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Two decades of progress

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Planning Futures

## CSI Miami—Creative, Simple and Innovative

Paul J. Bedford

**M**ANY OF US ASSOCIATE Miami with the TV show about Crime Scene Investigation, but after meeting Miami City Planning Director Ana Gelabert-Sanchez and her senior staff on a recent winter break and learning about a new city-wide performance based zoning code called Miami 21, I think CSI should stand for Creative, Simple and Innovative. Here's why.

### Starting points

Miami is the home of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, who are probably the “parents” of Smart Growth and New Urbanism. Beginning with Seaside, Florida, they have since been involved in numerous planning initiatives all over the world, including local area exercises such as Cornell in Markham and a new village in Niagara-on-the-Lake. It is therefore no surprise to learn that they were the principal authors and proponents of a revolutionary new approach to zoning called Miami 21. This city-wide performance code replaces what we would call a traditional zoning by-law. It is all about making the public planning process more intelligent and producing a sustainable city. After three years and more than 500 meetings, the concept was adopted by the City Commission last October 22, and will take effect on May 20, 2010. The best way I can describe it to Ontario planners is that embodies many of the principles of the successful 1995 King-Spadina and King-Parliament urban design-based planning approach and extends them city-wide.

As we know, traditional zoning had its origin in a famous U.S. legal case in Euclid, Ohio, where zoning was upheld in 1926 as a legitimate governmental power. In the U.S., Euclidean zoning is typically characterized by establishing and regulating land use in separate zoning districts such as residential, commercial, institutional and industrial. Over time, the focus on size and height has resulted in urban sprawl, bedroom suburbs with long commutes, automobile dependency, excess parking and streets generally built only

for cars, and poor pedestrian amenity and street life.

In contrast, performance-based zoning codes advocate regulating development to achieve specific built form outcomes emphasizing mixed use, greater intensity of activities, predictable public realm, healthy pedestrian environment, transit-oriented development and a more sustainable overall result. Performance-based zoning codes are based on prescriptive standards that state what

you want in contrast to traditional zoning based on prescriptive standards that state what you don't want! As such, performance zoning is pro-active and is much easier for citizens to read and understand. It also produces healthier cities that work.

### Key Features of Miami 21

The new performance code has ten core principles, eight articles or sections and a defined public benefits program. I will only share the highlights and encourage readers to go to [www.miami21.org](http://www.miami21.org) for the details. The core principles include creating a mix of land uses, building compact communities, creating a range of housing opportunities and choices, creating a safe environment for non-motorized vehicles and pedestrians, fostering neighbourhood pride through distinctive, high-quality communities, conserving open space, views and environmentally sensitive areas, investing in a mix of transportation options, making predictable development decisions that are fair and cost-effective and encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration. As you can see, these would be at home in almost any Ontario city. The advantage of embracing core principles is that you can relate all future development against these principles to assess if they advance or detract from them over time.

The eight articles or sections of the new code include definitions, general provisions, general requirements for each zone, standards and tables, specific zone standards, supplemental regulations, procedures and nonconformities and thoroughfares. You will find heights, densities, parking and land use provisions, but there is a lot of room left to achieve public planning objectives through predictable built form.

The public benefits program is most interesting as it targets specific areas and provides incentives in the form of height and density to help achieve them. Ontario planners using section 37 provisions of the Ontario *Planning Act* will appreciate the clarity of the Miami



Also in Miami Beach, a gorgeous new corner building



Downtown people mover system, completely free

performance code. Defined public benefits program areas are affordable/workforce housing, brownfields, civil/civic support, green buildings, parks and open space and historic preservation. Density and height bonuses are spelled out in eight different zones ranging from eight to 80+ storeys. What is most interesting is that developers make contributions to the appropriate fund based on an annual recommendation by the City Manager and City Commission.

### Implications for Toronto

I think Miami's city planners deserve a vote of confidence for advancing a new city-wide alternative to traditional zoning. It will be fascinating to observe how it works in practice. It is ironic that Toronto's planning staff have also laboured for the past six years to bring forward a consolidated zoning by-law encompassing all former zoning by-laws of the seven former municipalities in existence prior to Toronto's amalgamation in 1998. The new zoning by-law is scheduled to go to the Planning and Growth Management Committee in May and to city council for adoption by the summer. While their task was much more difficult and more complicated, I think it is a step in the right direction to finally have a single city-wide zoning by-law. Council should recognize the hard work and extensive public consultation that have taken place and adopt the new by-law as a good base. Perhaps future planners and councillors will make a bigger step to crafting an entirely new approach that spells out performance standards for land use, density, height and parking while leaving fine tuning to a development permit system.

I think planners should be cautious about putting our faith in traditional zoning, as it doesn't really address today's needs, given that it is a two-dimensional tool when what we really need is three or four dimensions that include visual dimensions and time. That would really help citizens to understand an often-misunderstood tool of planning. I hope that future planners are ready to take this challenge on.

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Before Miami's Illustrated Principles of Good Planning After



Lining parking garages with well-designed buildings continues the existing neighbourhood fabric



Building frontages are essential in the creation of a pedestrian-oriented streetscape

### Communications

# Kindling a whole new future

*Philippa Campsie*



**F**rom iPads to Kindles to Kobos . . . the electronic book has arrived. Reading, we keep hearing, will never be the same again. Possibly not.

The promoters and detractors are lining up. There is no shortage of people extolling the virtues of the e-book (searchable text! resizable fonts! no need to keep buying bookshelves, as the device holds a library in itself!). Those who are less enthusiastic (you can see only one page of one book at a time; the devices depend on batteries that can die mid-sentence; reading off a backlit screen is harder and slower than reading off paper) are sometimes dismissed as nostalgic stick-in-the-muds.

Meanwhile, Google and others are working to digitize millions of books and other documents, and increasing amounts of information are posted online, extending the reach of these devices. As this process unfolds, one finds oneself alternating between astonishment (as when I saw an onscreen copy of an obituary notice of an ancestor of mine, published in a small-town New Zealand

newspaper in the 1890s) and frustration (when online documents disappear or newer versions are substituted for older ones without notice).

The jury is still out on whether the brain processes the words in an ebook exactly the same way it processes words on paper. My own experience suggests that there is a difference, but it's not clear whether this is good or bad. Those who are infants now and who will grow up with ebooks may wonder why older people are tied to such an old-fashioned medium as a printed book. "You mean you can't click on a word and get a definition immediately? How on earth did you ever learn new words when you were a child, grandma?" "Never mind, my dear, which ending do you want to choose for your fairy tale today?"

In the end, it's not so much about which device we use. It's about two kinds of reading—the sustained, quiet kind that has given rise to the notion of being "lost in a book," versus the interactive, stimulating version that allows for links to multiple media (click