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## Public-private cooperation making difference

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For decades, Miami neglected its urban core. Businesses downsized, relocated and closed, but few opened. Sidewalks sat in disrepair, buildings grew decrepit and parks were neglected. Downtown Miami was a 9-to-5 neighborhood in the worst kind of way: Workers left the district by dusk, lights went out and steel shutters came down.

Today, downtown Miami is turning a corner following a decade of unprecedented public and private investment. More than \$13 billion has been spent on projects ranging from the construction of residential and commercial buildings, to the repaving of city streets and creation of green spaces and parks.

It's easy to point to the high-rise development dominating the city's skyline as the chief byproduct of this multibillion-dollar capital infusion. But look beyond the towers, and you'll find other signs of private investment — new retail shops and restaurants along Flagler and Brickell's South Miami Avenue and after-hours hotspots in the Park West neighborhood.

This investment is a key ingredient for progress, as retail businesses are serving downtown's resident population, which has

grown from 20,000 to 31,000 since 2000 — with another 15,000 residents expected to move in during the next six years.

In the public sector, the Miami Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is leading the charge to make downtown more livable and business-friendly. We are giving people a reason to visit downtown and ensuring that they have a pleasant experience.

### *Our investments are reversing years of neglect.*

In the last year, the city and Miami DDA have initiated more than \$4 million in projects beautifying downtown by adding new sidewalks and crosswalks, modern lighting and trees. Another \$3 million has been allocated for beautification efforts along Brickell. We partnered to launch an education and code-enforcement initiative to rid downtown storefronts of illegal signage, passed an anti-panhandling ordinance and increased police presence. The DDA's Downtown Enhancement Team is on the streets each day picking up litter and painting over graffiti; our ambassadors help with directions and improving safety. We also help property owners improve the facades of their building

and remove shutters.

The public sector has introduced new programs that are fueling activity on the weekends and after dark, such as Bike Miami and the free DWNTWN Concert Series, which is driving thousands to Bayfront Park. These programs complement downtown's cultural and entertainment destinations, including American Airlines Arena, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, Miami Dade College, and the Miami Art Museum. Once here, visitors are patronizing our new restaurants and retailers. What was once considered to be a daytime-only employment district is now evolving into a true 24/7 destination.

The investments we have made in downtown are reversing years of neglect. Building facades and storefronts are undergoing renovation, parks and sidewalks are becoming greener and cleaner and streets are more pedestrian-friendly. The results of these investments are clear: Residents are moving to downtown at record pace, new businesses have opened with more on the way and the city's streets are more vibrant after sunset.

Downtown Miami is coming alive again, but we need to do more.

State, county and city public officials need to renew investment in downtown by remov-

ing dangerous trucks from streets via a port tunnel, maintaining the mass-transit infrastructure and encouraging new ridership, replacing outdated traffic signals, resurfacing streets that fall under their jurisdiction, improving trash removal and curbing homelessness.

Likewise, retailers and property owners must step up efforts to invest regarding their storefronts and merchandise offerings. We are at a crossroads and must ask: Do we want to be part of the problem or solution?

For decades, Miami succumbed to urban sprawl, and downtown suffered. Now, with a sustainable infrastructure in place, we are reversing this trend. Realizing Miami's full potential as a world-class city will require continued commitment and increased investment in downtown on the part of the city, the county and the private sector.

*Alyce Robertson is executive director of the Miami Downtown Development Authority. She wrote this on behalf of the DDA Board of Directors.*

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