

Boynton Beach

Project gets CRA funding to boost downtown residency

By Jane Smith

Boynton Beach finally has a project to jump-start its mostly vacant downtown.

The city's Community Redevelopment Agency board unanimously approved in February to give the 500 Ocean owners about \$4.4 million over 10 years to help cover costs.

"The developer had asked for a 15-year agreement and \$3 million upfront," said Vivian Brooks, agency executive director, when explaining why the board should approve the deal. She emphasized there will be no money upfront and the deal cannot be passed along to the next owner.

The deal had languished for months and held back any improvements to the southwest corner of Federal Highway and Ocean Avenue.

"Our faith in Boynton Beach has not wavered," said Tom



The projected view of the project at the southwest corner of Ocean and Federal. Rendering provided

Hayden, development director at LeCesse Development Corp., a real estate company involved in the project. "There's been bumps in the road, but we believe in the location and we believe in Boynton Beach and looking forward to getting

started." His team planned to submit plans for the site and the garage in February, plans for the six-story apartment building in March and then start construction in April, Hayden said, ticking off an ideal

schedule. Only one person spoke during the public comment period. Dan Spotts, a frequent meeting speaker who owns the Miami Aqua-culture business in downtown Boynton Beach, directed his questions to

Hayden about the location. "Do you realize that the FEC will run 30 freight trains, and if All Aboard Florida gets its way, another 32 trains a day? Are you prepared to warn your tenants that the entrance may be blocked about 60 times a day?" he asked.

Vice Mayor Joe Casello responded, "Boynton Beach can't stop this train from coming, but this gentleman here is proposing 341 apartments of residents in the downtown. Hopefully those people will bring commerce to fill up those empty storefronts. You need people. ... Give us credit, work with us."

The development also includes 6,600 square feet of Class A office space, 13,300 square feet of retail space and a seven-story parking garage.

Agency board members agreed to the deal by a 7-0 vote.

The money will come from tax revenue created when the development is constructed on 4.7 vacant acres. The \$4.4 million will be front-loaded giving more money to the developer in the early years. The agency estimates that its share will be \$4.7 million over 10 years.

The day after the deal was approved, Ocean Ridge resident Gary Kosinski sent an email blast to town commissioners alerting them to the "massive over-development of Boynton Beach."

"Assuming 2.5 renters per unit and two workers per 100 square feet of commercial, that is almost 1,000 new residents on a 4-acre lot," he wrote. "This is over 60 percent of the entire population of all of Ocean Ridge in a single block."

He asked town commissioners "to minimize the ever increasing nonresident vehicular and pedestrian traffic today."

Kosinski could not be reached for comment.

Ocean Ridge Town Manager Ken Schenck said the town already bans on-street parking, but he adds that the town can't tell Boynton Beach what to do. "There is a concern that more people will be using the beaches," he said.

In other business, agency staff updated the board members of the marina parking situation.

The association that owns the Marina Village Garage will start charging \$5 per day from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., Fridays through Sundays. The fee started Feb. 13 and will end on June 14.

Agency staff gave each of its marina tenants one parking pass each for the garage while they continue to negotiate for parking spaces with One Boynton LLC, which owns the empty property at 114 N. Federal Highway. The agency will clean up and stripe the lot and offer about 200 free parking spaces to marina tenants. ★

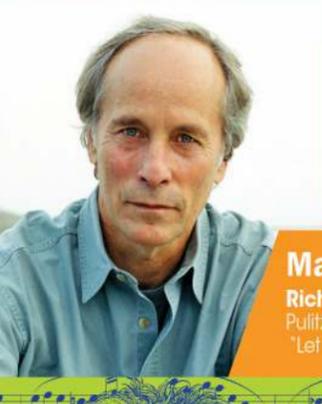


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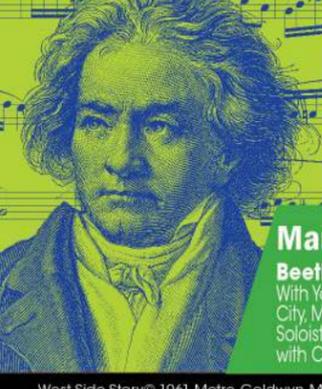
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