

THE INSIDER

CITY CENTER: Miami commissioners are to vote on granting a major use special permit today (2/24) to Carlisle Development for the \$53.3 million City Center at 100 NW 12th St. in Overtown. The project is to include two 27-story residential towers, a nine-story garage and street-level retail. The two- and three-bedroom workforce housing units are to rent for an average of \$810 monthly.

REVENUE SHARING: Doral, seeking a share of transit tax revenues, has yet to file its lawsuit against Miami-Dade County. Doral joins Miami Gardens in taking legal action as a means to resolve roughly seven years of revenue negotiations. The two cities, along with Cutler Bay, have sought surtax revenues since their incorporations after the 2002 passage of the voter-approved People's Transportation Plan, which added a half-penny tax for transit improvements on the first \$5,000 of a sales transaction. Currently, 80% of revenues are allocated to the county and 20% is split, based on population, among 31 of the 34 municipalities.

HOTEL DEMAND: Greater Miami and the Beaches hotels ranked in the top five in January 2011 for average daily room rate and hotel occupancy among US Smith Travel Research's top 25 markets, according to the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau. Miami's \$171.51 average daily room rate, a year-over-year climb of 4%, ranked second in the US. New York's average daily rate of \$195.17 ranked first. Miami's 74.5% hotel occupancy dropped 0.8% in January compared to January 2010 and reached second place in the US behind Oahu Island, Hawaii.

DITCHING DADE: To cut costs in a tough budget year, the Miami-Dade County Commission agreed last week to cancel this year's trip to Tallahassee. During annual Dade Days the commission usually spends two days at the capital, discussing community needs. In addition to the commission, more than 1,000 people representing more than 200 organizations from both private and public sectors attend. The event, which has been going on more than 20 years, was scheduled for April 6 and 7, but Chairman **Joe Martinez** recommended, and the commission agreed, that the county temporarily discontinue the pricey trip. "Dade Days will still go on," he said. "They'll still do the papaya under the tree and everything else. It's just that we will go when needed."



Joe Martinez

COUNTY CONTRACTS: As county contracts near expiration, Miami-Dade officials are working to renew relationships with vendors and keep funds. The county commission last week gave Mayor **Carlos Alvarez** authority to renew three noncompetitive contracts. The vote authorized him to exercise the second option-to-renew period to procure artist and exhibition services for \$125,000, the third option-to-renew period to procure legal research services used by the Corrections and Rehabilitation Department for \$215,000, and the second option-to-renew period for software licenses, maintenance and technical support services for a financial investigation system for the Miami-Dade Police Department for \$25,000. According to county documents, funding will only be expended if departmental budgets can support the expenditures as approved in their annual plans.



Carlos Alvarez

HISTORY TOURS: In honor of Black History Month, Miami-Dade Transit is to operate free history tours aboard Metrobuses at 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Feb. 26. The 3½-hour tours board at the Stephen P. Clark Center, 111 NW First St., and traverse through historic African-American communities, such as Overtown and Coconut Grove, as bus operators well-versed in local history narrate the significance of landmarks. *Details:* www.miamidade.gov/transit.

BRICKELL PREP: After much debate and community input, Miami commissioners are to deliberate today (2/24) on the fate of Brickell Preparatory Academy charter school. The main concern area Commissioner **Frank Carollo** expressed regarding the proposed K-12, 1,700-student school at 1742-1744 SW Second Ave. is its size and traffic it could generate.



Frank Carollo

DRAINAGE REPORT: Findings of the first phase in a two-part City of Miami Stormwater Management Master Plan are to be discussed at today's (2/24) city commission meeting. The study aims to help the city improve its National Insurance Flood Program-Community Rating System - which allows residents to get discounts on flood insurance - and to identify work in a five-year capital improvements plan "identifying drainage improvement areas and enhancements," according to city documents. The final phase of the plan is due in November.

WORK STUDY: On Wednesday Florida Power & Light Co. was to have opened its third call center in the state totally manned by Florida International University students. "Not only are the students being paid but they receive... career path training and job shadowing opportunities with FPL," said **Maria Gomez**, FPL's director of customer care and FIU alumna, in a press release. "This partnership provides a great way for us to find career-minded individuals who will help serve as the future of FPL."

HELPING HAITI: Haiti was in the heart at last week's Miami-Dade County Commission meeting as resolutions aimed to assist the Haitian community. One urged the federal government to extend temporary protected status for Haitian nationals for 18 months beyond the July 22 cutoff. The resolution also asked the administration to extend the period to apply for the status another six months to July 17. The commission also asked that the federal government allow 55,000 Haitians who have been approved for visas to enter the US in upcoming months.

CLARIFICATION: An article last week noted that NextEra Energy, formerly FPL Group, acquired three plug-in hybrid electric vehicles in 2010. Those were the only three new electric vehicles the company received that year, though they were added to an existing fleet of 371 hybrid or plug-in electric vehicles.

Citing misrepresentation, courts tell a bill collector change was past due

BY ASHLEY HOPKINS

In an effort to collect what's owed to the county courts, Miami-Dade's commission has accepted Clerk of Courts Harvey Ruvin's recommendation to award collection contracts to four of the county's five prior firms, excluding long-time contractor Gila Corp. d/b/a Municipal Services Bureau.

State law gives Mr. Ruvin authority to contract with an attorney or collection agency to recover outstanding traffic, parking, misdemeanor or criminal fines and court costs.

