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# South Beach, Coconut Grove... *Downtown Kendall?!!?*

A Poster Child for Suburbia Looks to Transform Itself  
Into Miami's Next Hip Village

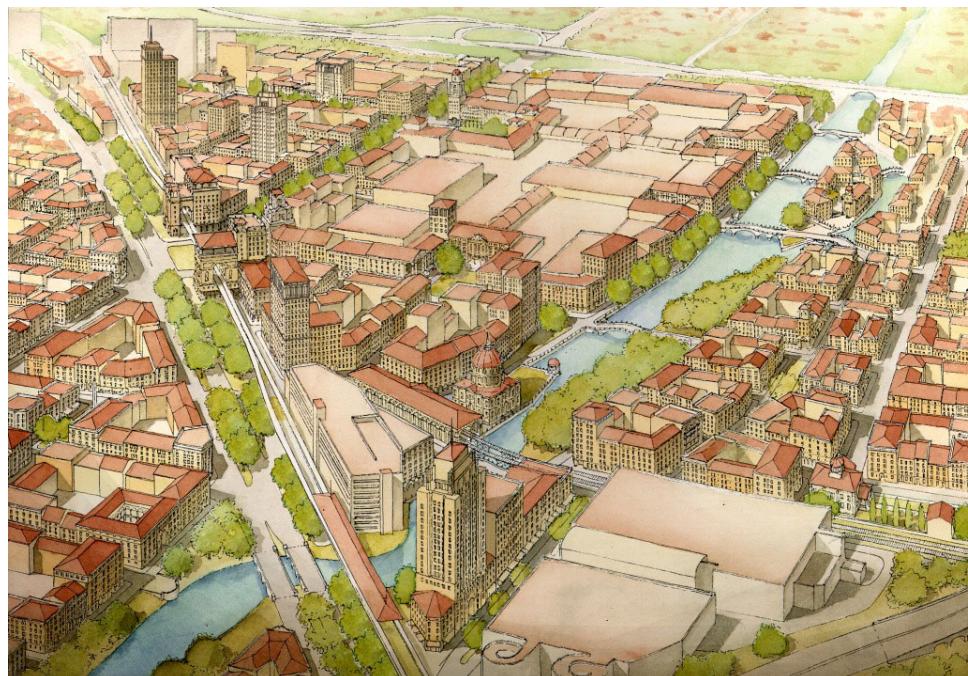
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	Page 2
HISTORY of Urban Development	Page 3
EVOLUTION of the Downtown	Page 8
PLANNING, Politics & Promotion	Page 12
VISION, Master Plan & Code	Page 14
DEVELOPMENT of an Urban Village	Page 17
IMPACTS to Urban Services	Page 20
EVALUATION of the Planning Process	Page 28
CONCLUSION	Page 30
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #000;"/>	
REFERENCES	Appendix 1
MAPS	Appendix 2
VISIONING PICTURES	Appendix 3
DEVELOPMENT MAPS / PICTURES	Appendix 4
REGULATING PLANS	Appendix 5
DISTRICT CODE	Appendix 6
MASTER PLAN	Appendix 7

## INTRODUCTION

*The downtown is more than just another shopping area – it presents the community’s image that significantly impacts visitors, investors and local citizens*

A downtown, a downtown, my kingdom for a downtown! It seems everyone these days wants their own downtown – a community center, a focal point, a bustling shopping district, a bubbling melting pot. Lately, even communities *with* a downtown, such as Greater Miami, are not content with just one and are working towards creating a second, third, or more *additional* downtowns. Such is the case with Downtown Kendall... a poster child for suburbia that is looking to transform itself into Miami's next hip village. Move over South Beach, adios Coconut Grove, see ya' later Coral Gables! If planners with Miami-Dade County have their way, the Argentine tourists, Brickelluppies, and rapper wanna-bees that regularly flock to Miami's tourist traps will be sipping their cafecitos, cosmopolitans and malt liquors in the ultra-chic boulevards lining Downtown Kendall.

In all seriousness, the New Urbanism movement, which preaches the benefits of downtown living, is behind a fascinating experiment in Downtown Kendall. The experiment's hypothesis is that an urban design focused on the pedestrian versus the automobile can revitalize and enliven the soulless suburban communities of yesteryear. This paper seeks to test that hypothesis, analyzing and evaluating the New Urbanist notion using Downtown Kendall as a case study. We begin with an examination of the history of urban development and an exploration of the evolution and characteristics of “the downtown.” The Downtown Kendall project itself is then studied -- with a focus on

its planning process, ensuing development, and impacts to urban services -- and an evaluation performed.

## HISTORY *of Urban Development*

*The history of planning in the United States is largely one of response to urbanization and the problems it has brought. (Levy, 1994)*

Every urban planning class begins with the same lecture: the history of urban development. History must be recalled so that a planner can learn from the past. The past is important because it shows mistakes and successes alike. The history of urban development is based on the population increases through the past century. America's cities saw the most dramatic changes because of these population increases. As more people moved to these urban areas, more development was created to house the population as well as to supply employment. While the densities rose, development continued.

Transportation played a large role in the high population concentrations of cities as well. In the beginning of the nineteenth century it was less expensive to travel by water than by land. This increased the popularity of urban areas by the ocean or on rivers. These urban areas were ideal locations for businesses because of the efficiency for the transportation of goods (Levy, 1994). Saving time through logistics could yield a much greater profit. As businesses transported themselves towards the water, the working population found themselves without employment. They found it necessary for their own self worth to move to these urban areas and as close to their work places as possible.

