

# The Miami Herald

## NEIGHBORS

June 14, 2009

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# NEIGHBORS

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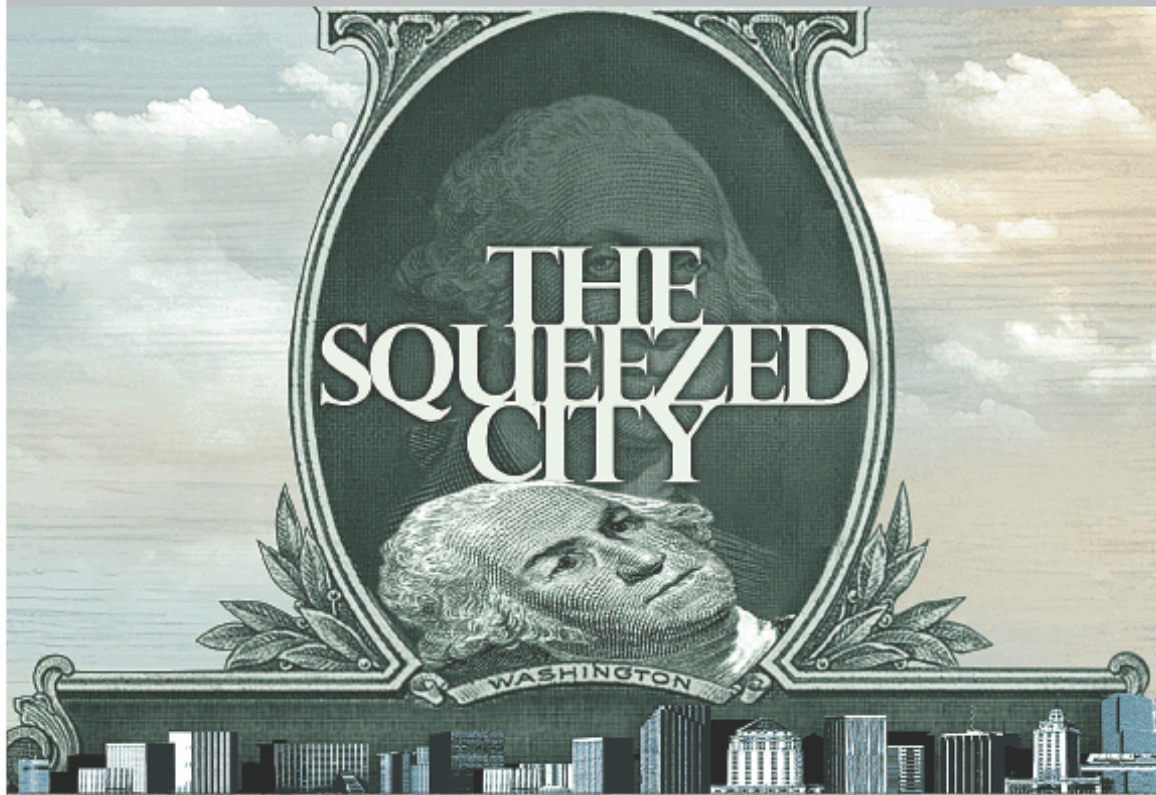


PHOTO: ILLUSTRATION BY MIA LENCE-LARRAQUE, MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Declining property values are leading to big drop-offs in city budgets across Miami-Dade County. With a tough budget season looming, municipalities might face tax hikes and cutbacks in services. **PAGE 1B**

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DOWNTOWN MIAMI

## SERENITY BECKONS

THREE NEW DOWNTOWN MIAMI MINI PARKS PROVIDE RESIDENTS WITH A RELAXING ATMOSPHERE TO EAT LUNCH, VISIT FRIENDS AND WALK. MORE PARKS ARE EXPECTED TO OPEN

BY ROCIO BLANCO GARCIA  
Special to The Miami Herald

Downtown Miami residents now can escape the concrete jungle without leaving town. It is all thanks to three mini parks that the city leaders recently opened.

The Paul S. Walker Urbanscape, together with the Joan Lehman Sculpture Plaza and Robert F. Clark Plaza, form a trio of oases in downtown's core where people can enjoy nature, breathe the fresh air or simply enjoy a tree's shade.

"This is really a lovely place to come to have lunch or just some coffee," said Fina Suarez.

With their large oak trees, benches and colorful flowers, the parks provide the relaxing atmosphere some residents have been looking for. Many

### If you go

- **What:** Paul S. Walker Urbanscape, 46 W. Flagler St.; Joan Lehman Sculpture Plaza, Flagler Street at Southwest First Avenue; and Robert F. Clark Plaza, Northwest First Avenue and First Street.
- **When:** Open every day from sunrise to sunset.
- **Information:** [www.dcmi.mifl.us/oms/parks](http://www.dcmi.mifl.us/oms/parks).

complained the downtown area didn't have enough parks.

"We really needed something like this around here," Suarez said. "We shouldn't



PHOTOS BY ALISON DIAZ FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

WELCOME SIGHT: Sandwiched between downtown Miami's buildings lies Paul S. Walker Urbanscape, one of three mini parks that the city has opened to create more green space for downtown residents and workers.

all the time." The mini parks, however,

are not completely new to the neighborhood. They had been around long before the city leaders decided to bring them back to life by removing dirt and concrete that made it impossible for people to enjoy their beauty.

The Paul Walker mini park, built in honor of Walker's contributions to the city, opened more than 30 years ago.

But after the city decided to lease the property out, a cafeteria and a building replaced it.

Not all the park's original elements were lost. Its waterfall, hidden under the building, was recovered, and it is now part of the newly improved Paul S. Walker Urbanscape.

The other two parks were also enhanced with pedestrian-friendly features such as new pathways and trees.

"It's extremely gratifying to see the dream of reopening Paul S. Walker Park become a reality," said Commissioner Marc Sarnoff, who

pushed for the park's restoration. "Restoring Paul Walker Park to its former glory is something that our community should be very proud of."

The city's decision to reopen the parks came after the Downtown Development Authority concluded there was not enough green space.

"Downtown has seen a tremendous growth in its residential population, and [it is] going to need some parks whether it is to walk or to eat their lunch outside," said the authority's Mark Sparoli.

More downtown Miami parks are expected. The DDA is currently evaluating an available space near Northeast 28th Street, north of the Omni.

"Miami's downtown doesn't have to be a concrete jungle. If we have the ability to provide a small oasis of serenity to downtown workers or visitors, it's our responsibility to make that happen," Sarnoff said.



PEACEFUL RETREAT: Pedestrian friendly features such as new pathways and trees are abundant at the Walker Urbanscape. "It's extremely gratifying to see the dream of reopening Paul S. Walker Park become a reality," said Commissioner Marc Sarnoff.