

Miami's Sarnoff eyes downtown authority chairmanship

BY YUDISLAIDY FERNANDEZ

As the departure of Miami City Commissioner Joe Sanchez as chairman of the Downtown Development Authority nears, another commissioner says he's prepared to take the seat.

Marc Sarnoff, who represents downtown Miami and Brickell, hopes the new commission appoints him authority chairman to put in place his agenda, which includes bringing the authority down to ground-level offices, cutting staff salaries and increasing police presence downtown.

In November, the city is to hold an election in which up to three commissioner seats—those of Mr. Sanchez, Michelle Spence-Jones and Tomás Regalado—are up for grabs.

Mr. Sanchez and Mr. Regalado are both in the race for Miami mayor.

The new commission has the right to appoint a commissioner

to sit as chairman of the downtown authority's board, a post that Mr. Sanchez has held for two years.

Alyce Robertson, the authority's executive director, said the board has no say over who the commission appoints as chairman. For that reason, she said, neither she nor the board is in position to discuss potential candidates.

Mr. Sarnoff, who last year also voiced interest in the post, said he has key priorities he plans to pursue if appointed chairman: spend most of the authority's budget on capital improvement projects, beef up police presence downtown and move the agency's offices to street level.

With Miami police lacking funds for the downtown patrols that stakeholders say they need, Mr. Sarnoff said he would work to set up a privately operated security force to patrol streets, especially at night.



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Marc Sarnoff

He plans to re-examine the agency's office lease on the 29th floor of the Wachovia Financial Center. He said the agency would better serve the public on the ground level of a more affordable office building.

Consolidation is also on Mr. Sarnoff's mind.

Creating a one-stop office downtown that houses the authority, downtown's Neighborhood Enhancement Team and possibly a branch of Miami-Dade's Department of Environmental Resources Management is another priority.

These are offices that area property owners and future business operators frequently use for services and assistance.

"We don't need to have three or four rents," he said. "This is how the private industry reacts to be more prudent with every resource."

Mr. Sanchez also envisioned a one-stop shop that would house downtown agencies but

the idea never took off.

Reducing proportionally the salary of downtown authority employees is also on his to-do list, he added.

For Mr. Sarnoff to carry out this agenda the city commission would have to appoint him chairman, a post he says should be assigned automatically to the commissioner who represents downtown and Brickell, the areas that fund the authority.

"It's unfair. All too often you saw Commissioner Sanchez take credit for a lot of the things happening in downtown," Mr. Sarnoff said, but with the flooding in Brickell and other things the finger was pointed at the area's commissioner.

Mr. Sanchez says after he took over as chairman two years ago, the authority began to focus on making infrastructure improvements and beautifying downtown.

"We had to change the per-

ception of downtown," he said.

In late 2007, an audit revealed that the authority was spending about half of its budget on salaries and rent.

Soon after, staff and administration were changed and new board members were brought on to steer the authority in a new direction.

That direction, Mr. Sanchez said, involved making people feel safe and luring locals downtown with programs such as concerts held periodically in different parts of downtown to get people acquainted with the neighborhoods.

A big challenge was getting the authority to work more closely with others, Mr. Sanchez said, such as the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, the Beacon Council and area stakeholders to improve quality of life and attract new businesses.

"We can take great pride in what we've been able to accomplish. Streets are cleaner, we have more green areas, more services and more events," he said.

Mr. Sanchez said he couldn't predict which commissioner might replace him, but he suggested some priorities the new chairman should address.

The next chair, he said, should work to bring more retailers downtown, get a world-class convention center built and push the city to put more resources into the urban core.

"Downtown still has a long way to go, but we'll get there."



'We can take great pride in what we've been able to accomplish.'

Joe Sanchez