At this time most of the labor force in large cities did not have a personal transportation vehicle such as a horse or buggy. If they wanted to work they had no other

choice then to live within walking distance of their employers facility. This is how residential densities began to become equivalent to industrial and commercial areas in many places (Levy, 1994). Workers did not have to walk over a mile to get to work each day. This should have been an ideal setting, however then came the rail line.

Once railroads became a second mode of cheap transportation for freight and other sorts of goods, industrial businesses were torn in location between water and tracks (Levy, 1994). Since commercial and residential communities followed industry in those days everyone was scraping for land. There was only a limited supply of it that was located both near water and railroad lines. The value of this land increased tremendously and builders were forced to create structures on the smallest plot of land possible (Levy, 1994). People were living and working in such crowded circumstances that getting elbowed was their last concern. Residential apartment buildings were housed with an overload of tenants. Not only were an excessive amount of tenants sharing a room, but they were in neglect of any sanitary facilities (Levy, 1994). This type of living began to shape urban centers into unattractive places of filth. Because of these conditions, natural decreases in population occurred (Levy, 1994). These were not areas that were visited by the wealthy or even the upper middle class. The buildings that contained the factories where these people worked were just as bad. At the time they were run by a series of pulleys and belts that received their power from a steam engine (Levy, 1994). This power could not travel far and also condemned close working quarters.

Eventually society realized that this type of working and living atmosphere could not be a standard. This brought on the sanitary reform in 1840 when one of the most revolutionary inventions for cleaner sanitary conditions was created- the water carriage

sewer (Levy, 1994). The technique allowed sewage to be carried off far away from the living areas of the city. The sewage system required a knowledge of the cities topography since the system relied on velocity of flow. Entire cities had to be mapped out to create these types of sewer systems (Levy, 1994). In a sense it may have been where “planning” evolved from. Many European cities were already planning for new sanitary and affordable housing. Unfortunately the United States did not take this opportunity and refused to have the government play a role in the ownership. At the time they believed that the market should be the only influence in the building of housing. Something that was created in the United States to help improve living standards was the National League of Improvement Association (Levy, 1994). This organization helped lobby for paved streets, public bathrooms, and providing public parks in urban areas. The association may have begun the movement towards public concern (Levy, 1994).

After the civil war ended there seemed to be a shift in thinking. There was more money going towards the cities urban centers and builders had the resources to increase quality. It became possible to create buildings that towered over any others because of new technology like elevators and steel frame construction (Levy, 1994). Another result of the civil war was the increase in manufacturers. It can be proven that by the end of the war manufacturers made a great profit. They had been contracted by the government to create material for two armies in the same country. In the post war period, the after shock can be seen as manufactures began to move toward urban centers at a very fast pace (Levy, 1994).

By the end of the 1800’s technology had brought new modes of transportation for individuals. The electric streetcar and the automobile had encouraged the decentralization

movement as well. In most cities residential areas nearly doubled in size (Levy, 1994). People realized that they no longer had to bother with the life threatening living conditions from before. For a small payment they could be whisked away on a streetcar and brought to their clean and friendly abode. Manufacturers began to see this as well and followed the population outward. Soon enough the populations of urban centers were decreasing faster than suburbs were increasing (Levy, 1994). Other influences on the decentralization movement were discoveries such as the telephone. The updated versions allowed people to conduct business without meeting face to face. Highways were also in the process of being built so that the wealthy could take vacations from the cities, however they better served as ways to get into the city for suburban residents.

Eventually things like art and entertainment began to draw people back into the urban centers. Playhouses and museums were hard to find in the suburbs. Another advancement that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century was the municipal art movement (Levy, 1994). This was a program that allowed cities to become concerned with their cultural charisma. It even reached out towards cities aesthetic interests. Cities were beginning to be thought of as places that should have beauty. This began to influence urban development by its architectural intrigues. Architects wanted their structures to have an effect on how a city looked, not just how many people it could house. Results from this movement can be seen today in structures throughout cities like squares, statues, fountains and other creative structures (Levy, 1994).

The municipal art movement also encouraged the next large step in cities and their focal points. This was the city beautification movement. It began with the hope of drawing the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Urban designers were in dire need of creating

something in their cities that made them stand out compared to the others in competition. They used municipal art, civic improvement, and landscape design as their tools (Levy, 1994). The movement was different because it was of a larger scale. Architects and planners were changing entire areas of the city, such as downtowns, not just fountains and arches.

Soon after the city beautiful movement an example was set in the winning city, Chicago. This example was said to be the start of a whole new era in designing cities. One of the main reasons for this is because for the first time, the residents of Chicago were included in the decision making of the master plan by creating a planning commission to carry out the plan (Levy, 1994). One of the larger issues of the plan allowed the public to have control over private land. The public was allowed to vote on how private land was developed. This had quite an impact on the way areas were developed where the public spent most of their time, focal points such as city centers. Because these areas were so important to the public they felt that they should have a right to determine how high buildings could be and what kind of zoning was to be allowed

This created the need for a more efficient zoning code. The planning commissions in cities were so aggressive on making land use decisions that zoning was becoming more of a sport than a practice (Levy, 1994). Around the early nineteen hundreds owning an automobile was becoming less of a rarity. Traffic was becoming an issue in highly developed areas. One way to keep this congestion out of “my back yard” was zoning. If an area were to be zoned only commercial, there would be no residents to complain about the traffic. Unfortunately this type of zoning pushed people out of commercial areas like downtown and other focal points of cities and suburbs. They could come there to shop

but not to live. There were very few areas left for multi-use development. This forced people into driving to their “commercially zoned area”. Today we can still see the way that these sorts of decisions have affected the way city centers look today. Most are not zoned for multiple use development.

