

NOTICE TO THE RIVERLAND COMMUNITY

Neighborhoods surrounding the 5 acre property at 2681 Riverland Rd. have seen significant changes beginning in 2014. Many mature trees and plants have been cleared. In April notice signs appeared that there was to be a hearing before the Planning and Zoning Commission requesting plat approval to build 14 homes. The existing home on the property would be demolished as part of the proposal. Everyone is upset to see this happen. Most people feel that there is nothing that can be done to stop the drastic changes from taking place, since this residential land is zoned for 3.5 homes per acre.

However this did not deter a small group of neighbors from showing up at the Zoning Commission hearing on May 20th to object to the proposed plat. Objections ranged from the loss of trees, to the proposed density of 14 homes, to traffic safety. The proposal would change the oak hammock neighborhood of homes on heavily wooded lots of ½ acre or more. Representatives for the plat applicant tried to dismiss the objections as unimportant. The Zoning Commission could not agree to approve the plat, and its application was **DENIED**. Members of the Zoning Commission know the unique and historical nature of this last section of undeveloped land.

The denial is important, but does not stop the process, as the City Commission has the final say for plat approval. The fact that the City has a maximum density of 3.5 homes per acre does not mean that the satisfaction of this requirement will cause the proposed plat to be approved. The City of Fort Lauderdale Unified Land Code has other requirements that must be met before a plat can be approved. These include environmental, safety and compatibility with the existing neighborhood.

The group of neighbors who went to the zoning hearing (now known as the Riverland Preservation Society) received a lot of peoples' attention. The group has more than tripled in size since the Zoning Commission's denial and continues to grow every week. Recent research has revealed that the proposed plat should be denied by the City Commission based upon serious and valid legal objections. These include:

- The proposed plat crowds 14 houses on average lot sizes of ¼ acre or less. Compared to the surrounding homes, this is less than one-half their size and causes a drastic negative change to the character of the neighborhood. The property south of SW 21st St. is in the hammock area and was developed with much larger lots. The proposed plat is not compatible with the adjoining homes. It fails this requirement.
- On the proposed ¼ acre sized lots it can be expected that a home, its driveway, and patio would occupy 50-60% of the lot. This would cause a loss of over 50% of the remaining trees on the plat. If you think the property looks stripped now compared to the way it existed 18 months ago, just imagine what it would look like with 14 built homes and one-half of the remaining trees gone!
- The land for the proposed plat is part of the rare oak hammock surrounding the New River. The area south of SW 21st St. was annexed by the City in 2002 from Broward County. It is the City's "Coconut Grove" in the heart of Broward County. It was originally part of the land acquired by the Brickell family in the 1890s. It has been maintained by subsequent owners in its natural state until the beginning of 2014 when the clearing started for development. It contains many mature oaks and palm trees that are considered "specimens". The northwest side of the parcel is bordered in part on a mangrove canal that has been visited by manatees in the winter months. This land has been "home" to many animal and plants, including nesting hawks, owls, raccoons, herons, gopher tortoises and orchids that will be lost forever if 14 homes are permitted. Further, gopher tortoises are protected under federal and state laws. Their habitat has already been disturbed and/or destroyed without first obtaining the necessary permits

applicable to them. In fact, the City's Land Code requires an environmental study to be prepared for environmentally sensitive land as part of a plat application. This has not been done.

- Anyone who lives or travels near the 90 degree curve on Riverland Rd. knows it can be dangerous. Numerous accidents have occurred and continue to occur because of speeding and the blind spots from hidden streets and driveways along the curve. Unfortunately, fatalities have resulted. The proposed plat places another new entrance and exit for the development on the north portion of the curve. This will only add to the danger as there is inadequate sight visibility at this point to see coming traffic traveling north on the curve. The north side of this land already has an existing entrance off of SW 21st St. on SW 27th Ave. which leads into the property. Use of that entrance would alleviate this danger. There is no need for another road on the curve. If another entrance is added to Riverland Rd., a one lane – one way street could be used with the existing driveway to greatly lessen tree destruction.
- Anyone who knows this neighborhood knows that the sidewalks are heavily used by children to get to and from school, joggers, skaters, bicyclists, strollers, dog walkers and other Mthe sidewalks on Riverland Rd., totaling about one acre. These are marked as open areas on the plat with public access. Everyone who knows the neighborhood also knows that the Riverland Rd. curve already floods these areas after heavy rains. No independent studies have been published to determine if the retention areas will be adequate for a development on the property, protect runoff to the existing homes, or how deep they will have to be. All existing trees in a retention area will have to be removed and cannot be replanted. Anyone can see the retention areas on the west end of Riverland Rd. (in the front of the original self-storage warehouse and Shell Station). These retention pits were dug very deep to be effective and require metal rails and chain link fences for safety. This would not be fitting in the hammock area of Riverland Rd. It is not known why storm water cannot be drained into the existing canals as the rest of the neighborhood does to avoid this.

The list can go on. The key is that valid legal objections do exist for the proposed plat. Two things must be remembered. First, the City Commission has the power to disapprove a proposed plat based upon valid objections. Secondly, the developer could abandon the plat if compliance with the laws increases its costs and it sees numerous community objections.

Riverland Preservation Society, Inc. needs your help to spread the message to your neighbors and the city commissioners. Calls, letters, & emails to the Commissioners 1 or 2 weeks before the hearing are all effective. We only will have one chance at the city commission hearing, so please show up. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WORKS! The lack of communicating your objections leads the commissioners to believe you approve the proposed development. Don't let them be misled.

The date for this hearing will be publicized when it becomes known (the soonest would be their September monthly meeting). In the meantime let everyone know you object and this can be changed.