



MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #VII.B

DATE: JANUARY 23, 2023
TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS
FROM: STAFF
SUBJECT: CORRESPONDENCE AND ARTICLES

Recommendation

Information only

Florida Politics spoke with all 13 members of the Miami-Dade County Commission about which issues they plan to prioritize this year.

After decades of glacial change from year to year, the 13-seat Miami-Dade County Commission is the freshest it's been since its inception, with nearly half its members winning office for the first time in 2022.

The board's new look is thanks to **term limits** that kicked in a little over two years ago, when five Commissioners boasting more than 70 combined years on the dais left office.

By this past December, six more Commissioners with nearly 122 combined years of service departed as well.

But while the composition of the county's legislative leadership has changed, Miami-Dade's most pressing issues — housing, transit, public safety and environmental resilience among them — remain the same.

Florida Politics spoke with every member of the Miami-Dade Commission about which issues they plan to prioritize in 2023 and what legislation they have coming to address them.



Oliver Gilbert III unanimously won election as Chair of the Miami-Dade County Commission. Image via Miami-Dade County.

Chair Oliver Gilbert III — District 1

A former Miami Gardens Mayor, **Oliver Gilbert III's** leadership streak continued when he transferred from municipal to county government. For the last two years, he served as Vice Chair of the Miami-Dade Commission and Chair of the county's **transportation planning board**, a post he stepped down from in December.

Last month, Gilbert's peers **unanimously elected him to a two-year term as Chair** of the County Commission. During his time at County Hall, he has distinguished himself as an evenhanded and inventive leader, approaching long-standing issues with novel insights. No issue has captured his attention more than the implementation of the **SMART Program**, an initiative to build rapid transit solutions along five key commuting corridors across the county. That won't change in 2023.

"To be a world-class community, we have to have world-class mass transit, and we do that by enabling people and giving them an opportunity to actually get out of their cars to get from point A to point B, C and D," he said.

Gilbert stressed that Miami-Dade is now at an inflection point at which it must lock down concrete plans to secure vital state and federal funding matches for the projects.

“It’s time to come up with a plan and stick to the plan, and that’s what we hope to do in the next two years.”

Things appear to be headed that way. In November, the county announced it will forgo a previously contemplated monorail solution on the Beach Corridor of the SMART Plan connecting Miami and Miami Beach.

Instead, the county went with a new plan to **extend its existing Metromover service** to provide a one-seat ride between the cities.

For the North Corridor between downtown Miami and the Broward County line, Miami-Dade is edging closer to adopting a new Metrorail line linking its northernmost station to Hard Rock Stadium through a **new plan** the county devised last year that is expected to accelerate development.

Work continues on the 11-mile East-West Corridor connecting West Miami-Dade to Miami International Airport and downtown Miami on dedicated bus lanes along State Road 836, the Northeast Corridor linking Miami with Aventura on Brightline tracks, and the 20-mile bus rapid transit route on the South Corridor between Kendall and Homestead, which is set to reach completion in 2024.

A sixth line, the **Kendall Corridor**, which would run from the southernmost Metrorail station to the Baptist West hospital in the Hammocks, no longer appears as part of the SMART Plan on the county’s website. Gilbert said the route is still “definitely something we know has to be addressed.”

District 1 spans a center-north portion of the county, including all of Miami Gardens, part of Opa-locka and **Miami-Opa locka Executive Airport**.

Gilbert, a lawyer, said he will likely release a list of new committees and committee assignments “in the next two weeks.” For now, the County Commission is holding meetings under an **interim committee structure**.



Marleine Bastien plans to apply her expertise in the nonprofit sector to policymaking. Image via VoteMarleineBastien.com.

Marleine Bastien — District 2

Marleine Bastien took office in November after **winning a contentious race** for the seat representing District 2. She brings more than 30 years of community service and government advocacy to the job as the founder and executive director of **Family Action Network Movement**, a nonprofit that works to fill gaps in services between the county and residents in need.

Accordingly, her focus is on community empowerment and strengthening public services.

At the forefront of that effort, she said, is addressing the county's affordable housing problem. Half of Miami-Dade's households are cost-burdened by housing, meaning they pay **30% of their income on shelter**. Nearly 98% of apartments countywide are occupied, according to apartment-listing service **RentCafe**. For every vacant apartment, there are 31 prospective renters competing to take it, making it the most competitive apartment market in the nation.

To take on the problem, Bastien said she's planning a mixed approach, targeting contributory factors like stagnant wages, helping parts of the labor force that are falling behind and giving residents on fixed incomes a boost.

"They all go together," she said.

To upskill Miami-Dade's workforce, she plans to tap county funds to "jumpstart" new projects and elevate existing vocational programs. She's eyeing new or expanded partnerships with Florida International University, Miami Dade College and local trade schools.

Small businesses need help too, she said, particularly when it comes to resilience.

"We need to look at various business models to make sure we improve the infrastructure of small businesses," she said. "That was one of the challenges I saw during the pandemic. Even though there were resources coming from the federal government, a lot of the small businesses in our district did not qualify. We will be sure to look at that and find ways to help them increase revenues."

District 2 encompasses sizable portions of North Miami and Opa-locka, as well as smaller pieces of Hialeah, Miami, North Miami Beach and the unincorporated neighborhoods of Biscayne Gardens, Liberty City and North Central Dade.



