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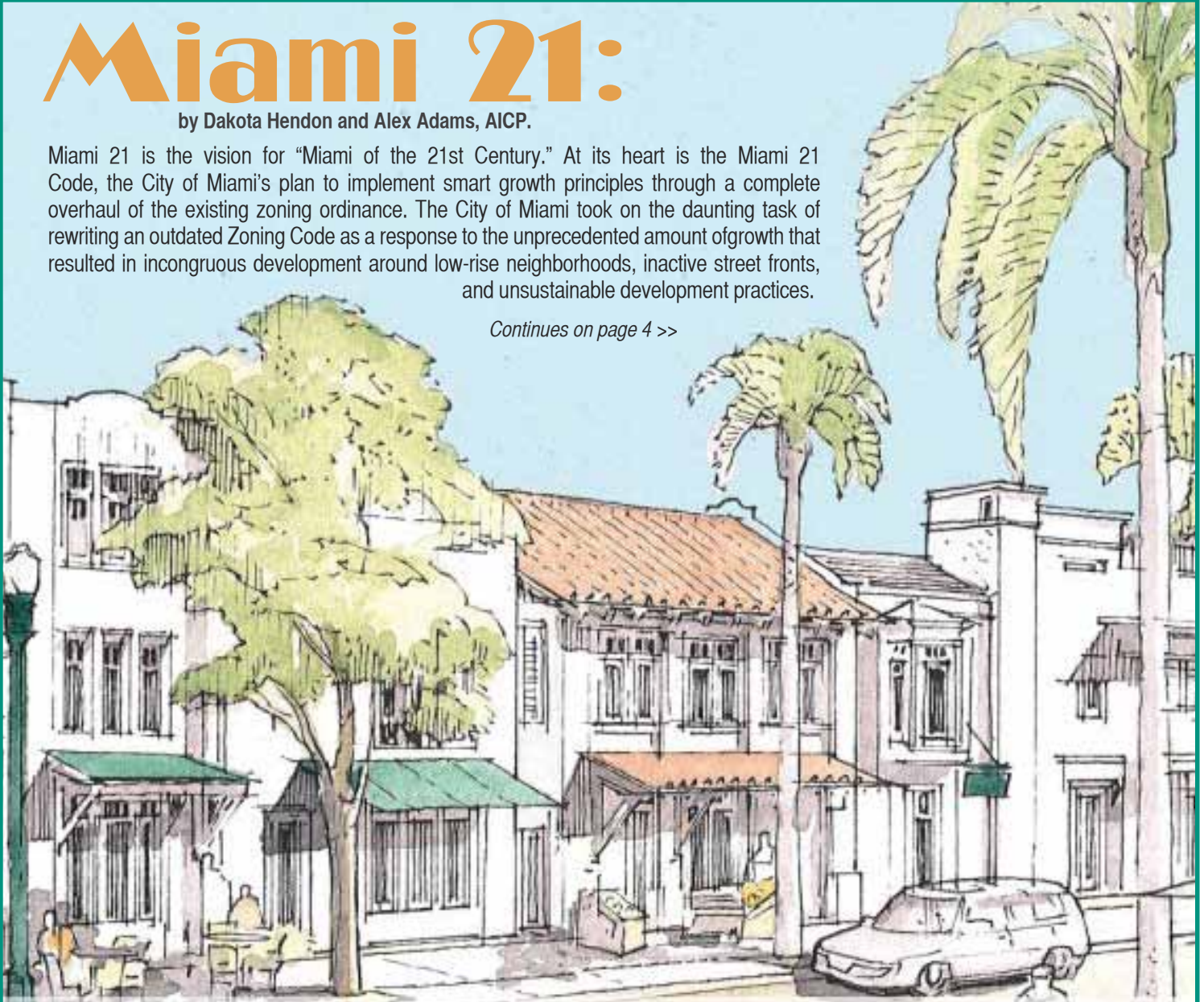
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Miami 21:

by Dakota Hendon and Alex Adams, AICP.

Miami 21 is the vision for “Miami of the 21st Century.” At its heart is the Miami 21 Code, the City of Miami’s plan to implement smart growth principles through a complete overhaul of the existing zoning ordinance. The City of Miami took on the daunting task of rewriting an outdated Zoning Code as a response to the unprecedented amount of growth that resulted in incongruous development around low-rise neighborhoods, inactive street fronts, and unsustainable development practices.

