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LOCAL

Florida food banks strain to keep up

Long lines indicate how families face rising costs

Clayton Park
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

This is the second of three stories about how Florida residents are coping with higher food prices.
Florida residents are turning out in droves throughout the state for help from food banks and other nonprofits as

grocery prices and overall living costs continue to climb.
"We get people lining up at 9:30 a.m. for our weekly Fresh Market where we give out fresh fruits and vegetables and frozen meats even though we don't open the doors until 5 p.m.," said Forough Hosseini, founder and chair of the nonprofit FBH Community in Daytona Beach.
That scene is being replicated throughout Florida at other food pantry programs, say nonprofit execs.

"At the end of last year, we saw a 13% increase in people seeking assistance from our food banks," said Nelle Miller, president and CEO of All Faiths Food Bank, which operates mobile food pantries in both Sarasota and DeSoto counties.
"We've already seen another 10% increase in the first quarter of this year. It's because the cost of food, the cost of fuel, and the cost of housing have all gone up. It's compounding."

Rising costs are forcing Floridians to make hard choices

Sky Beard, director of No Kid Hungry Florida in Melbourne, said her group recently teamed up with Aspect Strategic to conduct a statewide survey of more than 1,000 Floridians to learn how the rising cost of food is affecting them.
The survey results included 82% saying the cost of food is rising faster than

See **FOOD BANKS**, Page 33A



The Alba Palm Beach is a 22-story tower that features 55 luxury residences. It's located on the Intracoastal Waterway at 4714 N. Flagler Drive in West Palm Beach. PHOTOS BY GREG LOVETT/PALM BEACH POST

'Billionaire's corridor'

What's inside West Palm's Alba luxury condos?

Valentina Palm Palm Beach Post | USA TODAY NETWORK

WEST PALM BEACH — The Alba luxury condominium's grand opening on June 11 offered those who attended a first look at what could become "billionaire's corridor" along North Flagler Drive. • The 22-story tower in the Northwood neighborhood at 4714 N. Flagler is the first in a wave of ultra-luxury, high-rise developments coming to the north end of West Palm Beach.

Kenneth Baboun, manager of BGI Cos. and one of Alba's developers, said the project is a milestone for communities along the Intracoastal Waterway.
"We are the first ones to deliver in this corridor," said Baboun, gazing at the Atlantic Ocean from one of Alba's condos. "This will become billionaire's corridor because now all the major brands are looking into this area."

Other projects, including the Olara, the Apogee by Related Cos. and the Mandarin Oriental Residences will soon join the Alba along the waterfront. Intracoastal Waterway,

See **CONDOS**, Page 32A



Kenneth Baboun, manager of BGI Cos. and one of Alba's developers, said the project is a milestone for communities along the Intracoastal Waterway. In 2020 he toured the property and realized it was the only strip of land directly on the Intracoastal Waterway and not across Flagler Drive from the water.

Gardens park plan raises concerns

Some residents looking for last-minute changes

Julius Whigham II
Palm Beach Post
USA TODAY NETWORK

PALM BEACH GARDENS — A soon-to-be-constructed park and nature trail in Avenir has raised concern for some Palm Beach Gardens residents over its accessibility and safety.
During the City Council's June 4 meeting, multiple Avenir residents asked city leaders to postpone construction of the Gardens Nature Park and Trail until its design can be reevaluated. They said the current one limits access to the park's core amenities for persons with disabilities, among other concerns.
Palm Beach Gardens plans to build the park on 24 acres near Avenir and Sandhill Crane drives that Avenir Holdings donated to the city in 2019. Documents show construction is scheduled to begin this summer and be completed by the fall of 2027.

Avenir is a mixed-use development in western Palm Beach Gardens consisting of residential homes, businesses, schools, parks and nature preserves. The community will have more than 4,000 homes when it is built out.
Recreation officials recently hosted community forums to hear from area residents ahead of the final planning stages for the park. A Palm Beach Gardens spokesperson said staff members are reviewing the comments and working on revisions. She did not elaborate on what those revisions might entail, or when construction of the project will begin.

Suzanne Kline is a resident of the 55-and-older Regency at Avenir community next to the proposed park. She said she and others in the community have concerns about whether its amenities will be accessible for persons with disabilities, whether police can monitor the park and the effect it might have on native wildlife in nearby conservation areas.

"We support a true passive park, but we cannot support the current design, which we believe is inaccessible, unsafe, and was advanced without a meaningful response to public input," Kline said in a letter to The Palm Beach Post.

