

MEETING MINUTES CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE MARINE ADVISORY BOARD

FORT LAUDERDALE FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT 528 NW 2ND STREET, STATION #2 FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA 33311

3RD FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2024 – 5:00 P.M.

Cumulative Attendance January-December 2024

Steve Witten, Chair	Р	3	0
James Harrison, Vice Chair	Р	1	2
Tyler Brunelle	Р	3	0
Robyn Chiarelli (6:08-7:18)	Р	1	2
Barry Flanigan (arr. 5:10)	Р	3	0
Robert Franks	Р	2	1
Elisabeth George	Р	3	0
Brewster Knott	Р	3	0
John Lynch	Α	2	1
Norbert McLaughlin	Р	3	0
Noelle Norvell	Α	1	2
Ed Rebholz	Р	3	0
Bill Walker (arr. 5:26)	Р	3	0
Robert Washington	Α	2	1

As of this date, there are 14 appointed members to the Board, which means 8 would constitute a quorum.

Staff

Andrew Cuba, Marine Facilities Manager
Jonathan Luscomb, Marine Facilities Supervisor
Sergeant Travis O'Neil, Marine Unit Supervisor
Marco Aguilera, Code Compliance Officer
Robert Dunckel, Assistant City Attorney
Steven Glassman, Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner
Ashley Cacicedo, District 2 Outreach Coordinator
Karen Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype, Inc.

Communications to City Commission

None.

I. Call to Order / Roll Call

Chair Witten called the meeting to order at 5:08 p.m. He clarified that the business of the regular meeting will begin at or after 6 p.m.; however, stakeholders and members of the public are invited to the first "Reimagining the New River" discussion at this time.

II. Statement of Quorum

Roll was called and it was noted a quorum was present at the meeting.

III. Special Discussion – 5 pm to 6 pm – Reimagining the New River

Chair Witten explained that he has reached out to previous Marine Advisory Board (MAB) members who indicated that the Board's concerns regarding the New River date back several years. He recalled an instance in which the City Commission approved a waiver request for which the Board had unanimously recommended denial, which had led to the Board's decision to take proactive steps to address navigation on the New River. He characterized tonight's discussion as an open conversation, noting that the Board plans to hold additional public outreach meetings in the future. The intent of the discussion is to establish simple and consistent regulations for development on the New River.

Chair Witten reviewed some of the previous ideas that have been discussed by the Board, including:

- Changing the City's 30% rule to a 25% rule, which would permit no part of a boat or structure on the New River to protrude more than 25% into the waterway
- No designation of specific zones
- Incentives for pump-outs
- A bathymetric study and marine geophysical survey to determine what is in the waterway
- Boating regulatory zones, including Idle Speed/No Wake zones, Slow Speed/Minimal Wake zones, vessel exclusion zones, and passing zones within the navigable channel
- Maintaining a 60 ft. navigable channel, which can be achieved within the proposed 25% rule
- Confirming legality of existing slips, lifts, and pilings
- Ensuring timely waterway enforcement
- Increasing enforcement relating to illegal mooring structures
- Increasing the U. S. Coast Guard's presence in Fort Lauderdale

Chair Witten noted that there are a number of other issues that must be dealt with as part of the process, such as the FEC Railroad Bridge. Other considerations include resources, manpower, timing, and money. He noted that the Marine Unit is in need of additional staff on the waterway.

Chair Witten also advised that the ongoing discussion will focus on reimagining the New River rather than on the word "moratorium," as that terminology could be a trigger point

for some. The Board hopes to determine consistent terminology with which to educate the public. The timeline for the discussion is roughly one year.

Chair Witten strongly recommended that the Board members, and the members of the public present, reach out directly to their City Commissioners to share their thoughts on reimagining the New River.

The Chair read the following statement to summarize where the Board stands at present: "Establish an individual property owner's dockage area to be indicated on real property survey, based upon the parameters set forth in the ULDR [Unified Land Development Regulations], ex. 25 ft. waterway or by property line, within vessel and side yard setbacks. Dockage rights will be subject to any restrictions and/or accidents conveyed with the real property on sale."

