

## With added downtown police team now gone, area authority seeks aid

By CATHERINE LACKNER

They may not agree about the cause or the solution, but directors of Miami's Downtown Development Authority are concerned that police presence is "sorely lacking" in the city's core, and that may cripple the city's revitalization.

Sixteen officers who were temporarily taken off desk jobs and put downtown last December are gone, and though the Downtown Ambassadors corps of visitor assistants performs some security functions, board members say that's not enough.

With about 70,000 new residents, downtown "cannot afford a big crime," said board member and businessman Jose Goyanes. "The condo sales, the increased livability - gone."

He complained at last week's development authority board meeting that Miami has a police force of about 1,000 officers, but only 24 are assigned to downtown. "That's 2.4% of the workforce."

Miami commissioner and development authority Chairman Marc Sarnoff said the real problem is recidivism, because Miami-Dade County doesn't have enough jail space to house people who commit "lifestyle" crimes such as panhandling.

"If this were a garden hose, there's the crimp," Commissioner Sarnoff said.

A recent bond issue allocated \$300 million for a new jail "but they wanted a \$450 million jail," he said.

Authority directors discussed hiring police officers or other security, but the City of Miami should step up instead, said board member Rolando Montoya, provost of Miami Dade College. "We don't have the revenue and it's not our mission."

"There's no help coming," Mr. Sarnoff told authority directors. "You're not going to get more police unless a miracle happens."



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Other Miami neighborhoods have reported crime increases and residents are pressuring commissioners to bolster police in those areas, he said. After a meeting with city officials that he called "the most disappointing in my life as a commissioner," he said he had reached the conclusion that "it's going to be status quo until November."

If crime increases downtown, "A simple financial analysis will show that a decline in revenues here will affect all of the dis-

tricts," Dr. Montoya said. "Money from downtown flows to them."

"We do have a mission to ensure that downtown is safe," said board member Oscar Rodriguez. "We need to get it very clear in the public's eye that we're doing our job but having no results because of a lack of action on the part of the city commission. We're running into brick walls."

Part of the problem, Commissioner Sarnoff said, is that the county's main jail is near downtown, at Northwest 12th Avenue and 14th Street, so detainees tend to stay in the area after they're released.

"You have got to get more proactive," he told board members. "You've got to have a plan in place. Downtown is significantly underserved."

"Flower pots are nice," said board member Alan Ojeda, "but if we're willing to take action, we can change the destiny of this board. We have enough brain power here to solve this problem."

Authority members discussed individually lobbying city commissioners, the city manager, the chief of police and the state attorney. They finally agreed that Alyce Robertson, authority executive director, would draft a letter to the commission and each board member would sign it. If that fails, they agreed to consider other options.

If the recidivism issue were solved, Mr. Sarnoff said, "You wouldn't need a single extra police officer downtown." His idea for solving the prisoner housing crisis is to erect tent cities. "They do it in Iraq; they do it in Afghanistan. But," he conceded, "most people don't share my draconian view."

"I want a police presence," said board member Hank Klein. "It makes tourists feel comfortable. I'm not going to solve the recidivism issue."