

From 'Stonehenge,' a marina

An abandoned condo project will house boat slips again.

BY MIKE BRASSFIELD
Times Staff Writer

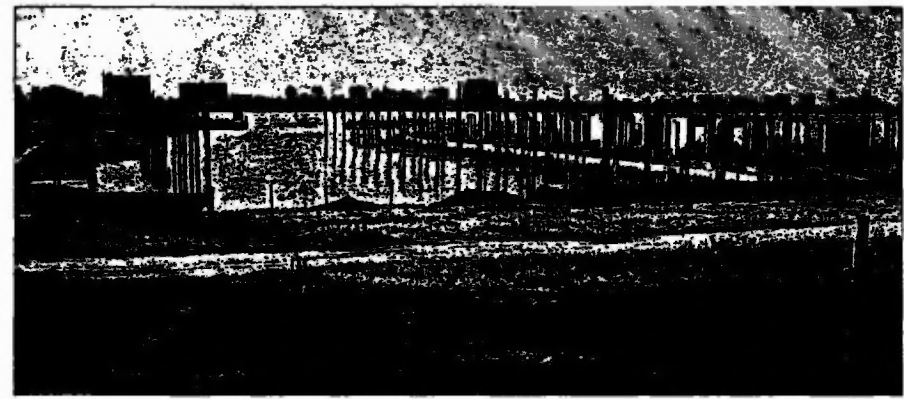
CLEARWATER — The neighbors call it "Stonehenge."

At the deserted site of the former Clearwater Bay Marina, about 100 concrete pilings stick up out of the ground with strands of rebar jutting out of them. They've been sitting there for years, the bleached skeletal remains of a luxury con-

dominium high-rise that never got very far.

On Tuesday, the current owner of the property got approval to put a new marina there — despite opposition from city planners who are still holding out hope that a condo tower might somehow rise there.

Clearwater Basin Marina will be an 87-slip marina at 900 N Osceola Ave., » See MARINA, 7



JIM DAMASKE | Times

About 100 concrete pilings are all that remain from a condo project in Clearwater.

From the front page »



» MARINA continued from 1

Abandoned high-rise condo project to become a marina

just north of the Seminole Boat Ramp. It is envisioned as a "quiet" marina where recreational boaters lease slips. It is to have no commercial boats or personal watercraft.

Neighbors in the surrounding Old Clearwater Bay neighborhood, who have opposed various plans for high-rise condos at this location, came out in favor of this proposal. In their view, an active marina will be better for their struggling neighborhood than an abandoned construction site.

Clearwater's Community Development Board approved the marina after hearing arguments for and against it.

City planners opposed the project on the grounds that it conflicts with a downtown Clearwater redevelopment plan that

developments sprouting west of Osceola along Clearwater Harbor. The property owner isn't proposing to build any condos right now, although that may come later.

Also, the owner has no plans to remove the unsightly, 18-foot-tall concrete-and-steel pilings, which contribute to blight in the area, city planner Scott Kurleman said.

But Todd Pressman, the developer's land use consultant, said the plan is to hide the pilings with a fence, hedges and tall trees.

"It's a lot more than putting lipstick on a pig. We consider it very good window dressing," Pressman said.

The pilings, which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars,

future residential buildings at the site, he said.

Pressman also argued that a marina will fit in with Clearwater's comprehensive plan. The city has called for preserving working waterfronts and marinas, which have been disappearing in recent years.

He added that a marina will be compatible with the neighboring Seminole Boat Ramp, which sees about 25,000 boat launches a year.

Also, a marina operated at this site for decades before it closed in recent years.

The Community Development Board sided with the developer and said city planners weren't being realistic by objecting to the lack of condos in the plan.

"There's not much of a market

board member Brian Barker.

"It's unreasonable to expect any kind of condo development," added Frank Dame. "When it makes economic sense, somebody will develop it."

Back in January 2005, the board had okayed a plan to build 133 condos in two 100-foot towers on the marina site. But the project never got off the ground. It died in the same housing crash that has left downtown Clearwater with largely empty condo towers.

Also Tuesday, the Community Development Board approved a couple of hotel projects on

Clearwater Beach. Unlike the new marina, the beach hotels also require the City Council's approval because they're seeking extra rooms beyond what normally would be allowed.

Shepherd's Beach Resort, the well-known hotel and entertainment complex on S Gulfview Boulevard, got approval for a significant expansion. It intends to grow from 96 rooms to 186. It plans to demolish the building on the eastern part of its 3-acre spread and replace it with a 134-foot-high structure.

And a company called Tropicana Resort Motels, headed by