

Miami voters approve hotel at Jungle Island



Brian Bandell | August 28, 2018

City of Miami voters approved a ballot referendum on Tuesday that will allow the owners of the Jungle Island amusement park to build a hotel.

With 95 percent of precincts reporting, 59.2 percent of the voters were in favor of the lease for a hotel on Watson Island. The hotel would be up to 130 feet tall with up to 300 rooms, and be constructed on what's currently the parking deck at Jungle Island. A new parking deck would be built for both the hotel and the amusement park.

While Miami has many hotels, this one would be distinguished because of its family-friendly animal theme and its close proximity to PortMiami, a major cruise port. It would be halfway between Miami Beach and downtown Miami, with an unobstructed view of Biscayne Bay in multiple directions.

“This has been a huge team effort on behalf of ESJ Capital Partners, spearheaded by Micha Dubernard, with the Jungle Island team,” said Arnaud

Sitbon, CEO of ESJ Capital Partners, the owner of Jungle Island. "We very much look forward to bringing this exciting project to life."

The developer has not yet announced a timeline for starting construction. It must still seek design review approval from the city for the hotel.

Coral Gables-based EOA Group designed the hotel.

Under the new lease, Jungle Island will pay an additional \$250,000 in rent initially and, upon completion of the hotel, pay the greater of \$1.22 million or 5 percent of hotel revenue. Jungle Island would also contribute \$700,000 to the nearby Ichimura-Miami Japanese Garden and \$750,000 to the city's low-income housing fund. Its lease with the city was also extended from 2060 to 2099, with a 15-year extension option.

Jungle Island is not seeking city funds to build the hotel.

"We are extremely grateful to the citizens of the City of Miami for their confidence in our vision of a new Jungle Island," said [Elie Mimoun](#), COO of ESJ Capital. "We will now be looking at a variety of options as to those next steps for the hotel. In any case, we need to now work through the city's clearly defined planning and zoning process, and we will of course continue to work with all of our neighbors."

The hotel could also increase visits to Jungle Island at a time when park owners are investing tens of millions of dollars in [adding new attractions](#).

In July, Jungle Island added the SuperFlight vertical wind tunnel and the NeoSplash water park. Upcoming attractions will include three escape rooms, the Flying Squirrel, an indoor trampoline park; the Nerf Battle Zone, a flow-rider wave machine; Skywire, a zipline course; and Joia on the Beach, an upscale restaurant. By summer 2019, a manmade crystal lagoon should open.

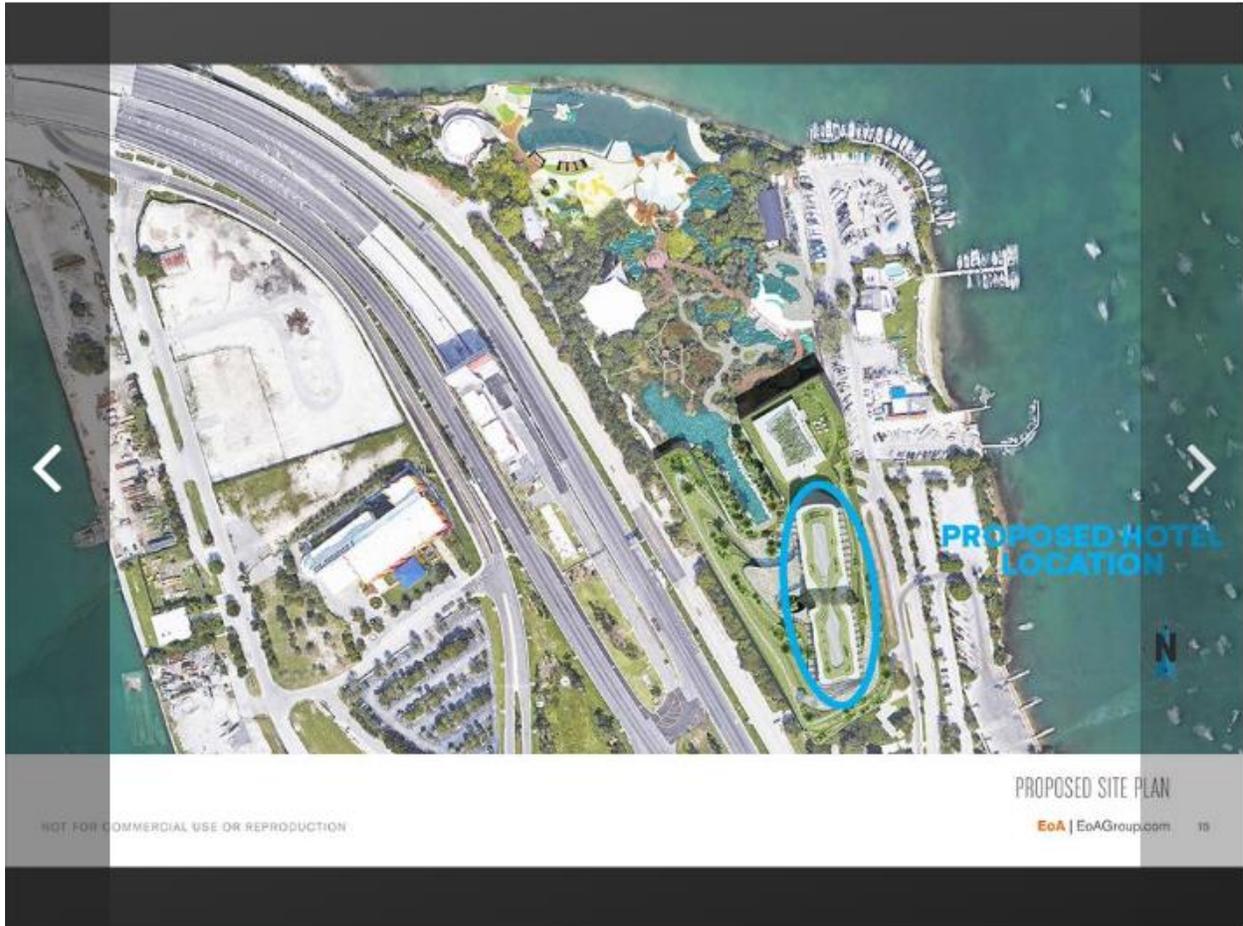
ESJ Capital Partners acquired Jungle Island for \$60 million in 2017.



A hotel planned at Jungle Island in Miami.



Jungle Island wants to build a hotel with up to 300 rooms on Watson island in Miami.



Jungle Island in Miami wants to replace its parking deck with a hotel, which would be situated atop a new parking structure.



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