



## MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #VI.B

---

DATE:               SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

TO:                 COUNCIL MEMBERS

FROM:              STAFF

SUBJECT:           CORRESPONDENCE AND ARTICLES

---

Please find herewith a compilation of recent articles for your review and information.

Recommendation:

Information Only.

**Interactive Table of Contents**

PortMiami dredging killed 80 times more coral than expected. More digging coming soon..... 2

Miami-Dade lawmakers to chair 4 House committees in 2024 Legislative Session..... 6

Homestead Community Redevelopment Agency Rocks the Block and Breaks Ground on New Homes..... 8

By sea and by land, Florida Keys deputies discover a large migrant smuggling operation..... 9

Higher trash fees coming in Miami-Dade, but financial strains remain from garbage .....10

States Say Flood Insurance Fight Should Continue .....12

Fact Check: Is this the hottest summer on Earth .....14

Miami-Dade considers trash rate hike to keep recycling program. What to know ahead of the vote.....17

Housing, transit and resilience: Mayor Levine Cava's proposed budget for Miami-Dade.....19

Brightline again delays trips from South Florida to Orlando.....21

Electric cars soaked by saltwater from hurricane go up in flames, Florida officials say .....23

Theme park planned near Zoo Miami faces long delay.....25

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Presents and Integrated View and Update of its Many Projects in Southeast Florida.....27

Examination of Sedimentation Impacts to Coral Reef along the Port Miami Entrance Channel, December 2015 and April 2016.....28

Trash burning in Broward? Opponents rally against possibility of new incinerator .....30

A new law is supposed to boost affordable housing. South Florida cities are furious.....33

State board taking control of Miami-Dade toll expressways after MDX loses court fight.....41

Mayor wants Doral trash incinerator to stay closed after fire, rebuild near Everglades.....44

Florida lawmakers urge NOAA to enhance coral rescue efforts.....47

606-unit Miami Worldcenter condo tower to have five parking spaces.....49

City of Tampa warns about garbage trucks catching on fire because of household chemicals.....51

Fed raises interest rates 0.25 point, opens door to another hike despite easing inflation .....52

What's the hottest Earth's ever been? .....60

## PortMiami dredging killed 80 times more coral than expected. More digging coming soon

BY ALEX HARRIS



*The skeleton of a dead coral, smothered by sediment raised by the dredging of Port Miami. Miami Waterkeeper*

When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers first set out to deepen PortMiami to make room for bigger and more ships in 2013, it estimated all that work would kill about 3.3 acres of corals.

A new report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found the toll was exponentially greater — 278 acres of coral reef gone forever.

The report, released last week, confirms suspicions that were raised even before the Corps started chopping away at the rock underbelly of the busiest cruise port in the world. All that activity raised clouds of sand and dirt that smothered corals — and may have led to or exacerbated the outbreak of a terrible disease that's since killed corals all over the Caribbean.

And yet, eight years after the project officially finished, no agency has been held accountable for destroying nearly 300 acres of coral, although Miami-Dade County could be on the hook for it. And more South Florida dredging is on the way.

PortMiami is gearing up for the next phase of its dredging project, one that could cover even more ground than the 2013 project. And Port Everglades, in Broward County, is well underway on its own dredging project, which it now estimates could also kill a similar number of corals.

“At this point, I think it's safe to say that more money has been spent planning the next dredging project than fixing the last one,” said Rachel Silverstein, head of Miami Waterkeeper and a longtime foe of PortMiami dredging.

She and her organization sued over the project and successfully got 10,000 corals replanted to replace the million or more she estimated were killed by the dredging.

“That’s a drop in the bucket in terms of the total scale of the impact that was done,” Silverstein said. “This gaping wound in the reef has been sitting unanswered for almost a decade. It is beyond time we fix it.”

## WHO PAYS FOR IT?

The NOAA report’s record of the damage from the dredging project is more than just an accounting of the environmental losses from economic expansion, it could also mean a financial penalty to the taxpayers of Miami-Dade.

The Army Corps of Engineers was in charge of the dredging project, but its “local sponsor” was Miami-Dade County. So while the Corps was the one who hired the company to dredge — and monitor the corals — Miami-Dade signed a [2012 local sponsor agreement](#) to handle the additional coral monitoring required by law after the project finished.

The document states Miami-Dade is responsible for “meeting the mitigation success criteria or any associated additional mitigation that may be necessary.”

Silverstein said that, according to [the county’s permit](#), anything that remains damaged a year after a project is completed is considered permanent damage, and state and federal rules require someone to fix it, usually by paying for mitigation.

The NOAA report does conclude that “compensatory mitigation is essential to jump-start recovery of this invaluable ecosystem.” But NOAA isn’t in charge of determining what’s permanently damaged, Florida’s Department of Environmental Protection is. And DEP has yet to complete its survey of the damage.

DEP did not respond to the Herald’s questions of why it hasn’t finished the survey work after nearly a decade, whether it would come after Miami-Dade to fix the problem or how much it would consider charging for the damage. But last June, in a meeting with several agencies including the county and Waterkeeper, DEP said [its preliminary estimate showed 213 acres of corals](#) smothered by sediment.

The price tag for fixing that much damage could be high.

[NOAA report on Port Miami dredging impact on corals](#) by Miami Herald on Scribd

One estimate, used by the Army Corps for mitigation costs in Port Everglades in 2016, pegged the cost of replacing an acre of reef at about a million dollars, using an arguably less effective method of replacing reefs. With NOAA’s estimate, or even the state’s early findings, that could potentially leave Miami-Dade on the hook for more than \$200 million — or more.

Miami-Dade declined to comment on its legal or financial responsibility for the damage, and instead sent a statement from Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, who said she advocated for increased monitoring during her time as a commissioner, while the project was ongoing.

“My priority is and will continue to be safeguarding our environment — which is inextricably linked to our economy and future prosperity — and ensuring sustainable growth for our community,” she said. “I’m deeply concerned about the damage of coral colonies and committed to learning everything we can about what took place and where we go from here.”

Levine Cava said her staff is reviewing the report and speaking with DEP about next steps.



*The dredger Terrapin Island sits in the center where it will deepen PortMiami in order to accommodate Super Tankers in the future in this Dec 6, 2013, file photo. C.M. GUERRERO cmguerrero@miamiherald.com*

But it isn’t guaranteed that DEP will come after Miami-Dade for a hefty check. In some cases, like in Fort Lauderdale after its dilapidated and saltwater corroded sewage pipes burst and spewed filth into local waterways, the state turned the mandatory fines for the city into a demand for a list of projects to fix the problem.

Silverstein said she’d like to see the same thing in this situation. She sees this amount of funding as a potentially “transformative” source of money to ramp up coral reef restoration in South Florida.

“Rather than a penalty or an enforcement action, we want to see something truly positive out of this and see funding go toward helping the coral restoration community,” she said. “We need to be able to restore millions, if not tens of millions or hundreds of millions, of coral in a year.”

“The time has come to scale it to industrial levels.”

## **FUTURE DREDGING**

The NOAA report noted that lessons learned from the 2015 PortMiami dredging project are already being worked into other dredge projects, like PortMiami’s and Port Everglades’ latest expansions.

“The development of additional lessons learned and translation to dredging project best practices near coral reefs or other sensitive habitats is warranted,” the report said. “Future port expansions cannot further contribute to the downward trajectory of the condition of Florida’s coral reef and must be in the public interest.”

Phase IV of PortMiami's dredging project has only just begun and is in the planning stage. Officials don't yet have an estimate for how many corals could be hurt by the project, which has four times the footprint of the Phase III project.

Port Everglades' project is much further along. Earlier this year, the Corps said [in a presentation](#) that it expects the Port Everglades dredging project to directly kill about 449,000 corals. That includes about 26 acres of coral habitat directly killed by digging and anywhere from 124 to 177 acres smothered by sediment.

The Corps told restoration companies it would likely need to replant anywhere from 498,000 to 720,000 corals — with 100,000 to 500,000 coming from the coral nurseries dotting South Florida's coast.

That might be a tall order for Florida's nascent coral nursery market, especially after a summer of "apocalyptic" bleaching and death.

The biggest producer in South Florida, Coral Restoration Foundation, said it makes 45,000-50,000 "reef-ready" corals every year, each about the size of a hand. University of Miami's Rescue A Reef program said it can produce about 5,000 corals a year, but that can be scaled up with additional funding.

"No one in the field right now can handle coral restoration of that size," Silverstein said. "And if we don't have the ability to phase up coral restoration to meet the mitigation needs for these projects, there will be a dredging moratorium."

**Read more:** <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/environment/article279055859.html>

# Miami-Dade lawmakers to chair 4 House committees in 2024 Legislative Session

BY JESSE SCHECKNER

**Daniel Perez and Demi Busatta Cabrera will keep their committee leadership posts. Alex Rizo and Tom Fabricio are the new Chairs of two other panels.**

Four state Republican Representatives from Miami-Dade will Chair committees in the Florida House during the 2024 Legislative Session.

Their share of panel leadership posts — 12% of 34 non-joint committees — is commensurate with the county's share of the state population.

Atop the list is Speaker-designate **Daniel Perez** of Miami, who will continue to serve as House Rules Committee Chair, a position normally held by future House Speakers.

House Speaker **Paul Renner** — who doled out this year and next year's committee assignments — was Perez's immediate predecessor in the role. Perez takes over as Speaker in November 2024.

Rep. **Linda Chaney** of St. Petersburg will similarly keep her position as Vice Chair, and Plantation Rep. **Mike Gottlieb** will stay on as the ranking Democratic member.

Two other Representatives from South Florida, though none from Miami-Dade — Democratic Reps. **Christine Hunschofsky** and **Kelly Skidmore** — will remain on the committee as well.

Hialeah Rep. **Alex Rizo** is taking over as Chair of the Choice and Innovation Subcommittee. Sebring Rep. **Kaylee Tuck** is departing the panel to instead chair the new Select Committee on Health Innovation with Coral Gables Rep. **Vicki Lopez** as Vice Chair.

Jacksonville Beach Rep. **Kiyan Michael** will serve as Rizo's second in command in the Choice and Innovation Subcommittee, while Tampa Rep. **Susan Valdés** will hold the ranking minority seat.

Four other Miami-Dade lawmakers — Democrat **Kevin Chambliss** of Homestead and Republicans **Fabián Basabe** of Miami Beach, **Alina Garcia** of Miami and **Juan Porras** of Miami — will join 11 other non-ranking members of the panel.

Miami Lakes Rep. **Tom Fabricio** is taking the reins of the Ethics, Election & Open Government Subcommittee following the departure of its prior Chair, fellow Miami-Dade resident **Juan Fernandez-Barquin**. Fernandez-Barquin left the Legislature in June to serve as the county's appointed Clerk of Courts. Fabricio was not part of the subcommittee during the 2023 Session.

**Webster Barnaby** of Deland will serve as Vice Chair. Kissimmee Rep. **Kristen Arrington** is the Democratic ranking member.

Again, four others from Miami-Dade — Porras, Rizo and Democrats **Ashley Gantt** and **Felicia Robinson** — will serve on the subcommittee too, alongside 11 other non-ranking members.

The all-South Florida leadership of the **State Administration and Technology Appropriations Subcommittee** will go unchanged, with Coral Gables Rep. **Demi Busatta Cabrera** serving as Chair, Islamorada Rep. **Jim Mooney** in the Vice Chair seat and Robinson holding the ranking Democrat post.

Republican Rep. **David Borrero** of Sweetwater is part of the 15-member group, as is **Jervonte Edmonds** from nearby West Palm Beach.

Interim meetings for the 2024 Legislative Session begin 9 a.m. Tuesday, Sept. 19. Members have until Jan. 5 to file bills for consideration. The first day of Session is Jan. 9.

**Read more:** <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/633501-miami-dade-lawmakers-to-chair-4-house-committees-in-2024-legislative-session/>



# Homestead Community Redevelopment Agency Rocks the Block and Breaks Ground on New Homes

BY COMMUNITYNEWS RELEASES



The Homestead Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) kicked off its Southwest Neighborhood New H.O.M.E (Home Ownership Made Equitable) Initiative and Rock the Block neighborhood beautification on SW 6th Street. On Saturday, August 29, 2023, dozens of volunteers, city employees, and elected officials gathered to clean up SW 6th Street from 6th Avenue to 10th Avenue. Participants collected trash, installed new mailboxes, painted fences, and planted trees and flowers. Sidewalks and driveways were also pressure cleaned and the street will be repaved in the coming months. Several homes in the area will also be receiving a fresh coat of paint, thanks to the CRA.

Saturday also marked the groundbreaking of four new homes that are part of the Southwest Neighborhood New H.O.M.E Initiative which promotes affordable homeownership as a way to create a thriving community and a gateway to building generational wealth. Qualified buyers will receive \$20,000 in down payment assistance from the CRA and education about additional programs available for assistance. The homes will be constructed through Minority Builders Coalition (MBC), a nonprofit developer, and other partners such as **South Florida Regional Planning Council**, Housing Foundation of America, LHP Construction & Management, Corp., and Sagoma Construction.

For information about the new homes contact Nancy at Housing Foundation of America at 954-923-5001.

For information about CRA projects, please visit [www.cityofhomestead.com/cra](http://www.cityofhomestead.com/cra).

Read more: <https://communitynewspapers.com/south-dade/homestead-community-redevelopment-agency-rocks-the-block-and-breaks-ground-on-new-homes/>

## By sea and by land, Florida Keys deputies discover a large migrant smuggling operation

BY DAVID GOODHUE



*A white Ford van is parked on the side of U.S. 1 in Key Largo Thursday, Sept. 7, 2023. The Border Patrol and Monroe County Sheriff's Office say it was carrying people from Cuba recently smuggled into the Florida Keys. U.S. BORDER PATROL*

Florida Keys deputies stopped a car pulling a trailered boat Thursday morning, and that led to a migrant smuggling operation involving three scenes along the island chain. Monroe sheriff's deputies stopped the boat as it was being pulled off a ramp at the former site of the Quay restaurant on the Gulf side of the Middle Keys city of Marathon, said Adam Linhardt, sheriff's office spokesman. He said the vessel, which was not tied down properly, triggered the traffic stop.

Witnesses told the deputies that they had seen that same boat, a blue and white center console with a Bimini top, unloading what looked like a large group of migrants by the Seven Mile Bridge, about seven miles south of the boat ramp, Linhardt said.

The sheriff's office called the U.S. Border Patrol, who took over the investigation. Later, in what seemed like an unrelated event, deputies pulled over an orange car and a white van driving north on U.S. 1 around mile marker 104 in Key Largo, which is about 50 miles north of the boat ramp. Linhardt said both cars were speeding. Inside were 21 people from Cuba who the sheriff's office and Border Patrol say were the Cuban migrants who landed earlier.

