

# KENDALL GAZETTE

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## New growth areas highlight first Kendall Corridor report

BY RICHARD YAGER

**A** preliminary Charrette Planning Study report providing direction for future development of a Kendall Drive Corridor met with mixed reaction from a crowd of more than 100 meeting at West Kendall Regional Library on June 11.

The report distilled suggestions of a daylong workshop held Mar. 1 at Felix Varela Senior High School, when several hundred residents including students worked with county planners on corridor maps to offer suggestions for future improvements.

A Power Point presentation that transferred citizen concepts into formal recommendations was made by Jess Linn, principal planner for the county's Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources.

Corridor boundaries approximate an area one-half mile north and south of N. Kendall Drive (SW 88th Street), extending from 137th Avenue west to Krome Avenue (177th Avenue).

While Linn urged residents to consider the report as an overview of potential 10- to 20-year changes, the still-to-be-approved document still offered several specific recommendations. Among them:

- Redevelopment of the Kendale Lakes Shopping Plaza at Kendall Drive and 137th Avenue, including conversion of existing unused parking areas locations for small retail shops amidst landscaped medians.
- Creation of street-side parking areas along SW 152nd and SW 149th avenues, to replace unsafe and illegal current parking on swale areas that creates safety hazards for vehicles and pedestrians.
- New planning for the 83-acre Town Center property as a DRI

## Soil contamination closes ball fields at Kendall park



Three baseball fields closed at Hammocks Community Park.

BY RICHARD YAGER

Discovery of contaminated soil has closed three baseball fields at Hammocks Community Park in Kendall.

A \$2.4 million soil removal and remediation project that got underway May 29 closed all three fields on June 6. All other areas of the park remain open and have been designated safe for public use.

Samplings of county parks for possible contamination began in 2011 when federal officials found contamination in areas around Olinda Park in northwest Miami-Dade. Soil reviews then got underway to determine safety of all 263 county parks.

To date, the Department of Environmental Resources Management

(DERM) has determined that 192 parks remain safe for use, according to Laura Phillips, county parks spokesperson.

In early June, contamination findings extended to Chapman Park, located in Coral Gables, where several baseball fields have been closed temporarily.

In a report summary, Phillips stated: "To ensure the safety of the Miami-Dade County Parks users and its employees, Miami-Dade County Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources - Division of Environmental Resources Management (DERM) initiated the evaluation/screening of each of the 266 Miami-

## All of us should support 'Miami Begins With Me'

BY GRANT MILLER

Publisher



As Miami-Dade continues to grow by leaps and bounds year after year and our economy becomes more diverse, it is easy to forget that tourism remains this area's bread-and-butter industry.

While we may not be as dependent on the snowbirds as we once were, tourism is our biggest moneymaker and creates more jobs than any other single business entity in the county.

That's why it is so important for all of us who live in this beautiful area to take heed of recent remarks by Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau (GMCVB) president/CEO William Talbert when he rolled out changes in the Bureau's "Miami Begins With Me" customer service training program, which has trained more than 25,000 employees of major community businesses and organizations since it began in 2009. These include staffs at Miami International Airport (MIA) and PortMiami, as well as Miami-Dade taxi drivers.

"As the No. 1 economic driver and top employer in Miami-Dade County, the tourism industry is everybody's business in Miami and The Beaches," Talbert said. "It is more important than ever to invest in the education and training of our customer service providers. Leisure and business travelers deserve and expect out-

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(Development of Regional Impact), a total of one million-plus square feet of retail, entertainment and professional venues, including a theater, hotel, restaurants, office buildings and multi-family housing.

- Improving Kendall Drive traffic and commuting by converting center lanes to dedicated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) with elevated bridges over major north-south intersections.

- Designation of the undeveloped acreage north of Kendall Dr. between 167th and 177th avenues as an UEA (Urban Expansion Area), with residential and commercial mixed uses fronting a chain of man-made lakes for water retention.

"We are reaching the final step in completing a process to provide a vision for the future growth of the area," said Miami-Dade District 11 Commissioner Juan C. Zapata who commented extensively on the report during a two-hour session, including answering questions raised by residents participating in the study.

Those comments ranged from a plea by Lawrence Percival to schedule at least one or two more charrettes within Kendall areas needing detailed study to a request for "nature paths to protect wildlife" by schoolteacher Esther Garvett.

