

NEWS

Compass Landing by Margaritaville site work underway in Melbourne with 2024 target opening

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Scoured clean: Heavy equipment operators have broken up and trucked away the aging asphalt and cracked concrete across the future home of Melbourne's 4.6-acre Margaritaville tropical-themed hotel-restaurant complex off U.S. 1.

Now labeled Compass Landing by Margaritaville, the resort will feature a seven-story, 146-room hotel; a two-story restaurant with 400 seats; a marina with 221 boat slips; a 14,000-square-foot event lawn with stage; a four-level parking garage; and a public boardwalk.

"We're demoing the site, as you can see. And that's going to be a good three- to six-month window to stabilize the existing conditions," said Harry Mirpuri, who heads Margaritaville's Melbourne development team.

Project's portrayals released : Melbourne Margaritaville artist's renderings released; City Council approves site plan

Lakoona Beach at Melbourne: Man-made Crystal Lagoon with housing, retail planned off NASA Boulevard in Melbourne

More Margaritaville: Margaritaville brand booming across Florida, with sites planned in Melbourne, Gainesville

"We have our marine contractors coming in to begin work shortly. That will entail shoring up the existing conditions on the seawall and putting in a brand-new revetment system, and some pilings as well," Mirpuri said.

Despite supply-chain issues creating "an environment of 'can't get windows' and 'can't get doors,'" the goal remains to open Compass Landing by Margaritaville in 2024, said Jim Wiseman, Margaritaville's president of development.

"As the area grows — and it's growing in leaps and bounds — we're extremely bullish on Melbourne and the whole Space Coast. It's in a great location," Wiseman said.

Site work kicked off in mid-October at the long-vacant U.S. 1 property, which fronts the Indian River Lagoon shoreline just south of Cherry Street. The site's defunct marina, which will be resurrected, encompasses another 3 acres of submerged lands.

Factoring in inflationary cost increases, Wiseman said Compass Landing by Margaritaville may cost \$75 million to \$100 million to build.

Former site of Shooter's and Coral Bay

The property's development history dates to a zoning change for O'Brien's Transmission Shop in 1979, Melbourne City Council records show. The site also was home to a marina and popular restaurants dating to the late 1980s: Shooter's, Skipper's, Dixie Crossroads and Coral Bay.

Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne heavily damaged Coral Bay back-to-back in 2004, and crews razed the ruined restaurant in 2011.

Then in 2017, a wrecking company demolished the dilapidated remains of the shuttered Intracoastal Marina boat storage building next door. Hurricane Irma's gusts had left the building's rusting metal frame dangerously leaning roughly 10 degrees to the east.

Mirpuri said crews will soon take test pilings to analyze the site's underground conditions, and a second round of permit applications is heading to Melbourne City Hall for building construction review. He hopes to schedule a ribbon-cutting ceremony by February.

Company officials plan to use the outdoor event lawn to host Margaritaville- and Caribbean-themed events, holiday events, a Gasparilla-type event, craft beer festivals, food and wine festivals with food trucks, art festivals, car shows and weddings.

Similar to Anna Maria Sound

Wiseman said the Melbourne project will be "very similar" to Margaritaville's Compass Hotel Anna Maria Sound, which opened in July 2020 on Bradenton's Perico Island.

The six-story building marked the Jimmy Buffet-spirited chain's first Compass hotel, offering 123 rooms.

"It's got a marina and dry stack (boat storage) right beside Anna Maria Sound. It's got a fairly robust restaurant, Floridays (Woodfire Grill & Bar), right beside it as part of the complex," Wiseman said.

According to the Compass Hotel Anna Maria Sound website, guests "enjoy complimentary courtesy snacks at check-in. Kick-off your day with our complimentary breakfast buffet. Soak up the sunny ambience and island atmosphere. Relax and grab a light bite or a beverage at Compass Bar & Chill."

Menu items at Floridays Woodfire Grill & Bar include the Five Alarm Chicken Sandwich (blackened chicken breast, habanero relish, Monterey jack cheese, lettuce and tomato) for \$13.99; Lobster Gravy Hushpuppies for \$14.99; and Seafood Boil (shrimp, mussels, clams, sausage, potatoes and corn in an herbed beer broth) for \$27.99.

City sold land to developer for \$2 million

Melbourne leaders have touted Margaritaville as an economic driver and tourist destination, though a few residents have expressed concern about the project's impact on the imperiled lagoon.

The city of Melbourne purchased the vacant property in 2013 for \$1.375 million in hopes of attracting a developer. Mirpuri's Ocoee-based company, River Walk Marina Partners,

LLC, bought the site from the city for \$2 million in 2018.

Melbourne resident Kurt White volunteers with Brevard Zoo's Restore Our Shores oyster-mat program to try to improve the health of the imperiled lagoon. Last month, he emailed all seven City Council members with concerns about development harming "our slice of paradise."

White cited City Hall zoning changes required for Margaritaville and Avery Eau Gallie, a seven-story structure with 326 apartments, a six-level parking garage, and ground-level shops proposed for construction just southwest of the intersection of U.S. 1 and Eau Gallie Boulevard.

"It seems evident to me that your predecessors in our local government and the citizens of Melbourne intended through these ordinances and specific verbiage to prevent the type of rampant development that has turned South Florida into a concrete jungle," White wrote in his email.

The Melbourne Margaritaville general contractor is Welbro Building Corp. Based in Maitland, the construction management firm previously built Hotel Melby in downtown Melbourne.

Welbro will also build a smaller three-story, 100-room Compass by Margaritaville in Flagler Beach, according to the company website.

Second Compass by Margaritaville opens

In July, a Compass by Margaritaville hotel — the second in the fledgling chain, after Anna Maria Sound — opened in Medford, Oregon, on the South Pacific Highway.

The Compass by Margaritaville website also lists two "coming soon" hotel properties in Beaufort, North Carolina, and Louisville, Kentucky. The Melbourne site is not included yet.

Hurricane Ian's destructive landfall will probably push back the opening date of Margaritaville's future Fort Myers Beach resort six to eight months from its late-summer

2023 target, Wiseman said.

"We didn't get much damage with our building, thank goodness, because it was under construction," Wiseman said.

"But in Fort Myers Beach, we really think that Margaritaville is going to lead a renaissance. And in just a few years, it's going to be back much better than before," he said.

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