



EDITORIALS

Riverside Wharf a good deal for Miami

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Riverside Wharf, as proposed, is low in height, appropriate in scale and fitting in function. The proposed \$30-million complex of eateries and a seafood market would front on the Miami River, just west of Interstate 95, offer water views and entice the public to the river's edge, instead of shutting people out.

And because part of Riverside Wharf would be built on city-owned property, Miamians get a say in whether the project should get the green light when they go to the polls.

We think it should.

As envisioned, Riverside Wharf will take what is underused, but valuable, riverfront, and turn it into the kind of destination of which there are too few locally: family friendly, easy to access by foot, by boat and by car, with plenty of parking already available. The plan is to put four two-story restaurants, a landscaped plaza and a tricked-out fish market on the oddly shaped property. Though much of it is privately owned, about three-quarters of an acre are in the city of Miami's hands. That parcel is leased to the family that runs the popular Garcia's seafood restaurant nearby. The Garcias use the land to run a commercial fishing operation.

According to developer Alex Mantecon, who with his business partner, Guillermo Vadell, are seeking voters' approval, Riverside Wharf would incorporate the Garcias' operation as an enhanced market, selling locally caught seafood.

Miamians who go way back will remember when the property was the site of the long-closed East Coast Fisheries restaurant, across the water from Jose Martí Park. With the addition of the market, Riverside Wharf will give commercial fishermen an economic boost, while giving city residents an even more reason to visit.

Mantecon's firm, MV Real Estate Holdings LLC, is to pay the city an annual minimum of \$195,000 in rent and spend at least \$7 million on improvements on the city's land. This includes filling in the gaps of a public river walk, which will allow people to amble from the foot of I-95 to the Southwest First Street bridge. The initial 30-year lease comes with two 10-year options.

Mr. Mantecon told the Editorial Board that the state Department of Transportation plans to construct a ramp to the sometimes difficult-to-reach site off the bridge to make access, including foot traffic, less circuitous. This is a heartening example of transportation administrators recognizing the value in coaxing people out of their cars.

Riverside Wharf would be part of the burgeoning development along the eastern part of the Miami River, long poorly used — if at all.

As long as private funding, indeed, is to be used to build the project, the city's only contribution should be the leased land. Given the improvements to come and the rent the city could realize annually, Miami voters should approve what stands to bring a handsome return on investment.

The Herald recommends voting **Yes** to Riverside Wharf.