Chair Witten explained that this is based upon the idea that a property survey should indicate what is allowable on that property, including structures such as docks or boat lifts present on the property when purchased. The intent is to make it clear to prospective owners what can be docked or built on the property. This would include involvement by realtors who would help ensure that owners are informed of what they can construct or dock at their properties.

Chair Witten further clarified that one proposed change would be to allow an owner to extend a boat or structure no more than 25 ft. past their property line. This would eliminate confusion about where an extension may begin, and would include required setbacks.

The Chair also recalled the Board had previously discussed elimination of the term "perpendicular docking," as it is immaterial what an owner would like to do with their space as long as they remain within the standard.

Mr. Brunelle pointed out the need for clarification of whether the rule would be for 25% or 25 ft. He also asked if it is known how many boats docked on the New River are perpendicular and would break either a 25% or 25 ft. rule. He pointed out that many of the owners of these boats may not be aware of any issues with extensions into the waterway, and that a change in this rule could significantly affect property values and rights.

Ms. George commented that this is not dissimilar to rules imposed on buildings on land. A property owner may, for example, find out that a fence they had believed to be on their own property is actually on City property. Mr. Brunelle reiterated that a rule change could create a massive decrease in property value.

Vice Chair Harrison observed that many of the variance requests that have come before the Board involve dolphin pilings: for instance, it may not be possible to safely dock a boat without a variance for dolphin pilings. He also pointed out that marinas on the New River could be threatened if the waterway is blocked with too many perpendicularly docked

boats, as there are passing and holding areas for boats under tow that must be considered. This can create conflicts between homeowners and marinas.

Vice Chair Harrison continued that one option could be to have the New River declared a federally navigated zone by the Coast Guard. Mr. Brunelle noted that the Coast Guard would not be looking out for the marine industry, as they would be able to restrict the size of boats that can use portions of the waterway.

Vice Chair Harrison advised that a bathymetric survey currently underway would determine where the waterway's navigable channel is actually located. Mr. Brunelle added that there may also be a need for the City to dredge the waterway and maintain this channel.

Vice Chair Harrison continued that current measurements into the waterway are made from the seawall. A federally navigated waterway would establish a channel of specific width that runs throughout the entire length of the New River. If this is done, maintaining the consistent width of the channel would be a determining factor for extension into the waterway rather than distance from the seawall.

Another consideration would be the dolphin pilings themselves, as there would be no guarantee that an owner could place these structures in the waterway. Owners would also not be allowed to moor boats "in a dangerous manner," such as having a dolphin piling at 15 ft. but a boat that extends 80 ft. into the waterway.

Mr. Brunelle asked what would happen in the case of property owners who have already received waivers, noting that these owners would also be likely to reach out to their City Commissioners if their property values are affected. Assistant City Attorney Robert Dunckel advised that any new Ordinance would be adopted prospectively rather than retrospectively. He added that under the Bert J. Harris, Jr., Private Property Rights Protection Act, an Ordinance may not inordinately burden an existing use or vested right to a use. Should that occur, the owner would be able to sue for the amount of diminution of fair market value.

Attorney Dunckel continued that there is an administrative mechanism within the Bert J. Harris Act which would bring the case before a Special Magistrate. This mechanism would allow for some modification of an Ordinance.

Mr. McLaughlin stated that when the existing extension percentage was determined, the City Commission considered its potential impact on real estate value. This meant a realtor would be aware that a prospective buyer would not be able to dock a boat over a certain size on a property, depending upon its dimensions.

Mr. Brunelle observed that the Board has historically approved some waivers for dolphin pilings that extend beyond the ULDR limit into the waterway. Vice Chair Harrison advised

that enforcement is another issue, and one concept may be to restrict boats from extending beyond a dolphin piling.

Mr. Walker asked if the New River discussion is based on structures or on the waterway's depth. He noted that determination and/or dredging of the channel may alleviate issues caused by existing waivers.

Chair Witten acknowledged that the Board has not yet discussed issues such as what might happen when existing pilings or other structures are in need of replacement. There have also been cases in which the Board was supportive in the past of a property owner docking a larger vessel than can be accommodated on their property. Mr. Flanigan pointed out that this would have happened in the past based on previous conditions that may now have changed.

