



Next round of Bahia Mar debate: May 10

Infrastructure, long-range planning report should be addressed before development

I hope everyone is enjoying the winter season as the milder weather has finally blessed us these past several weeks. It's great living in Florida, and there is no better place than right here in Fort Lauderdale.

The debate over the future of the Bahia Mar property and the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show continues. The good news is the City Commission has agreed to set a special meeting for May 10.

It will be a workshop to discuss how we can work with the developers to fashion a project that best suits the needs of the community. We look forward to hearing from as many voices in the community as possible.

We all are eager to see what new plans the developers will propose. They were asked to respond to the concerns that residents raised about the height, traffic impact and neighborhood compatibility of the original proposal.

In the meantime, there are a couple new factors that I hope the city considers in evaluating the Bahia Mar and other major development.

A spate of recent water main breaks has exposed the troublesome issue of aging infrastructure.

Almost 60 percent of Fort Lauderdale's water mains are more than 40 years old. As the network ages, the number of pipe breaks has dramatically increased. We had 55 in fiscal year 2011, but city staff estimates there will be 156 this year. The sewer system faces the same challenges.

Our staff attributes these pipe failures to a variety of issues, including corrosion caused by salty groundwater and deterioration because they are beyond their expected life. The most disturbing explanation that staff gives for the problem is that the distribution system is stressed by heavy use.

These pipe breaks are both costly and disruptive.

When a 20-inch cast iron water main broke under East Sunrise Boulevard on Christmas Day, it interrupted service to 250 homes and 243 businesses for 16 hours. Repair crews had to detour westbound traffic



on Sunrise as well.

The city's capital improvement plan sets aside between \$16.6 million and \$20.6 million each year for the next five years to deal with our water and sewer infrastructure. That's a lot less than what national experts recommend. They say we should budget more than \$30 million a year based on our size.

The city manager wants to conduct an in-depth study of pipe conditions. He also is buying a rapid response trailer to help the utility department handle emergency repairs.

Those steps will help, but my broader concern relates to the ongoing surge of construction. Given the frailty of these pipes, should the city approve massive developments if they will overload the water and sewer system further?

The second new factor that the City Commission should consider in reviewing a revised Bahia Mar plan and other development is the newly adopted Evaluation & Appraisal Report, which supplements the city comprehensive land-use plan.

This is a very important, state-mandated document. Together with the Comprehensive Plan, it represents a blueprint for development. It lays out the issues and challenges that officials must consider in reviewing development plans.

The City Commission approved the EAR the same night that it told Bahia Mar's developers to return with less intrusive plans. According to the EAR, the city should examine projects in light of such issues as climate change, long-term sustainability, transportation and sense of place.

Here are a couple highlights that are

particularly poignant:

• **Sense of place.** "The city's unique neighborhoods are the foundation of its overall sense of place. As in any city, new development needs to be compatible with existing development in order to preserve and strengthen neighborhood character and sense of place."

• **Transportation.** "The continued growth of traffic has tested the capacity of much of the roadway network, particularly during peak commuting times. Fort Lauderdale is largely built-out, and it is unlikely that the vehicle capacity of its roadways can be significantly increased." In fact, a survey conducted for the EAR showed 87 percent of respondents reported that traffic congestion makes it hard to get around the city.

• **Infrastructure.** "In order to maintain the physical capacity of its infrastructure system, the city of Fort Lauderdale has adopted level of service standards... The city... requires that the infrastructure needed to serve new development... is in place prior to or at the time of development." More than 45 percent of people surveyed said the city's infrastructure needs "major improvement."

• **Climate change.** The EAR states Fort Lauderdale faces a crisis because rising sea levels will make the community increasingly prone to flooding. According to the report, "The construction of new dense real estate in vulnerable waterfront areas is continuing at a record pace. This can increase the risk of future loss if these climate factors are not considered in the siting and design of these developments." One conclusion is to "encourage new development in higher elevation, less vulnerable areas."

I'd urge everyone to remember these guidelines because they form the framework for future developments and the basis for decisions that the City Commission will now confront.

Sincerely,



Community news updates

Las Olas Marina

Efforts to expand the Las Olas Marina so it can handle more yachts continue. An initial round of bidding to find a contractor to build and operate a larger marina resulted in two proposals.

The city manager has tweaked the request for bids and put it back out on the street in hopes of garnering more proposals for the project. The city expects to receive the new round of bids in April with the City Commission set to review them on May 17.

Las Olas Isles drainage

The city has started work to help prevent flooding in the Las Olas Isles neighborhood. The project includes the installation of 27 tidal valves to prevent high tides from flooding streets through storm drains. Also, catch basins, drainage pipes and swales will be improved.

Residents should expect some temporary lane closures during the work. The project should be completed by the end of July.

Holiday Park dog play area

Construction should begin this summer on the long-anticipated dog play area in Holiday Park. City staff will advertise for bids in April and seek approval from the City Commission on a contractor by early June.

The park should open by early fall. In addition to the \$50,000 that Commissioner Trantalis committed from his parks improvement fund, private contributors provided another \$86,000 to the work.



Commissioner Trantalis and Mayor Jack Seiler help residents of the Progresso Village neighborhood break ground on an improvement project that includes new sidewalks, swales, storm drains and lighting.



Commissioner Trantalis meets with Revital Malca and Lisa McClaskey of Israel's consulate in Miami as well as representatives of the Sister City program to discuss Fort Lauderdale's sister city relationship with Haifa.



Commissioner Trantalis and Mayor Jack Seiler join a ribbon-cutting for the new lobby at the Ritz Carlton hotel on Fort Lauderdale beach.



Commissioner Trantalis participates in the festivities at the city's annual Neighbor Support Night at City Hall. The event showcases city services and programs.