



2021-2022 Florida Job Growth Grant Fund Public Infrastructure Grant Proposal

Proposal Instructions: Please read this document carefully and provide the information requested below. Some questions may request that a separate narrative be completed. If additional space is needed, attach a word document with your entire answer.

Governmental Entity Information

Name of Governmental Entity: City of Hialeah

Government Federal Employer Identification Number: [REDACTED]

Primary Contact Name: Carlos San Jose

Title: Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff

Mailing Address: 501 Palm Ave, 4th Floor, Hialeah, FL 33010

Phone Number: 305-588-3559

Email: csanjose@hialeahfl.gov

Secondary Contact Name: Ismare Monreal

Title: Mayor's Chief of Staff

Phone Number: 305-883-5938

Public Infrastructure Grant Eligibility

Pursuant to section 288.101, F.S., the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund was created to promote economic opportunity by improving public infrastructure and enhancing workforce training. Eligible entities that wish to access this grant fund must submit public infrastructure proposals that:

- Promote economic recovery in specific regions of the state, economic diversification or economic enhancement in a targeted industry. ([View Florida's Targeted Industries here.](#))
- Are not for the exclusive benefit of any single company, corporation or business entity.
- Are for infrastructure that is owned by the public and is for public use or predominately benefits the Public.

1. Program Requirements:

(If additional space is needed, attach a word document with your entire answer.)

Each proposal must include the following information describing how the project satisfies eligibility requirements listed on page 1.

- A.** Provide a detailed description of the public infrastructure improvements.

Please see attached Exhibit "A"

- B.** Provide location of public infrastructure, including physical address and county of project.

The infrastructure is located in the City of Hialeah, Miami Dade County. The project includes the lining of 100% of the sewer mains located in basins 008, 009, 010, 011, 053, 054, 055, 056, 058 and 059. Please see attached Exhibit "B" for a more detailed location of the basins and sewer mains.

- C.** Is this infrastructure currently owned by the public? Yes No

If no, is there a current option to purchase or right of way provided to the County?

N/A

- D.** Provide current property owner.

The City of Hialeah owns the right of way where the project is located.

- E.** Is this infrastructure for public use or does it predominately benefit the public? Yes No

The use of these funds would serve an essential public purpose by engaging in preventative maintenance of a public utility that will benefit the public at large.

- F.** Will the public infrastructure improvements be for the exclusive benefit of any single company, corporation, or business entity?

Yes No

No, the improvements will not be for the exclusive benefit of any one entity, rather for the benefit of the City's economy and job market as a whole.

G. Provide a detailed description of, and quantitative evidence demonstrating, how the proposed public infrastructure project will promote:

- Economic recovery in specific regions of the state;
- Economic diversification; or
- Economic enhancement of a Targeted Industry ([View Florida's Targeted Industries here.](#))
 - Describe how the project will promote specific job growth. Include the number of jobs that will be retained or created, and in which industry(ies) the new net jobs will be created using the North American Industry Classification System ([NAICS](#)) codes. Where applicable, you may list specific businesses that will retain or create jobs or make capital investment.
 - Provide a detailed explanation of how the public infrastructure improvements will connect to a broader economic development vision for the community and benefit additional current or future businesses.

See attached Exhibit "C"

2. Additional Information:

(If additional space is needed, attach a word document with your entire answer.)

A. Provide the proposed commencement date and number of days required to complete construction of the public infrastructure project.

Proposed commencement date is February 2023, but this date is contingent on the availability of funds.

B. What permits are necessary for the public infrastructure project?

No permits are necessary for the project because sewer lining is a minimally invasive practice which engages in trench-less construction to complete the project. Furthermore, the City owns the utility in question thus permits are unnecessary.

- C. Detail whether required permits have been secured, and if not, detail the timeline for securing these permits. Additionally, if any required permits are local permits, will these permits be prioritized?

N/A

-
- D. What is the future land use and zoning designation on the proposed site of the infrastructure improvements, and will the improvements conform to those uses?

See Attached Exhibit "D"; Yes, the improvements will conform to the land use and zoning designations and help facilitate the vision for growth encompassed in the designations.

-
- E. Will an amendment to the local comprehensive plan or a development order be required on the site of the proposed project or on adjacent property to accommodate the infrastructure and potential current or future job creation opportunities? If yes, please detail the timeline.

Yes No

N/A

-
- F. Is the project ready to commence upon grant fund approval and contract execution? If no, please explain.

Yes No

N/A

-
- G. Does this project have a local match amount? Yes No

If yes, please describe the entity providing the match and the amount.

The City of Hialeah will provide 10% of the total project cost, or \$950,000, as a local match for the proposal.

-
- H. Provide any additional information or attachments to be considered for this proposal. Maps and other supporting documents are encouraged.

See attached "Addendum"

3. Program Budget

(If additional space is needed, attach a word document with your entire answer.)

Estimated Costs and Sources of Funding: Include all applicable public infrastructure costs and other funding sources available to support the proposal.

1.) **Total Amount Requested** \$ 8,550,000.00
 Florida Job Growth Grant Fund

A. Other Public Infrastructure Project Funding Sources:

City/County \$ 950,000.00
 Private Sources \$ 0.00

Other (grants, etc.) \$ 0.00
Total Other Funding \$ 950,000.00

N/A
 Please Specify: _____

B. Public Infrastructure Project Costs:

Construction \$ 0.00
 Reconstruction \$ 8,500,000.00
 Design & Engineering \$ 1,000,000.00
 Land Acquisition \$ 0.00
 Land Improvement \$ 0.00

Other \$ 0.00
Total Project Costs \$ 9,500,000.00

N/A
 Please Specify: _____

Note: The total amount requested must be calculated by subtracting the total other public infrastructure project funding sources in A. from the total public infrastructure project costs in B.

- C. Provide a detailed budget narrative, including the timing and steps necessary to obtain the funding and any other pertinent budget-related information.

See Attached Exhibit "E".

4. Approvals and Authority

(If additional space is needed, attach a word document with your entire answer.)

- A. If the governmental entity is awarded grant funds based on this proposal, what approvals must be obtained before it can execute a grant agreement with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (e.g., approval of a board, commission or council)?

The Hialeah City Council must approve the grant agreement prior to execution of the same.

If board authorization is not required, who is authorized to sign?

N/A

- B. If approval of a board, commission, council or other group is needed prior to execution of an agreement between the governmental entity and the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity:

- i. Provide the schedule of upcoming meetings for the group for a period of at least six months.
- ii. State whether entity is willing and able to hold special meetings, and if so, upon how many days' notice.

The City Council holds its regularly scheduled meetings on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month. Traditionally, the Council has observed a recess during the month of July. Additionally, the City would need three business days in order to meet the notice requirement associated with a special call meeting.

- C. Attach evidence that the undersigned has all necessary authority to execute this proposal on behalf of the governmental entity. This evidence may take a variety of forms, including but not limited to: a delegation of authority, citation to relevant laws or codes, policy documents, etc.

See Attached Exhibit "F"

I, the undersigned, do hereby certify that I have express authority to sign this proposal on behalf of the above-described entity and to the best of my knowledge, that all data and information submitted in proposal is truthful and accurate and no material fact has been omitted.

Name of Governmental Entity: City of Hialeah

Name and Title of Authorized Representative: Mayor Esteban Bovo, Jr.

Representative Signature: _____

Signature Date: 6/27/22

CITY OF HIALEAH

Florida Job Growth Grant Fund Application

Addendum



Exhibit A

Project Description and Background Information

Provide a detailed description of the public infrastructure improvements.

The City of Hialeah (hereinafter the "City") has entered into a Consent Agreement with the Miami Dade County Department of Environmental Management (hereinafter "DERM"), in accordance with the regulations of the Environmental Protection Agency (hereinafter the "EPA") and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (hereinafter the "FDEP") regarding sewer collection. The City's Consent Agreement with DERM obligates the City to reduce infiltration and inflow into the City's sewer system and meet the thresholds adopted by DERM. The City is currently bound by the terms of the Consent Agreement when considering any new development or redevelopment projects.

The City currently needs to engage in preventative maintenance a series of sewer mains which are responsible for carrying sewage to Miami Dade County (hereinafter the "County") pump stations. The City's proposed project will service a total of 222,182 linear feet, or over 42 miles, of sewer mains. Without engaging in this preventative maintenance, any and all economic growth in the area will be halted by DERM because of the sewer system's inability to service increased commercial uses.

The average lifespan of this type of sewer main is typically 40 years, and the mains in question are rapidly approaching their projected lifespans. In order to extend the lifespan of the mains, the City has engaged a groundbreaking practice called sewer lining which has proven effective at other locations throughout the City and Miami Dade County. Sewer lining consists of cleaning, inspecting, and lining the inside of the sewer pipes without the need to disrupt roadways using trench-less construction. After the lining is complete, the main's lifespan is extended by approximately another 40 to 50 years. Furthermore, the risk of infiltration to the sewer line is dramatically reduced, and the sewer main gains the capacity to allow for further development and economic growth.



Exhibit B

Project Location

Provide location of public infrastructure, including physical address and county of project.

The infrastructure is located in the City of Hialeah, Miami Dade County. The project includes the lining of 100% of the sewer mains located in basins 008, 009, 010, 011, 053, 054, 055, 056, 058 and 059. The following two pages include a visual representation of the location of these sewer mains and the basins where they are located.