Walter Slosar, chief agent for Border Patrol's Miami operations, said in a statement on X, formerly Twitter, that the migrants and "multiple suspected smugglers" were taken into custody. He said the case is under investigation by his agency along with Homeland Security Investigations.

*This breaking news report will be updated.*

Read more at: <https://www.flkeysnews.com/news/local/article279066334.html#storylink=cpy>

# Higher trash fees coming in Miami-Dade, but financial strains remain from garbage

BY DOUGLAS HANKS



*The annual fee for residents whose trash is collected by Miami-Dade County is going up by \$38. Miami-Dade Solid Waste Management*

Miami-Dade residents will pay higher trash fees in 2024 after a divided county commission narrowly approved a \$38 yearly increase. The 7.5% increase to the existing \$509 fee marked one of the most contentious votes of the year for the 13 commissioners, with a narrow majority at first rejecting the proposal. Two hours of debate later, a vote switched and Mayor Daniella Levine Cava won a higher fee she said was vital to [maintain existing trash and recycling services](#) for the nearly 350,000 households on county garbage routes.

"I'm absolutely grateful that decision was made," Levine Cava said after the 7-6 vote approving the \$547 yearly fee.

[READ MORE: Recycling costs just doubled in Miami-Dade. What's next for your yearly trash fees?](#)

Levine Cava's proposed fee didn't draw much public opposition: Nobody spoke at the hearing scheduled before the vote at the Stephen P. Clark Government Center.

But commissioners said the higher fee would be too much of a burden for residents living on the financial edge and without the time to make a trip to downtown Miami to sit in the chambers awaiting their chance to speak.

"A lot of the folks who didn't come are working-class folks who can't leave their jobs," Commissioner Kevin Cabrera said. "I'm not going to vote for this. I'm not going to continue to increase fees on our residents."

Cabrera was on the winning side of the first trash vote, which saw Levine Cava's [proposal for a \\$36 increase](#) fail by one vote. Chairman Oliver Gilbert, who voted for the increase, declared a brief recess.

The swing vote appeared to be Commissioner Keon Hardemon, who favored higher fees but voted against the mayor. He complained the \$36 increase wouldn't put the county's trash system on sound financial footing or bring in more crews needed to pick up piles of litter regularly dumped across Miami-Dade.

"I don't want my community to look like other communities," said Hardemon, who represents parts of downtown Miami and the northern areas of the city. "Sometimes you have to pay for that."

After the break, Hardemon briefly pushed for an increase of more than \$100, Hardemon settled for the \$38 hike that will go into effect Oct. 1. Joining Cabrera in voting against the increase were commissioners Cohen Higgins, René Garcia, Roberto Gonzalez, Raquel Regalado and Anthony Rodriguez.

## RECYCLING PROGRAM WASN'T CUT

While the vote tables some of the drastic cuts floated to absorb flat fees — in July, Cabrera briefly proposed ending the county's recycling program — the higher charges won't solve the Solid Waste Management Department's ongoing financial strain.

The administration said [a \\$116 increase](#) is needed to cover collection services in the department's nearly \$700 million budget, and that to cover the gap Miami-Dade will borrow from reserves set aside for landfill extensions and a new incinerator to replace the outdated one in Doral that was shuttered by a February fire.

Gilbert criticized commissioners who balked at the higher fee but wanted to cover the gap with one-time revenues or demand a long-range plan on the future of Solid Waste from the administration.

"If you want to cut services, fine. Make a proposal to cut services," Gilbert said. "But understand that the fees match the service."

With Solid Waste reserves dwindling, commissioners and Levine Cava could be wrestling with an even larger fee increase in 2024, when the mayor and half of the board will be up for reelection. "I don't want to have this discussion in an election year," said Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez, who backed the higher fee, "because I know what's going to happen."

The compromise proposal for an extra \$2 per household that won Hardemon's vote came from Commissioner Eileen Higgins. She added a requirement that the administration use the additional revenue to target illegal dumping of garbage and relief for low-income homeowners.

Levine Cava said she wants to shift garbage fees in 2025 to a new property tax on homes that use county trash service, which would mean bills tied to real estate values instead of flat fees.

Commissioner Marleine Bastien voted for the higher fees but said she's certain many homeowners can't afford even an extra \$36 yearly expense. "Times are tough," she said. "Folks are hurting."

*This article was updated with the correct sponsor of the \$38 trash-fee increase.*

Read more at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article279008609.html#storylink=cpy>

# States Say Flood Insurance Fight Should Continue

BY JIM SAUNDERS



*Taylor County sustained flooding and other widespread damage in Hurricane Idalia. Mike Exline*

TALLAHASSEE — Florida and other states are trying to fend off an attempt by the Biden administration to end a lawsuit challenging changes to the National Flood Insurance Program that have led to higher premiums for many property owners.

Attorneys for 10 states and local government agencies in Louisiana filed a 44-page document Tuesday urging a federal judge to reject arguments that they lack legal standing to challenge the changes, which became fully effective April 1 after being phased in. U.S. Department of Justice lawyers filed a motion last month to dismiss the case.

Tuesday's document pointed to "crippling effects" of changes in the program, which is the dominant provider of flood insurance in the country.

"Plaintiffs do not dispute that, under the legacy rating system (previous system), many individuals experienced slight annual increases as permitted under (a federal law)," said the document, submitted by Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry and joined by the other plaintiffs. "But policyholders have never seen rate increases like the ones they are seeing" under the changes.

The legal fight is playing out as areas of Florida's Gulf Coast clean up from flooding caused by Hurricane Idalia, which barreled up the gulf last week before making landfall in the Keaton Beach area of Taylor County.

A document in the lawsuit said the National Flood Insurance Program included about 1.391million Florida policies, with total coverage of nearly \$367 billion. Many homeowners who have mortgages are required to carry flood insurance.

The lawsuit, filed in June in the federal Eastern District of Louisiana, centers on changes known as “Risk Rating 2.0: Equity in Action.” Federal officials contend that the changes, which gradually started taking effect in October 2021, are designed to make the flood-insurance program “actuarially sound” and reflect the risks of each property.

“These changes all reflect best practices in the insurance industry, which is precisely what Congress charged FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) to do under the NFIA (National Flood Insurance Act),” Justice Department attorneys wrote last month. “Furthermore, the geographical distribution of premium payments has been stark: Under the legacy rating approach, taxpayers and policyholders in landlocked states were covering the cost of flood risk in a few coastal states. Risk Rating 2.0 charges every policyholder their fair share based on their property’s true flood risk and thus accomplishes the stated purpose of the NFIA.”

But the lawsuit alleges, in part, that federal officials violated a law known as the Administrative Procedure Act by making changes that were “arbitrary and capricious.”

In trying to prevent dismissal of the case, the plaintiffs raised a series of arguments about having standing to challenge the changes, including saying they will suffer economic harm.

“It (the overhaul) imposes unreasonable and unexpected costs across the board, and as a result, it imposes distinct and direct harms on each plaintiff,” the document filed Tuesday said.

Along with Florida and Louisiana, other states in the case are Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia.

While the National Flood Insurance Program dominates the market, a commentary released Friday by the AM Best financial-rating agency said an increasing number of Florida property owners are buying private flood-insurance coverage.

“Given the rise in average pricing of flood policies provided through the National Flood Insurance Program, private flood insurance in Florida has seen notable growth, with the number of policies up 30% in 2022 from 2021,” the commentary said.

**Read more:** [https://www.newsserviceflorida.com/latest/headlines/states-say-flood-insurance-fight-shouldcontinue/article\\_7f4200c4-4cbf-11ee-b15f-13fde477da49.html](https://www.newsserviceflorida.com/latest/headlines/states-say-flood-insurance-fight-shouldcontinue/article_7f4200c4-4cbf-11ee-b15f-13fde477da49.html)

## Fact Check: Is this the hottest summer on Earth

BY JOHN CARNEY



*The Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on Mayor Daniella Levine Cava's proposed 2024 budget on September 7.*

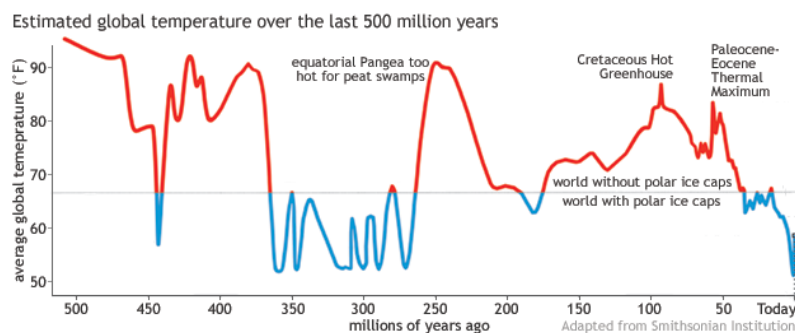
An article in Barron's about rising food prices made [the claim](#) on Wednesday morning.

CNN's headline [proclaimed](#): "The world has just experienced the hottest summer on record – by a significant margin."

You can find similarly alarming headlines from [CBS News](#), the [Guardian](#), and the [Associated Press](#).

**Verdict: Misleading.** Compared with most of the earth's history, this summer is unusually cold. The "record" referred to is kept by the United Nations World Meteorological Organization and European climate service Copernicus. It goes back only to 1940.

Researchers for the Smithsonian Institution surveyed the earth's temperatures over the last 500 million years. As you can see from the chart below, the earth has been much hotter for most of the past 500 million years.



*By subscribing, you agree to our terms of use & privacy policy. You will receive email marketing messages from Breitbart News Network to the email you provide. You may unsubscribe at any time.*

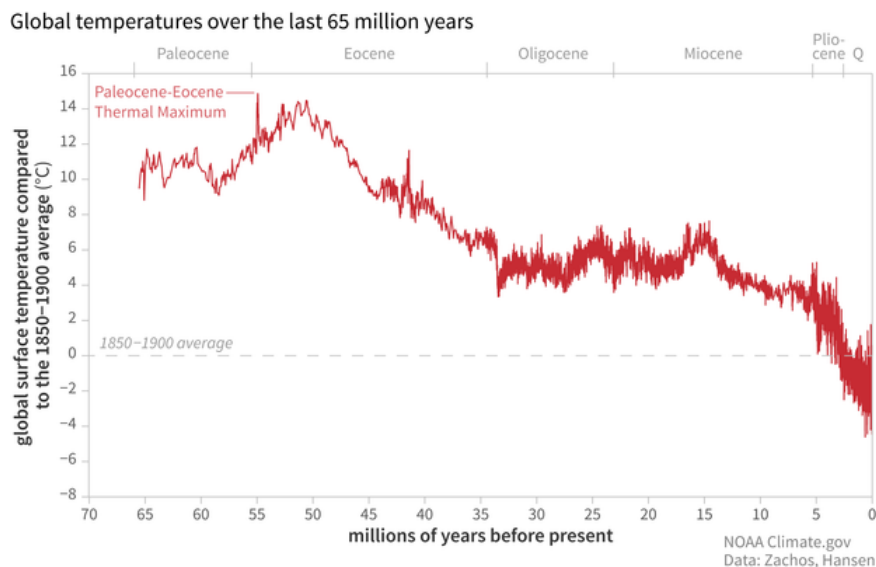
This study was not undertaken by climate change deniers. In fact, the researchers who undertook it wanted to prove how devastating climate change can be to life on earth.

“The two researchers also thought a temperature curve could counter climate contrarians’ claim that global warming is no concern because Earth was much hotter millions of years ago. Wing and Huber wanted to show the reality of ancient temperature extremes—and how rapid shifts between them have led to mass extinctions. Abrupt climate changes, Wing says, ‘have catastrophic side effects that are really hard to adapt to,’” the Smithsonian wrote in 2019.

Even earlier on, the earth was much, much hotter. When our planet was young and still being bullied by wayward miniplanets smashing through the solar system, the heat of these collisions would have kept Earth molten, with temperatures upward of 3,600° Fahrenheit, according to [this piece](#) on climate.gov.

That website—climate.gov—is the official climate information site of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, a scientific and regulatory agency within the United States Department of Commerce.

Even if we zoom in on the time scale, as climate.gov did in their article, we can see that the Earth is far from the warmest it has ever been.



Let’s quote climate.gov again:

Modern human civilization, with its permanent agriculture and settlements, has developed over just the past 10,000 years or so. The period has generally been one of low temperatures and relative global (if not regional) climate stability. Compared to most of Earth’s history, today is unusually cold; we now live in what geologists call an interglacial—a period between glaciations of an ice age.

So what is going on with all these media organizations claiming this is the hottest recorded summer on earth? A lot of misleading work is being done by the phrase “on record” or the word “recorded” in the news stories. The “record” referred to is kept by the United Nations World Meteorological Organization and European climate service Copernicus. It goes back only to 1940.



Apparently, the headline writers thought “Hottest Summer Since 1940” was just not alarming enough.

The records of fossilized corals, leaf shapes, ancient glaciations, and hothouse periods show that global temperatures are nowhere near as warm as they have been in the past. It may be hot out there this summer—perhaps even the hottest in decades—but we are nowhere near the hottest temperatures the earth has experienced.

**Read more:** <https://www.breitbart.com/environment/2023/09/06/fact-check-this-is-not-the-hottest-summer-on-earth/>

## Miami-Dade considers trash rate hike to keep recycling program. What to know ahead of the vote

BY YAIMA CRESPO



*The Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on Mayor Daniella Levine Cava's proposed 2024 budget on September 7.*

Residents of Miami-Dade County may soon see an increase in their trash collection fees.

The proposed increase is due, in part, to climbing operational, staffing, and global recycling costs exacerbated by the long-term impact of the pandemic.

The proposed fee increase, which would add \$36 to the current annual fee of \$509, aims to keep the recycling program and other waste services operational for over 366,176 households.

But not everyone is on board.

"I'm not going to be voting in favor of any sort of increases for our residents," said Miami-Dade Commissioner Kevin M. Cabrera (District 6).

Cabrera argues the community is already grappling with several challenges.

"They're struggling with inflation. They're struggling with ever-increasing property taxes, property insurance, groceries, gas," Cabrera said.

Cabrera suggests temporarily halting the existing recycling program, calling it ineffective.

"Let's figure out ways to make it better," he said.

NBC6 spoke with Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava.

"Recycling is a very, very important part of how we deal with our waste stream," the mayor said.

She warns that stopping the recycling program would worsen existing conditions.

"We have limited capacity to put things in our landfill. Right now, we don't have a waste-to-energy plant, which was taking half of our garbage. If we do not recycle, that's just more going to the landfill and filling them up quicker," the mayor said.

Earlier this year, a fire at a waste-to-energy plant in Doral left the county scrambling to find alternative waste disposal solutions.

