

Downtown authority questions muffling of Ultra activity

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Balancing downtown residents' quality of life against the economic impact and sizzle of the hugely popular Ultra Music Festival is a tricky act, directors of Miami's Downtown Development Authority said Friday.

There is a move afoot to have the city take over contract negotiations for Ultra from the Bayfront Park Management Trust, said Ken Russell, authority chair and Miami commissioner. "Then, District 2 [which he represents] can weigh in first, versus trying to change a contract the Bayfront Management Trust has already written."

For the March event, which is attended by thousands and televised to many more, the city would like to see closing time shifted from 2 a.m. to midnight, "which would be a big win for quality of life downtown," Mr. Russell said.

Over the years, there have been those who would like to discourage the event

or turn it away, because of noise, littering and drug activity complaints.

But trying to water down the electronic dance music event would be a mistake, some directors said. "If you choose to live downtown – and I have commercial and residential property downtown – you expect some noise, some activity," said Alicia Cervera, authority board member and managing partner of Cervera Real Estate. "You're making a choice. I hope we're not going backwards."

Even more important, she said, is the exposure Miami gets to a young, affluent class of buyer. "We're introducing our city to the next generation of entrepreneurs. These young people are well-funded, and we're teeing up our city for them. It's not my flavor, but it's a hugely impactful event."

"The fact is that people move to the urban core for the lifestyle, the museums, the shows, the park," said authority board member Jerome Hollo, vice president of

Florida East Coast Realty. "We have to be careful to keep that lifestyle thriving. I've developed in other urban cores [where activity such as Ultra is discouraged] and you destroy the golden goose."

"I grew up in New York City," said authority board member Gary Ressler, a principal of the Tilia family of companies. "But there's a difference between lively and having your park shut down for months."

"The grass is destroyed for four to five months," said Eileen Higgins, newly elected county commissioner, who was visiting the meeting and who presumably will be appointed to the board. "Lollapalooza [a music show in Chicago] has a three-week build and a one-week tear-down. Ultra destroys the neighborhood for a very long time. There needs to be more oversight."

While no agreement was reached, "We're the perfect group to discuss this," Mr. Russell said. "We can balance business development with quality of life."



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Alicia Cervera