



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

**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, FEBRUARY 5, 2026 – 6:00 P.M.**

**Cumulative Attendance
May 2025-April 2026**

Steve Witten, Chair	P	8	0
Robert Washington, Vice Chair	P	8	0
Norm Bekoff	A	5	3
Tyler Brunelle	P	8	0
Jeffrey Coburn	P	7	1
Courtney Day	P	4	0
Jason Dunbar	P	8	0
Barry Flanigan	P	6	2
Robert Franks	P	7	1
John Lynch	P	7	1
Sam Mitchell	P	5	0
Ted Morley	P	5	0
Dr. Bret Ribotsky	P	7	0
Bob Swindell	P	6	2
LaRhonda Ware	P	7	1

As of this date, there are 15 appointed members to the Board, which means 8 would constitute a quorum.

Staff

Andrew Cuba, Marine Facilities Manager
Marco Aguilera, Chief Waterways Officer
Bob Dunckel, Assistant City Attorney
Edward Eason, Code Compliance Officer
Sergeant Travis O’Neal, Marine Unit
Captain Chad Robertson, Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue
N. Day, Recording Clerk, Prototype, Inc.

Communications to City Commission

None.

I. Call to Order / Roll Call

Chair Witten called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. Statement of Quorum

It was noted a quorum was present.

III. Approval of Minutes – January 7, 2026

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

IV. Waterway Crime & Boating Safety Reports: Sgt. Travis O’Neal (FLPD) / Capt. Chad Robertson (Fire Rescue) / Edward Eason (Code)

Sergeant Travis O’Neal of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department’s Marine Unit reported the following activity from January 2026:

- 3 boat burglaries of Garmin devices

Sgt. O’Neal emphasized the effort that is going into addressing boat burglaries on a statewide basis. Local jurisdictions are actively investigating these crimes.

Since the adoption of Fort Lauderdale’s amended Anchoring Ordinance, 51 boats have anchored on Lake Sylvia, 18 of which currently remain there. Five of these vessels have exceeded their 30-day anchoring limit and the vessel owners have been cited. No owners have gone to trial thus far. Once these cases have been closed, the Marine Unit plans to increase the number of charges that will be brought against boats whose owners do not want to move on. At-risk investigations of boats that have not met standards for operability or steering are underway; if these charges accrue, the boats can be removed as derelict vessels. He noted that these cases typically move slowly through the courts.

Since the Ordinance was passed, 23 boats have anchored at Las Olas, although only four boats are currently anchored there. Two of these have exceeded the 30-day limit and have been charged. Of the 34 vessels that have anchored in Sunrise Bay, five currently remain and none have overstayed their limit.

Dr. Ribotsky asked if the Marine Unit monitors inoperable boats to ensure that sewage is being disposed of properly. Sgt. O’Neal replied that due to changes in Florida law, the Marine Unit cannot test this disposal without the owners’ consent; however, if Officers are denied access, the U.S. Coast Guard can proceed with testing.

Dr. Ribotsky also asked if boats that have been charged with violations are permitted to leave the United States. Sgt. O’Neal confirmed that they may do this, but pointed out that if the boat leaves Fort Lauderdale’s jurisdiction, law enforcement efforts are considered

successful. Owners are warned in advance of their anchoring deadline. Fines are left to the judges' discretion and may accrue at a rate of up to \$500/day. Owners are also subject to 60 days in jail.

Chief Waterways Officer Marco Aguilera added that the Marine Patrol provides owners with brochures explaining the Ordinance and what must be done to remain in compliance. The City is in the process of ordering signage to be posted on Lake Sylvia and Las Olas so boaters are aware of the Ordinance.

Code Compliance Officer Edward Eason reported the following activity from January 2026:

- Property cited on 11/12/25 for illegal land use: a residential property is operating a charter business with multiple boats advertised; this case went to a hearing on January 29, 2026 and was ordered to comply within 28 days or a fine of \$100/day would begin to accrue
- Property cited on 1/27/26 for operation of a vacation rental on a boat; all ads promoting the rental must be removed by 2/22/26; this is a recurring violation originally cited in 2023

Captain Chad Robertson reported the following Fire Rescue activity from January 2026:

- 4 fire boat calls
- Dive training is ongoing

He added that Fire Chief Stephen Gollan attended Broward Days in Tallahassee with Florida Representative Chip LaMarca to advocate for grant funds for a new fire boat

Mr. Dunbar requested information on the availability of public dockage at or near the Fort Lauderdale Beach, and recalled that operators of the Suntex Marina had indicated there would be no public dockage at that facility. Chair Witten noted that this may be due to contractual issues between the City and the marina, and indicated that this would be added to the Marine Advisory Board's (MAB's) 2026 whiteboard list of issues. He encouraged Board members and the public to raise marine concerns with their respective City Commissioners.

