

THE INSIDER

SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES HOT: June saw the second-largest number ever of resales of single-family homes in Miami, 1,346 homes, trailing only 2015, when 1,390 were sold, the Miami Association of Realtors reported this week. Prices of those homes jumped 6.3%, from \$315,000 to \$335,000, as prices of single-family home resales have risen for 67 consecutive months here, the association said. The median number of days between listing a single-family home and a contract was 48 days, up from 47 last year. "Buyer demand and impending interest rate hikes are fueling purchases as buyers want to get settled in their new Miami homes before the school year begins," said Christopher Zoller, chairman of the association's board.



Christopher Zoller

NEW BEGINNINGS IN NEW CITIES: Charles Scurr, executive director of the Citizens Independent Transportation Trust, informed Anna Lightfoot Ward, trust chair, earlier this month that he intends to retire Feb. 5, 2018. "It has been my distinct honor and privilege to serve with you," his letter said. "We have accomplished a tremendous amount together and I am certain that the Trust will be equal to the challenges ahead." Last week, it was announced that Bobbie Hartz, executive director of Miami Homes for All and Mr. Scurr's wife, will retire in January. The couple has three sons who live in Atlanta and Nashville, and they will be splitting their time between the two cities, Mr. Scurr said last week.



Charles Scurr

CONTAMINATION NOTICE: County commissioners last week gave preliminary approval to posting notice of contamination on properties where anyone lives or on vacant properties. The legislation, if passed, would also require laboratory results from everyone responsible for site rehabilitation and enforcement by civil penalty. Currently, the county requires notice about contamination only in limited situations and many residents may not be aware of contaminants where they live or in the surrounding area, the ordinance states. Miami-Dade's Government Operations Committee is to hold a hearing on the legislation Sept. 12. *Details: www.miamidade.gov/govaction/matter.asp?matter=171854&file=truckyearFolder=12017*

RICKENBACKER RATING RISING: The county's credit rating on Rickenbacker Causeway bonds was recently upgraded by Fitch from BBB to BBB+ and by Standard & Poor's from BBB+ to A-, with both rating agencies maintaining a "Stable" Outlook. Such ratings changes are likely to mean lower interest costs to the county going forward.

RESILIENCY A TARGET: One Community One Goal, the Beacon Council-led effort to target seven key industries to add high-paying jobs, will focus more on resiliency in the year ahead. Penny Shaffer, co-chair of the drive and market president for South Florida of Florida Blue, told a celebration of the first five years of its second incarnation last week. The community needs to continue to grow jobs no matter what we experience, she told about 900 people marking the five-year celebration at Jungle Island, hence the new focus on resiliency. "What are we in the future? That's the most important thing," she said. The big announcement was that the organization would continue its work. The other co-chairs are Maria Alonso, newly named CEO of the United Way here, and Carlos Giménez, Miami-Dade County mayor.



Penny Shaffer

EXECUTIVE RECRUITMENT: Past co-chairs of the One Community One Goal organization joined in recounting its achievements last week as the organization vowed to continue its efforts to bring more high-level jobs here. Art Torneo, senior vice president international and cargo of American Airlines, told the crowd that he had just moved back to Miami from Texas, the third time he has been based here, and "I told my wife I will never move again." But he was being by past co-chair Nelson Lazo, the Beacon Council's chair-elect and the CEO of Doctors Hospital, who said, "I've left this town four times, I've come back four times. I'm not making that up." Do the two of them count as Miami bringing in seven senior executives?

COMMITTED TO SERVICE: At the Airports Council Conference this week, Emilio González, director and CEO of Miami International Airport, joked about the airport's struggle to keep everyone happy: "When people ask me how I like my job, I tell them, I've got to keep the mayor, 13 county commissioners, 106 air carriers, more than 160 concessionaires and every three-letter agency in the federal government happy - I fail miserably on a daily basis," drawing laughs from the crowd. "But it does make for a lot of fun."

HEAR ABOUT PROPERTY TAXES: County commissioners last week agreed to hold a public budget hearing about proposed property taxes at 5:01 p.m. Sept. 7 in the Stephen P. Clark Center, 111 NW First St. Jose "Pepe" Diaz asked that the meeting be after Labor Day to make sure county staff is prepared. *Details: www.miamidade.gov/govaction/legisatfiles/Matters/2017/171795.pdf*

CONSERVE WATER: July is Smart Irrigation Month in Miami-Dade, which remains under permanent watering restrictions. Officials advise picking up water-saving tips that will result in financial savings and preserve water resources. Homeowners can qualify for up to \$500 in rebates if they agree to recommendations for reducing water use and increasing efficiency through the landscape irrigation rebate program. Home evaluations are free. *Details: (786) 552-8974.*

CORRECTION: An article on PortMiami's issuance of commercial paper notes in the July 20 issue should have stated that the commercial paper notes are to be repaid from Seaport revenues as the primary source. The county's non-ad valorem revenues are a secondary source of repayment.

CLARIFICATION: An article on county bond refunding July 20 mistakenly implied that the bonds were to be used for new construction. They are simply repaying old bonds to achieve interest savings.

Expressway authority can run pilot buses on 836 and 874 in fiscal year

By CATHERINE LACKNER

The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) has proposed a pilot project that would run buses on the inside shoulders of state roads 836 and 874, and it could be accomplished in the upcoming fiscal year, said Javier Rodriguez, MDX executive director.

