Fall Talks: Can the Beach Carry It?

Transcript of the Save Miami Beach Zoom, Sunday, November 8, 2026

Watch the recording, with chapters and slides: savemiamibeach.org/recordings/fall-talks-can-the-beach-carry-it. Click a time in square brackets to open the recording at that moment.
This transcript was made automatically by Zoom and then corrected by Save Miami Beach. It may still contain errors, and it leaves out cross-talk that could not be made out. Home addresses of audience members have been removed. Research provided by Miami Beach Journal.

0:00 Welcome, and what we cover tonight

[0:00] Okay, so I think we're gonna get started. For those of you who have not joined the Zoom before, I wanted to welcome you as well as those returning. My name is Daniel Ciraldo, and I am the editor and publisher of Miami Beach Journal, which I started last November to bring more local news to Miami Beach. And we have been covering the Live Local Act Which we consider a crisis, since last year. And so these talks are how we have been sharing some of the research with residents and other members of the public. This is our third Zoom on Live Local, and on October 11th, we went through the law and the towers, and then two weeks ago, we went through the numbers on workforce housing. Tonight, we're going to be looking at what is underneath it all.

[0:54] Can an island that already floods carry thousands of more residents? And so, we're going to talk about, first, what has happened since our last Zoom. Then, how the pipes of the island actually work. And where they stand today. and also what these new towers would add, and a look at the review of some of the projects so far. So, if you have any questions in the meantime, you can add them to the chat, and we will be going through questions as well at the end. Also, while we're on the chat, if you can, let us know what area you're joining us from, and if there's a particular building that, you're concerned about. So, I'm going to now jump over to the slides, and I'll turn my video off to make it easier for everyone to see.

[1:50] Okay.

1:55 Since Oct. 25: the king tide, Southgate, the election, a Sarasota ruling

[1:55] Okay, so, since our last, Zoom, there has actually been quite a lot that happened. Oops, if I can move this slide. Okay. Alright, so on Tuesday, October 27th, there was a king tide. It was the highest King Tide in Virginia Key. Since 1994, outside of a hurricane. There were streets flooded in North Beach, on Indian Creek, and on Collins Avenue. The next king tides are the end of this month. And on October 30th, the planning director told the owner of the Southgate Towers that that project that they were wanting to meet about, 910 West Avenue, does not qualify for the Live Local zoning, because the Bayside of West Avenue is zoned as residential, and the Act covers commercial, industrial, and mixed-use land.

[3:00] And so, the owner, though, Blackstone, is able to appeal. So, we'll have to stay tuned on that. On November 3rd was the election. local and national, and both of the Live Local sponsors did win their respective elections, but they were relatively close. Vicki Lopez was… did win with 60% plus, throughout the district. 5, but within Miami Beach, it was much closer, and in particular, in the areas of Live Local that are impacted by these buildings, she did not perform as well. And Senator Calatayud, won relatively narrowly, 49% to 48% against, Richard Lamondin, who was a guest on one of our Zooms, so… There's

definitely been a lot of, concern, and I think a lot of us are hopeful that the results, that what Vicki and what Alexis said during the campaigns, that there should be amendments, that they will follow through on those. And then another interesting thing happened on November 4th, which is that a Sarasota judge ruled that Sarasota County must process an apartment application under the Live Local Act. And so, basically, the county had said, no, we don't want to approve this, but the judge found that, yes, the land did apply, for Live Local, because it had already allowed some commercial use, and so the way that impacts Miami Beach is, for example, the West Avenue 910 that we just spoke about is in a residential zone, but then the one on 1771 in Sunset Harbour That is considered a commercial or mixed-use zone, and that's likely why that particular application was not denied, up front.

[5:12] And I see, some questions, from [name removed] about the percentages, and there's an interesting article about that, but yes, I think that, that it was very close in… in South Beach, in particular.

5:27 The count: 16 projects on the city's list, 13 after corrections

[5:27] So moving on, this was… is a summary of images and massings that we looked at in prior Zooms. Now, the count has changed. So, 2 weeks ago, we said there were 16 projects, and that was from the city's own list of projects. However, since then, we've gone through all the permits, and two of the projects are stale, and there's some duplication, so… In the end, we have, the number of 13. projects that are still pending, or potentially can't go through. 824 Alton was the one that the planning director had said the approval is very close. And we're going to come back to that, because it has to do with sewer conditions.

6:21 Where a flush goes: the county plant has room, the city's pipes are the limit

[6:21] So, where… where does… A flush go. When… a toilet bowl. is flush, where does that go to? So, here's how it works in our neighborhood. Your building has its own line out to the street, but then the city controls the pipes. from there to their pump stations. And then the pump stations of the city then, push the… sewage to the county plant on Virginia Key. You can see an image of that on the bottom left. And, so basically, this plant takes all of the sewage and treats it, and has a permitted capacity of 143 million gallons a day. And as of fiscal year 2024, it averaged 121.95 million gallons a day. So, it had about 21 million to spare. So, basically. Virginia Key does have capacity for more sewage and more development in that regard, but the issue is really the pipes.

