

**Research Institute on Social & Economic Policy
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Miami Voter Dispositions toward the Development 'Boom' and Economic Development Policy

A Report on Focus Group Research among City of Miami Voters

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Primary Findings

In all the focus groups, negative critiques of Miami's development predominated. Every group did an opening exercise in which respondents briefly wrote and shared aloud their opinion of the development of the built environment in Miami. Initially, almost no one had anything positive to say. The few free market, anti-government, pro-development people present immediately recognized that they were a singular minority and prefaced their remarks with statements such as, "I am pro-development," and often felt compelled to explain why ("because I came from a small city where they did not do anything").

Two general critiques were widely shared and emotionally felt:

- **Planning is either non-existent or ineffectual**
- **Development must have oversight and both developers and government officials must be held accountable.**

More specifically, focus group participants tended to agree on points that clustered under the categories of Benefits and Costs, Planning and Quality of Life, Oversight Accountability and Democratic Decision-Making, and Uneven Development with impacts on Neighborhood and Small Businesses. The consensus of the respondents on these issues were:

(1) Benefits and Costs

- (a) Development is inevitable, necessary and can be positive. Miami's location will continue to attract new residents who will require more housing. Development can also bring desirable services, such as embodied in the Performing Arts Center.
- (b) However, the costs for Miami's current development have been greater than the rewards.
- (c) Development must be carried out in a more planned, fair, and accountable manner.
- (d) Miami is presently over-developed. There is an over-supply of condominiums and expensive housing that will be difficult to fill and have negative repercussions for the local economy.

(2) Planning and Quality of Life

- (a) Development has resulted in more cars on the road and construction has resulted in extraordinary automobile congestion that negatively affects the lives of residents. There was insufficient planning to accommodate the traffic and other problems generated by the unprecedented development activity.

(3) Oversight, Accountability, and Democratic Decision-Making

- (a) Existing regulations on development are not being implemented because of insufficient oversight.
- (b) Policy makers have not been accountable to the public in their decision-making surrounding the development process; they are characterized as greedy, corrupt, not trustworthy, and sometimes incompetent.
- (c) The community does not participate in the development process and is not sufficiently informed nor consulted about development plans.
- (d) Publicly funded development projects like the Performing Arts Center yield a poor return from taxpayers' investment in them: they should be completed on budget and on schedule.

(4) Uneven Development: Neighborhoods and Small Businesses

- (a) Development is gentrifying older, inner city areas and driving up housing costs, making housing increasingly unaffordable and forcing many working class people to move away from developing neighborhoods.
- (b) If the needs of average working people are not taken into consideration the urban economy will not be sustainable.
- (c) Certain neighborhoods receive more attention and investment than others, and wealthier residents reap the benefits while lower-income residents bear the burden of most of the costs of development.
- (d) Small businesses need assistance because they help create a pedestrian friendly urban living environment, and serve and support the needs of the poor and working classes.

Focus group participants heartily endorsed the idea of developers being required to pay decent wages with benefits, to provide training and advancement opportunities and to hire locally. There was especially strong support for addressing issues of transportation and affordable housing. Participants also felt positively about the need to address employment, open space and recreation, the environment and locally owned small businesses, but support for these issues was not as robust and widespread as for oversight, transportation, and affordable housing.



Participants were especially vocal about accountability. They generally felt that we should expect developers to be primarily concerned with profits. Government officials, however, should be held to different standards. Cynicism toward government officials, both appointed and elected, was universal. Many simply argued for greater grassroots political involvement, while other participants advocated more forceful mechanisms to assure accountability.

Background to Research

The purpose of this project is to assess City of Miami residents' opinions about Miami's building boom of the past few years. We were concerned with how development directly affects the lives of individuals in Miami, especially in the areas where development is concentrated. We wanted to learn what residents view as the positive and negative impacts of development and what path they felt development should follow.

The Moderators Guide attached in the appendix details the issues addressed in the focus groups. The research focuses on residents in selected voting districts where City of Miami commission elections will take place in 2007; these are districts one, two, and four. In addition, focus groups were conducted in voting district five, which has several major development projects and is experiencing significant investment activity, though this district will not be an election site in 2007. The map in the Appendix outlines the areas from which we recruited for the focus groups. The map's Focus Group Zone 1 we label in this report as Little Haiti/Morningside. Focus Group Zone 2 on the map, we label as Downtown/Midtown. Focus Group Zone 3, we label as Flagami/Allapattah and Focus Group Zone 4 is labeled as Coconut Grove.

Focus group respondents were recruited by the Research Institute on Social and Economic Policy (RISEP) utilizing the State of Florida voter registration file. For the purposes of the CBA coalition our respondent universe was narrowed to include only "likely voters." At the half way point of the overall project we have conducted 9 focus groups, completing the first of two rounds of focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted in each of the districts with the exception of districts 1 and 4, where an additional one was conducted to accommodate a small group of English-only speakers. In the first round, focus group goals and the corresponding research questions examined the attitudes and beliefs of residents regarding development. (See Appendix for details on the methodology.)

Overall Feelings Toward Development

It's Needed

The likely voters with whom we spoke are greatly dissatisfied with present development, yet they all recognize that development can bring benefits and is inevitable.

I like the idea of development downtown. I think that's where it's needed. There never was a residential downtown. There was no center. It used to close at 5 o'clock. So I'm looking forward to that. I think it's a good place for it.

Terry, Coconut Grove

The one thing I do think is a positive is revitalizing downtown. There's a lot more new things going up there...I don't know, I haven't lived here long enough, a lot of you people have been here a lot longer, but at some point I think downtown was just kind of... dead at night. No one lived there, just office buildings. So I think that's a positive. That's the only sort of positive I really find.

Edward, Little Haiti/Morningside

I like it because like I said, it brings jobs and I believe in evolution. I'm not going stop nobody from building any new high rise, you know, but it brings problems to us. And there is another thing I want to bring (up); there is nothing affordable [for] these people, for the real people.

Modesto, Downtown/Midtown

What is happening in Miami is great. It creates jobs and gives opportunities in all of that, but at the same time, it's affecting my pocket. Because I own a house and when I purchased the house I used to pay let's say \$200 between taxes and insurance and now I have to pay \$400. That's an extra \$200 every month that I have to get.

