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John Brinckerhoff Jackson
A Sense of Place and a Sense of Time
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CITY OF MIAMI GARDENS

FUTURE TOWN CENTER AREA

DRAFT SUMMARY OF VISIONING PROCESS

JULY 2005

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Miami Gardens is currently facing a number of challenges not uncommon to many cities throughout South Florida. Pressures for increased development have caused the City to reevaluate its current path. Miami Gardens is now planning for an increase in future population by reviewing ways to accommodate new modes of transportation and by providing avenues for redevelopment.

Miami Gardens has begun exercising care and caution in the growth of the City. It is taking steps to be a desirable place to live, work and recreate by creating new attractive and planned developments. These developments will not only function as a vehicle for providing a better quality of life for its residents, but will also attract visitors from around the region by offering a variety of resources.

The City has proposed the Town Center, which encompasses approximately 130 acres, located around the intersection of NW 183rd Street and NW 27th Avenue. This location has been suggested by the City of Miami Gardens to house the Town Center since it is not only the geographic center of the City, but was once the “focal point” of commercial development within Miami Gardens. This area no longer contains many viable businesses and is not a pedestrian friendly environment. The conditions in the area highlight the need for the City to revitalize the Carol Mart shopping center, adopt guidelines for permitted uses and provide a safe pedestrian environment.

As a way to protect this area from further incompatible development and to study the potential for redevelopment, the City adopted a six-month moratorium beginning in April 2005. The purpose was to prevent any additional construction of buildings that do not reflect the design elements and land uses desired for the town center area. This allowed the City to study the most effective way to maintain local control and research alternatives to current development.

The City is currently in the process of creating a number of plans designed to provide a mixed-use, urban environment within Miami Gardens. First, the development of its Comprehensive Development Master Plan is a City-wide policy plan to provide long-range goals and objectives to guide future development. The consultant firm of Parsons Transportation Group is also working on the conceptual plan for the NW 183rd Street Transit Station as part of the North Corridor Metrorail Extension. Finally, In April 2005, the City retained Calvin, Giordano & Associates, to assist with the preparation of the Conceptual Master Plan for the town center area.

The purpose of this document is to provide a public record of the initial citizen involvement and input to seek further direction from the City Commission. It provides the vision the residents described for their town center as well as the process by which the citizens arrived at this vision. Input received was based on materials presented at the design charrettes.

PURPOSE OF CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLANNING

The City of Miami Gardens has a vision of creating a Town Center. To begin outlining this vision, the City must establish design and development goals—all viewed as pieces of an overall whole of the town center area—resulting in a functional and unique sense of place.

The City recognizes that a Conceptual Master Plan is needed to guide future development projects and capital improvements through design, land use and zoning regulations to meet the City's needs and desires for the Town Center area.

Once adopted, the Master Plan will be a blueprint for how growth and development should occur. It will guide decisions which will reinforce the creation of an urban, pedestrian friendly, transit supportive, and mixed-use town center with the desired character, sense of place, scale and identity for all the residents.

The first step in establishing the vision is to identify the actual elements (uses) of the design concept and connectors of the area that present the main opportunities and form development patterns. The area designated as the town center is anchored by the proposed Metro-rail stop, proposed to be located on the southwestern portion of 183rd Street and NW 27th Avenue.

The addition of transit makes this town center concept a true Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). TODs encourage pedestrian friendly environments and mixed-use structures with a unique sense of place. The proposed transit stop will provide residents with modal choices for work, recreation and shopping opportunities. Due to its close proximity to Pro Player Stadium and Calder Race Course and the transit stop, the proposed Town Center can become a destination center with retail, hotels, restaurants, cultural and entertainment services.

The public can play an essential role in shaping the direction of future development. Through the vision and guiding principles described by the residents of the City of Miami Gardens, the Conceptual Master Plan will provide elected officials with a roadmap in making development decisions within the Town Center area.

STUDY AREA

Two major established corridors bisect the town center's area. The intersection of NW 183rd St. and NW 27th Ave. is commercial in all four corners and contains one of the most widely utilized bus transfer centers in the area. A Job Corp Center is located to the west of the intersection. Two public schools, an elementary and middle, just barely lie within the half-mile radius. More than 11% of the station (half in just one parcel) is undeveloped at present. Also, the library is connected by a linear parkway to the town center.