Chair Witten advised that Neighbor Support Night in Fort Lauderdale is scheduled for Thursday, February 12, 2026.

Chair Witten continued that a new Agenda Item will be added at the Board's March 2026 meeting to hear from local captains, including some who are Board members. Mr. Flanigan briefly addressed the impact of large yachts on the City's economy, emphasizing the importance of maintaining these boats' access to the New River and marine facilities in particular.

Chair Witten continued that the City is participating in the Aden Perry Life Ring Initiative, which provides life rings at boat ramps throughout Fort Lauderdale and other South

Florida municipalities. Life jacket stations are also being built to provide these items to boaters.

Chair Witten briefly addressed water quality on the North Fork River, stating that the Board will continue to keep this issue in mind, although he acknowledged that there is no “quick fix” to the problem. He noted that this item will also be part of the upcoming whiteboard discussion, and encouraged Board members to reach out to Mr. Cuba’s office with any items they would like to discuss in the future.

V. Captain Jeff Hart, FWC (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission) One of the most important partners we have on the water! Discussion of mutual challenges for 2026.

Chair Witten introduced Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Captain Jeff Hart, recalling that FWC was instrumental in implementing a new speed zone on the Intracoastal Waterway. Captain Hart has worked closely with public safety and law enforcement in Fort Lauderdale and throughout Broward County and has championed educational outreach to the community with respect to natural resources.

Captain Hart explained that he oversees FWC’s patrol operations for Broward County. FWC is the largest state conservation agency in the United States, with the primary mission of ensuring the safety and conservation of Florida’s natural resources and wildlife. They also promote boating safety and protection of waterways.

Dr. Ribotsky requested clarification of the hierarchy of law enforcement agencies that operate on the water. Captain Hart replied that this depends upon the jurisdiction. He advised that FWC helps other agencies, such as the Marine Unit. They are closely involved with hunting and fishing throughout the state of Florida. He also noted that there are redundancies in effect to help keep waterways safe.

VI. Motion for reconsideration: 1409 SW 17th Street

- **Motion for approval subject to conditions. The public hearing has been concluded and it is returned to the Board for consideration of a Motion to recommend approval subject to conditions.**

Assistant City Attorney Bob Dunckel explained that when this Item was first heard by the Board, it addressed two proposed finger piers, the eastern of which is 36.5 ft. and the western of which is 56 ft. The 25% mark in the waterway is at 35.2 ft. He suggested that the Board may want to reconsider the item and re-send it to the City Commission with a recommendation of approval.

Ryan Abrams, representing the property owner at 1409 SW 17th Street, stated that his client had requested a waiver based on extraordinary circumstances. He explained that the definition of the term “waterway” does not include private property, property that has

been dredged, or manmade submerged land. He also pointed out that if a property owner wishes to create a marina by dredging, there are no City limitations on the docks that can be placed there.

Mr. Abrams continued that the subject land is taxed by the City and has no riparian rights, as the waterway in question is manmade rather than natural. He observed that there are other nearby marinas which were dug out over time, and their docks extend farther than 30% into those waterways. He emphasized that his client's request was to place a dock on privately owned land and to challenge the interpretation of what constitutes a waterway.

Mr. Abrams asserted that the Board can grant the waiver due to the existence of extraordinary circumstances, and that the owner would stipulate to a requirement that the dock would never extend past the ownership boundary line. He also noted that this line is consistent with the seawall along other properties on the subject canal, and that the property line is defined in Code as inclusive of water as well as land.

Attorney Dunckel reiterated the distances of the proposed finger piers, stating that he would suggest the Board recommend approval of the easternmost pier. He advised that consideration of the two piers be taken separately.

Motion made by Mr. Lynch, seconded by Mr. Brunelle, to approve the easternmost pier at 36.5 ft.

