

**Palm Beach Civic Association  
Statement on Royal Poinciana Plaza**

**Town of Palm Beach  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
February 18, 2009**

**After thorough review, the Palm Beach Civic Association believes the developer's plan for redevelopment of the Poinciana Plaza has merit and deserves further study.**

In our opinion, the plan, while interesting, does *not* contain sufficient detail to make informed decisions about the Plaza's future. Therefore, **we urge the Landmarks Preservation Commission to (1) accept these proposals as a good starting point for further negotiations, (2) require additional information from the developers, and (3) engage in negotiations on a firm timeline hopefully to reach an agreement that provides maximum benefits and protection for Palm Beach residents.**

**Height, Density, and Visual Appearance**

**We are concerned about the size and visual appearance of the proposed Plaza buildings, especially the condominiums facing the waterfront.** We believe that many of the proposed structures are much too high and far too massive, especially in relation to the two-story John Volk parallel buildings. What will these buildings look like from ground level or from the new Flagler Memorial Bridge that will be much higher than the present structure?

**We urge the Landmarks Commission to secure detailed renderings of the new buildings planned for the Plaza as well as a large scale model of the fully developed property.**

**We think the size and density of the new Plaza buildings should be dramatically reduced.**

The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council reports that an overwhelming majority of Town residents who participated in the charrette last winter expressed deep concern about new Plaza buildings that are oversized and out-of-proportion. While most were comfortable with two or possibly three stories, virtually everyone was opposed to four or five story buildings on the site.

The new plan contains two condominiums along the water and a new theater; each is five stories high. These structures seem to us massive and imposing in relation to the other features on the property. They will distort the appearance of the area and block the view of many residents in the neighboring Palm Beach Towers.

### **Waterfront Access**

**We are concerned that the proposed waterfront park does not adequately address residents' need for a waterfront that is *truly* public in nature.**

The second major concern expressed by an overwhelming majority of Town residents at the Poinciana Area charrette was "access to the waterfront." Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council representatives report that those in attendance felt strongly that the Plaza waterfront should be open to the public. By "open to the public," people meant truly open and accessible to Palm Beach residents, not just to those who live on-site in the condominiums.

**We fear that, in the final analysis, the public may not be welcomed or encouraged to use the waterfront under this current plan.** It seems unrealistic to us to think that high-end, expensive waterview condominiums can co-exist with an active public realm. Will condominium owners tolerate the commotion of a public restaurant beneath their windows? Will they put up with diners strolling outside by their bedrooms after a late night meal? How will they receive the general public—children, dogs, picnickers, fishermen, bicycle enthusiasts—frolicking in their front yards on every beautiful sunny day?

We also note that the bicycle path, while picturesque and beautiful, does not proceed along the waterfront, but instead parallels the property's northern boundary along Royal Poinciana Way to Cocanut Row. Many residents were hoping for a plan that promoted public access to the waterfront by extending the bicycle path along the entire waterfront portion of the Plaza property.

### **The Theater**

**Serious concerns have been raised about the financial viability of the Poinciana Playhouse both in terms of the cost of renovation and as an operating entity.** For many years, the Civic Association has called for a truly independent study to address these and other theater-related issues. What *is* the cost of renovating the current

Playhouse? How can the Playhouse operate under sound financial conditions in today's world?

We note that the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council in its report on the Poinciana area, the president of the Palm Beach Town Council, and the chairman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission are also recommending that a definitive Playhouse study be performed.

**We urge the Town to commission an independent study of the Poinciana Playhouse so that objective, informed decisions about the future of that theater can be made.**

**We believe that a theater should be part of any future plan for the Plaza.**

**We urge the Town to seek assurances that a new theater, if constructed, will not fall victim to the same fate as the current theater on the property.** The 1979 agreement states that the Royal Poinciana Playhouse can only be used as a theater. To our dismay, the owner has allowed the playhouse to sit empty and deteriorate for many years. The building has become an eyesore and an embarrassment to the community.

**We strongly recommend that the Town forge an agreement with the developers of the Plaza guaranteeing that significant penalties will be assessed if a newly constructed theater is not fully maintained and utilized as a theater.**

### **Development Concerns**

**We urge the Town to develop a clear timeline for development of the Plaza that gives the highest priority to construction of the public realm and theater.** We are concerned that the most profitable buildings, *i.e.* the condominiums, will be erected first with the theater and the public areas scheduled for later phases of development.

**Finally, we are concerned about the impact of this major construction project on Palm Beach residents.** We understand that full development of the proposed plan is estimated to take four years. In our experience, construction schedules are almost always overly optimistic. With new bridge construction scheduled to begin in 2012, overlap of these two projects appears likely. **We believe that residents must be given definite assurances that these two significant building programs will be managed to protect the quality of life we currently enjoy.**