


Memorandum



Date: May 17, 2022

To: Honorable Chairman Jose “Pepe” Diaz
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From: Daniella Levine Cava
Mayor 

Subject: Aligned Application to Amend the County’s Comprehensive Development Master Plan

To build a Miami-Dade where our residents can thrive and prosper now and long into the future, we must take on the major challenges threatening our community – like worsening traffic, flooding, contamination of Biscayne Bay, and our affordability crisis. Many of these are a direct product of poor development choices made in the past – mistakes that we pay for many times over, as we spend billions to retrofit our County for a sustainable future. We are pouring billions into Comprehensive Everglades Restoration (CERP) because we damaged the Everglades decades ago; now we struggle to restore water flows to save the drinking water beneath our feet. We are undertaking costly septic to sewer conversion across Miami-Dade to protect the Bay from years of sewage seeping into our waterways. And we do all this with the specter of rising seas and a worsening climate crisis knocking on our door.

We can’t continue to make these same mistakes, compounding our existing challenges and saddling future generations with the consequences of more poor planning. The Urban Development Boundary (UDB) was established to ensure smart growth based upon need. Pushing it east for 800 acres of poorly planned warehouses is simply not smart economic development.

This is why I fully support the recommendation of our professional staff who have determined that the “Aligned” application to move the UDB should be rejected. This project seeks to convert hundreds of acres of farmland into industrial warehouses squarely in an area we have deemed vulnerable to the impacts from even the weakest of hurricanes – placing industrial facilities, which inevitably produce chemicals and pollutants, in an area targeted for restoration of Biscayne Bay. And in exchange for these impacts to our vulnerable wetlands, the project promises tens of thousands of jobs that in all likelihood may never materialize.

Again, we only have to look to the past to realize that the project’s promised job numbers are heavily exaggerated. Nearly 16 years ago, the County brought over 1,000 acres into the UDB in the hopes of creating economic transformation for North Dade. Today, industrial development has occurred on less than half the site, and applications to undo the industrial plans have dominated activity on the other half. In South Dade hundreds of acres of land near the Homestead Air Reserve Base were conveyed to the County from the Air Force for economic development, yet sat vacant for almost two decades despite concerted efforts to bring industry there.

In fact, the application would leave half of the 800 acres without a coordinated plan of development – a clear indication that the project is not actually ready to be developed.

Instead of looking beyond the UDB, we should be investing in smart development to build density along growing corridors like the South Dade Transitway. We need to account for how people actually live and move by investing in jobs around transit and existing infrastructure and prioritizing transit-oriented development.

I am proud to have championed sound economic development for South Dade as District 8 Commissioner, and now as Mayor. Through the South Dade Economic Development study, our “South Dade: More to Explore” campaign in partnership with the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, and other efforts, I have proudly collaborated with our business community to make positive investments in South Dade’s community and industries. The economy of South Dade is diverse, including our critically important agricultural industry and two National Parks which attract over one million visitors annually. Economic development for South Dade must build on these important economic engines rather than undermine them.

The project also threatens Everglades restoration. The area is under consideration for CERP’s Biscayne Bay Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) project intended specifically to save southern Biscayne Bay, and restoration of freshwater flows that are critically important to our future will be severely compromised if the project moves forward. No amount of stormwater infrastructure can correct for continuing to eliminate areas where water would flow and be absorbed. This is another critical reason why we must maximize our infill footprint, rather than compromise the long-term livability of our paradise by paving over our remaining farmland and wetlands.

Finally, the application states that agriculture is worse than industrial activity for the Bay – yet the northern watershed is the most imperiled part of Biscayne Bay, the result of decades of historic industrial uses. At the same time, our South Dade soil is vital to the prosperity of our entire region and Miami-Dade is one of the few parts of the U.S. where crops can be grown and harvested year-round. Recent global shortages are a harsh reminder of the critical importance of food security, another reason not to convert a major piece of agricultural holdings.

The Comprehensive Development Master Plan was created to help us make good decisions now that keep us on track toward a sustainable future. I urge you to deny this application so that we can continue to build a strong, sustainable foundation for future economic growth – rooted in a resilient, thriving environment and smart development.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

c: Geri Bonzon-Keenan, County Attorney
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