Attorney Dunckel further clarified that a vessel docked at this structure could not extend more than 30% into the entire waterway. He also noted that the issue would be more straightforward if the Board does not attach any additional conditions to the proposed waiver for the easternmost dock.

In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed 12-2 (Dr. Ribotsky and Mr. Swindell dissenting).

Attorney Dunckel reiterated that the Board has the following options with regard to a motion for the westernmost finger pier, which is proposed to extend 56.5 ft. into the waterway:

- Continue to recommend denial
- Recommend approval subject to limiting extension to 30% of the waterway
- Recommend approval subject to limiting extension to 56.5 ft. into the waterway

It was noted that if the measurement of the waterway begins at the wet face of the seawall, the westernmost dock would extend more than 30% into the waterway. It was also suggested that if the waterway in the subject location is owned by the Applicant, he would not need a waiver. Attorney Dunckel clarified that he did not agree with this position, and emphasized that the Board is asked to make a recommendation to the City Commission of either approval or denial of the requests, which may be subject to the limitations he had noted.

Motion made by Mr. Lynch that we approve, subject to limiting the size of the dock to 30% of the waterway or 42.27 ft.

Chair Witten clarified that this **motion** referred specifically to the westernmost pier.

It was noted that the previous discussion of this Application, which occurred at the November 6, 2025 MAB meeting, had included an indication that the property owner wished to dock a boat 90 ft. in length or greater at the site.

Mr. Mitchell **seconded** the **motion**. In a roll call vote, the **motion** failed 2-12 (Chair Witten, Vice Chair Washington, Mr. Brunelle, Mr. Day, Mr. Dunbar, Mr. Flanigan, Mr. Franks, Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Morley, Dr. Ribotsky, Mr. Swindell, and Ms. Ware dissenting).

Attorney Dunckel advised that it would be appropriate for the Board to recommend denial of the request with regard to the westernmost pier.

Mr. Morley stated that he had made the original motion for reconsideration of the Application because the Board is charged with ensuring fair and equal access to the City's waterways. He added that the Board had suggested the Applicant consider installing smaller docks, but the Applicant had not been willing to do so, resulting in denial of the Application.

It was suggested that one option could be building both docks to the length recommended by the Board for the easternmost structure. Mr. Abrams asserted that the two docks are essentially the same, with no significant difference between the structures.

Motion made by Mr. Morley, seconded by Mr. Brunelle, to approve the dock at 36.5 ft., the westernmost pier.

It was clarified that approving this length for the westernmost finger pier would mean that both finger piers are the same size.

In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed 13-1 (Mr. Swindell dissenting).

VII. Communication from the Bridge – Marco Aguilera / Chief Waterways Officer

Chief Waterways Officer Marco Aguilera explained that the City is considering the creation of a living seawall program, which are shoreline protection structures that mimic natural habitats and offer a sustainable and environmentally conscious approach to coastal management. These structures provide more habitat for vegetation and other marine life, and can assist in improving water quality as well as adding aesthetic value for communities.

The proposed living seawall initiative would establish an assistance program to pay the base permit fee when a property owner installs a qualifying living seawall as opposed to a standard concrete seawall. A dedicated fund for this expense currently stands at \$50,000. If the program is successful, it is possible the City may increase its funding and continue it over time, possibly including it in future City budgets.

Mr. Aguilera continued that the program will also include an expedited permitting process for qualifying structures. Base permit fees for Fort Lauderdale are typically 1.75% of job costs. Other fees related to seawalls are associated with Florida Building Code and State Statutes and may not be modified by the City.

Between January 2024 and October 2025, 106 seawalls were replaced in Fort Lauderdale, only one of which was a living seawall. The program is intended to help increase the number of these structures. The City is also considering the installation of living seawalls to replace existing standard City seawalls. Some South Florida municipalities offer similar rebate programs.

Criteria for receiving assistance include:

- Property owners must apply for the funds, which will be issued on a first come/first served basis
- Owners must be planning to install a living seawall on 51% of the length of the seawall
- Seawall must be brought up to the latest North American Vertical Datum (NAVD) elevation as required by City Code
- Living seawall must meet the definition when established

Key decision points related to the program include:

- Funding of the proposed program at \$50,000 to determine if it incentivizes property owners to install living seawalls
- Maximum rebate amount is \$3,500 for residential property and \$7,000 for commercial property

Mr. Aguilera requested the Board's input on what may qualify as a living seawall. Thus far, the definition for the purposes of the proposed Ordinance is as follows:

“[A] vertical structure made of pH-neutral concrete, steel, vinyl, or other material designed as a rigid tidal barrier, with modifications on the waterward side such as modular retrofit panels or textured structural elements intended to support marine organism attachment. The modifications must contain habitat-enhancing components such as textured surfaces that may mimic natural habitats like mangrove roots or tidal pools and encourage aquatic life to attach and grow to the seawall. These modifications must be permanent in nature.”

