

35 Years MIAMI TODAY

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HIGH-END CONDO BUYERS AND SELLERS PLAYING CAT-AND-MOUSE GAME FOR LEVERAGE, PG. 13



SHOTSPOTTERS EXPANSION TARGETED:

Less than two months after approving an expansion of its Shotspotters program, Miami-Dade commissioners may order Mayor Carlos Giménez to provide a report on enhancing its existing systems with license plate readers and surveillance cameras to address gun violence. Commissioners in 2012 adopted Shotspotters, an acoustic sensors system that detects gunfire and transmits locational data to police within 45 seconds of a shooting, but discontinued it a year later. They revived the program in 2016. As of April 2018, the system had led to just 14 suspect identifications and 18 arrests. Commissioners in committee Tuesday forwarded to a full vote an item calling for the report, sponsored by Barbara Jordan, which states that “layering the technology and using the systems together would significantly boost their effectiveness and [county police] efforts to reduce crime.”

“SLUDGE LAGOON” OZZES ON: Miami-Dade will build a new water and sewer “Sludge Lagoon” to replace the existing facility nearing retirement, as county commissioners Feb. 5 OK’d an item sponsored by Jose “Pepe” Diaz approving its construction. The lagoon, Deputy Mayor Jack Osterholt wrote, is “necessary to continue the disposal of calcium carbonate residuals and... continued production of potable water from the Hialeah-Preston Water Treatment Plant.” The new facility, which will be built by 2020 about 1,040 feet west of the Florida Turnpike just south of the existing facility, is anticipated to provide Miami-Dade with over 100 years of calcium carbonate disposal capacity. No information was in the item as to whether the county will charge admission, what rides will be featured and if seasonal passes will be provided.

SCREENING SUNSCREENS: Certain sunscreen products in the Sunshine State would require prescriptions, under a measure proposed in the Florida Senate. Sen. Linda Stewart of Orlando filed a bill that would require prescriptions to buy sunscreen that contains oxybenzone or octinoxate. The bill says the chemicals “cause mortality in developing coral” and “degrade corals’ resiliency and ability to adjust to climate change factors.” The Florida Society for Dermatology opposed a similar proposal that moved forward in Key West.

MUSICAL GRANTS: The Dr. M. Lee Pearce Foundation has given a series of more than \$500,000 cash grants that include \$100,000 to the Cleveland Orchestra Miami Residency program, a fellowship of \$50,000 at the New World Symphony and five University of Miami Frost School of Music Chopin Academy scholarships of \$10,000 each. When he died last year, Dr. Pearce left in place a foundation to support classical music and improve medical care, especially to the aging.

THE ACHIEVER



Eileen Higgins

Brings her business experience to the county commission
The profile is on Page 4

Affordable housing on summit list

By JESSE SCHECKNER

To infuse new ideas into housing, Miami-Dade Commissioner Dennis Moss is calling for an “affordable housing summit” where decision-makers and experts can jointly target solutions.

On Monday, at the first Housing, Social Services and Economic Development Committee meeting, Mr. Moss, the chairman, said he also wants county departments to submit “reaching” ideas that “would really make a difference.”

“I’m asking people to think outside of the box, [and] I don’t want you to come with small projects,” he said. “For example, [I hope] our housing agency... will come back and say they’re prepared to build 10,000 units of housing this year.”

But no matter how much is built, Commissioner Jean Monestime said, land is finite and gentrification is pressing.

“The cry-out is very loud,” he said. “We have an unlimited amount of need but very limited... space.”

Commissioner Xavier Suarez recommended inviting “important other municipalities”—specifically Miami, whose voters in November 2017 OK’d a \$400 million Forever Bond with \$100 million for affordable housing and economic development.

Vice Chairwoman Eileen Higgins seconded that suggestion, adding that Little Havana in her district has the city’s highest percentage of natural affordable housing but could grow unaffordable as developers scoop up property.

She said she was also working with Public Housing Director Michael Liu to “co-collaborate” with the city in densifying county land in the city to add “more than 1,000 new affordable units.”

As skyrocketing costs and prohibitive down payments force young adults to remain at their parents’ home, Commissioner Joe Martinez said he was less optimistic. “I know the feds have their own definition, but what is exactly affordable?” he asked. “I don’t know if we can tackle that, because supply and demand, and we do have a capitalist society.”

■ Gables sets housing fund, pg. 17

Move over, food truck — here comes the bank

By JESSE SCHECKNER

Banks on wheels — or “bankmobiles” — are now one vote from becoming reality in Miami-Dade, as commissioners in committee Tuesday unambiguously forwarded an ordinance change to permit mobile banking operations.

Representatives from SunTrust Bank attended to support the item, telling commissioners that once approved by the full commission, its “SunTruck” will hit county streets by April. “It’s a win-win for the community and the county in general,” said attorney Graham Penn. “We’re eager to put this in effect.”

Barbara Jordan, the item’s sponsor and chairwoman of the Infrastructure & Capital Improvements Committee, said banks on wheels would “give an opportunity to people who cannot get to the bank,” including seniors, disabled residents and “young people who may be in high school and want to open their first bank account.”

Commissioner Joe Martinez said he thought it was “a great idea” and way to combat predatory payday loans and other businesses that are “taking advantage of the disadvantaged.”

But Mr. Martinez, a former policeman, also

expressed safety reservations.

“Any bank can get robbed,” he said. “It’s one thing to rob it. It’s another to get in and drive away.”

Asked to detail the bank’s safeguards to protect customers, employees and property, Candace Soler, a SunTrust retail distribution execution manager, said each truck will come with cameras providing around-the-clock monitoring, as well as an off-duty police officer “from open to close for teammates and clients, [the same as] any non-mobile branch.”

An estimated 8% of South Florida households lack bank accounts and 17.6% have accounts but rely on payday lenders and other alternatives that charge far more, according to a 2017 report from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

The proposed ordinance would extend to banks the same permission and standards given to mobile sales and food service operations, commonly referred to as food trucks.

Vehicles under the ordinance can operate in certain commercial, industrial and urban districts, as well as at museums, hospitals, schools and religious properties.

They must adhere to strict parking rules,

occupy a total vending area of no more than 600 square feet, restrict signage to that area, and cannot operate on vacant or unimproved properties unless otherwise approved.

Banks on wheels have operated since at least the 1940s, according to the Royal Bank of Scotland, which runs such services today and bought its original mobile banking service from the US Army, which used a Studebaker van to pay US military personnel posted there during World War II.

Today, banks worldwide have wheeled banking, including stateside mobile ATMs and bankmobiles from SunTrust, Visa, Citibank, Wells Fargo, Chase, IBC Bank, Navy Federal Credit Union and many local or regional operations.

Increased use of mobile banks and a decline in brick-and-mortar locations prompted the British Broadcasting Corp. in December 2017 to publish, “Can ‘banks on wheels’ replace brick-and-mortar?”

In November, National Public Radio aired a nine-minute report titled, “All Aboard the Bankmobile,” about the Bank of Bird-in-Hand, PA, which serves Amish customers and others for whom regular trips to banks are difficult.

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PEOPLE

**Erin Knight****Monument Capital adds executive VP**

Erin D. Knight has been named executive vice president of real estate investment firm Monument Capital Management. She will be based in the corporate offices in Miami.

Previously, she had been chief operating officer of a high-end women's fashion house and before that executive vice president-market president Miami-Dade for Stonegate Bank, now Home BancShares. Earlier, she was senior vice president-private banking sales manager for Regions Bank.

Ms. Knight received her bachelor of arts in political science from Florida State University.