Levine Cava proposes building a large waste-to-energy facility near the Everglades, as a way to address the situation.

Noel Cleland, chair of the Sierra Club Miami Group, supports the Mayor's initiatives, which also aims to develop a zero-waste master plan.

"I think her whole team is showing a lot of foresight initiative to try to be able to have not a one-size-fits-all, but let's do a little bit of everything to keep this from becoming a crisis," Cleland said.

Cabrera would like to take a step further and stop traditional recycling.

"I do think that we need to build a new waste-to-energy facility that is ultimately the best way to recycle. Why? Because in a waste-to-energy facility, you're getting waste, you're creating energy, which is generating funds for taxpayers," Cabrera stated.

Davie and Pembroke Pines already use this approach, sending waste and recyclables to a waste-to-energy facility. Under Florida law, this process counts as renewable energy.

Levine Cava and Cabrera agree that improving public education on recycling could benefit the program but it will require more funding.

According to the Miami-Dade Department of Solid Waste Management, the rate of contamination — wrong items placed in the recycling bin — has decreased to 40%, but according to data from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the county's recycling rate is still lower than other parts of the state.

**Read more:** <https://www.nbcmiami.com/responds/miami-dade-considers-trash-rate-hike-to-keep-recycling-program-what-to-know-ahead-of-the-vote/3105657/>

# Housing, transit and resilience: Mayor Levine Cava's proposed budget for Miami-Dade

BY HELEN ACEVEDO



*The Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on Mayor Daniella Levine Cava's proposed 2024 budget on September 7.*

Next week, the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on Mayor Daniella Levine Cava's proposed 2024 budget.

It's a record \$11.7 billion blueprint aimed at a lot of the crises the county is experiencing these days. From housing affordability and public transit to climate change resiliency and recycling.

When the Mayor unveiled her [budget last month](#), she called it "smart, compassionate and future-ready."

Speaking on the latest South Florida Roundup, Mayor Levine Cava told WLRN's Tim Padgett that the budget is a year at a time but the county's needs are far into the future.

"What's great about this particular budget is that we're making extraordinary investments in infrastructure," she said. "We've brought down almost \$2 billion in federal and state grants covering everything from transit to septic to sewer resilience and other other transportation infrastructure."

Just last year the county declared a [housing affordability crisis](#) — and the problem persists.

The Mayor says that through the county's [HOMES](#) program, they are carrying out several solutions — from renovating housing that would otherwise be demolished to rental assistance and providing homeowners with subsidies to take care of their insurance.

"We've prevented 25,000 households from eviction and are providing legal support, counseling support, relocation assistance, everything we possibly can to deal with this ongoing crisis," she said.

**READ MORE:** [Signature Miami-Dade affordable housing program off to a slow start](#)

Transit is another point the Mayor wants to target with her proposed budget. She told the South Florida Roundup that when combining housing and transportation, "we are the least affordable place in the country."

Her plan includes funding the Better Bus Network, completing the South corridor and making upgrades to the county's MetroRail and MetroMover system.

After a fire this year knocked out our most important garbage incinerator, waste management solutions are dire for the county.

"We just can't keep building up the landfills or shipping our garbage out of state," said Levine Cava. "We need to stop purchasing disposable plastics. We need to compost in our homes. We need to get smart about recycling."

The mayor says that the county will be launching an improved outreach campaign to move toward sustainable strategies for waste management.

Miami Dade County is taking in record revenue. So, when it comes to property tax rates, Mayor Levine Cava is proposing a 1% cut to meet the needs of the community.

"The growth of the economy, the newcomers and the increased property roles need to be shared. We need to share with the public because they are struggling," she said.

On September 7, the Board of County Commissioners will hold their first budget hearing where commissioners will be open to public comment and begin debating the budget for the next year.

Also featured on the South Florida Roundup was the City of Miami mayor Francis Suarez's ethics issues and his short-lived run for president, as well as the international community's inability to come up with a workable plan of intervention to help Haiti overcome gang rules.

You can listen to the full episode [here](#) or wherever you get your podcasts.

**Read more:** <https://www.wlrn.org/government-politics/2023-09-04/housing-transit-resilience-budget-miami-mayor-levine-cava>

## Brightline again delays trips from South Florida to Orlando

BY DAVID LYONS



*A view of two Brightline trains inside the company's new "Basecamp" maintenance facility in Orlando. A startup of service to Orlando International Airport is still pending as Brightline moves to complete a certification with federal regulators.*

Brightline, the higher speed South Florida rail service, announced another delay Wednesday of the launch of its 170-mile extension to Orlando from West Palm Beach, and will again refund tickets, this time for rides scheduled for between Sept. 7-21.

"Thank you for booking tickets to be part of the initial rides between South Florida and Orlando — we're close to identifying a start date, but we've added a few more days to our work schedule to complete the final stages of certification and testing," the company told would-be riders in an email early Wednesday morning.

And so, "rides booked between Sept. 7-21 are canceled," Brightline said.

A similar message appeared on the company's social media account with "X," formerly known as Twitter. The company's online schedule now shows tickets may be purchased starting Sept. 22.

[It was the second false start](#) in less than a month after the Miami-based rail line announced the completion of its construction phase, which includes a new station at Orlando International Airport.

The railroad [initially sold tickets in anticipation of a Sept. 1 launch](#) on the front end of the Labor Day weekend. But management said the certification process could not be completed in time. Refunds again will be paid in full, with credits arriving in customer accounts within three to five days, the notice said.

As before, the company is also gifting a complementary "premium" service voucher for future use, equivalent to the party size of your original purchase. And it is offering discounts through Avis, its rental car partner, should passengers still need to travel to the Orlando area on their original dates.

### **Lengthy certification process**

Among other things, Brightline needs to obtain Federal Railway Administration approval for a so-called Pre-Revenue Service Safety Validation Plan, which the agency said is under review. Earlier this month, the agency said it anticipated announcing a decision on its approval “in the near future.”

The Florida East Coast Railway, which owns the tracks on the north-south portion of the Brightline extension, is not involved in the process.

According to the agency, there are multiple regulatory approvals necessary for an operation to start service that are addressed under different FRA regulations. They include a certification of Brightline’s positive train control system, which is designed to prevent train-to-train collisions and derailments caused by excessive speeds.

Brightline also needs to comply with regulations such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, and various state or local codes/ordinances.

### **St. Lucie River bridge**

Last week, Brightline and the FEC announced they were completing additional rehabilitation work on the St. Lucie River drawbridge in Stuart in advance of Brightline’s opening to Orlando.

The U.S. Coast Guard, which sets the operating timetable for raising and lowering the bridge, approved an FEC request for a temporary set of operating hours so the work can be completed.

“The scope of work includes replacement of timber ties and lift rails to improve operating speeds over the bridge,” the railroads said in a statement.

The bridge’s operation has been a flashpoint between the railroads and marine industry interests, with the latter group raising concerns over passage limitations once Brightline’s passenger trains start running.

But after discussions, the Coast Guard set a temporary timetable and operating procedures through mid-December as a test to ensure equitable access for the railroads and marine operators.

Among other things, Brightline and FEC installed a bridge app and website to serve as a guide to boaters. Brightline and the FEC also installed “variable message signs” on each side of the bridge, which are interconnected to the railroad’s signal system. The signs display a countdown to each bridge closure and opening.

Brightline recently constructed a bridge monitor house, and a tender is located on site between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. each day.

**Read more:** <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/2023/08/30/brightline-again-delays-orlando-trips-will-refund-ticket-purchases-for-rides-through-sept-21/>

## Electric cars soaked by saltwater from hurricane go up in flames, Florida officials say

BY IRENE WRIGHT



*A Tesla burst into flames in Palm Harbor after it was flooded with saltwater during Hurricane Idalia, the fire department said. Palm Harbor Fire Rescue via Facebook*

Hurricane Idalia ripped through Florida's Nature Coast, leaving a path of destruction behind.

But, as the floodwaters recede, there is a new risk threatening owners of electric vehicles.

Two Tesla cars, one in Palm Harbor and another in Pinellas Park, seemed to spontaneously combust after becoming flooded with saltwater during the hurricane, Florida officials said.

On Aug. 30, Palm Harbor Fire Rescue responded to a Tesla on fire in Dunedin, according to the department's Facebook post.

The car had become [flooded with saltwater](#) during the storm surge following Hurricane Idalia.

In Pinellas Park, on Aug. 31, a Tesla owner called a tow truck to [move his flooded car](#), the Pinellas Park Police Department told WTSP.

When the car was on the back of the truck, it suddenly burst into flames, leaving behind a charred frame when the fire was finally subdued, the outlet reported.

"If you own a hybrid or electric vehicle that has come into contact with saltwater due to recent flooding within the last 24 hours, it is crucial to relocate the vehicle from your garage without delay," Palm Harbor Fire Rescue said in the post.



Firefighters said exposure from saltwater can trigger spontaneous combustion of lithium-ion batteries, used in electric cars, but also found in some golf carts and electric scooters.

“Don’t drive these through water. PHFR crews have seen numerous residents out in carts and children on scooters riding through the water,” Palm Harbor Fire Rescue said.

## REMINDERS OF HURRICANE IAN

In September 2022, Hurricane Ian brought massive flooding to Florida’s west coast.

In the weeks following the saltwater surge, there were [12 reports of electric vehicle fires](#) in Collier and Lee counties, according to the U.S. Fire Administration.

One of those fires grew so severe it burned down two houses on Sanibel Island, the administration said.

“According to the NHTSA, residual salt within the battery or battery components can form conductive ‘bridges’ that can lead to short circuit and self-heating of the battery, resulting in fires,” the USFA said. “The time frame in which a damaged battery can ignite has been observed to vary widely, from days to weeks.”

## AWARE OF THE RISKS

Tesla is [aware of the potential fire risks](#) following saltwater flooding in its vehicles and provides information about flooding on its website.

“Tesla wants to ensure you have the information you need to should there be a risk of vehicle submersion or if your vehicle experiences submersion in water,” the company says. “If you notice fire, smoke, audible popping/hissing or heating coming from your vehicle, step away and immediately contact your local first responders.”

Tesla also recommends moving any submerged car at least 50 feet away from all structures or combustible materials for fear a fire would spread.

McClatchy News reached out to Tesla about the specific fires following Hurricane Idalia and did not receive an immediate response.

Palm Harbor is about 25 miles northwest of Tampa.

Pinellas Park is about 20 miles south of Palm Harbor.

Read more at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/state/florida/article278835624.html#storylink=cpy>

# Theme park planned near Zoo Miami faces long delay

BY IRENE WRIGHT



*The Miami Wilds water park is planned near Zoo Miami. MIAMI-DADE COUNTY RECORDS*

Plans for the Miami Wilds water park near Zoo Miami could be delayed for years, and the hotel on the site could be scrapped, as the county responds to a lawsuit against the project by an environmental group. In 2020, the Miami-Dade County Commission approved a [lease on 27.5 acres](#) at 12400 S.W. 152nd St. with Miami Wilds LLC for the purpose of building a water park, a hotel with at least 200 rooms, and 15,000 to 20,000 square feet of retail. It also approved a release to remove land use restrictions from part of the property to allow for development.

In February, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Tropical Audubon Society and several environmental groups dedicated to protecting bats and butterflies filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Miami against the U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, seeking injunctive relief to block the project.

Alleging that the Miami Wilds project would violate the Endangered Species Act by threatening rare animals in the Pine Rocklands ecosystem, the environmental groups stated in the lawsuit that the National Park Service improperly transferred land use restrictions from the project area without first completing an environmental analysis and considering conservation measures. The Center for Biological Diversity asked the court to set aside the National Park Service's release from land use restrictions on the property so it can complete an environmental review.

Miami-Dade County was granted a motion to intervene in the case as an additional defendant on June 29. The lawsuit remains pending. On Sept. 6, the County Commission will consider a resolution designed to "resolve and moot" the Center for Biological Diversity lawsuit, according to a staff memo. This would be accomplished by amending the lease with Miami Wilds in several ways.

First, it would rescind the release that removed the National Park Service's land use restrictions, which would allow the National Park Service to "comply with its legal obligations" for an environmental study before potentially entering into a new release of land use restrictions with the county. The developer can't move

forward with the project until the National Park Service approves this release, or Miami Wilds could wait for two years without a decision from the National Park Service and only build on land that doesn't need a release from land use restrictions. That would essentially delay, and potentially shrink, the project.

The amended lease would also remove Miami Wilds' obligation to build a hotel, require the developer to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on coordinating noise and lighting, and remove all Pine Rockland areas from the development site.

However, the amended lease identifies a site used for Coast Guard housing as a potential expansion site for a hotel or affordable housing, but that land isn't included in the current lease.

Paul Lambert, one of the developers behind Miami Wild, said he's happy to move the planned hotel from the entrance of the zoo on the leased parcel to the Coast Guard site. They could potentially build a larger hotel and new housing for the Coast Guard, he said. One of the biggest concerns that environmental groups had was that the hotel would result in people staying on the site 24/7, he said, so eliminating the hotel from the leased parcel should resolve that.

Lambert added that 100% of the land Miami Wilds would be developed on is currently the zoo's parking lot. Studies have found that an endangered bat flies over the parking lot at night, but it flies over other properties as well, he said. Lambert doesn't believe the water park, which would be closed at night, would disturb the bats.

"Once this [environmental] analysis goes through, it will allow us to do all the additional studies we need to do and begin the design process," Lambert said. "We are happy this is coming to a resolution and the legal cases can wind down."

Eliminating plans for the hotel would reduce the project's job requirements as set forth in the lease to 225 from 304 and drop the anticipated capital investment to \$47 million from \$99 million. Regardless, Lambert said, the first phase of the water park would cost over \$100 million to build because of the increase in construction costs since the time the deal was signed.

"We are relieved that the county and National Park Service are poised to rescind the unlawful removal of land use restrictions from the site," said Elise Bennett, director and senior attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity's Florida and Caribbean office. "But until there's a firm commitment to protect key habitat on and around the site, we remain concerned for the endangered bats, beetles, butterflies, snakes and plants who live there. There must be a better place to build a theme park and retail development than this highly environmentally sensitive habitat that these rare species need to survive."

Bennett said she would like to see a commitment from the National Park Service to analyze the project under the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act before it considers whether to grant a release to the county for development.

Read more: <https://www.bizjournals.com/southflorida/news/2023/08/30/theme-park-planned-near-zoo-miami-faces-long-delay.html>

## U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Presents and Integrated View and Update of its Many Projects in Southeast Florida

On August 29th, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACE), Jacksonville District held a virtual public meeting to update partners, stakeholders, and the public on numerous projects the Corps is leading in southeast Florida and discuss plans for integration of ongoing projects. While the ACE has discussed these projects individually before, at this meeting they illustrated how these projects work together for overall regional resiliency and how they are integrated together through integration.

