

Booming Flagler Village Replacing 'Old Fort Lauderdale' Feel

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It's a short drive from Fort Lauderdale's legendary beach and a quick walk from the illustrious entertainment on Las Olas Boulevard. And yet, developers say, Flagler Village is far removed from anything the city has seen.

The hip, rapidly growing neighborhood could be the next destination for thousands of young people who want urban living in a downtown atmosphere, but not the trappings of "old Fort Lauderdale."

Flagler Village is intentionally different. Businesses include a microbrewery, a bar with old-school arcade games and pinball and an axe-throwing bar. A commercial Realtor calls them "cool and creative tenants."

The buildings' outsides are artsy — think of a mural of Martin Luther King Jr. with the encouraging text "Chase your dreams," and a massive tiger adorning another wall.

About 1,400 new apartments have been built, and it's estimated that number could swell to at least 4,200 units within the next few years.

Once a crime-ridden and decaying warehouse district, Flagler Village had marine- and car-repair shops, as well as working-class, single-family homes. That's "why so many wrote off this neighborhood," said commercial real estate broker Jaime Sturgis of Native Realty.

Jenni Morejon, president and CEO of the Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority, said Flagler Village's past was a collection of "underutilized land."

"The bones of Flagler Village have always been there to make it a great urban neighborhood [with a] real sense of downtown living with a neighborhood feel," she said. Now there are "walkable blocks [with the] shops and restaurants you need."

Developer Charlie Ladd is one of the pioneer developers in Flagler Village. He has three projects within Flagler Village that are pending, including two office and retail buildings that are awaiting building permits. His third project, a 400-seat IPIC movie theater on top of retail shops and a restaurant with a rooftop bar, will break ground in September.

Today, he sees potential in Flagler Village, a 270-acre section bordered by Sunrise Boulevard south to Broward Boulevard, and Federal Highway west to the railroad tracks.

Developers are "building from scratch a new urban neighborhood. ... We're two-thirds of the way there," he said. The new businesses sprouting up provide "urban amenities that the new residents want and expect when living in a downtown."

One of the largest projects under construction is a seven-story apartment project known as Motif.

Formerly known as ArchCo Metropolitan, Motif will be a 385-apartment project with retail and restaurant space on the ground floor at 500 N. Andrews Ave.

The site spans a full block from North Andrews Avenue to Northeast First Avenue and from Northeast Sixth to Fifth streets. The first phase of Motif is scheduled to be complete in January 2020, with the second phase three months later.

Motif's design includes a "paseo," or walkway for strolling. It'll serve as a destination, with market stalls, outdoor restaurant seating, a 7,396-square-foot public plaza and courtyard.

The Motif, too, will have a public art component, Sturgis said. Artists will be contracted for art throughout the building in the paseo and in the walkways along Andrews Avenue.

The faces of Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix, Marilyn Monroe and "Aladdin Sane"-era David Bowie are splashed across businesses in what's known as the Hive.

"It's not as large and expansive as Wynwood, but the accessibility to downtown and the beach trumps — from a location standpoint — Wynwood," Alan Hooper, a pioneer developer in Flagler Village, said of the Miami arts district. "It's a much better location. Over time it will have its own identity."

The building boom for recently completed projects, according to the Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority, includes:

- Pearl Flagler Village apartments: seven stories of 331 units
- The Whitney apartments: 30 stories of 386 units
- Ora Flagler Village Apartments: six stories of 292 units
- The Dalmar Fort Lauderdale hotel: 24 stories of 323 rooms

Building permits are also pending for Modera 555 at Flagler Village, a proposed 24-story, 350-rental apartment tower in the downtown's north end.

Sturgis said rent for the new apartments generally hovers around \$2,000 a month for a one-bedroom studio to \$3,000 a month for a two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment.

Business owners said the growth is exciting.

Designer Ali Grief has owned Montce, a swimwear store in Flagler Village, since 2013. Her neighbors include a coffee shop and a salon.

She said she's excited about the growth and hopes it includes retail — such as dresses and shoes — that could help her attract more customers.

"I love the area because it's an artsy, popped-up area with new food and new people," she said. "It's like a mini village."

Flagler Village Brewery opened four years ago inside The Brass Tap, a craft beer bar, on Federal Highway. Young professionals are the typical clientele, said general manager Carlos Polit. He plans to include an empty bottle in a care package a new housing complex is going to assemble for tenants, who can exchange it for a free bottle of beer. "We mostly appeal to the housing around us so the more the merrier," he said. "We're part of the identity of Flagler Village."

More changes are underway as empty warehouses become bars and restaurants, empty lots become rental apartments and a church transforms itself.

First Lutheran Church will be leased to a new tenant, Sturgis said. The two-story church, now closed, is best known for its Romanesque stone facade that originally adorned the county's first Catholic church, St. Anthony's, which was built in 1922 on Las Olas Boulevard.

“There’s still quite a bit of development left to do,” Hooper said. “There’s a lot of land that hasn’t been developed, a lot of pockets that have been ignored for several decades so there’s a lot of work to be done to turn it into an urban village.”