

Boca Raton is getting younger and bigger. How has it grown?

Madaleine Rubin Special to The Palm Beach Post
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Boca Raton, Palm Beach County's southernmost municipality, was long considered more of a retirement community than a trendy destination.

But thanks to recent growth, vibrancy and opportunity across the city, that's no longer the case.

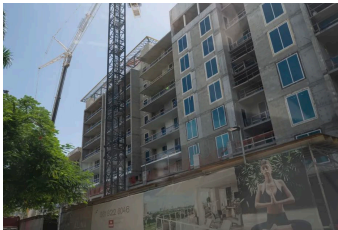
Boca has gotten younger (median age is 48) and bigger: its population is approaching 100,000 and it grew nearly three times as fast as the population of the United States during the past two years. And that has led to growth.

In 2022 alone, the City Council approved six major 100,000-square-foot projects in the CRA.

Does Boca Raton finally have a downtown?



A closer look at new developments in downtown Boca Raton
A closer look at developments in the downtown Boca Raton area including Camino Square and Alina Residences



The construction site of the upcoming Alina Residences Phase 2 at 200 SE Mizner Blvd. on Wednesday, July 12, 2023, in Boca Raton, Fla.

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Much of the recent growth is centered around a small but active 344-acre downtown district that runs roughly just south of Glades Road to Camino Real (about 1 mile north and south) and Crawford Boulevard to the Intracoastal (about 1 mile east and west).

Numerous luxury downtown residences are under construction, a new high-speed rail stop was built, a growing university has developed a national reputation and a plan to transform the city's Mizner Park Amphitheater into a multistage performing arts and events center was just approved.

Mizner Park was Boca Raton's big boom moment



Mizner Park welcomes new fine dining seafood restaurant
With locations across the United States, Eddie V's Prime Seafood is now open at Mizner Park in Boca Raton.

"Mizner Park holds the key to Boca Raton's future," read the headline of a 1989 Palm Beach Post article. The area's development — then a recently approved \$40 million project — would signal "the true beginning of the downtown renaissance" in Boca Raton, officials proclaimed 34 years ago.

Mizner Park's present-day land plot was, at the time, home to the Boca Mall, a derelict and half-vacant relic from the 1970s. What is today the iPIC Theaters, an upscale movie theater and Mizner Park staple, was then the mall's last tenant, Christy's Dive Bar — a popular FAU student spot with bare, concrete floors described by its owner as a "causal, come-as-you-are, regular-guy place."

Mizner Park was the first major project city officials and residents approved in Boca's community redevelopment area (CRA), a portion of the city selected for revitalization back in 1980. More than 40 years later, Boca Raton has become one of South Florida's preeminent hubs of retail, tourism, and corporate activity. The city houses luxury high-rises, condos, and more than half of Palm Beach County's corporate headquarters.

By 1995, a few years after Mizner's opening, there were 350 residential units in the CRA. Today, there are nine times that amount, and nearly seven times as many property owners.

Boca's luxury residences are taking over

In 1988, Boca's City Council authorized more than 8 million square feet of development within the boundaries of the CRA. Of that amount, only 14% remains to be approved. Nearly 7 million square feet have gone toward completed projects, or have been allocated to either projects under construction or approved projects.

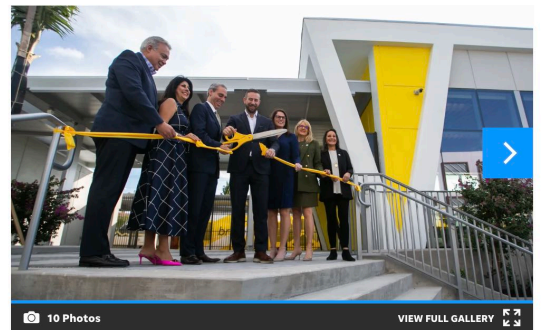
In the past 20 years, roughly 3,000 residential units have been added downtown. And while that growth was gradual, there's been a particular uptick in luxury residence offerings during the past five years.

