

Financial kinks remain as ‘unified’ downtown signs loom

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Agencies in Miami’s core have launched a collaborative effort to install a “graphically unified family of directional and identification signs” downtown. The signs won’t be installed for a least one year, however, and financial kinks have yet to be worked out.

“We had an initial kickoff meeting of the steering committee” in mid-February, said Javier Betancourt, the Downtown Development Authority’s deputy director. “The consultants came down and met with the stakeholders and destination representatives to get our ideas.

It was very positive; everyone is excited about the project.” The committee, he said, is to meet again this week.

Last December, the authority voted to hire Gannet Fleming and MERJE for \$157,000 to analyze downtown signage needs and prepare construction documents. The goal is to unify the current maze of more than 2,000 directional, traffic and informational signs in the city’s core.

The project is now in the design stage, which will take several months, partly because various agencies regulate signage downtown, and also because of numerous physical and legal issues, including setbacks and rights-

of-way. Preparing the engineering and construction documents is expected to take at least nine months.

Then, things get interesting.

“We don’t have all the funding identified, so we will rely on our partners” for manufacture and installation of the signs, Mr. Betancourt said. Those partners are the City of Miami, Miami Parking Authority, the downtown Community Redevelopment Agency and others.

“We are going to fund some of it, but we can’t do it all,” he said. “We’ve received verbal commitments from our partners to assist in that effort.” Construction and placement, he said, will

cost \$1 million to \$2 million.

After the signs are installed, the downtown agency hopes to move into electronic media, using innovations including an iPhone (or similar) application to direct drivers to public or private parking and to help them get around the city.

The agency hopes the project will reduce confusion, improve traffic, enhance pedestrian access and create a cohesive theme.

Last year, authority board member Neisen Kasdin, a land-use attorney and former mayor of Miami Beach, recalled the city’s decision to institute unified signage: “It was one of the best things they ever did.”