

KELLER WILLIAMS REALTY

THE WATERFRONT BUYER'S FIELD GUIDE

The Bridge Height Relocation Guide

Two homes on the same canal can hold two completely different boats. Before you fall for the water, learn to read the one thing that actually sets the ceiling — the bridge.

POMPANO BEACH · LIGHTHOUSE POINT · FORT LAUDERDALE

Austin Zamecki

Realtor, **Keller Williams Realty** · Waterfront & Luxury Specialist

(352) 208-9684 · austinzamecki@kw.com · [@austinzamecki.realtor](https://www.austinzamecki.realtor) · FL License #3637294

“Ocean access” and “no fixed bridge” are not the same thing.

Almost every boater relocating here opens with the same request: “*Just find me something on the water.*” It's the right dream and the wrong measurement.

The water is never the constraint. The **bridge** is.

THE ONE IDEA TO TAKE AWAY

Between your dock and open water there is one **governing bridge** — the lowest fixed span on your route to the inlet. That single structure sets a permanent ceiling on the tallest boat that can ever leave your dock. It doesn't matter how new the seawall is, how wide the canal is, or how much you paid. Everything behind that bridge inherits its number.

Here's the part most buyers miss: a fixed bridge is not a discount you negotiate down. It's a **cap on your buyer pool** — the day you go to sell, every buyer with a taller boat is already gone, and no renovation brings them back.

*A fixed bridge doesn't lower the price.
It caps the buyer pool — permanently.*

That's why this guide is built around one question, asked in the right order:
not “is it on the water,” but “can my boat actually get out?”

The four clearance tiers, in boat terms

Waterfront doesn't come in one flavor. It comes in tiers, set by the governing bridge on your route. Here's roughly what fits under each — so you can size a home to your vessel instead of guessing.

TIER 1 Open No fixed bridge	Unrestricted — any vessel height Nothing is excluded. Sportfish, towers, flybridge, sailboats. A direct or bridge-free route to the inlet. This is the access profile the market pays the most for — and the reason it does.
TIER 2 ~14 ft+ Restricted	Most express cruisers & smaller flybridge Clears a good share of cruising boats under ~40 ft. Towers and true sportfish do not fit. Comfortable for many, a hard stop for some.
TIER 3 ~10–13 ft Capped	Center consoles with T-tops, small express Fine for a lot of Florida boats — but a 38 with a tower is out. This is where buyers most often get surprised after closing.
TIER 4 <10 ft Severely capped	Center-console territory Some owners lower the T-top just to get out. A permanent, structural cap on the boat — and on who buys the home next.

Read these as boat-fit bands, not property promises. Your actual ceiling is set by the single governing bridge on *your* route to the ocean — which is exactly what has to be identified and verified per home, not assumed from the neighborhood name.

The number you see isn't the number at 2 p.m.

Nearly every published clearance is measured at **Mean High Water** — the conservative, governing figure. It's the right number to plan around, but it isn't the number you'll meet on any given afternoon.

~2.5 ft BROWARD TIDAL SWING	+ room AT LOW TIDE	– room AT KING TIDE
---------------------------------------	------------------------------	-------------------------------

Broward's tide swings about two and a half feet. So the same bridge gives you noticeably **more** room near low tide and noticeably **less** near a king tide. King tides are exactly when boats get stuck and when the frustrated phone calls happen.

The trap is simple: tour a canal at the right tide and a marginal bridge can feel perfectly fine. The clearance that governs your life on the water is the **worst-case high-water number** — not the one that happened to be true during your showing.

*Boats don't get stuck on the average day.
They get stuck on the wrong tide.*

The rule of thumb I use: take the published Mean-High-Water clearance, then plan for less room on a king tide — and confirm the figure at a known high tide rather than trusting a calm-afternoon glance.

A REAL EXAMPLE

Three streets apart. Two completely different boats.

This is the whole idea in one Pompano Beach comparison — and it's not a hypothetical.

BEHIND THE BRIDGE — TIER 4

8.64 ft

The Old Pompano Canal (the G-16 system) sits behind a fixed bridge at SE 6th Terrace / SE 11th Avenue. Federally documented clearance at Mean High Water: **8.64 feet**. Center-console height — and it's permanent.

PAST THE INTRACOASTAL — TIER 1

No fixed bridge

A few streets east, past the Intracoastal, properties run clean to the Hillsboro Inlet with no fixed span in the way. Any boat leaves the dock. Same city. Often a similar price.

Same neighborhood on paper. Same “waterfront” in the listing. But one dock is capped at T-top height forever, and the other holds anything you'll ever own. The two homes don't just boat differently — the day you sell, they draw **completely different buyers**.

That gap doesn't show up in photos, and it rarely shows up in a listing description. It shows up in **8.64 feet of concrete** — and only if someone actually checked.

Source: SE 6th Terrace / SE 11th Avenue bridge clearance — U.S. Coast Guard Seventh District public notice. A planned replacement will raise it only modestly; the city has stated it cannot be brought up to match the neighboring span. The cap is structural, not temporary.

WHY THIS IS HARD TO GET RIGHT

Most bridge numbers online are simply wrong.

This isn't a knock on anyone. It's a data problem — and it's a big one. In a recent review of live, published clearance sources, individual bridges were off by as much as **34 feet**.

WHERE THE ERRORS COME FROM

Bridge records list **two different clearances**: one for the roadway overhead (for trucks) and a separate one for navigation (for boats). Pull the wrong field and you can publish a number that's off by dozens of feet. On top of that, the federal inventory, Coast Guard notices, and NOAA charts sometimes disagree on the very same bridge — and the same span reads differently depending on the tide datum behind the figure.

HOW I HANDLE IT FOR YOU

Every clearance I put in front of you is traced to a **primary source** — U.S. Coast Guard notices, the federal bridge inventory, NOAA charts — and cross-checked against the others. Where those sources conflict, I tell you they conflict, instead of quietly picking the flattering number. Where a figure can't be verified from a desk, it gets confirmed at a known high tide before it ever reaches you.

*The goal isn't a number that sounds right.
It's a number your boat can trust.*

Anyone can copy a clearance off a website. Very few have checked whether it's the boat number or the truck number — and on the water, that difference is the whole ballgame.

Five questions to answer on any waterfront home.

- ✓ What is the **one governing bridge** — the lowest fixed span — between this dock and the inlet?
- ✓ What is its clearance at **Mean High Water**, from a primary source, not a listing remark?
- ✓ What's my boat's **air draft**, and how much cushion is left at high tide? At a king tide?
- ✓ Is my route to the ocean **genuinely bridge-free**, or does it just feel open from this address?
- ✓ Can I actually **turn and float** — canal width and depth at my dock, at low tide?

COMMENT · CALL · TEXT

Relocating with a boat? Let's map your route to the ocean before you tour a single house.

I'll match your vessel to the canals that can actually hold it — and steer you clear of the docks your boat can never leave. No pressure, just the real numbers.

COMMENT "CANAL"

CALL OR TEXT

(352) 208-9684

EMAIL

austinzamecki@kw.com

INSTAGRAM

@austinzamecki.realtor

LICENSE

FL #3637294

This guide is educational and general. Bridge clearances vary by tide, route, and structure, and must be verified on a specific property before any purchase or vessel decision. It is not a substitute for primary-source verification on the home you're considering. © 2026 Austin Zamecki, Keller Williams Realty.

Call or text (352) 208-9684 with any questions, or to start your search or sell.