## EVOLUTION *of the Downtown*

*Downtowns have faced many challenges during their evolution over the past few hundred years. Downtowns' roles as community centers have been challenged continually*

As we look through out the history of urban development we can see the patterns that took place and how they influenced the shapes of the world today. One thing that can be established is that development is continuously changing. Almost everything goes through these types of changes in the world. It is part of the evolutionary process that downtowns and focal points have always been a part of. Looking at the way downtowns have evolved in the past to the present can also help create a better development plan for today.

In the Early Commercial Periods of downtowns in the pre-nineteenth century we see that these focal points were really created because of early settlers who were doing business out of their own homes (Ontario, 11/03). New to these communities, these early residents did not have the funds to create a place of business and a place of shelter; they had to choose one. If the business were successful a movement of creating a business in their household would be established. If the household was on different levels the entire first floor would be converted into the storefront; eventually the streets these houses were on would all become first level storefronts (Ontario, 11/03).

Later evolution takes a second push into the Real Commercial Period which took place mostly through out the mid to late nineteenth century. This is when most of the town center turned into strictly places of business. There were some scattered factories through out. Factory workers for the most part still lived in the areas but all the former store owners had now moved away. Since there were to be only stores, factories and offices throughout the downtowns, larger and more affordable buildings were needed with "...larger windows, awnings, and customized shelving (Ontario, 11/03)."

We have now come upon the era of technology, the Consumerism and Competitiveness Period which began around the last decade of the eighteen hundreds and ended before World War II (Ontario, 11/03). These were also the years when the birth of the department store fell upon downtowns (Ontario, 11/03). These stores were a threat to the entire existing business bureau. Department stores incorporated elevators and escalators, which allowed them to have as many stories as they could afford (Ontario, 11/03). Here customers would find they had to go to one place to find all of their needs. Another large impact of this period was the increase in automobile drivers through out downtowns, as mentioned earlier. Evidence proclaims that merchants decided larger advertisement and store signs would be appropriate since people were passing by at a quicker pace (Ontario, 11/03).

Moving on to more memorable times such as the Post War Expansion Period that lasted about until 1970, it is easier for planners and other professionals to recall the important influences of this time since most people who lived then are still with us today. This is a time when soldiers were coming back from all over the world to their lives and their families; this also is a time when many babies were born. Because of new home

ownership mortgages, people spending money were generally living in the suburbs. They were not driving downtown to shop, they were shopping in the suburbs as well – enter strip mall. These shopping centers typically took up a lot of space because they were one level and had all the parking you could imagine. As downtowns tried to compete with these shopping malls, they found themselves encouraging small retain chains. They wanted to give the suburbanites the same comfortable atmosphere as the homogeneous stores did near their home; this also meant more big signs and more advertisements (Ontario, 11/03). At this time all residential and most industrial uses became obsolete leaving many areas for infill in the downtowns. This image of neglect gave the downtown a depressing look that turned visitors away for good (Ontario, 11/03).

These shopping malls had to digress as well, people can only stay occupied for so long. The next big thing had to be an inside shopping mall with twice as many stores. This brings the downtown to an all time low in the Malling Period, which lasted about twenty years, until the early nineties (Ontario, 11/03). Malls actually began to create an entire substitution for the downtown. In many towns and cities they became the focal point or new urban center. They supplied recreation, cultural entertainment, and even fine dining which took away any significance that a downtown might of still had (Ontario, 11/03). Downtown structures seemed to only be good for service type functions and storefronts continued to appear empty (Ontario, 11/03). This is when local governments felt that they finally had to step in. They realized that the deterioration of the downtown was devaluing their municipality. Planners were called in to revitalize.

Today we still see the impacts of the downtowns evolutionary importance. While planners are fighting their way through the present day Globalization Period, we see how

much the need for downtowns and urban centers have changed thanks to certain government officials. Things that are popular in downtowns today are technology-based entities, which have had a large influence from the internet (Ontario, 11/03). People are coming back to the downtown areas but not out of loyalty like the old days. They are there to bargain hunt and to find “specialty products” that may not be found in other places, such as shopping malls. However the chains still exist almost as anchors in most new urban downtowns. Places like The Gap and Pottery Barn are sure to be the first to sign leases in these revitalized urban centers (Ontario, 11/03). The major change in these focal points today is that the destination of “downtown” is beginning to matter. People don’t go to comparison shop, they go because they want to feel like they are in a place that has individualism, where things are happening like cultural events, and specialty restaurants. Some like to be there for a few hours, and some are planning on moving there.

In most examples you will see that the downtown has been neglected by its neighboring communities. This is most likely happening because of the resident’s need for specific types of shopping areas. Resident’s are used to going to a strip mall where they can make all their purchases in one trip. Although shops are normally close together in a downtown, there still may not be the same variety. A way to solve a problem like this is to promote a downtown for it’s new image (Tyler, 1998). This can be done in several ways. In this example creating an image that has variety of merchants could be a start. If there is a variety of merchants there will be competition. Consumers enjoy competition because it offers them comparison pricing. Marketing and economics is key to a successful downtown. As Terlep reminds planners, “everyone agrees marketing is

important, but not on how to do it." Smart consumers want good deals and these are the people that are needed in a new downtown- people who are spending money.

