3

Miami's 20th-Century Park System

Miami's park system was created in the twentieth century in a local economy based on real estate development and tourism, unlike the Olmsted park systems of the nineteenth century that were created to balance the social and environmental problems of industrial cities. Most of the major parks in Miami today were in place by the 1940s and the vast majority of today's parks were created by 1982.

THE CREATION OF MIAMI'S PARK SYSTEM

MIAMI'S EARLIEST PARKS

At its beginnings, the city of Miami was a farm and market town, surrounded by water and the Everglades. When Henry Flagler extended the Florida East Coast Railroad to Miami in 1896 and built the Royal Palm Hotel on Julia Tuttle's land at the mouth of the Miami River, the history of modern Miami began. The Royal Palm Hotel also began the history of Miami's parks. Early community events were held in the extensive bayfront grounds of the Royal Palm Hotel, making it Miami's first de facto park. Planted with palms and other tropical plants, the park also included a pavilion/band shell, baseball field, and track. By the 1920s, the City of Miami had entered into a lease agreement to pay Flagler's company $1.00 per year for public access.

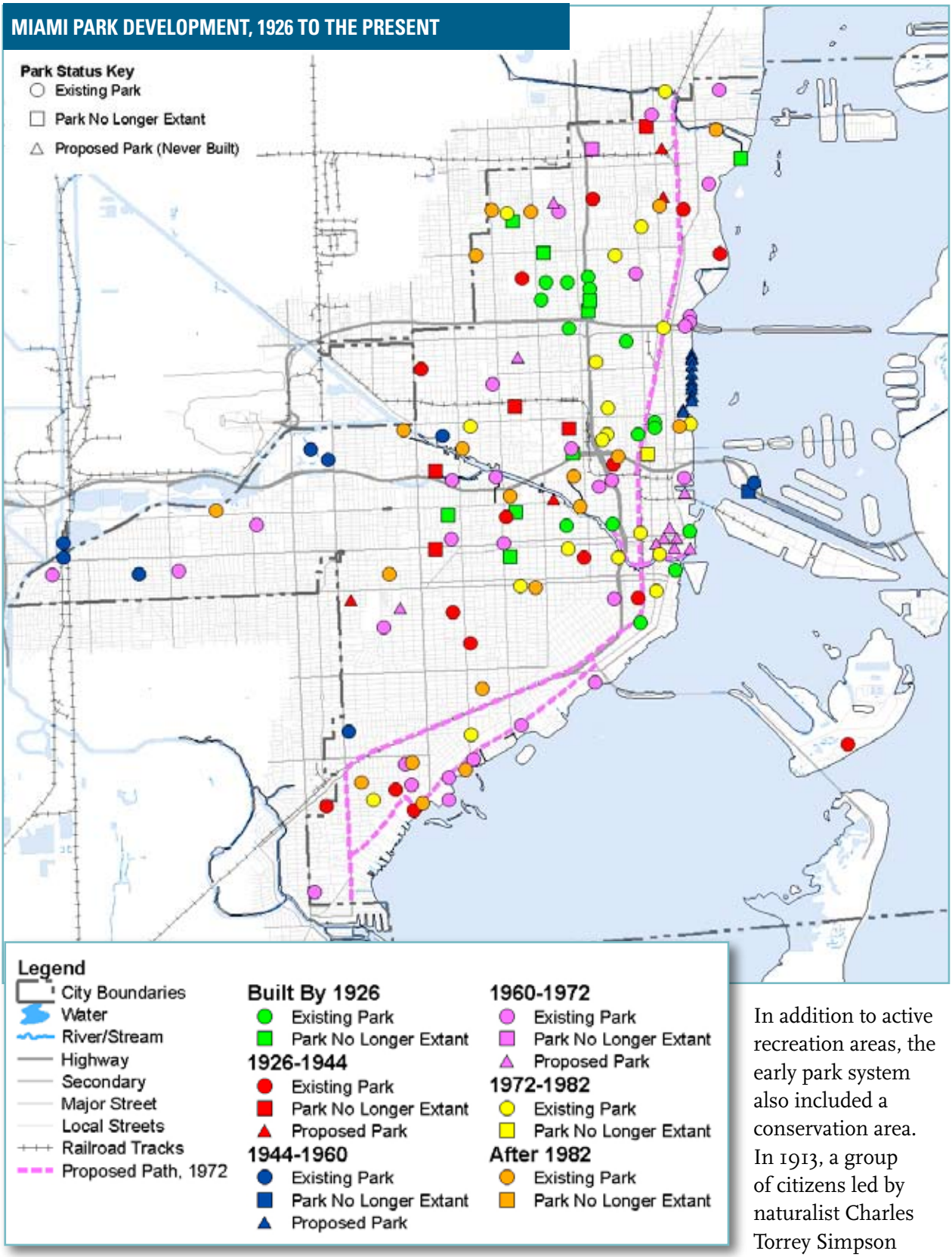
Community baseball game on the grounds of the Royal Palm Hotel in 1918.