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THE BLUEPRINT FOR MIAMI'S FUTURE

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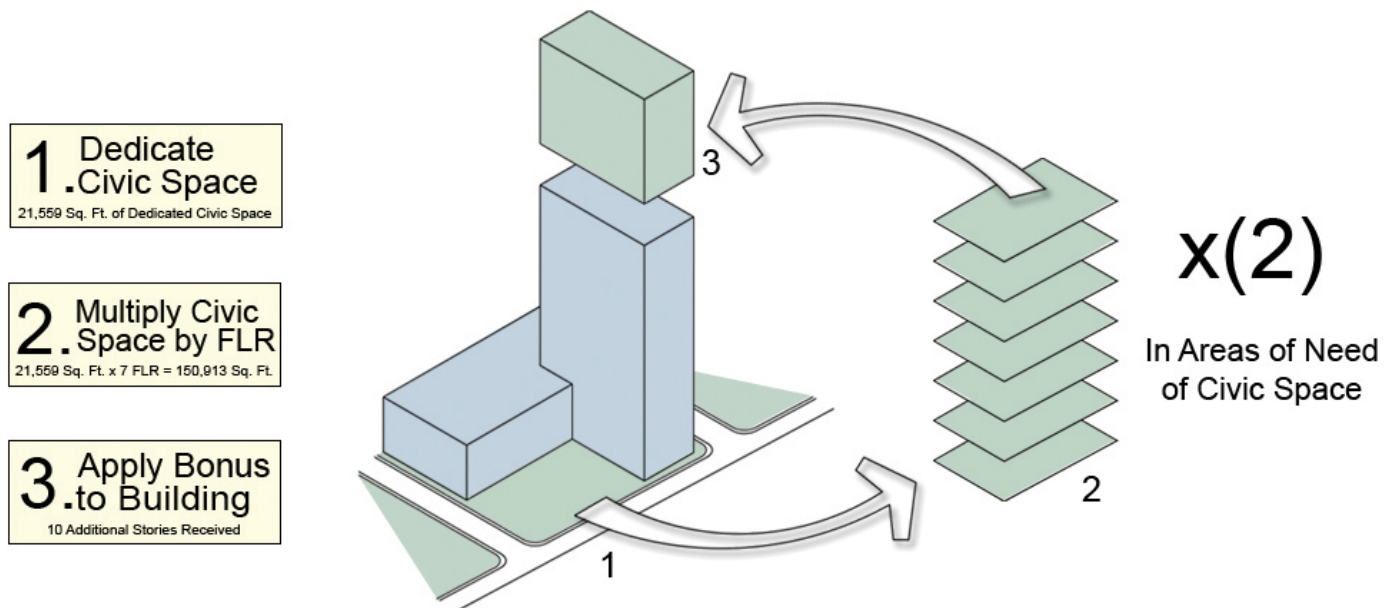
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The Florida Chapter of APA provides statewide leadership in the development of sustainable communities by advocating excellence in planning, providing professional development for its members, and working to protect and enhance the natural and built environments.

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Miami 21 provides development capacity bonuses when public benefits are provided on-site, such as affordable housing or open space. In the case when a public open space is provided on-site, a building may receive the full development capacity of the open space as additional floor area, and up to two times the development capacity if the open space is in an area of need determined by the Parks and Open Space Masterplan.

THE PROBLEM

At the beginning of the recent building boom, development seemed to have no limits; and in some ways, it didn't. The zoning code allowed unlimited height along many commercial corridors throughout the city. Early development took advantage of this and many low-rise commercial corridors began to be transformed by large-scale development. Worsening the problem was a series of allowances that encouraged bigger buildings. The use of "Gross Lot Area"¹ and FAR² allowed small properties to obtain a large amount of development capacity, while PUD bonuses of up to 20% were granted at no cost. Not only was development out of scale, it was out of touch with the street. Inactive ground floors, multi-level exposed parking garages and narrow sidewalks were physical evidence of the lack of design criteria.

THE BIRTH OF MIAMI 21

The City responded quickly by establishing a series of Special Districts that would require additional oversight in areas where development was occurring, but in many cases the districts could not be created quickly enough. It was clear that constant amendments to the code

were complicating an already difficult system and benefitting only a few. Miami needed a plan that would be proactive, not reactionary. In 2005, Former Mayor Manny Diaz and Planning Director Ana Gelabert-Sanchez spearheaded the move to create an all-new zoning code that would be based on predictable regulations that provided contextual development, walkable streets, and sustainable building practices. It was to be Miami's plan for the 21st Century.

Through the use of Transects, based on the Smart Code, properties were assigned zones of varying intensity according to their location in the context of the city. These zones progress from the environmentally preserved areas (T1) to the urban core (T6), each zone becoming denser and more intense in sequence.

PREDICTABILITY

Working with Miami-based, world-renowned planners Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Co. (DPZ), the Planning Department first established key changes to the framework of the code that would enable predictable expectations on development. "FAR" was replaced with "FLR"³, creating a development capacity ratio that was

inclusive of parking and mechanical areas and provided for a maximum gross area for a building. To make calculations easy, "Gross Lot Area" was also replaced by "Net Lot Area," defining only the area of land under ownership to be counted towards development capacity. The result was an easily definable development capacity that residents could calculate without requiring a land-use attorney or architect to decipher.

