

**Bahia Mar Park Proposal:
The Impact of Including Permanent Residential Uses
(Report I)**

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The Bahia Mar Park proposal is a comprehensive plan to convert an existing, outdated hotel, a few commercial uses, and several acres of asphalt surface parking lot into a mixed-use neighborhood with hotels, offices, retail shops, restaurants, a 4.5 acre park, and residences. This report explains the importance of the permanent residential component of the plan, the two multi-family residential buildings, and why they are an essential part of the proposal to develop this neighborhood.

The first section of this report discusses the theoretical basis for including permanent residential uses in neighborhood development plans -- the impact of having people live in the neighborhood on development in general. The second section discusses the relevant reasons for approving the proposed multi-family residential buildings -- the positive impact that they and the people who live in them will have on the benefits that the public will derive from this development. The final section discusses the impact on the benefits that the public will derive if the multi-family residential buildings are not approved as part of this neighborhood development plan -- the alternatives if the permanent residential units, as proposed, are not included in the development plan.

I. Permanent residential uses are essential to successfully develop a neighborhood.

Successful neighborhood development is development that creates a vibrant neighborhood, that is, a neighborhood with an identity that distinguishes it from other places, that has activity day and night, and that is safe. A vibrant neighborhood attracts and supports shops and amenities that serve and benefit people living nearby. If done well, the development will create a neighborhood that attracts residents from more remote parts of the city as well as tourists. People will want to come to the neighborhood to shop, dine, and enjoy the experience. The neighborhood will become a destination. Neighborhood development can achieve those goals only if it includes permanent residential units as part of the overall mix of uses in the plan.

Permanent residents are essential to the creation of a vibrant neighborhood for several reasons. First, they give the neighborhood character, an identity that is distinct and unique. Permanent

residents, as opposed to tourists or other transient users, develop relationships with the business proprietors over time as they come to know each other. The residents also develop relationships with each other. The distinctive quality of the interactions among the residents and with business owners provides the personal feeling that distinguishes a neighborhood with permanent residents from a “tourist” area. The distinction can be seen, for example, in the difference between an authentic neighborhood pub and a generic, chain sports bar or restaurant that could be found in any mall in any town.

Second, permanent residents use a neighborhood at all hours, not just during the work day or on weekends. Office workers are only in the neighborhood during normal business hours. Tourists are as likely to go to other parts of the city as stay and shop near their hotel. Permanent residents, however, are in the neighborhood all the time. They are there early in the morning, having breakfast at the local restaurant. They are there after work, picking up their dry cleaning and buying something at the deli counter in the local market for dinner. They go out to the local pub after work for a drink and to listen to music with friends. The Fannie Mae Foundation and the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, in a survey of 25 cities, including Miami, found that “housing helps create a 24-hour downtown: a place with retail, entertainment, and office activity around the clock.”¹

That activity, in turn, makes the area safer. Jane Jacobs coined the phrase “eyes on the street”² to symbolize the way that having people watch what is happening in public areas creates a safer environment. She emphasized the importance of having residents who are active in the neighborhood continuously, “. . . both to add to the number of effective eyes on the street and to induce the people in buildings along the street to watch the sidewalks in sufficient numbers. Nobody enjoys sitting on a stoop or looking out a window at an empty street. Almost nobody

¹ *Housing Facts and Findings*, Issue 2, p. 24.

² Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York, NY: Random House.

does such a thing. Large numbers of people entertain themselves, off and on, by watching street activity.” (p. 35). Permanent residents provide that essential element to make the neighborhood safer.

Third, permanent residents provide the base to attract businesses that provide services and amenities that benefit people living in nearby neighborhoods. People who live in a place need different types of goods and services, such as grocery stores or home goods, than people just visiting. The distinction can be seen in the difference between the food a person could buy to take home at a neighborhood market, such as Fernanda’s or Dean & DeLuca, and at a Kwik Mart or 7-Eleven, or in the difference between a clothing store and t-shirt shop. The stores attracted by permanent residents in the new neighborhood also serve residents in nearby neighborhoods, who will gain better access to more goods and services that they want and need. Residents in those nearby neighborhoods will come not only to shop in the new stores but will also support other shops and restaurants in the new neighborhood. The overall effect is to multiply the impact of the new residents, creating even more activity and vibrancy in the new neighborhood.

Permanent residents are an indispensable part of vibrant and safe neighborhoods, as firmly established in classic planning texts, such as *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, as well as more modern studies published by the Brookings Institution and the American Planning Association.³ The effect of having permanent residents as part of a plan for neighborhood development is to create a neighborhood that has a unique character, more activity, more variety, and is livelier than one without residents. People living nearby have more convenient places to buy the things that they need. By shopping in the new neighborhood, those residents of nearby areas will support even more activity in the new neighborhood. The overall impact will be to

³ Birch, Eugenie. 2002. Having a Longer View on Downtown Living. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 68(1):5-21;

Zelinka, Al, and Dean Brennan. 2001. *Safe Scaping: Creating Safer, More Livable Communities Through Planning and Design*. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association.