Mr. Aguilera concluded that he had brought the proposed rebate program before the City Commission in December 2025. The Commission had requested it be brought before the

MAB as well as the City's Sustainability Advisory Board (SAB) for input. It is expected to be brought back to the Commission as a Resolution in April 2026.

Chair Witten requested that the Board members be provided with copies of the definition so they can review it further at their leisure and return any comments to Mr. Cuba's office.

The Board discussed the proposed program, clarifying that a living seawall would be very similar to a concrete seawall but would also address some of the ecological problems presented by hardened shorelines. While differences in cost may be minimal, the difference in value to the City's shorelines is significant.

Mr. Aguilera was asked if the City plans to switch to a living seawall model at some locations. He replied that Staff is looking at options for steel seawalls, although these can be less readily available than structures built of other materials. He concluded that approximately 90% of the City's seawalls are located on private property. It was also acknowledged that living seawalls are made with new technology that has been subject to less testing than standard materials thus far.

VIII. Ongoing Discussion – 2026 White Board. Summary of salient discussion points from January. Agree to focus on a handful of front burner items. Review short- & long-term objectives.

Chair Witten noted that the Board members were provided with backup materials listing items that appeared on the MAB's whiteboard in 2025. He emphasized that the Board has both short- and long-term goals, both of which are subject to change as needed.

Chair Witten continued that the whiteboard items included the following topics:

- Ensuring that boating is safe and accessible to everyone
- Boating safety education
- Marine Unit patrol and what is needed by Marine Unit and other law enforcement/public safety Officers
- Speed zones
- Illegal charters
- "Pinch points" on the New River
- Marine contractors, including commercial use of private docks
- Docks and boat lifts
- Derelict vessel removal and illegal discharge
- Clarification of measurements
- Extraordinary circumstances

He requested that the Board members send additional suggestions to Mr. Cuba's office for inclusion.

IX. Old / New Business

- **736 NE 20th Avenue – Motion to Reconsider or in the alternative a Motion To Amend as to previous action by the Board. Public hearing has been concluded. This is being returned to the Board only for consideration of the Motion to Reconsider or Motion to Amend.**

Chair Witten recalled that this property is located on a very wide canal where large boats are perpendicularly docked. There are multiple zoning districts in the area. At the subject location, an individual docking a boat must either own or rent the property and must also own the boat. Space cannot be leased.

Attorney Dunckel explained that the Board had recommended denial of the Application for 736 NE 20th Avenue. Most discussion had focused on the issue of dock rentals and other activity at the property. The standard text of the proposed Resolution for this item states that “use of the boat slip shall be limited to the owner or tenant in possession of the upland property.”

Attorney Dunckel continued that he is considering changing this language to read that “use of the boat slip shall be limited to the owner in possession or tenant in possession of the upland property.” He concluded that the Board may wish to vote to reconsider this item.

It was further clarified that the owner or tenant may not use the vessel docked at the property for commercial means. Attorney Dunckel advised that the boat is no longer considered an accessory use when a commercial aspect is introduced.

It was asked what has changed since the previous time the Board had discussed this item. Attorney Dunckel replied that there have been no changes with regard to the underlying facts of the case. The only reason it was presented today was to consider the possibility of a provision in the approval Resolution which would allow the Board to approve the item.

Chair Witten recalled that when the Item was previously discussed, he had felt the Board had taken a subjective position based on the history and reputation of the site. Mr. Mitchell recalled that neighbors of the subject property had expressed concerns with activity on the site as well as the activity of the crews of boats docked there.

Motion made by Mr. Mitchell to reconsider.

Mr. Cuba clarified that motions to reconsider are typically made when something about the application has changed. There have been no changes in this case since the Board's earlier vote.

The **motion** died for lack of second.

No action was taken on this Item.

X. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 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.]