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The City of Miami Gardens' Planning and Zoning Department along with Calvin, Giordano & Associates, convened two Design Charrettes to allow all residents to give ideas to the vision of the future Town Center area. In addition, the consultant developed a design questionnaire designed to give feedback on the future of town center (Refer to Appendix C).

The meetings were held from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM at the North Dade Regional Library in the Conference Room. Sixty people attended the first design charrette on June 27, 2005; and 94 people attended the second charrette on July 20, 2005. Participants heard a presentation of the conceptual master plan's scope of work, timeline, principles of transit-oriented design, and the purpose of the participants' role and involvement (See Appendix A).

The public was notified ten days prior to the meeting by U.S. mail. Property owners as set forth on the latest Miami-Dade County tax rolls-- within one-half mile of the town center boundary line-- were sent notices inviting them to the Town Center Design Charrettes (Appendix C). 1,200 notices were mailed, 100 emails were sent out and flyers were placed in various areas throughout the City.

Following the consultant's presentation, the residents were asked to formulate a vision for their town center by writing and/or drawing over the existing designated area. Before the visioning session began, some residents had questions, including how this area was chosen as the town center and what are examples of successful town centers designed around a major intersection. Examples were provided and the proposed transit station at the intersection was described as the main component for the location.

After the general presentation and large group discussion, the residents broke up into four small groups, they were asked to consider four main questions to guide the vision for their town center, including:

1. What should the town center look like in the future?
2. What kinds of places are most important in the town center?
3. What strategies should help fulfill the vision?
4. What development concepts and designs should be recommended for the town center area?

The groups had approximately 45 minutes to explore their vision and provide a conceptual design. The small groups reported the results of their discussions. The results of the meetings are summarized in the following pages.

Small Discussion Group 1-- The first group's proposal was for retail, including boutiques and outdoor cafes, occupying the first floor of six story buildings along the east side of NW 27th Avenue with condominiums in the upper floors. The east side would also include a Civic Center and City Hall located



adjacent to the existing fire and police stations. The City Hall would be the tallest building in the town center. The west side of NW 27th Avenue would include a community center and regional mall. Throughout the town center would be concrete pavers, crosswalks, and a bell tower as the focal point. In this vision, the mall is the main attraction to draw in residents and visitors alike, who may utilize the metro rail for transportation to and from Miami Gardens.

Small Discussion Group 2-- The second group wanted to create a "garden" theme throughout the town center with a large city park and pocket parks. With the addition of a transit stop, the group wanted to provide attractive and easily accessible walkways to and from the residences and the metro rail. A walkway was envisioned along the existing canal, from the apartment complex to the north to the metro rail stop. This walkway, which is located east of NW 27th Avenue, would also be

connected to new restaurants along the canal, an existing church, a hotel and a new residential building adjacent to the transit stop. A second main walkway would connect the police and fire stations with a pocket park, another hotel, specialty restaurants, a movie theater and a bowling alley. Also, they saw a great need for a quality bookstore and opportunities to include seniors in passive recreation.



This group was interested not only in providing a new town center, but also to build on the existing landscape. The west portion of the town center includes Job Corps. This provides job training to the residents of Miami Gardens, which this group saw as a vital component for the success of its young residents. Therefore, they wish



to provide walkways from the existing site into the town center. One of the walkways would enter into the city park and the second walkway could enter into a museum/performing arts center. The group also saw the importance of providing better vehicular access through cross streets and encouraged parking structures, rather than surface parking lots. Finally, this group, same as the first, wanted to build a city hall that would be the tallest structure in the town center.

Small Discussion Group 3- Instead of identifying exact locations of buildings, the third group gave ideas for their vision. The group provided a list of items they saw as essential for the success of the town center and the coordination with the metro rail stop.



They listed items of most importance including:

1. Stamped concrete walkways
2. The town center located within walking distance of the metro rail station
3. Luxury town homes
4. Job creation
5. Hotel/banquet hall, which would provide live entertainment and a performing arts center
6. Upscale restaurant
7. Landscaping along the intersection of NW 27th Avenue and 183rd Street.
8. Face lift for Carol Mart.