ACE Staff discussed project integration and provided project overview and status update on the following:

- a) Navigation Projects
  - Miami-Harbor Improvement Studies
- b) Coastal Storm Risk Management (CSRM) Projects
  - Miami-Dade Back Bay CSRM
  - Key Biscayne CSRM
  - Dade County CSRM
- c) Flood Risk Management Projects
  - C & SF Flood Resiliency Study
- d) Ecosystem Restoration Projects
  - Broward County WPA C-11 Reservoir
  - Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW)
  - Biscayne Bay Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem (BBSEER)

In addition, the ACE's Resilience Partners the South Florida Water Management District, Miami-Dade County, and Broward County provided updates and their perspectives.

The meeting begins at minute 20:09.

SE FL Project Integration Virtual Public Meeting:

<https://usace1.webex.com/usace1/ldr.php?RCID=3b8f968fdc0a24b57688e74133dff123>

Password: FvFTc2rA

### For additional information:

John Paul "JP" Rebello  
Public Affairs Officer  
Corporate Communications Office  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Jacksonville District  
Email: [johnpaul.p.rebello@usace.army.mil](mailto:johnpaul.p.rebello@usace.army.mil)

E. Timothy Gysan, P.E., PMP  
Resilience Senior Project Manager  
Ecosystem Branch  
Programs & Project Management Division (PPMD)  
USACE Jacksonville District  
(904) 232-3272 (Office)  
[earl.t.gysan@usace.army.mil](mailto:earl.t.gysan@usace.army.mil)

Read more: [https://sfregionalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ALL\\_SLIDES\\_29Aug23-SEFL\\_integration\\_public\\_mtg\\_1.pdf](https://sfregionalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ALL_SLIDES_29Aug23-SEFL_integration_public_mtg_1.pdf)

# Examination of Sedimentation Impacts to Coral Reef along the Port Miami Entrance Channel, December 2015 and April 2016

BY NOAA'S NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

In December 2015 and April 2016, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) assessed potential damage from dredged sediments to coral reefs adjacent to the Port Miami Entrance Channel. This was an unprecedented evaluation based on concerns brought to us by various partner, regulatory, and action agencies and after reviewing satellite images depicting large sediment plumes over areas of coral reef. Based on our own observations of sediment damage to coral reefs, we were then afforded through NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, the ability to take a closer look at the coral reef. The reefs examined are fishery habitats protected under the Endangered Species Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The surveys focused on locations more distant from the channel than those specified by the State of Florida for assessing permit compliance during dredging. The work conducted during December 2015 examined the Inner Reef North of the channel (findings described in Miller et al. 2016 and NMFS 2016a), and the work completed during April 2016 included the Inner Reef south of the channel. The purpose of the surveys was to further our understanding of the spatial extent and severity of sediment-related impacts resulting from the dredging. The majority of locations examined were not included in previous quantitative assessments by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), its contractors, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), or other groups. Our surveys were limited to areas mapped as reef or hardbottom before the dredging began and focused on determining bottom cover, measuring sediment depth, and recording coral condition related to sediment stress after dredging ceased.

We found bottom cover at sediment assessment locations differed significantly from reference locations. The bottom cover class "sediment over hardbottom" was the primary driver of the variation along the Inner Reef, representing an average of 42% of bottom cover observations at sediment assessment locations, compared to only 7% at reference locations. The mean sediment depth also differed significantly between Inner Reef sediment assessment locations,  $1.4 \pm 0.1$  centimeter (cm), and reference locations,  $0.6 \pm 0.1$  cm. On the Inner Reef, severe impacts to coral reef habitat from sediments occurred over an estimated 278 acres of reef, and lesser impacts likely extended to an even larger area. We view this acreage estimate as conservative for many reasons, including, but not limited to, exclusion from the acreage calculation of the nearby patch reefs, artificial reefs, Outer Reef, and Nearshore Ridge Complex. Combining our results with those from Barnes et al. (2015), Cuning et al. (2019), and data collected from the FDEP-permit required monitoring, in addition to measurements and observations made by several groups (FDEP 2014; Miami WaterKeeper 2015; DERM 2015) of the same dredging event, it is possible that a much larger acreage of coral reef habitat was damaged by dredge-related sedimentation.

NMFS will use this information to help Port Miami, state and federal agencies, and other stakeholders with planning the Port Miami Phase IV dredging. For Port Miami Phase IV, the Endangered Species Act and Magnuson-Stevens Act require NMFS to forecast impacts relative to an environmental baseline. The environmental baseline must include the past and present impacts of all federal, state, or private actions and other human activities in the action area; the anticipated impacts of all proposed Federal projects in the action

area; and the impact of state or private actions that are contemporaneous with the consultation in process. This report helps establish the environmental baseline by enumerating the acres of coral reef affected by the unplanned sedimentation impacts. The report also will guide subsequent surveys needed by the USACE and Port Miami to determine the mitigation needed for Port Miami Phase III and Phase IV.

**Read more:** <https://sfregionalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/669975874-NOAA-report-on-Port-Miami-dredging-impact-on-corals.pdf>

# Trash burning in Broward? Opponents rally against possibility of new incinerator

BY LISA J. HURIASH



*Can Broward learn how to recycle enough to stave off efforts to build another incinerator? County officials say while it's possible another waste-to-energy plant could be built in the southern portion, there is no plan in the works now.*

Mary Stephens, a longtime Pembroke Pines homeowner, worries about the possibility of an incinerator being built near her Pembroke Pines community.

Like some of her neighbors, she says the potential addition would spoil the quality of her neighborhood, where she has lived for 28 years. "I've been losing sleep, I'm really freaked," Stephens said. She lists her concerns: "The air quality, the noise, my house value."

Upset residents have united against the potential for [an incinerator being added](#) to county property off U.S. 27 near Pembroke Pines and Southwest Ranches. County officials say while it's possible a waste-to-energy plant could be built in the southern portion, there is no plan in the works now and officials said it would be a last resort, because of the expense, the environmental concerns and the public pushback.

Moving forward, part of the decision would hinge on whether Broward residents can learn how to recycle [enough to stave off efforts](#) to build another incinerator in the county.

"It all depends on what is needed," County Commissioner Beam Furr said.

"Could it be there?" Furr asked of a potential incinerator. "Yes. Everything is on the table. But I will tell you there is an emphasis on trying to reach 75% recycling and the reason is if you can reach 75% recycling, you don't have to build another incinerator.

“If we can’t reach 75%, we have to find someplace for that garbage to go. We don’t want to be adding more to the landfill.”

### **Residents’ concerns**

Pembroke Pines recently hosted a Town Hall meeting for residents to voice their concerns. In attendance was Richard Ramcharitar, of Southwest Ranches, who is one of the organizers of Broward Clean Air. The group formed in June for fear of an incinerator being built.

“Human health is a major issue,” he said. “We’re not just concerned about ourselves, but the entire community,” including animals.

He worries if there were an accident, like what happened in Miami-Dade County in February, there would be “no way to evacuate animals fast enough.”

Ramcharitar was referring to the fire at the incinerator plant in Doral, in Miami-Dade County. The smoke from the trash fire reached unhealthy levels, and forced people indoors and two nearby schools closed early and canceled outdoor activities. Officials had encouraged nearby residents to wear masks, run their air conditioning at home to recirculate air, and roll up vehicle windows while driving through.

Miami-Dade’s mayor is recommending the county-owned plant remain shuttered, and replaced with a new incinerator about eight miles away at an airfield, which sits within several miles of the Everglades, the Miami Herald reported.

Southwest Ranches is a town near the Broward County site, where residents are getting increasingly concerned. The town council passed a resolution last month urging the county not to build an incinerator near its borders, stating that such a plant would be “incongruous to the town’s desire to maintain its rural lifestyle” and saying that empirical data suggests such “plants negatively impact the environment by emitting harmful contaminants into the atmosphere.”

Steve Winner, of Southwest Ranches, said it was “ludicrous to consider an archaic form of trash disposal at the foot of the Everglades in an area we’re trying to preserve.”

### **County’s considerations**

The worry comes as the majority of Broward’s cities have voted to create a new taxing authority that will be tasked with handling trash and recycling.

Pembroke Pines voted last week against the move, becoming one of three cities that didn’t join in. But the majority of the 31 Broward municipalities did back the plan. Now, as efforts get underway to create a master plan, the formalities and organization begin in September. Voting into the system also means those cities are pledging their garbage to the system.

It will come down to disposal of both trash and recycling: “Where does trash go when it’s picked up (and) where is it going to go?” said Furr, who is the vice chairman of the Solid Waste Working Group, the group of elected officials who are trying to enhance Broward’s recycling capabilities and reduce waste.



Among the choices for the waste: burn it in an incinerator, recycle it, bury it in the landfill, or compost it. “Or other options they are doing in Europe that I am looking at,” Ross said. “Israel is doing something different. Everyone is doing something different.”

Recycling in Broward reached a high in 2012 at a rate of 60% of the waste. But then the numbers of recycling items plummeted, while the landfill rate went up. The rate of recycling the waste now hovers at nearly 31%, Furr said.

Broward generates four million tons of garbage every year, Furr said. “That has to be dealt with,” he said.

Among the options:

- There are currently three boilers within the incinerator in unincorporated Broward County near Davie. An addition could be a fourth boiler, which would handle another 250,000 tons of capacity of trash.
- Build an incinerator on another county property off U.S. 27 near Pembroke Pines and Southwest Ranches, which would provide another million tons of capacity.
- The county could purchase another property someplace else, such as landfill at the Monarch Hill site near Coconut Creek now owned by Waste Management to build an incinerator or use it for “another methodology” like composting, Ross said.

“My hope is we recycle so much” that there is no more need for an additional boiler or incinerator to handle trash.

Still, for now, “there is no plan yet,” Furr said.

**Read more:** <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/2023/08/28/opponents-rally-against-possibility-of-a-new-incinerator-in-broward/>

## A new law is supposed to boost affordable housing. South Florida cities are furious

BY ANDRES VIGLUCCI AND RAISA HABERSHAM



*An architectural rendering shows a residential and commercial complex that would replace nine small motels along the Broadwalk in Hollywood beach. A two-story beach club and restaurant would face the Broadwalk, with a high-rise apartment tower behind it, separated by North Surf Road. A parking garage that's part of the project can be seen at far right near two existing motels whose owners have not agreed to sell to the developer. MICHE Kaller Architecture*

The Florida Legislature was widely praised this year when it [passed sweeping legislation](#) designed to supercharge construction of affordable housing by directing hundreds of millions of dollars in low-interest loans and big tax breaks to developers.

But in the early days of implementation in South Florida, the Live Local Act is running into significant roadblocks because of another, less-publicized feature of the law that went into effect July 1: Provisions that override local zoning controls on building height and density.

The idea is to allow developers to build big in exchange for setting aside apartments in mixed residential and commercial projects at lower rents for people who meet certain income criteria. The new law, touted as a bold and comprehensive attempt to tackle [Florida's crippling housing crisis](#), requires cities and counties to approve the projects without hearings where elected officials could seek public input and discuss and vote on the proposals, even if they dramatically violate existing height and density restrictions.

Critics question whether the state law really will help people struggling the most to afford soaring apartment rents and home sale prices that became [South Florida's hallmark during the pandemic](#). Most controversially, the Live Local Act bars local authorities from enacting rent controls as Orange County voters did last year.

Housing advocates had called for such controls to calm down the frenetic Miami-Dade housing market. What's more, the language of the law appears intended to entice real estate developers who typically build market-rate

projects to build housing, rather than give experienced affordable homebuilders new incentives to get more homes built.

In at least two local cities, Doral and Hollywood, developers have cited the new law signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis, in publicly floating supersized plans for high-rise residential and commercial developments that would far exceed anything around them in height, scale and density.

Oasis Doral would be a 17-acre residential and commercial project at a major intersection backing up to a pair of longstanding developments of modest two-story townhomes Villas of Amberwood surrounding a golf course called Costa del Sol. In Hollywood along the beachfront Broadwalk, a group of motels would be replaced with an 18-story condo and apartment tower complex, a three-story beach club and restaurant facing the pedestrian promenade.

The proposals though not yet formally submitted to local officials for review and approval, have rapidly drawn heated pushback in both cities from residents, property owners and public officials. Elected officials in Doral and Hollywood are frustrated that the state law appears to render them powerless to address community concerns or to plan for the effects on established neighborhoods from the oversized scale of the contemplated new projects.

In both cities, officials say they're applying the brakes to considering developers' applications under the law for real estate projects including affordable homes — possibly in violation of the statute — while they sort out its implications and press state legislators to clarify or revise the law's zoning clauses. That official posture represents a rare public resistance to the Legislature's increasing tendency to approve developer-friendly laws that gut local zoning, environmental and tenant protections in a practice called "preemption."

Weston, another city in Broward County, already has taken its own preemptive action. After the Legislature in March passed the housing bill the governor signed into law, the city commission on June 20 [passed the first reading](#) of an ordinance that would require a public hearing for development proposals involving affordable housing.

## LOCAL OFFICIALS LEFT WITHOUT INPUT IN LAW

The money promised from the law, which earmarked \$711 million in funding for various state housing programs, has yet to flow. The [Florida Housing Finance Corporation](#), a state agency that [manages the programs](#), has not yet released rules for competitive funding but said it will open applications Oct. 1.

But developers are already racing to figure out if they can take advantage of the zoning override provisions, consulting with land-use attorneys who have been putting out the word to recruit business, lawyers and business groups say, and approaching municipalities with preliminary development plans.

In South Florida, the Doral and Hollywood proposals are among the first to surface publicly statewide — and the first to run into what some experts say could be a wave of public opposition, as projects are submitted to counties and cities for approval.

Officials and residents say the Live Local law means they can't say "no" or scale back plans by a developer who wants to build towers in the middle of a warehouse district or a low-scale downtown district, no matter how

disruptive or how little sense it makes. Some complain that legislative authors of the act, championed by Republican Senate President Kathleen Passidomo of Southwest Florida, did not consult with county or municipal officials or developers specializing in affordable housing, or rejected their input when it was offered.

The reaction has been especially furious in Doral.

An overflow crowd packed a confrontational townhall meeting earlier this month to grill a developer over his Live Local Act colossal construction proposal. The plan calls for five new 10- and 12-story towers with 623 new apartments and 44,000 square feet of commercial space on the traffic-clogged southwest corner of Doral Boulevard and Northwest 97th Avenue.

Audience members booed and groaned out loud as the developer, Edward Abbo of Aventura-based The Apollo Companies, tried to downplay the effect of his proposed towers on the low-scale neighborhood.

