

Deerfield's upscale beach vision coming true -- except for one spot

DEERFIELD BEACH It is not as big as Fort Lauderdale, or as quirky as Hollywood, but the city is creating its own identity as a boutique beachside destination.

A Hollywood movie producer drawn by the city's low-rise character opened an oceanfront hotel of nine luxury rooms and three suites last December. Millions are being spent upgrading existing beachside restaurants and the city is adding a marina to the nearby amenities. In addition, an upscale 16-unit condo development is scheduled to break ground January 6.

"We like the huge potential the area has — there are very few places left that close to the ocean, that close to a fantastic beach," said Ignacio Diaz, co-operating manager of Group P6, which is building the condos.

Yet in the middle of this increasing activity stands an outsized obstacle to the city's grand plans: A rotting, 45-foot, silver trailer parked on almost an acre of private beach property. It's missing a few windows. It has no tags. And, the land surrounding it — just a few feet from the city's bustling volleyball courts — is posted with no-trespassing signs.

"Creepy," said Tina DeVries, 35, visiting from Grand Rapids, Mich.

The city agrees – and in February 2014 filed suit to get rid of the abandoned trailer, which was put there just about two years ago by the owners of the site.

The motion to dismiss the suit says the trailer does not violate any city ordinances and the suit has been languishing since April, 2015.

Still, there may be progress. One of the property's owners said he's in negotiations with the city to sell the land but city officials would not confirm it.

"We've agreed that if we can come to the right price, we'll sell," said Robert Sweetapple, a [Boca Raton](#) attorney. "Its best use is in the public domain."

Deerfield Beach Vice Mayor Bill Ganz acknowledged the city wants to buy the land, but declined to discuss specific plans for it.

He agrees with Sweetapple that "the beach serves a greater public purpose. It's in the best interest of everyone if the beach is available for public use."

Toward that end, the city is about to add a marina to the west side of the Intracoastal Waterway. It will be the only public boat access between Boca Raton and Pompano Beach and one of the only places in South Florida to offer kayaking and paddleboarding around an oceanic nature preserve, city officials say.

Residents say Deerfield Beach has come alive in the three years since the ribbon was cut on its \$5 million pier remodeling. That re-do added a walkway and a city-run restaurant to the offerings. A new, city-run welcome center is also planned.

The city's investments have already paid off. An empty building was transformed into an outlet for a national surfing gear retailer, Billabong, and a blighted area has blossomed into the Royal Blues Hotel.

Edward Wilson, whose Hollywood credits include *City Island* with Andy Garcia and *Blue Jasmine* with Cate Blanchett, opened the hotel, saying he saw it as a hideaway for celebrities looking for an experience unlike anywhere else.

The hotel, according to Group P6's Diaz, is proof the beachside is destined to be "very, very upscale," as it's the only Florida location for Relais & Chateaux, an international luxury hotel and gourmet restaurant group.

Deerfield Beach's burgeoning upscale yet small scale character is why Group P6 sees such potential for its oceanside developments, Diaz said. He moved forward despite the city's beachside restrictions that prohibit buildings taller than 55 feet, about four or five stories, unless they win citywide approval in a referendum.

"Don't get me wrong — I'm a developer, I would love to build a giant tower," Diaz said. "But that (smaller-scale development) is what makes it good for the neighborhood ... more appealing in the long term,"

Oceans 234 proprietor Danielle Rosse said she just sank \$1.8 million into upgrading her restaurant, even though the abandoned trailer is just a few hundred yards away.

"There's so much beach and that's such a small piece," she said. "Overall, Deerfield Beach is headed in the right direction."