

That Sinking Feeling

Written by Francisco Alvarado, BT Contributor
March 2019

Why has the public boat ramp at Miami's Legion Park has been closed for a decade?



Bill Mathisen steps through an opening near the chain-link gate that had once been the entrance to the free public boat launch at Legion Park in Miami's MiMo Historic District, part of the Upper Eastside.

The gate is welded shut and next to it is a big white sign with black lettering that reads, "Boat ramp closed for repairs." It has been that way for nearly a decade, after a woman fell through a broken wood slat on the dock.

A tall chap who lives in the nearby Palm Bay Club condominium, Mathisen for years has been active in civic affairs. "This is a forgotten waterfront asset the city needs to maintain for its residents and all our use," he says, pointing to the dock's mangled remains. "City of Miami representatives lose track and forget to keep their big plans moving forward. There's no reactivation of the boat ramp. It now just sits there, wasted behind locked gates."

Three wood pilings jut out of the water now, and half of the roughly 12-foot-long wood dock is gone. A bed of dried-out seaweed and trash, three inches thick covers the concrete area where trailers used to lower boats into the water.

Meanwhile, a furious amount of construction activity is under way next door. In early February,

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two private equity firms -- Miami's Global City Development and the Singapore-based Asia Capital Real Estate Management (ACRE) -- began the foundation work on a mixed-use project with 237 apartments on the former site of American Legion Post 29.

The developers have a deal with the veterans group for a 75-year lease on its 3.5 acres at 6445 NE 7th Ave. and to build the five-story structure, which will also include a new 15,000-square-foot American Legion facility and 435 parking spaces. The development, known as MiMo Bay Apartments, is supposed to be the first phase of a larger complex that Global City wants to build next door to Legion Park and which entails three towers as tall as 176 feet for 476 condos.



That proposal is in limbo following stiff neighborhood opposition to the size of the buildings and the developers' attempt to count Legion Park acreage in their application to qualify for a Special Area Plan. Such Special Area Plans allow greater height and more density for development projects.

In 2017, the Miami City Commission passed a measure that prohibits city departments from entering into any agreements with developers to include publicly owned land in their applications special area plans.

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While city officials waste no time accommodating developers and helping them cut through red tape to begin construction, the boat ramp suffers from demolition by neglect, Mathisen tells the *BT*

. It would be great, he says, if the city turned the Legion Park boat ramp into a green-conscious dock, catering to non-motorized watercraft, including small sailboats, kayaks, and paddleboards.

“Construction work is moving forward at full pace next door,” Mathisen adds. “Yet we’re still stuck without any follow-through.”

Brian Pearl, Global City’s co-founder and principal, tells the *BT* that his company and partners have no interest in acquiring the boat ramp, but that they would also like to see the city fix it. “If it gets improved, that would be great for everybody,” Pearl says. “But it’s not up to us. The people in charge of the park need to figure it out.”

In an e-mail response to questions, Patricia Pocasangre, the capital improvements outreach coordinator for the City of Miami, refutes Mathisen’s criticisms, noting that the city has a permit to rebuild the dock pending before the Miami-Dade Department of Environmental Resources Management, or DERM. “It is a priority and an important project,” Pocasangre explains. “Once the permit for the project is secured, we will proceed to advertise it for bid through City of Miami’s Procurement Department.”

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