North Miami Economic Development Action Plan
Downtown Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program

Introduction

Generally located on NE 125th Street from approximately NE 6th Avenue to NE 10th Avenue, the Downtown Commercial Corridor has recently developed into a viable alternative to the higher rents on Biscayne Boulevard and has become the focal point of interest for new retail and service businesses coming to North Miami within the past year or so.

Anchored by the nationally and internationally renowned Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), which was built in 1996, City Hall, and the Police Department, the Downtown Commercial Corridor has become home to several art galleries, mid-Century furniture stores, and boutiques. Many believe artists are seeking refuge from increasing rental prices in the South Beach and the Design District areas, and that they’re seeing North Miami as a viable alternative.

This movement started ten years ago with the establishment of a City Commercial Façade Rehabilitation Program. Funded through its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and with Miami-Dade County participation, the City was able to work with commercial property owners in rehabilitating the 700 and 800 blocks of NE 125th Street, creating an improved image for the Downtown area.

The project consisted of the following elements:

- construction of a canvas awning throughout the entire block
- Installation of illuminated signage on each storefront
- Installation of pedestrian orientation signage
- Installation of new lighting
- Painting of entire facade
- Repair of decorative tile
- Installation of molding and metal-works
The effort was followed by the opening of a number of art galleries (Ambrosino, Tachmes, Roker, among others), which were attracted to the NE 125th Street by existing vacancies, affordable rents, high traffic volume and the proximity to MOCA.

Additional efforts by the City included the creation of two music series --“Music @ the Plaza” and “Folk Friday” designed to attract patrons to the downtown area followed by the designation of the “North Miami Arts District along NE 125th Street. --“Music @ the Plaza” and “Folk Friday” were later replaced by the current “Jazz @ Moca” series with concerts on the last Friday of every month, which combined with the monthly “Gallery Walk”, brought hundreds of people to the downtown area at the peak of the excitement.

The opening of a Starbucks store in late 2006 with City economic incentives and other assistance next to MOCA seemed to confirm that downtown had mature and it would be a question of time for it to take off.

In addition to these initiatives the City and the CRA were actively involved in a branding campaign for the City that resulted in the creation of a new City logo, as well in additional efforts in enhancing code enforcement, and implementing beautification and clean-up programs.

The City’s prior Commercial Façade Program, and the CRA’s present Commercial Rehabilitation and Commercial Beautification Grant Programs also contributed to improve the appearance of dozens of buildings in the central area.

As new land use and zoning changes more favorable to new development introduced by the new Comprehensive Development Master Plan that was approved by the State of Florida Department of Community Affairs in February 2008 anticipated a potential new era for the downtown, the economic crisis and the prolonged recession that followed, symbolized by the closing in 2008 of the recently opened Starbucks hit the country. The chronic business turnover brought back old questions and doubts about the future of the downtown area.
The Urban Land Institute Panel

In April 2009, the North Miami Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) and the City of North Miami engaged the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to look at the Downtown area and provide recommendations for the economic repositioning of North Miami and the Downtown Commercial District.

The ULI recommendations were summarized in five major categories:

- **Diversify and strengthen the retail mix.** To diversify and strengthen the retail mix and capture a larger share of the regional economic pie, the city and the NMCRA should invest in getting the word out about what North Miami offers, recruiting investment-grade businesses, providing a full menu of incentives that can be tailored to the needs of individual businesses, nurturing public-private partnerships, and creating an inviting, lively public realm.

- **Capitalize on North Miami’s distinguishing assets.** North Miami has strong educational and cultural assets on which to build. Therefore, the city and the NMCRA should develop strong partnerships with the three major universities located in or at the edge of the city, using those partnerships to promote university investment that benefits both the universities and the city’s downtown. The presence of MOCA at the heart of the city and its proximity to the city government/civic complex offers an exceptional opportunity to create a dynamic city center that will catalyze new business investment on 125th Street.

- **Create a signature public realm.** North Miami should invest in creating a public realm that will encourage people now driving through the city to stop, get out of their cars, walk around, stay a while, and perhaps even come back and invest in a business or new home. Creating signature gateways, eye-catching wayfaring signs, appealing buildings that contribute to a walkable public realm, and attractive and lively streets and civic spaces should all be a part of the public realm package. Likewise, encourage the development of strong pedestrian linkages to the residential areas to the north and south and reconnect the historic fabric of the city to its downtown.
• *Establish vision-based incentives and NMCRA investments.* North Miami should adopt the practice of truly successful places: begin with the end (the vision) in mind, using that vision as a benchmark when making investment decisions. The city’s incentives, land use regulations, public investments (including the capital improvements program), and business recruitment strategies and marketing plan should all support and flow out of the end-vision. The litmus test should be whether an investment or policy decision will take the city closer to (and not away from) that vision.