Keon Hardemon wants to boost economic growth in District 3. Image via Miami-Dade County.

Keon Hardemon — District 3

A lawyer by trade and former four-time Chair of the Miami City Commission, **Keon Hardemon** took office in November 2020. Since then, the soft-spoken, levelheaded persuader has never shied away from tough conversations. There are likely to be many of those this year.

His top priority through Dec. 31, he said, is ensuring residents, businesses and communities enjoy economic growth as a result of several initiatives he has in the works to supplement ongoing affordability, community beautification and anti-poverty programs.

He listed three projects already on deck. One is a \$4 million initiative to revitalize the façade, road and lighting on 18th Avenue. Another will see affordable housing developments rise on a dozen infill lots in District 3. And in Brownsville, he secured funding for a project to beautify Lincoln Memorial Cemetery Park, which turns 100 this year.

Hardemon said he also plans to expand several existing programs. Among them: the Keon Hardemon Small Business Grant, which in 2022 awarded about \$160,000 to small businesses, and the Peace and Prosperity Plan, which has provided professional development and life skills to 85 teenagers in the district so far, though funding for that program now needs a new source.

“Since my time as a Miami Commissioner, I have been focused on uplifting the most vulnerable areas in our community,” he said. “My commitment has always been to invest in our local economy and enhance the quality of life for all our residents.”

District 3 covers the unincorporated neighborhoods of Brownsville and Biscayne Shores, a large chunk of Miami — including Liberty City, Little Haiti, Overtown, the Upper East Side, Edgewater, Buena Vista, Allapattah, Wynwood, San Marco Island, Watson Island — and the villages of El Portal and Miami Shores.



Micky Steinberg is planning legislation to target quality-of-life issues. Miami-Dade County.

Micky Steinberg — District 4

The sole Miami-Dade Commission candidate to win unopposed last year, former Miami Beach City Commissioner **Micky Steinberg** opted to keep much of the District 4 staff onboard upon succeeding its longtime representative, **Sally Heyman**.

During her first year at County Hall, Steinberg said she'll focus on quality-of-life issues, including upgrading local infrastructure to improve coastal resilience and alleviating traffic congestion. “I want to aggressively invest in those efforts —stormwater infrastructure, flood mitigation, continue with septic-to-sewer strategies and obviously focusing on Biscayne Bay to ensure our water quality remains safe and clean,” she said. “And traffic congestion — that’s obviously a quality-of-life issue.”

There's also the budget. Every September, Miami-Dade Commissioners OK the county's annual spending plan, which came in at \$10 billion last year. The timing of its approval means Steinberg and other incoming Commissioners have limited say in how the county allocates its money during most of their first year in office.

"The budget we walked into has been set, and it's the framework for addressing all of these challenges," she said. "It's important to get a really strong understanding of that and the needs of the community."

To solicit constituent engagement, Steinberg plans to bring back "**Mondays with Micky**," an online, town hall-style forum she ran while on the Miami Beach Commission.

"We would pick a specific topic and invite the professional staff from the topic to come, so whenever residents were interested in a particular topic, they could come and hear about it," she said. "I'm going to kick-start that again sometime in the new year. We're going to take these different topics and hear from the residents themselves, and a lot of that will help shape the legislation we put forward."

District 4 covers a northeast corner of the county spanning some unincorporated neighborhoods and the cities of Aventura, Bal Harbour, Bay Harbor Islands, Biscayne Park, Golden Beach, Indian Creek, Miami Beach, Miami Shores, North Bay Village, North Miami, North Miami Beach, Sunny Isles Beach and Surfside.



Eileen Higgins' focus remains on transportation and housing. Image via Miami-Dade County.

Eileen Higgins — District 5

A political newcomer when she defeated an established and better-funded opponent during a 2018 special election, **Eileen Higgins** became the Miami-Dade Commission's senior member following Gov. **Ron DeSantis' suspension of Joe Martinez** late last year.

Now serving in her first full, four-year term, Higgins said her priorities in 2023 will be consistent with the work she's done in years prior, particularly on the issues of housing and transit.

The biggest undertaking combining those interests is the **Metro Center Project**, a \$10 billion plan to redevelop dozens of acres around County Hall into a taller, denser, more pedestrian-friendly metropolitan area with upwards of 3,000 new affordable and workforce housing units near the county's central transit hub. "And of course, affordable housing located near transit is even more affordable than anywhere else, because you don't need a car or insurance for that," she said. Speaking of transit, Higgins stressed "excellent progress" has been made toward developing five key commuting corridors identified in the county SMART Program. "Particularly with the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in Congress, there is a lot of opportunity to push our mass transit projects forward," she said.

Higgins also has her sights set on revising the standards by which companies seeking county contracts must treat their employees, including an update to the county’s living wage requirements. “We are still missing a few classes of workers that do work on county contracts who right now aren’t covered, including health insurance,” she said.

The other missing piece, she said, is paid sick leave. “We have a lot of contracted workers that do not receive even one minute of paid sick time, and it’s very important we fix that,” she said. “During the pandemic, we learned the importance of being able to stay home if you’re sick. It actually saved companies money when their employees were able to take a few days off rather than come to work ill and then not be able to pay their rent.” District 5 covers parts of Miami and Miami Beach — including the neighborhoods of Brickell, Downtown Miami, Miami River, The Roads, Silver Bluff, Shenandoah, Little Havana and West Flagler.



