

September 25, 2009

Three top staff members at the Miami Downtown Development Authority have accepted salary cuts to support the cash-strapped county

By Melissa Arteaga Marti | PODER360.com

While Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Alvarez defends raises handed out to top administrators, police majors and some firefighters in cash-strapped Miami-Dade County, three top staff members at the Miami Downtown Development Authority have accepted salary cuts.

Executive Director Alyce Robertson will see her 2009-2010 salary reduced 6%. Meredith J. Nation, deputy director, and Mark Spanioli, senior manager of planning, design, transportation and services, will each take 5% cuts next year in the authority's proposed budget.

The reductions are in keeping with a City of Miami request that members of management take pay cuts of 7% to 15%, depending on their salaries.

"Obviously, I'm not happy to have my salary reduced, but these are unusual times," Ms. Robertson told the authority's board of directors at their meeting Friday. "I'm OK with it.

"This board owes a debt of gratitude to these three professionals," board member Hank Klein told the group.

"I'm sad to cut their salaries," said board member Rolando Montoya. "What they produce deserves the compensation they get, and our financial condition is sound." Nevertheless, he reluctantly accepted the proposal.

No other employees' salaries were cut.

The reductions are part of the authority's proposed budget for fiscal 2009-10, which begins October 1.

As local governments struggle to maintain service levels in an era of declining revenues, Miami's Downtown Development Authority would appear to be in an enviable position. If all goes as planned, the agency will meet expenses next year and apply \$1.3 million of its \$9.4 budget to future years' reserves.

The authority proposes to spend \$7.4 million on its own operations next year, up substantially from projected spending this year of less than \$4.8 million and \$4 million last year.

The authority, funded by an incremental tax on businesses in the city's core and the Brickell corridor and some revenues from other agencies, sent its tentative budget for fiscal 2009-10, which begins October 1, to the Miami Commission for approval Friday.

The City of Miami, deep in contract negotiations with its employee unions, has requested salary concessions of its management staff. The suggested cuts decrease on a sliding scale beginning at 15% for those who earn \$250,000 or more per year to 7% for employees earning \$50,000 to \$70,000, Ms. Robertson told the board.

Though the authority is fiscally healthy, "The [City of Miami] leadership feels it's appropriate for us to sharpen our pencils during this economic time," Ms. Robertson said.

A document circulated to the board would seem to bear that out: in fiscal 2006-07, personnel accounted for 51% of the agency's \$3.52 million expenditures. The amount projected for 2009-10 is \$1.7 million, or 23% of \$7.4 million in spending.

Total administrative expenses have remained level — \$2.4 million in 2006-07 and \$2.5 million next year — but because the budget has grown, they represented 69% of the total then, as compared to a projected 34% next year.

