



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, MARCH 5, 2026 – 6:00 P.M.**

**Cumulative Attendance
May 2025-April 2026**

Steve Witten, Chair	P	9	0
Ted Morley, Vice Chair	P	6	0
Norm Bekoff	P	6	3
Tyler Brunelle	A	8	1
Jeffrey Coburn	P	8	1
Courtney Day	P	5	0
Jason Dunbar	P	9	0
Barry Flanigan	P	7	2
Robert Franks	P	8	1
John Lynch	P	8	1
Sam Mitchell (dep. 8:28)	P	6	0
Dr. Bret Ribotsky	P	8	0
Bob Swindell	P	7	2
LaRhonda Ware	P	8	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
- Marco Aguilera, Chief Waterways Officer
- Edward Eason, Code Compliance Officer
- Sergeant Travis O’Neal, Marine Unit
- William Knowles, Fort Lauderdale Police Chief
- Steven Glassman, Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner
- Ben Rogers, Assistant City Manager
- Daphnee Sainvil, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager
- 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 6:01 p.m.

II. Statement of Quorum

Roll was called and it was noted that a quorum was present.

Chair Witten advised that former Vice Chair Robert Washington was no longer a member of the Marine Advisory Board (MAB), and requested nominations for the open position.

Motion made by Mr. Dunbar, seconded by Dr. Ribotsky, to nominate Ted Morley, In a roll call vote, Mr. Morley was unanimously elected Vice Chair.

Chair Witten provided updates to the Board, noting that a representative of the U.S. Coast Guard will give a presentation at the April 2026 meeting in light to Board members' concerns regarding navigation on the New River. He noted that a portion of the New River which runs beneath the I-95 bridge is federalized, which means it is the federal government's responsibility to maintain that section of waterway.

Chair Witten continued that the Tortuga Festival is scheduled for April 2026. It is the largest festival scheduled on the water in Fort Lauderdale and has raised millions of dollars for environmental causes. Another upcoming event is the Fort Lauderdale Air Show, which is scheduled in May.

Chair Witten recognized Division Manager Melissa Doyle and contractor the Aquatic Control Group for their work in keeping the City's waterways clean. He also noted that there has been recent discussion of placing the New River on the National Historic Registry, which may be possible due to the Seminole nation's historic presence on that waterway.

Chief Waterways Officer Marco Aguilera provided a brief update on Broward County's waterway cleanup efforts. Code Compliance Officers, cleanup boats from Aquatic Control Group, and other vendors will be at the sandbar to receive trash and dispose of it. Another cleanup event will be scheduled in June.

Chair Witten continued that there has been significant feedback from Fort Lauderdale residents who would like to expand the recently implemented Slow Speed/Minimum Wake Zone on the New River. He recognized a donation of \$10,000 from Coastal Conservation Association for the City's pump-out boat.

Chair Witten concluded that the city of Hollywood provides a mooring field for boats for a daily fee, and recommended that Fort Lauderdale consider establishing an area on Lake Sylvia for this purpose.

The following Items were taken out of order on the Agenda.

**VI. Special Guest: Paulee Day – Chief Executive Officer of West Marine
“Partnering to the betterment of our families.”**

Chair Witten introduced Paulee Day, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of West Marine. She is the first woman to hold this position since the company was founded in 1968. Ms. Day stated that the business’s first retail location opened over 50 years ago in California and first came to Fort Lauderdale with assistance from Mr. Swindell. The company is firmly entrenched in the boating community.

Ms. Day advised that over the years, West Marine has undergone several changes in ownership and leadership. Her goal is to return the company to its roots as a core marine parts provider. The company’s mission is keeping people on the water and encouraging safe recreational boating with families and friends.

West Marine currently has 201 retail locations across 34 states as well as two online sites that carry up to 300,000 core marine products. She strongly emphasized the importance of boating safety. West Marine has 2,500 crew members across the country who are also boaters and anglers. They also serve marine service professionals, including boat dealers, manufacturers, boat- and shipyards, technicians, and more through West Marine Pro, providing the safety equipment needed by all vessels on the water.

