

Look at Them Now

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
May 2019

Two Miami Beach neighborhood parks are improved



Belle Isle is a natural barrier island in Biscayne Bay that was enlarged with sand dredged from the digging of Collins Canal in the early 1900s. Located at the easternmost end of the Venetian Causeway, this South Beach community in Miami Beach is home to roughly 2000 residents, with many living in high-rise condominiums.

In 1913 the mangrove hammock on the island was removed by John S. Collins and Carl G. Fisher, making space for a road connecting to the Collins Bridge. Then the world's largest wooden bridge, it ran from the main island of Miami Beach to Miami in the west. Years later, the bridge would become today's Venetian Causeway.

In 2010 the Venetian Streetscape Project began, and along with it for the next few years, construction improvements on the bridge and drainage pipes on Belle Isle.

In the middle of this circular island is Belle Isle Park, 3.3 acres surrounded by high-rises, that went through a major renovation in 2006, part of Miami Beach's Capital Improvement Plan,

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costing \$600,000. Landscape improvements, sidewalks, park lighting, and a dog park were central to the park project.



Some parking spots can be found around the park, but you won't find an official Miami Beach park sign. Citi Bike rentals are on the north side of the park along the causeway, and are popular with locals and tourists.

From sunrise to sunset, bicyclists, mothers pushing children in strollers, and dog walkers take the wide, pink, concrete walkways that loop through the park. It's quiet enough to hear songbirds among the native oaks and gumbo limbos. Palms, flowering trees, and a large banyan also provide a bit of shade and lovely landscaping to look at along the park's perimeter. Many of the trees are braced, and each one is mulched along its base. Large enough for impromptu games like Frisbee and catch, the main open space is an oval-shaped lawn, very green and well mowed.

The park's pleasant landscape design offers some nooks for relaxation, with benches, garbage receptacles, water fountains, and pet waste stations at different points along the walkways. The
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didn't see any litter or dog poop on a visit in late March.

Most dogs and their owners here head southwest to the fenced-in dog park, with its two separate runs for large and small dogs. They come from all the Venetian Islands, not just Belle Isle, to visit this dog park.



From March 4 to April 1, the large bark park was closed for maintenance, in particular, re-sodding. During that time, big dogs shared the small-dog run, which now could use sod repair as well.

Ground cover around the high-traffic gate entrances to the dog areas is crushed shell, and the attractive metal fencing with double safety gates that actually lock in place are smart choices for the bark park. There are pet waste stations with bags and human/dog water fountains.

In March 2017, the Miami Beach Neighborhood and Community Affairs Committee voted to approve the building of a children's playground at Belle Isle Park. The following month,

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\$230,000 was amended in the 2016/2017 Miami Beach budget, transferring those funds from the \$1,453,000 appropriated for the nearby Maurice Gibb Park Redesign project. The proposed Belle Isle Park playground would serve as a temporary play area during the Maurice Gibb Park closure.

In February 2018, Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber hosted the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new playground. The installation includes a Supernova spinner, jungle gym with a climbing net, and climbing wall, slide, two sets of swings, and two shade structures. Metal fencing keeps the playground totally enclosed. Mulch flooring and very little grass cover the ground surface here. There are a few trees within the fencing, but they and the shades provide only a little protection from the summer sun. One bench gives parents a place to sit while watching their kids.



Melissa Berthier, Miami Beach assistant director of marketing and communications, tells the *BT* that the total cost of these playground improvements was \$209,169, paid through a Parks & Recreation Beautification Fund.

A little more than seven miles away in the North Beach area of Miami Beach is a small park that has also gone through recent positive changes.

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Normandy Shores Park and Tennis Courts at 2600 Biarritz Dr. is only two acres in size, but has a mammoth view of Biscayne Bay with approximately 250 feet of waterfront. It is located across from Normandy Shores Golf Club.

According to Berthier, the Normandy Shores Park project's \$135,000 estimated cost was approved in September 2012, paid for out of the 2013 capital budget. In an e-mail exchange with the *BT*, Berthier wrote, "The scope of the improvements covered demolition of the existing storage building/restroom, which was in poor condition, as well as the installation of a fitness circuit, park furnishings, such as benches and trash receptacles, and new fencing, sod, and trees."



Three-hour parking is permitted in front of the park, and there are plenty of parking spaces. Most of the park is a large four-court tennis center. All hard courts in very good shape, as are the metal benches and ten-foot chain-link fencing with netted shades to keep one protected from the sun.

The new outdoor fitness gym has six machines installed on rubber safety flooring under a broad canvas-topped pavilion. There is a water fountain, and although no dogs are allowed at the park, Miami Beach has installed a pet waste station on a grassy spot in front of the tennis courts. A five-foot-wide pink concrete path now makes a circuit around the park.

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Many young trees at Normandy Shores Park are braced, probably the result of Hurricane Irma. Queen crepe myrtles, Spanish stopper, and wild tamarind trees, cocoplum shrubs, and coontie are now gracing the park and its seawall. Once a prolific plant throughout South Florida but ravaged for starch production in Miami's pioneer days, coontie is the host plant of the endangered *Atala* butterfly. Nectar plants are also needed here to help the butterfly thrive.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com



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Belle Isle Park
52 Venetian Way
Miami Beach, FL 33139
305-673-7000

Park Rating



Hours:	Sunrise to Sunset
Picnic Tables	: No
Barbecues	: No
Picnic pavilions	: No
Athletic fields	: No
Swimming pool	: No
Night lighting	: Yes
Dog Park	: Yes
Playground	: Yes