



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, JUNE 5, 2025 – 6:00 P.M.**

**Cumulative Attendance
May 2025-April 2026**

Steve Witten, Chair	P	2	0
Robert Washington, Vice Chair	P	2	0
Norm Bekoff	P	1	1
Tyler Brunelle	P	2	0
Jeffrey Coburn	P	2	0
Jason Dunbar	P	2	0
Barry Flanigan	A	1	1
Robert Franks	A	1	1
John Lynch	A	1	1
Dr. Bret Ribotsky	P	1	0
Bob Swindell	A	0	2
LaRhonda Ware	P	2	0

As of this date, there are 12 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
Assistant City Manager Ben Rogers
Marco Aguilera, Chief Waterways Officer
Sergeant Travis O’Neal, Marine Unit
Fire Chief Eric Knowles
Edward Eason, Code Compliance Officer
Dr. Nancy Gassman, Assistant Director of Public Works (Sustainability)
Raymond Nazaire, Project Engineer
Jill Prizlee, Chief Engineer

Communications to City Commission

None.

I. Call to Order / Roll Call

Chair Witten called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He noted that Agenda Item XIII, a dock waiver Application, has been deferred to a later date.

II. Statement of Quorum

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

III. Introduction of New Member – Dr. Bret Ribotsky

New Board member Dr. Bret Ribotsky introduced himself at this time.

Chair Witten also noted that a meeting was held in Fort Lauderdale's Harbor Beach neighborhood which discussed the Florida Legislature's House Bill (HB) 481. He requested that Chief Waterways Officer Marco Aguilera address this issue during his presentation later on the Agenda.

IV. Approval of Minutes – May 1, 2025

Motion made by Mr. Brunelle, seconded by Mr. Dunbar, to approve. In a show of hands, the **motion** passed unanimously.

V. Waterway Crime and Boating Safety Report

- **Sgt. Travis O'Neal (FLPD) / Chief Eric Knowles (Fire) / Edward Eason (Code)**

Sergeant Travis O'Neal of the Marine Unit reported that the Marine Unit received a call regarding a sinking vessel during the Air Show, as there were rough seas during that event. He showed the Board a video from that response, noting that the Marine Unit vessel involved with the rescue has over 5000 miles on its engines and continues to operate daily in a patrol capacity.

Sergeant O'Neal also noted the following activities since the May 2025 meeting:

- An individual was charged with dumping waste into a waterway when a video of the activity was provided to the Marine Unit
- Investigation into an at-risk vessel which resulted in an arrest related to a warrant
- A stolen boat was recovered from the New River

Fire Chief Eric Knowles addressed Fire Department activity on the water during the month of May, stating that incidents can occur when boat owners do not know how to properly repair, maintain, or fuel their vessels. Dr. Ribotsky suggested that additional training may be necessary for fuel dock staff, and Mr. Bekoff emphasized the importance of boaters knowing their own vessels.

Chief Knowles also discussed two calls from the previous month, including a boat fire on Memorial Day Weekend to which Fire Boats 249 and 49 responded. 11 individuals were transported from the boat. Another incident occurred when a fishing boat caught fire and washed ashore, requiring assistance by Fire Boat 6.

Chief Knowles provided a map to the Board members showing the locations of calls for Fire Boats, which can be a challenge for responders. Four personnel are required per vessel for firefighting and five are required for dive/rescue operations.

A question was asked regarding when the U.S. Coast Guard is called to water emergencies. Chief Knowles replied that a Coast Guard response involves multiple layers of bureaucratic approval, which slows its response time. They are often called out to emergencies, although the incident may have been addressed by the time they arrive.

VI. Visit by State Representative Chip LaMarca and City Commissioner Ben Sorensen

Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner Ben Sorensen provided an update on a number of issues addressed since his last visit to the Marine Advisory Board (MAB). He noted that a ban on fertilizer pollution of the waterways is underway and is expected to help control algae bloom. The City is also making progress with the installation of more oysters on its waterways and is working with Broward County on required approvals.

