

Next step: Downtown board must adopt master plan study

By YUDISLAIDY FERNANDEZ

Downtown Miami's master plan – years in the making – is moving forward with stakeholders' vision for a pedestrian-friendly urban core with parks and green spaces.

The Downtown Development Authority's directors are to take a first glance at the tweaked and refined plan at a meeting scheduled May 27.

Next step calls for the board – which did not adopt the previous master plan study – to take a vote in the near future, said Executive Director Alyce Robertson.

In recent months, the authority has held three workshops to hear comments on the plan from local workers and residents. Zyscovich Architects prepared the plan as a blueprint for the downtown of tomorrow.

The public's comments centered on enhancing streets to make them friendlier for pedestrians, said Javier Betancourt, the authority's manager of urban planning and transportation.

Another request emphasized by the growing residential community is more open green spaces and parks, he said.

"Ninety percent of the comments centered on those types of issues," he said.

With green a hard color to find in today's downtown, the demand for more parks and open space is something the authority is already focusing on, officials say.

A ceremony was scheduled Tuesday to celebrate completion of three pocket parks in the central business district that are part of the authority's beautification program.

The authority invested more than \$350,000 to restore the parks, adding 23,000 square feet of green space to downtown.

The parks are: Paul S. Walker Urbanscape at 46 W Flagler St., Joan Lehman Sculpture Plaza at Flagler Street and Southwest First Avenue and Robert F. Clark Plaza on Northwest First Avenue and First Street.

Authority Director Robertson said the master plan sets the framework for planning the future of a 24-hour, urbanized downtown.

To accomplish these long-term plans, she said, the quasi-public agency has to build partnerships with state, county and city agencies that have jurisdiction over segments of downtown.

The authority also has to take into account other developments slated for downtown, she said.

For example, a major project to rise along Biscayne Boulevard is the transformation of underdeveloped Bicentennial Park into Museum Park, a complex to feature a state-of-the-art park and house three local museums.

A key task is "making sure those plans aren't contradictory," she said, "acknowledging that they exist and not trying to contradict those efforts."

The authority also plans to

incorporate suggestions from the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's New World Center Committee, which spent months reviewing the proposed master plan, Mr. Betancourt said.

A group of business leaders including local architects, developers and real estate brokers teamed up to make recommendations for the downtown of tomorrow.

"Better connection between waterfront and the different districts was a major recommendation of the New World Committee report and the workshops," he said. "That is something we will be incorporating, something not a lot of downtowns have and we need to recognize is a major asset and build upon that."

Another idea under consideration is to design a pedestrian mall along historic Flagler Street, Mr. Betancourt said.

Once the board of directors reviews the master blueprint, he said, the plan is to present the final product to government agencies and local organizations to collaborate to implement it.