To maintain neighborhood character, height limits were applied along commercial corridors across the City, in stories, according to the surrounding context. Properties abutting low-rise areas have required stepbacks at upper levels to reduce the bulk of the building and are restricted from participating in the public benefits program for additional development capacity.

While these measures were aimed at addressing building form, additional steps needed to be taken to prevent the encroachment of high-density commercial zoning into single-family and duplex neighborhoods, a significant problem that led to large development sites, in some cases, immediately adjacent to single-family homes. Successional zoning was designed to reduce drastic changes in the zoning of

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¹ "Gross Lot Area" – Considers portions of right-of-way, parks, and water as part of land area when calculating development capacity

² "FAR" – Floor Area Ratio: Development capacity based only on sellable space, providing no limits on gross building area.

³ "FLR" – Floor Lot Ratio: Development capacity based only on gross building area, including parking and mechanical areas.

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a property by limiting zoning changes to the next zone of higher intensity. Therefore, a single family home (T3) could only rezone to the next transect of greater intensity, T4, a zone designed to encourage townhouses at a maximum height of 3 stories. Successional zoning allows the city to grow over time, but rationally and in relation to its surrounding context.

WALKABILITY

Beyond providing predictable regulations, Miami 21 seeks to enhance the public realm by creating active and inviting streets. It is about creating a vitality that will encourage the use of the street as a public open space. This vitality will be created by codifying urban design principles that have been proven across the world to create unique and vibrant spaces: mixed-use areas to provide retail and services within walking distance of all neighborhoods; additional sidewalk space through a ten-foot setback

adjacent to all streets in mixed-use areas; habitable space along all ground floors and parking garages to create activity and eyes on the street; and restrictions on driveway dimensions and entrance locations to promote the use of the sidewalk for pedestrians, not vehicles.

SUSTAINABILITY AND PRESERVATION

As a long-term plan for Miami's future, Miami 21 also sets high goals for sustainable building practices and removes long-standing barriers to energy efficient design. Minimum LEED silver certification is required for all buildings over 50,000 square feet while higher certifications are encouraged through bonus development capacity for achieving LEED gold and platinum. Also allowed are encroachments into setbacks for facade components that promote energy efficiency such as shading and screening devices, formerly restricted by the current zoning code. Even natural

light and cross-ventilation of interior spaces is considered in the code through the use of floor plate limits above the eighth story, similar to restrictions in Germany that require natural light for interior spaces used as work environments.

The Public Benefits Program promotes sustainable design by rewarding additional development capacity for buildings that provide civic and open spaces such as parks and plazas, a public library, and affordable/ workforce housing. The benefits program provides up to twice the bonus when benefits are provided on-site or in areas of need in order to encourage immediate contribution to the community in lieu of providing a payment into a trust fund for future use.

A transfer of development rights (TDR) program under the Historic Preservation chapter of the City Code is also enabled through Miami 21. The TDR program enables a historic property owner to transfer its unused development capacity to another

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property owner who then is allowed to add "bonus" height or intensity to its property. The purpose of the TDR program for designated historic properties is to encourage the preservation of historic buildings instead of demolition or renovations that would diminish the integrity of the property's historic value. By creating a monetary value for the unused capacity that would otherwise be lost, pieces of the city's history will be preserved.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN INTEGRATED

The city's Future Land Use map and Comprehensive Plan were updated in coordination with the Miami 21 effort. In order to apply a form-based code, the land-use categories were modified to allow more mixed uses and additional categories added to incorporate the transect differentiations. The City worked very closely with the State to make this process seamless and on

parallel paths. The land-use items were brought to city commission as companion items. In addition, Miami 21 by its nature already puts Miami in an advantageous position to comply with requirements of House Bill 697.

Dakota Hendon and Alex Adams, AICP are Planners with the City of Miami Planning Department. They can be reached at 305-416-1400.

THE RESULT

In October 2009, after four years, over 500 meetings, nearly a quarter million unique visitors to www.miami21.org and many refinements, the "MIAMI 21 CODE" was officially adopted by the Miami City Commission. By doing so, Miami became the first major U.S. city to adopt a comprehensive zoning ordinance that applies smart growth and form-based principles citywide. The new regulations will take effect in May 2010, allowing the public and the city time to adjust and implement the new regulations.



"8th Street" - The benefits of a form based code are shown in this before and after image of Calle Ocho, a major commercial corridor in Miami. Miami's form based code requires active ground floor uses with frequent doors and windows in order to activate streets and create interesting places to walk. The former code lacked design criteria which resulted in blank walls along many of Miami's main corridors.

BEFORE



AFTER

