



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

**MEETING MINUTES  
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE  
MARINE ADVISORY BOARD  
FORT LAUDERDALE FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT  
528 NW 2<sup>ND</sup> STREET, STATION #2  
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA 33311  
3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM  
THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2025 – 6:00 P.M.**

**Cumulative Attendance  
May 2024-April 2025**

Steve Witten, Chair	P	10	1
James Harrison, Vice Chair	A	7	4
Norm Bekoff	P	5	2
Tyler Brunelle	P	10	1
Jason Dunbar	P	10	1
Barry Flanigan	P	10	1
Robert Franks	P	9	2
John Lynch	P	10	1
Noelle Norvell	P	8	3
Bob Swindell	P	4	0
Bill Walker	A	7	4
LaRhonda Ware	P	2	1
Robert Washington	P	9	2

As of this date, there are 13 appointed members to the Board, which means 7 would constitute a quorum.

**Staff**

- Andrew Cuba, Marine Facilities Manager
- Luis Villanueva, Marine Facilities Senior Administrator
- Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner Ben Sorensen
- Susan Grant, Acting City Manager
- Chris Cooper, Assistant City Manager
- D'Wayne Spence, Assistant City Attorney
- Sergeant Travis O'Neal, Marine Unit
- Edward Eason, Code Compliance Officer
- Fire Chief Stephen Gollan
- Deputy Chief Garret Pingol, Fire Rescue Marine Team
- Captain Chad Richardson, Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue Marine Unit
- Battalion Chief Eric Knowles, Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue Marine Unit

**Communications to City Commission**

None.

I. Call to Order / Roll Call

Chair Witten called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

**II. Statement of Quorum**

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

**III. Approval of Minutes – March 6, 2025**

The minutes were approved by consensus in a unanimous voice vote.

**IV. Waterway Crime and Boating Safety Report**

• **Sgt. Travis O’Neal – Marine Unit**

Sergeant Travis O’Neal of the Marine Unit provided an overview of incidents that occurred in the month of March 2025. It was noted there were no burglaries from vessels during that time.

• **Captain Chad Richardson – FL Fire Rescue Marine Unit**

Captain Chad Richardson of the Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue Marine Unit reported the following activity from March 2025:

- 16 calls involving Fire Boats
- Recovery of dive gear, although no missing divers were reported
- Fire Boats, as well as the Broward Sheriff’s Office (BSO) and the U.S. Coast Guard, responded to a missing diver from a commercial vessel; as of two days later, the diver has not been found
- Injured individual in a vessel on the Intracoastal Waterway

Captain Richardson introduced Battalion Chief Eric Knowles, who oversees the Fire Rescue Marine Unit. Chief Knowles reviewed statistics including average dive call duration, which is one hour, 24 minutes, and 12 seconds for Engine 49, Ladder 49, and Rescue 49. This takes those units out of service in their zone during that time period. He emphasized that the Marine Team performs rescue operations, including one hour of search time. The time necessary for training also poses a challenge.

It was asked how many divers may be on a given boat. Chief Knowles explained that for a dive, a minimum of five people must be on the boat, three of which are divers. Adaptive response determines whether the unit will respond by land, by water, or both. The fire boat has a delayed response or inability to respond for approximately six to 12 hours of the day.

Chair Witten recalled that the Marine Advisory Board has advocated for the addition of another Fire boat, which would significantly increase the number of personnel on the water. It was noted that a member of the Fort Lauderdale community has offered to donate a portion of the funding for a Fire boat, and the City is working to identify gap funding for this potential purchase. The City's 42 ft. Fire boat is currently scheduled for replacement in 2027.

It was further clarified that although there is not sufficient personnel to keep the Fire boat staffed at all hours, the Police Department's Marine Unit follows a set schedule and maintains an Officer presence on the water. Fire Rescue has looked into actions it can take to provide higher levels of service on the water; however, funding challenges remain.

Mr. Bekoff asked how a commercial operator could monitor operational communications channels in order to avoid approaching an active scene on the water. Fire Chief Stephen Gollan clarified that this would more accurately be a question for the Police Department, and that channel 16 is consistently used, although multiple radios may be monitored at one time. It was also clarified that the Coast Guard is adamant that local law enforcement does not have permission to shut down the Intracoastal Waterway, aside from blocking portions for very short times during events such as fireworks.

Dr. Bret Robotsky, member of the public, asked when the Coast Guard is called in to assist local authorities. It was explained that this process involves a higher level of bureaucracy, as the Coast Guard's involvement must be approved through Miami.

- **Edward Eason – Code Compliance Officer**

Code Compliance Officer Edward Eason showed a PowerPoint presentation on two active Code cases. He added that Code Compliance is also assisting the City's Building Department in monitoring properties that are doing work on the water.

Chair Witten requested clarification of why the dumping of landscaping clippings into the water is not permitted. Officer Eason explained that Code Compliance's management team is working to clarify this issue, as it is a gray area.

