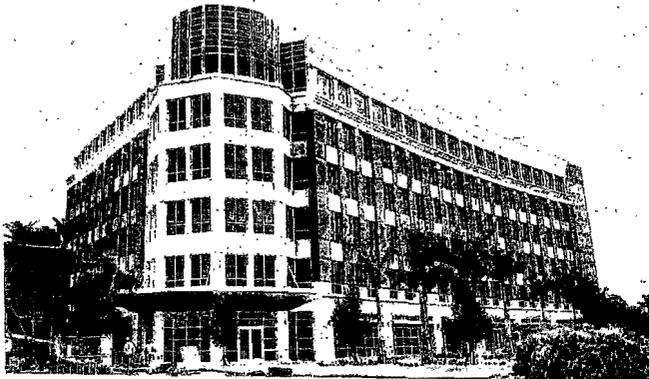


Office space a key to thriving suburban downtown centers

By LIDIA DRUKOVA



8333 Downtown Doral, built in 2010, houses technology companies, government agencies and law firms. Photo by Maxine Uckian



Living and working once coincided, said Maria Juncadella. "We are looking to integrate everything again." Photo by Maxine Uckian

To create a thriving downtown in suburban or suburban-industrial communities, as some South Florida municipalities are striving to do, experts say office space is just as important as retail and residential.

"If you don't have the office space... it doesn't really work," said Ana-Marie Codina Barlick, CEO of Codina Partners, the company behind Downtown Doral. "For the retail amenities to work, they work much better with an active daytime population."

While residents in suburban downtowns are more likely to go to restaurants and shops in the evenings and on weekends, office workers would provide the weekday patronage, she said.

"They kind of go hand in hand," said Ed Silva, director of the Department of Building and Capital Projects at the Village of Palmetto Bay, speaking about the balance of residential, retail and office space in suburban downtowns. "You have to have enough spaces to give these people a place to go to work and go find a doctor and find a lawyer."

More than 1 million square feet of Downtown Doral in the largely suburban-industrial City of Doral will be dedicated to office space, said Maria G. Juncadella, VP principal, Fairchild Partners, the real estate brokerage firm leasing office space in Downtown Doral.

Mrs. Codina Barlick said about a third of Downtown Doral's land in acreage will be office space.

Six of the seven office buildings already exist: the Davenport, the Dawson, the Spokane and the Trenton buildings were renovated and are 80% occupied; the 150,000-square-foot six-story 8333 Downtown Doral building, at 8333 NW 53rd St., was built in 2010 and houses technology companies, government agencies and law firms among others; and the 69,000-square-foot 7950 building is also on Northwest 53rd Street, Ms. Juncadella said.

Still to come: the 150,000-square-foot 8350 building on Northwest 53rd Terrace, she said.

South Miami-Dade's largely suburban Palmetto Bay is studying the possibility of a downtown in an area sometimes called the Franjo Triangle, located from Southwest 184th Street north to 168th Street and from US 1 east to 91st Court, 93rd Avenue and 93rd Place.

A third-party market study showed that in the next five to seven years "the market absorption for office space in Palmetto Bay should be between 135,000 to 270,000 square feet," said Mr. Silva, director of the Department of Building and Capital Projects. The study, he added, shows how much office space the community can support.

In addition, a survey of residents on the downtown initiative showed that 55% of respondents want medical offices,



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53% want professional office suites and 50% want banks and financial services in the proposed downtown.

"They are getting tired of having to drive to other places to have these services performed for them," Mr. Silva said.

The idea behind downtown Palmetto Bay is for the village to invest in studies, infrastructure and a code rewrite, which in turn would prompt developers to invest in the area.

So far, eight developers have been interested, Mr. Silva said, and seven have offered mixed-use developments where retail and office space is housed on the bottom floors and the rest of the building is residential.

But, he added, market forces will dictate exactly how much office space could open in Palmetto Bay's downtown.

A task force comprised of about 40 architects, urban planners and other professionals has proposed the downtown Palmetto Bay development.

"There hasn't been a lot of good quality, Class A type space, at least in the South Dade market," said Scott Silver, executive director for advisory services for Metro 1 Properties and a task force member. "You have certain areas - and Palmetto Bay is one of them - where it's near certain affluent managers and where the owners of businesses live, and they want to be able to locate their offices there."

A suburban downtown office, he added, would significantly cut drive time.

"Would you'd rather drive two hours back and forth to work, or two minutes?" he said.

Ms. Juncadella, of Fairchild Partners, said suburban downtowns complete with office space create a stronger "community feel."

Historically, she said, people had their businesses downstairs and worked upstairs in the same building. Then, communities created "work centers" specifically zoned for office space.

"Now, we are looking to integrate everything again," she said, "to improve our quality of life, to improve the strength of the community."

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