[7:45] within our own city, which have to push that all out to Virginia Key. And the proof is here from the city itself.

7:56 The city's own words: the Alton Road sewer lacks capacity

[7:56] Which is that from, Public Works review, the Alton Road Capacity Analysis. In October 2025, they said that the sewer system along Alton Road, particularly between 5th and 15th Street, does not have sufficient capacity To reliably accommodate an increase in demand. And, then, Five Park, 500 Alton, was the test case for that, because it added… it was projected to add 57,000 plus gallons per day, and the city said at that time the 15-inch sewer beside it does not have sufficient capacity. So what they did with that specific project is the flow was sent south of 5th. Through a new force main. And, but what's happening now, though, is that all of the sewage goes to Pump Station 1, which is shown on this map here, and that is at Jefferson and, 11th Street.

[9:07] And from there, it then goes down to, to Virginia Key. So, already in 2025, the city was saying the sewer system was going to fail. But even before that.

9:21 March 2020: a drilled main, a sewer moratorium, and Pump Station 28

[9:21] there were some serious issues. Now, this happened around COVID, and some of us sort of missed that it happened, but it was really important, especially to what's happening today. So, basically. In March 2020, a contractor was drilling a well, and they hit the city's main sewer line on Michigan Avenue, just north of Lincoln Road. By the next morning, there were close to a million gallons that had gone into the streets, the storm drains, and the bay. So, with a main out, the flow was pushed onto a 50-year-old pipe, and the public works director said they knew that pipe could not handle it, and unfortunately then, at 28th and Pine Tree. Next to Pump Station 28, a third, that pipe burst, and then a third pipe burst on Harding. So half of the sewers, the city sewer capacity was gone.

[10:22] People were asked not to flush. The city sent out notices asking residents not to flush their toilets. Trucks were hauling sewage out, warnings were going up along the bay, and then the county actually put Miami Beach and the three towns north of us under a sewer moratorium, and they said that no new sewer connection could… could happen for any building until this issue was rectified. And so that moratorium lasted 6 months, But… right after that, the Public Works asked the City Commission for $122 million to improve the infrastructure. And, so you could see that even if Virginia Key has more sewer capacity. If our own pipes are not strong enough to push it out there, and if just one pipe That breaks during a project can cause so much damage. You know, this all really can impact our safety and our quality of life.

[11:32] And so, just a few years after that. disaster. Pump Station 28 had a failure, and then, the… the… it was placed under a second, moratorium. in January of 2024. That was only for a short period of time, and they corrected it, but, basically, there's now a condition that says that if these pump stations go down to just one pump again. like has been happening, there's gonna be an automatic moratorium, which is, I think, smart, because we don't want these pipes to continue bursting and hurting our environment in the Bay. So that also, by the way, applies to Live Local projects. If, there is a pipe burst. A live local project can be a part of a moratorium. The state did not preempt that, as long as all buildings are treated the same, live local or not live local.

12:41 Flooding: 15 tidal-flood days, 83 new pump stations, $3.7 billion

[12:41] So, that was, sewage, but next, what about flooding? So, flooding is something that many of the readers are concerned about as well. You know, where does the water go on a barrier island? And so, Virginia Key has a flood gauge, and they measured 15 days of tidal flooding, since 20, 20… 6. Or, yeah, yeah, sorry, 15 days of tidal flooding in 2026. Miami Beach… Is 93% within the special flood hazard area. And so, obviously, flooding is all over the city, and the city says that in order to meet a 10-year storm requirement. It needs 83 new stormwater pump stations. with an estimated cost of $3.7 billion. So, we have an issue of flooding that's unprecedented right now. We're in a special flood hazard area. We don't have enough pumps to safely pump out a 10-year storm.

[13:58] And just to resolve that is gonna be almost $4 billion. Which, again, underscores the concern about letting the state preempt zoning and pushing more development here when we want to take care of the issues that we already have. So, what happens with the Live Local projects and flooding? Well, the, Live Local projects do have to contain all of their flooding within the property. Here is an image from 1920 Alton, which is proposed in Sunset Harbour, and you can see, on the left from the plans, they have a drainage plan And in order to keep all the water on their site, they will have to put in two drainage wells. And so that's usually the answer when it comes to flooding is, you know, putting in more wells and, you know, pushing out the water. But has there really been a comprehensive look?

[15:06] at the drainage in these neighborhoods and the capacity, it seems to only be happening now at the time of the building, permit.