• *Brand and market what makes North Miami such a great location.* Consistent and ongoing branding and marketing are also essential ingredients in attracting a larger portion of the regional market. North Miami needs to tell its story (and keep telling it). The brand identity (which ties back to the city’s educational and cultural assets) that the city wants to convey should be reflected in everything it does (from events to signs and physical improvements). City and NMCRA actions should always further, not detract from, that brand.

In closing, the TAP observed, “we are very bullish on North Miami. The city has all the ingredients it needs to become a highly desirable and livable location and attract a larger share of regional markets and business. The important foundations of leadership and careful planning are in place. **The next steps to make that final difference should come quickly.**”

Since the conclusion of the ULI panel the City and the CRA are in the process of implementing the following programs, initiatives, and activities:

• Creation of a pilot Business Attraction Program which provides up to $10,000 in federal CDBG funding to specific types of businesses that located in North Miami
• Retention of a consultant to design a way-finding program for the City
• Creation of a streetscape program for NE 125th Street, which includes new sidewalks and landscaping.
• Implementation of a parking study for the City
• Participation in an FDOT funded study of alternatives to address the continuing West Dixie Highway congestion and traffic flow problems
• Preparation of an RFP to create a pool of City vendors to provide Architectural, Engineering and Planning professional services for a variety of projects
Downtown Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program

In order to move forward with the revitalization of the downtown commercial corridor, there are a number of actions that can be implemented, which include some of the initiatives above described. These actions can be replicated and/or adapted to other commercial corridors in the City as appropriate.

- Design of public improvements - street and traffic configuration, curbing sidewalks, street furniture, parking, landscaping, way-finding signage and lighting.
- Development of design guidelines for façade improvements to be applied to projects developed with City and CRA funding.
- Development of a joint marketing and promotion strategy for each corridor - webpage, printed materials, advertising campaign, events, etc.
- Creation of an “ad hoc” committee of corridor stakeholders (property owners, businesses and local business organizations) to explore revitalization opportunities.
- Provide support to local business organizations
- Develop a program of incentives to retain, expand and/or attract businesses to the corridors.
- Identify and secure funding for project implementation (create a multi-year budget).
- Creation of a comprehensive database of physical inventory of commercial properties and businesses.
- Develop an interdepartmental taskforce to maintain a corridor quality level of appearance and safety.
- Identify a point person/organization to interact with the City in a continuous basis.
- Develop and implement a formal Business Retention Program to facilitate the growth and expansion of targeted businesses
• Develop and implement a formal Business Attraction Program

**Economic Development Action Plan - Work Program**

**Design of Public Improvements**

• RFP for corridor design concept
• Adoption of design concept by City Council and CRA Board
• Inclusion in the City’s Capital Improvement Program, City and CRA budgets
• Engineering and Construction (in phases)

**Design Guidelines for Façade Improvements**

• Retain consultant to develop design guidelines
• Adoption of design guidelines by City Council and CRA Board
• Inclusion of design guidelines in the City and CRA Commercial Façade Programs

**Development of joint marketing and promotion strategy**

• Creation of various marketing materials and campaigns in conjunction with local business organization -- webpage, printed materials, advertising campaign and events

**Committee of Corridor Stakeholders**

• Formalize invitations and create a schedule of quarterly meetings.
• Define agenda for the group (exchange of information about vacancies, development projects, City and CRA grants, etc.)

**Support to Local Business Organization**

• Formalize a grant program for local organizations working specifically on business and economic development issues.
• Develop specific program guidelines and application

**Business Attraction, Retention and Expansion Incentives**

• Create a menu of incentives to retain, expand and/or attract businesses to the corridor
- Develop program guidelines and application
- Adoption of programs by City Council and CRA
- Market and Implement the programs

**Funding for Project Implementation**

- Create a multi-year budget for the Corridor Revitalization Program (funded by the City, CRA, grants and other resources). The funding plan for the implementation of projects, programs and activities must ensure that all portions of the City of North Miami can be both involved and impacted. Funding for implementation should be considered during the FY 2010-11 budget development processes of the City of North Miami and the North Miami CRA respectively.

**Database of Commercial Properties and Businesses**

- Develop a database of properties and businesses located in the commercial district (ownership, use, size, zoning, physical condition, photographs, etc).

**City Taskforce**

- Convene a City Taskforce formed by key City Departments and CRA to meet as needed to address issues contributing to the improvement and maintenance of corridor quality level of appearance and safety.

**Corridor Point Person**

- Identify a point person/organization to daily monitor each corridor and interact with the City in a continuous basis.