Kevin Marino Cabrera’s top priority is bringing relief to tax-burdened homeowners. Image via Kevin Marino Cabrera.

Kevin Marino Cabrera — District 6

A former elected Community Council member, **Kevin Marino Cabrera** told Florida Politics he plans to follow through on promises he made last year, when he personally knocked on more than 71,000 doors to speak with residents in his district.

Priority No. 1, he said, is property taxes. Miami-Dade’s ballooning housing market may be beneficial to home sellers, but for many longtime residents who want only to continue living comfortably where they are — particularly seniors — increasingly burdensome property taxes are a strain. “You’ve got folks that have lived in their homes for 30-plus years who want to live out their golden years and retire in their homes, and their property taxes are increasing at a clip higher than their pensions, 401Ks and social security payments,” he said. “They’re struggling.”

Cabrera said he’s discussed the issue with Miami-Dade Mayor **Daniella Levine Cava**, whose HOMES Plan provides homeowners with up to \$1,500 to cushion the impact of property taxes, homeowners’ association fees and mortgage payments. While the county is limited by state law on what more it can do, Cabrera said he’s determined to do something. “We’re figuring it out, whether it will be in the form of a rebate or a reduction,” he said. “These are folks that created our county, our communities, and made it a desirable place to move to. We want to make sure they’re not being pushed out of their homes.”

Cabrera also has his sights set on improving mobility in Miami-Dade. To do that properly, he said, the County Commission must pass legislation to prevent any future misallocation of funds reserved for transit expansion

through the half-percent sales tax known as the **half-penny**. Miami-Dade residents voted in 2002 for the half-penny surtax to fund transit improvements, including an extra 90 miles of rapid transit, a doubled Metrobus fleet, upgraded infrastructure and a free Metromover. To date, the tax has generated more than \$3 billion. But until recently, little to no transit expansion actually occurred, thanks to a decision County Commissioners made during the Great Recession to use half-penny funds on existing operation and maintenance. Had they not done so, services would have been drastically cut, further deepening the economic woes many residents felt at the time.

It took more than a decade for the Commission to approve **unwinding** the half-penny from the county's general fund, a move that reached completion last year. Cabrera said he has legislation in the works to bar all future use of half-penny funds for anything other than what voters approved more than two decades ago.

"What we don't want is to be a place where you're spending three hours a day in traffic," he said. "That's where we're going unless we continue to move down the path of expanding our transit system."

Cabrera, a public relations pro with a background in lobbying and government work, is also looking to cut red tape tied to county permitting, pointing to the seven and a half months it took to gain approval for a septic-to-sewer project at his house.

"That was an arduous process considering I was trying to do the right thing for not only my home but the environment and our county," he said. "You look at a place like Jacksonville, and it's my understanding you get your permit in 30 days."

District 6 covers all or part of Coral Gables, Hialeah, Miami, Miami Springs, Virginia Gardens and West Miami.



If there's an issue facing Miami-Dade, Raquel Regalado's probably working on legislation to address it. Image via Miami-Dade County.

Raquel Regalado — District 7

Knowing the Miami-Dade Commission was headed for unprecedented turnover late last year, **Raquel Regalado** hastened to advance several legislative items beforehand. She succeeded in many areas.

"I turned out over 200 items, everything from **auxiliary dwelling units** (to help affordable housing) and changes to feasible distance, which is the way the county calculates when someone should **connect to our water and sewer system**," she said.

A lawyer and radio host, Regalado won her County Commission seat in 2020. She has since stood out as one of the board's most vocal policy wonks and an ambitious legislator.

Along with plans to tackle the county's property insurance issues, septic-to-sewer conversions and changes to condominium regulations stemming from the June 2021 **condo collapse in Surfside**, she plans to continue work on transit-oriented developments in and around her district and expand training programs on neurodiversity — a **personal issue** she championed for six years while serving on the Miami-Dade School Board.

She's now working on legislation to offer private companies a chance to help train government employees and others on best practices when interacting with neurodiverse people, including those on the autism spectrum.

"I spent a lot of time last year and the year before passing legislation to create employment contracts to educate county employees on neurodiversity. We educated our police force, fire department and our entire library system, and we're now working on transit and parks," she said.

"But we're at a point where we can use the data — how we train, how effective the training was, the feedback we get — to roll out an extensive employment exchange so folks in the private sector can do this work and it's not just the county offering these opportunities."

Regalado also anticipates either proffering or supporting measures to reform oversight of homeowners' associations, citing the recent arrests of current and former members of the Hammocks Community Association on charges of **racketeering and money laundering**.

That case still pends resolution, but the actions of that HOA and the inaction of the one in Surfside evidence a need for change, she said.

Added to Regalado's responsibilities at County Hall is her leadership of the board governing the operation of the intercounty commuter train service, **Tri-Rail**, which connects Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach. In June, Regalado's peers on the board **elected her Chair**.

"I've made a lot of changes in the last few months that we are going to implement," she said. "We're finally going to have bicycles and scooters at all the Miami-Dade stations. We're finally going to have concessions. We're wrapping the trains, and we're also looking at doing housing at the Hialeah station."

District 7 covers Pinecrest, Key Biscayne, portions of Coral Gables, South Miami and Miami, including Coconut Grove and Virginia Key, and the unincorporated neighborhoods of Kendall and Sunset.



