



TO: Department of Sustainable Development
FROM: Tarpon River Civic Association Board of Directors
DATE: September 26, 2019
RE: River Lofts on Fifth Project (DRC Case# R19066)

To the DRC Review Committee,

The Tarpon River Civic Association would like to share some concerns and comments about the proposed **River Lofts on Fifth** project that is on the October 8, 2019 agenda.

While we know that the developer meeting with the Civic Association to review potential projects PRIOR to submitting an application to the city, is not required, we feel that it is an important part of building a relationship, partnering and collaborating with the neighborhood. In this case, despite asking about the project repeatedly, we were not notified that any plans had been solidified until we received notice that the project was on the DRC agenda, only three weeks in advance of the meeting. **We continue to lobby the city to adopt an amendment making it a mandatory step in the approval process for the developer to meet with the community for input BEFORE they have finalized their plans to the point of submitting an application to the city.** Due to this last minute notice, we were only able to set up a meeting with the developer to include only two members of the TRCA BOD and one BOD member from the Esplanade Condominium (located in close proximity to the project site) two days prior to a deadline given to us for comments to be submitted for consideration by the DRC. As such, we were only able to do a cursory review and expect to have more comments as more members of our community learn more about the project

That said, we would like to remind the committee of the context in which we view this project. There have been 4097 residential units approved for high rise projects, in the very small area south of the New River, west of S Andrews Ave, south to SW 6th St and east of SW 4th Ave. This is a very small area for this density and the traffic flow will be affected by the New River to the north, the two draw bridges on the east and west, the railroad tracks with increasing rail traffic in the middle and the very small existing roadways that were created to serve a light industrial area that cannot be modified to any great degree. There is also the issue that semi-trucks, cannot fit under the Marshall bridge on SW 5th Ave. so they must exit the area via SW 3rd Ave, and that traffic can only go south on SW 4th Ave from SW 5th Ave. SW 4th Ave is a one way street going north for one block going north to SW 5th St.

Project size – building height and density

River Lofts on Fifth is proposing an additional 368 residential units in a 30 story building, in or very close to the transition zone area between the Downtown Regional Activity Center and the primarily low rise residential area of the Tarpon River Neighborhood. Specifically, it is located in the RAC-SMU. The whole SMU used to be considered a transition zone.

We understand that the current code allows for a 30 story building, but we would like to see a **lower height and density transition** from the center of the downtown core. The developer explained that they could have proposed a project with less height and more mass, but it is still our opinion that the building is too tall and dense for the area.

No Innovative Design

We do not think the building has sufficient “innovative design” qualities. We would like to see a more interesting design and not more of the same boxy towers that have been approved to date and are not visually stimulating, do nothing to enhance the appearance of our city and our neighborhood, and to make sure that “**high quality” materials** are used in its design.

Market Viability

There is concern that this is yet another project with very small units and wonder if the market for these is not already saturated, considering that most of the 4097 units already approved in the same area are of similar size.

Insufficient Neighborhood Amenities

With the exception of a bike shop (which we like) there is no ground level retail, restaurants or services for the neighborhood residents. The response from the developer was that people will not want to be in that area for restaurants, etc., as there are other restaurants in other areas. There are approximately 4 restaurants in the area which certainly will not suffice the over 4,000 additional individuals who will be living in the area once development is complete. This is mixed use space, and this should be incorporated into the plan. Community members will need to embrace walking in this area if they live in the area – mixed use amenities are a necessity. As it becomes more difficult and less desirable to drive, we would like to have businesses we need or want within walking or biking distance. This has previously been a requirement of new developments. Neither the developer nor the neighborhood wants empty store fronts, but we hope that some beneficial neighborhood amenities will be included.

Traffic quantity and flow

Due to the traffic flow restrictions already mentioned and other projects in the area under construction or already existing or approved, we are obviously concerned about the traffic implications of this project.

Please consider other existing or approved projects within 2 blocks during your review:

Esplanade on the New River – existing building on the corner of SW 4th Ave and SW 5th Ave
139 units, 17 stories. Entrance and exit on SW 4th Ave

Sailboat Bend Apartments - 110 unit, 9 story building currently under construction on SW 4th Ave at the end of SW 5th St. with its entrance and exit on SW 4th Ave. # of units in current building unknown, 7 stories.

Marina Lofts/ Raintree Lofts – 856 units currently approved on the corner of SW 4th Ave and SW 4th Court. and beyond. We understand this project may change, but potential traffic flow needs to be considered.

The alley along the west edge of River Lofts on 5th is only 14' wide. Currently, their loading zone and garbage pickup is located off the alley which would require service trucks to make a 90 degree turn into the alley on the south side from SW 5th St and out of the alley on to SW 4th Ct on the north side. The minimum road width required for a semi-truck making a 90 degree turn is 27'. There does not appear to be enough room to accommodate a full size moving truck. Garbage trucks would also have to navigate this path. The exit onto SW 4th Ct may conflict with whatever goes on the Marina Loft site.

The developer was not forthcoming on what the plans are for the undeveloped parcel on the corner of SW 4th Ave and SW 5th St. that is currently marked "temporary sod". If this lot is developed, it could also impact the traffic flow.

Parking

There is one parking space per unit+ 5 more. We do not think that is adequate for the potential number of residents. At a minimum, there does not appear to be sufficient guest or staff parking. As a comparison, the Esplanade has 24 spaces for guest(18) and staff (6) parking, with only 139 units. There is also no parking for any neighborhood amenities, such as retail or restaurant guests.

Electrical Lines

There is a high voltage electrical line running thru the alley. Construction and resident safety are of concern.

Tree preservation. This project site is currently filled with old growth trees. We'd like to bring to your attention the destruction of mature trees in our city (some of the few remaining old growth native "forested area") and the wildlife oasis provided by them - We request an inventory of the current trees on the site be taken by the forestry department. Many wild areas and mature trees are being leveled by developers with no notice to neighborhoods. We are rapidly losing our (FLL) green canopy and wildlife oases (plural) where many, many bird species nest and live (some rare). We'd like to reference **Sec. 47-21.15. – Tree Preservation, which states:**

- a. *Effort shall be made to design around existing, large, desirable trees.. If, as determined by the department, there are large desirable existing tree(s) and the proposed placement of the site plan elements will not save such tree(s) and sufficient root system to support the tree(s), and such tree(s) are capable of being protected by a reasonable modification of said plan, then a tree removal permit may be denied by the department.*

Stephanie mentioned that they will move 1 or 2 existing trees to the vacant lot they own to the west.

As mentioned, these are issues that came up with only a week to review the plans and consider the issues. No doubt there are other details that we have not discovered or thought of yet. We ask that you carefully consider these issues before you issue your final report.

We look forward to working with the developer and the city staff to create a project that we can all be proud of and is an asset to the Tarpon River Neighborhood and the City of Fort Lauderdale.