Sewer Interceptor Schematic

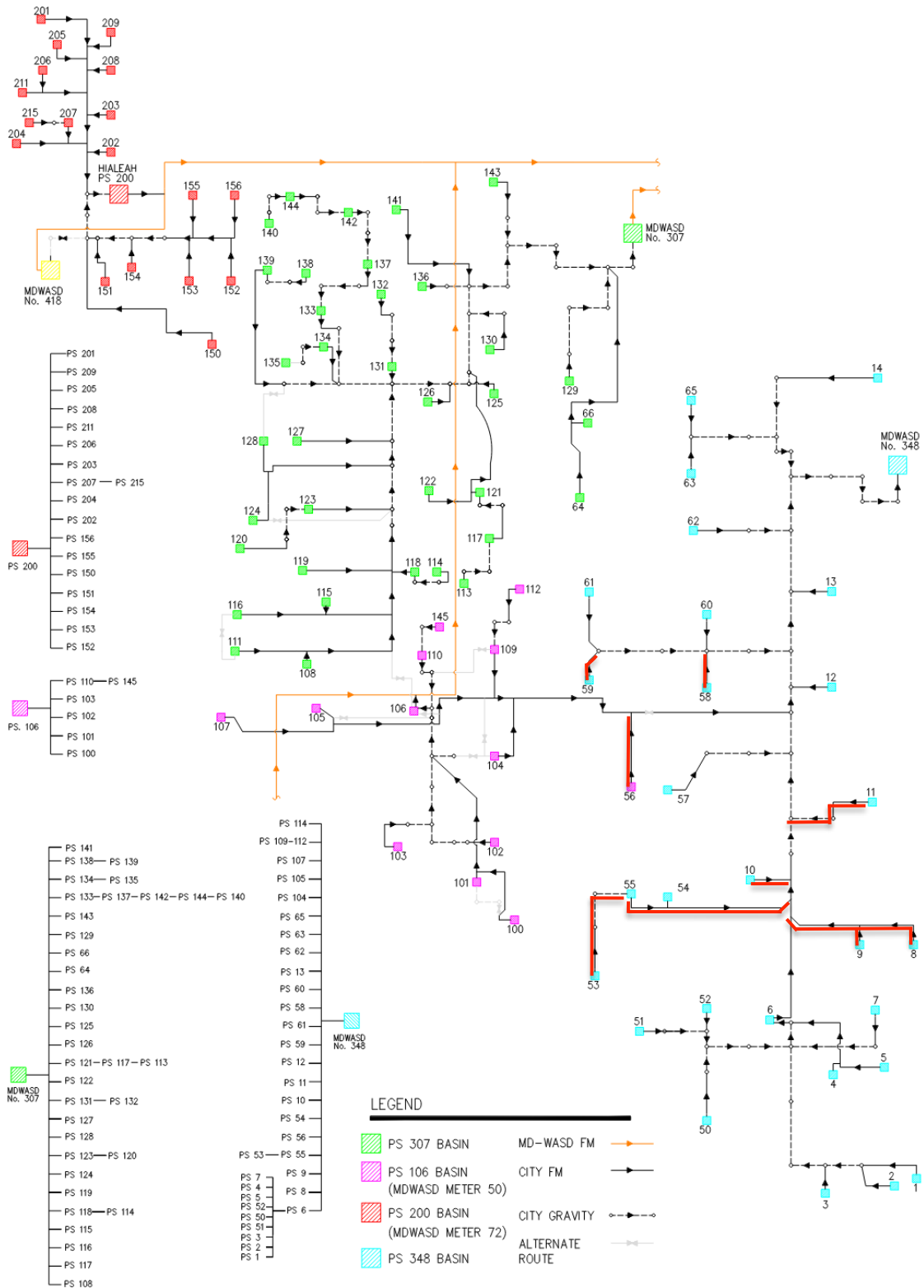


Exhibit C

Vision for Economic Development

Provide a detailed description of, and quantitative evidence demonstrating, how the proposed public infrastructure project will promote:

- Economic recovery in specific regions of the state;*
- Economic diversification; or***
- Economic enhancement of a Targeted Industry*

The City of Hialeah is seeking to reinvigorate the heart of its industrial sector by working with private investors to rebuild an area that established the City as a civilian manufacturing hub in World War II and continued through the City's manufacturing heyday in the 1980s. The area is being re-imagined as a work and show site for visual and performing artists as well as a new ground to cultivate the culinary arts including food producers and breweries. Anchored by Factory Town, an old bedding manufacturing plant that has been re-imagined as an entertainment and arts venue by Miami-area developer and historic preservationist Avra Jain, the district is home to underutilized manufacturing facilities that at one time housed our City's largest employers.

Just a few blocks north of Factory Town, the Leah Arts District has become a hotbed for young artists to express themselves in various formats. The Leah district is also home to the City's first brewery, named Unbranded, and a locally renowned Jewish deli named Stephen's Delicatessen which dates back to the 1950s making it the oldest deli of its kind in the entire state of Florida. Since its inception, Leah has hosted numerous block parties and other community events that provided much a needed economic boost to the City's old manufacturing epicenter.

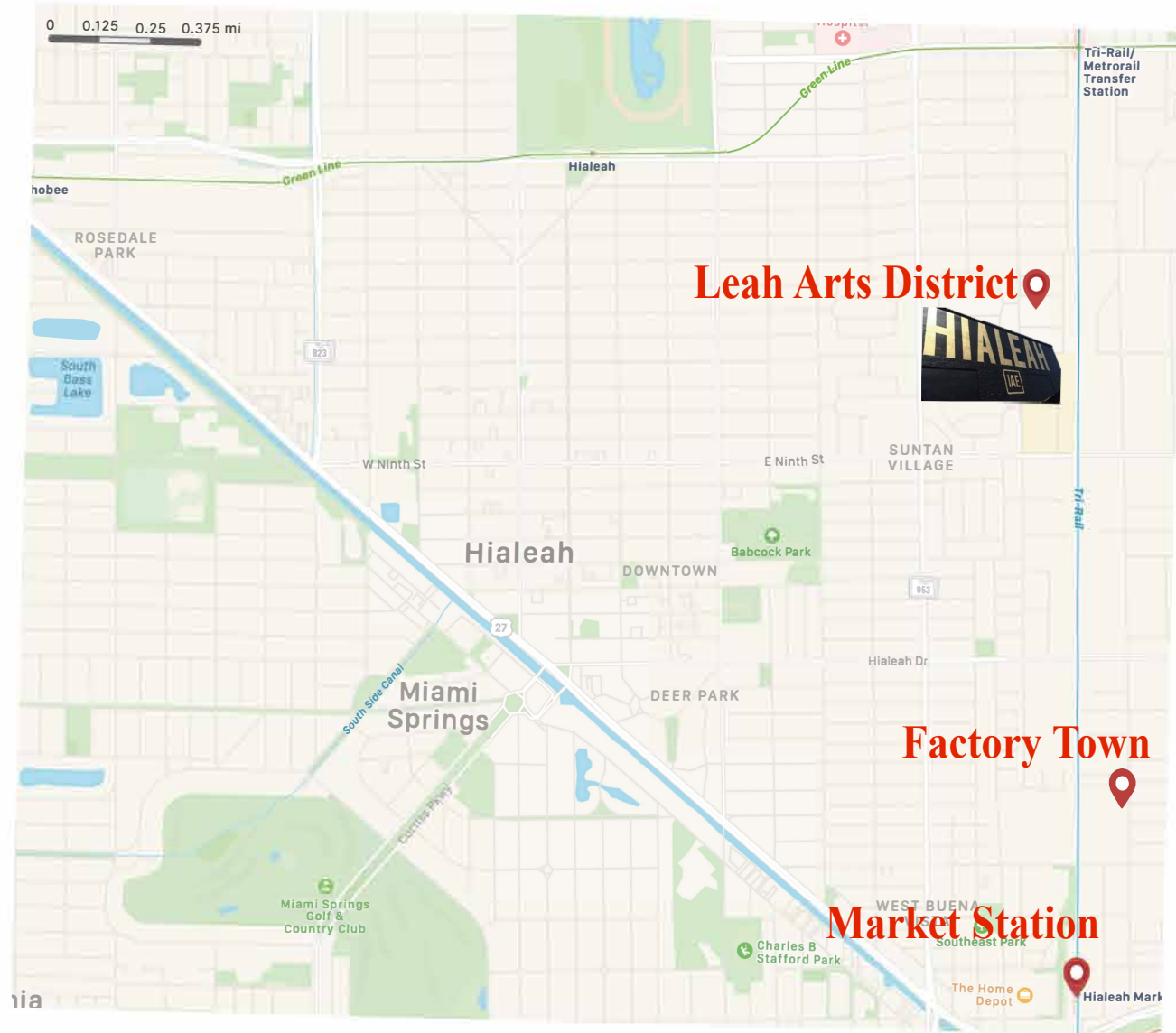
Lastly, just south of Factory Town, the Hialeah Market Tri-Rail Station provides an interregional transportation option for residents all over South Florida to visit East Hialeah. Furthermore, the Market Station is a historically designated site, as it is the site Henry Flagler's historic visit to south Florida. However, Market Station is currently abandoned and grossly underutilized. Part of the reason for the Market Station's current state is the aging public infrastructure in the area, namely the sewer lines in East Hialeah, which prevent Miami Dade County's DERM from granting the appropriate permits for any new or expanded uses of the property.

The City's vision for these three distinct neighborhoods is to facilitate the creation of a comprehensive and continuous economic hub that both preserves the region's manufacturing roots and offers new and exciting concepts including food and beverage, entertainment, and multi-family housing. This economic diversification that will result in job creation and the stimulation of an otherwise stagnant neighborhood will be truly transformative.



The area will again thrive to employ area residents and beckon additional investment from throughout the country and Latin America because of its central location and existing resources. East Hialeah is a short drive away from Miami International Airport, Miami Beach, the Port of Miami, and other regional assets. While the City continues to attract private investment, a key component of this effort is to address an infrastructure challenge that is central to ongoing development. The City's proposal would rehabilitate over 42 miles of sewer lining which would service Factory Town, the Leah Arts District, the Historic Market Station, as well as the existing industrial and residential properties throughout East Hialeah. This aging infrastructure is most often cited as the cause for hesitancy by Miami Dade County's DERM when considering any proposals for expansion or re-purposing of current land use designations.