### **A LITTLE BRICKELL ON A DORAL CORNER?**

“We’re up in arms against the size of the project,” Costa del Sol association president Jim Ferguson said in an interview after the meeting. “It’s too high and too close to our property line, and there are traffic issues at an already congested intersection. There are no 12-story towers anywhere within a mile or two from here. So you would have a little Brickell on the corner there. It’s just crazy.”

The meeting came a week after the Doral town council, reacting to increasingly angry pleas from residents, unanimously approved on first reading a six-month moratorium on accepting or processing Live Local affordable housing development applications, even after Apollo’s attorney, Joseph Goldstein of powerhouse law firm Holland & Knight, issued a barely veiled threat to sue the city. The council has set a second and final vote on the moratorium on Aug. 23.

Critics, including Doral Mayor Christi Fraga, say Apollo’s proposal would cram way too much development into a corner of Doral Boulevard and Northwest 97th Avenue never meant for it.

Abbo’s proposal would set aside 250 units, or 40% of the total, as workforce or affordable housing as defined by the state. That 40% portion is the threshold under the new law to override local zoning. The law applies in all commercial, industrial and mixed-use districts, but exempts areas zoned only for residential construction.

Fraga noted that, under Live Local, the Apollo development proposal provides no opportunity to Doral, as it normally would, to negotiate if a developer wants more height or density than allowed by existing zoning to ensure a project scale compatible with the surroundings. Instead, under the state law a developer can go as high as the tallest building in a one-mile radius within the local jurisdiction, and match the density of the densest allowed local zoning.

The act essentially tries to force the city to accept whatever the developer proposes, Fraga said, so long as the plan conforms to other aspects of local zoning rules, such as setbacks. Because the law also bars cities from prohibiting residential projects in industrial zones, she said it could also threaten the city’s economic and employment backbone — its extensive warehouse districts. Land speculation could cause prices in warehouse districts to rise, making continued industrial use economically unfeasible.

And putting housing in an industrial zone, Fraga said, seems questionable at best — especially if it puts people struggling to meet rent payments far from transit, work and shopping.

“This is the epitome of what local preemption is,” Fraga, who proposed the moratorium, said in an interview. “This truly can change the characteristics of a neighborhood that can completely challenge the quality of life of our residents. It overrides measures we have in place to protect that.

“My goal is not to be sued,” the Doral mayor said. “But I saw the uproar in the community and had to do something. My goal is to protect this community.”

During the special council meeting called to consider the moratorium, Doral city attorney Valerie Vicente said planners and administrators need the time to figure out how to process Live Local applications, interpret ambiguous language in the state law and consider how best to revise the zoning code to mesh with its requirements and protect residents.

“The city has been left grappling how to implement this statute,” Vicente said. “A lot has been left to interpretation. It’s such a significant impact for the city that it has to be done in a careful manner.”

In a subsequent letter to Doral officials, attorney Goldstein urged the council not to give final approval to the moratorium, which he argues would be illegal. He said the city has no choice under the new law but to approve Apollo’s project within 120 days of formal application.

Developer Abbo, during the townhall meeting, said he’s willing to work with residents to allay their concerns, though most appeared unpersuaded. “We are not your enemy,” Abbo said. “We’re here to work together and see how we can come up with a development that integrates well.”

## **REMOVING NOSTALGIA FROM HOLLYWOOD BROADWALK**

The second proposal, along Hollywood’s famed two-mile beachfront Broadwalk, would require demolition of nine of the resort district’s modest but characteristic mid-Century motels.

The plan by Brooklyn-based real estate investors and developers Condra Property Group would replace the one- and two- and three-story buildings and their 123 motel rooms with three separate structures on three blocks — the 18-story condo and apartment tower complex with ground-floor commercial, the beach club and restaurant facing the Broadwalk and an eight-story parking garage.

The residential complex would include 87 rental apartments, with an entrance separate from the condos, that meet the state definition of workforce or affordable housing. In a pre-application form filed with the city, the developers say the proposed height matches that of the city-sponsored Margaritaville Resort, and the density is less than that of Hyde Residences and Resort. Both properties sit farther south on Hollywood beach.

Condra partners Mark Drachman and Allen Konstam said they had previously proposed a 13-story hotel on property they had been assembling for several years, but the plan ran aground when Hollywood officials would not budge on their refusal to allow the developers to build higher than the current 65-foot height limit in the beach district.

Once Live Local passed, though, their attorney suggested they take advantage of its zoning override provisions, which also include a significant property-tax reduction, Drachman and Konstam said. The additional height and density allowed, along with the tax break, make the overall project financially feasible even with reduced apartment rents, they said.

“We jumped on it immediately,” Konstam said. Drachman added: “We are able to build a beautiful building that makes sense and offer affordable housing.”

Drachman said their development plan attempts to be “very mindful” of the Hollywood surroundings, placing the 18-story tower on the west side of their property towards A1A, with a low-rise club building facing the Broadwalk. The buildings they intend to tear down are outdated and in some cases in bad condition, they said.



*An architectural rendering shows a residential and commercial complex that would replace nine small motels along the Broadwalk in Hollywood beach. A two-story beach club and restaurant would face the Broadwalk, with a high-rise apartment tower behind it, separated by North Surf Road. A parking garage that's part of the project can be seen at far right near two existing motels whose owners have not agreed to sell to the developer. MICHE Kaller Architecture*

The partners acknowledge that numerous neighbors and city officials are opposed to their plan, but contend local hotel workers would benefit because they could live in the apartments, though they have not yet set rent and income targets. They said they intend to submit an application to the city in September.

“It’s a location that’s kind of a NIMBY location,” Konstam said, referring to “not in my backyard” opponents of development. “Obviously people don’t want any development of any size there. People are going to have their opinions. Others are absolutely excited.

“We didn’t propose an 18-story building the entire block, which we could have. Our goal is not to throw a monkey wrench into everyone’s area. We’re willing to work with the city and state to figure out this Live Local Act. We want everybody to be happy.”

But opponents say the scale and size of the project would tear apart the beach district's historic low-scale fabric and pack more people and automobile traffic into narrow streets already jammed to the point of near-immobility in winter high season and holidays. The critics say it would also disrupt the resort area's hospitality economy, which relies on tourists and snowbirds.

"This is going to be a disaster, that is a really bad idea," said Marie Balmaseda, manager at the Hollywood Beach Hotel, whose owners rejected overtures to buy from the Condra developers. The motel would be sandwiched between the condo complex and the parking garage. "This is a very small area and it's already packed. Think about it."

A few blocks down the Broadwalk, the longtime owner of the 1955 Bel Aire Motel, Craig McAdams, said the resort area's low-scale, familiar environment is what has drawn visitors to Hollywood beach from Canada and other points north for decades, including the regulars he depends on.

"This is what you call a mom-and-pop," McAdams said of the motel, which has been in his family for 66 years. "And so you're telling me that, at the signing of a pen, the state can change the face of Hollywood beach? So you can wipe out our laws and stick it to the residents? That ain't right. Someone has to have a long-term vision for this area other than lining your own pocket."

## **DISREGARDING COASTAL CLIMATE CHANGE EFFECTS**

The narrow beach district stretches just two blocks between A1A and the Broadwalk. It's already prone to flooding and highly vulnerable to the [rising seas](#) and storm surge driven by [climate change](#), Hollywood city commissioner Caryl Shuham said.

Shuham said the new law is flawed because its one-size-fits-all approach allows no provisions for such disparate local conditions and impacts, which should be left to local officials to handle.

"The idea that you would be encouraging density on barrier islands, how could they not have considered that?" Shuham said. "And how can you take away the public's right to weigh in?"

Moreover, she said, the law encourages developers to run roughshod over the city's careful planning to foster dense but carefully scaled mixed-use redevelopment, including affordable housing, in the city's nearby downtown and along transit and transportation corridors, where it's most appropriate.

Its effect on Hollywood would be "destructive," Shuham said. Then there's the question of enforcement: The law requires developers to keep rents for units set aside under Live Local at required low levels for 30 years, but doesn't say how that will be verified, or who will take on the onerous task.

Given the doubts, Hollywood assistant city manager Raelin Storey said town officials are not ready to move on any applications under the Live Local Act until such issues are cleared up — something she said might take litigation to determine.

"We are still analyzing the law and it's going to take a little while. There are questions we are still sorting through," Storey said. "It's going to require the courts or the state to provide clarity. We're not going to allow something to go forward without more clarity on that."

“We see many of the positive elements of Live Local, including the financing and getting development to market rapidly. We need affordable housing desperately. But then there are the concerns over how development looks and the impact on the existing fabric of our community, and this does seem to throw that out the window. It’s an opportunity for random development.”

Critics like Shuham say the zoning override rules also risk creating considerable public backlash against the laudable goal of dramatically increasing the state’s supply of workforce or affordable housing.

And some question whether the substantial benefits Live Local funnels to developers will pay off in terms of truly increasing the supply of homes for those most in need of affordable housing in Florida.

The act does reverse the state and the Legislature’s own longstanding practice of diverting millions of dollars in revenue earmarked for affordable housing to other uses.

It’s also clearly drafted, at least in part, to aim at cities and counties that made it hard for developers to build housing in many places through zoning restrictions, including prohibitions on building residential development in commercially zoned areas, or low density limits that encourage sprawl and artificially restrict housing supply.

### **‘PRO-DEVELOPER STUFF COUCHED AS AFFORDABLE HOUSING’**

That’s, however, not generally the case in Miami-Dade or cities like Miami, which already encourage development mixing residential and commercial. Miami-Dade has enacted far-reaching rules that encourage high-density development, including workforce and low-income housing, at and around public transit stations and along transit corridors, and require municipalities to lift restrictions on high-density housing development.

Compared to the carefully calibrated county approach, one Miami-Dade official not authorized to speak to the media called the Live Local law a blunt instrument.

There is also the question of who precisely the law will help.

It targets people making up to 120% of the local area median income, with rent levels set for each location by the state Housing Finance Corp. Developers can follow that standard or offer the set-aside housing at a 10% discount off prevailing market rents, depending on which alternative results in lower rents.

In Miami-Dade County, the median income is currently set at \$74,700 for a two-person household. In Broward, it’s \$82,100. That means projects approved under the Live Local Act should be affordable to two-person households making no more than \$89,640 in Miami-Dade and \$98,520 in Broward.

Those numbers define so-called workforce housing, typically described as being aimed at essential workers like teachers, cops and firefighters or hospitality workers who increasingly can’t afford to live near their jobs. That’s different from what’s generally understood to be affordable housing, which targets residents making below the county’s median income level.

Estimates compiled by Miami Homes for All, a housing advocacy group, show the local housing shortage is most severe for households making under 80% of the county’s median income. But the law doesn’t help those lower-income households that advocates say are the most in need of assistance. One executive at a large affordable development firm said the zoning provisions do little to foster construction of housing affordable to



people making less than the median income, which requires significant public subsidies and a complex mix of federal tax credits and financing, especially given the current high cost of construction. In fact, developers already doing subsidized affordable housing don't qualify for the property tax breaks under Live Local.

Instead, the law is geared to encouraging developers of market-rate projects to get into the workforce housing arena by offering so much profitable extra development capacity that they can afford to charge lower rents on some homes.

One partner at a major Miami law firm with a large land-use team predicted the Florida law will be attractive chiefly to developers looking to build mid-rise projects given sky-high construction, financing and insurance costs. Building above eight stories multiplies costs because of structural building-code requirements.

Attorney Anthony De Yurre, a partner at Bilzin Sumberg, said that extra floor or two of development capacity can be enough of an incentive for developers that he predicted the law will produce what it's meant to — a proliferation of mixed-income projects across the state, most at a middle scale.

"This will ultimately create mixed-income developments, so that developers are incentivized to include workforce housing along with market-rate housing, but not subsidized affordable housing," De Yurre said.

Some skeptics and critics, though, say they think the law will do more good for developers than for Floridians struggling with housing costs.

"It's a lot of pro-developer stuff, couched as affordable housing," Hollywood commissioner Shuham said.

Said Doral mayor Fraga: "I know developers have had their eyes on this bill for some time. It's a gift for them."

**Read More:** <https://www.miamiherald.com/article278059857.html>

# State board taking control of Miami-Dade toll expressways after MDX loses court fight

BY DOUGLAS HANKS



*The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority is being dissolved under a state law that courts recently upheld creating a new toll board to oversee five toll expresses, including the Dolphin, in Miami-Dade. Miami Herald file*

The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority agreed Friday to surrender control of five of the county's busiest toll roads after losing multiple court fights against a [state law creating a replacement agency](#).

While some legal avenues remain, the chairman of the county-controlled board on Friday sent an email instructing employees of the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) to begin taking orders from administrators of the new state board, the Greater Miami Expressway Agency (GMX).

"I am saddened to report that our fight for local control of MDX has taken a bad turn," Jose "Pepe" Diaz, a former Miami-Dade commissioner who served as MDX's chairman said in in the evening email. "This requires me to advise you that the legislative created agency, GMX, formed to take over MDX by the legislature, should now be allowed to access MDX's facilities and control over its affairs."

[READ MORE: Why Miami-Dade may lose control of Dolphin Expressway in state takeover of toll roads](#)

The email announced the end of a protracted fight for control of the Dolphin Expressway and four other commuting routes. The battle, mostly played out in court motions and hearings, pitted Miami-Dade's government against the administration of Gov. Ron DeSantis and the Republican-controlled Legislature.

Drivers on the former MDX expressways — Airport, Dolphin, Don Shula, Gratigny and Snapper Creek — shouldn't notice a difference beside changes in signage. The MDX was part of Florida's expressway system, with tolls paid electronically through SunPass or the state's toll-by-plate readers. MDX toll rates have been the same

since 2018, according to its most recent financial report, and the state law creating GMX [imposes restrictions](#) on toll increases through 2029.

In a statement, GMX's executive director, Torey Alston, said the transition will be smooth.

"The Greater Miami Expressway Agency (GMX) is committed to a seamless transition of operations that ensures the traveling public of South Florida continuity of services and sound financial accountability, including the continued payment of wages to current staff and to vendors,"

Alston said. The big changes in the switch from MDX to GMX come from who controls the boards and the more than \$230 million in toll revenue they produce each year. County commissioners appointed a majority of the members to the MDX board. Diaz, now Sweetwater mayor, was one of three former Miami-Dade commissioners on the board. Under state law, the governor appoints a majority of the GMX seats.

The legislature also kept power over the new GMX panel in Tallahassee by giving the Legislative Budget Commission veto power over the board's borrowing plans. That's a key function of toll boards, which borrow against toll revenue to pay for upgrades and expansions. MDX lists \$1.5 billion dollars in debt on its balance sheet, most of it bonds sold on Wall Street tied to yearly toll receipts.

