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## **Downtown Development Authority making progress**

BY LEO ZABEZHINSKY

In response to the Miami Herald article that ran on July 1 titled, "Macy's still unsure of downtown Miami's future," I would like to respond to the

points brought up by Julie Greiner, offer an alternative viewpoint highlighting the progress within the past year, and advocate for Macy's opportunity to be a part of the new downtown.

Specifically relating to Macy's, the Miami Downtown Development Authority and the city of Miami strongly value its historical contribution to Flagler Street and above all the 900 jobs that benefit our local economy. We have acknowledged the legitimate concerns that exist in the Central Business District and have been working with both local and national company representatives over the past 18 months to address the issues.

More than a decade of neglect is not easy to reverse within a short time, but we are making progress. In April 2008, the county and city manager recommended Alyce Robertson and Meredith Nation to take charge of the Miami DDA with an intense focus to leverage all available resources to improve downtown Miami.

### **20 NEW BUSINESSES**

An economic strategy is in place for both retail and corporate prospects. Our retail market research indicates that there is a significant demand for quality goods and services that is underserved. The positive story is that 20 new retail businesses have opened in the CBD since 2007, and there is a flurry of new activity in the pipeline.

Within the CBD alone, there have been more than 1,600 residential units completed in the past year, with another 1,800 anticipated before the end of 2008 -- a significant portion of the 15,000 new units reinvigorating the Miami DDA area. In addition, the current estimate of downtown employment is 194,000 -- without a doubt the economic engine of South Florida. The highest incomes also are based in downtown.

Macy's is a major property owner that has the ability to breathe life into Flagler Street and be a part of the collective revitalization effort. When national retail prospects see a major anchor taking the lead, they will be more inclined to follow -- such is the retail game. The interest in the downtown marketplace has already proved strong enough to attract the likes of Whole Foods, Il Gabbiano and Daniel Boulud.

The Central Business District is indeed a focal point for us at this juncture. The agency spearheaded the recent panhandling ordinance that the City of Miami passed unanimously -- a major victory for the downtown community -- protecting business owners and the public and promoting economic vitality in downtown. Within the past year, the Miami DDA has committed more than \$1 million in programs and initiatives such as the Downtown Enhancement Team, Ambassadors, Facade/Shutter Programs and landscaping improvements. In addition, a \$4 million City of Miami Downtown Streetscape

Beautification Project is underway -- repaving roads and creating new sidewalks throughout the CBD.

### **BUDGET INCREASES**

The Miami DDA proposed budget for FY 2008-09 will include increases for additional initiatives that will continue to improve the quality of life, physical environment, and retail mix in the CBD. Available incentives and public investment will be complemented by stricter code enforcement, police presence, and supplemental services.

Miami is still in the early stages of a turnaround; the tipping point for a vibrant downtown will only be attainable when public-private stakeholders pool resources and energy for the common purpose of improving our community. We are on our way and welcome Macy's and others to be a partner and catalyst in this change.

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