15:15 Who pays: a $522 million plan and 9% rate increases

[15:15] Which is… is not good. So, who is paying for all of this? Well, Miami Beach, the Commission, just last month, adopted a 5-year, $522 million program for water, sewer, and stormwater work. And so that is being paid for by our utility rates, which went up 9% Last month, and that's gonna be the first of five yearly increases. So, a typical house, is gonna go from about $138 a month to about $200 a month by 2031. And, that's just something that is going to be required to keep the level of service going, and that's been a very contentious topic at the City Commission, with various people, you know, in support or against it, given the high costs of this. And developers, though, will have to pay for any additional, you know, sewer upgrades in order to get the project, finally, you know, permitted. But to get it approved is a different story.

16:36 What the projects would add, and how the city tests them

[16:36] So if we were cumulatively to look at all these projects proposed. And take the Miami-Dade County, they have an estimate of how many gallons per day an apartment uses, they say 135. So, these projects that, that are essentially… you know… Preempted by the state, could add about 288,000 gallons a day to the city, and to the sewage system. And that is only about 1.4% of the county's space averaging a key, but it still is a significant increase in, in sewage. By the way, it doesn't include, like, restaurants and hotels. It only includes a residential impact. So, some of us are wondering whether the full impact is really being viewed. So, how does the city test a project? They actually look… Public Works.

[17:48] has a comment we found on every Live Local file, that if the demand for the building is over 10,000 gallons a day. then the city will do what's called a hydraulic model, and the applicant pays for it. And the hydraulic model will test if a project passes. And if it's under 10,000 gallons a day for the building, no modeling is required. So you see here this diagram we made of the different projects going through the pipeline. Some of them, that red line, are to the left, and they did not require a model, like 1501 Collins, and even 1920 Alton, the one we just spoke about. But others have required a model. Such as, the Savoy on Ocean Drive, 709 Alton, and 824 Alton. And so those models have sometimes found that, the sewage, capacity is not… is not being addressed properly, and so that has been a basis for denial of these projects, you know, which… which in some ways, you know, a check… check and balance to it. But the… the city continues to approve additional development, in this case, the block by the old Epicure, 1680 Alton. It's not a live local case, but just to give you an example, in their report, they… the applicant is suggesting about, Let me see… 47,995 gallons a day.

[19:35] And so, when you take these different projects and different proposals, and I know we're going to be talking next time about the Raleigh, but, you know, there's got to be a cumulative check on how much more sewage We are going to be pushing out, and how these fragile pumps that many that were laid in the beginning of the city's founding, you know, how are they going to handle it without causing the issues that happened in 2020 and beyond?

20:12 824 Alton Road: the sewer standard is not met

[20:12] So, in the case of 824 Alton Road, they did the modeling, and they found… the city found that the sewer standard was not met. And so, they basically said that the developer has to build the fix. So, before the building can open, they're saying that there need to be new mains on 15th Street. and Michigan

Avenue, a new public pump station at Flamingo Park. With about 2.6 million gallons a day, about 100 feet of 12-inch force main on Michigan Avenue. And then on Alton Road, about 860 feet of 18-inch and 470 feet of 24-inch mains, so these are the requirements that the city would say need to be completed, but They actually have to be done after the building is finished, before they get their Certificate of occupancy, not… When the building begins, and so, you know, those of us who have seen what they call sort of bait-and-switch of developments in the past are probably seeing a red flag here, like, wait, okay, so the developer has to promise this.

[21:33] But they could start building anyway, you know, what's gonna happen at the very end? And what could be the risk to our city? And I see a comment here from [name removed]. Yes, it's true, like, where would a pump station go in Flamingo Park? And then, even with that question, would the community have input into that? You know, it's… it's unknown. So…

22:03 What the applications do not say

[22:03] The applications say some things, but they don't say other things. The applicant doesn't say what the pipes can carry. The letters all say the project will not cause the city to exceed its quote-unquote level of service. But the capacity figures are only coming from the city side. They're not looking at sea level. They're saying, you know. That they're going to address it at the time of building, and each site is studied by itself And so it's a very piecemeal way to look at development and zoning, and, I think it's, you know, it's become pretty problematic.

22:51 State law is silent on pipes, and the city's code has a possible loophole

[22:51] So, the state law is silent on pipes, and actually, they don't even mention the words concurrency, utility, infrastructure, capacity at all. So I think that… there's a question of whether concurrency and what we've been talking about, this issue of sewage and infrastructure, whether that can be something that could limit some of these proposals until they are fully addressed. And it sounds like yes. Even though other things that we've spoke about in the past, like height or density, you know, are already preempted. But, it says, once again, that the sewer, drainage, and water must be in place and available by the certificate of occupancy, not at approval, which I just don't see how That is going to work out.