Danielle Cohen Higgins (left) is eyeing affordable housing ingenuity, county contract reform and bridging a gap between Palmetto Bay and Cutler Bay. Image via Danielle Cohen Higgins.

District 8 — Danielle Cohen Higgins

Appointed to the Miami-Dade Commission in late 2020, **Danielle Cohen Higgins** retained her seat in August, **winning election** to a full, four-year term. Cohen Higgins has several items at the top of her to-do list, including securing state dollars to develop the **South Dade Rail Trail**, building additional fire stations in her district, ensuring the continuation of the annual **Hometown Heroes Parade** that honors frontline workers and commencing construction on the 87th Avenue bridge between Palmetto Bay and Cutler Bay.

The \$3.1 million bridge project is a divisive issue among locals, and Palmetto Bay has even **sued the county** to stop its construction. But as she sees it, the bridge is a long overdue project that will be a net benefit to all once it's finished. "It's a transportation solution, but it's also a public safety solution because of the response time for (emergency services to) residents in that area," she said, adding that she is seeking an earmark in the next county budget.

For housing, Cohen Higgins is at work on a measure to ease development of modular housing, prefabricated units resistant to up to Category 4 hurricanes. Last year, she passed **legislation directing the administration to conduct a test of the structures**.

A lawyer in private life, Cohen Higgins also wants to close something of a loophole in the county's contracting process for construction projects involving the **Urban Development Boundary**. Currently, she said, the county allows an unlimited number of attempts, which benefits larger firms with more resources to dedicate to repeat tries. Commissioners Tuesday will weigh a **measure she sponsored cutting the number to three**.

"You'll have three attempts to revise or edit your application, do whatever you need to do," she said. "Otherwise, we need to reopen the public hearing so the public can have input on whatever changes the developers are making to their applications throughout the process."

District 8 covers much of Miami-Dade County's southern portion, including the municipalities of Palmetto Bay, Cutler Bay, Homestead and the unincorporated neighborhoods of Redlands, Falls, Princeton, Naranja, Leisure City and parts of West Kendall.



For Kionne McGhee, the focus is on housing affordability, the environment and pet adoptions. Image via Miami-Dade County.

Kionne McGhee — District 9

Now two years into his first term on the County Commission, former House Minority Leader **Kionne McGhee** maintains that affordable housing is the most pressing need facing the community. The county is “at a crossroads as it relates to affordability, opportunities for growth and generational wealth,” he said. “We believe, and I honestly hope, that legislation I will push forward will assist in addressing those issues.” Concurrent to that effort, he said, is legislation to restore the health of Biscayne Bay, the Everglades and other vital ecosystems. “That will be my second issue,” he said.

He also hopes to do more to boost animal adoptions, a “pet project” he began shortly after taking office in December 2020 through the “**Save Charlie Act**,” which helped to end most euthanasia practices at animal shelters. “I would like to see more attention and resources given to the Miami-Dade Animal Services Department so we can address pet adoptions and elevate conversations relating to pets and animals in our community,” he said.

McGhee, a lawyer, represents the southernmost part of Miami-Dade, including the municipalities of Homestead, Florida City and the unincorporated neighborhoods of Goulds and Perrine, among others.



Anthony Rodriguez brings experience from Tallahassee, and many connections, to County Hall. Image via Miami-Dade County.

Vice Chair Anthony Rodriguez — District 10

Former Rep. **Anthony Rodriguez** won the **Vice Chair seat** on the County Commission last month to cap off an election year in which he forwent seeking another term in Tallahassee for a public service job closer to home. While Rodriguez no longer works in the Legislature, he plans to tap relationships he fostered there to help several initiatives he’s working on.

One such effort centers on the “critical issue” of housing. Another is the SMART Plan, for which money is a major factor as well.

“We’ll be able to do some really good things for Miami-Dade together with (future House Speaker **Daniel**) **Perez**, Senate President (**Kathleen**) **Passidomo** and a lot of my colleagues I started with as a freshman in the Legislature who are now Senators,” he said. “We have **Nick DiCeglie**, **Ana María Rodríguez** and **Alexis Calatayud**, who is from the county and was a great friend back when she was an aide.”

Rodriguez, a property manager in private life, also wants to help small businesses gain a larger share of county contracts. The first step toward that end, he said, comes Tuesday through an **ordinance** creating a licensure program for small haulers of solid waste. The program’s structure, he said, could lead to similar arrangements for other business types.

“Right now, a single person that owns a small business and just has one truck and hauls garbage has to abide by the same guidelines, licensing fees and insurance requirements as some of the largest companies. That’s not feasible for a one-truck man to do. We’re creating a new program where it will be feasible for smaller companies to come into compliance,” he said.

“It’s important, as a government, that we create these conditions for small businesses, provide them with the tools and guardrails for how to operate and, once we do so, to get out of the way and let them thrive on their own without government overreach. That’s the mentality I have whenever I sponsor legislation and policies relating to business.”

District 10 covers an entirely unincorporated area of Miami-Dade, including the neighborhoods of Fontainebleau, Kendall and Westchester.



Rob Gonzalez promises to run one of the most accessible County Commission offices Miami-Dade has ever seen. Image via Rob Gonzalez.

Rob Gonzalez — District 11

The Miami-Dade Commission's newest member, **Rob Gonzalez** joined the board in late November, when Gov. **Ron DeSantis** appointed him to replace Joe Martinez.

