

Developer pitches plan to build lounge on Miami's historic black beach

BY DAVID SMILEY

The developer behind the ultra-luxe Aston Martin Residences in Miami wants to build and run a public oceanfront lounge on the shores of the city's historic black beach.

In an unsolicited proposal, G and G Business Developments has offered to build and operate a \$4 million beach pavilion on the southeastern shores of Virginia Key Beach Park. The venue, to be built atop an elevated platform, would include an event space and café, although many details remain vague thus far.

Tadd Schwartz, a spokesman for the developer, said the club would be open to the public "year-round." Under the terms of an offer submitted in December, G and G would pay the city \$120,000 a year over the course of a 30-year lease.

Schwartz said the asset would help pay for improvements to the historic, former "colored only" beach, which first opened to African Americans in 1945 following a "wade-in" at whites-only Haulover Beach. The park was closed in 1982 and reopened in 2008 after a sweeping restoration.

"While the Virginia Key Beach Trust Master Plan provides for a variety of recreational uses, the reality is that only a handful of the proposed improvements have been developed due to a lack of available funds and insufficient revenue generated by the park in its current state," Schwartz said in an email.

"Recognizing the benefits of fulfilling the vision set forth in the master plan, G and G Business Developments has offered to help make this vision a reality by constructing and operating a publicly-accessible beach-side pavilion."

Schwartz said the proposal is supported by the board of directors of the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust, a semi-autonomous entity affiliated with the city of Miami. Guy Forchion, executive director of the trust, did not return several messages and an email requesting comment.

Public records show the beach lounge has been a topic of behind-the-scenes conversation for months. It's expected to go before Miami commissioners Thursday due to a city law that requires all unsolicited proposals be discussed by the commission before the administration can move forward with negotiations. If commissioners want to pursue the project, they're required to give interested developers at least three weeks to submit their own proposals.

Initially, G and G Business Developments, the real estate arm of the Argentine Coto family, had discussed making half of the venue open only to dues-paying members. But Iris Escarra, a Greenberg Traurig attorney representing the developer, said that idea has been taken off the table.

In December, Escarra said her client would also replenish the park's beach sand, and place a stone structure in the water to help block the strong currents that flow between Virginia Key and Key Biscayne.