## PLANNING *Politics & Promotion*

*It's one of those "everyone agrees marketing is important, but not on how to do it" kind of discussions. (Terlep, 2/97)*

Municipalities take into consideration many different routes towards spurring marketing techniques. Most start out by taking on an entire staff that works strictly for the marketing profession. These employees are hired to do nothing else but monitor all advertisement and other promotion (Terlep, 2/97). Other urban centers choose to hire only one consultant who has experience in the field, which can be more affordable. It obviously depends on the size of the project, the amount of people, and the type of people who need to be exposed.

There are still downtown projects that choose to simply make a connection with their Business District Merchant Association or the Chamber of Commerce (Terlep, 2/97). Both these organizations can be extremely helpful and their cooperation could be useful in the long run. A great way to raise money for marketing is through the existing taxpayers. Since the value of local business will only rise with a downtown project, it is in their benefit to invest. The taxing can help pay for advertisement or to pay the extra marketing staff (Terlep, 2/97).

Although these folks will be there to make purchases, there still must be some incentive for them to come downtown to shop instead of the strip mall. The next step here is to create a character in the downtown area. If the area is different than anywhere else,

people will have a reason to come there instead of other places of commerce. Fortunately downtowns can do this, unlike strip malls. There is character in every structure of a downtown and in every special event that occurs in the urban center as well. This is what brings the people to the downtown, the promotion of exciting and unique atmospheres.

One unique characteristic of a new downtown is that there is a mixed package of old and new. When people are in a downtown they would like to feel that they are in a place with history. This is why it is important to keep some of the past in mind while building in the present. In a revitalized downtown planner's do a great job of keeping a good portion of the existing businesses (Tyler, 1998). That is because these businesses had originally helped mold the area; their influence guided the area into the type of district it would be, in this case a city center. Existing businesses also have been noted for their influence on the local economy. The University of Eastern Michigan concluded that "existing businesses contribute more to the local economy than new businesses of equal size... they are already established in the community, and typically most employees live in the local area, and locally owned businesses tend to spend their profits locally."

Attracting new businesses to a new downtown can be a difficult decision. Most of the time they are not locally owned. This causes an influx in lost profits for the downtown because money is not being spent locally. Employees that are hired for these new businesses may also be a threat because they are not from the area. A great example of this situation can be seen in West Palm Beaches own City Place. There are very few storefronts in the development that are not part of a large corporate chain. The management of these stores are not making purchases in the vicinity of City Place. The employees of the stores cannot afford to live in the area and therefore cannot make these

types of purchases either. However, many new businesses prefer to be in a place like downtown because it is a wise choice for their own economic future. Planner's still promote their downtown to new businesses because they tend to have the initial pull towards new consumers as well. It is also a great way to increase competition, as mentioned earlier, between new and old establishments (Tyler, 1998).

**VISION**  
*Master Plan & Code*

*Over the next 40 years, planners hope to pack Kendall with people, creating a European-flavored town center with romantic canal-side walkways, tree-lined boulevards, trolleys, colonnaded sidewalks, and stylish condominiums and apartment houses. (Carey, 8/99)*

The call for a return to the town centers and downtowns of the past has certainly been heard throughout the nation, but what about here in South Florida, and particularly Miami-Dade County? After all, the University of Miami School of Architecture and its protégés are at the very center of the New Urbanism movement, led especially by the very vocal Andres Duany, U.M. Dean of Architecture Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and the design firm of Dover Kohl & Partners. Oddly enough, however, the New Urbanists of Miami took a while to focus their New Urbanist attentions *on* Miami. “They were like prophets without honor in their own house. A group of South Florida architects and town planners, they gained respect across America for setting the pace in designing more attractive, humane, sustainable American communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. But they had little success in South Florida – until now” (Pierce, 12/00).

The “until now” refers, of course, to Downtown Kendall. Long a poster child for typical piecemeal suburban development, Kendall has chugged along over the years as an economically successful, but unwelcoming community. “For while the area has all the

making of a successful downtown – scores of prospering stores, office buildings, a hotel, even two Metrorail stations – it's jumbled together into a 60's-style agglomeration that, while big on parking lots and wide lanes, is short on amenity.” (Whoriskey, 7/98). Dadeland Mall in particular marks Kendall as a prime retail destination -- the mall is said to be the most economically successful in the nation -- but as New Urbanists like to say, Kendall truly lacked a comforting *sense of place*. Its gray and soulless character pained even the area’s chamber of commerce, ChamberSouth, which should have been quite content with the economic success of the community. As ChamberSouth’s president succinctly put it, “Many communities have a downtown, a center. But if we were going to have a fireworks display in Kendall or a parade – where would they go?” (Whoriskey, 7/98). Where would they go, indeed...

In fact, it was ChamberSouth, not the New Urbanist ideologues, government bureaucrats, politicians, or citizen activists, that began the process of creating a true sense of place in Kendall, a wonderful example of economic interests leading the way to community revival. Along the way, the chamber eventually picked up the support of those New Urbanists, bureaucrats, politicians and citizen activists, and a comprehensive visioning, planning and redevelopment process was born. Having hired the New Urbanist firms to lead the process, and the county, South Florida Regional Planning Council (SFRPC) and state to finance it, the process would naturally and necessarily take on a very public/community-oriented approach. The process chosen to carry it out was the charrette; the idea: “to get the citizenry involved in these new community designs... to bring people back into the planning of their communities... to democratize development.” (Pierce, 12/00).