The new GMX board is made up of Miami-Dade residents, including Miami lawyer Marili Cancio as chair. The board has met over the last year in state offices, and recently passed motions suspending MDX's top management. Alston is a former chief of staff at the state Transportation Department and a current DeSantis appointee on the Broward School Board.

With state lawmakers having authority over GMX borrowing, that will give Tallahassee a potentially central role in the future of an MDX signature project. The agency planned to spend more than \$1 billion extending the Dolphin — also known as State Road 836 — into West Kendall. That project has been stalled during control fight, which limited MDX's ability to borrow money from Wall Street given uncertainty over its future.

[READ MORE: Dems blame 'grudge' by Lt. Gov. Nuñez for latest state takeover bid of Miami toll roads](#)

Florida once owned the expressways that have been under MDX control since the 1990s, when the state struck a deal with Miami-Dade to create an independent toll board to run the roads and spend the money they generate. In recent years, MDX board members experienced friction over toll decisions with Republican members of the Legislature from Miami-Dade, including a [future lieutenant governor](#), Jeanette Nuñez.

Florida lawmakers first authorized the GMX takeover in 2019, but Miami-Dade and MDX fought off that law with court challenges. A primary defense was the "home rule" status Florida's Constitution grants Miami-Dade, the most populous county in the state. That provision generally prevents Tallahassee from enacting laws that only target Miami-Dade.

The Legislature defused that defense this year by tweaking the law to give GMX authority beyond Miami-Dade, to a corner of Monroe County that currently has one gravel road running through the federal Big Cypress Swamp preserve.

“It’s a joke,” said Gene Stearns, the longtime lawyer for MDX who called the state’s actions an “extraordinary attack” on home rule. “There’s never going to be an expressway through the Big Cypress Swamp.”

The new legislative language went into effect July 1 and led to a string of recent court wins for GMX. On Aug. 7, a Leon County judge ordered Bank of America to turn over MDX’s operating accounts to GMX.

On Wednesday, a Miami-Dade judge also rejected the Home Rule defense. On Friday, the Third District Court of Appeal rejected a county request to intervene. That was MDX’s last chance to fend off the GMX takeover, and Diaz sent his email after the ruling became public.

While appeals continue, Diaz said MDX was abandoning its defiance of the state law and acknowledging GMX had the legal authority to take over expressway operations.

“This is a sad day for many reasons but we have not gone down without a fight,” Diaz wrote in the email that went out at 6:55 p.m. and provided to the Miami Herald through a records request. “While I hope the County will find a way to restore local control of MDX, unless it does and unless the appellate court rules in our favor, you must come to work as usual, do your jobs as usual and accept the new leadership that has been thrust upon this agency by the legislature.”

**Read more at:** <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article278406259.html#storylink=cpy>

# Mayor wants Doral trash incinerator to stay closed after fire, rebuild near Everglades

BY DOUGLAS HANKS



*An aerial view of the Miami-Dade Resources Recovery Facility-Covanta Energy incinerator plant in Doral before a fire damaged the county-owned facility in February 2023. Mayor Daniella Levine Cava wants a modern replacement moved out of the city and in a more isolated area near the Everglades. PEDRO PORTAL*

Miami-Dade's mayor wants to abandon the county's shuttered incinerator in Doral and pursue a modern replacement near the Everglades while keeping open the possibility of retaining the trash-burning operation at the current site.

The plan released Friday by Mayor Daniella Levine Cava touches on the county's various trash challenges, [including the proposed \\$36 yearly hike in garbage fees](#) and how to avoid a development moratorium [if local landfills run out of space for more trash](#).

[READ MORE: Miami-Dade's trash chief resigns after warning that a landfill crisis is coming](#)

For Doral, the memo could be a double-barreled win, at least in the short term. The city urged Levine Cava and commissioners to relocate the privately run incinerator plant, which was burning about half of the garbage collected daily by Miami-Dade trucks before a fire shut it down in February.

Not only is Levine Cava recommending the county-owned plant run by Covanta remain shuttered, she's urging the commission to back replacing it with a modern facility eight miles northwest from the current one.

The proposed site for a modern incinerator is an airfield off Krome Avenue owned by Miami-Dade, which sits within several miles of [the Everglades](#).

It also is located outside the Urban Development Boundary, the planning divide Levine Cava has fought to keep in place as a check against over-building near the Everglades and farmland. The mayor's office noted the line

wouldn't have to move for a new incinerator and the other facilities Levine Cava wants to build around to handle other trash needs, such as processing yard waste. Government facilities are already allowed outside the line, known as the "UDB."

Known as the Opa-Locka West Airport, the idle airfield with two runways is located near where Krome Avenue meets Route 27. While there are some residential neighborhoods nearby, the property sits next to rock quarries.

Residential development expanded near the Doral plant after it was constructed in 1985. Homeowners complain of odor and truck traffic from the facility, which burns trash and converts it into exhaust, energy and ash.

"I'm happy with the memorandum," said Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez, the former Doral mayor who lives near the current plant and has been fighting to move it. "I think it's a perfect site."

While Levine Cava said the airport site should be the county's first choice for a modern incinerator, Miami-Dade would still ask regulators to approve constructing one on the current location in Doral.

The mayor wrote that "given the difficulty of obtaining applicable permits" from the federal Environmental Protection Agency and Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, Miami-Dade should submit proposals for the locations at the airport, in Doral and a third possibility near the current incinerator in Medley.

[READ MORE: Recycling costs just doubled in Miami-Dade. What's next for your yearly trash fees?](#)

Regulators would consider those proposals in a preliminary review that Levine Cava said could be completed in a year. The other two locations would be available as back-ups if permits can't be obtained for the airfield site.

Securing permits and then constructing a new incinerator would take about 10 years, she said. Levine Cava said the new plant would use modern technology already at work in Palm Beach County to make the incinerator process more efficient, creating less ash and odor.

"The Administration believes that the County now has a unique opportunity to invest in and modernize a 40-year-old system and turn it into a financially sustainable, environmentally responsible program that will grow with the needs of our community," she wrote.

In the memo, Levine Cava said the \$92 million estimate to repair the burned plant was too high to make sense. Without an incinerator for 10 years or more, Miami-Dade would rely on landfills for disposing of all its trash.

That could be a problem for developers because Florida requires counties to have enough landfill capacity to absorb five years worth of population growth in order to build new homes.

Levine Cava said she's considering a plan to transport some garbage out of the county by cargo train, and wants to expand existing contracts for landfills in Central Florida.

She's also recommending Miami-Dade commissioners approve expansion of the North Dade landfill off Northwest 47th Avenue outside Miami Gardens before it runs out of space in 2026. Already 135 feet tall, Levine Cava said she wants the landfill to grow taller but not expand its footprint.

Levine Cava also wants commissioners to study how to expand the county's second landfill, off Southwest 240th Street near Homestead [known as "Mount Trashmore."](#)

Commissioners have an immediate decision to make on the county's trash system, with Levine Cava urging passage of a \$36 increase in the \$509 fee more than 300,000 households pay for county trash pick-up services. The money is needed to pay for higher recycling costs and growing expenses related to garbage pick-up and disposal.

Levine Cava said she wants to end the fees in 2025, with Miami-Dade creating a new property tax to fund trash expenses instead that would vary based on the value of the real estate receiving the service. Commissioners would need to approve the new tax ahead of the 2025 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1, 2024.

The vote on the higher trash fee is scheduled for Sept. 6, when commissioners would also decide whether to accept Levine Cava's memo on long-term plans for the incinerator.

**Read more at:** <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article278384419.html#storylink=cpy>

# Florida lawmakers urge NOAA to enhance coral rescue efforts

BY BILL KEARNEY



*Bleached corals on Florida's Looe Key, July 28, 2023. Teams dedicated to ocean restoration are urgently moving samples to tanks on land as a marine heat wave devastates entire reefs. (Jason Gully/The New York Times)*

A bipartisan group of Florida lawmakers has written a letter to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration urging the agency to use its emergency powers to support the rescue and protection of corals threatened by the current marine [heat wave](#).

Florida's coral reef tract, the third largest in the world, has been suffering a [coral bleaching event](#) due to a marine heatwave this summer. Coral bleaching happens when stressors cause corals to expel the algae living in their tissues, turning the coral white.

The algae's photosynthesis provides the coral with nutrients. If the bleaching event is short-lived, corals have been known to regain algae and recover, but if the stress is prolonged, the corals often die.

The letter, addressed to NOAA administrator Richard Spinrad, stated, "We urge you to expeditiously use the emergency mechanisms available to you under to the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) to maximize the efforts being undertaken by state and federal managers and their non-profit partners to identify and monitor continuing heat stress across the reef, maintain essential genetic diversity of coral populations, and plan for responsible reintroduction and restoration."

Among the signees were Sen. Marco Rubio, R-FL, Rep. Darren Soto, D-FL, Sen. Rick Scott, R-FL, Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar, R-FL, Neal Dunn, R-FL, Jared Moskowitz, D-FL, Scott Franklin, R-FL, Gus Bilirakis, R-FL, Anna Paulina Luna, R-FL, Carlos Gimenez, R-FL, John Rutherford, R-FL, Kathy Castor, D-FL, Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-FL, Frederica Wilson, D-FL, and Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-FL.



The bipartisan Coral Reef Conservation Act reauthorized and modernized the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000. It strengthened NOAA's resources to help non-federal partners working on coral conservation.

Some sites around the Florida Keys are being exposed to twice the amount of heat stress that causes corals to die, and earlier in the year than ever before, scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said in a telephone news conference. They said the phenomenon is likely to affect the Caribbean very soon and a global bleaching event could be just around the corner.

"We are quite concerned and worried and stressed about this event," said Ian Enochs, a research ecologist at NOAA's Atlantic Oceanographic & Meteorological Laboratory. "It's not a normal thing."

Up and down the chain of islands that form the Florida Keys, coral rescue groups and government and academic institutions have mobilized to save the corals by relocating them to land-based facilities where they can be studied.

The goal is to figure out which coral types are best at surviving heat stress and then using them to build a more resilient reef, said Andy Bruckner, research coordinator for NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

**Read more:** <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/2023/08/19/florida-lawmakers-urge-noaa-to-enhance-coral-rescue-efforts/>

## 606-unit Miami Worldcenter condo tower to have five parking spaces

BY JOHN CHARLES ROBBINS



A new luxury condominium tower planned for Northeast First Avenue downtown expects to be the second-to-last development making up the multi-block mixed-use development known as Miami Worldcenter.

Developer Aria Development Group proposes to construct the 31-story building, called 600 MWC, at 600 NE First Ave. offering 606 residential units, about 3,750 square feet of commercial uses, 1,261 square feet of office use, and related amenities.

The city's Urban Development Review Board recommends approval. Miami Worldcenter District is a large mixed-use development under construction led by principals Arthur Falcone and Nitin Motwani, spanning several blocks in the Park West neighborhood.

The new tower is to rise on property that has frontages on Northeast First Avenue on the east and Northeast Sixth Street on the south. the property abuts the FEC Corridor to the north.

The property is within a half mile of a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) area, centered on the Freedom Tower Metromover Station. Due to its location and zoning, the developer isn't required to provide parking.

Brian Dombrowski, an attorney for the developer, wrote that there is an adjacent Metromover station, as well as multiple bus and trolley stops within walking distance. The project will provide five parking spaces.

Mr. Dombrowski wrote, "The development of the property will provide ground level retail, which the existing surface parking lacks. This will enhance the pedestrian realm, activate the ground floor, and encourage walkability in the area which currently has no retail frontages."

He added, "The property is located within a short walk of Maurice Ferré Park which provides recreational options, and Bayside provides dining and retail options within walking distance."

The developer is requesting special permission via warrants to:

- Permit new construction within the Miami Worldcenter District that ensures conformity of new buildings within the district.
- Increase the maximum lot coverage from 80% to 96%. The project proposes an arcade that provides shade and protection to pedestrians.
- Reduce the vehicular access separation from 60 feet to 51 feet.

The developer is also asking for a Special District Permit to increase the residential floorplate length from 200 feet to 212 feet 2 inches.

Attorney Iris Escarra, who also represents the developer, told the review board, "We have a huge dedication of right of way along Sixth Street and First Avenue, 14% of the site."

She noted all of the activity in this area, saying, "Along Sixth Street there are five active projects going in ... it will be an amazing street in the downtown core."

She added, "Hopefully when we're done there'll only be one block left (undeveloped) in Miami Wordcenter."

Luis O. Revuelta, principal of Revuelta Architecture International, presented details of the site plan and building design to the board.

"We tried to differentiate the building from those around us," he said.

The tower will be a darker shade of reflective glass, to give the building a sense of higher-end luxury, he said.

Board member Robert Behar called the project "great" and said it will be a good addition to the area.

Board member Gia Zapattini said, "I really like the design. I think it's beautiful. Very elegant. Very sophisticated ... Congratulations, I think it's a great project."

Board member Anthony Tzamtzis said, "I think it's an elegant building ... it's a little plain, you know, not really very loud but well laid out and very functional."

Board Chairman Ignacio Permuy said, "The massing is heavy, it's a little bit up there, but having said that, the way the building is designed, articulated and resolved, Mr. Revuelta, you've done an exceptional job, so I commend you and the entire team. It is a great project and it will have a positive, immediate impact on the area."

The vote to recommend approval was unanimous.

**Read more:** <https://www.miamitodaynews.com/2023/08/15/606-unit-miami-worldcenter-condo-tower-to-have-five-parking-spaces/>

# City of Tampa warns about garbage trucks catching on fire because of household chemicals

BY CASEY ALBRITTON

TAMPA, Fla. (Tampa Bay Now) - The City of Tampa is warning about a recent trend called "hot loads."

With the recent Florida heat, lithium ion batteries and hazardous chemicals are causing fires in garbage trucks. "It can cause a great explosion, it can cause property damage, it can cause pedestrian damage, anyone within the proximity," said Wayne Jackson with the City of Tampa Department of Solid Waste.

Jackson says recently garbage trucks catching on fire have been a problem. "When you see smoke, there's a fire," he said.

With the intense Summer heat, lithium ion batteries and other hazardous chemicals being thrown away are dangerous.

"We've had I believe two hot loads so far this year just in 2023," said Tampa Mayor, Jane Castor.

Hot loads happen when these batteries and chemicals get overheated and explode, and Mayor Jane Castor says on Saturday one of the City of Tampa garbage trucks caught fire.

"What makes a lithium ion battery fire different than a regular fire is they produce a lot of toxic gas, create explosive environments, and they are definitely difficult to extinguish," said Barbara Tripp, Tampa Fire Chief.

Lithium ion batteries are used in everyday items like cameras, cell phones, laptops and more. Tripp says there are some signs that your lithium ion battery is overheated.

"Changing of the color, too much heat, the shape and you might see some and you might see liquid leaking out of the item," said Tripp.

