



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

DRAFT
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, MAY 7, 2026 – 6:00 P.M.

Cumulative Attendance
May 2026-April 2027

Steve Witten, Chair	P	1	0
Ted Morley, Vice Chair	P	1	0
Norm Bekoff	A	0	1
Tyler Brunelle	P	1	0
Jeffrey Coburn	P	1	0
Courtney Day	P	1	0
Jason Dunbar	P	1	0
Katherine Fernandez	P	1	0
Robert Franks	P	1	0
John Lynch	P	1	0
Sam Mitchell	P	1	0
Dr. Bret Ribotsky	P	1	0
Bob Swindell	A	0	1
LaRhonda Ware	P	1	0

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
Edward Eason, Code Compliance Officer
Sergeant Travis O'Neal, Marine Unit
Eric Knowles, Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue Battalion Chief
Captain Chad Robertson, Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue
Scott Stone, Assistant City Attorney
Rickelle Williams, City 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 6:12 p.m.

~~II. Statement of Quorum~~

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

~~The following item was taken out of order on the Agenda.~~

~~VI. “**Women on the Water**”: A “fireside” chat with four women whose professional lives are based around Fort Lauderdale's Waterways.~~

- ~~• Captain Monica Aivazian: Captain of the Jungle Queen Riverboat~~
- ~~• Kitty McGowan: President & CEO, International Superyacht Alliance~~
- ~~• Betty Bauman, Founder: “Ladies, Let's Go Fishing!”~~
- ~~• Special guest: Betty Shelley — beloved, 96-year-old “pillar / rockstar of our community”~~

~~Chair Witten emphasized the importance of ensuring an understanding of the opportunities available to women interested in careers on the water. He introduced Captain Monica Aivazian, current Captain of the *Jungle Queen* riverboat; Betty Bauman, founder of “Ladies, Let's Go Fishing!”; Kitty McGowan, president/Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the International Superyacht Alliance and former MAB member; real estate and land use attorney Stephanie Toothaker; and Fort Lauderdale City Manager Rickelle Williams.~~

~~Captain Aivazian advised that she was in college when the opportunity arose to work on the waterway. She spent time learning how to serve as Captain before taking on that role. She emphasized her lifelong connection to the waterway and to Fort Lauderdale, noting that she is a member of the Fort Lauderdale Yacht Club currently resides on the water.~~

~~Ms. McGowan stated that she is also a longtime resident of Fort Lauderdale and became active in the marine industry in the 1980s, including involvement in the Marine Industries Association of South Florida (MIASF) as well as in U.S. and international superyacht organizations. She noted while the number of women currently involved in marine industries is relatively small, this is changing over time.~~

~~Ms. Bauman stated that she began the “Ladies, Let's Go Fishing!” initiative as a program allowing women the opportunity to network with one another and learn about fishing, including on- and offshore, fly-, surf-, and freshwater fishing. The program has been in existence for 30 years and has had 10,000 graduates, expanding throughout Florida and the United States, with international trips as well.~~

~~Chair Witten asked how marine infrastructure, including bridges, seawalls, dredging, and more, has affected women in the industry. Land use and zoning attorney Stephanie~~

Toothaker advised that one of her clients is Informa Markets, which produces the annual Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show. As boats continue to grow in size, there have been more instances in the City in which they may no longer safely pass beneath bridges. It can also be difficult to safely dock large boats at private homes. She spoke in favor of maintaining and helping the City's boating community, acknowledging the challenges the Board often sees in terms of dock permit and waiver applications.

It was noted that in addition to dockage in the City, many owners bring their boats to Fort Lauderdale for repairs and service. Access to these businesses can be challenging due to the opening and closing of the City's train trestle, for example, as well as other obstacles and challenges in moving up and down the river, where most marine jobs are located.