Leah Arts District

Factory Town

Market Station

Exhibit D

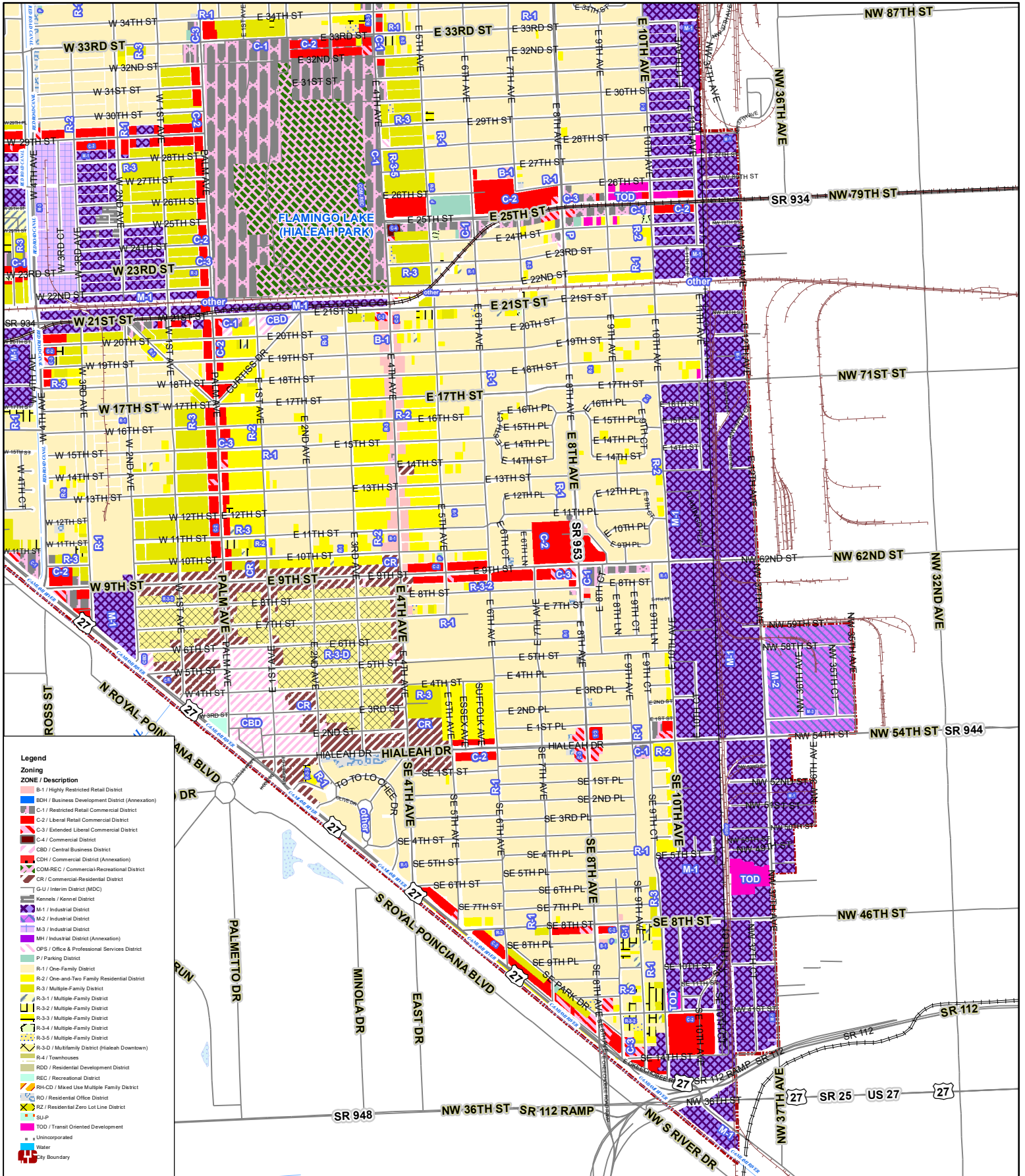
Land Use and Zoning Maps

What is the future land use and zoning designation on the proposed site of the infrastructure improvements, and will the improvements conform to those uses?

The proposed improvements will not be affected by the area's current or future land use or zoning designations because the City's proposal would only improve the infrastructure that services said area. Please see the attached maps for a detailed view of the zoning and land use designations of the the affected area.



City of Hialeah Zoning Map

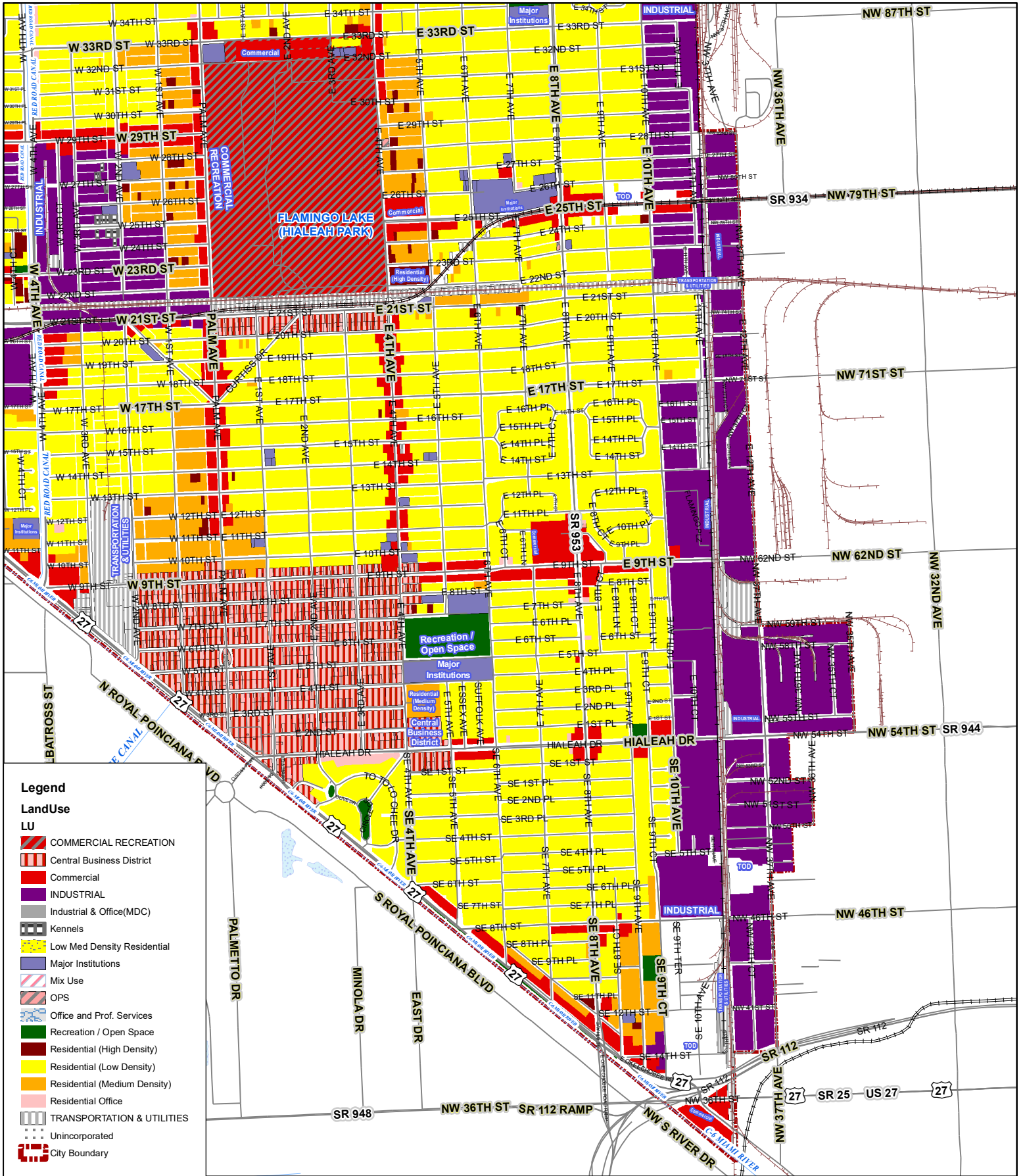


- Legend**
- Zoning**
- ZONE / Description**
- B-1 / Highly Restricted Retail District
 - BDH / Business Development District (Annexation)
 - C-1 / Restricted Retail Commercial District
 - C-2 / Liberal Retail Commercial District
 - C-3 / Extended Liberal Commercial District
 - C-4 / Commercial District
 - CBD / Central Business District
 - CDH / Commercial District (Annexation)
 - COM-REC / Commercial/Recreational District
 - CR / Commercial Residential District
 - G-U / Interim District (MOC)
 - Kennels / Kennel District
 - M-1 / Industrial District
 - M-2 / Industrial District
 - M-3 / Industrial District
 - MH / Industrial District (Annexation)
 - OPS / Office & Professional Services District
 - P / Parking District
 - R-1 / One-Family District
 - R-2 / One-and-Two Family Residential District
 - R-3 / Multiple-Family District
 - R-3-1 / Multiple-Family District
 - R-3-2 / Multiple-Family District
 - R-3-3 / Multiple-Family District
 - R-3-4 / Multiple-Family District
 - R-3-D / Multiple-Family District (Hialeah Downtown)
 - R-4 / Townhouses
 - RDD / Residential Development District
 - REC / Recreational District
 - RH-CD / Mixed Use Multiple Family District
 - RO / Residential Office District
 - RZ / Residential Zero Lot Line District
 - SU-P
 - TOD / Transit Oriented Development
 - Unincorporated
 - Water
 - City Boundary





City of Hialeah Land Use Map






















- Legend**
- Land Use**
-  COMMERCIAL RECREATION
 -  Central Business District
 -  Commercial
 -  INDUSTRIAL
 -  Industrial & Office(MDC)
 -  Kennels
 -  Low Med Density Residential
 -  Major Institutions
 -  Mix Use
 -  OPS
 -  Office and Prof. Services
 -  Recreation / Open Space
 -  Residential (High Density)
 -  Residential (Low Density)
 -  Residential (Medium Density)
 -  Residential Office
 -  TRANSPORTATION & UTILITIES
 -  Unincorporated
 -  City Boundary



Exhibit E

Budget Narrative

Provide a detailed budget narrative, including the timing and steps necessary to obtain the funding and any other pertinent budget-related information.

Below is an estimated narrative of the steps that the City would need to take prior to obtaining funding for its proposal:

- 1- Preliminary Grant Review (14 Days)
- 2- Present Grant Agreement to City Council for Approval (14 Days)
- 3- Execution of the Agreement (14 Days)
- 4- Issue Task Order to Contractor (7 days)

Estimated total time needed to obtain funding: 49 days



Exhibit F

Authority of the Mayor to Submit a Grant Application

Attach evidence that the undersigned has all necessary authority to execute this proposal on behalf of the governmental entity. This evidence may take a variety of forms, including but not limited to: a delegation of authority, citation to relevant laws or codes, policy documents, etc.

Please see the attached resolution of the Hialeah City Council.



RESOLUTION NO. 2022-081

RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF HIALEAH, FLORIDA, REPEALING AND RESCINDING HIALEAH RESOLUTION 2022-051 THAT AUTHORIZED ROMAN O. GARCIA, JR. TO SUBMIT GRANT APPLICATIONS ON BEHALF OF THE CITY OF HIALEAH; AND AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR OR HIS DESIGNEE, MARIA L. RUIZ, TO SUBMIT GRANT APPLICATIONS ON BEHALF OF THE CITY OF HIALEAH, FLORIDA, SUBJECT TO RATIFICATION BY CITY COUNCIL, UPON GRANT APPROVAL; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, on March 22, 2022, the City Council passed and adopted Resolution No. 2022-051 which authorized Roman O. Garcia Jr. to submit grant applications on behalf of the City; and

WHEREAS, Maria L. Ruiz will now be authorized to submit grant applications on behalf of the City; and

WHEREAS, a municipal government, the City of Hialeah is continuously searching and receiving notifications for funding availability which are time sensitive and may require immediate action; and

WHEREAS, due to time constraints it is not always possible to have City Council approval prior to the deadline for submission of the grant applications, which may potentially jeopardize available funding; and

WHEREAS, the acceptance and expenditure of all grants require official approval from the applicant's governing board.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF HIALEAH, FLORIDA, THAT:

Section 1: The Mayor or his designee, namely Maria L. Ruiz, is hereby authorized on behalf of the City of Hialeah to submit grant applications on behalf of the City of Hialeah in the discretion of the Mayor, subject to ratification by City Council.