Ms. Day emphasized that she wished to explore ways to become more active in the Fort Lauderdale boating community, including fostering relationships with vendors. The Board members discussed the availability of marine products and materials and participation in community efforts to keep waterways clean and safe.

Chair Witten advised that Assistant City Attorney Bob Dunckel, who has been present at several recent Board meetings to assist with Board discussions and business, plans to retire. He emphasized the importance of Attorney Dunckel’s assistance to Fort Lauderdale and the boating community in particular. Attorney Dunckel will remain with the City through April 2026.

Chair Witten continued that Chief Waterways Officer Marco Aguilera will be leaving his position with the City and has accepted a position with Amelia Island. He noted some of Mr. Aguilera’s accomplishments during his tenure, including establishment of mooring regulations, acquisition of the pump-out boat, and more. He will continue to work with the Deputy Director of Public Works during the transition period.

**V. Visit from Steve Glassman – Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner District
2**

Chair Witten introduced Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner Steven Glassman, who represents Commission District 2. He shared the whiteboard listing the MAB’s 2026

priorities and challenges with Commissioner Glassman, and noted the City Commission's marine priorities from the past year, which include purchasing the City's pump-out boat, promoting living seawalls, implementing the speed change on the Intracoastal Waterway, and more.

Commissioner Glassman recognized the Board members and their work for the community, emphasizing the importance of the tourism and marine industries to Fort Lauderdale. He addressed the Chair's earlier mention of a possible historic designation for the New River, suggesting that the Board may wish to speak with Principal Urban Planner Trisha Logan on this topic. He pointed out that a local historic designation may include more stringent requirements than inclusion on a national registry.

Commissioner Glassman advised that Commission District 2 includes most of the beach, the Las Olas Isles, and several City waterways and waterfront neighborhoods. He observed that during his tenure as a Commissioner, most of the comments he has heard from his district address the condition of these waterways. The Commission has hired an Education Officer, a Chief Waterways Officer, and a Coastal Affairs Officer as part of their commitment to addressing waterway concerns and issues.

Commissioner Glassman continued that the City is offering a program that will waive permit fees for property owners who choose to install living seawalls. This is the first program of its kind in the state of Florida. He added that the MAB was instrumental in encouraging acquisition of the pump-out vessel, and noted that the City plans to implement an Adopt-a-Shoreline program to help keep its waterways clean. Civic associations may apply for this program online and earn "Green Your Routine" program points.

Commissioner Glassman continued that the City has also hired Miami Waterkeepers to test the condition of many City waterways. The number of testing sites will be increased throughout Fort Lauderdale. The City is collaborating with Nova Southeastern University to identify grant opportunities for additional water and sediment testing throughout the entire canal network. This program will include 40 testing sites, 14 of which are within Fort Lauderdale.

Commissioner Glassman advised that in addition to the living seawall permit fee program offered to Fort Lauderdale property owners who raise or replace their seawalls, the City hopes to install living seawalls on City properties wherever possible. Litter control efforts on waterways which provide two cleanup vessels five days per week to service the full 165 miles of waterways in Fort Lauderdale. In 2025, over 200 tons of trash were removed from waterways.

Commissioner Glassman commented on the number of waivers that have come before the Commission over the years, noting that the Commissioners regularly read the MAB's input on those items. He observed that with a great many waiver requests coming forward, this likely means the City may need to do something differently. Chair Witten noted that

a “one size fits all” approach cannot work for all the City’s waterways due to the differing canal widths.

Chair Witten also emphasized the importance of boating opportunities for the next generation of boaters and participants in the marine industry. He concluded that the Board will reach out to the City’s Education Officer and other recommended contacts, and will continue to stay in touch with the Commission.

Mr. Mitchell asked if Commissioner Glassman was familiar with the contamination issue in the North Fork River. Commissioner Glassman replied that he is aware of this problem, adding that Miami Waterkeepers provide testing for many of the City’s waterways. Mr. Mitchell expressed concern that further action has not been taken on this waterway. Commissioner Glassman suggested that the Board may wish to send a communication to the Commission on this issue.