Commissioner Sorensen continued that 50 mangroves have been planted at George English Park. He has also met with living seawall construction companies and is working with the City Attorney's Office to draft a new Ordinance that would incentivize the installation of these structures. Living seawalls promote marine life that adheres to the walls and provides for a more robust ecological system. He asserted that he is in favor of installing living seawalls on City-owned properties.

Commissioner Sorensen advised that Fort Lauderdale has partnered with Miami Waterkeepers to test water quality at 11 locations throughout the City. He hopes to double this number of locations and increase source tracing of bacteria. Signage can also be improved when high bacterial counts are present.

Commissioner Sorensen stated that commercial vessel operations from City-owned docks are prohibited, and the City is working to increase enforcement of this prohibition. He added that Chief Waterways Officer Marco Aguilera is seeking a state grant for a pump-out vessel.

Mr. Bekoff suggested that the City consider implementing a fee structure for the use of City-owned docks by commercial vessels. It was clarified that many of the City's docks, including the floating docks Downtown, were purchased through a grant for recreational use only, which prevents their use for commercial operations. Commercial vessels may

currently pick up and drop off passengers in Smoker Park, but no other locations have been identified at this time.

Commissioner Sorensen addressed House Bill (HB) 481, which was recently passed by the Florida Legislature and signed into law by the Governor. This State Statute would allow municipalities to enforce anchorage limits of no more than 30 consecutive days, with additional factors of consideration. He characterized this legislation as a game-changer for residents near Lake Sylvia and similar locations.

The City is required to create a City Ordinance which is consistent with the new State Statute. This Ordinance is expected to come before the City Commission within the next two to three months.

Commissioner Sorensen continued that changes to the 17th Street Bridge were recently proposed with the support of the U.S. Coast Guard, the Marine Industries Association of South Florida (MIASF), and other leaders. Openings of this bridge will be reduced during rush hours.

Commissioner Sorensen stated that the City's failing seawall near the wharf on Riverwalk is in need of replacement. Pedestrian access to the area will be improved as well. He concluded that the City is seeking a Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) grant of \$100,000 to replace the heavily used motor of its Police Department vessel. The City also hopes to secure grant funding for two projects associated with the Aquatic Center.

Assistant City Manager Ben Rogers reported that following the May 2025 meeting, an Excel spreadsheet was developed to track all waterway initiatives on which the City is currently working. He encouraged the Board members to email him if they have identified any additional issues they feel may need his attention.

VII. Presentation – The Where and When of Sea Level Rise / Dr. Nancy Gassman

Dr. Nancy Gassman, Assistant Director of Public Works (Sustainability), gave a PowerPoint presentation on how marine interests are affected by sea level rise. These include seawalls, bridges, vulnerable areas, and the work the City is doing.

Dr. Gassman stated that approximately eight inches of sea level rise has occurred over the past 100 years; however, over the last 15 years, there has been a significant acceleration in sea level rise as observed at Virginia Key. In 2019, the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact projected that, using the year 2000 as a baseline, the City can expect between an additional 10 in. and 17 in. by the end of 2040. By 2070, this is expected to increase to between 21 in. and 40 in., with a possible projection of an increase that may be over 5 ft.

Dr. Gassman clarified that this projection is for relative sea level rise, which means there is a baseline measurement. A seawall installed in 2020 would be reaching the end of its 50-year useful life by the year 2070. The City is following Broward County guidance which requires all new seawalls to be built to a minimum elevation of 5 ft., which should protect against future sea level rise for a significant time moving forward; however, the groundwater table is also rising, which can create additional complications.

Both the Broward County and Fort Lauderdale Ordinances establish a maximum and minimum height for new seawalls. The minimum elevation is intended to protect a property from the ocean, while the maximum elevation is intended to protect the property from rain events.