Nasser, Downtown/Midtown

Nasser and Modesto, like many others in all the focus groups, make a point of articulating some of the benefits of development—more jobs and more housing affordability in the long run—but they also tie it to negative effects: the rising cost of living, particularly housing, and increases in traffic and crime. Those who live around the downtown area notice some affordable housing being built but agree that it is not enough; they see job growth and progress but wish it didn't have to come in this way. They clearly do not want to be thought of, however, as standing against development.

More common is frustration at development's failures.

I am pro-development, but in a responsible way, and what happened here is totally irresponsible.

Tricia, Downtown/Midtown

I agree that energy is exciting and investment is wonderful. Many areas were begging for investment for years and years. But the form of that investment should be controlled by our government in a planned way.

Annette, Downtown/Midtown

A small minority fervently believes in pro-market, laissez-faire policies, but even these participants feel compelled to qualify their position by recognizing both the current negative impacts of development and that they are a minority. Greg is one of the few unabashed pro-development neo-liberals in any of the focus groups. Yet, even he admits that development has negative effects.

I have things to say that may be unpopular here. I understand the concerns, but my first thoughts were progress, gentrification, increased home values, pleasant environment, beautification, anti drugs, anti-crime and temporary inconvenience. It's horrible to drive in this city [and] I am not discounting what everyone said, those are all valid points. But I also think that, look where the lack of the developments has left us in the past. Drugs and crimes all up and down Biscayne Blvd, people breaking into our homes. It seems like this area has been hit hard over the years. And, although I wasn't here in the 80s but look what's happened to South Beach, it's gone from night to day.

Greg, Little Haiti/Morningside

More typical are those such as Tylor who recognize the potential value of development, critique its present form, and wish to make it better.

I think we should, let's not get caught in demonizing development. Let's focus on how to make development better. There is a way to have affordable housing that looks nice, there's a way to have public transportation that really works, to have ballparks. But that means there has to be some entity in place that will commit to applying some sense. We also have to think, how much can this sustain?

Tylor, Little Haiti/Morningside

There were a variety of ways of recognizing the positive outcomes of development, but virtually always with the added qualification that it must be efficient, "balanced" and fair.

One thing I would like to say [about] the performing arts center... It shouldn't have cost that much and they shouldn't have gone so far over the budget, but nevertheless if you're going to build a great city you're going to have to do development like that... And so sometimes you have to spend, not overspend, but spend money like that to be able to have a center to have a city grow around.

Marlon, Downtown/Midtown

There's nothing wrong with progress, progress is supposed to be beneficial. But this, what I see is not benefiting a certain group of people.

Leroy, Little Haiti/Morningside

I think a certain amount of urbanization is necessary for us to maximize the good for our life so that we can have a walking life and do those kinds of things. This area has lived for a long time in a kind of limbo where it is definitely urban but without a lot of advantages of living in a large, urban area. And a certain amount of development... is necessary. [There] needs to be balance... What I believe to be the primary driving forces in the construction industry is greed. So [the question is] how we balance these things to come up with the urban life... the quality of it.

Ruben, Little Haiti/Morningside

I think the development and redevelopment has good and bad elements to it... There are some buildings that are crumbling that need to be redeveloped... But I do agree that the issue of affordable housing has to be addressed as part of that redevelopment, it has to be a comprehensive plan that involves all the elements and I think it can be done but it's going to take the county [& city] commissioners [requiring] that you have affordable housing as part of any redevelopment.

Bob, Little Haiti/Morningside 7

We Don't Have Coordination

The sense of a lack of control and overdevelopment are rooted in the belief that Miami has no effective planning and oversight.

The city can't just issue permits randomly because development just runs amuck and the people who pay the price are the people who live here and pay the taxes and don't see their tax dollars come back to them in anyway.

Winnie, Coconut Grove

Lack of coordination that undermines governance and efficiency was a foremost concern for several respondents who lived in the area near Midtown and north of downtown. All of the participants in the focus groups from the Midtown area agreed that coordination of development projects was deeply lacking.

We're completely not there.

Raymond, Downtown/Midtown

They're not clear and I don't know if they even care about [the consequences of development].

Modesto, Downtown/Midtown

No coordination, not in Miami. We don't even expect coordination in Miami.

Marlon, Downtown/Midtown

A few participants argued that mechanisms for planning and coordination exist, but they are simply not effectively implemented.

We have something called a metropolitan planning organization, which is [in] charge [of] this specific job... There are bodies that [are] supposed to do things there, but they are not functioning the way they should be... We [are] supposed to have a comprehensive neighborhood plan. We have these things, it sounds fabulous, but there [are] no objectives.

Annette, Downtown/Midtown

Too Much, Too Fast

Beyond the moderate discourse of development's good and bad aspects, many respondents concentrated on what bothered them the most or at least what they considered foremost among the problems with development. When asked to summarize their feelings about current development in Miami, the most common immediate response was a huge sigh or a laugh followed by remarks about overdevelopment, "out of control" development, "overheated" development, and similar remarks.

Overdevelopment! My god this neighborhood is just incredible and I guess the City of Miami is incredible. I'm just amazed at the amount of towers that I see going on here... Too many properties for the market. Can the market really support the amount of properties that are coming on line?

Marlon, Downtown/Midtown

Marlon later also referred to the prevailing form of development as unnatural, in the sense of being out of scale with existing structures. Modesto specifically focuses on the uncontrolled pace of development.

What I would like from the government is the construction in a good pace that we can control because all of the boom comes in just one minute — boom, and right there!

Modesto, Downtown/Midtown

Steve and many others are certain that the boom will be followed by a bust.

I think we're in for a major economic downturn when all these buildings [are] completed. You've got 50 thousand workers looking for construction work and there are not going to be any more, because they're... starting to cut back.

Steve, Downtown/Midtown

Money Talks

Linette and Michael, both of Coconut Grove, explain why they see "them," the government, "watering down the rules" that regulate development.

Because money talks. It comes down to who are the ultimate people responsible for... government. Ethics is not there because money talks.

