Real estate is our domain
GlobeSt.com™

June 28, 2010

Park Remediation Gets Green Light

By Hortense Leon

MIAMI-In mid-June, the city of Miami gave the green light to a $2 million remediation project in Bicentennial Park in downtown on Biscayne Bay, which will pave the way for the start of construction of twin museums in the park. The $27- million Miami Science Museum and the $120-million Miami Art Museum both currently have smaller facilities within a few miles of Bicentennial Park. Plans for the two institutions have been in the works for about a decade.

The remediation is necessary, because the park, which is also being redesigned to be more user-friendly than it is presently, was the original site of the Port of Miami. Part of the land is contaminated with oil.

The city of Miami has hired New York-based Coopers Robertson & Partners to re-design the park so that the waterfront will be more accessible, with supporting green space and walking places, says Alyce Robertson, executive director of the Miami Downtown Development Authority.

Since 2004, 23,000 condominiums have been built in downtown and surrounding areas, says Robertson. Of those, a good proportion are over-looking Bicentennial Park. The new design of the park is important to make it walkable and inviting for those living nearby, but also for the area as a whole, she says.

The remediation is expected to begin shortly and take about two months, after which the Miami Art Museum will begin construction on its more than 100,000-square-foot building, says Aaron Podhurst, chairman of the board of MAM. It will take 25 months to build.

The MAM, which like its sister museum is a private, non-profit entity, is getting $100 million from Miami-Dade County to build the new facility, compliments of a 2005 $2.2 billion county bond issue which is funding a host of other public projects. The museum also has an endowment for operating expenses, which includes setting up exhibitions for school children, says Podhurst. The MAM is being designed by Swiss architects Herzog & DeMeuron. MAM has needed a larger home for many years, for a number of reasons, one being that it needs more room for its children's

exhibitions, says Podhurst. The county will take over the existing, 30,000-square foot facility when the new one is complete.

The current MAM was not supposed to be a museum in which to keep artwork, says Robertson. It was for traveling exhibits, she says. The Miami Science Museum, which is receiving $175 million from the county, will start construction early next year, says Frank Steslow, chief operating officer for the Miami Science Museum. The building is scheduled to be finished in late 2013 and open in early 2014, he says. The design for the 250,000-square-foot museum is still being worked on, but it will be a combination science museum, aquarium and planetarium, he says.

Both museums will have three consecutive land leases of 33 years each with the city, or essentially a 99-year lease, says Steslow.

The new museum will have exhibitions on health and nutrition, space and time and there will be an "energy playground" for children. But the aquarium will be the main exhibit, says Steslow, with a half-million gallon gulf stream exhibition. It will have sharks and schooling fish such as tuna and sea turtles and will appear to have no boundaries when viewed from outside.

A lot of the space in the new science museum will be outdoors, but under-cover, says Steslow. The height of the outdoor portion of the aquarium will be three floors and the building will have different ceiling heights.

"We were trying to build a sustainable building which will at least have a LEED-silver rating," says Steslow. It will use natural sunlight, solar panels and may include other green energy-generating technology, such as wind power, he says. Gray water will be used for the cooling towers of the air-conditioning system.

The museums are working together to develop a plaza between the two which is being designed by Field Operations, a landscape architectural firm in New York, says Steslow. Beneath the museums and plaza, there will be a continuous parking garage with 500 spaces. The garage won't be underground, but it will appear subterranean, he says. The first levels of both museums are more than 20 feet above sea level.