BOTH IMAGES: FLORIDA PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION OF THE FLORIDA STATE ARCHIVES

The 1910s and 1920s were boom decades for Miami, as its population grew from approximately 5,500 people in 1910 to 110,637 in 1930. In addition to these permanent residents, seasonal visitors packed the city's hotels, rooming houses, and cottages. Miami developed a fledgling park system that both loosely followed and prompted the development of residential subdivisions. In 1909, the City purchased a tract of land west of downtown near the Miami River with the intent of developing a city recreation area. Lummus Park, named after one of the city's early mayors, became the catalyst for a new neighborhood and, similarly, Mary Brickell designated one of the parcels in her 1910s Riverside subdivision south of the Miami River as a community park, with playing fields and a neighborhood playground (the park no longer exists).

Lummus Park, one of Miami's oldest parks, was built as an early recreation center near downtown.

MIAMI PARK DEVELOPMENT, 1926 TO THE PRESENT



In addition to active recreation areas, the early park system also included a conservation area. In 1913, a group of citizens led by naturalist Charles Torrey Simpson became alarmed at the rapid loss of Miami's natural landscape and petitioned the City to purchase property south of the Miami River and preserve it in its natural state as a new city park. In 1914, Mary Brickell sold the City 5.5 acres of land along South Miami Avenue for Jungle Park, which was to be left as a remnant of the

native coastal hammock. In the 1920s a beautification group decided to "improve" the park by introducing exotic plant species to the hammock. Fortunately for the naturalists, the 1926 hurricane that devastated Miami provided the opportunity to eliminate all of the exotic species and return Jungle Park (now Simpson Park) to its original condition.

By early 1926, the system included 110 acres of park land in 36 parks, which ranged from very small open spaces in residential neighborhoods (such as traffic islands) to a large park at the city waterworks site at NW 36th Street and 7th Avenue. At least 15 of these parks were located outside of today's city limits, and several of the larger parks no longer exist.

BOTH IMAGES: FLORIDA PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION OF THE FLORIDA STATE ARCHIVES

Tennis courts at Moore Park–one of Miami's oldest recreational facilities—in 1935 (upper photo). The lower image, from the late 1920s, shows residents and visitors enjoying then-new Bayfront Park's waterfront setting.

Miami faced the loss of its major downtown park when Flagler's company made plans to sell some of the Royal Palm's grounds for development. The City purchased a strip of waterfront land and a pier and in 1924 began to fill in the bay. The City decided that the new 39-acre Bayfront Park should be a beautiful passive downtown retreat that would include a yacht center on the northern end and a community band shell on the southern end. Between these two anchors, the fill was to be richly landscaped with numerous palm trees, shade trees, and shrubs. Additional amenities included winding walkways, bayfront seating, and secluded nooks, such as the Rock Garden and its goldfish pond. Despite construction delays resulting from the 1926 hurricane, Bayfront Park was open to the public by 1927 and soon became the centerpiece of Miami's growing park system.

In addition to caring for the city's parks and providing recreation programs, the city's Park Division planted street trees and maintained three city nurseries, the largest at Biscayne Park next to the city cemetery. In order to encourage Miami's residents to make their new neighborhoods greener, the Park Division in the 1920s gave away free trees and shrubs for planting on residential property, distributing more than 18,000 plants in 1926 alone. The Park Division that had only five workers before 1922 expanded rapidly over the next four years to include a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, five foremen, twelve park tenders, seven truck drivers, four park policemen, four nurserymen, one carpenter, one storekeeper, one stenographer, and 75 to 100 day laborers. In 1926 play supervisors were first hired for most playing fields and playgrounds.

MIAMI'S EARLIEST PARKS: BEFORE 1926
(OLDER NAME IN PARENTHESES)

- Lummus Park—6 acres
- Biscayne Park—8 acres
- Simpson (Jungle) Park—5.5 acres
- Riverside Park (defunct)—3 acres
- Roberto Clemente (Wyndwood) Park—3 acres
- Henderson Park—3 acres
- Dorsey (City) Park—2 acres
- Moore (Waterworks) Park—19 acres
- Miami Field (defunct)—15 acres
- Royal Palm Park (leased only; defunct)