A lawyer who ran unsuccessfully for the House last year, Gonzalez said his goal is to increase residential engagement in the political process.

"You would be amazed at how many doors I knocked on and how many people I talked to who don't know who their state legislator, county Commissioner or local judges are," he said. "We live in a republic, which only works if the citizens are involved, so I want to be the person that bridges the gap between citizens and their political officeholders."

In terms of policymaking, Gonzalez plans to prioritize many of the issues he ran on last year while seeking state office, including supporting public safety, improving transit, reforming HOA regulations and blocking added costs to housing.

"One of my biggest goals is to, No. 1, make sure there is no unnecessary increases in taxes, fees or costs," he said. "We want to make sure folks are able to keep as much money in their pockets as possible. God knows they need it right now."

A large portion of Gonzalez's district abuts the Everglades, which he called "the lungs" of the county and critical to its resilience. He vowed to defend that area and other portions of District 11 that are dedicated to agriculture from commercial development.

"We have one of the best water systems in the world," he said. "But if we don't take care of it, my daughter may not be able to say the same thing, and her children won't have the same benefits we enjoy."

District 11 covers a swath of unincorporated neighborhoods on the county's west side, including Country Walk, Hammocks, Kendale Lakes, Bent Tree and Lake of the Meadows.



Juan Carlos Bermudez intends to set concrete guidelines for municipal annexations. Image via Juan Carlos Bermudez.

Juan Carlos Bermudez — District 12

The founding and immediate past Mayor of Doral, **Juan Carlos Bermudez** brought decades of government experience to County Hall when he won election to the District 12 seat in August. Many of his early priorities are congruent with those of his peers, from tackling housing unaffordability to expanding transportation options countywide.

“Some of the things that are very present and urgently important are right in front of us, and both of those issues are critical for me,” he said.

But there are other matters to which he’ll dedicate much of his attention this year. One concentrates on how the county approves changes to municipal borders.

In December 2021, the Miami-Dade Commission approved an annexation by the city of Sweetwater of a high-value commercial sector that nearly doubled the city’s size and is projected to lower taxes for its residents.

Doral sought the area as well, but then-County Commission Chair **Jose “Pepe” Diaz**, a former Sweetwater Mayor who is all but certain to run for the job again, passed a rule change that excluded Doral from contention.

Bermudez at the time likened the fast-tracked amendment to “changing the rules in the middle of the game,” telling Florida Politics, “This is why people get bothered by government.”

Since winning his seat at County Hall, Bermudez, a lawyer, has pushed for uniform annexation rules in all future processes, including ones pending for the cities of Medley, Virginia Gardens and others.

“I want to make sure they are treated the same way as Sweetwater,” he said.

In District 12 specifically, Bermudez hopes to move a trash incinerator out of Doral. He said the county rushed approval and placement of the waste-to-energy facility, whose emissions have clouded the city in a stinky, egg-like fog.

“I support the new facility, but I don’t necessarily support making the decision that quickly, and I may have some legislation for that to at least open up reconsideration so we can have a franker discussion on what the best technology is and where the best place is to put it,” he said.

Countywide, Bermudez said Commissioners need to get a handle on the next budget, which won’t include funds previously enjoyed from the American Rescue Plan Act.

There’s also the matter of constitutional offices returning to the county, including the elected positions of Sheriff, Tax Collector and Supervisor of Elections, which voters will again choose in 2024.

“For the first time in forever — since the 1960s — you might have a Sheriff’s Office independent of the county government,” he said. “How that transition takes place in 2024 hasn’t yet been determined. It’s going to be a very involved issue for the Commission this year amongst many other things.”

District 12 covers an area in northwest Miami-Dade encompassing all or part of the municipalities of Doral, Hialeah, Hialeah Gardens, Medley, Sweetwater and Virginia Gardens, as well a large portion of the county’s unincorporated area.



René García plans to bring added transparency to local government. Image via Miami-Dade County.

René García — District 13

Former Sen. **René García** said his priorities haven’t changed since he won county office two years ago: bringing more transparency to government, streamlining its processes and fixing procurement issues. “At the end of the day, I do think we lack some transparency as to how issues are done and come to the table, and I want to make sure the public has the same opportunity to vet issues we handle,” he said.

That extends to the speed by which some items make it onto a Commission agenda, he said, pointing to the board’s hastily approved and now defunct deal with cryptocurrency exchange FTX for the naming rights of the Miami Heat arena. “It came to us maybe 12 hours before we had to vote on it. That is part of the reason I voted against it, and now you see what’s happened,” he said, referring to FTX’s bankruptcy, the federal indictment of its CEO and millions of lost sponsorship dollars by the county, city and team.

García said building affordable housing is high on his list of priorities as well but expressed wariness about developing properties without the necessary subterranean infrastructure to support it. “We’re having all this debate, talking about moving the Urban Development Boundary and bringing more development, yet I don’t believe our infrastructure, our water and sewer system, is up to date or has the capacity to sustain all this new development. Miami-Dade is still under a federal consent decree to upgrade its water and wastewater system,” he said.

“We’ve got to become statesmen and women and not just politicians and think of the long-range goal of where we want to be in this county in the next 10 to 20 years. That starts with investing now in projects that will outlive us as opposed to those that are for ribbon-cutting and taking pictures.”

