stories—they are the norm. And they represent a culture of disregard and disrespect from the city leadership that must be addressed.**

**Anonymous Worker:** "I do everything—from setting up city events to cleaning up waste to washing the city van. I barely take a breath all day and still feel like I'm invisible."

**Anonymous Worker:** "New hires are coming in making more than me, and I've been here a decade. I trained some of them. There's no respect."

**Anonymous Worker:** "We're expected to do more with less. Supervisors don't step in, and if we speak up, they retaliate or just ignore us."

**Anonymous Worker:** "There are days when we're out in the sun hauling trash for hours with no break. People pass out, and it's just expected. But still, no bonus, no recognition—nothing."





# WAGE INJUSTICE AND THE RISING COST OF LIVING

## Essential roles, yet undervalued and overlooked

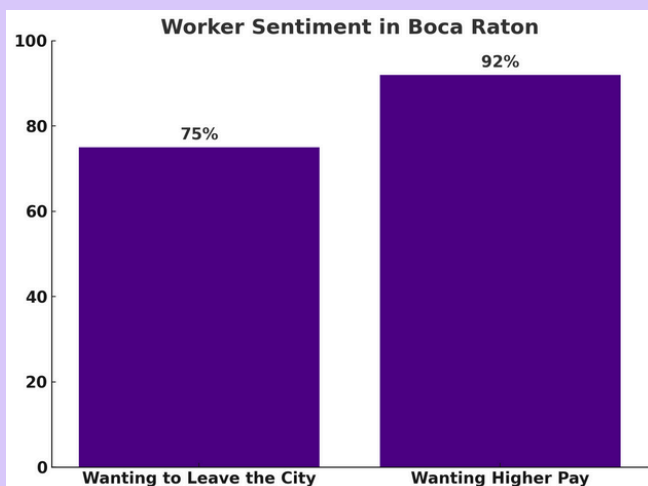
Over 90% of workers surveyed listed higher wages and cost-of-living adjustments as top priorities. Many explicitly stated they had considered leaving the city for better-paying jobs.

Blue-collar workers are also looking for fairness in boot check reimbursements, shift differential pay, and allowances for gear like shoes and belts required for their jobs. Even small expenses eat into already thin paychecks.

Workers who operate city vehicles or use their own tools and supplies often receive little to no support from the city. And while the cost of living continues to rise, the city has failed to respond with meaningful wage adjustments.

When asked whether they thought the city's practice of awarding bonuses to management and non-union employees—but not to blue-collar workers—was fair, every single respondent answered a resounding NO.

Anonymous Worker: "It's demoralizing to see people who don't even step outside get \$3,000 bonuses while we're the ones in the dirt every day with nothing."



**Anonymous Worker:** "I'm asked to inspect city trucks, find problems, and fix things before they break down. That saves the city money—but my paycheck doesn't show that."

**Anonymous Worker:** "I've worked here 17 years and still haven't reached top pay. I've been told there's no room to grow."



# COMMITTED TO THE COMMUNITY

## Ignored by the City

Despite the challenges, these workers remain deeply committed to their roles. Many shared how proud they are to serve the city, how much they care about residents, and how they go above and beyond every day.

They are not just workers—they are parents, community members, and neighbors who believe in public service.

Multiple employees volunteered to serve as bargaining representatives, stewards, and communicators. Many already speak up at City Council meetings and engage coworkers to build solidarity. But this level of commitment must be matched by respect and recognition from city leadership.

**If Boca Raton wants to maintain the excellence it is known for, it must invest in the very people who make that excellence possible.**



### **Anonymous Worker:**

"I love working in public service. I'm not here for the glory —  
I'm here because I believe in keeping this city beautiful and safe.

But believing doesn't pay my bills."



# WORKERS' DEMANDS: A PATH FORWARD

The City of Boca Raton has a choice to make.

Will it continue to ignore the voices of its most essential employees, or will it finally step up and treat its workforce with the dignity they deserve?

Here's what the workers are asking for:

1. **Fair Wages** - that reflect experience, expertise, and the high cost of living in South Florida.
2. **Equity in Bonuses**—no more rewarding only the top while ignoring those on the ground.
3. **Respect and Dignity** from supervisors and managers.
4. **Clear and Fair Advancement Policies** that reward longevity and performance.
5. **Improved Benefits and Health Coverage** that match the needs of working families.
6. **More Paid Time Off and recognition** of the physical demands of their jobs.
7. **Worker Voice in decisions** that impact their daily lives on the job.

These are not radical demands—they are the basics of fairness.

The men and women who clean your parks, keep your streets safe, manage your waste, and protect your beaches are not asking for special treatment.

They are asking for justice.

**Anonymous Worker:** "We're not asking for a handout. We're asking for the same respect given to others. We built this city, too."

**Anonymous Worker:** "The city finds money when it wants to. But when it's our turn, they say there's nothing left. That has to change."



# BOCA RATON - MUST DO BETTER

## A Message from President Alphonso Mayfield

Boca Raton has the resources.

It has THE budget.

What it has lacked—until now—is the will.

The time has come for city leaders to look beyond the beachfront views and luxury condos and see the human beings who make it all possible.

The status quo is not sustainable.

Workers are frustrated.

Morale is low.

Inequity is rising.

And the community is watching.

It's time for Boca Raton to live up to its image—not just as a beautiful city, but as a JUST city.

**The blue-collar workers have spoken.**

**Now it's the City's turn to act.**



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