

Marina Villages Revive Waterfronts

Throughout history, people have been drawn to waterfronts. The world's great cities sprouted along rivers and harbors, as boats were the primary vehicles for transportation and trade.

For decades, however, waterfronts in many places were neglected. In some cities, while many people migrated from city centers to suburbs, some downtown waterfronts became under-utilized zones of decrepit warehouses and factories. A recent trend in real estate development, the marina village, can help to revitalize waterfronts and reflects humanity's fascination with living alongside great bodies of water.

To be successful, however, a marina village must be carefully planned and have the proper mix of boating facilities, housing, and amenities to attract boaters, residents, and visitors. Coming up with the right formula requires diligent market research and comprehensive planning.



What is a marina village?

Simply put, a marina village is the integration of the marina with residential and commercial development to create a single, inclusive facility. A successful marina village is like a city within a city, containing most of the amenities necessary for it to be a self-contained community. A good example is the European marina village model such as in St. Tropez on the French Riviera. The first attempt to create a planned marina village in the US was Harbour Town, part of the Sea Pines Resort on Hilton Head Island, SC. It's billed as a "colorful marina village filled with great shopping, dining, activities, and water sports among the beauty of a spectacular yacht basin."



Another marina village, Atlantis on Paradise Island in the Bahamas, took the marina area "from stale to stellar," according to Sam Phlegar, Senior Vice President and Director of ATM's Marine Division, thanks to development of a marina village where people can shop, kids can play, and families can eat—all next to a lagoon where everyone can enjoy its allure. The marina village formula is to create a fun, vibrant area within the backdrop of an attractive waterfront where shops, dining opportunities, parks, promenades, plazas, apartments and condos overlook pleasure boats and marine activity.

Key attributes

The elements required for a successful marina village are:

- A sense of place with a distinctive personality.
- Something for people of all ages.
- Amenities for both boaters and non-boaters.

Unsuccessful marina villages occur when a plan:

- Is poorly master-planned/phased/integrated.
- Fails to incorporate all components properly.



DRY STACKS COMPLEMENT MARINA VILLAGES

Drystacks, the multi-level parking garages of the boating community, can be valuable assets to a marina village. With the capability to store vessels in vertical rows, drystacks allow a marina to increase its ability to accommodate more boats per square foot of dockside and slip space. Since a marina village needs to attract a steady stream of boaters, the more boats the marina can support, the better.

Though some perceive drystacks as large, monolithic structures that may not be aesthetically pleasing, innovative designs can actually make them assets to marina village ambience. For instance, a drystack structure can include retail and restaurant space such as one finds lining newer downtown parking garages.

In fact, at some marinas, drystacks can be sightseeing attractions. For example, a restaurant featuring a picture window with a view of a crane lifting boats into and out of a drystack can add to patrons' appreciation of the waterfront atmosphere.

"One of the biggest concerns with drystacks is their mass," says Robert Semmes, Vice President with ATM's International Marina Consulting practice. "But there are ways you can break up a drystack facility into separate structures to make it less massive." There are also new techniques in drystack design that improve efficiency, minimize spatial requirements, and allow for larger boats to be put on racks.

Marina village project developers should consider incorporating drystacks into their plans. Their utility is undeniable, and they need not be feared as detractors to the desired atmosphere.



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- Creates an undesirable atmosphere (poor aesthetics).
- Fails to create a “destination” with attractions for people with varying interests.

For instance, a destination that is too remote, without ways for people to access the waterfront area, will likely fail. If boaters are kept out by a lack of transient slips, the odds of failure are also high.

ATM works with developers to build marina villages in areas that will attract visitors and connect to the surrounding population. This is essential for the development to succeed. “We help the marina planner, the architect, the developer, and all parties involved to design a marina village that brings a solid return on investment to the marina, the retail area, and the connected community,” Phlegar says.

Is your marina suitable for a marina village development?

Site prerequisites for a marina village project include enough buildable contiguous space to the waterfront to support the plan. Frequently, rezoning may be required, particularly to allow for residential development. Sometimes blighted or brownfield parcels may require environmental cleanup and/or acquisition by eminent domain. Because a marina village has a large impact on the community, local government and public support is essential.

Analyzing the market

Understanding your market begins with a demographic analysis of the boating and non-boating communities. Characteristics of potential visitors such as age, income levels, and types of boaters, all impact the village's conceptual plan. For example, retirees may want more high-end restaurants and retail outlets, while in an area expected to attract many parents with children, a water park and playground areas may be key components.

Market analysis also includes developing projections for marina usage including the numbers of boats and their size ranges. It's also critical to plan for the types of boaters expected (e.g., transient boaters, megayacht owners, boaters who live in or near the development, fishing or other charters, etc.) Seasonal variations in boat and visitor traffic are also important considerations. All of these factors influence the project's design.

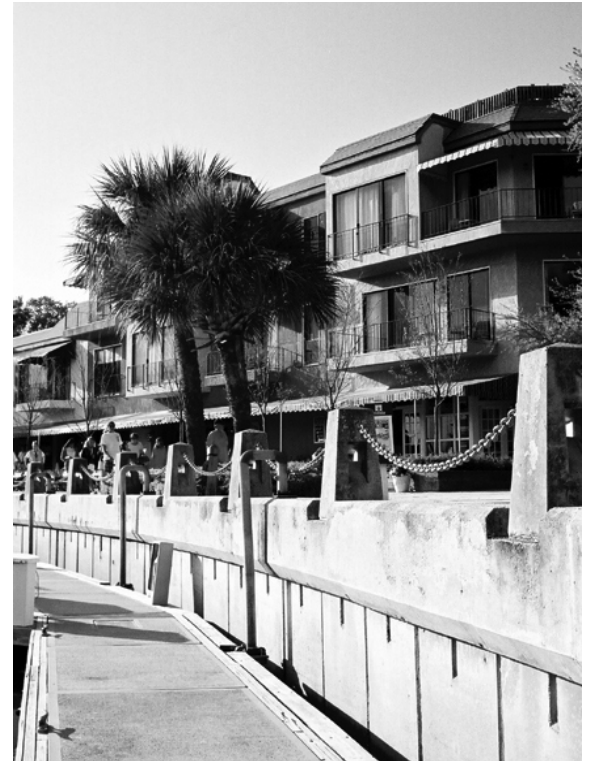


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The conceptual plan

Armed with market analysis data, consultants and the developer typically put together a series of design charrettes that are presented at public workshops. It is important at this stage to give the public a good idea of what the developer has in mind, find out what concerns the community may have, and address those concerns. The conceptual plan includes details about the programming of the development, including the amount of square feet projected for residential, retail, and food and beverage.

The marina business plan

Obviously, the key element of a marina village is the marina, and it is critical to ensure that the marina's facilities will be appropriately designed to support a thriving business. The marina business plan looks at the boating demographics in the market analysis, the marina's current slip rates, revenue, and costs, and projects these factors based on expected boat traffic after the development is completed. This plan will provide details on key marina attributes including the number and size of new slips required, projected market for drystack, new slip rates, and whether rates will need to be adjusted for seasonal boating traffic fluctuations.

All in all, a marina village development requires a lot of upfront preparation to create a design and mix of elements that will fulfill the goals of a thriving marina and successful business zone that are enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. Given the many successful marina villages that have been catalysts for waterfront rebirths, vibrant new resorts, and revitalized year-round communities around the world, many owners consider it as a small upfront investment well worth the effort. ●