It was asked if there have been significant changes in commercial boating activity over recent years. Captain Aivazian acknowledged that it can be difficult to maneuver the *Jungle Queen* on the river with many other vessels in a range of sizes. Boat traffic, particularly charter boats, has increased substantially, as have personal watercraft. She added that most of this increased traffic is on the New River rather than the Intracoastal Waterway. Other issues include the need for dredging in certain areas, illegal charters, and distracted or impaired boating. The importance of safety education for boaters was emphasized.

Chair Witten addressed environmental concerns, including sea level rise as well as storm surges and events, and requested more information on how this can affect work on waterways. Ms. Toothaker replied that the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) now requires many properties to be raised significantly when constructed, which is a challenge for both that homeowner and their neighbors who may not have raised properties. The City is responsible for enforcing this federal requirement, which applies to commercial as well as residential properties.

It was asked what environmental shifts Captain Aivazian has personally observed, including areas such as water quality, wildlife, flooding, and storm impacts. Captain Aivazian emphasized the effect of significantly increased boat traffic on water quality, including sewage contamination, which can impact charter business. Some concerns occur at a global level, which limits the City's ability to control them.

A question was asked regarding what the public may misunderstand with respect to maintaining waterways. Captain Aivazian replied that the marine industry is not glamorous, and it can sometimes be difficult for marine businesses to meet environmental regulations and requirements.

It was noted that another factor is the commercialization of boatyards, many of which have been purchased by large corporations which have a negative effect on smaller local businesses. It can also be difficult for yacht crews to identify locations they can afford to rent in Fort Lauderdale while boats are being serviced.

~~Chair Witten asked what is needed going forward to improve the City's waterways and make them more family friendly for boaters. Ms. Toothaker strongly emphasized the need to protect the City's marine industry, suggesting that one way to address this is through education of how critical this industry is to Fort Lauderdale. She added that it is vitally important to maintain these businesses on the water and to provide reliable waterway access to them.~~

~~Safety issues on the waterway were also addressed. Captain Aivazian again emphasized that education is a key means to address safety, particularly with recent increases in watercraft rentals. Many newer boaters may not be familiar with all the requirements of piloting their boats, and some longtime captains may need to re-familiarize themselves with this information.~~

~~Chair Witten asked what steps can be taken to head off waterway issues in the future. Ms. McGowan replied that there have been drastic changes to the City over the past 20 to 30 years, and cautioned that the proliferation of new development and infrastructure during that time has significantly affected water quality. She also noted significant development along the New River. New technologies, such as improved water treatment and infrastructure such as living seawalls, are emerging as ways to improve water quality.~~

~~Chair Witten asked what advice the experts would give to interns or young people with an interest in marine careers. It was suggested that the industry engage with local schools to provide opportunities for marine and/or environmental community service. Chair Witten also noted that members of the industry may be able to serve as mentors for young people interested in careers on the waterways. There are also programs which provide children who may not live in waterway adjacent communities with experiences on the water.~~

~~It was noted that South Broward High School, as well as local middle schools, has worked to establish marine magnet programs. The importance of introducing young people to marine experiences, and ensuring that both adults and young people understand that oceans and waterways must not be taken for granted, was also emphasized.~~

~~An overview was requested of what can be done to strengthen marine aspects of the City, including enforcement assistance and financial investment. Ms. Williams advised that she recently participated in budget development meetings with the City's Police and Fire Rescue Departments, and has recommended a replacement plan for all of the City's vessels. The Fire Department hopes to replace a boat at an estimated cost of \$1.4 million, while the Police Department's Marine Unit will seek to replace one of its eight vessels every year, as some of these are old and/or not in optimal condition. A replacement plan will help both Departments routinely plan for the future instead of waiting to make replacements or repairs when the need arises.~~

~~Dr. Ribotsky asserted that existence of a replacement plan does not constitute adequate address of the additional resources needed by the City's emergency response teams. Ms. Williams replied that she has looked favorably upon requested marine resources. Chair Witten suggested that the Board can also play a role in advocating for those Departments' needs, as can state elected officials who work to secure funding for City needs.~~