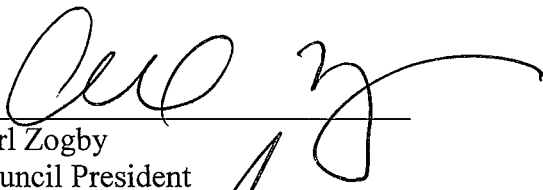
Section 2: The Mayor or his designee is further authorized to make any and all necessary certifications and assurances in furtherance of any grant application made subject to ratification by City Council and final grant acceptance by the Council.

Section 2: The City of Hialeah, Florida hereby repeals and rescinds Resolution No. 2022-051 (March 22, 2022).

Section 3: Notwithstanding the repeal or rescission of any resolution in conflict herewith, all acts taken pursuant to the authority of such prior existing resolutions shall be deemed and taken as lawful actions of the officeholders and all rights, obligations, or liabilities contracted or incurred by such officeholders on behalf of the city shall continue of the same force and effect as though such act had not been repealed. All actions taken to date by officers and employees named herein in connection with the signing of any check, payment of any claim, warrant or voucher on behalf of the city are hereby approved, confirmed, and ratified.

Section 4: This resolution shall become effective when passed by the City Council and signed by the Mayor or at the next regularly scheduled City Council meeting, if the Mayor's signature is withheld or if the City Council overrides the Mayor's veto.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this 14 day of June, 2022.



Carl Zogby
Council President

Attest:

Approved on this 23 day of June, 2022.

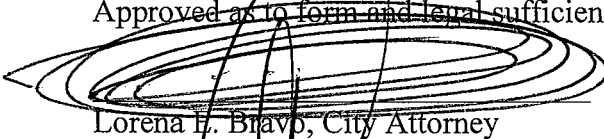


Marbelys Fatjo, City Clerk



Mayor Esteban Bovo, Jr.

Approved as to form and legal sufficiency:



Lorena L. Bravo, City Attorney

Resolution was adopted by 6-0-1 vote with Councilmembers Calvo, Garcia-Roves, Casals-Muñoz, Rodriguez, Tundidor, and Zogby voting "Yes" and with Council Vice President Perez absent.

Exhibit G

Articles and Letter of Support





TO: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
FROM: Representative Alex Rizo, Florida House of Representatives, District 110
SUBJECT: CITY of HIALEAH SEWER LINING PROJECT
DATE: June 7, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of the City of Hialeah's request for funding of a sewer lining project located within my district. Residents and business owners alike have expressed their concerns regarding the integrity of the City's aging sewer system, along with the effects of deteriorating portions thereof. The sewer interceptor, which this proposal would service, is rapidly approaching the end of its estimated service lifespan and is in desperate need of repair.

The improvement to the sewer interceptor would facilitate the vision to both reinvigorate the City's original manufacturing hub, as well as integrate newer arts and entertainment concepts into East Hialeah. Both of these initiatives stand to bring quality jobs to Hialeah which would, in turn, add a much needed boost to the City's economy, as well as add to and improve the quality of life of the affected residents.

I have been proud to work alongside Governor DeSantis to bring financial support to the residents of the City of Hialeah, and this project presents another opportunity to bring relief to the residents of Northwest Miami-Dade County. I thank you in advance for considering the City's proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Alex Rizo", written over a light blue circular stamp.

Representative Alex Rizo
Florida House of Representatives, District 110



HIALEAH

‘Why not Hialeah?’: The city aims for entertainment, urban living to lure the young

BY ANDRES VIGLUCCI

UPDATED APRIL 20, 2022 2:37 PM



An architectural rendering shows how a street near Hialeah’s Tri-Rail Market Station could look if redeveloped under a 2016 transit-oriented zoning plan. *Plusurbia*

READ MORE


Hialeah gets hip

Buoyed by developers such as Arva Jain, who is converting warehouses into an entertainment venue, Hialeah is becoming a place to see and be seen.

EXPAND ALL

When most people look at a long stretch of east Hialeah that's cross-hatched by bumpy tracks for freight trains and the [Tri-Rail](#) commuter service, they may see a confusion of rutted, potholed streets and old and sometimes dingy warehouses occupied by body shops, construction suppliers, plumbing firms and storage and food distribution centers. Trucks are parked willy-nilly, while wrecked cars sit on the street awaiting repairs.

Hialeah Mayor [Esteban "Steve" Bovo](#) sees something else: His city's future.

 This story is a subscriber exclusive

Bovo, city planners and [Hialeah](#) boosters say the ramshackle if still bustling industrial corridor, minutes from Miami International Airport and geographically at the center of Miami-Dade County, is poised for a transformation.

If they get their wish, the old warehouses will be replaced by dense, appealing and affordable urban districts offering restaurants and nightlife. They will be anchored by transit stations, walkable streets and everything else a young Hialeah resident longing for urban experiences might want, right at home.

For a city known for sprawl, choking traffic and a light touch on planning and zoning, a proud and loudly proclaimed working-class ethic, and where [little has seemingly changed](#) in decades, the vision may seem not just implausible, but even antithetical to everything it's come to symbolize.

But Bovo just shrugged.

"Why not Hialeah?" he said.

It won't happen overnight, of course. But the changes, driven by developers' growing interest, already have begun to unfold, Bovo said.



Esteban "Steve" Bovo was sworn in as mayor of Hialeah by U.S. Circuit Judge Bárbara Lagoa at city hall in November. Jose A Iglesias jglesias@elnuevoherald.com

He and city planning chief Debora Storch pointed to construction underway, or in the planning stages, of new developments mixing shops, offices and apartments next to the industrial corridor's two Tri-Rail stations, one of which connects to Metrorail; a rising arts district in between; and [Miami developer Avra Jain's ambitious plan for Factory Town](#) — the new music, hospitality and arts complex on the six-acre site of a former Hialeah mattress factory.

Bovo, a former Hialeah council member and Miami-Dade commissioner who was elected to Hialeah's strong-mayor seat in 2021, has embraced a long-in-the-works vision by the city's planners. [The plan](#), drawn up by Miami planning firm Plusurbia and approved in 2016, aims to foster development of transit-oriented hubs of apartments and businesses around the Tri-Rail Market Station and the Transfer Station connector. To support the grand effort, the city also created a

community redevelopment agency that can funnel property tax revenue from new projects into local improvements.

As mayor, Bovo has emphatically backed Jain's unconventional Factory Town idea. He supported creation of a zoning overlay that allows outdoor music and entertainment and 24-hour liquor service for the property.

Bovo, who campaigned in part on encouraging development and giving young people reasons to stay in Hialeah to live, work and play, said Factory Town and the transit-oriented projects will help the city achieve that elusive goal even as it recasts the city's image for investors, outsiders and even residents. One goal of the transit districts is to feed use of public transportation while giving residents much of what they need for daily living within a short walking distance.

Miami-Dade's transit agency has in recent years been [aggressively courting](#) such dense, mixed-use development on parking lots at Metrorail stations along U.S. 1 and in historically Black Brownsville, on Hialeah's east border.

"If done right, it can bring new life and investment to what looks to me like an old warehouse," Bovo said. "Public transportation works when people get out into a safe area. When you are able to walk out of a transit station into a place full of activity, that's where it works. We haven't had that conversation in Hialeah before. But you have to give people reasons to go there."

He stressed that Factory Town, which has drawn thousands of people to the neighborhood while hosting only limited events on Halloween and during Art Basel week in December, already has provided financial benefits to local business and property owners. Neighbors have made money on sales, parking and in some cases have sold property to the project's ownership group, which is looking to expand the project's footprint beyond the six self-contained acres.

“That for me is scratching the surface of the potential in the area,” Bovo said. “All those areas are seen as ripe for a rebirth. Investors may see gold where you or I would look at those warehouses and ask why anyone would invest there.”

It’s a tested approach that encourages redevelopment and reuse in aging industrial districts and urban-core neighborhoods to generate new residential and commercial development. Look no further than Wynwood, a few minutes east along the State Road 112 Expressway.

Just don’t call what Hialeah’s doing the new Wynwood.

Backers say it’s eminently a Hialeah thing, geared to and meant primarily for locals who now have to venture out to Miami Lakes, South Beach or, yes, Wynwood, for dining and entertainment.

The reappraisal of east Hialeah also taps into the city’s history and its characteristically funky mix of utilitarian, everyday architecture. The four-block Leah Arts District includes many of the once-legendary *factorias* where squads of Cuban exile seamstresses manufactured clothing in the 1960s and 1970s for Jewish owners, who had established textile businesses in the city after World War II

because land was cheap and plentiful. The industry disappeared after clothing manufacturing moved abroad starting in the 1980s.

East Hialeah's rising profile comes as the city of 223,000, like the rest of the county, has seen growing demand for housing and soaring home prices and rents. That has forced first-time homebuyers to look beyond the city's borders to Brownsville and also historically Black Liberty City, where developers have been [rehabbing aging ranch houses](#) as starter homes.

That demand has spurred developments mixing apartments and commercial uses west of the old industrial corridor, in the city's historic heart.

They include a 29-unit garden-style apartment building on West 69th Street from Boschetti Realty Group. Near the city's downtown, off Okeechobee Road, developer Shoma is building a complex with 304 apartments and its own food hall on the site of a former strip mall. By the famed but dormant Hialeah Race Track and the Hialeah Metrorail Station, Station 21 Lofts will offer 90 workforce housing units in three low-rise buildings.

Until recently, east Hialeah was considered a sketchy prospect at best. Little happened after the city, then under Mayor Carlos Hernandez, approved the two transit districts in 2016.

Perceptions began to change with the establishment of the compact Leah Arts District around that time. Warehouses were painted with colorful street murals, a la early days of Wynwood. Though the district remains largely an industrial section, several artists work in studios in old warehouse spaces, and the district's first art gallery is opening soon.



The Unbranded brewery is one of the anchors of the flourishing Leah Arts District in Hialeah. Robert Martinez

Today, the district is anchored by the hip [Unbranded Brewing](#), a vast microbrewery that opened a tasting room and restaurant in February 2020. The Kush Hospitality Group, known for Lokal in Coconut Grove and its Kush by Lokal in Wynwood, took over [Stephen's](#), an old-fashioned 1954 Jewish deli, one of the last remaining in Miami-Dade, and added a few Hialeah-centric touches and a craft cocktail bar in the back. Thrift stores in the district are an added attraction.

With a state transportation grant, the city established a Freebee shuttle service linking the arts district to Hialeah City Hall and the Metrorail/Tri Rail station, where several redevelopment projects are under construction or in the planning stage.

