

BRIEFLY

Downtowners' two cents on trolley

This week, some downtown stakeholders filled out a 10-question online survey to assist in determining a route for the rubber-tire trolley slated for the urban core. The City of Miami plans to use \$4.08 million in transit federal stimulus funds to run three to four trolley systems to serve Downtown/Brickell, Coral Way, Overtown and Allapattah. In preparation, Miami's Downtown Development Authority conducted the survey that closed Wednesday and held a meeting this month with stakeholders along Biscayne Boulevard and Brickell Avenue to discuss the city's plans. The route could run from the Omni bus terminal to the Rickenbacker Causeway.

Authority to restructure committees

Downtown Development Authority Chairman **Joe Sanchez** said at this month's meeting that he plans to work with Executive Director **Alyce Robertson** to re-structure board committees. He said board members will have the opportunity to join new committees or be appointed to other committees that fit their interests and skills. Existing committees include marketing-communications, service delivery and economic development and research. Ms. Robertson also announced creation of an advocacy panel to help the agency address issues requiring outreach to other governmental agencies.

Protester noise dying down

Talks of a lawsuit against the Carpenters Union for disruptive protesting activities have evaporated. In the last months, the City of Miami and the downtown authority have held numerous meetings with Carpenters Union leaders and downtown property owners and managers, leading in some cases to owners' changing contractor language. "The need for us to be in the streets has greatly diminished," said Terry Darling, director of business development for the Carpenters Union at the authority's meeting this month.

Since early last summer, protesters have picketed along Brickell and downtown sidewalks on behalf of the Florida Carpenters Union Regional Council. The group pushes for more responsible contractor language to hold general and sub-contractors responsible for employee rights. The authority's outside counsel, **Jay Solowsky**, a former board member, said the union has been responsive in lowering the noise at buildings from which a high volume of complaints were coming.

In other cases, the dialogue has been productive and the union and building landlords have reached amicable solutions, he said. "Most of the landlords have adopted and instituted responsible contract language."

Authority's motion to dismiss

Outside counsel **Solowsky** reported at the board's last meeting that a lawsuit seeking to dissolve the downtown authority has been moved to the complex business litigation division, which he said tends to rule faster. The city's legal team is seeking dismissal of the case, he said. Milan Investment Group sued in December, claiming the 44-year-old quasi-independent agency's formation is unconstitutional. The suit also claims that the agency doesn't have the power to levy taxes without voter approval and that the board's boundaries have been expanded illegally.

Mr. Solowsky said he has filed a motion seeking to stop plaintiffs from taking discovery – the pre-trial formal investigation that allows questioning and request of documents and other evidence – until the court decides whether a claim exists. The city and authority are also seeking attorney fees to cover expenses in the case.

\$2 million global ad effort promotes

The Downtown Development Authority is partnering with the Beacon Council, the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau and American Airlines and other sponsors to promote Miami as a place to live, work and play in a global advertising campaign. The authority is contributing \$150,000 to participate in the \$2 million campaign "Where Worlds Meet." The campaign promotes Miami-Dade County as world-class destination for business, vacation and meetings at a national and international level with advertisements in Brazil, Canada and New York City.

The discussion led some board members to voice ideas on how developers and business groups can be attracted to Miami's downtown. Board member **Jerome Hollo**, a local developer, said offering companies tax incentives is one option. County commission representative **Bruno Barreiro** said education is another big priority for professionals making the move and something companies consider before moving their headquarters or opening new offices.

Hot dog vendors stay

The Downtown Development Authority has backed off its threat of three months ago to ban or reduce the number of street vendors allowed in downtown streets.

The authority is instead opting to relocate some hot dog vendors, mostly those near restaurants, to other blocks. All 28 street vendor permits were issued to hot dog vendors, causing some restaurant owners to complain that the food carts were taking business away and clogging the sidewalks.