III. ~~Approval of Minutes – April 2, 2026~~

~~Mr. Mitchell requested information on the approval process for meeting minutes. Mr. Cuba explained that draft minutes of previous meetings are sent to the Board members in advance of scheduled meetings; once the Board has approved the minutes, they are no longer considered a draft document, and are posted on the City's website as approved minutes.~~

~~**Motion** made by Dr. Ribotsky, seconded by Vice Chair Morley, to accept them as written. In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed 12-0.~~

IV. ~~Marine Advisory Board Annual Elections – Motion to reschedule to June 4, 2026~~

~~Mr. Cuba explained that Chair Witten's term of service on the Board ends in June 2026; postponing the elections by one month would allow him to complete his term in the role of Chair. He emphasized that it is the Board's choice of whether or not to hold elections today.~~

~~**Motion** made by Mr. Lynch, seconded by Mr. Franks, to reschedule to June. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.~~

V. ~~Waterway Crime & Boating Safety Reports~~

~~Sgt. Travis O'Neal (FLPD) / Capt. Chad Robertson (Fire Rescue) / Edward Eason (Code)~~

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

- ~~• April 22: a property on Whale Harbor Lane was cited for a vessel and a dock which extended beyond the 33% waterway width limitation as measured from the property line; fenders were removed from the structure, which brought the property into compliance~~
- ~~• April 16: waterway inspection on SW 12 Avenue resulted in the citation of a property for eight boats stored in its back yard, one of which encroached into the required 5 ft. setback and an adjacent property; the property owner has until May 20, 2026 to comply~~

~~Chief Eric Knowles of Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue reported the following activity from April 2026:~~

- ~~• The Fort Lauderdale Air Show is scheduled for the weekend of May 8-10, 2026~~
- ~~• Two Fire Stations responded to a boat fire in Boca Raton~~
- ~~• A Fire boat responded to a drowning emergency near Sunrise Boulevard and A1A~~
- ~~• Fire Boat 49 responded to multiple sick individuals on a vessel~~
- ~~• Fire Boat 49 responded to a reported flare offshore~~

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

- ~~• Stolen dinghy from the back of a vessel at a marina~~
- ~~• Emergency call related to a malfunctioning dive boat which could not return divers to the boat; the Marine Unit assisted with the rescue~~
- ~~• Jet ski crash on the Intracoastal Waterway~~
- ~~• Rods stolen from a sport fishing vehicle; victim did not wish to prosecute~~

~~Chair Witten reported that there are ongoing pressures to continue seeking a speed change on a portion of the Intracoastal Waterway from Oakland Park Boulevard/Commercial Boulevard to the Sunrise Boulevard/Middle River area. He recalled that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) was able to implement a speed change on another portion of the Intracoastal Waterway following a fatal accident. This type of change requires data collection, including a sufficient number of tickets issued in the area to justify a speed change. FWC is now looking into the additional proposed speed change.~~

~~Sgt. O'Neal clarified that the issue was not the number of tickets written in a particular zone, but the tracking of those tickets through records logs. He had personally compiled a list of tickets issued in the Sunrise Boulevard to Oakland Park Boulevard; however, north of Oakland Park Boulevard, there is no additional danger.~~

~~Sgt. O'Neal added that a great many citations have been written in the Las Olas Boulevard area, and there is a blind curve at that location. He felt this area was a likely candidate for a speed change.~~

~~Chair Witten explained that he was asked to prepare language for Board consideration which could significantly affect the impact of personal watercraft, possibly by banning the rental of jet skis or similar equipment by individuals who have had no opportunity to train in the use of this equipment. His proposed language recommends a ban on jet ski rentals on the City's canals and narrow waterways. The ban would not affect operation of these devices on the ocean. He distributed a memo with the proposed language to the Board members.~~

~~Assistant City Attorney Scott Stone stated that companies which rent watercraft for personal use must be certified through FWC and carry insurance. An individual without~~