Mr. Rebholz addressed timing, requesting clarification of the deadlines involved with determining a proposal and providing public notice and hearing. Chair Witten replied that the Board does not have a deadline at this time, but noted that they will work with City Commissioner Warren Sturman, who has offered meeting space, to coordinate these efforts. He further clarified that because the Board is operating under a Zoning in Progress designation, no new waivers will be brought before the Board while the discussion is ongoing.

Mr. Brunelle asked if placing a moratorium on any new waivers on the New River and maintaining only previously approved structures would address the issues sufficiently. Chair Witten advised that this is the status under which the Board is currently operating due to the Zoning in Progress. Mr. Brunelle asked if this might continue going forward, as it would be a relatively simple solution and would not further constrain either property rights or navigation on the waterway. Chair Witten commented that extraordinary circumstances may arise which could necessitate a waiver application.

Attorney Dunckel pointed out that waivers issued on the New River affect docks and mooring piles rather than vessels. This would mean that while docks and pilings might be limited to a specific distance, there would be no such limit on the size of a vessel docked at that property. This could create issues for enforcement.

Chair Witten recalled that the Board had made a recommendation on a specific waiver application that would have restricted boats on the subject property from extending beyond the proposed mooring piles. The Commission, however, had not accepted the recommended restriction and permitted boats to extend past the piles. He felt this was a factor that should be considered going forward.

Attorney Dunckel also noted that there may be different bathymetric conditions for different areas of the New River, which could result in different solutions based on those varying conditions. He added that the navigable channel may need to be greater than 60 ft. in some locations, such as the "Little Florida" area. This could mean in those areas, the

limitation should be expressed as a percentage of the waterway's width rather than a set width.

Mr. Brunelle reiterated that the public will need to support whatever Ordinance is brought forward in order for the City Commission to pass it. There are also instances in which specific communities have hired attorneys to fight legislation, which would also make it less likely to pass.

Tyler Chappell, representing The Chappell Group, advised that federal channelization of the New River would not be a good idea, as this would require federal maintenance of the channel to be budgeted by Congress. Florida waterways receive very little funding from the federal government at present, as they are not seen as primarily commercial waterways. Another consideration is that the New River is owned by the state of Florida, which means if it were federalized, an easement would be required.

Mr. Chappell continued that the Bert J. Harris Act is another issue, as property owners on the waterway have riparian rights granted to them by the state. When the moratorium was first proposed, he had received calls from attorneys exploring the issue of riparian rights for prospective clients.

With regard to the proposal of a 60 ft. wide channel, Mr. Chappell noted that this would match the width of bridges on the waterway. The existing 25% rule, and its relation to structures as opposed to vessels, is already in place and is consistently required by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Broward County, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, regardless of what the City may do. Permits for docks, other structures, or vessels must show that the item is within 25% of the waterway from wet face to wet face of the seawalls.

Mr. Chappell continued that City Code differs slightly from this, as it requires use of the property line as the basis of measurement for structures and the wet face of the seawall for vessels. His recommendation would be to set this measurement at 25% with a 60 ft. channel as a benchmark, unless the channel is wider in some areas. He recalled that there are some "pinch points" on the New River which are only 99 ft. wide, which would mean there may be less than 60 ft. available for the channel. These areas would require further consideration.

With regard to turning zones and different sections of the waterway, Mr. Chappell stated that the focus is only on the New River, not on waterways throughout City limits. He He reiterated that maintaining the 25% rule would be satisfactory in most cases. He was also in favor of retaining a waiver process, as this would give the Board the ability to consider requests on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Chappell also emphasized the importance of enforcement in ensuring any regulations are effective. This would require significant fines and determination of penalties by the City's Building Department.

Erin Myers, resident, explained that her dock is in danger of collapsing, but cannot be rebuilt even to its current footprint due to the moratorium. The dock would require a waiver due to the location of the property line and requirements for a new seawall. There is also no timeline for the end of the moratorium.

Ms. Myers concluded that while she is in favor of the direction of the Board's discussion, she is currently in a gray area, as she is working to bring her property up to Code. She asked how the ongoing discussion might affect individuals in similar circumstances to her own.