Picture Paris, London, Melbourne, Australia – three of the world’s great urban centers. Now, close your eyes and imagine downtown Kendall along those lines: high density office and residential mixes, light-rail transit, maybe even bridges over busy intersections. With the help of Kendall residents, that’s exactly what urban designers Dover Kohl & Partners and Duany Plater-Zyberk would like to see (Rabin, 6/11/98)

Partially as a result of enticing press articles like the one above, the charrette for Downtown Kendall was a well-attended affair, and well-balanced among the civic, non-profit, public and private stakeholders with interest in the area. Case studies of other communities were heard, planning jargon tossed about, and lively discussions had. The general feeling of the citizenry was captured in a comment directed at a Dadeland Mall representative: “You think this road is a driveway to your mall. We think it’s the community’s living room. We want it built the way we envision” (Pierce, 12/00). At the end of the day, well, week really, participants were amazed when, at looking over each other’s drawings and recommendations, they found a surprising amount of agreement across the various stakeholder groups.

The final vision looked like something out of a New Urbanism 101 textbook, and recommended 8 overriding concepts: to (1) make pedestrians the number one priority; (2) put the motorcar in its place through road, parking and traffic altering design; (3) improve pedestrian corridors; (4) aggregate open space for squares and plazas; (5) extend and promote the use of transit; (6) attack visual blight; (7) reform the local land development rules to guide New Urbanist development; and (8) stay organized. (Downtown Kendall Master Plan, ‘98). Key aspects of the plan include the creation of key pedestrian corridors (i.e., Kendall Blvd., Dadeland Blvd., Snapper Creek Promenade...), a balanced mix of uses, urban building design (street frontage, arcades, ground-floor retail...),

scattered mini-parks and town-squares, street side and hidden parking, generous landscaping, and the utilization of the Snapper Creek Canal as a signature waterfront.

Once the Master Plan was finalized, the original partners – ChamberSouth, Miami-Dade County, Duany Plater-Zyberk and Dover Kohl & Partners – set out to develop a new development code that would turn the Plan's vision into reality. The result was a comprehensive code, 53 pages in all, entitled the Downtown Kendall Urban Center District, complete with land-use, building and transportation regulations, and supporting maps, tables and drawings. Adopted as an ordinance of Miami-Dade County on December 16, 1999, the plan immediately set off a frenzy of development, speculation, and even some panic. Over a year in the making, the Downtown Kendall Plan was Miami-Dade's first foray into New Urbanism, and its success would help to spur a slew of similar redevelopment projects throughout unincorporated Dade – i.e., Naranja, Leisure City, North-Central, Model City – and other municipalities – i.e., Miami (Overtown, Model City, Biscayne Blvd.), Coral Gables, Miami Shores, El Portal, and North Miami Beach. Unbelievably, Kendall, long the poster child for soulless sprawl, had become the poster child for New Urbanism.

## DEVELOPMENT *of an Urban Village*

*The future of multifamily development lies in the urban qualities – convenience, access to daily needs, access to mass transit. People are tired of getting into their cars and driving for an hour to and from work. (Villano, 10/03)*

In many places of the United States, the passage of a new master plan and code might not have any foreseeable impact for years, as development trickles in at glacier pace. In development-happy South Florida, however, a wave of activity can come

crashing into the County application hopper as quickly as one can say *Tsunami!* A deluge or flood might be a better metaphor for the amazing development frenzy that followed the passage of the Downtown Kendall plan. Everyone, it seems, was caught by surprise. As Maria Crowley, Chief of Community Planning, recalls, “the response from developers was beyond what anyone, even the most optimistic of us, had imagined. Frankly, it has been a bit overwhelming.” (Crowley, 11/5). Indeed, no less than 6 major developments have been proposed for the immediate study area, and a variety of others proposed not too far away. The following breakdown outlines the largest developments:

1. The Metropolis - two 25-story condominium towers with more than 400 apartments, being built by Terra-Adi International on South Dade Boulevard;
2. Dadeland Park Village – 25-story twin towers with 364 apartments being built by Premier Urban Properties at Southwest 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 86<sup>th</sup> Street;
3. The Colonnade – four 10-story towers with more than 500 condominium units being developed by Lennar on the bank of the Snapper Creek Canal behind Dadeland Mall;
4. A 25 story rental tower with 400 apartments and 40,000 square feet of retail space being built by Fairfield Dadeland Limited Partnership at North Kendall Drive and Dadeland Boulevard;
5. A 15-story tower with 116 rental apartments to be built by The Green Companies at North Transit Drive and 70<sup>th</sup> Avenue plus two 17-story office buildings;
6. A short distance away, just one block south of Kendall Drive at 90<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 94<sup>th</sup> Street and almost next door to Baptist Hospital, will be The Grande, an 8-story building of 71 condos that sold out the day the sales center opened;
7. And, just a few blocks south of the Kendall downtown district, The Reserve, a 4-story development of townhouses at Southwest 75<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 102<sup>nd</sup> Street in the Village of Pinecrest. (Kelly, 11/02)

The largest development, however, and the one that most adheres to the letter and *spirit* of the Master Plan, is Downtown Dadeland, a 7.5 acre, urban village composed of

seven 7-story buildings, a bit over 400 condominiums, and a mixture of restaurants, shopping and cafes lining the sidewalks. Located at the former Williamson Cadillac site on North Kendall Drive, the development will face its antithesis, Dadeland Mall, on the other side of the street. Unlike the mall, Downtown Dadeland will be criss-crossed by a series of new, pedestrian friendly roads, with brick-paved sidewalks, street side and underground parking, and a canopy of trees and other landscaping. County planners are ecstatic about the project: “The whole idea of Downtown Kendall is it really creates an urban environment and one which is really pedestrian-focused,” said Lee Rawlinson assistant planning director for the County [(since retired)]. “The project will be the first example in Dade County of this kind of urban development” (Levy, 11/29). Additional accounts articulate the uniqueness of the project:

