

Redevelopment of Flagler Street a waiting game once more

BY CATHERINE LACKNER

The long-delayed redevelopment of Flagler Street between the Dade County Courthouse and Biscayne Boulevard appears to be a waiting game again, but it's one that stakeholders say will result in a better product.

"A funding agreement between the City of Miami, Miami-Dade County and Flagler Street stakeholders was reached in 2018 that will fund streetscape improvements along Flagler Street, ushering in a 'festival-style' design that is pedestrian-friendly and compatible for major events," Alyce Robertson, executive director of Miami's Downtown Development Authority, said via email.

The authority has championed the project since its inception and has contributed

substantial funding. "The city is now finalizing detailed plans for the street," Ms. Robertson said. "We expect that proposal to come before the city commission in the coming months."

Terrell Fritz, executive director of the Flagler Street Business Improvement District, said the city commission must sign off before a notice to proceed can be issued. "We've had some productive discussions since the first contractor left," he said in January. "We want to move forward as quickly as possible but in the best way possible. I'm optimistic we'll see construction in early to mid-2019, if all goes well."

Last June, Miami-Dade County, Miami and the downtown authority pledged to pump more money into the project, to bring to life the festival design proposed by Moïse Mana,

an investor who has bought a portfolio of Flagler Street properties. The Mana design would raise the roadbed slightly and eliminating curbs – as has been done in Midtown Miami and Miracle Mile in Coral Gables – to create a pedestrian-friendly, more open, street. "It's a big-sky, tropical vision," said Dylan Finger, Mana Miami managing director, then. "We looked at a broad range of designs."

There was general agreement that the plan was better than its predecessor. The changes would take about 36 months to complete with the current contractor, and 42 months if a new request for proposals has to be issued, he said then. It would only affect the curbs and roadway; the sidewalks would remain the same, he added.

But the new plan costs a lot more, and probably take at least

three more years. Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Giménez has volunteered \$3.8 million from the county, said Ken Russell, authority chair and Miami commissioner, last summer.

"After a hard engineering review, we agreed that the city supports the expanded festival street concept," said Nzeribe Ihekweba, Miami assistant city manager and chief of operations, last summer. "The city should be able to fund some of

the deficit, but not the entire amount. It's only fair: if the county can up its offer, the city will match it, if the commission approves. The city is committed to getting this done."

"The mayor is enthusiastic about funding the thing," said Ed Marquez, county deputy mayor, last summer. "Ultimately, it must be blessed by the commission, but I'm sure if the city comes up with the money, we'll match it."



Photo by Cristina Sullivan

Work on Flagler Street that began in 2016 might resume under a new design by the middle of this year.