~~a boating license must take a brief online course to secure a temporary license. Most individuals take this course the same day they rent personal watercraft. They must also be physically shown how to ride the watercraft. It was noted that the issue with these rentals appears to be a lack of education and experience by users. An individual renting a personal watercraft must be 18 years old, and the individual operating the craft must be at least 14.~~

~~Sergeant O'Neal clarified that rental companies operating in Fort Lauderdale are tracked, inspected, and can be cited if necessary by the Marine Unit. Most of these companies regularly pass inspection and follow the law; however, it was noted that the law in this area is not strict.~~

~~Attorney Stone explained that the state of Florida oversees the regulation of personal watercraft and preempts local governments from taking certain actions. Local governments cannot enact or enforce any ordinance or local regulation which discriminates against personal watercraft. Property rights issues must also be considered.~~

~~It was asked if the liability of rental companies could be restricted so the companies are more responsible if anything happens to renters of personal watercraft. Attorney Stone advised that there are already rigorous liability requirements within Florida Statutes.~~

~~It was suggested that the areas in which rented personal watercraft may be used could be further restricted. Attorney Stone reiterated that state preemptions prevent the local regulation of vessels on the Intracoastal Waterway. In addition, he cautioned that attempting to single out personal watercraft but not other types of vessels would be problematic.~~

~~The Board discussed the role of speed in personal watercraft accidents, including the possible option of creating more slow zones on the waterway. This would apply to all vessels, not only to personal watercraft.~~

~~Chair Witten pointed out that unless the Marine Unit has a constant presence on the City's waterways for enforcement, there is no good way to regulate the speed of vessels; in addition, most recreational users of these devices are aware that the Marine Unit's presence is limited. He felt it was possible for the Board to encourage action, although enforcement would remain an issue.~~

~~Mr. Mitchell suggested that the age at which individuals are allowed to operate personal watercraft could be raised. The age limit is currently 14 years. It was clarified that this would require a change to state law.~~

~~Chair Witten concluded that the Board would not be sending his proposed language on to the City Commission at this time; however, the last line of his memo urged the City Commission to schedule a public hearing to assess the impact of personal watercraft.~~

~~He encouraged the Board members to send any additional proposed language to Mr. Cuba's office so it can be provided to the members for further discussion next month.~~

~~Mr. Cuba explained that a communication to the City Commission does not need to be in memo form; it can use a format such as bullet points, which he can prepare and bring back to the Board for discussion at a subsequent meeting.~~

~~Vice Chair Morley noted that a portion of the Middle River is one of only two remaining designated waterskiing areas in Fort Lauderdale; when previous efforts were made to implement slower speeds in these areas, there was significant resistance from entities representing recreational boaters. He emphasized that the City must find ways to enact, enforce, and educate without being considered punitive to recreational waterway users.~~

~~Chair Witten briefly reviewed activities since the April 2, 2026 meeting, noting the recent retirement of Assistant City Attorney Bob Duncel, who had previously worked with the Board. He recalled that the Living Seawall Assistance Program, which was presented to the Board at a previous meeting, was recently approved by the City Commission.~~

~~The Chair also addressed the lack of day dockage in the City's Downtown area. Mr. Cuba advised that there is currently a City project underway to provide floating dock space within walking distance of Downtown. It was suggested that signage could be posted to make residents aware that progress is being made.~~

~~At this time Chair Witten opened public comment.~~

~~Natalie Lance, private citizen, stated that she lives on the Intracoastal Waterway, and advised that waterway speeding is becoming more prevalent in this area. She expressed concern with safety issues, including the safety of manatees. She has reached out to private businesses as well as the District 1 City Commissioner to share these concerns.~~

~~Ms. Lance further clarified that while noise from speeding watercraft is one aspect of the issue, her primary concern was high speed in the No Wake Zone. She added that she was not certain whether speed zone signage was not clearly visible or was being ignored. Chair Witten advised that FWC is currently in the process of updating its waterway signage for greater clarity. He again expressed concern with the need for a greater Police presence on the City's waterways.~~

