



Bahia Mar and the Boat Show

City Commission approves apartment complex for site. Boat Show questions loom large.

During its first meeting in December, the City Commission voted to allow developers the right to build private housing units at the publicly owned Bahia Mar on the barrier island.

The developers will be allowed to demolish the current hotel and build a new one as well as build a grocery store and a large amount of retail shops and restaurants. Most of the complex will sit atop a large subterranean parking garage.

It all sounds pretty ambitious. That's especially true since when it's all said and done, there will be only 35 years left on their lease of the Bahia Mar and the city will then own the entire project. Sounds unreal, right?

The Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show will be sandwiched in once a year with the on-land portion housed in a parking garage. The boat show draws thousands from around the world and will now occur in the front yard of 651 rental units. These visitors and the Bahia Mar residents are all supposed to get along for the four weeks or so despite the crowds, traffic or noise generated by such an event.

I could not possibly vote for this project. The lobbyists and developers swarmed around City Hall offices for months, trying to twist everyone into submission. Yet, while the other commissioners were persuaded to support the project, I foresee only trouble.

Let me explain why.

The planned development simply overwhelms what Bahia Mar is meant to be. The citizens of Fort Lauderdale bought Bahia Mar 70 years ago to preserve it for public purposes. The city has consistently said in the decades since that the property was to be a world-class hotel-marina resort.

Bahia Mar has not been maintained



over the years like it should, and I agree a facelift is needed. But this is simply too extreme. This is the densest proposal ever made for the site – the equivalent of building two Las Olas Riverhouses or three Venetians.

This is a bad deal for the public any way that you look at it. It maxes out traffic on overcrowded beach roads. It puts more

pressure on a water and sewer system that is already overburdened. And, the city gets a pittance of additional income while the developers make millions.

The city auditor estimates that operating revenue for the developers will more than double in the next decade, bringing them an extra \$50 million in 2028 than this year. What does the city get? The

\$1.4 million they currently pay in rent would grow to \$3.7 million. Pennies in comparison. But the rest of the commission didn't want to renegotiate the lease or get a new appraisal.

The fact is the Florida Department of Transportation considers A1A in the central beach to be "failing" because of the amount of traffic today. Imagine the additional traffic of 651 apartment dwellers and all the grocery shoppers. And the sewer system? The project has about 1,000 toilets. If they are flushed eight times a day, that's an extra 26,000 gallons of sewage a day.

We're just beginning to grapple with the infrastructure crisis in which pipes are constantly breaking around town.

To make this decision, the rest of the commission turned away from key planning documents. Both the city zoning ordinance and its beach redevelopment master plan say the primary focus of the area should be resort uses.

On top of that, the county's master plan that must be used to evaluate new development states intensification of land uses, particularly high-density residential projects, should be discouraged in coastal high hazard areas such as this because of disaster-planning and evacuation needs.

We are all aware how the sea level is rising and how king tides are consistently higher than ever before. This project puts



651 units in a dangerous area where evacuation is not easy and recovery difficult. Just look at what happened with A1A by Birch State Park during Hurricane Sandy. All these new residents at Bahia Mar must park their cars in a two-story underground garage. The developers are certain it won't flood.

But perhaps the most important thing to remember about Bahia Mar is the Boat Show. The Boat Show is critical to our economy and must be preserved. The developers claim they are doing that, but is that true?

Look at the pictures of the development. The entire area once occupied by tents and vendors is taken over by apartment buildings. Most of the show will take place inside Bahia Mar's parking

garage. It fundamentally changes the show. How can we possibly host a boat show of the same size and prestige that we've come to expect?

The public had spoken loudly about this. The City Commission received a petition last year signed by more than 1,000 residents seeking a referendum requiring beachside public land be preserved for public purposes. The majority of the commission ignored the voice of the people then and again now with Bahia Mar. We deserve better.

It appears the Bahia Mar saga is to be continued as I expect the developers to come back next year asking for more from the city. In the meantime, I wish everyone a happy holiday season.

Sincerely,



Commissioner Trantalis thanks volunteers at the Sanctuary Church on Federal Highway for a pre-Thanksgiving food distribution to the less fortunate.



Commissioner Trantalis joins Mayor Jack Seiler, other city commissioners and neighborhood leaders for the annual holiday event Light Up Sistrunk.