They include:

* **Metroparc**, a 10-story complex with 433 apartments and ground-floor retail by Coral Gables-based MG Developer, better known for its luxurious townhouses in the City Beautiful. Amenities are more akin to a new building in Wynwood, including a co-working space and a shared, open-air kitchen. Completion is expected in spring of 2024.

* Two new four-story buildings, each with 12 apartments, at **859 and 853 East 24th Street** that are nearly ready for occupancy.

* At the **Tri-Rail Market Station**, just blocks south of Factory Town, the city is working with a developer on a proposal for a project mixing residential and retail. So far, it's the only one to come up in the district, but the city has high ambitions for it. The station property, controlled by the state and the Tri-Rail authority, includes the original [Seaboard Air Line Railway depot](#) from 1926, shuttered for years along with an adjacent, failed market that could become a commercial draw if renovated.



An architectural rendering shows how the area around Hialeah's Tri-Rail Market Station, at center, could look if redeveloped under a 2016 transit-oriented zoning plan. *Plusurbia*

The city also hopes to create a public space like Barcelona's Las Ramblas on a narrow state-owned spit of land behind an abutting Home Depot. The space could host festivals and food trucks, said Storch, the Hialeah planning chief.

As the transit districts grow, planners hope to knit them together into a cohesive new urban neighborhood, in part with Hialeah's own version of The Underline, the 10-mile linear park [now under construction](#) beneath the Metrorail tracks through Miami, Coral Gables and South Miami along U.S. 1. Hialeah planners described their version as "a safe linear path for bicycles and scooters."

"We will find a way to connect all of these together," Storch said. "I have been with the city 19 years, and we have been planting seeds that are now starting to grow."

This story was originally published March 13, 2022 6:00 AM.



ANDRES VIGLUCCI



Andres Viglucci covers urban affairs for the Miami Herald. He joined the Herald in 1983.



HIALEAH

What is Factory Town? Old industrial site promises a hip vibe for Hialeah

BY ANDRES VIGLUCCI

UPDATED MARCH 13, 2022 10:29 AM



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Hialeah gets hip

Buoyed by developers such as Arva Jain, who is converting warehouses into an entertainment venue, Hialeah is becoming a place to see and be seen.

EXPAND ALL

Wend your way through the ramshackle old warehouse district on Hialeah's eastern edge, past the wrecked cars in the street awaiting repair, and you'll arrive at a nondescript iron gate that slides open to reveal what seems, at first befuddling glance, a surreal ruined landscape.

It's as if [the Roman Forum](#) was made up of industrial detritus and transplanted to east Hialeah, or something out of a dreamlike painting by Italian artist Giorgio [de Chirico](#): A lofty, rescued [kapok tree](#), sprouting its first leaves after being hauled by truck and crane from a south Miami-Dade property where it had been slated for destruction, stands like an impassive totem at the center of an industrial yard. Steel beams support streaked, bare concrete walls, open to the sky and garlanded by graffiti-style murals by Hialeah artists.

 This story is a subscriber exclusive

In a concrete shed with shattered glass windows and part of the roof missing, a hulking, well-used compressor sits like a sculpture on exhibition, which is what it will be once the space is turned into the Machine Bar. Piles of debris and salvaged [Dade County pine](#) beams from the partial demolition of crumbling warehouses lie scattered everywhere. An open path lined with tall, freshly transplanted royal palms leads to a vast open space with a miniature man-made cypress swamp at one end, and a small grove of mature, rescued native trees arrayed along another concrete enclosure.


Towering clouds roll across the enormous blue sky overhead. Periodically, the whole place shakes as a commuter train rushes by on its tracks just a few feet behind the back wall of the six-acre property.

Only a small sign high up on the front wall outside, so unobtrusive you might have missed it, provides a clue to what this place is: "Factory Town," it reads, the name outlined in festive light bulbs.

It's a little hard to explain Factory Town. It's a ragged, unshorn spot, a former mattress factory so expansive it had streets connecting a half-dozen buildings, the earliest dating to the 1940s.

And it's now in the process of becoming something completely different — a permanent, ever-evolving creative and entertainment district just possibly big and robust enough to redefine the aging industrial corridor around it, and maybe even Hialeah itself.





A kapok or ceiba tree transplanted from a site in the Redland where it was slated for destruction stands in the yard of a former mattress factory in Hialeah that's being converted into a music and entertainment venue called Factory Town by developer Avra Jain and partners. Andres Viglucci *Miami Herald*

At least that's the [outsized ambition laid out by developer Avra Jain](#) and the city of Hialeah, which has embraced her still-evolving plan to turn the former factory's six fractured acres into the cornerstone of a new, [utterly un-Hialeah thing](#) — a hip, youthful district with outdoor music, art, cool restaurants, bars and places to live.

It's a tall order, but if anyone can pull it off, it's Jain. In an unconventional two-decade career in Miami development, [Jain has shown an unusual knack for reinventing broken-down old places redolent of history](#) and architectural zest that no one else would touch.

She's best known for rescuing the jazzy, iconic Vagabond Motel on Biscayne Boulevard and helping remake the Miami Modern historic district that surrounds it by renovating a half-dozen other historic mid-20th century motels and converting them to other uses, like offices and cafes. Once a haunt for prostitutes and the street drug trade, the corridor is today a vibrant strip of restaurants, shops and offices in historic and new buildings alike that draws people from across Miami.

NO BLUEPRINT FOR REDEVELOPMENT

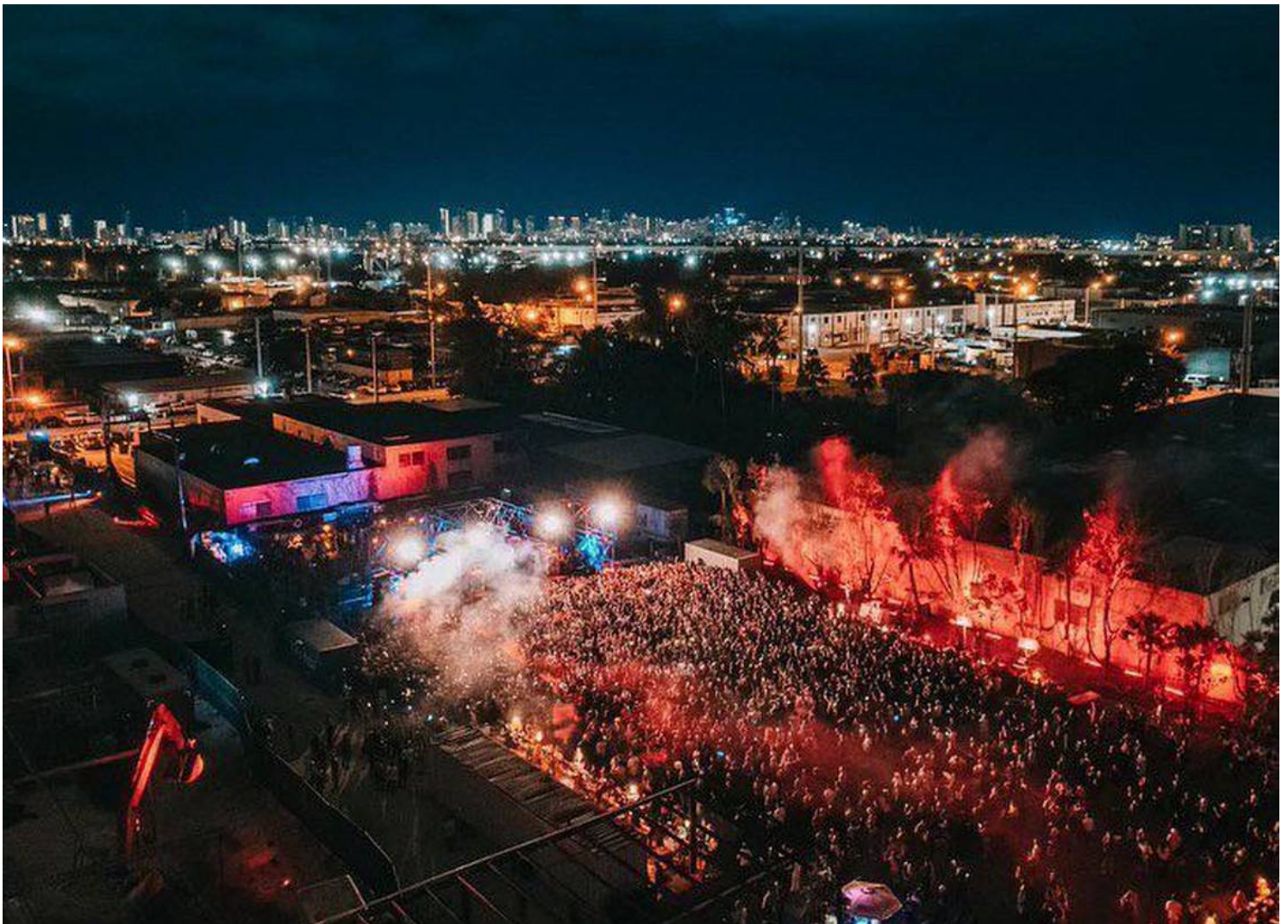
Factory Town, to be sure, is a different animal, self-contained and hemmed in by working warehouses and active industrial businesses. But city officials, who created a special zoning district to allow live outdoor entertainment on the site, think it can provide sufficient critical mass to draw crowds of young people and new investment to the neighborhood, a long-overlooked corner of Hialeah that happens to sit geographically at the heart of Miami-Dade. The city's eastern boundary line is just outside the gate, running down the middle of Northwest 37th Avenue.

There is no blueprint, no master plan for Factory Town.

But think DJs and electronic dance music, bands, art installations, artists' studios, cafes and bars, inexpensive working space for food startups, a spirits distillery, an

ecological garden sprouting amid Hialeah's concrete jungle. All are already on the table or in the works, backed by deep-pocketed investors and the seasoned music promoters behind Club Space and the III Points festival. There also could soon be a boutique hotel and an outdoor wellness spa. Ideas will spring up as they move forward, Jain and her partners say.

The buzz is already building. Since Jain and her partners quietly took over the property last year, after paying \$10.5 million for it, Factory Town has, with minimal promotion, hosted thousands of people for limited music events. The events comprised a Halloween bash and several nights of music, food and exhibits of NFTs, the art world's hottest craze, during Art Basel week in early December. Among the reported visitors during the latter: Tesla CEO and world's richest person Elon Musk.