Linette, Coconut Grove

One of the problems regardless how positive any plan is, this city runs on variances and exemptions. If you've got enough money you're gonna get to do what you wanna do. Look at the Grove and all the popular setbacks for all these townhouses. It's again going back to money talks... if you've got friends in the right places or enough money or the influence, regardless of the quality of the claim, you're going to get an extension or a variance and that's gonna undermine the success [of zoning].

Ed, Coconut Grove

Sheer Greed

Though many agreed that self-interested and greedy behavior permeates the political process, they at times distinguished between greedy politicians and greedy developers. Several were critical of developers' and investors' irresponsible behavior toward the communities and residents where the developers' projects have the greatest impact.

Coconut Grove residents seemed to raise the issue of greed and corruption more often than respondents in other groups. But greed and corruption also significantly concerned some observers in the Little Haiti/Morningside area. In both areas gentrification is apparent and realtors and investors have been known to work together to "flip" properties.

All of this can be done if it weren't motivated by sheer greed... Most of these [developments] are empty most of the year... and greed on behalf of the city for more and more taxes and I don't know what they do with the money.

Caroline, Coconut Grove

I have a fear of developers making large profits at the expense of ordinary people.

Dolores, Little Haiti/Morningside

So I think this is for flippers, for investors more than it is for people who actually need to live here.

Edith, Coconut Grove

I think it's wonderful that my house value has increased so dramatically, but the expense of that—not in terms of dollars but the people expense—has been involved with greed of individuals and developers coming in really, almost throwing out the residents that were there before, sometimes nicely sometimes not nicely. It is a human cost.

Claudia, Little Haiti/Morningside



Governance: Trust, Corruption, Greed & Incompetence

I have No Confidence in the Leadership --- None!

Edith from Coconut Grove expressed the widely held sentiment of virtually all participants. They have little faith in public officials; money drives politics, and government officials express only bureaucratic indifference and arrogance to regular voters.

I have no confidence in the leadership. None. Starting from the mayor on down.
Edith, Coconut Grove

What [it's] coming up to is corruption within our government. Like the need to regulate our developers but no faith in the regulating body, basically, and I don't really know how we're going to get out of that cycle. But it seems like at this point what we all need to do is bring in an overseeing commission from some other part of the country.
Lydia, Coconut Grove

I don't sign up with (support) anybody. Everybody is more or less is the same for me.
Linda, Flagami/Allapattah

I can see the corruption. You don't have to be blind. You can smell it, you can see it, you know what's going on. You go in front of the zoning commission. Some poor little guy who's added two feet to the back of his garage gets it knocked down and they bring some development project that goes four feet over the line and that's fine. I'm sorry, it is the most corrupt group of people I've ever met... It is so much sleaze there is so much payoff. And it's not just the fact that we're building new buildings. It's the fact that the people don't trust it anymore. They don't have the confidence in the politicians. I think [the county] should be broken up into smaller units.
Laurence, Coconut Grove

The mistrust of the government underlies arguments against more funding for public agencies, services, and especially more equitable development initiatives.

I don't think that any of these government schemes to set aside or create affordable housing are good because I wouldn't give those politicians any control over anything.

Raymond, Downtown/Midtown

They Take A Message And You Never Hear From Them

There was an overwhelming sense among many respondents that decisions about development were being made with little regard for the concerns and opinions of residents. Whether a matter of courtesy and consideration for people's time, neglecting an underserved area or imposing greater density in single-family home neighborhoods, it seemed to respondents that local government was indifferent and arrogant in their management of the development process. Again, these views and experiences were disproportionately concentrated among Coconut Grove and Little Haiti/ Morning-side residents.

But also talking about the problem of city hall, I've been down there so many times and you're making your talk and the commissioners get up and they wander around; they go in the back; they leave the podium for a half an hour; they're on phone calls. This happens all the time. I'm down there quite a bit. When I was having a particularly difficult time with a preservation officer she wrote me an email that said, "I recommended this one development because it went from 14 stories to 8 on a little postage stamp lot." I said, "it's still inappropriate." She said, "part of my job is to keep the city out of law suits." I said, "no it's not. You're the preservation officer. You're supposed to recommend is this appropriate or not. It's for the city attorney to decide that. That's not your job." Let me tell you something else. Developers are not the only people who get to sue the city. Morningside did it and they won. So there is this perception that the developers are going to sue the commission, sue the committee if they don't vote their way and that's what's perpetuating a lot of this stuff.

Edith, Coconut Grove

Ok, I try to be on top of my neighborhood or my meetings in the neighborhood, and I even speak to the commissioners and all that, but I see that sometimes even though they—you speak to them, and they make you promises or they try—they say they are working with you, [and] at the end nothing happens.

Alina, Little Haiti/Morningside

When you spend two hours waiting for them and then they don't show up. "You work for me." They work for us. If I have to take off work for a meeting and then it will be postponed. Like the Miami 21 meeting [that] was postponed. We have to hold our politicians feet to the fire. They work for us!

Romero, Little Haiti/Morningside

See you when you call them they take a message and you never hear from them. 'Cause we've been going to meetings for over 5 years at the police station... and everything that they saying in the meeting, like "Oh, we're going to fix NE 2nd Ave. This is going to be done and that is going to be done." But when we leave through the door, everything is dead. Because we never hear anything else. We're going to put some cameras up because to see people that are coming from Broward who are dumping garbage in our area, nothing is done about it.

Marlena, Little Haiti/Morningside:


The government won't do anything unless we force them to do it.

Jacob, Little Haiti/Morningside

The following quotes from Edward and Lydia further suggest the need and desire for a more democratic and participatory process.

What's amazing is in my neighborhood, if somebody wants to put up a fence or somebody wants to change the front of their house, they got to put a sign up out front, there's going to be a public hearing in a month and you know, there's plenty of notice if anybody wants to make any sort of comment. But if there's a high rise going up at the end of the street, there's no sort of outreach that I can see from the government saying hey, this is going to happen, what do you think. Is there any sort of input?

