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Plan To Turn Downtown Miami Into A 24-Hour City

Developers Hope A Planned Panhandling Ban Will Help With Security Issues

MIAMI (CBS4) — In major cities around the nation you'll find communities where people work and live in the same area. In South Florida that is extremely rare. You need a car to get just about anywhere but there is an initiative underway to turn Miami into a 24-hour city.

When the sun sets on Downtown Miami, so do the gates. Scores of stores shut down and by the time the lights come on at night, you can walk down Flagler Street all by yourself.

Historically, Downtown Miami has been a place of business, but after hours, all those business people are off to the suburbs, but that may all be changing.

Alyce Roberts, the Executive Director of the Downtown Development Authority says Miami is on the "cusp of change."

It's called the 24-hour city, and The Downtown Development Authority, retailers, and developers are pushing it.

"It's exciting because it means people," said developer Loretta Cockrum from the Forum Group.

In just a couple of years, 13,000 new apartments have been created in Downtown Miami. The massive inventory has led to foreclosures and fire sales, but it also has introduced thousands of new residents to the area.

The massive introduction of people has led developer Loretta Cockrum to build even more. When Brickell Financial Center is done it will have 91 times the space of the Bank of America building.

"I hope that it continues to allow Miami to become the great city that it will become. We're not there yet. But we are definitely on our way," said Cockrum.

Mary Brickell Village is also benefiting greatly from the influx in residents.

"The area is growing. There is a lot of development in this area. It's created a nightlife within the Brickell area itself. We are a part of that," said Fernando Perez from Mary Brickell Village.

The brand new mall is 85-percent occupied and despite a downturn in the economy, a new Publix Supermarket and an LA Fitness gym are expected to open in early 2009.

While the people are coming, Miami's biggest hurdle is likely still ahead of it and that's safety.

The remarkable new half million dollar condominiums are not only home to new tenants, but hundreds of homeless who have plagued the city for decades. This is where the battle between the Miami of the past and future are meeting.

Jay Solowsky of the Downtown Miami Development Authority says, "When we are trying to encourage people to frequent the area, to move into the area, to enjoy the area, their experiences are negatively affected when they are constantly being panhandled. And therefore we need to do this."

Video



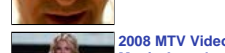
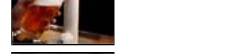
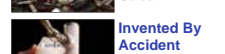
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This is the city's attempt to create a safer downtown. In a few weeks, a new law will be enforced that outlaws panhandling. In other words, someone asking you for money in Downtown Miami would go to jail.

Panhandler Rob Rollins says some people don't have a choice. "I mean they are living in the street. They can't get a job, so what else can you do? It's better than hitting someone over the head and robbing them."

Rob Rollins makes an interesting point. The law is also hotly contested by the ACLU calling it a violation of first amendment rights whether the person is homeless or not. In response, the city will restrict the ordinance to 7 miles.

"Right now it's critical that we protect the interest of those people who have invested their money, who have invested their lives, who are moving here so that they will have an enjoyable experience," explained Solowsky.

The Homeless Trust, an initiative started 15 years ago to end downtown's homeless problem, hopes the law will be the end all.

"We're enabling them to stay on the streets by putting money out there. We've got to stop that. If they don't have money to eat it gives our outreach teams a better opportunity to bring them into our homeless assistance center and get them the care, get them the treatment, get them re-educated, get them re-trained, get them into a job and permanent housing," said Ron Book from the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust.

In a few months, homeless meters will dot Miami-Dade County. They are parking meters used in cities around the nation like Denver. The money people donate goes to organizations ending homelessness.

"We are going to do this in a big way," says Book. "The goal is to have several hundreds of meters."

So the recipe for the 24 hour city is services, safety, and lastly affordability.

"The affordability issue is very key to that because if you can combine the cost of your home and you can combine the cost of your office for an entrepreneur, that's a big cost," said Gladys Margarita-Diaz of the Miami-Dade Housing Financing Authority. "And if you can shave the commute time down all the sudden you are collapsing into one number what would be three different numbers, very large ones."

With 8,500 more units expected to come online by the end of 2009, prices are likely to continue to be pressed downward which will help the 24-hour city become a reality.

"Miami is a young city. It's like a teenager just becoming a woman. It's like wow, we're here at the beginning of everything and that's what I think is really exciting," said Margarita-Diaz.

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