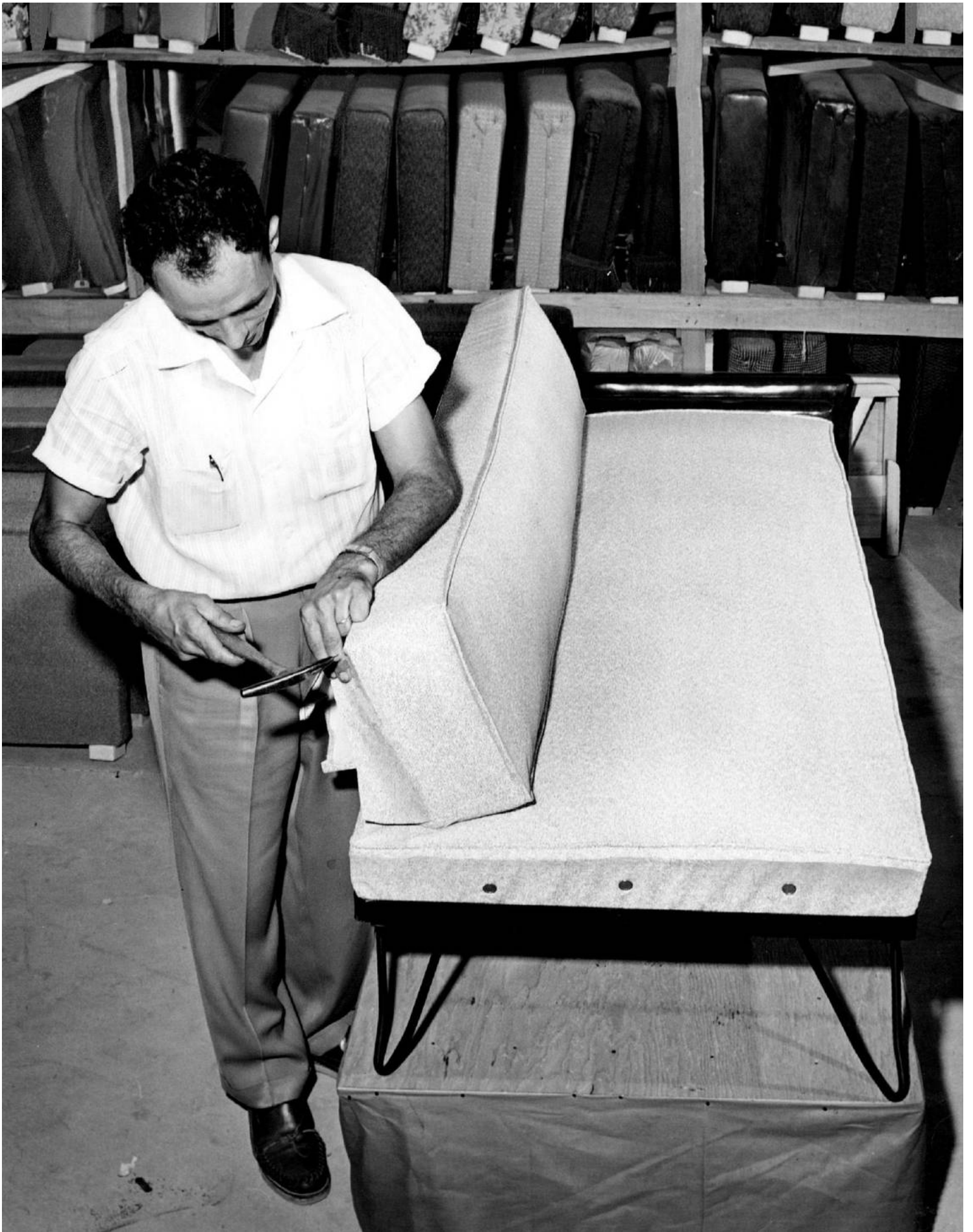
A drone shot shows a DJ performance at Factory Town in Hialeah in 2021. The site is a former mattress factory in east Hialeah's industrial district that developer Avra Jain and partners are turning into a music and events venue. Factory Town *Factory Town*

On March 26, Factory Town will hold perhaps its most high-profile date. The 24-hour [Get Lost](#) electronic music fest, previously held in other locations during its 15-year history, will set up shop at the venue with a roster loaded with star DJs. It's part of Miami Art Week, the umbrella for a series of electronic, hip-hop and other pop music events centered around the three-day Ultra festival, which is [returning to downtown Miami](#) after a COVID-19 pandemic absence and years of battles over noise with local residents that now have been settled.

Unlike the dynamic in Wynwood, another industrial district turned entertainment zone, where warehouses are rapidly giving way to sleek new apartment buildings, Jain intends to retain much of the raw, rundown magic of distressed concrete and industrial verve that defines Factory Town.

The walls and materials and the warehouses on the site that remain sound enough to be saved and repurposed, she said, have much to tell about the history of Hialeah and the people who made it.

Factory Town's regeneration as a center for entertainment encapsulates Hialeah's evolution from early suburb and tourism attraction to industrial, working-class city and magnet for Cuban refugees and immigrants, Jain and her partners say. And they've told the story in a digital, illustrated 35-page history of Hialeah and the mattress factory.



Richard De Maria of Dixie Bedding Co. in Hialeah tacks mildew-proof plastic to the back of a sofa. The factory, which was started in 1946, is being redeveloped as a music and arts venue by developer Avra Jain and partners. *Miami Herald File*

Without that concrete history visitors can touch and experience, she said, Factory Town would lose what sets it apart.

“We’re going to sort of let things organically happen. We wanted to save the look and feel of it. We’re trying to keep everything we can keep and have that juxtaposition of old and new, which I love,” Jain said. “Adaptive reuse is not easy. It’s much easier to just knock down. But that defeats the purpose.

“It’s about saving the right things and saving the context. Because if we lose the context, we lose the heritage. When people first walked in here, it was like, ‘Where am I?’ But we’re not Wynwood. We’re Hialeah.”

MUSIC AND ART WON’T BE DISPLACED

Given an off-the-beaten-path location and the size of Factory Town, Jain said, it’s also a place where music and art won’t get pushed out by upscale new development, as occurred in Wynwood and other gentrifying, resurgent neighborhoods — along with the buildings and landmarks that are too often erased in the process, wiping out swaths of Miami’s history.

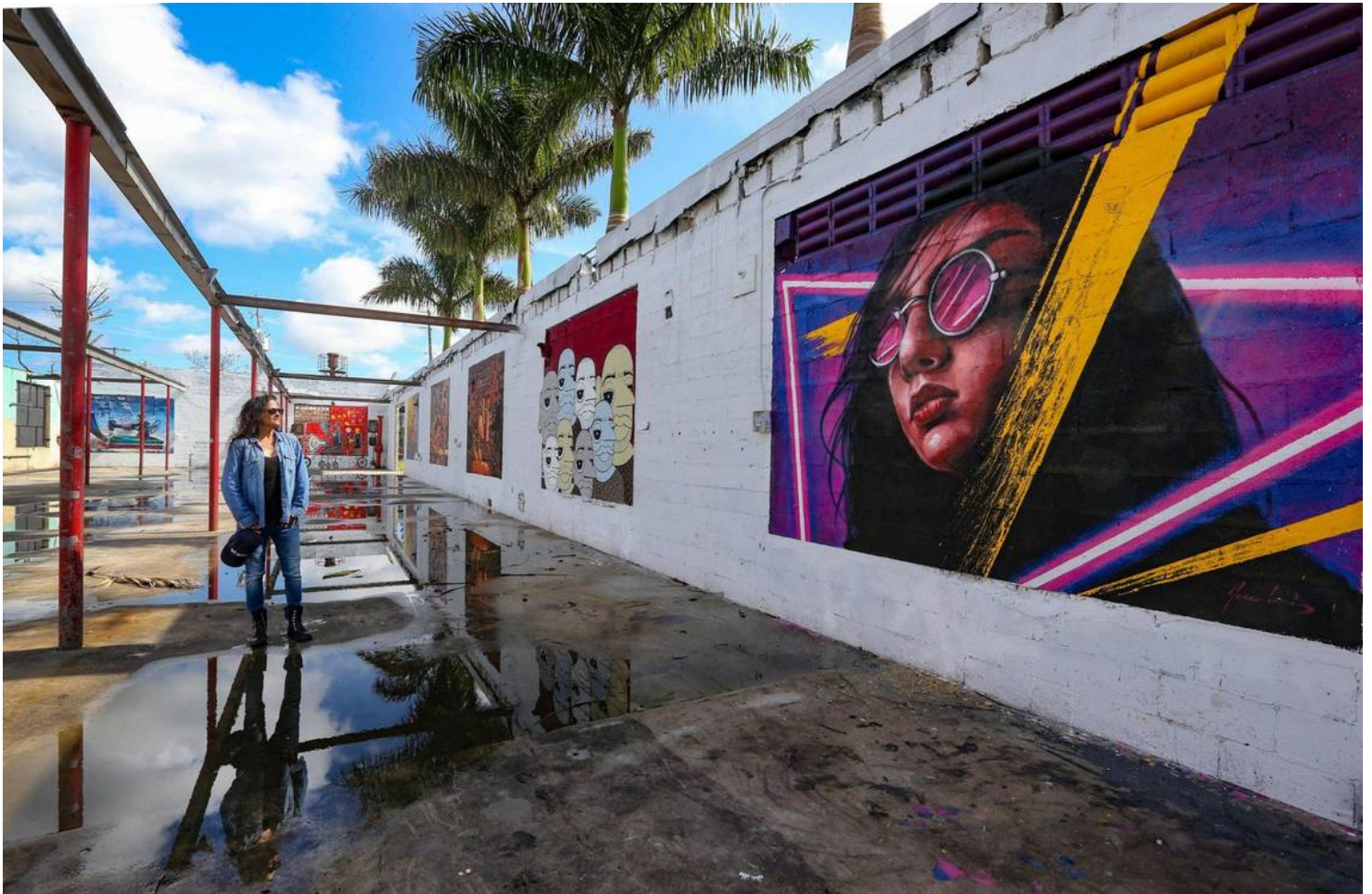
In fact, the original impetus behind Factory Town arose from the need to find new venues for loud, outdoor music events that Miami has become famed for. Outdoor electronic dance music festivals and live music are getting pushed out of Miami Beach and even Wynwood and restricted sharply in downtown Miami, as their residential populations grow and people want a quiet night’s sleep.

“Where can we be in Miami where we can still make some noise?” Jain asked. “The same people who make neighborhoods are the people who get displaced out of those neighborhoods. It’s culture and entertainment that put Miami on the map. Losing that ability to have outdoor entertainment events would be a huge loss to the city.”

During Art Basel week, town officials in Miami Springs two miles away say booming bass emanating from Factory Town rattled windows and prompted

dozens of noise complaints to local police. The town [filed a lawsuit](#) against Factory Town, but withdrew it after Jain and her musical partners partners set up open-air sound systems as they would for live events, tested the result at several locations in the Springs, and repositioned and recalibrated speakers to make sure no one in the town will be disturbed in the future. The tests prompted no complaints, Jain said.

