

## Development authority OK's \$157,000 for signage scheme

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Help is on the way to guide visitors through downtown Miami's maze of 2,000 directional, traffic and information signs.

Directors of Miami's Downtown Development Authority voted last week to sign a \$157,000 contract with Gannet Fleming and MERJE to develop signage and a scheme for downtown – but not before extensive discussion about the project's scope.

The team is to analyze downtown signage needs and prepare a plan to unify signs, then prepare construction documents for new signs but

not manufacture or install them.

The Miami Parking Authority, the Community Redevelopment Agency and other downtown entities are expected to contribute to the design project, which can take as long as year.

"So, for \$150,000, we get their ideas and suggestions?" asked board member and developer Oscar Rodriguez.

Javier Betancourt, authority manager of urban planning and transportation, told directors the authority had been able to negotiate a reduced price – the original bid was \$197,000 – but that didn't placate cost-conscious directors.

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*'So, for \$150,000, we get their ideas and suggestions?'*

**Oscar Rodríguez**

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"I'm still trying to figure out how the \$150,000 breaks down," Mr. Rodriguez continued. "That's not an extensive set of drawings."

"You're dealing with public rights-of-way, setbacks, multiple issues," said Alyce Robertson, authority executive director. "Each location has requirements of its own, and there

are 2,000 different locations" that have to be reworked.

"Why is this going to take a year?" asked Miami Commissioner and authority Chairman Marc Sarnoff.

"Two thousand signs are a lot," said land-use attorney and board member Neisen Kasdin, a former mayor of Miami Beach. But, he said, when that city instituted unified signage, "it was one of the best things they ever did."

"Will you be ready to launch, soup to nuts, in a year?" Commissioner Sarnoff asked Mr. Betancourt.

"Yes, in a year or less," Mr. Betancourt said.

Back in October, in hopes of

instituting a "graphically unified family of directional and identification signs" in the central business district, the Brickell area, Park West and the media and entertainment district, directors selected the Gannet Fleming and MERJE team for the preliminary work. Four firms were invited to compete; bids ranged from \$100,000 to \$400,000.

After the physical signs are installed, the development agency hopes to move into electronic media, using innovations including an iPhone (or similar) application to direct drivers to public or private parking and to help them get around the city.