[23:52] The city's own code has some of its own, conflict. For example, they recently added this clause, section 2.5.5.6, that each site plan shall be subject to public facility levels of service, concurrency review, and the city's mobility fee. But then, if you look at another section, 3.1.4, it says that non-elderly and elderly, low- and moderate income or workforce housing developments are exempt from concurrency. So, I think that's something we've got to ask the planning department, what does that mean? Does that mean that all these towers, as long as they have workforce housing, don't have to meet all these sewage and other concurrencies? You know, hopefully that's not another loophole that is yet to be, discovered.

24:50 What planners and water groups say

[24:50] So, wrapping up, we also looked at other groups around the state, and what they've been saying about this issue, and so there's 4 big voices, and these are just summaries of what we've found, different things. They haven't taken positions on specific Miami Beach project. But 1000 Friends of Florida is the state's smart growth group, and they support infill building where the sewer and water lines already are, but they object to doing it by state preemption and with no hearing. And, the barrier islands, they've expressed concern about barrier island overdevelopment, flood zones, etc. The League of Cities speaks for city

governments. And they have housing as a priority, but they also wanted to be in line with each community's capacity for public safety, resilience, and financial stability without more preemption or staff-only approvals. And they did oppose last year's Live Local sorry, this year's Live Local bill, and I know they've opposed prior ones as well, because when I was up in Tallahassee.

[26:05] advocating. The Florida League of Cities was very involved, as well as the Friends of Florida. There is a Florida Housing Coalition that supports the Act. They're pro-housing, and You know, they… They are, they're happy about more housing, but they do, talk a little bit about the possibility for moratorium for storm water, drinking water. and sewer repair. And then there's a Miami Waterkeeper, has not taken a public position we found on Live Local, but they do talk about how much of the sewer system in the area, in the region, is 50 to 100 years old. And, we know that a lot of the western side of the day has septic tanks, and not… and they're not connected at all to sewage. So there has been a push to switch those over to sewage, and really, that's a whole other question, just region-wise. What is the overall capacity remaining.

27:15 What you can ask the city to do

[27:15] So, what can you ask the city to do? Well, this week, there is a special commission meeting on Live Local that is Thursday, November 12th. at 3.30, and, there's gonna be a Sunset Harbour sewer report at the Commission, supposed to be on Wednesday, November 18th. We have to also make sure that the city follows through on their October 14th resolution to do a citywide capacity update. Neighborhood by neighborhood. And that's supposed to come out on January 12th. The city manager is… is… has been directed to make that… that report, so we'll stay tuned for that. Going to the planning department, number 3, and asking about that loophole with concurrency, to just make sure these Live Local projects do still need to have the sewer, etc, concurrency.

[28:20] We are gonna also look at some of these hydraulic models further, and we'll be asking for more records, just to understand how they're modeling the sewage for these developments. Every November 1st, or sorry, since November 1st, every city must list its Live Local projects For the state. So, we'll want to keep tabs… the city's good. Miami Beach has on their website already a list, but we'll just want to make sure that that stays up to date. And if anything can change in Tallahassee, perhaps, you know, testing the capacity before approving a project's not at the occupancy point. There is a Miami-Dade delegation meeting on December 9th. And that's a time where any members of the public can go. It's locally, you know, here in the Miami area, and you can go and you could speak, you know, for a few minutes about any topic.

[29:25] So if this is a concern for you, I suggest you go there. And then the next session, the legislative session in Tallahassee, is not until March 2nd, 2027, but, you know, that's sort of around the corner these days, so… hopefully by then, maybe some of these commissioners and legislatures will have some plans of how they can fix some of these big issues with Live Local, and and so that's sort of where we are today.

29:55 The next two talks, and closing

[29:55] But I wanted to thank all of you for joining. If you have any questions, I will be looking here on the chat, but also, if you want to raise your hand and speak on the audio, too, just let me know. But our next talk is on November 15th. We're going to talk about the Raleigh Hotel. Which is coming in for a, specific rezoning of their site. And then December 13th, we're going to be looking specifically at what are some concrete ideas to fix Live Local in Tallahassee in 2027. A lot of it is based on what we hear from our readers, what we see in the news, what we see other places are doing. So, please stay tuned for that. And the recording of this will be up shortly on SaveMiamiBeach.org, so feel free to share that with your friends

and family and neighbors.

[30:58] And, and thank you again for joining. Let's see, in the meantime, I'm going to look at some of these, okay, [name removed]? Said that, Oh, yes, [name removed] mentioned saltwater intrusion. I'm sorry I didn't mention that, but it's a very, very good point. As the sea levels rise, some of that could impact, drinking water and sewage. All right, well, seeing none, I want to thank you all again for joining, and have a great rest of your weekend, and we'll see you soon. Thank you.