When Jain first brought them to the Factory Town property, two of her musical partners said, they recognized the potential right away. David Sinopoli, one of three partners running III Points and Club Space and managing musical events at Factory Town, said the place and Jain’s vision reminded him of the earliest days of Wynwood’s resurgence.



Developer Avra Jain walks through a gallery of murals by Hialeah artists painted on the walls of an old Hialeah warehouse whose roof has been removed during the conversion into an open-air music and performance space. Al Diaz adiaz@miamiherald.com

“You felt you were at the beginning of something,” Sinopoli said. “Factory Town is super special. We saw a lot of aesthetic power in the distressed walls, the broken

windows. When we saw this big metal door on wheels in one of the warehouse buildings, we thought, ‘Wow.’ Other venues pay to put these in. This is the real thing.”

A second musical partner, Coloma Kaboomsky — the name used professionally by Jose Coloma Cano — noted the site feels like another world, even though it’s just a short ride by car, Uber or transit — Tri-Rail and Metrorail stations are nearby — from Miami.

From a business standpoint, he and Sinopoli said, it offers both a convenient location and the flexibility to help fill gaps in the number and size of venues for music and entertainment venues across greater Miami as the city continues to grow exponentially — especially those that can accommodate events for 1,500 people or 7,000 to 10,000 people.

“It’s not in Miami, but it’s as close as you can get to Miami,” Kaboomsky said. “So it speaks to the growth of Miami.”

Sinopoli and Kaboomsky, whose third partner is Davide Danese, say they initially expect to hold six to seven music events at Factory Town every year while other plans for it gel.

“Avra and us, we think we’re pretty aligned,” Sinopoli said. “She works as hard as we do, as hard as anyone I’ve ever known. It’s going to take some time. We like things to progress naturally. We need to establish the bones of it first.”

NEW LIFE AT DORMANT SITE

Those bones, for now, are pretty bare. Stages and sound systems must be brought in and installed for every event. Jain just got water service, power and working bathrooms restored. A pair of structurally unstable warehouses have been taken down, and only some walls and striking steel skeletons or bits of factory mechanisms and machinery left in place. Cargo containers were brought in and modified to serve food and drinks. Tons of trash and debris have been removed.

Jain is also reintroducing the flora that once grew plentifully in the area, a flooded prairie [drained and reclaimed](#) from the Everglades by Hialeah’s developers, aviation pioneer Glenn Curtiss and cattleman James Bright.

She has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to transport and replant some 50 royal palms, oaks and other species of mature trees rescued by her arborist, Ian Wogan of Tree Resources, from development sites around South Florida. Wogan designed, dug and planted a miniature cypress dome that emulates the tree islands of the Big Cypress swamp. He used another row of native trees to create a bioswale that collects and absorbs runoff water, which is then purified as it filters through limestone bedrock into the [Floridan aquifer](#) below.



Arborist Ian Wogan plants cypress trees at Hialeah's Factory Town to re-create a tree island from the Everglades wetlands. Al Diaz adiaz@miamiherald.com

Jain said she's also in talks to bring in arts nonprofits to provide working and exhibition space for artists, a craft spirits distiller looking to expand, and food startups in need of inexpensive space. That's something she said Factory Town can amply provide at rents far more favorable for small and creative entrepreneurs than Wynwood or Little River can offer.

All that would fit in existing warehouse space. Next would come new construction, ideally a hotel and an indoor music venue, maybe more office space if demand warrants. She said key financial backers, [including wealthy investor and entrepreneur Chris Burch](#), who helped launch the Tory Burch fashion label, are all in. She said she couldn't provide a budget because there isn't one.

“There is no lid on this. This is not a spreadsheet development,” Jain said. “I look at this as an opportunity. You never know what you're going to be when you grow up.”

INITIALLY, REVIVING MATTRESS FACTORY SITE TOUGH SELL

When she first came across the property, though, it was a tough sell to find partners willing to invest. The Dixie Bedding mattress factory, started at 4800 NW 37th Ave. in 1946 by Harold Beck, was once the largest in the Southeast. It employed 200 people and provided cots and bedding to American soldiers in World War II and the Vietnam War. It kept growing through the 1970s, when its newest, hardiest structures were built. But the business declined as manufacturing moved offshore.

By the time it ceased operations and was put up for sale, some of the factory buildings were on the verge of collapse. Mountains of trash had piled up. And the place seemed so out of the way that even some prominent developers and investors with experience in the revitalization of Wynwood and other urban districts didn't get what Jain saw in it, she said.

But Burch did. As a young man, he bought and renovated a warehouse in an old mill town outside Philadelphia for his first business, an apparel company. He also backed designer Alan Faena's plan to convert an abandoned warehouse on Buenos Aires' desolate docklands into a luxury hotel, helping turn Puerto Madero into one of the city's hottest districts. And with another partner he turned a rustic surfers' lodge on an Indonesian island into one of the best hotels in the world, the luxurious but laid-back [Nihi](#).



Developer Avra Jain walks across a pile of debris left from the removal of a warehouse roof in Hialeah. The warehouse walls, reinforced with steel buttresses, remain standing to make it into an open-air performance space. Al Diaz adiaz@miamiherald.com

Shortly after he was introduced to Jain by a mutual friend, Burch said, he toured the site, saw just what she did in the place, and agreed to back Factory Town and her vision for it.

“You could just tell she’s full of creation and vigor and passion and integrity and hard work,” Burch said. “She understands budgets and collaboration. I looked at that Factory Town and thought that could be the start of something very unusual. I can feel the energy of it, the way it’s constructed, the people and the location. I don’t know of another place that’s quite like it.

“When you walk into Factory Town, it feels like you’re taking a bit of a journey. When you walk through those gates and half the buildings are half torn down, you are going through a piece of Hialeah’s history and you *feel* those walls.”

SUPPORT FROM HIALEAH LEADERS

Jain said support from city planning and elected officials in Hialeah was also critical. For the city, Factory Town has become an integral piece in a broader strategy, years in the making, to create new urban districts that mix living, work and recreation around a pair of transit stations, one a Tri-Rail stop and another a combined Metrorail and Tri-Rail station, incorporating the rising new Leah Arts District in between.

Newly elected Mayor Esteban “Steve” Bovo, who campaigned in part on a promise to bring in new development and retain the city’s young people, seized on Factory Town as a golden opportunity and eagerly backed the site’s special zoning. So did then-councilman Oscar de la Rosa, Bovo’s stepson, who said his peers in Hialeah desperately want places like Factory Town.

“We don’t have an entertainment district, anywhere where young people can gather and go on a weekend,” said de la Rosa, who stepped down from the council to avoid potential conflicts of interest arising from his family relationship with Bovo. “This is our new downtown Hialeah. It’s what we aspire to.”

Already, he said, the momentum created by Factory Town has brought “tons” of inquiries for space in the neighborhood by restaurant and bar operators from Wynwood and other hot neighborhoods where rents, costs and competition are rising fast.



Fashion photographer Jahmad Balugo walks through a set for a January fashion shoot for label WE-AR4 at Factory Town in east Hialeah. Al Diaz adiaz@miamiherald.com

“In 24 months, you will see new bars and venues in this area,” de la Rosa predicted. “You will see an evolution of new residential buildings, new office buildings.”

Jain said she’s already seen the interest, suggesting she has already fielded at least one offer for the Factory Town property, at a significant premium over what her group paid. But she said neither she nor her like-minded partners are interested in selling. They’re all in it for as long as it takes, she said.

Jain acknowledges that the task she’s taken on in Factory Town may strike some as “crazy.” But she said she’s not much daunted by it, and that’s thanks to the diverse and high-powered cast of backers and collaborators she’s managed to assemble for the project.

“When I first brought people here, they said, ‘Who’s going to come here?’ I’ve developed the confidence to take on this risk, but it takes partners. I stretch the canvas, and I let others do the painting.”

She paused. At 60, and a high point in her real-estate career, Jain said, she can’t imagine doing anything else.

“You know, this is *so* much fun,” she said with a laugh. “This is something I *have* to do.”

This story was originally published March 13, 2022 6:00 AM.



ANDRES VIGLUCCI



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REAL ESTATE NEWS

Hialeah makeover focuses on arts district, transit hubs, big bet on Factory Town, and much more

BY ANDRES VIGLUCCI

UPDATED MARCH 14, 2022 4:07 PM



An architectural rendering shows how a street near Hialeah's Tri-Rail Market Station could look if redeveloped. It's part of an ambitious plan to make the city desirable for young and old. *Plusurbia*

Bit by bit, the snarl of aging warehouses, train tracks and potholed streets that make up east Hialeah's old industrial districts are seeing something novel: new buildings mixing housing and shops, plans for new public spaces and a bike trail

beneath the elevated Metrorail lines, and even an unusual music and entertainment district in a vast old mattress factory called Factory Town that's generating considerable buzz.

The new development, already under way or in the planning stages, clusters around the industrial corridors' two Tri-Rail stations, one of which, known as the Hialeah Transfer Station, connects to Metrorail. Between the two, there's the rising Leah Arts district and Miami developer [Avra Jain's ambitious plan for Factory Town](#). There's even a Freebee shuttle running between the Transfer Station, Hialeah city hall and the Leah district.

READ MORE: [Read all about Factory Town, a music, arts and food venue](#)

READ MORE: [Miami developer Avra Jain preserving Hialeah's history](#)

The reappraisal of east Hialeah taps into the city's history and its characteristically funky mix of utilitarian, everyday architecture. The four-block Leah Arts District includes many of the once-legendary *factorias* where squads of Cuban exile seamstresses manufactured clothing in the 1960s and 1970s for Jewish owners, who had established textile businesses in the city after World War II.



The Unbranded brewery is one of the anchors of the flourishing Leah Arts District in Hialeah. Robert Martinez

The city has growing demand for housing and soaring home prices and rents. That has forced first-time homebuyers to look beyond the city's Hialeah's borders to Brownsville and also historically Black Liberty City, where developers have been [rehabbing aging ranch houses](#) as starter homes.

That demand has spurred developments mixing apartments and commercial uses west of the old industrial corridor, in the city's historic heart.

Those include a 29-unit garden-style apartment building on West 69th Street from Boschetti Realty Group. Near the city's downtown, off Okeechobee Road, developer Shoma is building a complex with 304 apartments and its own food hall on the site of a former strip mall. By the famed but dormant Hialeah Race Track and the Hialeah Metrorail Station, Station 21 Lofts will offer 90 workforce housing units in three low-rise buildings.

Until recently, east Hialeah was considered a sketchy prospect at best.