Edward, Little Haiti/Morningside



[Regarding a new development project,] I had a dialogue going on with Elena, whoever the head person [is], and I asked them what is it going to give back to us? What are we getting [back] by letting them build on this piece of property that's been government and institutional... It's beyond me. I can't wrap my mind around it. We need a community center in Coconut Grove. That's what should be on that piece of land. Not these high-end private condos. It makes no sense to me. I just want to say that I watched them all vote against it. And the woman I asked what are you going to give us and she couldn't answer!

Lydia, Coconut Grove

Fragmented/Sectarian Politics; Thrashing Government, Governance

A few observers attributed the problematic outcomes of development to the fragmented and often sectarian nature of politics in Southeast Florida.

Municipal Myopia. All of our municipalities seem to be moving forward with development that makes sense for them without seeing any kinds of regional approach to it.

Stuart, Little Haiti/Morningside

[The City goes] out of their way to create divisions in our community...They divide and conquer by race, income, by language. The idea is to keep us off balance. The process got so bad, unfortunately. Now the single family neighborhoods and historic neighborhoods are starting to try to work together. And for the first time, we are starting to work together and we created Miami Neighborhoods United, which is an umbrella group for 22 neighborhood associations, because we are all fighting the exact same thing. And I think we have been able to get some attention as a result.

Annette, Downtown/Midtown

For Annette, divisiveness is not just a cause of problems but sometimes also a governance strategy. Moreover, while Stuart talked about the problem of fragmentation at the regional level Annette is talking about the challenge in city and neighborhood politics.

Uneven Development, Costs to the Poor, and Urban Sustainability

The perception that development has been unequal, uneven and has disproportionately cost the poor was as widespread as the concerns about governance. Respondents told us either that their neighborhood was being neglected by investors and policy makers while nearby areas were revitalizing or they felt that their neighborhood was developing rapidly but to the benefit of the rich and at the expense of the poor.

I feel that we are left out. And I think everything is being done the way the city wants to run it, whether you like it or not.

Fred, Little Haiti/Morningside

They develop the areas that are already looking beautiful, and the areas that really need developing, they neglect us all the time.

Marlena, Little Haiti/Morningside

What I wanted to say [is] that new development is just concentrating in certain parts, certain areas. If you go around the city of Miami you're going to find a lot of empty lots..., old houses, old buildings, and empty buildings. They are just concentrating around here.

Nasser, Downtown/Midtown

The gap between have and have nots... we are a little more accelerated here than in other places. I think it's really glaring...

Carl, Coconut Grove

Construction in Miami has advanced to beautify all the nice neighborhoods but we the poor people also need to advance. We need a balance. We poor people need assistance because without help, life can become very sad ... Development is not only the beautification of buildings it is also to help poor people so that they can live like the ones that have [more]. They need to consider everyone. If nothing gets done, we are all going down.

Juanita, Flagami/Allapattah

What Juanita alludes to at the end of her statement is what some participants from Coconut Grove address more directly—the urban economy is not sustainable without the working class.

We all want to see our city look great but when we have high end or luxury properties being developed and they're taking the place of middle income properties....The people who live here are the people who work here and they're the people who manage these buildings those properties. Either they're maids or they're landscapers or they're gardeners whatever. They're middle income, they're low income. They need a place to live. ...

Winnie, Coconut Grove



(Un)Affordable Housing & Gentrification

The major concern leading respondents to question the sustainability of the present mode of uneven development was that the new housing being built is not affordable for local people. Some respondents were specifically concerned with the plight of the poor and the working class.

*Most of the people who rent are the people that work here. Service personnel who work at restaurants ...
And so what is happening to all these people? Where do they go? I don't think it's being addressed.*

Benny, Coconut Grove

*I know the people that work to build it; I can see that, but the people afterwards?
Because in my neighborhood, they tore something down to put something else up,
so those poor people went somewhere else so that they can support themselves, be-
cause they are not going into the high-rises that they have built.*

Jamie, Flagami/Allapattah

*Right around here, this used to be a very working class neighborhood and these expensive condos, there's
no way they're going to bring the price down. They won't [be] for the sort of people who have lived here.*

Marlon, Downtown/Midtown

This here's going to bring a lot of problems for the people that are living here now... Because by building all these homes, the people that are coming in from out of state and buying, people with money, the local people don't have any homes that they can buy that are reasonable price. You can't even rent apartments here at a reasonable price any more.

Fred, Little Haiti/Morningside

The funny thing is when they say affordable housing and you go apply for it and you don't qualify. Income is based on their salaries not on my salary.

Nasser, Downtown/Midtown

Carl and Terry specifically mention the importance of the affordable rental market.

Lots of renters here won't be able to afford to live here and they staff the restaurants and service jobs.

Carl, Coconut Grove

Things are being taken out of the market that are affordable, too. The backbone of the market is these little 4, 6 unit apartment buildings that are in the North Gables, Little Havana... These little 2 bedroom apartments and the buildings are being sold to developers because the investors can't afford them. They don't make any sense. They're being torn down and they're building townhouses and that sort of thing.

Terry, Coconut Grove

Sara talks about how unaffordable homeownership affects the poor.

The problem is that when taxes and insurance rates go up for owners, they have to charge more for rent. There aren't even apartments available for \$500 and the one that owns a house also suffers. I have a sister who owns a house here and her taxes and insurance has gone up so much and I am a little scared. She has worked for years and years but now she has to sell her house. And I don't know what is happening to incomes here, where is the poor going to go? I have a co-worker who owns a home but was not affected by the hike in insurance rates from the hurricane until her neighbors whose house was affected called their insurance. Since then, her insurance was cancelled. Is that fair? That is not fair.

Sara, Flagami/Allapattah



Others were specifically concerned about affordable housing for middle-income residents.

In Miami it's that everything is going like this...too low and too high and there is nothing in the middle.

Juanita, Allapattah

I think there is a need for housing, but I don't believe that most of the recent things that have gone up are for middle class people. I don't think the average working person can afford 5 or 6 hundred thousand dollars for a two bedroom condominium somewhere .

Edith, Coconut Grove

Thinking of my daughter who is a fourth year school teacher who makes under \$40,000 a year. There is no way she can afford anything [being built now,] let alone a \$500,000 condominium.