~~It was clarified that rental organizations provide renters of personal watercraft with information on the City's speed and wake zones along the Intracoastal Waterway. There was discussion of whether guides provided by rental companies can be ticketed or are otherwise liable if their instruction is not followed or reckless driving occurs. The Board concluded that enforcement and a Police presence on the water remain key issues.~~

~~Attorney Stone noted that Florida Statutes speak to the responsibility of rental entities as well as the obligations of renters themselves; most waivers signed by personal watercraft renters include disclaimer clauses that relieve the rental facility of responsibility if the driver acts in a reckless manner. Changing these waivers would require a change to state law.~~

~~With no other individuals wishing to speak at this time, Chair Witten closed public comment.~~

~~**VII. Dock Waiver – 1614 Brickell Drive / 1622 Brickell Drive, Inc. David Pain, President**~~

~~Jena Robbins, representing the Applicant, stated that the request is for a waiver of limitations for a boat lift on the New River. She provided photos of the site, pointing out that the Applicant has a 200 ft. concrete seawall and an existing 100 ft. x 8 ft. marginal dock. A 53 ft. vessel is currently docked at the site.~~

~~The proposed boat lift is approximately 18.5 ft. wide and 59 ft. long. It will extend 27 ft. 8 in. into the waterway from the wet face of the seawall, with the final 2 ft. 8 in. extending beyond the allowed limit. A survey shows that the property line extends into the water; the lift would extend 11 ft. from this demarcation.~~

~~At the subject location, the New River extends between 215 ft. and 235 ft. from wet face to wet face. The lift extends into 13% of the waterway's width. Marine structures are not permitted to extend more than 25 ft. or 25% into the width of the waterway, whichever is less when measured from the property line.~~

~~Ms. Robbins concluded that the proposed lift will not extend further into the waterway than the vessel currently docked at the site. The boat has been there for a number of years and has not presented a navigational hazard. The subject portion of the New River is highly trafficked and the Applicant wants a boat lift to reduce the likelihood of wake damage to his vessel.~~

~~Extraordinary circumstances include:~~

- ~~● Width of the waterway~~
- ~~● Enhancing the safety of the boat during severe weather events~~
- ~~● Minimal size of the requested extension, which is 2 ft. 8 in.~~
- ~~● Raising the boat from the water will allow sunlight to penetrate the area beneath it at various points throughout the day, encouraging the growth of sea grass~~

~~Ms. Robbins reviewed other waivers granted to nearby locations, adding that the project has received environmental approval from Broward County and state entities. The Applicant has also received letters of support, which are included in the Board members' backup materials.~~

~~Mr. Cuba confirmed that no letters of objection were received, and all properties within 300 ft. of the site were provided with notice of the request.~~

~~Mr. Day advised that he felt the term "extraordinary circumstance" was not appropriate to the Application. Ms. Robbins confirmed that extraordinary circumstances are necessary for an application of this nature. Chair Witten suggested that a more appropriate term may be "mitigating circumstances."~~

~~**Motion** made by Dr. Ribotsky that we accept the proposal presented.~~

~~At this time Chair Witten opened the public hearing. With no individuals wishing to speak at this time, the Chair closed the public hearing.~~

~~Mr. Lynch **seconded** the **motion**. In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed 12-0.~~

VIII. Dock Waiver – 234 Plaza Las Olas / Susan Rotman

Ms. Robbins, representing the Applicant, stated that the request is for a finger pier and boat lift at the subject property. She showed photos of the site and its surrounding area, noting that there is an existing 45 ft. structure that extends 18.5 ft. into the waterway. The center of the navigable channel is approximately 400 ft. from the property.

The Applicant proposes to replace the existing marginal dock within its current footprint and also proposes a 30 ft. x 8 ft. finger pier at the southern end of the property, with the boat lift at the end of this structure. Both the finger pier and the boat lift will extend a maximum of 40 ft. 10 in. from the property line.