Ewing, Reid. 1996. *Best Development Practices*. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association.

create a neighborhood that can become an attractive destination for shopping or entertainment for residents from all parts of the city and for tourists.

Success in creating a vibrant destination for tourists and residents from all parts of the city is not the same as successful renovation of one hotel and the addition of a second hotel on the site. The renovated Bahia Mar and new Waldorf=Astoria hotels will be economically viable without permanent residents on the same site. The location is extraordinary, with water views on all sides and easy access to the beach and marina. The hotels will be attractive destinations for tourists despite the lack of other amenities, such as a variety of restaurants and shops, within walking distance. They will, however, do even better, be even more attractive to guests, with the multi-family residential buildings as part of the neighborhood. The multi-family buildings will provide space for a greater variety of shops and restaurants, offering hotel guests more choices for recreation within easy walking distance. People living in the neighborhood will have visitors stay at the hotels because they are the most convenient place for them to stay.

The difference will be in the feel and experience for the hotel guests. There will be fewer things to do, fewer people around without the multi-family residential buildings and the shops and restaurants that are included on the ground level of those buildings. The hotel guests will simply be more likely to drive to other areas to shop, eat, and enjoy themselves. When they return to the hotel, they will go right inside because there will be little else to do, and, without activity on the street, the area will not feel as safe.

II. Permanent residential uses - whether as condominiums, co-op apartments, or in some other form - will significantly increase the public benefit from this neighborhood development proposal.

Planning theory clearly suggests that including permanent residential uses in a neighborhood development plan is essential for the creation of a vibrant and successful neighborhood. The benefits of the development, however, affect more than just the people who live in the new residential units. The benefits to the public at-large -- residents of nearby neighborhoods and the

city as-a-whole -- are significant. Some of those benefits are from the general differences between mixed-use development with permanent residents and without, as discussed earlier in this report. Some of the benefits, however, are from the specific details of the Bahia Mar Park proposal; how inclusion of the two multi-family residential buildings and the additional shops and restaurants they house will affect the rest of the proposal.

General benefits

As noted in the discussion of mixed-use development theory, including permanent residential units affects the kinds of businesses that choose to locate in the neighborhood. People who live in a neighborhood need and want different kinds of goods and services than tourists and short-term visitors. Permanent residents need groceries that can be used to prepare meals at home. Hotel guests do not. Residents need places to buy home furnishings and cleaning supplies, go to the doctor, get prescriptions filled, buy clothes for work, or rent a movie. They need to have their hair cut and their clothes dry-cleaned. The predictable demand for those goods and services will encourage businesses offering them to locate in the neighborhood. Residents in nearby neighborhoods then benefit from the availability of goods and services they need and which are available, in large part, because there are permanent residents in the newly developed neighborhood to provide the base of support those businesses need to survive and succeed.

Permanent residents do more than affect the kinds of businesses in their neighborhood. Residents are active throughout the day, outside of normal business hours. They add to the perceived level of activity, making the neighborhood seem livelier and safer. This will make the redeveloped neighborhood more attractive to other residents and visitors, giving them an additional place to shop, visit, and enjoy.

Proposal specific benefits

The benefits that the public derive from development of this neighborhood will be greatly enhanced by the inclusion of the multi-family residential buildings and the additional shops and restaurants on the site, as proposed. The two most obvious public benefits that the multi-family

residential buildings affect positively are: 1) improved access to goods and services that people living nearby need and want; and 2) more public access to and use of the western portion of the site.

The first of those public benefits, attracting the kinds of goods and services that residents of nearby neighborhoods can also use, and to which they currently do not have easy access, is inherent by virtue of including permanent residences in any neighborhood development. The other two, however, are specific to this proposal.

Considering the Bahia Mar Park proposal as a whole -- with hotels, the two multi-family residential buildings, and the 4.5 acre park -- the ways in which inclusion of the multi-family residential buildings enhance the benefits that this neighborhood development proposal provides the public are clear and unmistakable when compared with what exists on-site now. The 7.6 acres behind the Bahia Mar hotel are used, for the most part, for surface parking. That means most of the benefit to the general public right now is to the people who park in the lot.

This proposal includes two features which will greatly increase the benefits the public receives from that public land. Both are dependent on including the multi-family residential buildings in the proposal.

First, the Bahia Mar Park proposal includes multi-family residential buildings which will also house shops and restaurants on the ground floor. Not only will those establishments provide better access to goods and services for people living nearby, those businesses will also need to attract people from other neighborhoods onto the site in order to be successful. Restaurants and shops will affirmatively seek to attract people to the site, to use public space that they now rarely, if ever, enjoy.

Second, the proposal includes pedestrian walkways, a promenade along the waterfront, and a 4.5 acre park that the public can use. The multi-family residential buildings, restaurants, and shops

in the two buildings bring residents and business customers to provide the constant level of activity that creates a feeling of safety, the essential element to make the park and paths places that the public can and will enjoy. In fact, the businesses have the most powerful incentive to get the public to use the park and walkways -- increased profits -- even if most of the people who enjoy the park and walkways never spend a cent in the shops. The presence of people attracts more people, and that will increase the profitability of the shops, even if some of the people are only there to people-watch or enjoy the boats on the Intracoastal Waterway. People from all over the city can benefit from the park and promenade at no cost except for parking, which is the same expense they would have today if they had a reason to go to the site.