Laura, Coconut Grove



Several respondents also expressed concern over the fate of **local small businesses**, particularly as these primarily serve and support low-income and working people in neighborhoods like Flagami, Allapattah, Overtown, Wynwood, Little Haiti and similar places.

Most of us here, we are into saving and we would rather walk to Winn-Dixie to find specials. And then you see how businesses have closed in four or five days and that is because of the prices. The difference between the prices of milk in one of these bodegas compared to supermarkets is a difference and it is not their fault since they have to pay too much for the rent.

Sara, Flagami/Allapattah

The small pharmacy that was in my neighborhood had to close because a Wal-Mart opened up. They are swallowing the small people. The large one eats the big one.

Jesus, Flagami/Allapattah

Now you have to buy in large quantities because the large businesses don't give you an option since everything is pre-packaged... [And] the sense of community has been lost. For example, the little pharmacy where everyone knew the doctor and all the other small business. Just like when I now have to go to Home Depot rather than the small hardware shop. In my community they have closed three pharmacies already. I don't have any other alternatives but CVS or Walgreens.

Juanita, Flagami/Allapattah

Traffic, Public Transit & Nuisances

Traffic was a universal complaint.

They bring the cars and they congest us, they invade us, so you can see those three over there... They even go to the other people's space that we have already... That was a nice neighborhood; now it's out of control. You see the nice car but they have to park outside because they get charged inside the building to park your car. That's a problem.

Modesto, Downtown/Midtown

The problem is that the population has grown incredibly and public services like transportation have not been maintained to accommodate the current population. So now there are more autos, but you wait and wait for a public bus... Next to my house they are constructing a 17 story building and... this new building is going to become a mess. The traffic is going to be [even] worse.

Juanita, Flagami/Allapattah

We're not looking at people anymore we're looking at cars. 'Oh [I] can't go to Broward to the park or theater because there's rush hour traffic. Can't pick you up at the airport. I'm so sorry try to find a way to get here yourself.' Congestion is ruining my life, where I go, who I see.

Caroline, Coconut Grove

Winnie from Coconut Grove is also concerned about traffic and congestion but according to her own priorities.

I'm thinking if my little guy wanted to ride his bike along the sidewalk and he's gotta contend with tractor trailers idling, waiting to drop off their load and they can't do it because the 7 truck bays that Home Depot is proposing, they're full... [Also,] if my little guy gets sick, it's gonna take me an hour to get to Mercy hospital because I can't cross 27th Avenue.

Winnie, Coconut Grove

The traffic in our area just continues to get worse and worse and we don't have a good taxi system, we don't have a really good bus system. I would never think of taking public transit any place.

George, Coconut Grove

Michelle and Tom's remarks are typical of perceptions of mass transit systems.

They are kind of promising the rail up to the design district and you know they are trying to address those issues but I don't see anything happening.

Michelle, Downtown/Midtown

Mass transit is extremely lacking. Our forefathers and our current administration still cannot get that vision in place.

Tom, Little Haiti/Morningside

Green Spaces and Streetscapes

Traffic was foremost among the “quality of life” issues raised. But the focus group respondents who lived near Midtown or the downtown area, expressed disappointment over the lack of green and park space, the lack of an “inviting” street scene with small restaurants, bars and other diversions, and the persistence of crime in their neighborhood. They complained of finding nothing to do when walking outside and of having their cars or homes burglarized. Though they were significant concerns for some in our first focus group, these issues were rarely raised in other focus groups. Still, these “quality of life” issue concerns may provide support for some of the coalition’s policy goals, such as helping small businesses.

Michelle’s remarks are typical in this respect.

I think that they need to make these areas inviting... they need to offer [help to small businesses]. I think the small businesses are great, I think this is an opportunity for them to open and succeed. They should get as much help from the government as they possible can, but they need to get these shops open and get people out in the streets... Whether it’s a gallery, a restaurant, a hardware store, no matter what it is but makes it easy for these businesses to go and open.

Michelle, Midtown/Downtown area

What Should Be Done?

Opinions on regulatory policy

Several respondents offered their analysis of how and why Miami was growing and changing so rapidly. They seem to have adopted the “globalization” discourse that has become increasingly popular: Miami is competing on a global market; growth and change in accordance with that market is inevitable.

We are in a world market; Miami has now come up into the world market so we are competing with apartments in London, Paris, and Hong Kong. We were so artificially low for so many years. We are playing catch up, we haven’t caught up yet, so we have a bit to go.

Zachariah, Coconut Grove

I don’t think greed is an issue. I think it’s economics. You’re talking about 1,100 people a day moving to South Florida. There is and there will continue to be. There’s absolutely nothing that can be done about it as long as Florida maintains its weather versus the rest of the United States.

Michael, Coconut Grove

The marketplace demands it. So we can’t go back to what we enjoyed, what we liked about Miami.

Linette, Coconut Grove

But the discourse of the “inevitable” present mode of development was challenged by those who felt that it was not working well and that the political process can potentially control the direction and benefits of development.

I think we've been doing that open market thing for years, the last five years from what I've seen. And, it's not working... I mean, it's working for the people that can afford it, but it's not working for the low-income [people]. So I really don't think it's even a question at this point.

Edward, Little Haiti/Morningside

The Roman government took care of its poor people. It built places for them. Whether you want to call it tenements or low income. This is supposed to be a democratic, republican society where you choose your leaders. They're supposed to be working for you. Ought to be democracy.

Leroy, Little Haiti/Morningside

Some respondents suggested that electoral politics is the way to ensure accountable development.

The real question is who do our elected leaders really work for? In theory they work for us, but everyone knows that there is a long history in this city not just the county of elected officials who really don't work for us... The government is corrupt and we know that developers have a lot more say than the people. But the real issue is the quality of people that we elect and whether they understand that they work for us or do they work for developers who provided all the money for their campaigns?

Carl, Little Haiti/Morningside

We tend to react rather than be proactive; many people do not contact their government officials before these things happen. These trends have been happening for a long time. The people don't realize the value of one vote. As an educator, my hardest job is to get the parents to buy into the kids' education. In economic development the process is the same thing. We need to educate the community to get people out. We are still reacting to a situation. I take advantage of a lot of things because I do know about them, most people don't know.