Perceptions began to change with the establishment of the compact Leah Arts District around that time. Warehouses were painted with colorful street murals, a la early days of Wynwood. Though the district remains largely an industrial section, several artists work in studios in old warehouse spaces, and the district's first art gallery is opening soon.

Today, the district is anchored by the hip [Unbranded Brewing](#), a vast microbrewery that opened a tasting room and restaurant in February 2020. The Kush Hospitality Group, known for Lokal in Coconut Grove and its Kush by Lokal in Wynwood, took over [Stephen's](#), an old-fashioned 1954 Jewish deli, one of the last remaining in Miami-Dade, and added a few Hialeah-centric touches and a craft cocktail bar in the back. Thrift stores in the district are an added attraction.

With a state transportation grant, The city established a Freebee shuttle service linking the arts district to Hialeah City Hall and the Metrorail/Tri Rail station, where several redevelopment projects are under construction or in the planning stage.

Redevelopment projects and plans around the Transfer Station include:

* **Metroparc**, a 10-story complex with 433 apartments and ground-floor retail by Coral Gables-based MG Developer, better known for its luxurious townhouses in the City Beautiful. Amenities are more akin to a new building in Wynwood, including a co-working space and a shared, open-air kitchen. Completion is expected in spring of 2024.

* Two new four-story buildings, each with 12 apartments, at **859 and 853 East 24th Street** that are nearly ready for occupancy.

Near the **Tri-Rail Market Station**, a set of very different projects are getting started.



Developer Avra Jain, who revived the Vagabond Motel and half a dozen other Miami Modern historic district properties, is converting a former mattress factory in east Hialeah's industrial district into a music, food, and events venue called Factory Town. The compressor behind Jain once powered the factory's conveyor system. It will be the centerpiece of a new bar. Al Diaz adiaz@miamiherald.com



FOOD

This Jewish deli was in Hialeah before Cuban food. Now it's making a comeback

BY CARLOS FRÍAS

UPDATED JANUARY 29, 2020 5:39 PM



Stephen's Delicatessen watched all the others disappear.

Goodbye, Wolfie's. Goodbye, Rascal House, Pumpernik's and Corky's. Goodbye to all the other smaller Jewish delis in South Florida.

Quietly, improbably, Stephen's deli managed to stay in business since 1954 in the unlikeliest of places — Hialeah.

Where has the corned beef gone? At these old Miami delis, the taste is just a memory

MARCH 17, 2019 1:54 PM

It lasted through seven owners (one owned it twice) over the last 65 years, as it went from being on the corner of the once-booming Jewish-owned garment district to the forgotten warehouses for cabinet makers, tile shops and glass and mirror cutters where Hialeah shops for its illegal efficiencies.

Everyone seemed to forget about Stephen's — until now.

Stephen's Delicatessen is ready to make a comeback June 19 with owner number eight — Matt Kuscher, the innovative chef-owner of Lokal, Kush, The Spillover and [Vicky's House milkshake bar](#), who knows how to make his restaurants a cool-kid destination. (Usually, a secret bar is part of the equation as it is with Stephen's.)

And Kuscher has a secret weapon: Henderson Biggers Jr. The longtime manager, who everyone calls Junior, started as a dishwasher there 62 years ago and learned to hard-carve the homemade pastrami and corned beef as Stephen's scenery changed.

“Junior never left. Even through clientele changes, demographic changes, he was the connection,” Kuscher said.



Matt Kuscher, left, bought Stephen's Delicatessen in November 2017 and kept its longest-running employee, Henderson "Junior" Biggers, who learned to hand-carve the pastrami and corned beef made in house in his 62 years at Stephen's. *Handout*

Kuscher bought the restaurant at 1000 E. 16th St. in November of 2017 with the painstaking goal of making a new-and-improved Stephen's look like it hadn't been touched at all.

New, textured wallpaper evokes the restaurant's original wood paneling. He kept the original "Welcome to Stephen's" stained-glass, the L-shaped bar and vinyl-topped stools, the chairs imported from Poland, the cracked tile floors, the mint-green Formica tables that the previous owner, Shelly Nadelman, let his wife pick out.

The bar mitzvah oil painting of Kuscher's father and a slew of family photos, arranged just as they were at his mother's house in Maryland, decorate one wall. And next to it, a framed menu from his grandparents' deli, the Plantation Nook in

Broward, where he spent summers with Joe and Dorothy Kuscher. Stephen's kitschy beige and brown menu is a replica of the Nook's.

"I kept the bullet holes in the window," Kuscher said. "I wanted it to feel you've been coming here for 30 years."



Restaurateur Matt Kuscher remodeled Stephen's Delicatessen to make it look period correct. CR-eate *Handout*

The one change: Biggers is out front.

Biggers moved to Miami to live with his brother after serving in the Air Force in Roswell, New Mexico and Okinawa, Japan, and took the only job he could find in Florida in 1957: dishwasher.

"Blacks could only get certain jobs," Biggers, 83, recalled one day last week.

But over the years Biggers quickly moved up the ranks at Stephen's, manning the grill and learning the art of carefully slicing pastrami and corned beef to make the most of the meat, cured and smoked through an intensive process. And, to get the thinness and texture just right for a piled-high sandwich.

“When you’re serving something where the meat is the star, all those little details are important,” Kuscher said.



Henderson “Junior” Biggers has been an employee at Stephen’s Delicatessen for 62 years, through seven of its eight owners. *Handout*

Sandwiches are the highlight. Junior’s Pastrami or corned beef start at \$13 for six ounces of sliced meat. The Reubens and Rachels are \$15 and feature housemade sauerkraut, cole slaw and Russian dressing. They share a large deli menu with Kuscher’s Bubbie’s Matzoh Ball soup (\$7), Sabra hot dogs wheeled to your table in a pushcart, latkes, egg cream sodas and all-day breakfast.

Several of these dishes, including a hit pastrami on rye, are [already available at the Timeout Market on South Beach](#), where Stephen’s has a kiosk.

At Stephen’s the carving station is out front where customers can see Biggers beneath a mural-sized, pink-and-teal neon sign that reads, “Hand-slicing pastrami

since 1945.” A poster of Biggers with a brief bio hangs prominently on one wall as a tribute. The city of Hialeah intends to give him a proclamation, Kuscher said.

“Lots of people, when you get up in age, they don’t want to fool with you,” Biggers said. “Over here, they appreciated me and the work I’d done.”

Sitting at a table with Kuscher and Biggers, Scott Nadelman, whose family owned the deli for 41 years, stopped in to see the progress.

“Everyone’s replaceable — except him,” Nadelman said, nodding at Biggers.

Of course, this wouldn’t be a Kuscher restaurant if it didn’t have his attention to detail — and a hidden bar of some kind.



Homages to Hialeah at Stephen’s Deli include themed bathrooms, including a women’s restroom inspired by astrologer Walter Mercado. CR-eate *Handout*

At his burger and craft beer restaurant Lokal in Coconut Grove, Kuscher used a phone booth made to look like it was from the movie “Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure” as a pass through to his hidden milkshake bar Vicky’s.

The beer-and-wine waiting room for his Wynwood restaurant Kush resembles a botanica. And in bathrooms at The Spillover are homages to Chespirito and the many Spanish-television characters of actor Roberto Gomez Bolaños.

At Stephen's, the woman's bathroom is an ode to South Florida soothsayer Walter Mercado, the men's room dedicated to a local eccentric who calls himself the Hialeah Spiderman.



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The so-called Hialeah Spiderman gets a nod in Stephen's Deli's men's room. CR-eate *Handout*

And down a hallway where black light illuminates a mural-sized map of Hialeah, is a hidden door to a craft cocktail bar, La Cocina Cocteleria. It's an ode to Hialeah, with walls lined with Caja China boxes, a luminescent Ñooo Que Barato sign and the Spanish People's Court style show, "Caso Cerrado" playing on a loop. Yes, Hialeah swag from Hialeah-born artists are for sale. (The bar will open separately in July.)

"Nobody walks around with T-shirts that say, 'I'm from Kendall,'" Kuscher said. "People from Hialeah love to rep it."

Aside from a full bar and a separate bites menu are a dozen cocktails, each designed by one of Miami's best known bartenders, including Havana Club's brand ambassador in Miami, Gio Gutierrez, Jaguar Sun owner Will Thompson and Beaker & Gray co-owner Ben Potts.

No, it's not the same Stephen's from 1954. Then again, neither is Hialeah.

"Of course, I'm nervous. I'm opening a Jewish deli in a Cuban neighborhood," he said. "But if you put out something that's authentic, that's cool, with quality, you'll give people a reason to come."

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HIALEAH

Hialeah inaugurates Leah Arts District

By Alfonso Chardy

achardy@elnuevoherald.com

UPDATED MAY 19, 2015 11:07 AM



Street party attendees gather by a mural titled "El Viandero" by artist donrimx in the new Leah Arts District in Hialeah at 1501 E. 10th Ave. on Sunday, May 17, 2015. PEDRO PORTAL *EL Nuevo Herald*

The City of Hialeah on Sunday staged a street festival to open its first art district in hopes of one day drawing as many artists and visitors as Miami's world-famous

Wynwood Art District.

“Four months ago, this area was designated as an artistic area for artists to live and work here,” Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez said shortly after the start of the festival along the 1500 block of East 10th Avenue. “The idea is attracting artists to our city.”

Hundreds flocked to the area, gawking and taking pictures and selfies in front of giant graffiti murals drawn by more than a dozen urban artists. Among them was a young woman known as Kazilla. At the start of the festival that opened the district known as Leah, Kazilla was at the top of a ladder putting the finishing touches to the wing and tail of a giant flamingo in pink, black, white and magenta.

“My work represents the fauna and springs of Florida,” said Kazilla.

Other graffiti “muralists” included Atomik, Abstrk, Derick G., Diana Contreras, Don Rimx, Ernesto Maranje, Junk Lainez, Mr. Dheo, NM Salgar and Trek 6.

Many visitors said they had decided to attend the Leah festival Sunday to experience something new, outside South Beach or Wynwood.

“We came to see something new,” said Tania Bravo, who was at the festival with her sister Natasha, both residents of Miami. “Something different outside Wynwood.”

Apart from the large graffiti murals covering the walls of warehouses and stores in the area, the festival included food trucks selling hot dogs, hamburgers and other food, as well as juices, soft drinks and beer. The longest queues were in front of the truck offering cold beer.

“This is the culmination of work done since 2006 when we started the first art exhibition in the city of Hialeah,” said art curator Gustavo Orta.

Orta said the Leah art district “is like Wynwood” where all artists can exhibit their works.

Wynwood is gold standard because the hip neighborhood draws not only artists and gallerists but also celebrities and fashion models and designers.

Follow Alfonso Chardy on Twitter: @AlfonsoChardy

This story was originally published May 18, 2015 3:03 PM.

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