Another critical issue for owners of waterfront properties and users of the City's waterways is bridges. Fort Lauderdale has 53 fixed bridges, but does not have the right-of-way to accommodate significant elevation of those bridges to increase the availability of space beneath. This can make it difficult for boaters to travel beneath the City's bridges during high tides. Sea level rise further exacerbates this challenge by increasing lateral stressors on bridges if the tide reaches the bridge's foundation in the roadway. 33 of these bridges are single-access bridges, which means if the bridge fails, homes on the other side of that bridge would be cut off from access.

Dr. Gassman also addressed king tides, which are higher tides that occur in the fall of the year due to the alignment of the sun and moon. Over the last seven to eight years, Fort Lauderdale has experienced 180 high tides that exceeded the threshold for flooding in some lower-lying areas. High tides are one of the first local indicators of sea level rise.

From January 2019 through December 2024, more extreme tides have continued to occur in the fall, with each year experiencing tides that are higher than 2 ft. at peak. The average high tide in 2025 is 0.41 ft. North American Vertical Datum (NAVD), which means tides over 2 ft. would be over 1.5 ft. more than that average.

Dr. Gassman continued that by the mid-2030s, the moon's orbit is expected to wobble outside the same plane as the earth and sun. When this happens, the earth's northern hemisphere is likely to experience even higher tides than predicted during that decade.

Dr. Gassman noted that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has predicted an intermediate high at key locations in the City by the year 2040 due to the confluence of sea level rise with an extreme high tide. These locations include the City's core economic centers, including the Marina Mile, and can be expected to experience high tide flooding at some point during the year.

The City has made significant efforts to address many impacts of climate change, including extreme heat, extreme rain, tides, storm surge, and more. One concern is access to residents' properties, which is affected by flooding on roadways. Steps to

combat flooding include the installation of more tidal valves than in any other coastal South Florida municipality.

Another step is seawall elevation. The City owns fewer than seven miles of total seawalls along 165 miles of waterway, which shows that most seawall protection is located on private property. Most City seawalls are either located in parks or adjacent to roadways such as Cordova Road.

Stormwater improvements can also support some aspects of tidal flooding, although these are mostly intended to address extreme rainfall. Additional options are pumping systems and roadway elevation. The City is considering funding a Roadway Master Plan to determine which roadways must be raised in order to ensure continued access to neighborhoods.

In 2017, Fort Lauderdale released a Seawall Master Plan which focused primarily on seawalls adjacent to roadways. This provided a road map for future consideration of which roadways are critical and should be protected. It also identified areas where seawall elevations were not helpful in protecting roadways against the effects of sea level rise. Thus far, the City has completed seawall improvements on Cordova Road, Isle of Palms, Hendricks Isle, SE 10th Street, and the south side of Las Olas Boulevard.

The second phase of the Seawall Master Plan identifies all seawalls under City ownership, including those located in parks, on dead-end streets, and at other City-owned facilities. This phase prioritizes those seawalls for replacement based on elevation and current condition.

The City has also undertaken an effort known as Fortify Lauderdale which targets extreme rainfall. The City's current stormwater system is equipped to address three inches of rainfall in a 24-hour period; however, extreme rain events have become more frequent and more intense in recent years. Plans have been developed to provide a level of service (LOS) in the range of seven inches of rainfall in 24 hours in a number of City neighborhoods. Dr. Gassman noted that while the original design was intended to accommodate seven neighborhoods, it now encompasses fifteen, with improvements underway in some neighborhoods and in the permitting phase for others.

Following the April 2023 flood, the City expanded these plans to address 17 neighborhoods. By the time conceptual designs were complete, the expansion had increased to 25 different neighborhoods. The City plans to bundle these neighborhoods into 12 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects that will hopefully be complete by 2034. The expected investment is between \$500,000 and \$1 billion in stormwater improvements over that time frame.

Dr. Gassman noted that in coastal areas in particular, tidal valves and pumping systems will be critical infrastructure if the City is to meet its desired level of service and keep roadways from flooding under more typical rain events.