Scott, Little Haiti/Morningside

Developers Should Give Back

So one of the things that we should ask as owners and voters here is as these developments get built that the developers give back to the community and pay for the infrastructure and pay for the underground... everything that needs to be done. They're making millions. And I mean, hey, I'm all for capitalism, I'm a salesperson, I do very well for myself. But by the same token you've got to give back to the community.

Ricardo, Coconut Grove

Others felt that it was not their job to regulate developers but rather that responsibility fell to “the government.”

We should say nothing to the developers. We should tell our elected officials to tell the developers what to do. That’s the chain of command.

Tammy, Coconut Grove

Regardless of the nature of the relationship among developers, residents and elected officials, there was agreement that, in some form or another, developers should “give back” to the communities that they impact. “Giving free services” and “giving back” are popular requests but more detailed requests were rare.

Oversight and Accountability

Some participants felt that regulating development would not be effective without some form of oversight. We found that notions of holding politicians accountable were surprisingly widespread. The remarks of Romero and Greg were typical in this respect.

Can we resolve this? Can we kick out politicians? Make them follow the rules like they are supposed to? The fiasco that happened in Miami, the housing authority, did anyone lose their jobs? Only some people. The buck stops here. Let’s get a committee together, you do something wrong, you’re gone. We need more enforceability or accountability.

Romero, Little Haiti/Morningside

As far as holding the developers and our elected officials accountable in terms of regulating development: I think that regulation is important based on what everyone has said. I think it can be done. I think it will slow down progress, which is okay. Maybe what could happen in Miami, we could [have] a citizen’s oversight board that works in conjunction with our politicians. If we could have something like that and make it part of local law or local ordinances that this community citizen’s board to make sure that our politicians stay in place. Overspreading of development is out of control, we need the citizens to say no, this is not right

Greg, Little Haiti/Morningside



Putting It All Together

Accountability and Enforceability

The likely voters we spoke with seem supportive of more accountable development and enforceable policies. They were highly critical of overdevelopment, the daily disruptions caused by all of the construction and cranes, the lack of planning and foresight and the misplaced priorities of developers and politicians. Their analysis suggests that they recognize that growth and change in Miami is inevitable but they expressed sentiments that they may be willing to force developers to give back and hold politicians accountable to a smarter form of development.

Planning and Citizen Voice

Respondents expressed moral outrage at their exclusion from the political process of development. Most were angered by the impression that local government was indifferent to their concerns and arrogant in their imposition of a mode of development that was designed and decided on by outsiders to their neighborhoods, particularly profit-seeking investors and developers. Also a problem for many of our respondents was the lack of information they had or were given with respect to development projects. They would like to have more and better information, and have enough time to evaluate it before decisions are made.

Responsible Contracting

Focus group participants generally endorsed the components of Responsible Contractor policy in public contracting. We raised some of the issues incorporated in such policies, and participants raised others spontaneously. Participants heartily endorse hiring locally, paying decent wages and providing training and advancement opportunities.

Participants were highly critical of the employment outcomes of development projects. Though they believed that in theory development can create good jobs for local residents, many said they had not seen or heard of positive employment outcomes for local residents. Many argued that development should be an opportunity to uplift the community through training and good paying jobs with benefits. Moreover, most participants also felt that public projects or taxpayer funded projects should be completed on budget and on schedule, and that companies getting public contracts should be held accountable to schedules and budget but also to the principle of good jobs for local people.

We believe that participants would heartily endorse hiring locally, paying decent wages and providing training and advancement opportunities, and holding public projects accountable to schedules and budgets.

This is a right to work state. I came from Missouri, where it is highly unionized; everybody was trained to their most. The workforce down here to me is terrible. It is the worst workforce I have even been around. It's terrible, because we have sunk into the third world. ...I think there should be set asides. But I also think they should be trained to do the jobs.

Rick, Downtown/Midtown

I was reading in the paper a couple days ago about where that Lindsey Hopkins... high school, the one's on 7th Ave. there, they're going to start giving training to carpenters, electricians, they're going to start having classes for them, which I've never seen before.

Fred, Little Haiti/Morningside

Some are critical of the kinds of jobs created by the development “boom” as many do not provide benefits and they are perceived to be short-term.

You can not see the jobs. Well okay, once they are constructing things those people have jobs. But once they are done, then they are left without any jobs. Not only that but many of those people do not have benefits. The construction workers that I see every morning do not have benefits and this morning two workers were electrocuted. What benefits do the families have?

Sara, Flagami/Allapattah

I know they hire local laborers but I don't think that they hire construction workers from here. I don't know that for a fact, but a lot of developers who come in bring their own people. So they don't really come from our area unless they get the contract from our area.

Mark , Flagami/Allapattah

Two respondents from Little Haiti specifically mentioned their preference for hiring local, small contractors because this will help uplift the local community in addition to achieving high quality construction.

[It is] strange people [who are] coming in our neighborhood and building, not the local people. These people in the local neighborhoods are jobless. You know I went to a meeting, this guy, he owns a construction company, and he said that he's willing to train young people to build houses in our own neighborhood—and he showed us where it can be did. And we don't need the big developers... you know. And he can produce work for the whole neighborhood.

Jacob, Little Haiti/Morningside

Small contractors. All these other jobs are done by big contractors. If you get enough small [contractors] they'll build you small two bedroom houses by the dozens if you want... and a heck of a lot cheaper than any of these other condos.

Fred, Little Haiti/Morningside

The strongest support for apprenticeship training, local hiring, and local small business contracting was from working class people from the Allapattah and Little Haiti areas.

Community Impact Reports

Focus group participants would strongly endorse a Community Impact Report policy. If enforced such a policy embodies their concerns about oversight, community consultation, and planning. There would be especially strong support for addressing the needs of transportation and affordable housing. Participants also felt positively about the need to address employment, open space and recreation, the environment and locally owned small businesses, but support for these issues was not as robust and widespread as for oversight, transportation, and affordable housing.

Participants were especially vocal about accountability. Many simply argued for greater grassroots political involvement.

The government won't do anything unless we force them to do it.