Chief among inquiries of residents was how any improvements could be implemented, a process likened to a Bird Road Corridor Study that produced specific recommendations for in-place commercial and residential areas, revising land use and zoning for properties within its area.

Similar in purpose to the Kendall Corridor, county planners in 2008 conducted a series of public events for a Bird Road Study to develop "a shared long-term vision for the east/west corridor that would be pedestrian friendly, visually cohesive, commercially vibrant and create a unique identity for Bird Road."

A town hall meeting and two-day design workshop were held Sept. 23-25, 2008, at the West Dade Regional Library where planners consulted with residents. In 2013, the county commissioners adopted a Bird Road Corridor Urban Area zoning district to implement charrette recommendations.

"This study is a little bit different," Zapata said, explaining he initiated the charrette to "give people a chance to speak up in the planning and development of the place where they work and live.

"Frankly, my own purpose was motivated to encourage economic growth that would make West Kendall a destination area and create more job opportunities through a defined vision of future development and redevelopment potential."

Zapata concluded the session with his own views of West Kendall's major problems, declaring that he is continuing "to have conversations about extension of the under-used freight rail line tracks west of Miami International Airport to serve as a future commuter line."

He also is looking ahead to the creation of a major interchange with an extended SR 836 (Dolphin Expressway) at Krome Avenue "to create a separate 'back door' access to West Kendall that can lead to further relief of Kendall Drive traffic congestion."

The study is the fourth of its kind during the past 15 years to direct growth in Kendall, including two in East Kendall that created the Downtown Dadeland District and a second providing growth parameters adjacent to Baptist Hospital. These were in addition to the Bird Road Study.

A recording of the June 11 corridor meeting is available at <http://kendallcorridor.wordpress.com/2014/06/13/june-11-meeting-video>. Additional or new comments can be entered on that page or by email to [linn@miamidade.gov](mailto:linn@miamidade.gov).

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Dade County parks during the fall of 2011.

"The evaluation of the accessible parks was accelerated at the end of 2013 due to the discovery of contamination at some of the City of Miami parks. To date, DERM has determined that 192 of the county parks evaluated are safe for their use. In addition, during this evaluation DERM has identified the following:

"(1) Hammocks Community Park, August, 2012: On-going soils restoration;

"(2) Brothers to the Rescue, November, 2013: No soil contamination found; however, due to the presence of surficial (cq) solid waste, temporary engineering controls were installed, and

"(3) Chapman Park (baseball fields) June, 2014: Based on the soil arsenic concentration found in the ballfields, the field areas have been closed in an abundance of caution. Further information will become available pending completion of the assessment and evaluation by the Miami-Dade County Department of Health.

"We expect to complete the evaluation/screening of all the remaining accessible parks by the end of September 2014," her statement concluded.

One of the three fields at Hammocks Community Park is expected to re-open by Sept. 30; the remediation will open the two adjacent fields by Dec. 30 or earlier, depending upon work progress.

## MILLER, from page 1

standing service from the minute they arrive at our airport, check into our hotels and hail our cabs."

And Talbert is absolutely right. We all know the importance of tourism to our local economy and it is critical to the success of the program that all of us strive to make our visitors welcome and insure that they have a positive experience in our community. When they do, they will return to a place where they enjoyed themselves and where they were treated well.

Look at it this way, tourism dollars help keep our taxes low and our local economy strong. It's as simple as that.

We all have an interest in keeping visitors to South Florida happy, but remember, it's the little things that make a difference. A warm smile to someone you pass on the street, friendly directions to the nearest coffee shop or ATM, a tip about a restaurant with fresh, tasty seafood and water views — these are the things that

make visitors feel that we care about them.

This is where you can get involved with the Miami Begins With Me initiative, because Miami really does begin with you, and with all of us. We are the ones who have the good fortune to live in this year-round paradise. We get to enjoy the beautiful beaches, the Everglades, the Florida Keys, the energy and excitement of South Beach, and all of the wonderful things that Miami's many unique neighborhoods have to offer. And we can do that whenever we want, not just on a two-week vacation.

So get involved with the Miami Begins With Me program. It only takes a moment to be friendly to a visitor, and you will be rewarding yourself and helping your community.

More information on the expanded Miami Begins With Me program, details and class registration may be found at [MiamiBeginsWithMe.com](http://MiamiBeginsWithMe.com).

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