Chair Witten requested information on how residents can be more proactive in addressing the impacts of climate change. Dr. Gassman replied that part of the Fortify Lauderdale program includes the development of guidance for private property owners so they can take steps to become more resilient. These include both low-cost and more expensive solutions. The City is seeking to hire a resilience coordinator to provide community outreach and work with commercial and residential partners who are interested in having more resilient properties.

A question was asked regarding the potential effects if not all homes on a block raise their seawalls to appropriate height. Dr. Gassman emphasized the importance of raising all seawalls. If one neighbor's seawall is breached, this can affect the roadway. Code Compliance has a team which works with stormwater operations during king tide season to identify these homes and cite them. Once a property is cited, the owner has one year to remediate the seawall by either repairing it appropriately or raising it to the newer elevation requirement.

VIII. Dock Waiver – 1500 SE 12th Street Unit 2A Slip 19 / Douglas C. Marty

This Item was deferred.

IX. Discussion – Riverwalk Seawall Replacement Northside – Floating Dock

Assistant City Manager Ben Rogers explained that the City has been working on a seawall project to replace a portion of the northside Riverwalk seawall. They are seeking FIND grant funds for this project, which will install a new seawall in front of the existing seawall. The new seawall will reach the required elevation of 5 ft.

Visual renderings of the proposed new seawall were shown. An existing concrete dock will be removed and the floating dock will be relocated within the previous footprint of that concrete dock. The project will include 120 ft. of living seawall. Construction is expected to take roughly 18 months.

Vice Chair Washington asked if there are concerns for nearby properties due to the installation of steel sheeting. It was clarified that vibrations will be monitored.

Jenni Morejon, president of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), stated that the Riverwalk portion of the Huizenga Park project is nearing completion and will be reopened to the public by the next week. Approximately 13 pilings were placed into the waterway near the Riverwalk path, and no new seawall was added, although some existing seawall was repaired. She has not heard any complaints related to the impacts of the pilings on water traffic. The entire Huizenga Park project is expected to be complete by the end of 2025.

Ms. Morejon continued that the City has been very responsive to stakeholders with respect to the Riverwalk project, including upland property and business owners, the Riverwalk, pedestrians, and the marine industry.

With regard to the location of the docks, Ms. Morejon stated that the DDA does not have a position on this issue as long as it works for the marine industry and upland owners who have license agreements to use commercial dockage in the area. She concluded that some short-term improvements will be made before the beginning of the project.

Phil Purcell, representing the Marine Industries Association of South Florida (MIASF), addressed concerns related to the floating dock, pointing out that there is a pinch point in the area. He reviewed the site's proposed layout, emphasizing the need to ensure there are no negative impacts on marine industry traffic.

There was also discussion of the site's schematics, including the difference in elevation from the dock to the deck of the boat, which could create a trip hazard. Larger cleats were also recommended to accommodate larger vessels. It was emphasized that the facility should be user-friendly to a wider range of sizes.

Chair Witten encouraged the Board members to submit comments on the proposed project to Mr. Rogers' office.

Chair Witten asked if there is a likelihood that the Board's next meeting, which is scheduled for July 3, 2025, will be able to reach a quorum due to the pending holiday. It was determined that Mr. Cuba would contact the Board members to determine their availability for the July meeting.

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

Chief Waterways Officer Marco Aguilera raised the subject of anchoring limitation areas (ALAs), which were discussed at a recent meeting of the Harbor Beach neighborhood. He advised that the passage of HB 481 allows for a different method of enforcement, and recalled that at neighborhood meetings, there has been more support for enforcement according to HB 481 than for enforcement related to ALAs. The City plans to adopt an Ordinance that aligns with HB 481.

Mr. Aguilera reviewed the differences between the two enforcement methods, explaining that ALAs are designated areas in which vessels may be anchored for a period not exceeding 45 consecutive days in a six-month period. ALAs may not exceed 10% of the County's delineated navigable waterways, which means there may eventually be a time in which no additional ALAs may be designated within Broward County. He noted that the City of Hollywood has reported success in managing its designated ALAs, although he pointed out that they have not yet had to enforce these areas.