Visions of a downtown Kendall put forth at a 1998 charrette are starting to take shape as developers plan a seven-building, residential-retail complex across from Dadeland Mall, which is ready to begin renovations. Observers of the area say the [7.5 acre project] is the first component in an urban planning process that could transform the parking lot-laden area off Kendall Drive into an elegant 24-hour community. (Levy, 11/01)

Perhaps the most unusual of the new developments is Downtown Dadeland which, while into a high-rise, is a radical departure in design and environment. [The developers] say the village concept is the development is a spectacular example of the New Urbanism.” (Kelly, 11/02)

One could point to many factors in fostering this frenzy of development activity -- amazingly low interest rates; a shift in investment portfolios from stocks to real estate; the scarcity of open, developable land; a growing desire for living closer to work... -- but one cannot dismiss the Master Plan as the defining factor. After all, developers could have built in the area before its passage – it had been a Regional Activity Center for quite some time -- but largely did not, at least not any residential development. The following accounts further describe the development:

While introduction of high-rises and other multi-family buildings was envisioned as part of the mixed-use zoning in the county's plan, the magnitude of development and the strong demand for the condo units indicate the area has been a sleeping giant. (Kelly, 11/02)

Developers say they are an eclectic mix of buyers. They range from young people who work downtown and in the Dadeland area, to young married couples, to Latin American and Europeans buying a stop-off place, to local residents tired of maintaining private homes and looking for a secure place to live. (Kelly, 11/02)

Developers of the various projects describe their pricing as "affordable luxury." Prices start in the mid \$100,000s and go up to \$500,00. But in several developments, the least expensive units are long sold. (Kelly, 11/02)

This initial flurry of development seems to have slowed over the past year, a welcoming relief to stressed-out county planners. According to planner Gilbert Blanco, who oversees the development approval process for the district, "the initial deluge of applications has all but stopped recently due to escalating land prices. Developers are finding the land too expensive to make building to the new code profitable. That said, we are way ahead of where we thought we'd be when this thing was put together, so you won't hear too many complaints from our side. In any case, we have faith that market forces will eventually set things right" (Blanco, 11/5). It's also possible that other, more conservative developers are holding off to see how the new developments will fair, with their success likely leading to a new round of intense development in the future.

### IMPACTS to Urban Services

*Critics say the plan's high densities create a false hope, attracting thousands to an area already burdened by crowded schools and inadequate resources. Downtown Kendall, they say, is about 40 years too late. (Villano, 10/03)*

While praised by many, the Master Plan and its resulting development have also earned the scourge of others, including some residents, commuters, and retailers. Critics point to a variety of issues that were inadequately addressed or completely overlooked.

“As the pace of development seems to outrace planning efforts, many residents worry about overdevelopment, traffic congestion and the potential strain on already thin public services” (Viglucci, 4/03). Some residents are fretting that the new construction will flood already congested streets and tax already overcrowded schools: “I think it’s too much,” area resident Martha Salazar said. “The traffic is already too much, and this is going to bring even more people into the area. I don’t see much good in it all” (Fordyce, 6/25). Below, impacts to schools, traffic, water & sewer, affordable housing, and retail are explored in greater detail.

## SCHOOLS

No issue, with the possible exception of traffic, seems to pique the public ire as much as the overcrowding of schools. As evidenced by the recent passage of an amendment to the State’s constitution to limit class size, citizens have long complained of the impacts to schools caused by an imbalance between residential development and school construction. Every school in the County, it seems, is filled beyond its means, and the Kendall area is no exception. “School district officials are scrambling to figure out what to do with the new students who will flow into the system, about 600 when all of the projects are done. ‘As it is, those schools are overcrowded,’ said Fernando Albuerne, interim administrative director for the school system. ‘We need to build for the new kids as well as the current students’” (Fordyce, 6/03).

The problem is that, as is the case in many other redevelopment efforts, there was a huge lack of communication between the school system, and the planners and developers. So much so, that the schools official in charge of such planning had to hear about the Master Plan through the media: “The district is building to try to head off the

increased demand, but [school district official Fernando] Albuerne says no specific plans were made for Downtown Kendall. He said he found out about all of the developments by reading a Herald article” (Fordyce, 6/03). The District was not clued into the new development plans because there was no *requirement* to contact them: “Because the land being built on was already zoned for condominiums, developers did not have to sit down with the school system to discuss the impact of their construction on nearby schools” (Fordyce, 6/25).

Having finally communicated with the appropriate County planners after the fact, the school district came to the conclusion that the plan would pose a potential impact of 600 additional students spread out over the Kenwood K-8 Center, Ludlum Elementary, South Miami Middle and South Miami High schools. The 600-figure, however, is the result of a standard formula that doesn’t distinguish between various types of development and the type of occupants they are likely to attract. A County planner expresses his doubts about the figure: “Frankly, neither we nor the School Board think that these developments will result in an overwhelming number of new students, given the type of people they are attracting – empty nesters, childless young couples, and foreign investors” (Blanco, 11/5). Required by law to plan for the 600-figure, however, plans are being made to accommodate them: “Albuerne said the school system is planning to deal with the increase of students – and that a five-year plan is also in the works to continue dealing with student growth. Albuerne also told the council that the possibility of two new charter schools might help absorb some new students” (Fernandez, 7/03).

