

**In reference to the petition for: PB20-0416. 1501 COLLINS AVENUE.  
NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACT ESTABLISHMENT.**

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I am the president of the condo association at The Drake, 1460 Ocean Drive, and am speaking on behalf of myself, the board of the association, and a number of the residents.

The Drake is a Contributing Art Deco Building, so designated by the City of Miami Beach, built in 1937 by the architect David Ellis as a hotel. During WWII, along with many other hotels on South Beach, it served as a billet for soldiers and a center for language classes. It was almost demolished during the period in the 1980s when a bad element of Marielitos took over Ocean Drive, but it was saved by the Arkin family of builders. The Arkins developed it to a high standard as a condominium circa 1992/3, reducing the 77 hotel suites to 31 units, ranging from one to three-bedrooms. It's occupied by fulltime resident owners; owners who use The Drake as a seasonal/second home; and some long-term renters. We have one commercial unit, The World of Kids, which was grandfathered in by the developer and the owner of the business when the hotel went condo. There are no other commercial units allowed in the building and short-term rentals are also not allowed. We are the real thing, a building in the Art Deco style that enchants visitors to Miami Beach.

Many of our residents work from home; others commute to other areas to their jobs. We do not tolerate nightclubs nor noisy commercial or residential neighbors on our north end of Ocean Drive and 15<sup>th</sup> Street. We are by no means a glitzy millionaire ghetto like some of our neighbors at the north end of Ocean Drive. We are extremely diverse with all income levels represented and, above all, a busy and friendly place, with families with children, single people, and retirees. We treasure our low-key ambience and this diversity.

Ocean Steps has always been a problem for us.

It was terribly mismanaged by Billboard Live; the restaurants there were loud and had a garish, carnival-like atmosphere. (The colored, blinking lights!) When Billboard Live, and later the Bancroft office space, the restaurants (Tequila Chica was particularly a problem), an illegal nightclub, and the other businesses there closed down, the vacancies became open territory for a number of criminal homeless individuals. (We have had several attempted break-ins by these dangerous individuals over the years.)

This backstory is important because we would truly and whole-heartedly welcome a decent and respectful use of this space, which faces us directly across 15<sup>th</sup> Street on the north side of our building. We are sincere when we say this.

It should also be noted here that parking is always an issue that has to be addressed. Quality Meats, which did not survive its tenure at the corner of Collins Avenue and 15<sup>th</sup> Street, was allotted two valet spaces on 15<sup>th</sup> Street by the Parking Department, as was their right. But, some years ago, this small wedge of 15<sup>th</sup> Street had been set aside for the exclusive use of Zone 5 residents after 6 p.m. (This was basically for residents of The Drake, as we have no inside building parking and other residential buildings in the area do have parking.)

CitiBikes then took up 3 spaces at the end of the street – unfairly sneaked in overnight with no advance warning to us, as we would have vociferously challenged this misuse of our parking allotment. We were very disappointed when this occurred. With this, and the 2 valet spaces claimed by Quality Meats, our street parking shrank dramatically in size. (Do the math ... we lost five spaces overnight.) And, as if the 2 valet spots were not enough, Quality Meats got greedy and claimed two additional spaces, their valets intimidating residents into thinking this was legal. It was not. So, yes, parking has always been an issue, and something we shall seriously have to negotiate in future with the developers.

But, over and above the parking, we treasure the historic Bancroft Hotel on the Collins Avenue corner. (There had been three hotels there once, but the arson committed by a legendary character called Marvin the Torch\* was said to have effectively destroyed two of them.) A renovation of the Bancroft – following strict historic guidelines – is something we would welcome.

As for the other renovation of the Ocean Steps space ... We have made it clear to the attorney who gave us two presentations of this proposal that we would not be happy if there was suddenly an attempt to turn Ocean Steps into a nightclub, but if it is indeed slated to be what was proposed to us: commercial, quiet office space with amenities – described as “Office Clubs” – indeed a high-end concept -- we would not object to it. (High-end is something Ocean Steps has not been for a very long time.) But morphing these spaces into party spaces and nightclubs – something that happens too often in South Beach -- is not something we could ever approve, as these venues would seriously impact on the quality of life we enjoy in our quiet condominium. We are, therefore, trusting that developers will keep their word on exactly what this conversion of Ocean Steps would be. We like good neighbors and we ourselves are excellent and law-abiding neighbors.

So, briefly, then, YES to this proposal from us at The Drake, with the caveat that it does not suddenly change from its original plan.

Thank you.

Jo Manning for The Drake Condominium

2/23/21

\*The *Daily News* columnist Jimmy Breslin was fascinated by Marvin: “Marvin the Torch never could keep his hands off somebody else’s business, particularly if the business was losing money. Now this is accepted behavior in Marvin’s profession, which is arson,” Breslin wrote.