Now, the city is asking people to bring their lithium batteries to Hillsborough County chemical collection sites, or download an app called Tampa Trash and Recycling that will tell you how exactly to dispose of these materials.

Jackson says in the meantime, his team is taking extra precautions to stay safe.

"When they came on, that's one of the things we try to encourage. Be safe out there, take your time, don't take chances so that you can go home to your family," said Jackson.

**Read more:** <https://www.cbsnews.com/tampa/news/city-of-tampa-warns-about-garbage-trucks-catching-on-fire-because-of-household-chemicals/>

# Fed raises interest rates 0.25 point, opens door to another hike despite easing inflation

BY PAUL DAVIDSON, CHARISSE JONES, AND BAILEY SCHULZ

WASHINGTON – Despite a recent pullback in inflation, the [Federal Reserve](#) raised its key interest rate by a quarter point Wednesday and signaled another hike is at least on the table, if not likely, in coming months amid a solid economy.

The move nudged the federal funds rate [to a range of 5.25% to 5.5%](#), the highest level in 22 years. In a statement after a two-day meeting, the Fed repeated that “determining the extent of additional policy firming (rate increases) that will be appropriate” to lower inflation to the Fed’s 2% target will hinge on inflation as well as economic and financial developments, among other factors.

## Is the Fed going to raise interest rates again?

That suggests another rate increase is likely in September or November, Barclays wrote in a note to clients last week. Another hike would have been less likely if the central bank had reverted to language in a prior statement that referred to “the extent to which additional policy firming may be appropriate,” Barclays said.

Protect your assets: [Best high-yield savings accounts of 2023](#).

At a news conference, Fed Chair Jerome Powell acknowledged inflation's slowdown in June but added that while it's "welcome, it's just one report, one month of data." He said the process of lowering inflation to the Fed's 2% goal "has a long way to go."

"The labor market continues to be strong," he said, noting the Fed wants to bring supply and demand in the economy and labor market "into better balance." Otherwise, consumer prices could surge again. Noting the Fed will see two more inflation reports and two jobs reports before its next meeting in September, Powell said, "It's certainly possible we would raise (rates) again at the September meeting and it's also possible we would hold steady."

In its statement, the central bank said that “economic activity has been expanding at a moderate pace” – an upgrade from its previous description of “modest” growth. That’s a possible signal that the Fed believes the economy could withstand another rate hike and that sturdy growth may push inflation higher again. “Job gains have been robust in recent months, and the unemployment rate has remained low,” the Fed added, echoing its previous statement.

"We're seeing strong spending and a strong economy and that made us confident we can go and raise interest rates for a third time" since the Silicon Valley Bank crisis in March, Powell said. The latest rate bump means another rise in borrowing costs for consumers and businesses who got a reprieve when the Fed paused its aggressive hiking campaign in June. Rates for credit cards, adjustable-rate mortgages, auto and other loans are now poised to climb again. But Americans, especially seniors, are finally reaping higher bank savings yields after years of paltry returns.

### **How much did the Fed raise interest rates?**

After lifting its benchmark short-term rate by 5 percentage points in 14 months – its biggest flurry in 40 years – the Fed took a break in June to assess the lagged effects of a hard-nosed strategy that many forecasters say will cause a recession this year.

Yet at the same meeting, Fed officials forecast two more rate increases in coming months to contain a bout of pandemic-related inflation that hit a 40-year high of 9.1% a year ago. Although yearly consumer price increases have steadily eased, a “core” measure that strips out volatile food and energy items and better reflects long-term trends has remained stubbornly high.

Earlier this month, however, the consumer price index unexpectedly revealed that both overall inflation and the core reading slowed notably in June, to 3% and 4.8%, respectively, though that’s still above the Fed’s 2% target. Goldman Sachs believes Wednesday’s rate hike will be the last now that inflation has reached a “turning point.”

“By the November meeting, we expect the core inflation trend will have taken a decisive step down... and that this will convince (the Fed) that a second hike is unnecessary,” Goldman wrote in a note to clients. Markets that predict Fed funds rate movements also believe the central bank will now hold rates steady before cutting them next year.

### **How is the economy in the U.S. right now?**

Barclays, however, says a still resilient economy and stock market will persuade the Fed to raise rates once more. On Thursday, the government is expected to report that the economy grew a fairly solid 1.8% in the second quarter, faster than many forecasters projected earlier this year.

Last month, employers added 209,000 jobs and average wages grew 4.4% annually. Both mark slowdowns from earlier paces but are still strong showings. Initial jobless claims, a gauge of layoffs, have retreated toward historically low levels after rising in June. Consumer spending, the economy’s main engine, is still robust despite higher borrowing costs and prices. A core measure of retail sales that excludes volatile categories increased sharply last month.

And financial conditions have been favorable, with the S&P 500 stock index climbing steadily since March. That tends to lift consumer sentiment and bolster spending. The positive economic backdrop likely makes the Fed “skeptical that inflation will remain on a downward trajectory toward its 2% target without another rate hike,” Barclays wrote in a research note. The resilient economy also seems to be persuading Fed officials that the inflation could be tamed without triggering a recession. Powell said Fed staffers are no longer predicting a downturn. “There is a pathway,” Powell said.

### **What is CPI?**

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measurement of the average change in prices for certain products and services during a period of time, according to the Bureau of Labor Services.

### **Why is CPI important?**

The Federal Reserve keeps its eye on two key spokes of the economy, price stability and maximum employment, and those are the main considerations in its [interest-rate decisions](#). The Fed looks at the CPI to help determine if prices are “stable.”

### **What is the difference between CPI and core CPI?**

Core prices leave out volatile food and energy items and therefore give a more accurate snapshot of longer-term trends.

### **How are auto loans affected?**

The average interest rate on newly financed vehicles jumped to 7.2% in June, the highest it's been in 16 years, and up from 5.2% a year earlier. Used vehicle rates leaped to 11% from 8.3%, according to car industry data from Edmunds.

Meanwhile, the average monthly payment of \$733 for a new vehicle in the three months ending June 30 was a record – and up from \$678 a year earlier. And a record-high 17.1% of consumers financed a new vehicle with a monthly payment of [\\$1,000 or more](#), Edmunds said.

"The good news for new car buyers is that automakers have gradually offered more subsidized loan programs as inventory has improved and stabilized," said Jessica Caldwell, Edmunds' executive director of insights. "That should take some of the sting out of [rising interest rates](#) for qualified consumers with good credit, with the caveat being a shorter loan term than desired in many cases. All other shoppers will need to [tread cautiously](#)."

The rejection rate for [auto loans](#) in June rose to 14.2%, the [highest level since this data was first collected](#) in 2013, as lenders become leery of borrowers who have struggled with high inflation and a surge in interest rates and have piled on debt to make ends meet.

Many lenders, including Fifth Third Bancorp, Citizens Financial, U.S. Bank and Capital One Financial, have already either cut out or scaled back auto lending.

### **Loan rejection rates on the rise**

The [rejection rate for people applying for credit](#) jumped to 21.8% in June, the highest level in five years, according to a Federal Reserve survey released earlier this month.

Rejection rates for credit cards, credit card limit increase requests, mortgages, and mortgage refinance applications rose to 21.5%, 30.7%, 13.2%, and 20.8%, respectively, the Fed said. Major banks have reported setting aside more money to cover bad consumer loans as credit card balances rise.

### **Will mortgage rates be affected by Fed's rate decision?**

Not necessarily. The Fed can impact but doesn't directly set mortgage rates, so home loan costs may not shift significantly in the near term. Other factors, like [housing demand](#) and the [economic outlook](#), also influence mortgage rates.

Those rates did double in the wake of the first Fed rate hikes last year, but the most recent moves by the central bank have had minimal impact.

"Each month when the Federal Reserve has raised rates most of the time the mortgage market has already baked in those rate increases because it's been very clear what the Federal Reserve had intended to do," says Bright MLS Economist Lisa Sturtevant.

Nevertheless, any action that makes consumers or investors less certain can cause mortgage rates to fluctuate. And in the three periods since the late 1970's when the Fed raised interest rates to cool the economy, prices generally stayed steady, but the number of existing homes sold declined.

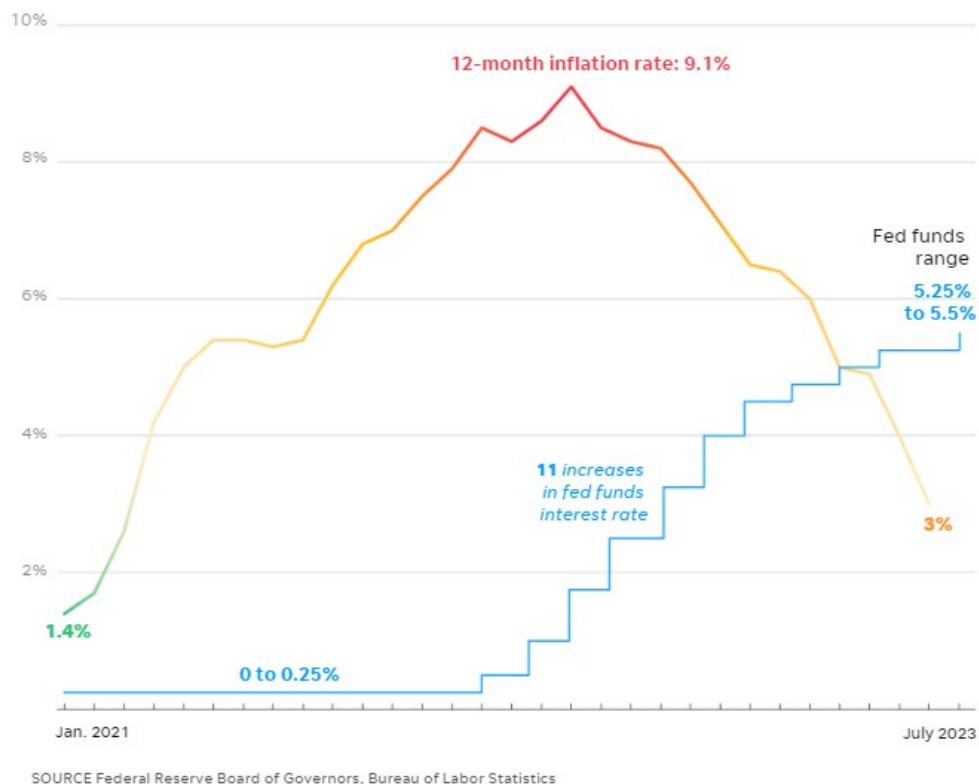
### Current mortgage rates

The average rate [for a 30-year fixed mortgage](#) was 6.78% as of July 20, according to the latest data from Freddie Mac. The 15-year fixed-rate mortgage averaged 6.06%

### Fed rate hike history

Inflation has cooled since the Fed started its rate hike campaign, but experts have mixed opinions on whether the Fed should take credit.

Some economists [say little or none of the progress](#) on inflation comes from the Fed's interest rate hikes, and instead point to the unwinding of pandemic-related supply chain bottlenecks, a sharp drop in commodity prices and a pullback in COVID-19-related consumer spending binges. Others say the central bank has played a supportive role by affecting consumer inflation expectations and modestly dampening a hot job market.



### When is the next Fed interest rate decision?

[The Fed's meeting schedule is:](#)

- July 25-26
- Sept. 19-20
- Oct. 31/Nov. 1
- Dec. 12-13



### **What the Fed rate increases meant to credit card rates**

The interest rates banks charge on their credit cards are pegged to the prime rate which is largely connected to the Fed funds rate.

In the late '70s and early '80s, state laws largely barred credit card lenders from charging more than 18%. In the mid-90s, with the prime rate hovering between 8% and 9%, credit card rates were 15.5% to 16%. Now, as the prime rate has risen to 8.25%, the average interest rate for a new credit card has risen from 14.6% in February 2022 to 24.2% last week, [according to LendingTree](#). That's raised monthly interest charges to \$140 – roughly a \$55 monthly uptick – on the average American's \$6,965 credit card balance.

### **Unemployment number**

The [U.S. gained 209,000 jobs in June](#) as the unemployment rate dipped from 3.7% to 3.6%, according to the Labor Department.

That growth came despite inflation and high interest rates that are making it more expensive for both employers and consumers to borrow. But it was also the weakest uptick since December 2020.

### **How will another rate hike affect the stock market?**

Stocks have been surging on hopes that inflation is slowing enough that a rate hike on Wednesday will be the last from the Fed this year, and the economy will [avoid recession](#), - especially since the [labor market is strong](#). The benchmark broad-market S&P 500 index closed Tuesday at the highest level since April 2022, while the blue-chip Dow had a winning streak of 12 consecutive days, the longest rally since February 2017.

Despite this impressive run, some remain wary because higher rates make borrowing and business investment more expensive. They also dampen consumer spending, which pares corporate profits and can spark layoffs. Some economists say that a ripple effect could still occur, though most likely towards the end of the year.

"Recession risk is still elevated, pushed out but not quite eliminated," said Alex Pelle, economist at Mizuho Securities USA. "Economic bears may yet be right that monetary policy lags will eventually have a serious bite."

### **What is a recession?**

[A recession is](#) "a significant decline in economic activity that spreads across the economy and lasts more than a few months," according to Michael Pugliese, an economist with Wells Fargo. The nonprofit National Bureau of Economic Research, which designates when a recession occurred, looks at various indicators such as the jobless rate, consumer spending, retail sales and industrial production.

The last two downturns happened when the economy was jolted by a housing crisis in 2008/2009 and then the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which led to massive layoffs as many businesses struggled or were forced to shutter when people hunkered down in their homes.

A recession this year would be triggered by the string of rate hikes implemented by the Federal Reserve to tame an economy that rapidly accelerated as the pandemic waned.

### **Monthly inflation rate**

The inflation rate has decreased by more than half from its peak of 9.1% in June 2022. Here's a look at the inflation rate in the U.S. by month since May 2022:

- May 2022: 8.6%
- June 2022: 9.1%
- July 2022: 8.5%
- Aug 2022: 8.3%
- Sept 2022: 8.2%
- Oct 2022: 7.7%
- Nov 2022: 7.1%
- Dec 2022: 6.5%
- Jan 2023: 6.4%
- Feb 2023: 6.0%
- Mar 2023: 5.0%
- Apr 2023: 4.9%
- May 2023: 4.0%
- June 2023: 3.0%

### **How high will interest rates go in 2023?**

In June, the Fed forecast additional rate hikes amounting to a half percentage point this year, according to officials' median estimate. That was a quarter point more than economists expected, and a half point more than the Fed projected in March.

The Fed felt it had to continue boosting rates since earlier hikes were having a minimal impact on inflation. But [financial markets figure](#) that while the key rate will likely get another push in July, there won't be another hike this year because the economy and inflation will cool significantly without one.