Jacob, Little Haiti/Morningside

We can empower the political leaders by challenging them... What we realized [was] that those who work for the government have lobbyists. They have money. All we have [is] numbers... We have to confront the powers.

Tylor, Little Haiti/Morningside

Others argued for legal accountability. Some even asserted that elected officials post forfeitable bonds against their promises for development. If the elected officials did not deliver on their promises, the participants argued that they should forfeit their bonds.

How about a performance bond for the commissioner? They have to put up what they have and the city will match it when you do a performance bond where you're going to do this project, you're going to build this bridge, you're going to do this playhouse, whatever it is, you sign your assets for x million dollars to get this 4 or 5 million dollar bonus. It might give you a 5 million dollar bond. Your net worth might be a million and a half. You pledge a million and a half. If you don't deliver they take the million and a half.

Michael, Coconut Gove

But where and how do we enforce the government to do what we want? That's my question. [You] got an idea... so we're going to let you, we are going to give you the money that you want, but you have to respond for what we want.

Modesto, Downtown/Midtown

While these suggested solutions may be impracticable, they reflect the strong opinions participants had concerning accountability. Indeed, the biggest obstacle to supporting any new policies is the cynicism of whether they would really be enforced and thus make a difference.

APPENDICES

Methods

The study was designed to be carried out in two phases with 8 focus groups in each phase for a total of 16 when the project is complete. In the first round, however, we completed 9 focus groups because at one site a three-person group interview was conducted to accommodate English speakers in a predominantly Spanish speaking sample.

Focus group respondents were recruited by RISEP utilizing the State of Florida voter registration file. For the purposes of the project our respondent universe was narrowed to include only “likely voters,” meaning that they voted in two out of the last three elections. This ensured that respondents voted recently in at least one local election. This will enhance the probability that our findings reflect the ideas, beliefs, and likely actions of a more politically active segment of the voting population.

In addition to recruiting only “likely voters,” our sampling focus had two dimensions: one, to target voters in City Commission districts where elections will be held in 2007 and two, to target areas that have experienced substantial redevelopment activity. Since each City Commission district is comprised of several smaller voting precincts, the precincts that were found to be closest to substantial redevelopment activity (e.g., the Midtown Miami project, several large condominium developments) were chosen to ensure that focus group respondents had some experience with the nature and impacts of redevelopment activity. City Commission districts one, two and four were selected because they will be up for election in 2007, and voting precincts in City Commission district five were added because this district is experiencing considerable redevelopment activity. A map of the City of Miami commission districts is attached below to illustrate the parameters of the geographic zones of voting precincts that were chosen.

Respondents were recruited over the phone from RISEP offices using the list of likely voters with contact information. However, the contact information for voters in the State of Florida’s voter registration file was incomplete; most “likely voters” had no phone number listed. Once the list of likely voters was generated we used online telephone directories to match phone numbers to voter names.

Up to 20 participants were recruited for each focus group with the expectation that only about half would attend. In actuality some focus groups had fewer than this (6-8) and a few had far more participants (19). The focus groups lasted one to one and one-half hours and were facilitated by a RISEP moderator.

Focus group sites were identified in subjects’ neighborhoods to ease the transportation burden on participants. People Acting for Communities Together (PACT), the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (IFCWJ), and Jobs with Justice (JwJ) were instrumental in helping us identify prospective sites. By way of their introduction we contacted and made arrangements to use spaces in local churches, schools and community organization headquarters to conduct the focus groups.

RISEP supplied all recording equipment and staff for the project. The audio content of each focus group was recorded digitally and on cassette, and descriptive notes were written by a RISEP staff observer to help ensure accurate transcription, translation (when needed) and consistent interpretation. The focus groups adhered to the human subjects research protections required by Florida International University’s Institutional Review Board. An important component of these protections is to assure the anonymity of all focus group participants. Hence, only first names and pseudonyms are used in the report to identify individual participants. A nominal fee to defray transportation costs and time lost was paid to participants and refreshments were served to them at the focus group sites.

MODERATOR'S GUIDE

Introduction

Good day everyone. My name is _____ and I'd like to start off by welcoming you and thanking you for coming and being part of this focus group. The reason we asked you to come today is because your personal views and experiences will serve as a very important part of our research and your opinions really matter to us. We are trying to learn more about recent changes in Miami and what it means for you and the overall future of Miami. We are particularly interested in all the building that has gone on, the high rises, the condos, [whatever else]. As residents of Miami and neighborhoods that are at least somewhat close to all this development, you are the experts on that and I'm really interested in your views and opinions. This is why you are here today. We want to hear what you have to say.

But before we begin I'd like to tell you a little bit about what a focus group is. Being part of a focus group is an excellent opportunity for you to be heard as an individual. One of the dynamics of a society is that people will always have different opinions about different issues, but usually there is never really a medium where they can express themselves. Today you will have the opportunity here.

There are no right or wrong answers. It is important that everyone speak their mind. The only ground rules are that we are polite and let a person have their say. It is perfectly alright to respectfully disagree because there can be no right or wrong answers. In fact the focus group is about hearing the full range of opinions represented by all of you. Today you have the opportunity to make your feelings known. In many respects, you are like an Advisory Board to us. We are here to find out what each of you really thinks about the issues of recent developments in Miami, so that we can write about it and tell the larger world.

I want to emphasize that everything discussed today will be kept completely confidential and, for this reason, we will not be using any last names. We really want to hear from you and want you to feel very comfortable and relaxed.

For your information this session will be video & audio taped in order to make sure that no one is misquoted. Again, please note that everything will be kept confidential and that we want you to feel comfortable. Please remember that everyone is entitled to their opinions and we must be courteous to one another.

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

A Short Questionnaire:

Please take a few minutes to fill out this short form. Do not put your name on it. This is confidential so let us know what you really think.

Please write down what comes to your mind when you think about development in Miami.

Allow for 3 minutes?

Body of Focus Group:

Introductions. Let's begin by introducing ourselves, first name only, where you were born and how long you have lived in South Florida?

Now, let's return to what you wrote on the sheet. Who would like to start by telling us what came to mind when you thought about development?