Ms. Ware asked if federalization of a portion of the river meant dredging is not permitted. She pointed out that pollution is visible in the water and odors are a problem as well. Commissioner Glassman replied that this had not been brought to his attention before now, and he would look into it further. He continued that even if a portion of the river has been federalized, both the City and residents can reach out to state officials and Congressional representatives for coordination.

It was noted that the City’s Fire boat is in need of repair, and neither the Police nor Code Compliance have sufficient waterway assets. Commissioner Glassman replied that the City has already begun its budget process for fiscal year (FY) 2026-2027. He advised that Police and Fire officials make budget requests for equipment and personnel, and these proposed expenses are discussed with those officials. The City’s Budget Advisory Board (BAB) meets with representatives of all City Departments to discuss these needs. He recommended that the Board reach out to the BAB, adding that he communicates with that board as well.

Ms. Ware also shared concern for the City’s emergency response, which she cautioned was not sufficient for a city known as the Yachting Capital of the World. Commissioner Glassman reiterated that the Board may send a communication to the City Commission, which will stimulate further conversation by the Commission. He advised that he has not heard the same sense of urgency when public safety officials have submitted their budgets to the City, or when the BAB makes its recommendations.

Assistant City Manager Ben Rogers explained that fleet replacement cycles are part of the City’s budget process. These cycles include emergency vessels such as the Fire boat. He recalled that in the previous year, the City successfully secured two motors for Police vessels with grant funding. The City plans to seek grant funds for a Police vessel as well as additional motor replacements.

The Board members raised additional concerns, including boating access to businesses and the recently implemented slow speed zone. Mr. Bekoff addressed illegal discharge, pointing out that while the addition of the pump-out boat and providing public information on available City facilities have been helpful, most of the City's marinas do not make pump-out facilities available to the boating public. He recommended providing more pump-out access to boaters, including facilities that can service larger boats. There was additional discussion of the possibility of state and county partnerships that would allow the City to be more proactive on this issue.

III. Approval of Minutes – February 5, 2026

Motion made by Dr. Ribotsky, seconded by Vice Chair Morley, to accept the minutes. 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)

Intergovernmental Affairs Manager Daphnee Sainvil explained that she oversees the City's local, state, and federal priorities. The City is currently going through the federal earmark process; on the state level, Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue has requested \$643,000 toward the cost of a new Fire boat. The Florida House of Representatives has allocated roughly half of this amount in its proposed budget. The Florida Senate has not yet proposed any funding for this item. Both chambers must come together through the budget process to arrive at a single budget. At present the chambers are still at a stalemate.

Ms. Sainvil continued that the City is still working with its contract lobbyist to encourage the Senate to provide the remaining half of the requested funds. They are also seeking federal grant opportunities toward the purchase of equipment. It is also possible that if the House and Senate allocate the funds, the Governor may use his line-item veto to remove the allocation.

Local fundraising was proposed as a possible option if the full amount needed is not allocated by the state. Chair Witten recalled that the Coastal Conservation Association has provided funds toward City marine needs in the past. He emphasized the importance of Board communication with the Commission on this and other key issues. The intrinsic value of public safety assets to the marine community was discussed, along with the suggestion that companies within the marine industry may be able to contribute toward public safety assets.

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

- 3 accidents
- 1 fuel spill

- 1 boat burglary

Sergeant O'Neal strongly emphasized that when boat burglaries occur, it is incumbent upon owners to allow the Police to process the scene in order to gather evidence, including collection of fingerprints. He explained that most individuals who report burglaries do not want their boats to be processed. He also recommended the use of cameras on boats.

Sergeant O'Neal also addressed ongoing anchorage enforcement, stating that several boats have been charged with exceeding limited anchorage. Some of these cases have gone to court. Some of the boats involved have been designated at-risk for dereliction and have received citations. He noted that owners are provided with ample warning before they are cited.

Chair Witten requested information about preparations for spring break season. Sergeant O'Neal replied that during the past week there has been a significant increase in calls for service.

