

Infill development will help hold line

BY JAVIER A. BETANCOURT

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Last month's court ruling halting the planned development of a Lowes superstore outside Miami-Dade County's



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Urban Development Boundary was an important victory in the ongoing battle against westward sprawl in our community. But the more

pressing issue going forward is whether residential development outside the boundary should proceed.

The answer to this question is a resounding "No."

Now that new commercial

development on the fringe of the Everglades has been rejected, urban planners along with developers and business and civic leaders should turn their attention to the chief challenge facing Miami-Dade: how to create a sustainable community without expanding our geographic footprint.

By focusing our collective efforts on revitalizing and expanding existing communities through infill development, we will make better use of our land supply, reduce congestion and preserve our region's valuable natural resources. At the same time, we will realize a number of economic and urban planning benefits, including better connectivity between businesses and the labor force, more efficient use of our existing infrastructure and across-the-board increases in property values.

Miami was planned and developed after the advent of the automobile, so sprawl became a way of life in South Florida. Only now we are witnessing a reversal of this trend, as residents and businesses inject new life into urban centers that were long

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overlooked.

Some of the most desirable neighborhoods in Miami-Dade County — Downtown Miami, Coral Gables, South Miami, Miami Lakes and Downtown Dadeland, to name a few — have been home to condensed growth that combines residential, commercial and retail development. Each of these communities offers opportunities for continued investment, and each is taking shape within the confines of the UDB.

Nowhere have the benefits of infill development been more evident than in Downtown Miami, home to our state's largest employment center, an existing public transit system and commercial base, and a population

that has grown by more than 50 percent since 2000.

The mixed-use development that has taken shape in our urban core has accelerated Downtown Miami's evolution as a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly district. New businesses are opening, people are moving in, cultural and entertainment institutions are thriving, and street activity is picking up after hours. These trends speak to a growing demand for the convenience and lifestyle offered by urban communities and to a dramatic shift away from sprawl.

The court's decision in May supported the need for sustainable growth. Now the business and civic communities need to act by advocating against expanding the UDB and evaluating how to maximize our investments in the emerging urban centers within the boundary.

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Is there a business issue you'd like to comment on? Send ideas to businessmondav@MiamiHerald.com.