While he could have awarded up to six contracts, after a selection committee reviewed and ranked 18 proposals based on past performance, qualifications of key personnel and approach and operational plan, Mr. Ruvin chose to re-award contracts to Linebarger, Goggan, Blair & Sampson LLP, AllianceOne Receivables Management Inc., Penn Credit Corp. and Law Enforcement Systems Inc.

As just 13 rating points separated the first- and fourth-ranked firms and as 28 points separated the fourth and fifth, Mr. Ruvin chose to exclude Gila, which had collected debts for the county since 2003, and Pioneer Credit Recovery Inc.

"I had a clear break between four and five," he said told commissioners Feb. 1. "To me, that was a clear indication."

While Mr. Ruvin in the past awarded five contracts, he said he

made cuts as it would allow firms to compare results without complicating the collection process.

"The more [firms] you have, the more difficulty arises in the management of the whole collection effort," he said, adding that he thought four firms would more than adequately meet needs.

Gila, however, protested Mr. Ruvin's recommendation, claiming it had been unfairly ranked. According to county documents, from 2003 to 2010 the firm collected \$26 million on more than 539,000 delinquent accounts. Of the \$91.2 million the county's five contractors were asked to collect in 2009, Gila had collected nearly \$1.7 million.

"We never once asked the hearing examiner or through this process asked to be awarded the contract," said John Shubin of Shubin & Bass, the Miami-based law firm representing Gila. "What we wanted was a fair process. We wanted a process that if you said you were going to evaluate someone based on performance, you don't ignore the performance."

While a hearing examiner determined the evaluation and selection committee should reconvene, re-evaluate and re-rank all 18 proposals, Mr. Ruvin said that would be "unnecessary and unwarranted," as past performance accounted for only one third of evaluation criteria.

According to Mr. Ruvin, a number of complaints were brought to light during the evaluation and se-

lection process that, despite Gila's seven years of service to the county, were cause for concern.

While complaints are hard to avoid in debt collecting, according to county documents Mr. Ruvin said he had "received serious complaints as to the overly aggressive nature" of Gila. Mr. Ruvin told the commission that in reviewing complaints against the firms recommended for award, Gila had been cited for representing itself as part of the clerk's office and not as a separate collection agency.

"To me, that [complaint] went to a higher level, because they were misrepresenting themselves," Mr. Ruvin said, adding that he had serious concerns about the company's approach in dealing with the public.

While Mr. Shubin argued that complaints against Gila weren't put in the perspective of other vendors, Mr. Ruvin said the complaints didn't factor into which companies he chose to recommend. He said the evaluation/selection committee member who ranked Gila lowest testified that the complaints had no bearing on his scores.

"I looked over the whole record," Mr. Ruvin said. "I find that this decision was rationally based, that it was rendered in good faith and that there is no basis to throw it out."

According to Mr. Ruvin, last year's contracts expired Feb. 15 and all firms that were re-awarded contracts are continuing to collect county court debt.

Waning stimulus cash may be last

BY ASHLEY HOPKINS

In nearly two years Miami-Dade received almost a quarter-billion federal stimulus dollars and created about 5,000 jobs, but as funds run out and projects are finished, county officials are beginning to question whether more money, and more jobs, may ever come down the pipeline.

The county had sought \$601.7 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds and had received \$247.7 million, resulting in creation of 3,481 direct, eight indirect and 1,448 contracted jobs, according to an Oct. 15 report from County Manager George Burgess. This amounts to about \$50,000 per position.

According to Dan Wall, director of the Office of Grants Coordination, while county officials should issue another report in upcoming months, it's unknown when they'll provide that update or how much numbers might have risen.

As projects near completion, job creation has slowed, Mr. Wall said, adding that there may not be many more opportunities for the county to get stimulus funds. While in the past the county has worked to promote shovel-ready projects, Mr. Wall said any more money to come out of Washington would most likely be in education-related fields, benefitting the public schools.

Based on October's quarterly

report, most jobs created were contracted projects through the Public Works Department and the Housing and Community Development Department.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization got \$56.2 million from the Federal Highway Administration for its Surface Transportation Program. These funds can be used for construction improvements on federal highways, public roads, bus terminals and transit facilities. Funds resulted in 78 direct and 1,154 contracted positions, about \$46,000 per job.

The Public Housing Agency got \$19.3 million from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development for 74 projects to improve energy efficiencies in public housing units. As a result, 23 direct and 294 contracted positions were created or retained, amounting to about \$61,000 per job.

The Office of Community and Economic Development got a \$4.9 million US Department of Housing and Urban Development block grant to provide housing improvements to residents with low to moderate income, maximize job retention and do infrastructure projects. The grant resulted in five jobs, at about \$977,000 each.

Miami-Dade's Community Action Agency got nearly \$9.3 million from the US Department of Health and Human Services to finance Head Start programs, resulting in 70 teaching and ad-

ministrative posts. This amounts to about \$133,000 per job. Funds are being used to provide comprehensive health, educational, nutritional and social services to low-income children, to increase the number of families receiving service, and to give employees training and technical assistance.

The Transit Department got \$1.1 million from the Federal Transit Administration for metrorail improvements, resulting in five positions, and \$7.5 million to upgrade signs, resulting in six positions. Taken together, this amounts to about \$786,000 per job.

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