## **TRAFFIC**

As controversial as school impacts may be, however, the most substantial impact of redevelopment is often to the automobile, especially in terms of traffic congestion, and parking. Certainly, Kendall is no exception. “In the short term at least, contends lawyer and activist Tucker Gibbs, who represents neighborhood groups fighting development, Miami is unprepared to absorb the traffic and other effects of construction already underway” (Viglucci, 4/03). An irate citizen expressed a similar sentiment at a neighborhood meeting: “One of the components originally made when this whole thing got started was that we’re not going to need this many parking spaces for residents because they’re going to have one car and they’re going to get on the train to go downtown,” said resident Marcia Finkel. “That’s not reality, and that’s my concern” (Fernandez, 7/03).

The plan’s supporters don’t completely disagree -- in fact they freely admit that the plan *will* impose negative impacts on traffic and parking – but they contend that, on balance, the plan is worth it. Supporters also point to the myriad of alternative transportation options that will result from implementation of the Master Plan as a sort of mitigating counterweight to the negative impacts to the auto. Those alternative transportation options include major improvements to Kendall’s transit infrastructure and service, which already features 2 Metrorail stations and comprehensive bus service. No more than just dreams when they were conceived, the improvements – including a light-rail line along Kendall Drive – have a good chance of becoming reality due to passage of the County’s  $\frac{1}{2}$  penny dedicated sales tax for transit in 2002. In addition to, and complementing transit, are the major improvements to pedestrian transportation. In fact,

one can argue that the pedestrian forms the heart of the New Urbanist design principles adopted in the Kendall plan. Buildings that front the street, arcades, shade trees, wide, brick-paved sidewalks, and transit are all designed to promote the use of feet over tires in getting from one place to another.

For those who continue to depend on the automobile, the Plan proposes major improvements for them as well, focusing especially on connectivity and circulation. As county planner Lee Rawlinson stated to a critic, “we’re trying to make it work. The last thing we want is a plan that’s developing out that’s so bottlenecked with traffic, congestion and no parking that it begins to kill itself” (Fernandez, 7/03). A planner with the regional planning council agrees, giving the county an A for its efforts: “In terms of traffic impacts, I believe that the County really has addressed that issue as well as it could. The Master Plan puts a lot of thought into traffic circulation, connectivity, and the relationship between land-use and transportation. The fact that there are two Metrorail stations there already are what makes this plan feasible in the first place” (Dahlstrom, 10/23).

## **WATER & SEWER**

After schools and traffic, there appear to be no overly serious adverse impacts on the miscellaneous infrastructure of the area. Clearly, demand will increase for urban services such as solid waste, utility lines, water and sewer, but thanks to the growth management laws regarding concurrency, these impacts are adequately mitigated by the developers that cause them. The fact that the Master Plan area had already been designated a Regional Activity Center for many years enabled service providers to plan ahead for the oncoming development. For instance, according to a county planner: “Water and sewer

impacts were studied as part of the area's application for and designation as a Regional Activity Center, so the plans are already there to accommodate for this rate of development. The impacts will be mitigated as part of the regular development approval process.” (Blanco, 11/5).

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

To the extent that the provision of affordable housing is considered an urban service, it must be said that this service was neglected in the planning of the Downtown Kendall Master Plan. A county planner admits that it was never really a consideration: “No provisions or incentives were developed for affordable housing. Both the County and community’s priority was providing the character and sense-of-place to attract the desired development; we were trying to get developer buy-in, and burdening developers with affordable housing requirements would have turned them away from what we were trying to do” (Blanco, 11/5).

In fact, the Plan has clearly resulted in a substantial increase of property values in the area, and likely to lead to additional increases as the proposed developments are built, and additional developments are pursued. These increases, while a positive impact for the area’s property owners, are a blow to the affordability of the area, especially given the lack of thought given to any mitigating strategies during the planning process. That the Plan might result in additional jobs and transportation alternatives for the poor, does not do much for those who can’t afford to live there to take advantage of them.

## **DADELAND / RETAIL**

While not an urban service impact, per se, a real impact will certainly occur to the existing and incoming retailers in the Downtown Kendall area. Chief among these

retailers, and a big chief at that, is Dadeland Mall. Oddly enough, Mall representatives had participated in the planning of the Plan from the beginning, but waited until passage of the code to communicate its misgivings:

Both sides broke bread during a county-funded planning workshop in 1998. But a schism formed after zoning changes became official, prompting Dadeland to file a formal claim of property-rights violation. In taking that action, the mall opposed the Kendall master plan after the County Commission had approved it...Beaverly Ricks, an Atlanta investor in Dadeland, said construction of a downtown Kendall could have a devastating impact on mall revenues. Consultants said the road work would diminish accessibility and visibility. 'We remember when the whole area used to be called Deadland,' Ricks said. 'And we hope it doesn't go back to being known as Deadland'. (Ross, 4/01)

According to county planner Maria Crowley, the County and Mall have since reconciled their differences, and the Plan has been modified to allay some of the concerns of the Mall, chief among them, altering plans for requiring roads through the mall in the case of a major renovation resulting from extensive property damage. As it stands now, Dadeland would be allowed to build to the old code if construction begins within a year of extensive property damage, but would have to build to the new code – through-streets, street-lined buildings, etc. – after that. In the spirit of cooperation, and probably realizing that the new code would actually be good for business, "Dadeland announced a \$30 million renovation that mall officials said would consider the theme of the downtown Kendall movement" (Levy, 11/01).

Other retailers centered on the parking impact of the Plan for their criticism.