### **Will Fed rate hike help savers?**

Higher costs for borrowers can be good news for savers. After years of earning nearly 0% on savings deposits, another boost to the fed funds rate could earn savers another 20 to 30 basis points in high-yield online savings accounts, according to Ken Tumin, founder of DepositAccounts.com, which tracks depository banking products.

### **Stock market today**

Stocks were mixed in morning trading as the markets waited on the Fed's decision. Dow Jones futures were up a slight 0.03% and 10-year treasuries rose 3.86%. The S&P 500 was down 0.16% and Nasdaq dipped 0.40%.

### **Will Fed rate hike hurt borrowers?**

The Fed's rapid rate hikes have definitely [punched consumers in the pocketbook](#). Because of the 500 basis points in rate increases from March 2022 to May 2023, borrowers already will [pay \\$34.4 billion in extra interest charges](#) over the next 12 months, according to WalletHub.

Another 25-basis-point increase, which is expected to be announced by the Fed on Wednesday, will cost consumers \$1.72 billion more. That means the annual cost of the Fed's recent rate bumps is a staggering \$36 billion in total, WalletHub said. At the end of March, total household debt stood at [\\$17.05 trillion](#), and the share of debt becoming delinquent rose for most debt types, according to the New York Federal Reserve.

### **When will inflation go down?**

The worst of the [current bout of inflation](#) is probably behind us, with the four-decade high inflation rate of 9.1%, reached last June, dropping to 3% last month.

"I've seen forecasts of inflation coming down to normal levels by the end of 2023 and into 2024," Fabio Gaertner, an associate professor at the Wisconsin School of Business, previously told USA TODAY.

For now, however, the current inflation rate is still well above the Fed's 2% goal.

### **How does raising interest rates help inflation?**

The Fed raises its key rate to make it more expensive for consumers and businesses to borrow, potentially putting a break on spending and slowing down spikes in the costs of goods and services.

### **How many times has the Fed raised rates?**

Since March 2022, the Fed has increased its benchmark federal funds rate at 10 consecutive meetings by a total of 5 percentage points. That's the steepest spate of rate hikes in forty years. But in June it broke that streak when it left the key rate unchanged.

### **Can the U.S. dodge a recession with a "soft landing?"**

Amid stubborn inflation, economists have [hoped for a soft landing](#) that would mean prices are reined in without big jumps in joblessness or the economy contracting.

Many have [predicted a rockier road](#), paved by the Fed implementing ten rate hikes in a row to get inflation under control. Those actions have threatened to tip the U.S. economy into at least a mild recession, economists say.

But a low unemployment rate, consistent consumer spending, and gradually falling inflation are giving some banks and investors more confidence that a "soft landing" could be the outcome.

"We have greater resiliency within the economy than I would have anticipated at this point in time, given the extent of rate increases we've gotten," Matthew Luzzetti, [Deutsche Bank's chief U.S. economist said](#).

### **Are we in a recession?**

No, though some economists say that if the Fed continues to raise rates, the U.S. will tip into a downturn.

So far it hasn't happened largely due to consumers having significant savings to fall back on in the wake of the pandemic. During the global health crisis, when many Americans had to stay home and were on the receiving end of trillions of dollars in federal stimulus checks aimed at helping laid-off workers survive, households accumulated roughly \$2.5 trillion in [excess savings](#).

That financial cushion has helped Americans stay afloat despite inflation that reached a four-decade high last June and rising interest rates. Additionally, consumers who had to mostly stay home during the pandemic continue to be in a spending mood, with consumption rising 3.8% in the first three months of this year.

But savings are waning, with only about \$1.5 trillion of the pandemic-related surplus remaining, according to Moody's Analytics.

### **U.S. inflation rate**

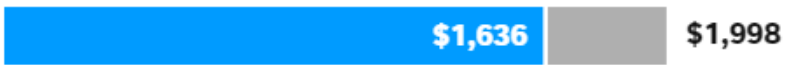
[Consumer prices overall rose 3% in June as compared to a year earlier](#). That was down from the 4% uptick the previous month, according to the Labor Department's consumer price index.

## Payments jump on new 30-year fixed rate mortgage

MONTHLY PAYMENTS BASED ON \$90,000 DOWNPAYMENT

3.6%: January 2022

PRINCIPAL & INTEREST



PROPERTY TAX & INSURANCE |

6.8%: July 2023



SOURCE [Bankrate mortgage calculator](#)

June marked the 12th month in a row that [inflation cooled](#) as static [grocery prices took some of the sting](#) out of gas prices that were again on the rise, and rent costs that remained stubbornly high.

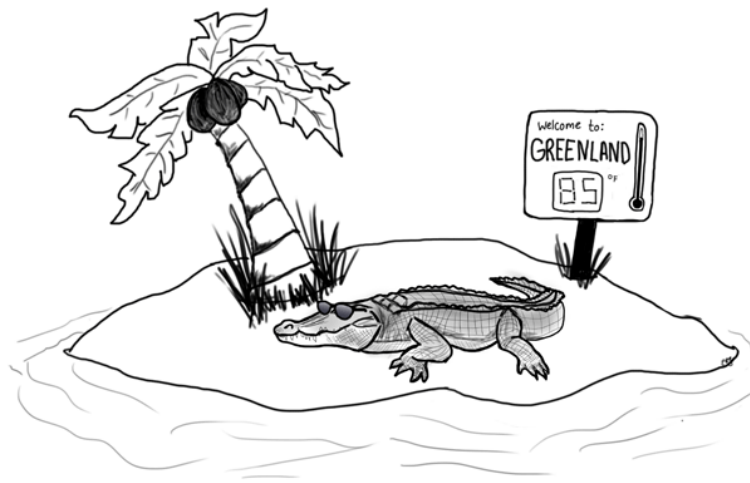
Broadly, prices have been all over the map. Used cars for instance have become more affordable as pandemic-related snarls in the supply chain start to unwind. But services like haircuts and car repairs continue to cost more as employers offer higher wages to keep workers amid lingering labor shortages.

When will the Fed lower interest rates? [With more hikes expected in 2023, timeline shifts](#)

Read more: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2023/07/26/fed-interest-rate-hike-live-updates/70463418007/>

# What's the hottest Earth's ever been?

BY SCOTT AND REBECCA LINDSEY



56 million years ago

*Cartoon by Emily Greenhalgh, NOAA Climate.gov.*

## History of hot

Temperature records from thermometers and weather stations exist only for a tiny portion of our planet's 4.54-billion-year-long life. By studying indirect clues—the chemical and structural signatures of rocks, fossils, and crystals, ocean sediments, fossilized reefs, tree rings, and ice cores—however, scientists can infer past temperatures.

None of these techniques help with the very early Earth. During the time known as the Hadean (yes, because it was like Hades), Earth's collisions with other large planetesimals in our young solar system—including a Mars-sized one whose impact with Earth likely created the Moon—would have melted and vaporized most rock at the surface. Because no rocks on Earth have survived from so long ago, scientists have estimated early Earth conditions based on observations of the Moon and on astronomical models. Following the collision that spawned the Moon, the planet was estimated to have been around 2,300 Kelvin (3,680°F).

Even after collisions stopped, and the planet had tens of millions of years to cool, surface temperatures were likely more than 400° Fahrenheit. [Zircon crystals](#) from Australia, only about 150 million years younger than the Earth itself, hint that our planet may have cooled faster than scientists previously thought. Still, in its infancy, Earth would have experienced temperatures far higher than we humans could possibly survive.

But suppose we exclude the violent and scorching years when Earth first formed. When else has Earth's surface sweltered?

## Thawing the freezer

Between 600 and 800 million years ago—a period of time geologists call the Neoproterozoic—evidence suggests the Earth underwent an [ice age](#) so cold that ice sheets not only capped the polar latitudes, but may have extended all the way to sea level near the equator. Reflecting ever more sunlight back into space as they expanded, the ice

sheets cooled the climate and reinforced their own growth. Obviously, the Earth didn't remain stuck in the freezer, so how did the planet thaw?



*A geologic history of Earth since its formation 4.6 billion years ago, divided by eon and period, and showing fossils typical of a given period. Fossils reveal not only ancient plants and animals, but also ancient climates. Artwork © Ray Troll, 2010. Used with permission.*

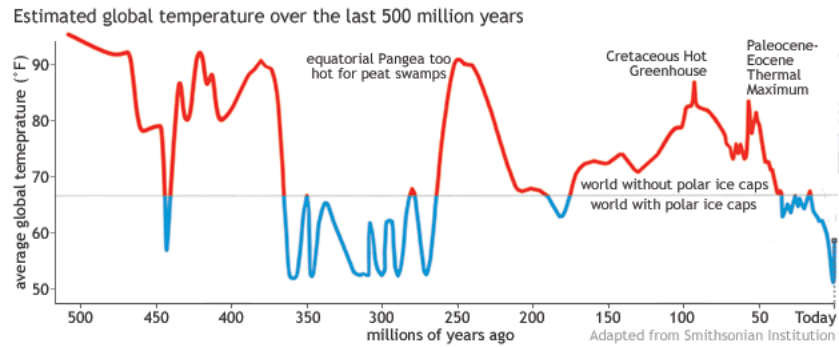
Even while ice sheets covered more and more of Earth's surface, tectonic plates continued to drift and collide, so volcanic activity also continued. Volcanoes emit the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. In our current, mostly ice-free world, the natural weathering of silicate rock by rainfall consumes carbon dioxide over geologic time scales. During the frigid conditions of the Neoproterozoic, rainfall became rare. With volcanoes churning out carbon dioxide and little or no rainfall to weather rocks and consume the greenhouse gas, temperatures climbed.

What evidence do scientists have that all this actually happened some 700 million years ago? Some of the best evidence is "[cap carbonates](#)" lying directly over Neoproterozoic-age glacial deposits. Cap carbonates—layers of calcium-rich rock such as limestone—only form in warm water.

The fact that these thick, calcium-rich rock layers sat directly on top of rock deposits left behind by retreating glaciers indicate that temperatures rose significantly near the end of the Neoproterozoic, perhaps reaching a global average higher than 90° Fahrenheit. (Today's global average is lower than 60°F.)

### The tropical Arctic

A Smithsonian Institution project has tried to reconstruct temperatures for the Phanerozoic Eon, or roughly the last half a billion years. [Preliminary results](#) released in 2019 showed warm temperatures dominating most of that time, with global temperatures repeatedly rising above 80°F and even 90°F—much too warm for ice sheets or perennial sea ice. About 250 million years ago, around the equator of the supercontinent Pangea, it was even too hot for peat swamps!

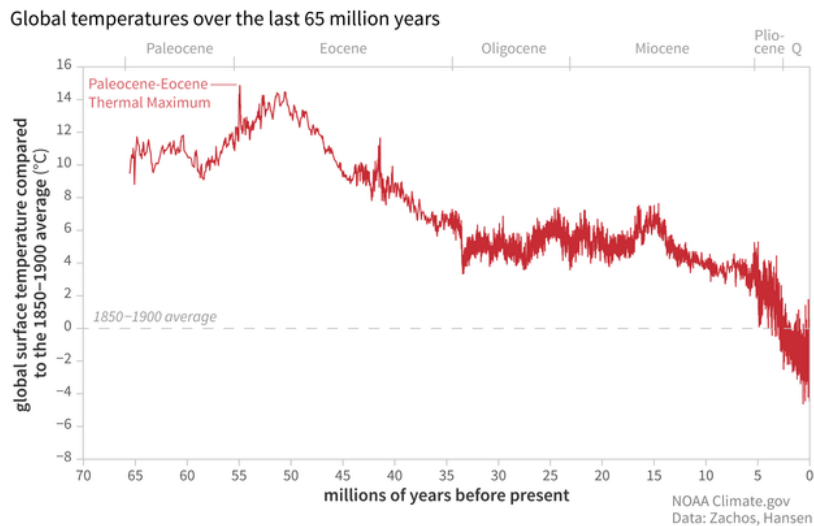


Preliminary results from a Smithsonian Institution project led by Scott Wing and Paul Huber, showing Earth's average surface temperature over the past 500 million years. For most of the time, global temperatures appear to have been too warm (red portions of line) for persistent polar ice caps. The most recent 50 million years are an exception. Image adapted from Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

Geologists and paleontologists have found that, in the last 100 million years, global temperatures have peaked twice. One spike was the Cretaceous Hot Greenhouse roughly 92 million years ago, about 25 million years before Earth's last dinosaurs went extinct. Widespread volcanic activity may have boosted atmospheric carbon dioxide. Temperatures were so high that champsosaurs (crocodile-like reptiles) lived as far north as the Canadian Arctic, and warm-temperature forests thrived near the South Pole.

Another hothouse period was the Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum (PETM) about 55-56 million years ago. Though not quite as hot as the Cretaceous hothouse, the PETM brought [rapidly rising temperatures](#). During much of the Paleocene and early Eocene, the poles were free of ice caps, and palm trees and crocodiles lived above the Arctic Circle.

During the PETM, the global mean temperature appears to have risen by as much as 5-8°C (9-14°F) to an average temperature as high as 73°F. (Again, today's global average is shy of 60°F.) At roughly the same time, paleoclimate data like fossilized phytoplankton and ocean sediments record a massive release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, at least doubling or possibly even quadrupling the background concentrations.



Global surface temperatures were generally high throughout the Paleocene and Eocene, with a particularly warm spike at the boundary between the two geological epochs around 56 million years ago. Temperatures in the distant past are inferred from proxies, in this case, oxygen isotope ratios from fossil foraminifera, single-celled marine organisms. "Q" stands of Quaternary. Graphic produced using [data](#) from [Zachos](#) and [Hansen](#), with help from Dr. Carrie Morrill, Director of the World Data Service for Paleoclimatology.

It is still uncertain where all the carbon dioxide came from and what the exact sequence of events was. Scientists have considered the drying up of large inland seas, volcanic activity, thawing permafrost, release of methane from warming ocean sediments, huge wildfires, and even—briefly—a comet.

### **Like nothing we've ever seen**

Earth's hottest periods—the Hadean, the late Neoproterozoic, the Cretaceous Hot Greenhouse, the PETM—occurred before humans existed. Those ancient climates would have been like nothing our species has ever seen.

Modern human civilization, with its permanent agriculture and settlements, has developed over just the past 10,000 years or so. The period has generally been one of low temperatures and relative global (if not regional) climate stability. Compared to most of Earth's history, today is unusually cold; we now live in what geologists call an interglacial—a period between glaciations of an ice age. But as greenhouse-gas emissions warm Earth's climate, it's possible our planet has seen its last glaciation for a long time.

**Read more:** <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/climate-qa/whats-hottest-earths-ever-been>