Dr. Ribotsky asked if the Police may board vessels to check for appropriate disposal of black water if the vessel has overstayed its anchorage. Sergeant O'Neal replied that while Police may not do this, the Coast Guard can board vessels to check them, and he has a secure working relationship with that agency. He explained that it is difficult to police vehicles to prevent illegal disposal of waste. Vessels that cannot prove they are pumped out or that they take waste to an appropriate facility may be cited.

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

- A property was cited on February 9, 2026 for encroachment of a tree into the waterway and granted a 30-day deadline for compliance; the property is not yet compliant and will go before the Special Magistrate if compliance has not occurred by March 17
- A complaint was received regarding a boat too wide for the waterway; a waterway inspection was conducted on December 3, 2025 and the boat was determined to extend roughly 2.5 ft. beyond the 30% limitation; the property was cited and the boat has been removed

The Board members further discussed encroachment of boats into navigable channels and possible means to address this issue, as well as existence of multiple docked vessels which may constitute a marina in a residential area. Mr. Aguilera advised that Code Compliance is aware of these issues and monitors the property to look for evidence of a marina. Thus far they have been unable to observe prohibited activity on the site. Sergeant O'Neal requested additional information on the issue, noting that it may be possible for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) to address it.

**VII. Behind the Scenes of Our Boating Community: *Discussion with Kelly Esser*
Yacht Captain & Maritime Professional.**

Chair Witten explained that this is a new Agenda Item, which he hopes to make a regular Item going forward. The intent is to allow captains and other marine professionals and stakeholders to keep the Board abreast of issues on the water.

Captain Les Annan, yacht captain and Fort Lauderdale resident explained that yachts and superyachts bring their own entire economy to the City. The cost of dockage is over \$250,000 per year. He emphasized that Fort Lauderdale does not have a great deal of large yacht dockage, particularly as yachts become bigger. It can also be difficult for yachts to travel on the City's waterways.

Captain Annan continued that the yacht he pilots has an 11-member crew, all of whom live in Fort Lauderdale. When the boat is serviced in the City, the money spent stays in Fort Lauderdale. The impact of yachts on the environment is also quite low.

Captain Annan discussed dockage for yachts and superyachts in and near the City, noting the need for more space for boats of this size. He added that the role of technology in the marine economy has increased significantly over the past several years. The importance of these vessels to the economy was also emphasized, as was the role of large yachts in assisting with aid to other communities in the aftermath of hurricanes.

Chair Witten commented that the Board must ensure that the City Commissioners are aware of the importance of these vessels to the local marine economy.

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

Mr. Aguilera advised that tonight will be his final meeting as Fort Lauderdale's Chief Waterways Officer, and thanked the Board members for their support of the initiatives he has brought forward over the past several months.

**IX. Old / New Business
Scuttlebutt, Loose Ends, Progress on Initiatives**

Dr. Ribotsky suggested that the Board identify topics each month that they would like to discuss with the City Commission. Mr. Cuba explained that when major issues have arisen in previous years, the Board has submitted communications to the City Commission to provide input. The communications are typically discussed by Commissioners at Conference Agenda meetings. He strongly encouraged Board members to attend these meetings in case the Commissioners need additional information on the communications. A motion from the Board is required in order to send

a communication to the Commission. Chair Witten also urged the members to reach out directly to their appointing City Commissioners.

Mr. Bekoff addressed waivers, noting that while the Board may recommend denial of a waiver application, the applicant may appeal that recommendation directly to the Commission. He requested clarification of the Board's track record with regard to the success of their recommendations. Mr. Cuba estimated that over the past 20 years, very few appeals were successful after the Board recommended denial. He recalled only a single instance when this has happened.

Vice Chair Morley emphasized that the Commission is typically very receptive of the Board's recommendations and expertise regarding the items they address. Chair Witten advised that this is another reason the Board should take a proactive stance on marine issues.

Mr. Franks advised that he has provided copies of the information he has gathered on the New River for distribution to the Board members. He recommended that a representative of Florida Power and Light (FPL) be invited to attend a Board meeting to explain the importance of access to the New River, as this will help accurately define the width of the navigational channel.

X. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 8:28 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.]