The public-private partnership would include ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft, that riders could hail with their phones to be taken to park-and-ride terminals like the new facility being built near the Dolphin Mall, Mr. Rodriguez told members of the county's Transportation Planning Organization, or TPO, on July 20.

On June 22, the planning organization had urged the MDX to consider adopting one of six corridors slated for mass transit in the Strategic Miami Area Rapid Transit (SMART) plan.

"It's only been 30 days, and I don't have all the answers," Mr. Rodriguez told the group. "Today I'm here to present to you what we can do. I can only speak about what we have done on the facilities and on the proposed service we want to put out there."

"The reason we can address this is that we already had, in our master plan, an inside lane dedicated for express bus or rapid transit service," he said. "We looked at moving people, because we simply can't accommodate everyone who wants to use the expressways. Our highways will never accommodate the demand, so giving people choices is important."

MDX has already spent \$50 million to prepare the shoulders and widen bridges to make way for the dedicated lanes, he said. The bus service is a pilot project because, as is happening in all of the SMART



"We are very much invested in providing transportation choices to the community."

Shelly Smith Fano

plan corridors, a project design & environment study, or PD&E, is underway, he added.

"This fiscal year, we can provide a shuttle service on our highways," Mr. Rodriguez said. "We've spoken to FIU and to the on-demand services that could use the facility. We want to attract the choice rider, the person who drives a vehicle."

The highways would function as trunk lines, he said. "These have to be long-haul trips; having multiple stops would defeat the purpose." Potential trips could be from Kendall to Miami International Airport or from Doral to downtown, he added.

The expressway authority would study demand for trips before coming up with a service delivery plan, which it would present to the TPO, he added. "We feel that, while the PD&E is going on, this can build ridership along this corridor."

Assuming the southwest expansion of State Road 836 is approved,

the service would be extended there, too, he said. On State Road 874, the corridor is already set up for buses to ride in the shoulders, he said.

Stations would provide "a premium experience" with air conditioning, level boarding platforms and buses that look like trains, he said. "We will model this as we do most of the services at MDX, which is in a public-private arrangement," Mr. Rodriguez said. "We will define the service we want and then we will let the private sector tell us how they would do it. When you start getting too prescriptive," he said, projects can be limited.

"I'm here to respond to your resolution," he told the board. "We are going to take over rapid transit service on the east-west corridor."

"The goal is to get to that level," said Esteban Bovo Jr., chair of both the TPO and county commissioner. "You guys know how I feel about buses, but I know where we need to get to."

"Thank you for coming up with a very ambitious plan that takes the bull by the horns," said Daniela Levine Cava, county commissioner and TPO member.

"I'm glad the bus rapid transit is moving forward," said Dennis Moss, county commissioner and TPO member. "I like this plan. We can make good things happen for this community. If we stay together, we can get these plans accomplished."

"We are very much invested in providing transportation choices to the community," Shelly Smith Fano, MDX board chair, told the TPO board. "Since I've been on the board, we've partnered with the state and the county to bring in over \$2 billion in infrastructure projects. I look forward to continuing the collaboration with the TPO."

Gables, Doral get voice in transit plans

By CATHERINE LACKNER

After a years-long battle, Coral Gables on July 20 won a seat on the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), the group charged with establishing transportation priorities for the county. Though it had not been campaigning as long, fast-growing Doral also won a seat.

The TPO governing board voted unanimously in favor of a request by Jose "Pepe" Diaz, county commissioner and TPO member, to change board's composition, a move that had been approved by the planning organization's Executive Policy Committee.

Rebecca Sosa, county commissioner and TPO member, had also backed the inclusion of the two cities. The Executive Policy Committee "amended the item because we wanted to make sure we were fair, and that both the City of Doral and the City of Coral Gables, who have qualified to be part of the TPO, are included," Ms. Sosa said.

"I don't know if we have enough chairs to include them, but I guess we'll work it out," said Esteban Bovo Jr., chair of the TPO and the county commission.

"Mayor, any comments before we vote unanimously in your favor?" he asked Juan Carlos Ber-

mudez, Doral mayor, to laughter from the rest of the board.

"I'll make this short," Mr. Bermudez said. "We thank you, and we're willing to stand."

"We're extremely humbled," said Vince Lago, Coral Gables commissioner. "It's been a long haul, but we're going to be great contributing members of this TPO."

"We've wanted to be part of the MPO [the TPO's previous name] for a long time," said James Cason, former Coral Gables mayor, in 2015. Suspecting that the population had grown since the 2010 census, the city paid the US Census Department this year to conduct an interim census, a special count to supplement the general census compiled every 10 years. It was discovered that Coral Gables' population had topped the 50,000 mark, the requirement for a seat on the TPO.

But Miami-Dade County said it wanted a full special census, also called an inter-decennial census, that would cost more than \$1 million to conduct and take nine to 10 months, said Craig Leon, Coral Gables city attorney, at that time.

One reason the city wants a greater voice in transportation matters is that "everyone has to go through the Gables to get to somewhere else. We did a count - we have 189

entrances," Mr. Cason said during the city's campaign for a seat.

The city's police department found that about 90% of drivers who were involved in accidents were from outside Coral Gables, Mr. Cason added.

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