

March 29, 2007

Murmurs

Miami Blackjack Part 2

Ready or not, folks, the new urban-planning blueprint known as **Miami 21 is coming** — especially if you live or own property in what is being called the **“Eastern Quadrant,”** which includes areas such as the **Upper Eastside, the Design District, Buena Vista, Little Haiti, Wynwood, Edgewater, Overtown and downtown Miami.**

Although around 100 pages, Miami 21, designed by urban planner **Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk of Duany Plater-Zyberk** (or DPZ), aims to simplify Miami's zoning code while, at the same time, providing incentives for the creation of affordable housing, parks, alternative transit and even arts and cultural institutions. The plan is based on the “transact theory.”

“The existing code is focused on what is allowed, rather than what is desired. It has been further complicated by additional amendments, resulting in a voluminous set of

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regulations that creates conflict and frustration amongst developers and residents alike,” declares Miami 21’s mission statement. “The new Miami 21 will provide a long-term vision emphasizing ‘the form.’ Planning under this vision focuses on urban design practices proven to be effective, including great neighborhood centers, stable residential streets, successful urban parks, vibrant high density commercial streets and the successful coordination of standards for urban design, architecture, landscape, thoroughfare and use.”

Yet a fair number of people are **not in the mood to sing “Kumbaya.”** Some **residents** fear the plan is just an excuse to pack more density into their already **built-out neighborhoods.** There are **property owners** who feel Miami 21 will take away some of their existing rights, will create hundreds of nonconforming buildings and that it doesn’t provide enough incentives to build affordable rentals (i.e., lots of density in areas where land prices ain’t so high, like, *saaaaaay*, Little Haiti). And then there are the activists who have nearly zero faith that Miami’s leaders will **pay attention to the wishes of the electorate.**



The Miami 21 Eastern Quadrant plan was discussed at a workshop held last Saturday at Archbishop Curley Notre Dame High School. Photo by Luciana L. Gonzalez/Courtesy of city of Miami Planning Department

Fact is, there is **nothing like the pending restructuring of an entire zoning code** to create anxiety and conflict among Miami's **competing interests**. The situation has made many stakeholders urge Miami leaders to put the brakes on the momentum.

Not happening. On Wednesday, **April 4**, the **Planning Advisory Board** is expected to hold a "zoning in progress" workshop to discuss the most recent draft of the most recent revamping of Miami's code starting at 3 p.m. Then two weeks to the day later, at 6 p.m., the PAB is scheduled to make a decision. If that decision is positive, Miami 21 will move on to the **Miami City Commission** for a first reading on May 24 and a second and final reading on June 28.

City planners and DPZ consultants, while emphasizing that they are continuously tweaking a draft that was released March 16, tell Murmurs they've been holding public meetings for more than two years. "Hopefully the process will move forward," said DPZ's Miami 21 project manager **Marina Khouri**.

Miami Mayor Manny Diaz, who spearheaded this process so long ago, concurs.

"Like anything of this magnitude, you are **never going to make everybody happy**," Diaz told Murmurs Tuesday by phone. "I'd be **concerned if someone is extremely happy**. It just means someone is extremely unhappy. ... I think Liz has done a great job; her team has done great job. Hopefully we will have action on this over the next few months.

"A few months ago people were saying [the process was] going too slow," Diaz later added. "Now **it's too fast**."

For more information on Miami 21 (including fresh zoning maps), log on to www.miami21.org.

Poor People's Money?

Sitting as the board of the **Community Redevelopment Agency**, Commissioners **Tomas Regalado, Marc Sarnoff** and **Michelle Spence-Jones** approved a resolution **opposed to using any property taxes** the CRA collects for the construction of a baseball stadium or streetcar system.

The CRA was created with the purpose of **eliminating blight and slum**, as well as providing affordable housing.

The two resolutions, both proposed by Regalado, were approved unanimously on Monday. But Regalado **isn't done yet**. He is also advising that **no further CRA funds** be allocated to the **Carnival Center for the Performing Arts** or for the **construction of a proposed billion-dollar underwater tunnel for the Port of Miami, Parrot Jungle** and the **Gardens of Watson Island, Inc.**, until "the **issue of affordable housing** in the redevelopment areas has been fully addressed." Regalado also grumbled about the possibility that **CRA money might be used to help pay for any cost overruns** related to converting Bicentennial Park into **Museum Park** — i.e., an open space for a new **Miami Art Museum** and a new **Miami Science Museum**, which Miami-Dade County taxpayers are already committed to forking over **\$275 million to construct**.

"You know it is easy for me to approve anything in the CRA," Regalado said to Spence-Jones and Sarnoff. After all, the Omni and Overtown/Park West Districts are located in their districts, not his, he said. But Regalado added that CRA money should be used to "**help poor people**" and not to further schemes hatched on the 29th floor of County Hall or the 10th floor of the Miami River Center.

Regalado received immediate support from Spence-Jones and Sarnoff to block CRA funding for a baseball stadium or a proposed \$200-million-plus streetcar system. But Spence-Jones worried aloud that county officials may become reluctant to allow the expansion of the CRA into other Overtown neighborhoods. Sarnoff felt the same way and he also wanted to make sure the Carnival Center, which he described as a "jewel," was properly maintained.

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That same day the CRA approved the first of many annual \$1.43 million payments expected to be doled out to the Carnival Center, part of a 1997 deal with the county to use Omni money to help pay for an \$87 million bond that financed the construction of the Carnival Center. While expressing that he's not sure he would have backed the construction of the \$400-million-plus performing arts center, Sarnoff said now that it is built, the city must do what it can to maintain it.

Regalado replied that other funding sources, such as resort tax money, could be used. And as for the county, Regalado said he is **prepared to launch a propaganda war against the powers that be in County Hall** as opposing the poor if they resist the city's desire to expand the size of the CRA or extend the two districts' lives beyond 2017.

Mayor Diaz, in a rare talkative mood with Murmurs Tuesday, **ridiculed Regalado's move**. Although Diaz suggested a site near Government Center for a Marlins stadium, he insisted that he never proposed using CRA money to help construct it. Diaz also said that CRA money has not been suggested thus far to help fund a streetcar project needed to bring concurrency to thousands of condos proposed in Miami. A county spokesperson also told Murmurs she knew of no plans to use Miami CRA money to help fund the tunnel project, the Museum Park project or any ventures on Watson Island.

Well, **not yet anyway**. Diaz acknowledged that CRA money might be looked at for such things and feels all funding sources should be considered as plans move forward. **“This is all part of the big picture,”** Diaz said. “You can't simply pick and choose one item or another item.”

Besides, Diaz added, “The issue was brought up as a pocket item **with only three commissioners present**. It seems to me when you are going to make **huge funding decisions** like that, you should **probably have everybody present**.”

Regalado sees it that way too. He told Spence-Jones and Sarnoff Monday that he would love to discuss what projects the CRA should fund with all five commissioners, including Diaz's absent allies, Commissioners **Joe Sanchez** and **Angel Gonzalez**. Regalado plans to bring up the tunnel, Watson Island and the performing arts center in **future meetings**. “Hopefully at the next meeting I'll get the performing arts center [resolution approved] also,” he said.

Got a murmur? E-mail editorial@miamisunpost.com Comments? E-mail letters@miamisunpost.com