Downtown apartment buildings — such as Tower 155 and Alina Residences Phase 1, are both new high-rise complexes. Tower 155, a 150-unit, 13-story building on East Boca Raton Road, is under construction and will have luxury one-to-three-bedroom condominiums steps from Sanborn Square and longstanding restaurants such as Tucci's Pizzeria.

Alina Residences, set to be a three-building complex less than half a mile from Tower 155, is being constructed in phases. All 121 units in the first building, completed in March 2021 and nestled behind Royal Palm Place, are occupied.

In 2024, more luxury condos are opening in the city to meet increased demand. On East Boca Raton Road, Reve Del Mizner — a three-story, five-townhome luxury residence — will fill a vacant lot walking distance from Mizner Park. And on Camino Real, a \$69 million mixed-use venture called Camino Square is under construction, slated to contain two eight-story apartment buildings, a swimming pool and dog park.

Brightline and a 'major investment' in Boca Raton business



A year after construction began, Boca Brightline is open for business
Boca Raton and Brightline officials hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony ahead of the station opening to the public on December 21st.

As more people move to Boca, businesses are doing the same. Overall office space within the city's limits is increasing, and more businesses than ever before are located downtown. There are more than 1,000 active businesses within the CRA, and 46% more office space downtown today than there was in 1995.

Boca's Brightline high-speed train station, located next to the Boca Raton Public Library and less than 5 minutes from Mizner Park, opened in December 2022. The \$56 million project connects travelers to other South Florida Brightline stations in Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach in under an hour. Service to Orlando was just announced and begins Friday, Sept. 22.

Real estate investment management group Grover Corlew in 2022 bought Palmetto Park City Center, the five-story luxury office building at 120 E. Palmetto Park Road, in downtown Boca. The building is already 90% occupied, many of which are family offices moving down to Florida from the Northeast or West Coast, Grover Corlew said.

Further downtown, right next to Sanborn Square, another luxury office space project called Aletto Square is coming soon. Developed by Compson Associates, Aletto will feature two office buildings — one 10-story structure with a rooftop restaurant and another six-story space — as well as a six-story parking garage. It's projected to be completed in 2025, and will be the first "Class A" office space built or renovated in downtown Boca Raton in 20 years.

Dining, entertainment scene: Tourists are starting to check out Boca Raton



Rendering of the Innovation & Education Center. By its fifth year in operation, the future Boca Raton Performing Arts Center is estimated to be generating an annual \$342.5 million for the area, culminating in \$10.3 billion over a 30-year period. Courtesy Of The Center For Arts & Innovation

As more people and businesses move to Boca, the number of people visiting the city is increasing. And more people, whether residents or visitors, require dining and entertainment options.

Mizner Park has been home to restaurants, bars and cultural centers such as the Boca Raton Museum of Art since it opened in the 1990s. To meet demand from new residents and tourists, though, many new tenants have moved downtown the past year.



American Social Bar & Kitchen is now open at Mizner Park in Boca Raton. It is the fifth location in the state after Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Orlando and Tampa. American Social

Restaurants including American Social Bar and Kitchen, or Strike 10 Bowling and Sports Lounge, a bowling alley that caters to adults with a bar and billiard tables, opened in May 2023 in Mizner Park. Two gourmet markets — BellaDukes and Spirits & Spice — have also moved downtown, along with multiple new retail stores.

The city's downtown area is also home to four cultural facilities, one of which — the Mizner Park Amphitheater — is getting a \$140 million upgrade that includes five flexible spaces for events and performances.

New hotels are coming to Boca Raton



The Mandarin Oriental hotel and residences, under construction in downtown Boca Raton. Alexandra Clough

To keep up with increased tourism, new hotel options are also coming to Boca Raton. The city recently approved the construction of a hotel at Royal Palm Place, and The Boca Raton — formerly known as the Boca Raton Resort & Club, and known for its signature, Addison Mizner-style pink façade — is undergoing a \$200 million facelift.

Eight years in the making, The Mandarin Oriental, a luxury hotel chain, is set to open its 164-room hotel and branded residences in downtown Boca in 2024.