Chair Witten noted that this was an example of why Attorney Dunckel and Mr. Chappell had indicated support for a waiver process in the future, as there may be individual issues that must be taken into consideration. He concluded that he would report back to the Board on this issue at next month's meeting.

The following Item was taken out of order on the Agenda.

VII. Introduction – District 2 Commissioner / Steven Glassman

Chair Witten introduced City Commissioner Steven Glassman, who was present at the meeting.

Commissioner Glassman stated that he works closely with neighborhood associations in his district, including the Sailboat Bend community in which Ms. Myers lives. He noted that the historic preservation process is less onerous at present than in previous years, and he is working with the neighborhood association to develop a Master Plan for Sailboat Bend, which is a residential historic district.

Commissioner Glassman continued that other efforts in which he is involved include a number of Public Works projects, many of which address infrastructure in neighborhoods that are prone to flooding. He has also worked toward roughly \$3 million in improvements to Cooley's Landing, including parking and marina areas.

In addition, when a recent \$200 million Parks Bond initiative was passed in 2019, each City Commission District was allocated \$7.5 million for land acquisition to create more open and park space. Development of a passive park in Sailboat Bend is underway. He emphasized the importance of historic preservation as well as revitalization within his district.

Commissioner Glassman emphasized the importance of the City's waterways, and concluded that he keeps abreast of and supports the Board's work. He thanked all the members for the work they do for the City.

Chair Witten observed that there is a need for more resources for the Marine Unit and Code Compliance. Commissioner Glassman suggested that the Board consider sending a communication to the City Commission detailing why additional resources are necessary.

IV. Approval of Minutes – February 1, 2024

Motion made by Mr. Rebholz, seconded by Mr. Franks, to approve. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

V. Waterway Crime & Boating Safety Report

Marine Unit Sergeant Travis O'Neil reported that no marine burglaries occurred in February 2024. He described two incidents to which Officers responded, including rescues of two different jet ski users.

Additional boats are present on the City's waterways beginning March 1, 2024 due to spring break. The Coast Guard will also increase charter inspections during that period, as an influx of these vessels is anticipated during spring break. Sgt. O'Neil added that the Marine Unit has worked with boat owners to prevent several vessels from being classified as derelict.

Chair Witten requested additional information on the Marine Unit's efforts during spring break. Sgt. O'Neil replied that there are dedicated river patrols on evenings and weekends to address any issues with charters. He concluded that individuals may contact the Marine Unit at 828-5440. If there is no response at this number, his office may be contacted directly at 828-5441. He can also be reached via email.

Chair Witten also introduced Code Compliance Officer Marco Aguilera, who will make presentations to the Board as an Agenda Item going forward. Officer Aguilera advised that charter activity has increased in preparation for spring break, and that many of these vessels do not have business tax receipts (BTRs) and may be stored illegally on residential properties as well. Other charter vessels, while licensed, do not follow regulations regarding where passengers may be picked up. Code Compliance has seen a recent increase in these types of activities.

Officer Aguilera stated that if the Board communicates with the City Commission regarding staffing, they may wish to address the fact that his hours on the water are limited. This means Code Compliance is only able to be reactive rather than proactive. Chair Witten commented that additional staffing is needed for both the Marine Unit and Code Compliance.

Ms. George recalled a recent incident in the city of Miami involving an unlicensed charter vessel, and asked if this type of incident is also a possibility in Fort Lauderdale due to the proliferation of unlicensed charters. Sgt. O'Neil noted that licensing is more of an issue

for the Coast Guard, and advised that Coast Guard Officers may be present on Marine Unit vessels to assist with enforcement.

VII. Dock Permit – 919 Cordova Road / William S. & Linda S. Tretheway

Jena Robbins, representing the Applicants, stated that the seawall at this location has been rebuilt to current standards. There was an existing dock on the property which was demolished prior to work on the seawall. The subject property has 75 ft. of shoreline and City seawall. The Applicants wish to rebuild the dock to a length of 65 ft. It will be a separate structure from the seawall. Ms. Robbins noted other dock permits granted to properties along Cordova Road.

