

# The Miami Herald

Posted on Sun, Dec. 20, 2009

## Miami 21 worth fixing

What's worrisome is Mr. Regalado's push to potentially undo Miami 21, the sweeping overhaul of the city's zoning code before residents have had a chance to see how it would work in action.

It was disappointing to see the City Commission backtrack on Miami 21 last week with its 90-day implementation deferral. Miami 21 is not perfect. But it would foster a more pedestrian-friendly city and discourage boxy, drab construction at street level in favor of welcoming store fronts, hidden garage entrances and attractive landscaping.

It would mix residential and commercial development in areas suitable for such transitions. It would put limits on height and density in some places and promote sustainable construction. Neighborhood integrity would be upheld far more than it is under the existing code.

One big myth promulgated by commissioners in voting to defer Miami 21 is that more input is needed from stakeholders. Miami 21 was scrutinized and tinkered with during hundreds of public meetings over four years' time. What the commission's change of heart boils down to is that they and the mayor are under pressure from neighborhood groups, developers and zoning lawyers -- none of whom got everything they wanted in Miami 21.

Mayor Regalado assured the Editorial Board on Friday that the new code will come up for a vote again in May, but he also hinted that it would need one major change for approval. He would continue to allow losing petitioners at the Planning and Zoning Board to take their case to the City Commission rather than Miami 21's requirement that they go before a judge instead.

If this allows civic groups to feel empowered in public forums, then so be it. But there's a caveat to the status quo: commissioners are susceptible to powerful interest groups that make campaign contributions. A judge is likely to be less politically inclined in zoning disputes.

Approve bigger CRA

Miami 21 is part of a much grander plan that is under fire at County Hall. The so-called Global Agreement, negotiated by former Mayor Diaz and Miami-Dade County Manager George Burgess, won both the city and county commissions' approval.

Yet now, the County Commission is backtracking on a key element -- the city's plan to expand the Omni Community Redevelopment District to help pay for the Port of Miami tunnel off the MacArthur Causeway and build a park to surround two museums in Bicentennial Park.

The park and part of the causeway need to be declared ``blighted'' in order to make them part of the Omni special taxing district or CRA to generate revenue to pay the city's share of the tunnel's \$1 billion cost.

Granted, it takes a leap of faith to call the causeway blighted. But Bicentennial Park was a crime haven for years; the county even shut down the park's Metromover stop for lack of use. Now the park is slated to hold two museums funded in part by county bonds, one being the county's own Museum of Art.

The Global Agreement paved the way for the county to proceed with two big goals: building a new domed stadium for the Marlins and building a tunnel to the seaport, which the county owns. The agreement moved hotels' bed tax money from one kitty to another to pay debt on the Adrienne Arsht Performing Arts Center to help pay for the stadium. The county embraced this plan. So why the grandstanding?

This global agreement was the first meaningful cooperation between the city and county. Both need to continue working in that spirit for this community's future.

---

© 2009 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.  
<http://www.miamiherald.com>