A hospital administrator in private life, García said mental health and substance abuse treatments have been careerlong focuses that informed his legislative priorities. That will still be the case this year, when he also plans to sponsor a measure to address HIV locally.

“We’re one of the highest in HIV cases nationally, if not **the highest**,” he said. “I want to make sure we work on that.”

District 13 covers a northern portion of Miami-Dade, including the municipalities of Hialeah, Hialeah Gardens and Miami Lakes.

National Park In Florida Keys Closes Indefinitely After 300 Migrants Land On Shores

BY JOHN RIGOLIZZO



(Stephen Frink/Getty Images)

Dry Tortugas National Park in the Florida Keys announced it would close beginning Monday in response to a flood of [migrants](#) arriving on its shores.

The park, located on the Western extreme of the Florida Keys, announced the closure on Monday. The National Park Service said in a statement that it was closed in order to respond to nearly 300 migrants who arrived on the island in recent days. The migrants mostly arrived from the communist island nation of Cuba by boat.

“On January 2 at 8 am, Dry Tortugas National Park will temporarily close to public access while law enforcement and medical personnel evaluate, provide care for and coordinate transport to Key West for approximately 300 migrants who arrived in the park over the past couple of days,” the [National Park Service](#) said in its statement.

“The closure, which is expected to last several days, is necessary for the safety of visitors and staff because of the resources and space needed to attend to the migrants. Concession-operated ferry and sea plane services are temporarily suspended.”

“Like elsewhere in the Florida Keys, the park has recently seen an increase in people arriving by boat from Cuba and landing on the islands of Dry Tortugas National Park,” the NPS added. “Park first responders provide food, water and basic medical attention until the Department of Homeland Security arrives and takes the lead. While the park is closed, vessels may seek safe harbor in the designated areas within the one nautical mile anchoring zone around Garden Key, including Bird Key Harbor. There will be no visitor services available while the closure is in effect and emergency services will be extremely limited. All closures will remain in place until further notice.”

Walter N. Slosar, the Chief Patrol Agent of the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Miami Sector, tweeted that Border Patrol agents had encountered at least 200 migrants on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day alone, in more than a dozen encounters.

“During the past 24 hours, U.S. Border Patrol agents & LE partners responded to 5 migrant landings throughout the Florida Keys and encountered 88 Cuban migrants,” Slosar [tweeted Saturday](#).

“New Year’s Day in Florida: Over 160 migrants have been encountered today in the #Florida Keys,” he added [Sunday](#). “Border Patrol agents with support from federal, state, and local LE partners responded to 10 migrant landings since midnight.”

Rear Admiral [Brendan C. McPherson](#), commander of the Seventh Coast Guard District & director of Homeland Security Task Force – Southeast, added in a separate statement on Twitter that the migrants would be removed and provided with food and water and basic first aid, before being transferred to the custody of Border Patrol for processing. “Irregular, illegal maritime migration is always dangerous and very often deadly. #DontTakeToTheSeas,” he said.

The park, about 100 acres in area, is a small archipelago about 70 miles from Key West. It is made up of the seven Dry Tortuga islands, and the incomplete naval fort and former prison, Fort Jefferson. Most of the park is water, and it is home to some of the best-preserved coral reefs in the Florida Keys. The Park is renowned for its abundant tropical marine life and birds.

Read more: <https://www.dailywire.com/news/national-park-in-florida-keys-closes-indefinitely-after-300-migrants-land-on-shores>

Hines plans to start new FAT Village project in Fort Lauderdale this summer

BY ERIK BOJNANSKY



The T3 office building planned in Fort Lauderdale.

A real estate investment firm intends to start work on the first phase of the new FAT Village in downtown Fort Lauderdale this summer.

[Alan Kennedy](#), a managing director of Houston-based Hines, said design work on the 5.6-acre office, apartment and retail project at 501 N.W. First Ave. was finalized Dec. 9 and is now being actively marketed to potential commercial tenants and construction loan providers.

"We are open for business," he said. "The plan is, we will be searching for debt the first half of this year, and start construction sometime this summer."

The other part of the plan is to finish the first phase – consisting of two apartment buildings totaling 604 units and a 180,000-square-foot Class A office building – by March 2025, he added.

One of the apartment buildings will be 24 stories and consist of 355 luxury apartment units, Kennedy said. The other will be 13 stories and consist of 249 apartment units marketed toward a variety of incomes.

"There will be about a \$500-a-month difference between the products," Kennedy said.

In November, the average monthly asking rent for a Fort Lauderdale apartment was \$2,140 for a one-bedroom unit and \$2,980 for a two-bedroom unit, according to apartment listing website Zumper.

The six-story Class A office building, called T3 Fat Village East, will be lined with timber, and feature large, open floor plates, flexible workspaces and private programable balconies. It's also designed to help tenants attract young professionals.

"The office we are planning for the project is not your dad's office building," Kennedy said.

On top of that, T3 – which stands for timber, transit and technology – will be surrounded by restaurants and retail. Each of the buildings that make up the first phase of FAT Village will have ground-floor retail, Kennedy said.

The first phase will total 72,000 square feet of retail, said [Christina Stine Jolley](#), senior VP of Blanca Commercial Real Estate, the Miami-based brokerage representing Hines in lease negotiations.

When it is finished, T3 will be downtown Fort Lauderdale's newest office building. Aside from The Main Las Olas, which was completed in late 2020 and is now [100% leased](#), most of downtown Fort Lauderdale's office stock is a couple of decades old.