Here's the problem: Given a choice, most major retailers prefer putting parking lots out front. It may be ugly, but it's convenient for shoppers, who like to pull up and park on an impulse. And there are other obstacles. Some developers, for example, are loath to give up land for sidewalk construction. Others shrink from abandoning parking lots because garage construction can cost as much as \$10,000 per space. And many developers are afraid to build sidewalk shops because, with most people driving in and out of the area, there are few pedestrians to patronize such shops, at least for now. (Whoriskey, 7/98)

Indeed, the Plan calls for eliminating the suburban strip mall style parking that retailers love for a more pedestrian-friendly parking environment that pushes parking to the street-side, and into hidden parking lots. Planners rather dismissed the retailers' criticism and pointed to areas such as South Beach and Coconut Grove as successful examples of the Plan's parking design.

An additional impact to consider is the Plan's effect on neighboring communities and their downtowns. There is only so much demand for the retail and entertainment goods and services that the new developments will bring to the area, so logic suggests that for every customer that Downtown Kendall attracts, a neighboring community loses a customer. The most likely candidates to be affected by this 'supply and demand' dilemma, given their relative proximity to Downtown Kendall, are areas such as Sunset Place in South Miami, The Falls in Cutler Ridge, the CBD of Coconut Grove, The CBD of Coral Gables (including Miracle Mile and the new Village of Merrick Park in Coral Gables), and ironically enough, the Kendall Town Center that opened in the community's western fringe not so long ago. The myriad of businesses along U.S. 1, western Kendall Drive, and other major corridors also face the potential of losing costumers to the new development. And it is certainly conceivable that areas further out, like Downtown Miami and South Beach, might be impacted as well. Finally, the impact to Dadeland Mall itself is a big question mark... will the surrounding development steal its business, or add to it? Seemingly, this question was never raised or addressed throughout the planning and development process for Downtown Kendall, but it is certainly one that merits consideration.

## EVALUATION *of the Planning Process*

*Will the neotraditional downtowns prove any more competitive than the traditional downtowns that the Dadelands and their kind once crushed? (Whoriskey, 7/98)*

While there are clearly a number of positives associated with the Downtown Kendall Master Plan, this analysis has clearly revealed a number of negatives. Let's begin with the good. One of the greatest accomplishments of this planning effort was the process itself. A true, bottoms-up approach, the Master Plan was the product of a broad and comprehensive community vision, accentuated by the charrette process. A variety of stakeholders -- from residents, businesses, bureaucrats, and community organizations -- were able and encouraged to provide their input; and at the end of the day, that agglomeration of ideas begat a vetted Master Plan rich in ideas and perspectives. Most importantly, it achieved the critical *buy-in* of the various stakeholder groups, enabling its quick passage and immediate success.

Speaking of which, the speed with which this effort went from visioning to plan to code to development must also be counted as a huge success, especially when compared to similar efforts around the county, and indeed around the nation, that have often take decades to achieve comparable results. The final plan, and its ensuing developments, while not perfect, are an enormous improvement to the status quo, and have the real potential for creating the sense of place and community center envisioned by the Plan, especially given its pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented focus. The Downtown Dadeland project in particular, provides a textbook example of the type of urban village development espoused by New Urbanists and pursued by the Plan. Lastly, from a regional perspective, one of the great strengths of this project is that it faces the

reality of population growth, and works to accommodate, and taken advantage of it, through urban design and mitigation tools.

On the flip-side, a number of problems must also be attributed to Downtown Kendall. Beginning with *process*, there was a major failure to engage the school district in the visioning and planning process that led to the Master Plan, and that disconnect continues to plague the Plan as it moves into its development stage. The same could be said for the lack of affordable housing perspectives throughout the process. Perhaps if Downtown Kendall had been considered as a DRI, those elements would have been better considered, as the SFRPC's David Dahlstrom states: "Unfortunately, schools and other impacts may not have been addressed as well as traffic. If this were a DRI, all of those impacts and more would have been thoroughly vetted and mitigated to the greatest extent possible, but the County's process does not have to be as stringent as ours" (Dahlstrom, 10/23).

A number of negative impacts -- ranging from traffic and schools to affordability and nearby retail centers -- will almost certainly result as a consequence of the Plan; and while some, like traffic, were thoroughly vetted and mitigated to the greatest extent possible, others, like affordability were largely ignored. Those overlooked impacts (i.e., affordable housing, schools, and the effect on nearby retail centers) constitute a major blemish on what is an otherwise stellar planning effort.

The most vexing issue in my opinion, besides the lack of coordination with the School Board, is the lack of a project manager or some kind of overarching organization to oversee and pursue the full implementation of the plan and its logical extensions. Another area that could use some attention is the lack of a capital improvement plan for

civic spaces, parks, and other public amenities, to complement the private investment. To a great extent, however, this project remains the standard in South Florida for how to visualize, plan for, and create new downtowns or town centers.

## CONCLUSION

*Arc de Kendall? Well, Why Not? (Rabin, 6/98)*

In the end, the Downtown Kendall Master Plan is a major improvement over the current situation, and looks to have the real potential for achieving a real sense of place and community center. This must be weighed against the various impacts of the Plan -- especially to schools, traffic, and surrounding shopping centers – but given the county's continuing evolution and the inevitable pressures that result, Downtown Kendall is a good synthesis of growth and quality of life.

Thus it could be concluded that the New Urbanist hypothesis -- that an urban design focused on the pedestrian versus the automobile can revitalize and enliven soulless suburban communities – can be successful if properly and thoroughly planned. Downtown Kendall may not provide the cosmopolitan environment of historic downtowns, as described earlier in this paper, but should go a long way towards providing the neighborhood center and sense of place envisioned by the community.

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