City documents show that under

See **PARK**, Page 32A

Condos

Continued from Page 31A

fueled by the push to build high-rises in previously overlooked areas of the city, many of them dominated by smaller and even single-story buildings.

The Palm Beach Post recently got a tour inside Alba — and here's what it saw.

First look inside Alba, first waterfront tower on West Palm's Flagler Drive

The Alba Palm Beach is a 22-story luxury tower built on 1.71 acres along Flagler Drive near 47th Street by BGI Cos., one of the groups vying to transform West Palm Beach's waterfront.

It features 51 luxury condominiums, including six penthouse residences and four townhomes. Condos starts at \$2.5 million with an average unit selling for about \$3.5 million.

Baboun said Alba was designed with open-space, post-pandemic living in mind. It features private event spaces for business and personal gatherings, on-site health services and oversized balconies to accommodate an outdoor kitchen.

The condos have 9- to 10-foot ceilings, Italian-style kitchens, porcelain tile flooring, floor-to-ceiling windows and 16-foot-deep terraces with summer kitchens and panoramic views of the Intracoastal Waterway, the Atlantic Ocean and Palm Beach.

The 25,500-square-foot amenity space has resort-like features: two separate pool decks designed to showcase sunrises and sunsets; a bocce court; a gym with high-tech equipment and a Pilates reformer; a yoga room, a wellness center with a saunas and a spa; and a private dining room, with temperature-controlled wine storage for each unit.

Alba also has a cafe, a "pet spa" for grooming services and a home theater with a projector already set up for residents to watch FIFA World Cup matches, Baboun added.

The Alba will offer on-site medical services through a partnership with the Mount Sinai Health System. Baboun said a marina with boat docks is still under permitting stages.

Why did a real estate developer decided to build Alba?

The Alba started as an ambitious project born during the COVID-19 pandemic, Baboun said.

Back then, Baboun said, he saw interest from big-name companies and wealthy earners from the Northeast wanting to invest in West Palm Beach. Some chose to open a branch of their business and needed to buy a home. Others wanted to relocate to or buy a second or even a third residence.

Developers like Baboun have sought to court those wealthy earners by building new luxury residences that are priced below the \$8.8 million starting price of the Bristol condominium along South Flagler.

In 2020, Baboun toured the 1.7-acre lot where Alba sits. He said he realized it was the only strip of land directly on the Intracoastal Waterway and not across Flagler Drive from the water. That year, BGI Cos. bought the property for



Alba Palm Beach, right, is a 22-story tower that features 55 luxury residences on the Intracoastal Waterway at 4714 N. Flagler Drive in West Palm Beach. PHOTOS BY GREG LOVETT/PALM BEACH POST



One of the pools, complete with chess board, at Alba Palm Beach in West Palm Beach. It also includes a bocce court; a gym with high-tech equipment and a Pilates reformer; a yoga room; a wellness center with a saunas and a spa; and a private dining room, with temperature-controlled wine storage for each unit.

\$5.8 million.

"I can't believe no one has seen this," Baboun recalled thinking in 2020. "Northwood was a different area back then, but I took a chance and I bought

the property before even asking what I could do in it."

"I can't stress enough the difference of being on the water versus being across the water," he added.

Then, Baboun set out on a goal: Be the first to develop a luxury waterfront tower on the city's Northwood neighborhood, an area dotted with condos that date to the 1960s and 1970s.

After more than five years of construction, Baboun says it feels surreal to see The Alba completed. Baboun said he never expected the once sleepy residential area would one day be referred to as the "billionaires corridor."

"Will West Palm Beach get busier? Yes. But, will this be Miami? Never," Baboun said. "I think this area has its own character and we try to keep it a little exclusive that way."

Stretch on Flagler Drive dubbed West Palm Beach's billionaire's corridor

The Alba is part of a 2-mile stretch of Flagler Drive that runs along the Intracoastal Waterway dubbed West Palm Beach's "billionaire's corridor."

The Northwood neighborhood was known as a sleepy, residential neighborhood mostly built-out with low-rise condos. Baboun expects the new wave of development will transform the area with ultra-luxury, high-rise towers, similar to the "SoSo" enclave south of Southern Boulevard.

This part of the city has attracted national developers including Miami-based Related Group, which is set to build the Apogee tower, and Canada-based Great Gulf, which is constructing the Mandarin Oriental Residences. GL Homes also is planning NOMAR, a community of 100 luxury single-family homes.

"I think that when they coined this billionaires corridor, they were too early," Baboun said. "Now, I believe we got there."