

Inspection group finds many Brickell corridor deficiencies

BY ZACHARY S. FAGENSON

About 50 people walking the Brickell corridor in search of trouble spots had no trouble finding a flood of them, ranging from cracked streets to lack of trash cans and – well – a summer of flooding.

No problem was too big or too small for the group, which included Miami Commissioner Joe Sanchez and Deputy Police Chief Frank Fernandez and members of the Brickell Area Association, the Downtown Development Authority and representatives from city, county and state agencies.

They examined everything from aesthetic deficiencies to such infrastructural problems as flooding.

The two-hour inspection last Tuesday began at 777 Brickell Ave. and moved south toward Southeast 14th Street, which they followed west before turning north onto South Miami Avenue and ending in Mary Brickell Village.

Within minutes, problems were spotted and officials began jotting down the area's numerous improvement needs.

"We've walked three blocks and there hasn't been a single trash can," Mr. Sanchez said after seeing an empty pizza box and soda bottles left on a newspaper box.

The group identified broken, raised sidewalks, cracked streets, "ugly" utility marks on roads and

sidewalks, malfunctioning Metromover escalators and several buildings whose ground-level exteriors needed improvement.

As representatives of the city's public works noted a broken sidewalk here and a raised manhole cover there, officials said the most important thing was to open communications among the many agencies responsible for the ins and outs of the Brickell corridor.

"One of the [good] things I found is that [the walk] got all the parties together," said Downtown Development Authority Executive Director Alyce Robertson. "When a concern would be raised, it could be managed."

This communication is indispensable when it comes to such issues as "blocking the box" – when cars trying to beat a red light get stuck in the middle of an intersection blocking adjacent traffic.

It's a frequent occurrence at Brickell Avenue and Southeast Eighth Street.

Brickell Area Association members such as attorney Bruce Jay Colan of Holland & Knight attributed the traffic jams to backups on the Brickell Key Bridge. Solving the problem would require added enforcement from city police as well as adjustment of the traffic-light timing, which is controlled by the county, the walkers, including Deputy Police Chief Fernandez, concluded.



Miami Commissioner Joe Sanchez, left, and Randy J. Olen, president, Brickell Area Association, during the March 17 Brickell walkabout.

"The box is blocked here religiously," Mr. Colan said, calling the traffic system "atrocious." Laws need to be "enforced and there needs to be a PR campaign put out focused" on following the traffic laws.

The most pressing issue of the afternoon, however, was the constant flooding Brickell residents and businesses deal with after heavy rain.

The floods often turn Brickell Avenue into an extension of

Biscayne Bay, inundating parking lots and forcing ground-level businesses in Mary Brickell Village to close their doors.

Help, however, is on the way.

The Florida Department of Transportation is to begin work on a \$7.6 million pump station on Southeast 13th Street and Brickell Avenue in spring 2010 that will last about 12 to 18 months, according to Assistant City Manager Bill Anido.

While the pump station will

alleviate many businesses' problems, it will also allow for aesthetic-improvement projects along Brickell to begin.

One of the first issues the group spotted was bare dirt with little shrubbery both lining Brickell and in the median.

Many of them bemoaned the constant lack of upkeep but were told not to expect many improvements until after the pump station was complete.

Along with the pumping station, the area may see a sliver of President Obama's federal stimulus money if repairs to the Brickell Key Bridge begin.

"We have listed the bridge as one of the city's stimulus-package projects," Mr. Anido said. "It's the result of a fairly detailed bridge inspection that was performed by the Florida Department of Transportation at the city's request."

Mr. Anido said officials will know next month whether the \$1.27 million project will be approved and, if approved, the six-month job would begin soon after.

As the group neared the end of its walk, Commissioner Sanchez recognized the need to take charge after noticing a Metromover rail line with peeling, cracked paint that was falling onto the road below.

"Some things have been improved and it's important we work together to improve the area," he said. But local government "needs to lead by example."