There being no questions from the Board at this time, Chair Witten opened the public hearing. As there were no individuals wishing to speak on the Item, the Chair closed the public hearing and brought the discussion back to the Board

Motion made by Ms. George, seconded by Mr. Rebholz, to approve. In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed unanimously (11-0).

The following Item was taken out of order on the Agenda.

IX. Dock Permit – 1326 Ponce de Leon Road / William J. Jr. & Anne Scherer

Ms. Robbins, representing the Applicants, stated that a boat lift and dock existed at the subject property prior to seawall reconstruction. They would like to replace both items within the same footprint. The request is for a 35 ft. by 6 ft. dock as well as a boat lift, with stairs to be constructed on the landward side of the seawall cap. All structures will be independent of the seawall. The four-post boat lift will be used for a vessel no larger than 44 ft.

There being no questions from the Board at this time, Chair Witten opened the public hearing. As there were no individuals wishing to speak on the Item, the Chair closed the public hearing and brought the discussion back to the Board

Motion made by Mr. Rebholz, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve. In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed unanimously (11-0).

VIII. Dock Permit – 1320 Ponce de Leon Road / William & Anne Scherer

Ms. Robbins continued that this property lies directly south of 1326 Ponce de Leon Road, for which a permit was just approved by the Board. The SE 10th Street Bridge is located in front of this property. Before the seawall's reconstruction, the Applicants also had a previously existing dock. Their request is to install a new dock that will adhere to a 5 ft. setback. The new dock will be 36 ft. long and 6 ft. wide, which is shorter than the previous structure. Stairs would be constructed on the landward side of the seawall.

Attorney Dunckel advised that he was recently informed that a 25 ft. separation is required between the bridge and any marginal dock. The Applicant's plans show roughly 14.5 ft. of separation. Tyler Chappell, also representing the Applicants, replied that he has constructed other docks near City bridges without issue as long as they comply with side yard setbacks.

There being no questions from the Board at this time, Chair Witten opened the public hearing. As there were no individuals wishing to speak on the Item, the Chair closed the public hearing and brought the discussion back to the Board

Motion made by Mr. Franks, seconded by Ms. Chiarelli, to approve. In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed unanimously (11-0).

X. Industry Expert – Rock the Ocean & Tortuga Music Festival / Chris Stacey, Founder

Chair Witten introduced Chris Stacey, founder of Rock the Ocean, which has been in operation for over 10 years. He is also the founder of the Tortuga Music Festival. He reviewed the fan survey from last year's Festival, which indicates that the average attendee spendt roughly \$1300 in the City. The economic impact of the 2023 Festival was approximately \$123 million for the weekend.

Most fans were present specifically to attend the Tortuga Music Festival, and 78% were visitors to Broward County. The majority of those visitors stayed for three or more nights in hotels or rental houses. Mr. Stacey noted that nearly 20% of attendees used the Water Taxi to access the event, while 32% walked from their hotels.

Ms. Chiarelli asked if the Festival's producers take any advance steps to promote ridesharing or use of a form of transportation other than cars. Mr. Stacey replied that Water Taxi use is encouraged and promoted on social media and fan communications, and attendees are discouraged from bringing cars if possible.

Mr. Stacey recalled that the 2023 Tortuga Music Festival was challenging, as Fort Lauderdale experienced extremely severe flooding immediately prior to the event. Roughly 56% of 2023 attendees were returning fans, most of whom expressed satisfaction with the overall experience, even during a difficult year.

The Festival creates approximately 1000 full- or part-time jobs, with an economic impact of nearly \$101.4 million in Broward County alone. This is done at virtually no cost to the City, as the Festival pays for all City elements it uses, including Police and Fire/Rescue, parking, lifeguards, beach usage and cleanup, and other services. The Festival occasionally receives some funding from the City's Beach Business Improvement District (BID).

Mr. Stacey recalled that after last year's Festival, over 22 tons of materials were donated to the South Florida community for flood relief. They use a composting program as well as recycling/repurposing in order to divert material from landfills. The Festival seeks to be the most sustainable music event in the world.