The Development Boom

What do you think about all the building and development that is going on in Miami and in your neighborhood? [probably covered in intro]

What do you think about the amount of development that is going on in Miami right now? Is it too much, too little, just right, something else?

What about the pace of development? Is it happening too fast, too slow, just right, something else?

Do you think this development is good for you personally? How?

Do you think this development is bad for you personally? How?

How else does all this building and development affect you?

How have you seen that development affects other residents?

Community Benefits from Private Development

Now I want to ask you specifically about *private sector* projects or projects built by private companies, such as high-rise condos and office buildings, large-scale retail and commercial projects. Midtown Miami and all the high-rise buildings going up around there are good examples of large private development projects.

Do you think that private sector development projects are...?

Helping to create good paying jobs with health care for Miami residents?

Helping to create housing that working families can afford?

Helping to support local businesses?

Helping to support parks and public spaces?

Helping to preserve or at least not damage our natural environment, like our water supply, the air we breathe, the Everglades, etc.?

Public Investments and Public Returns

Now I want to talk about *public sector* projects that are funded by us taxpayers. These are city projects like the AAA, the Carnival PAC, but also the construction and provision of new hospitals, schools, roads, public transit, etc.

Assuming that these projects are going to be built no matter what, do you feel that you are getting the best “bang for your buck” or the best value possible from these projects? [In other words, are they built as efficiently as possible, or is money wasted?] Why or why not?

If any of the following things were included in public sector projects would that make it a better deal for you as a taxpayer? For example, would you get a better bang for your buck if the project had to...

create good paying jobs with health care for Miami residents?

hire residents from the neighborhood or nearby area to build it?

train workers through registered apprentice programs and used them to build it (explain if necessary)?

ensure that some minority contractors were used to build the project (explain if necessary)?

take steps to make sure the construction didn't hurt the natural environment?

help to preserve or create parks and public spaces?

Being Informed About Development

Would you like to know more about development projects before they are approved to be built in your community?

What would you like to know about them?

If there is one thing that you could tell your City Commissioners and the Mayor about development here in Miami, what would it be?

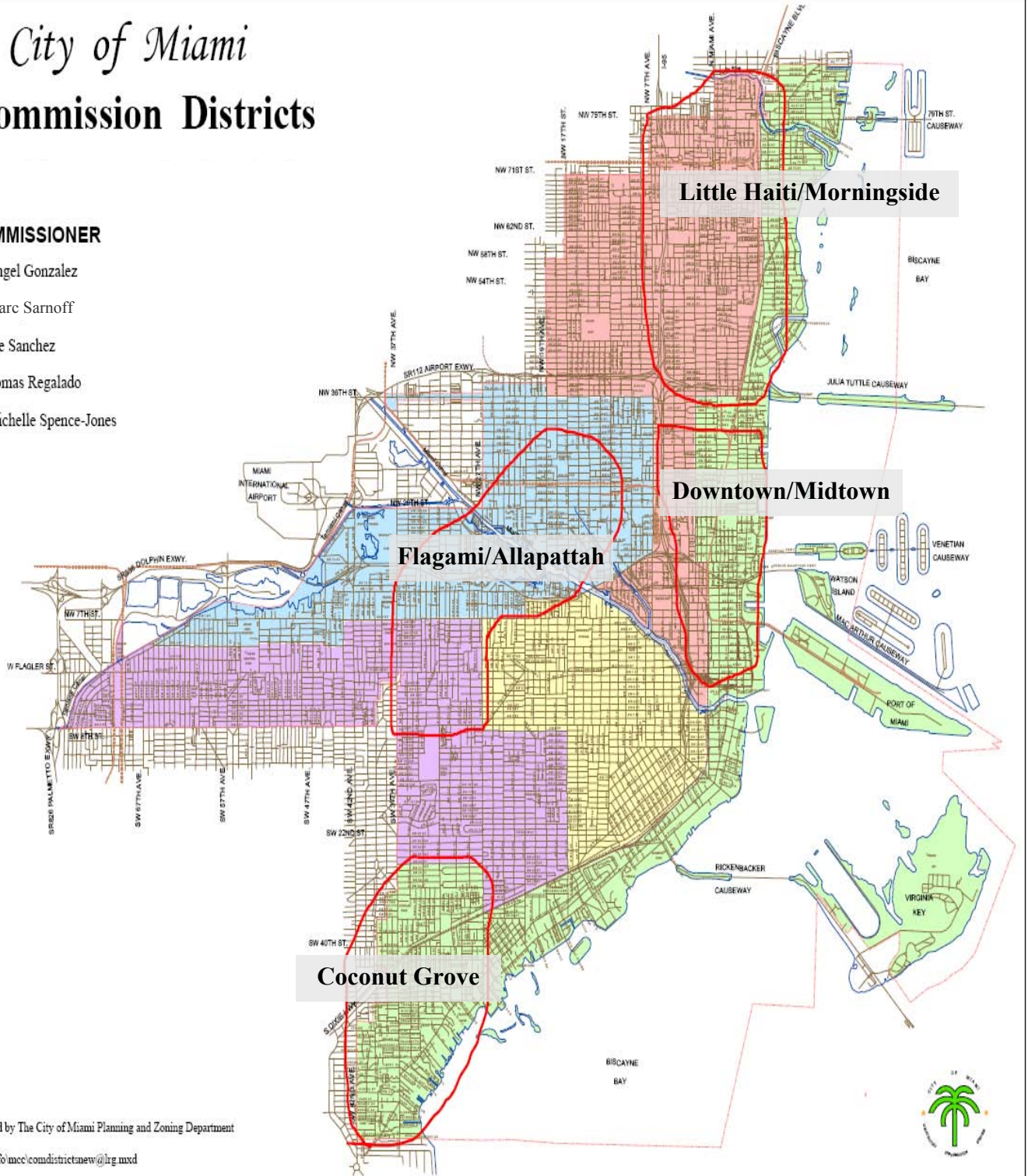
Wrap-Up Questions

Map of Selected Neighborhoods

City of Miami Commission Districts

COMMISSIONER

- 1 Angel Gonzalez
- 2 Marc Sarnoff
- 3 Joe Sanchez
- 4 Tomas Regalado
- 5 Michelle Spence-Jones



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