[Jenni Morejon](#), president and CEO of the Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority, said the downtown area [has seen a surge](#) of new multifamily and condo projects that have attracted thousands of professionals. What the city hasn't seen, though, are any new office projects, with the exception of The Main. As a result, she said, most of the new-to-market companies migrating to South Florida have opted to open offices in Miami's Brickell Financial District and West Palm Beach's downtown area.

"We need a stronger pipeline of new office buildings, especially with all the great talent [living here]," Morejon said.

Building new offices won't be easy. Office developers have told the *Business Journal* that banks are reluctant to finance office projects and transactions due to higher interest rates and overall uncertainty over the future of hybrid working. At a recent Urban Land Institute conference, [Stephen Ross](#), president and chairman of the Related Cos., said he won't break ground on One Brickell City Centre in Miami until the proposed 1,049-foot-tall project [is at least 25% preleased](#).

Stine Jolley said Blanca CRE is already "talking to different prospects." Because of the limited amount of brand new Class A office in Fort Lauderdale and the rest of Broward County, she said T3 should quickly fill up.

"It's supply and demand," she said. "We see the demand and the flight to quality for office buildings with amenities."

Hines has already financed most of the project, Kennedy added.

"We bought the land. We have the entitlements on the land. We designed the project. We have permits for the project. We are starting to lease and market the project," he said. "The only thing we need is a construction loan."

Hines also won't have trouble obtaining additional financing since the office building is just a small part of the project, Kennedy said. "When you look at this, it's a multifamily-led project."

Founded in 1957, Hines is currently building 200 projects worldwide, according to its website. As of June, the company had \$92.3 billion in assets under management.

The mixed-use FAT Village was initially proposed by a development team that included The Restaurant People CEO [Tim Petrillo](#) and [Alan Hooper](#)'s Urban Street Development. Hines purchased the land they assembled in the city's Flagler Village [for \\$57.41 million in October 2021](#). Hooper and Petrillo are still involved with the project, a spokeswoman for Blanca CRE said.

When complete, FAT Village will include 835,000 square feet of apartments, office and retail. A second office building, T3 Fat Village West, will be part of the second phase, Kennedy said.

Read more: <https://www.bizjournals.com/southflorida/news/2022/12/30/developer-plans-to-start-fort-lauderdale-project.html>

12/30/22

Resia proposes over 900 apartments at Miami-Dade County Metrorail station | bizjournals.com

Resia proposes over 900 apartments at Miami-Dade County Metrorail station

BY BRIAN BANDELL



*Resia filed plans with Miami-Dade County to build apartments at the Palmetto Metrorail station in Medley.
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY RECORDS*

Resia, formerly known as AHS Residential, proposed a workforce apartment development on land owned by Miami-Dade County at the Palmetto Metrorail station in Medley.

The Miami-based developer filed a pre-application with county officials for the 18.3-acre site at 7701 N.W. 79th Ave. It currently has the final stop on the north end of the county's Metrorail public rail system, along with a large parking lot. It's in a largely industrial area just off the Palmetto Expressway.

The 12-story development would feature 948 apartments, 7,500 square feet of retail, 1,680 parking spaces and a pool deck.

The application doesn't say how the developer plans to gain permission from the county to build apartments on the site. Officials with Miami-Dade Transit couldn't be reached for comment. The county has approved land leases with developers around numerous Metrorail stations in recent years.

If the county receives an unsolicited letter of intent to build on county land, it must allow other developers to bid for the same opportunity. The County Commission would ultimately have to sign off on the deal.

A spokesperson for Resia declined comment. Attorneys [Pedro Gassant](#) and [Alberto J. Torres](#) represent the developer in the application.

Miami-based Bellon Architecture designed the project. The apartments would range from 623 to 1,079 square feet. There would be 264 one-bedroom units, 624 two-bedroom units, and 60 three-bedroom units.

With apartment rents reaching record highs in Miami-Dade, many people are looking for less expensive neighborhoods to live in, such as Medley. Residing near the Metrorail station would allow those renters to reach employment centers such as downtown Miami and the Health District without encountering traffic. It could also boost Metrorail ridership.

According to county data, 11.5 million people rode the Metrorail during the 12 months ended Sept. 30. That's up 22% from the prior year, but down 38% from 2019 – prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Read more: <https://www.bizjournals.com/southflorida/news/2022/12/30/resia-proposes-apartments-medley-metrorail-station.html>

12/29/22

Congressional Spending Bill Includes First Ever Federal 'YIMBY' Grant Program | Planetizen.com

Congressional Spending Bill Includes First Ever Federal 'YIMBY' Grant Program

BY JAMES BRASUELL



Developers are trying to pressure Miami-Dade commissioners to expand the urban development boundary, which would help build a new industrial park in a flood and sea rise prone area. But what is the urban development boundary? BY PEDRO PORTAL

The new Congress passed a [\\$1.7 trillion spending bill](#) on December 20, sending the bill onto President Biden for a signature. The New York Times provides [news coverage of the bill's approval](#) and CNN provides [details of what's included](#) in the bill.

One program of particular interest to planners, the bill includes \$85 million for a new U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) planning incentive program advocated by the National Multifamily Housing Council (NMHC) and National Apartment Association. According to an [article by Paul Bergeron for Globe St](#), the “Yes In My Back Yard” program is designed “to help localities eliminate exclusionary policies, zoning and [density](#) restrictions, onerous [parking requirements](#) and other regulations.”

