

Brickell's needs will be addressed in budget, DDA says

By YUDISLAIDY FERNANDEZ

Brickell's needs are promised a prominent place in the planning for the new budget of Miami's Downtown Development Authority, the agency says.

With a hand from the City of Miami, Miami-Dade County and the Florida Department of Transportation, the authority plans major improvements for Brickell, including a \$7.6 million pump station to reduce flooding problems, aesthetic improvements to Metromover stations and street repairs.

Brickellites often dread the rainy season and the swamped roads and sidewalks that accompany it.

City Commissioner Marc Sarnoff, who represents the area, said flooding is the biggest complaint he gets from area residents.

He said he has been working with the Florida Department of Transportation, known as FDOT, to hasten the pump station's installation.

Gus Pego, FDOT's South Florida secretary, said the state is to bid out the contract in April 2010 and the work would begin that summer.

The project has taken a while to start because Brickell Avenue's repairs exceeded the available budget, Mr. Pego said. But he said with construction costs dropping, the agency can now fund the full work.

Judy Solaun-Gonzalez, FDOT's project manager, said repairs are to cover Brickell Avenue from Southeast 25th Road to Fifth Street.

Work includes repairing cracks, improving the street's surface and installing the pump station at Southeast 13th Street, she said.

The beautification project also includes repairing damaged sidewalks, upgrading ramps to meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards and installing new lighting, signage and pavement marks from Southeast 15th Road to Fifth Street, she added.

Ms. Solaun-Gonzalez said with city and downtown authority funds, decorative crosswalks are to be added at some intersections and new landscaping along the avenue.

Downtown Development Authority Executive Director Alyce Robertson said Brickell is also benefiting from transit improvements, a major concern for the authority's board this year.

The agency has been meeting monthly with Miami-Dade's transit department to discuss downtown's transit issues.

So far, she said some Brickell Metromover station escalators are back in service — after being broken for months and, in some cases, years — and other are now being repaired.

The next transit concern the



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agency hopes to address is painting the area's Metromover stations, she said, a job that has been on transit's to-do list but had no funding available.

The authority is exploring paying \$10,000 for the county to complete the stations' paintjobs with the condition transit reimburse the money from funds it is slated to receive from the federal stimulus package.

But Ms. Robertson said the authority's first choice is to have the county spend the money directly.

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money when an agency like transit is responsible for doing the maintenance," she said.

One challenge the authority faces when addressing street maintenance in Brickell is that different agencies control various roadways.

The state has jurisdiction over Brickell Avenue, the county over South Miami Avenue and the city over most of the Brickell area's cross streets.

She said the authority acts as "eyes and ears" for the agencies. "One of the roles of the DDA is to get agencies to focus on problems in downtown."

One problem the city is addressing is street repairs.

Miami plans to allocate \$2 million to make storm water, sidewalk and general beautification improvements along some of its Brickell streets.

Ms. Robertson said for the next's fiscal year's budget another priority is to enhance the pedestrian experience through all of its four districts: Central Business District, Brickell, Media Entertainment District and Park West.

She said the authority has applied for a grant from the county's Metropolitan Planning Organization to analyze pedestrian and bicycle issues downtown. It hopes to address them using next year's funds, she said.

Ms. Robertson said she also plans to continue funding the agency's Downtown Enhancement Team to help with

the upkeep of Brickell's streets.

This year — the first year the team extended its services to Brickell — \$165,000 funded a team of handymen for such maintenance as painting over graffiti, picking up trash and pressure-cleaning sidewalks.

She said it is critical to keep sending the team to the Brickell area to keep streets clean. "The team is doing a great job," she added.

Ms. Robertson said one hurdle the authority is overcoming — and is key to meeting Brickell's priorities next fiscal year — is improving its working relationship with the Brickell Area Association.

The partnership was damaged under the authority's former leadership, which the association has criticized for not redeploying enough tax dollars to improve Brickell.

The Brickell district alone chips in more than half of the authority's total tax collection. The authority funds area programs from the millage it collects yearly from properties within its boundaries.

This month, the Brickell Area Association held a walk-about, similar to one the downtown authority organized last year, to address needed repairs and improvements.

Ms. Robertson said it's important the two groups keep working together and be "true partners" to invest in the future of the bustling district.