If the park were built without the multi-family residential buildings and businesses overlooking it, the park and the walkways will not have the “eyes on the street” that are essential for a perception of safety. The public will not believe the park and walkways are safe. The area would, most likely, become the kind of urban vacuum that is common in many cities, where parks have become havens for anti-social behaviors, criminal activity, and are places to be avoided.

III. Without the multi-family residential buildings, or a comparable residential component on the site, the alternative options for development of the area behind the Bahia Mar and Waldorf=Astoria hotels will provide significantly less benefit to the public than the Bahia Mar Park proposal.

Proposals for neighborhood development are usually integrated plans, with each component contributing to the overall project. Therefore, it is essential to consider the impact of removing one element, such as the multi-family residential buildings, from an integrated development proposal.

Without the multi-family residential buildings, there will be two hotels on the 5.8 acres nearest Seabreeze Boulevard. The Bahia Mar hotel renovations and the construction of the new Waldorf=Astoria hotel will proceed because those are viable enterprises with or without the

multi-family residential buildings because of their superb location. They will be less successful in the short term because the 7.6 acres behind them will confer no additional benefit and will attract no additional activity to the area. The hotels should do well even without the additional restaurants and shops that the multi-family residential buildings provide, without the park and covered parking, without the pedestrian-friendly neighborhood, and without the amenities that the integrated plan would provide.

Without the multi-family residential buildings with their shops and restaurants, however, what happens on the remaining 7.6 acres of the site is less predictable. The developer will have to consider other options for that space.

One option that developers commonly consider is to build the portion of the development proposal that is approved and leave the rest of the site as is. In this case, that involves renovating the Bahia Mar and building the new Waldorf=Astoria, leaving the rest of the site as a surface parking lot. That option produces two viable hotels, with little other benefit to the public. There are no additional restaurants and shops. People living in nearby neighborhoods do not gain better access to the kinds of goods and services they need and want. The public does not get a waterfront park and promenade. People who park do not get covered parking. The city does not get an improved and permanent home for the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, a facility that can also be used for other events as well. On balance, the benefits to the public would seem to be considerably less with this option than would be created by approval of the entire Bahia Mar Park proposal with the multi-family residential buildings included.

Another common alternative for developers is to modify the proposal to conform with the limitations of existing regulations -- build what would be allowed without any exceptions, special permits, or other discretionary relief. Integrated development plans, such as those which can be presented under Planned Unit Development (PUD) provisions, almost always offer significantly more public benefits than conventional development under existing regulations. Integrated proposals can consider the spillover effects that one part of the project can have on the

other parts, minimizing the negative spillovers and maximizing the positive, in ways that most regulations of general applicability cannot. In fact, the principal reason for having provisions in local regulations to allow PUDs and other integrated proposals is the recognition that comprehensive development or redevelopment proposals can do more to benefit the public than development under conventional land use regulations.

For this proposal, the PUD option is what makes the park and permanent and improved facilities for the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show possible. Developing the site with the density and massing allowed under the existing regulations applicable to conventional development will result in smaller buildings covering almost the entire site. That form of development would leave insufficient open space for a park. As for the boat show, none of the buildings will be large enough to provide the interior space that the current proposal offers, and the buildings would cover the outdoor space that is now available for the show. The public would appear to derive significantly more benefit from the Bahia Mar Park proposal than it would from more conventional development of the site.

IV. Summary and Conclusion

The Bahia Mar Park proposal, as presented, offers significant benefits for the public -- a waterfront park and walkways, better access to needed goods and services for people living in nearby neighborhoods, covered parking, and improved new facilities for the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show. The proposed development can create a vibrant neighborhood that people from all over the city will enjoy. The combination of hotels, shops, restaurants, a waterfront park, and pedestrian-friendly design will make Bahia Mar Park a destination of choice.

The proposed development can only create those benefits, however, if all elements of the proposal work together. The multi-family residential buildings are an essential part of the whole Bahia Mar Park proposal. They provide the permanent neighborhood residents who sustain the businesses that serve the community. They provide the “eyes on the street” that make the park

and walkways safe and attractive. They provide the activity throughout the day and night that gives the neighborhood the vibrance that attracts people. Without multi-family residential buildings, many of the public benefits will not be realized.

The alternatives clearly appear to offer the public less. The 7.6 acres of public land may continue to be used as it currently is, which benefits only people who park their cars in the lot. The land could also be developed under conventional regulations, but that form of development will not encourage public use, will not create a park, and will not provide facilities for the boat show and other civic events.

The current plan is based on sound planning and community development theory and practice. Having people live in a place is good for the neighborhood and for the surrounding areas. The multi-family residential buildings bring that essential element to the plan, and they are essential to successfully developing the entire neighborhood.