Mr. Stacey explained that he created the Rock the Ocean Foundation, which is a nonprofit organization, to educate the public about the issues facing the earth's oceans. While the Tortuga Music Festival is a for-profit event, a portion of its proceeds each year go toward Rock the Ocean. Last year's event raised over \$4 million, which allowed Rock the Ocean to fund over 100 nonprofit organizations.

Rock the Ocean also funds habitat restoration by planting sea oats on the beach, which helps protect dune habitats. The Festival also oversees a large-scale auction to help fund these initiatives. Rock the Ocean's five core conservation issues include sea turtles, sharks, marine mammals, marine habitat, and coral reefs.

Work is underway for the next Tortuga Music Festival beginning next week. The event is planned for April 5, 6, and 7.

XI. Old / New Business

Mr. Luscomb stated that the City will work with Broward's Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) to place oyster rings around the New River in order to monitor what types of oysters can be attracted. The rings are considered to be more compatible with oysters than seawalls.

Chair Witten recognized Board member Bill Walker, who was recently honored as the 2024 Downtowner of the Year.

Chair Witten recalled that at the March 5, 2024 City Commission meeting, two City Commissioners supported the right of property owners who live across the street from City-owned seawalls to obtain and use docks for the safe mooring of their vessels. This use would occur at roughly a dozen locations where residents are not able to build seawalls themselves, as they are separated by a roadway. He advised that the Board has been asked to send a memo to the City Commission in support of this proposed right. The memo would also encourage the elimination of language that calls for docks to be removed in conjunction with City replacement of its seawalls, and would include a provision that would prohibit residents in these locations from building these docks on and after July 1, 2025.

Mr. Cuba explained that residents whose residences abut the waterway are unable to construct docks on the public property directly across the street from them. He emphasized that, unlike the permits voted upon earlier in the meeting, these residents' properties are waterfront properties. Roughly 12 homeowners would be affected.

Attorney Dunckel added that these residents are requesting the ability to dock vessels on City property. He recalled there were several months of public hearings on this issue in 2018-2019, which resulted in the creation of Ordinance 8-144, Subsection 17. He emphasized that the space in question is the City's right-of-way, and the City should be the party to determine specifications.

Mr. Flanigan asked if a decision against sending the memo would be the same as the Board withholding its support from allowing the properties to construct docks. Attorney Dunckel noted that the two Commissioners who are supportive of the proposal do not have a great deal of background knowledge on this issue, but have been lobbied by a group which supports it. The Board has been asked to "put a package together" for the Commissioners about the proposal. He advised that his own recommendation would be to hold off on sending a memo until City Staff has had sufficient time to provide input to the Commissioners.

Chair Witten stated that he agreed with Attorney Dunckel's recommendation, as the proposal was not an Agenda Item at this time. He felt it was incumbent upon the Board to ensure that they have correct information on any issue they are asked to vote upon or support. He concluded that the Board will revisit this issue in April, emphasizing that this is not a denial of the requested memo. Mr. Cuba added that he would request that Dr. Nancy Gassman of the Public Works Department attend that meeting to provide additional information.

At this time Chair Witten opened public comment.

Jim Perry, resident, recalled a recent accident near the approach to the Oakland Park Bridge which resulted in the sinking of a sign. He requested that the Board consider recommending an increase in the distance of that approach from 500 ft. to 750 ft. Because boats and their wakes have become larger, and there are businesses and marinas in that area, the lack of signage could contribute to damage or injury.

Chair Witten explained that while the approach to the bridge is not part of the Board's purview, it is under the jurisdiction of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC). He suggested that Board members can reach out to representatives that entity. Sgt. O'Neil added that he would also reach out to appropriate channels.

The members briefly reviewed the New River discussion at the beginning of the meeting. Ms. George commented that members of the public may have seen the meeting's Agenda but not fully understood the issue under discussion, and recommended that the members reach out to people they know to encourage additional participation.

Vice Chair Harrison added that the Marine Industries Association of South Florida (MIASF) is awaiting completion of the bathymetric survey. He will relay information from tonight's discussion to that organization, which will put together a recommendation package that will be communicated back to the Board.

XII. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

Any written public comments made 48 hours prior to the meeting regarding items discussed during the proceedings have been attached hereto.

[Minutes prepared by K. McGuire, Prototype, Inc.]