

## Downtown homeless called peril to 'golden age'

BY CATHERINE LACKNER

LeBron James's decision to join the Miami Heat may usher in "Miami's golden age," city Commissioner Marc Sarnoff told the Downtown Development Authority last week, but only if Miami works fast to solve problems in the city's core. Basketball season begins in late October.

"I'll bet by Dec. 10 there won't be a single condo for sale on Biscayne Boulevard," said Mr. Sarnoff, who chairs the authority. "You want to build on that image."

Mr. Sarnoff said street people and the charitable organizations that feed them stand in the way of a continuing rebirth downtown. In addition, he said, Biscayne Boulevard and the streets that feed into the American Airlines Arena need a facelift.

Neither is downtown pedestrian-friendly, said board member Alan Ojeda, who said a National Geographic article called Miami one of the country's four most dangerous cities for pedestrians.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has jurisdiction over Biscayne Boulevard, and in many parts of downtown, county and state laws supersede city ordinances.



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"There are at least 20 things to be done along the Biscayne Boulevard corridor," said board member Jay Solowsky. "FDOT hires people who come from non-urban areas. They don't have the skill set to solve this, but they're making the rules. We need more of a private-sector mentality."

"We need the county and the state involved," said board member Nitin Motwani. "When we had the Super Bowl here, things got done. Every municipality was involved." He suggested city, county and state officials walk through downtown and around the basketball arena. "Forget the bus; let them take a walk. This could be the lightning rod that gets people motivated."

Board member Oscar Rodriguez said living downtown for three years has given him a unique perspective. On Biscayne Boulevard, "Bicentennial Park is where it starts to go south, even though it's north," he quipped. "It's dangerous to walk there."

The homeless problem mostly plagues the western part of downtown, but north of MacArthur Causeway "it's both east and west," Mr. Rodriguez said. South of the causeway, street people generally don't

venture east of Biscayne Boulevard, he said, "probably because it's too dangerous to cross." He said another church has joined the roster of institutions feeding the homeless downtown "and there's a long line of homeless people there."

While no solution was suggested for the street people or problems caused by feeding them, anyone who does so should "prepare for what happens after you feed them — safely, efficiently and cleanly," Mr. Sarnoff said.

"Everyone needs to get in a room" to find answers to the immediate issues, Mr. Motwani said. He agreed to chair a work group, on which Mr. Solowsky, board member Neisen Kadin, board member and Miami-Dade County Commissioner Bruno Barreiro and others will serve. They are to meet soon to list goals and set a timeline for improvements.