Small Discussion Group 4-- This group did not envision tearing down the existing strip center known as Carol Mart the way the previous groups indicated.

Instead, they wanted to keep the existing commercial uses and provide aesthetic changes only. If the Carol Mart was to be torn down, this group wanted it replaced with an outlet center. The similar theme of a city hall, parks and open space area were described for the town center. Walkways were also important to the group. They saw the town center as the focal point of the City, where people could gather, meet, recreate, work and utilize the future transit.



The final group repeated many of the themes present in the other groups, including landscaping, public art, walkways, performing arts center and a cultural center.



Another theme introduced in this presentation was to encourage aesthetics to be culturally aware. The architecture should reflect the African American heritage of many of its residents by utilizing the Miami Modern (MIMO) architectural guidelines. Culture should be a defining element in town center with an emphasis on arts and music. This group also discussed the need for a town center that was an example of Miami Gardens with lush landscaping. The town center should function during the day with offices and residences, but also be an after hours destination with restaurants, events, and activities.

July 20, 2005
North Dade Regional Library

Ninety-five people attended the second design workshop held at the Regional Northwest Library. Most attendees were merchants who have businesses at the Carol Mart Shopping Center. The consultant briefly reviewed the previous PowerPoint version presented at the first meeting on June 27, followed by a presentation which covered the following points:



- ◇ Examples of transit oriented development and town centers.
- ◇ Urban design applications, including integration of amenities and public spaces, pedestrian scale, building height, densities, and architectural elements.

The full presentation is included in the Appendix B. In general, this forum believed it was of the most importance for the conceptual master plan to serve as a framework for any future development within the town

center area. The attendees generally favored allowing a mix of uses in an urban setting necessary to complement the transit station, although they also understood the

need to encourage funding for capital improvements in and around the shopping center. There was general support for the proposed Metrorail transit facility and an integrated development that is pedestrian friendly with a high quality urban design component.



Participants discussed the following questions in a large group setting:

1. What is the timeline for ground breaking of future development?
2. Look at funding sources. Will there be a Performing Arts Center?
3. Work with the residents and business community to help support the master plan. Continue process of communication, collaboration and consensus building.
4. Understand where the City is if current development trends continue.
5. Continue to contribute ideas for how the desired vision of town center can be achieved.
6. How will the proposed town center affect taxes?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In conclusion the attendees at the design charrettes were unified in their commitment to the principles listed below. These goals should serve as a framework for all the decisions and actions the City takes regarding any future development in the town center area. The conceptual master plan would:

- ◇ Encourage urban development that is transit oriented, pedestrian friendly and promotes urban design principles.
 - ◇ Create a compact and integrated mix of land uses, including residential, commercial (retail, restaurant, specialty goods and service oriented), hotel, entertainment, and professional office, as well as governmental/civic uses, cultural activities and community services.
 - ◇ Link proposed transit facilities with the rest of the town center in close proximity to one another.
 - ◇ *Master Plan* should serve as a framework for the proposed 183rd transit metro-rail station.
 - ◇ Integrate pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular circulation with well-managed structural parking that provides for auto access, but does not discourage the pedestrian environment.
 - ◇ Promote valuable cultural, environmental and architectural resources.
 - ◇ Build amenity and quality into public environments (plazas, court yards, and open space).
- ◇ Provide effective pedestrian connections between established and proposed uses (library, residential neighborhoods, proposed transit station, and town center).

TIMELINE

June-July	Start-up and Visioning Process
September	Present Vision and Guiding Principles to City Council
September	Identify Opportunities and Constraints
October	Present Draft Conceptual Master Plan
November	Present Draft Design and Development Guidelines And Draft Land Use and Zoning Ordinance
Dec./January	Begin City Adoption Process
2006	Continue Implementation

THE NEXT STEP

Based upon the initial input from residents at the open public charrettes, the consultant, with the assistance from the City staff, will evaluate existing conditions (opportunities and constraints), then refine and draft a conceptual land use plan and development regulations to implement the town center envisioned by the community.



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