

A Midsummer Roundup

Written by Shane M. Graber, BT Contributor
August 2016 - Last Updated August 2016



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As we approach midsummer, a lot has been happening in the Upper Eastside. Here's an update of what's new.

Celebrating the Fourth of July: The Bayside Residents Association hosted its annual Independence Day barbecue party at Baywood Park, which included a first-time invitation to adjacent Belle Meade residents.

More than 125 neighbors joined together in a good old-fashioned covered-plate neighborhood barbecue. A great time was had by all!

New MiMo Businesses: On June 27, California-based Trina Turk clothing boutique opened its

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new MiMo showcase store on 72nd and Biscayne Boulevard, after closing its Bal Harbour location.

More than 100 area influencers attended the opening -- one of many to come -- which benefited the iconic Wolfsonian Museum.

Residents are also celebrating the opening of Julian Chang Boutique's new location on 73rd Street and the Boulevard, while eagerly awaiting the opening of high-end New York-based Ángel Sánchez boutique at 75th Street.

On July 3, the Vagabond Motel closed its restaurant, only to reopen it 48 hours later with a new name -- Vagabond Kitchen & Bar -- and new management, led by partners Julien Géliot and Fabien Chalard, founders of Pléthore & Balthazar on South Beach. Their new concept focuses on "Americana with a French twist."

MiMo Development Updates: Everyone's talking about published reports that Boulevard 57, the mixed-use condo development slated for NE 57th Street and Biscayne Boulevard, is on hold.

According to real estate blogs, current concerns about a condo craze meltdown have hampered sales efforts, yet the project may proceed with the retail component -- potentially anchored by a Trader Joe's or "Publix-type" store, according Lyle Chariff, president of Chariff Realty, which is handling the commercial leasing.

Biscayne Boulevard Parking: Parking issues continue to challenge MiMo businesses, yet help may be on the way.

The Miami Parking Authority has released a new parking audit for the area, which recommends a combination of solutions, from shared parking to new lots to the return of on-street parking.

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New leadership at FDOT's District 6, which encompasses the Upper Eastside, may prove helpful in pushing for the return of parallel parking along the Boulevard. That's a step many say is long overdue in helping to provide parking while bringing back the original communal parking solution the neighborhood once enjoyed.

City Bond Meeting: On July 21 the city hosted its budget and general obligation bond meeting at Legion Park.

Topline: While the city is asking residents for support of a new bond issue meant to increase infrastructure investments throughout the city, the truth is that the Upper Eastside will receive very little in benefits from this tax burden.

Residents at the meeting were vociferous about a lack of code enforcement in the area, citing blatant commercial violations, including graffiti, trash, and signage issues. Some residents pointed to area businesses Mercy Market and Cleanway Cleaners as examples of lax enforcement.

Kudos to Nirvana Condominiums: The Nirvana Condo Association deserves a shout-out for increasing its involvement with Upper Eastside issues.

If you're not aware, Nirvana is a cluster of five garden-style buildings fronting Biscayne Bay between 62nd and 64th streets. It's a hidden piece of paradise nestled among tropical gardens and Banyan trees, with its own sandy beach on the bay.

Having successfully navigated its way through the last real estate crash, coupled with troubles from a developer handover, the current master association board has proved to be both visionary and proactive in determining how Nirvana can better catalyze and take advantage of the positive things happening in the MiMo Historic District.

Nirvana will also be a key player in determining what happens to the adjacent redevelopment of land surrounding the soon-to-be-replaced American Legion Hall.

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American Legion Development: While the former site of American Legion Post #29 is slated to be redeveloped as a five-story rental building, with a new American Legion Post incorporated into the project, the multi-acre site to its west is also slated for major changes.

The developer of that site, Brickell-based ACRE GCDM Bay Investment II, has confirmed that it should be ready for community presentations in September. At that time Upper Eastside residents will be able to voice their views on what that land could become, and how that development could benefit the overall community, including Legion Park.

This will be a crucial community conversation.

Residential Real Estate Update: Despite the gloom and doom published about Miami's residential real estate market, Upper Eastside values continue to rise.

Sure, the abnormal increases we've experienced over the past two years will not continue, but a changing buyer mix is showing that the Upper Eastside is poised for positive momentum. I reached out to some of the area's well-known real estate professionals to learn what's driving our real estate market.

Former Morningside resident John Sasso, a buyer's agent for the Jack Coden Group at Keller Williams, tells the *BT*, "We're seeing young professionals moving to the Upper Eastside because of the charm of the old neighborhoods and the excitement of new developments on Biscayne."

Belle Meade resident Kristine Flook of Urbanize Properties, agrees. "Location is everything," she says. "Our buyers want to be close to the Design District and Midtown, and they love the fact that we have accessibility to everything."

With the talk of a potential real estate slowdown, Sasso suggests that sellers consider what today's buyers are looking for. "Buyers are looking for homes with more character, like beam

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ceilings,” he says. “They want unique architecture and something with charm, and more than before, buyers are less willing to renovate. They’re looking for turn-key properties.”

As prices have increased, buyers expect such features as impact windows, updated electrical, and newer roofs, improvements that will reduce their insurance and the need for renovation.

With all that’s happening in the Upper Eastside, let’s keep in mind that the hurricane season is upon us, so make sure to be hurricane ready. It’s been years since Miami experienced a sizable storm, and sooner or later, it’s bound to happen again.

Here’s wishing everyone a wonderful rest of summer!

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com