ALAs must be smaller than 100 acres in size, may not include mooring fields or marinas, and must be clearly marked with signs and buoys. Mr. Aguilera showed a sketch of a proposed ALA for Lake Sylvia, noting that a 200 ft. buffer surrounds the area. Vessels are not prohibited from anchoring outside the marked boundary within the buffer; if they do so, there are no limitations on how long they may stay there. If a vessel departs the ALA after 44 consecutive days, travels one nautical mile, and returns the next day, that vessel is given another 45 consecutive days in which to anchor within the ALA. No dredging is required for these areas.

HB 481, which was recently passed by the Florida Legislature, restores authority that was stripped from municipalities in 2016 by allowing cities in counties with a population of five million or more to regulate anchoring. It permits time-based anchoring of no more than 30 days within any six-month period, with no requirement that days be consecutive.

An Ordinance in accordance with HB 481 would not allow municipalities to impose more restrictive limits than the 30-day and six-month periods cited in the legislation. Fort Lauderdale has the option to create an Ordinance that would align with the bill. Mr. Aguilera reviewed possible enforcement options which would allow vessels to anchor out during the day but would limit the number of days in which it may anchor out at night. This would allow vessels to travel through Fort Lauderdale but would require them to leave the City before the 30-day time frame has expired.

A question was asked regarding events such as the Winterfest Boat Parade or other activities that could involve anchoring at night. Mr. Aguilera advised that this would address only one day within the time frame. It was also noted that exceptions for certain time periods or events could be written into an Ordinance.

Regarding enforcement, Mr. Aguilera continued that the Marine Unit is working to develop a tracking mechanism such as a spreadsheet that will provide for daily checks of vessels. As the vessels approach the end of the 30-day period, they would be provided with notice. He also noted that if the City purchases a pump-out vessel, that boat would maintain contact with anchored vessels as well.

It was asked if the economic impact of boats anchored in Fort Lauderdale has been estimated. Mr. Aguilera estimated that this impact would be minimal, as most individuals living aboard their vessels do not leave them. Some anchored vessels are in place because their owners do not want to pay to store them.

It was asked if the proposed Ordinance could require that these boats be pumped out on a regular basis. Mr. Aguilera replied that the City could include this if they wish.

Mr. Aguilera concluded that if the City revises Code in order to implement limitations consistent with those of HB 481, including additional stipulations as necessary, this proposed Ordinance would come before the City Commission for two readings. Should they instead move forward with ALA, the City and County would need to enter into an

inter-local agreement, as well as determine which entity is responsible for purchasing, installing, and maintaining signage and buoys. The County would be required to provide two readings of a proposed Ordinance, which must be passed before the City could bring forward its own Ordinance.

It was noted once again that at the previous day's neighborhood meeting, the public appeared to be strongly in favor of following HB 481. Mr. Aguilera reiterated that certain exceptions can be included in the Ordinance, such as emergency conditions, mechanical failures, or other contingencies.

Mr. Aguilera added that a small number of individuals who live aboard their boats had attended the neighborhood meeting and expressed support for HB 481.

Chair Witten advised that Assistant City Attorney Bob Dunckel, who has regularly attended MAB meetings, had requested that the Board hear information on the two proposed methods of regulation. There was also additional discussion of options such as extending the 30-day time frame and other potential modifications to the Ordinance's language.

Motion made by Mr. Brunelle, seconded by Mr. Dunbar, to table. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

Mr. Aguilera requested that the Board members inform Mr. Cuba of any suggested exceptions so the City Attorney's Office can take them into consideration when drafting the proposed Ordinance.

XI. Old / New Business

Dr. Ribotsky asked that the Board discuss the provision of ladders on floating docks as an Agenda Item at the next meeting. Vice Chair Washington also requested a discussion of the City's procurement process at a future meeting.

Chair Witten stated that Board Member Barry Flanigan had described an issue regarding use of the dock at the Suntex Marina, and suggested that the Board address this further at a later meeting.

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Any written public comments made 48 hours prior to the meeting regarding items discussed during the proceedings have been attached hereto.