Ms. Robbins showed a rendering of 30% of the waterway width, noting that there is a federal channel on this portion of the New River which is governed by the U.S. Coast Guard. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has indicated that they do not have any concerns with the plans.

Extraordinary circumstances for the Application include:

- Width of the waterway is 720 ft. at the subject location
- The boat lift will allow the Applicant's vessel to be maintained in good condition
- The boat lift will enhance safety during severe weather
- No impacts to public safety

Ms. Robbins concluded that numerous waivers have been approved in the vicinity of the project. Two neighbors of the subject property have provided letters of support.

It was clarified that the distance from the boat to the property line would be 5 ft. The property adjacent to the nearby bridge is a City park. There is a second park in the vicinity.

Mr. Cuba confirmed that no letters of objection were sent to the City.

At this time Chair Witten opened the public hearing. With no individuals wishing to speak at this time, the Chair closed the public hearing.

Motion made by Mr. Lynch, seconded by Vice Chair Morley, to approve.

Mr. Day reiterated his concern with the continued use of the phrase “extraordinary circumstances,” which he asserted do not apply in this and many other cases, despite the requirement to identify them.

It was noted that one reason for the extension request could be the downward slope to the waterway as well as existing riprap. This could be identified as an extraordinary circumstance.

In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed 12-0.

IX. — Old / New Business

— Scuttlebutt, Loose Ends, Progress on Initiatives

~~Dr. Ribotsky requested that a representative of the U.S. Coast Guard be invited to the next Board meeting. Chair Witten explained that he had invited a member of the Coast Guard to tonight's meeting, but they had been unable to attend.~~

~~Dr. Ribotsky suggested that a representative of the Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) be asked to attend an upcoming meeting to discuss concerns related to enforcement. Chair Witten noted that the Fort Lauderdale Marine Unit, BSO, and FWC all have some jurisdiction on local waterways, and confirmed that he would reach out to BSO.~~

~~Mr. Franks distributed a handout to the Board members addressing concerns with New River congestion, stating that options include a Waterway Assessment Management Survey by the Coast Guard. He pointed out that federal regulation of the New River ceases at Tarpon Bend and is ceded to the City, which means the Coast Guard can provide advice but is unlikely to perform a study.~~

~~Mr. Franks proposed that a working group be established, composed of representatives from the City's Marine Facilities Department, the City's Chief Waterways Officer, the City Attorney's Office, the Marine Industries Association of South Florida (MIASF), and other stakeholders, to discuss potential solutions to Fort Lauderdale's waterway issues.~~

~~It was clarified that any working group or subcommittee would be subject to the same Sunshine Law requirements as the MAB, including prohibition of communication between members outside meetings. There was discussion of adding the ongoing~~

~~discussion of the New River's waterways as a regularly occurring Agenda Item for Board discussion.~~

~~Chair Witten suggested that a meeting or meetings could be scheduled to begin an hour earlier than usual and the public invited to speak on this issue, including marine industry stakeholders and other community leaders. Mr. Cuba explained that it can be challenging to schedule access to the Board's meeting room at an earlier time of day, as it may or may not be available. He proposed that the New River issue could be placed as the first Agenda Item for discussion.~~

~~It was also recommended that the Board reach out to marine stakeholders to encourage them to attend. Mr. Cuba clarified that there is no Sunshine Law violation associated with Board members reaching out to stakeholders or providing them with Mr. Cuba's contact information.~~

~~The Board briefly discussed the federalization of the Miami River, which was previously a City-controlled waterway. The Coast Guard took over the waterway to manage it more effectively. It was noted that this is one consequence the City hopes to avoid by properly managing the New River on its own.~~

~~Chair Witten suggested that this topic be the Board's primary focus at their June meeting, with the discussion to be held early on the Agenda. It was noted that as different City Commissioners continue to attend Board meetings, they can also be provided with information about members' concerns for the New River.~~

~~X. Adjournment~~

~~There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 9:04 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.]~~