“The grant program will help fund efforts by local communities to update their [zoning codes](#) and community engagement to remove obstacles to [affordable housing](#) production and preservation,” adds Bergeron.

A statement by the NMHC describes the new grant program as the first federal YIMBY policy that will be enacted into law. U.S. Senator Todd Young (R-Indiana) [first introduced](#) the [Yes In My Backyard Act](#) into Congress in 2019.

According to another [article by Christian Britschgi for Reason](#), the YIMBY Act gained support from the Biden campaign in 2020, but also again after the Biden administration entered office. “In its Housing Supply Action Plan from May 2022, the White House also said it would retool discretionary transportation grant programs (worth a collective [\\$6 billion](#)) to incentivize liberalizing zoning reforms,” according to Britschgi.

Britschgi does caution that the \$85 million in funding for the new program is unlikely to produce much progress on zoning reform.

“For starters, the bill would provide money to jurisdictions for identifying *and* removing barriers to affordable housing production. Once given, the money could be spent on improving “housing strategies,” implementing “housing policy plans,” and facilitating affordable housing production,” writes Britschgi.

“Taken together, that sounds like the program would pay jurisdictions just for drawing up plans for improving housing production, an approach that some housing economists have argued is ineffective.”

FULL STORY: [A First: NIMBY-Opposition Funds Included in Congress' Annual Funding Bill](#)

Read more: https://www.planetizen.com/news/2022/12/120612-congressional-spending-bill-includes-first-ever-federal-yimby-grant-program?utm_source=newswire&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=news-01032023&mc_cid=d225c21b7a&mc_eid=92f9e5e0be

Debbie Wasserman Schultz announces new \$55 million boost for federal courthouse in Fort Lauderdale.

BY ANNE GEGGIS



Developers are trying to pressure Miami-Dade commissioners to expand the urban development boundary, which would help build a new industrial park in a flood and sea rise prone area. But what is the urban development boundary? BY PEDRO PORTAL

Debbie Wasserman Schultz announces new \$55 million boost for federal courthouse in Fort Lauderdale.

The new federal courthouse in Fort Lauderdale is getting an extra \$55 million boost in the 2023 appropriations bills released late, last night, Democrat Rep. [Debbie Wasserman Schultz](#) announced Tuesday.

The additional funds are needed to get the 255,000-square foot project off the ground due to rising construction costs. The project is getting the biggest chunk of \$95 million in federal money that's in the bill for Congressional District 25 that will go to a vote later this week.

Congress in 2018, appropriated \$190 million for the courthouse but costs have risen by 34% since the project was first estimated at \$147 million, Wasserman Schultz's office said. That spending and \$40 million more in funding for projects in Wasserman Schultz's district are part of a [\\$1.7 trillion bipartisan deal](#) between the House and the Senate unveiled in Tuesday's wee hours as the government races to outrun a Christmas Eve [deadline for funding the government](#).

Federal lawmakers from both parties say they support the deal. And it's expected to pass both chambers later this week. President Joe Biden is urging lawmakers to support it.

The courthouse is at the heart of government operations that's now struggling to function in the current space, Wasserman Schultz said.

"The scales of federal justice in our community operate under immense space constraints and unsafe conditions, and I am so proud to help deliver the \$55 million needed to begin work and avoid further delays on a brand new federal courthouse," Wasserman Schultz said in a prepared statement.

The [U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida](#) is one of the largest and busiest federal judicial districts in the country, according to Wasserman Schultz's office. Its jurisdiction covers 15,000 square miles and serves more than six

million Floridians. Right now, the 40-year-old federal courthouse in Fort Lauderdale has a repair backlog of \$20 million. Mold, chronic roof leaks and flooding plague the center where 10,000 civil cases are filed annually, according to a news release.

“This is significant and positive news for all our citizens who rely upon a swift and seamless federal court system, and especially for those who valiantly move these wheels of justice,” Wasserman Schultz said. “Combined with all the other critical local funding needs that this omnibus spending plan includes, I am so thankful and very proud that it will make life better for millions of people in South Florida and Broward County in the next year.”

Other significant items in the bill for South Florida are:

- \$11 million for Florida International University to try out new monitoring systems to be tested near areas vulnerable to sea level rise.
- \$5 million to the Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization that will improve University Drive.
- \$3.8 million for Nova Southeastern University (NSU) to increase research about stony coral tissue loss that threatens ecosystems crucial to recreational fishing and scuba diving.
- \$3.8 million for the city of Hollywood to upgrade their drinking water infrastructure.
- \$2.5 million for the City of Sunrise to build a station to expand different kinds of transportation with bus stops and transfers, bike and scooter rentals and electric charging stations.
- \$2.5 million to NSU to purchase the cybersecurity equipment and infrastructure needed for high-performance computer capabilities.
- \$2 million for Feeding South Florida for a mobile market and kitchen that makes free and low-cost healthy and nutritious foods available to low-income Broward County families.

Broward County Mayor Lamar Fisher said he was glad to hear that a major thoroughfare on the western side of his county was included in the massive federal spending bill.

“This will improve University Drive dramatically,” Fisher said.

Read more: <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/577599-1-7-trillion-spending-bill-has-95-million-for-south-florida/>