Mr. Lynch asked for additional information on the type of work that can be done on the water. Officer Eason advised that minor work posing no danger to the waterway is typically left to the discretion of Code Compliance, who may educate the property owner on what is or is not permitted. They may also monitor a property to ensure compliance. He characterized minor repairs as a gray area as well.

Mr. Bekoff requested clarification of the term "marina-like activities" as seen on a citation. Officer Eason replied that this could refer to the operation of some type of business behind a property without a business tax receipt.

Chair Witten reported that three waivers approved at the March 2025 Board meeting will go before the City Commission at their April 15, 2025 meeting. He planned to be present at that meeting.

Chair Witten continued that the Tortuga Music Festival is scheduled for the weekend of April 4-6, 2025. Fleet Week will be April 22-30, with numerous public events throughout the County. The Air Show will be held on May 3-4.

The next MAB meeting is scheduled for May 1, 2025 and will include an introduction of the incoming City Manager and her team.

#### **V. Discussion – City Code 8-35 – Proposed Ordinance – MAB Notice Requirements**

Assistant City Manager Chris Cooper explained that the City Commission has requested an Ordinance addressing notice requirements for marine issues. The draft legislation provides requirements for mailed notices and agenda postings. When an item such as a waiver request comes before the MAB, notice will be mailed to all property owners within a 300 ft. radius of the subject property. The Ordinance would also provide for agenda publication to the general public within 10 days prior to the meeting date.

Mr. Cooper advised that the intent of the proposed Ordinance was to provide certainty to the Board, the City Commission, and the public that appropriate notice must be given to all parties that may be affected by the Board's decision. He further clarified that email notice is not an option; mailed notice is required.

Mr. Swindell asked if signs are physically posted on the subject property in addition to mailed notice. Mr. Cooper replied that the City has not considered a signage requirement at this time. The intent of the Ordinance is to establish a deadline by which notice must be provided.

Mr. Cuba stated that the MAB's agenda is provided to all the City's homeowners and neighborhood associations. The agenda is also posted at the 101 building.

**Motion** made by Mr. Franks, seconded by Mr. Bekoff, recommending approval of the Ordinance change. In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed unanimously (11-0).

#### **VI. Discussion – City Code 8-91 – ULDR 47-19.3 (c.) & (d.)**

- **Clarifying method used to measure width of a waterway when considering a Waiver or a Permit**

This Item was deferred to the May 2025 Board meeting.

#### **VII. Old / New Business**

Mr. Swindell requested an update on the Cooley's Landing marina. Mr. Cuba replied that pump-out stations are currently under construction, and renovations should be complete within two and a half to three months. It is hoped that by 2027, there will be a construction project at the marina to replace existing fixed docks. The project is currently delayed due to the anticipated costs; its layout is being reviewed in an effort to accommodate the budget.

Dr. Bret Robotsky, member of the public, stated that the Las Olas Marina does not have any ladders that could be used if an individual fell into the water there. He noted that this is a requirement at waterfront locations in other cities. He has spoken to the management of the Las Olas Marina, who indicated that they are not interested in providing ladders.

Dr. Robotsky suggested that the MAB consider advocating for the provision of ladders at the marina, as they would be inexpensive but potentially lifesaving additions.

Chair Witten asked if ladders are a Code requirement in Fort Lauderdale. Norbert McLaughlin, member of the public and former MAB member, recalled a previous Code requirement that ladders and life rings or cushions must be provided at fixed docks. Mr. Cuba stated that he would look into this further and bring information back to the Board.

- **Update from Captain Bob Franks on mapping the New River / GIS (Geographical Information Systems) study**

Board member Bob Franks recalled that the previous year, the City paid for a study to determine the location of the New River's channel and its depths. He gave a presentation on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping of the waterway, including the natural navigation channel as determined by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The channel is represented as having a minimum width of 100 ft., although it may be wider in some areas.

Mr. Franks also noted the designation of property lines on the mapped waterway, as well as the lengths to which a dock or vessel may extend into the waterway under current Code.

Mr. Cuba advised that historically, when property lines are located landward of the wet face of the seawall, the wet face is used as the starting point for the measurement of 30% of the waterway width. If the property line is waterward, the City requires a waiver for construction that extends beyond 25 ft. from the wet face of the seawall. He concluded that he would send copies of the draft map to the Board members.

Chair Witten noted that Assistant City Attorney D'Wayne Spence was present at tonight's meeting because the Board had requested that he join Assistant City Attorney Bob Dunkel in a discussion of measurement of waterway width. He also cautioned that it is unlikely there will be a "one size fits all" solution to waiver issues.

Mr. Franks stated that the Coast Guard determines the channel of the Intracoastal Waterway as far as Tarpon Bend. Past that location, the waterway is under the City's jurisdiction. He emphasized the need for the City to address waterway issues.

Chair Witten introduced Susan Bailey, representing Residents 4 Resilience. Ms. Bailey offered to make a presentation to the Board on the organization's ongoing projects at a future meeting.

### **VIII. Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:24 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.]