



From the desk of the Vice Mayor
DEAN TRANTALIS
Fort Lauderdale City Commission • District II

MAY 2016

Bahia Mar advances despite objections

Developers win OK for 29-story condo towers as residents organize to protect public land

During the course of the last several months, thousands of citizens from across Fort Lauderdale united behind a shared view that a developer's plan to reshape the Bahia Mar simply went too far.

They signed petitions. They wrote emails. They spoke up at city meetings, with some waiting until the wee hours of the morning for their chance to be heard. The city has not witnessed such an impassioned and widespread grassroots undertaking in more than a decade. I shared their desire to protect this treasured piece of city-owned land.

Regrettably, when the moment arrived for a decision on May 10, the rest of the City Commission voted to concede to the demands of the developer. I believe the commission not only could have held out for something better but had a responsibility to do so.

The developer won the right to build two 29-story condo towers.

That's a height that had been banned on the barrier island after a debate in 2002 about overdevelopment. The north tower will stretch 1½ football fields along Seabreeze Boulevard, more than twice what our zoning code otherwise allows. A four-story parking garage wrapped with five stories of residences will double as home for the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show.

The developer's plans have been disappointing. The city purchased the old Coast Guard station site in 1947 to preserve it for public use. Yet, the developer proposed hundreds of condos. The fate of the Boat Show seemed little more than an afterthought.

To sidestep the underlying zoning limits,

the rest of the commission and the developers relied on a new section of the zoning code called Innovative Development.

When we wrote that law, the idea was to allow developers to be more creative and iconic than what might be allowed by traditional zoning. We were misled. The ID designation is simply a chance for developers to set aside existing zoning for more aggressive development as long as they have the support of four city commissioners. And, our city staff has now revealed itself to be more than eager to find ways to capitulate to developer demands.

We can all agree that the Bahia Mar needs a facelift. It should be home to a world-class marina like it was back in its heyday when Patricia Murphy operated her restaurant there. And, we all support the importance of economic development in our community. The marine industry is a cornerstone to our economy.

Yet, the barrier island is a fragile ecology. The future is problematic as we deal with the impact of rising sea levels caused by climate change. The city's own long-range planning document talks about discouraging development in such vulnerable areas.

We need to draw a line in the sand. The City Commission is the public's steward for both the beach and the Bahia Mar. We don't want to "Manhattanize" our beach.

A massive development at the Bahia Mar is also concerning because of the traffic around the barrier island. Gridlock is too common on State Road A1A and its east-west links like Southeast 17th Street, Las Olas Boulevard and Sunrise Boulevard. The public's frustration is palpable.

Finally, I have an aversion to using public land for private development. I'm not against restaurants or retail shops to supplement the marina at Bahia Mar. But we



should be able to come together and find something more appropriate than building private condos on this property.

Public property should be open to the public. Condo development turns the land over to private use not just for the rest of our lifetime but that of our children and grandchildren. We fought that sort of philosophy a decade ago when developers proposed the Palazzo on the beach, and people were justified in fighting it now.

Despite these feelings, I do see positive aspects in the plan. The development team lowered the towers 10 stories. They proposed and later expanded a park along the Intracoastal. They will create a public promenade around the site. They will renovate the existing hotel. And most importantly, the Boat Show is happy with the final design.

We have forgone other possibilities so let us now move forward.

Soon, the City Commission and the developers will negotiate a long-term lease based on these approved plans. We all need to remain vigilant. We need to make sure the Boat Show is protected well into the future and that city taxpayers receive their fair share of the profits the developer will reap.

Sincerely,



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Commissioner Trantalis, Broward Mayor Marty Kiar and County Commissioner Chip LaMarca honor lawyer-lobbyist Courtney Crush as Downtowner of the Year.



Commissioner Trantalis speaks at a town hall forum hosted by the Florida Department of Transportation to discuss the ongoing bridge replacement project on Las Olas Boulevard.



Commissioner Trantalis joins Ozgur Kivanc Altan, Turkey's consul general from Miami, in issuing a proclamation by the city for "Children's Day."



Commissioner Trantalis and Broward Mayor Marty Kiar present proclamations to the Broward Art Guild during the ArtFlorida Exhibit at ArtServe on Sunrise Boulevard.