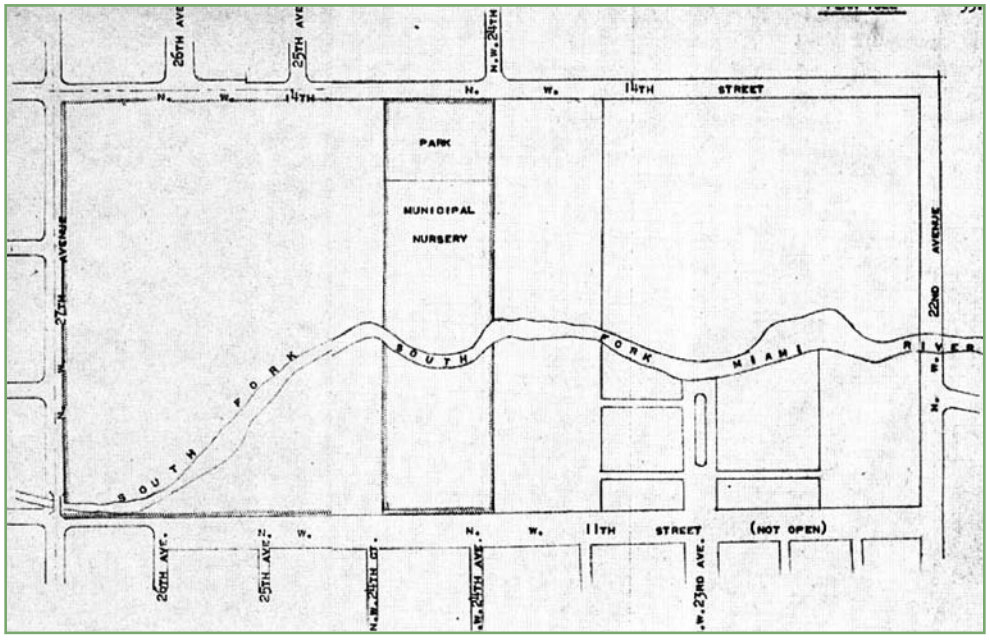
EXPANSION AND RECREATION

PARKS CREATED 1926–1944
(OLDER NAME IN PARENTHESES)

- Bayfront Park
- Athalie Range (Edison Center) Park
- Hadley (Manor) Park
- Little River Park (defunct)
- Morningside Park
- Southside Park
- Highland Park (defunct)
- Shenandoah Park
- Armbrister (Grand Avenue) Park
- Peacock (Coconut Grove Bayfront) Park
- Kirk Munroe (Oak) Park/Tennis Center
- Bryan Park
- Jorge Mas Canosa (Riverside) Park

Although the 1926 hurricane devastated many parts of Miami and brought an end to overheated real estate speculation, the city continued to grow, bringing new parks to new neighborhoods and focusing especially on providing active recreation opportunities for all ages. During the 1930s and early 1940s, the Park Division built many parks throughout the city, almost all of which included playfields and community centers intended to be used by neighborhood residents of different ages.

An ambitious 1944 park improvement plan heavily promoted expansion of existing parks and acquisition of land for new parks. The biggest proposal in the 1944 plan envisioned that the City's nursery property at the current location of Fern Isle Park would become a 64-acre horticultural and botanical garden straddling the South Fork of the Miami River. Although the present Fern Isle Park eventually evolved out of this large property, the plans for a "central park" in the form of a large garden center never materialized. Out of 38 park properties proposed for improvements in 1944, 14 were slated for expansion. In some cases, this involved acquiring a few lots around the park in order to create a new playing field or provide a site for a recreation building, but other plans involved much larger expansions. Plans were also advanced for the development of five new parks from 8 to 29 acres in size, dispersed around the city. Only two of these actually were built: Curtis Park and West End Park (but at less than half of its proposed size).



A 1944 plan promoted creation of a large botanical garden around the City's plant nursery on the South Fork of the Miami River.

SOURCE: MIAMI DIVISION OF PARKS' POSTWAR PLANS IN THE MIAMI METROPOLITAN ARCHIVE

SOURCE: FLORIDA PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION OF THE FLORIDA STATE ARCHIVES

Dupont Plaza parking lots on the bayfront and river, 1955. The City's plan to acquire this underutilized property and create an extension of Bayfront Park never materialized.

During the 1950s, Miami's growth slowed significantly. The pace of park development mirrored this slow-down, and few new parks were built during the 1950s. However, the Park Division continued to acquire land for new parks, mostly in the city's growing western neighborhoods. The old city nursery at Fern Isle became a much smaller park than originally proposed and the City expanded Morningside and Peacock parks and acquired Watson Island and part of Virginia Key. The focus of the 1950s park system was on creating and adding to large neighborhood and citywide park spaces rather than building new, smaller parks in existing and expanding neighborhoods.

Miami's 1959 City Master Plan and its 1960 recreation plan focused on deficiencies within the system by comparing Miami's recreation facilities with national recreation standards that had been developed for the burgeoning suburbs of post-World War II America. According to the master plan, Miami's 642 acres of park and recreation space, which included school grounds, was half the national standard for a city of Miami's size (1,300 acres).

Despite a discussion of Miami's special role as a tourist Mecca that needed "recreation facilities—public and private—to entice visitors here who might go elsewhere," the plan emphasized the need for neighborhood-focused parks within walking distance of residents. Using national standards, the plan found many deficiencies in the number of recreation facilities and recommended collaboration with the county Board of Education to allow neighborhood residents to use school playing fields and recreation areas after school hours and on weekends. Maps created for the 1960 recreation plan show a lack of playgrounds in all areas of the city, and playfields were noticeably absent in a large portion of West Flagler, Coral Way, Little Havana, and the northern portion of the Upper Eastside.

PARKS CREATED 1944–1960
(OLDER NAME IN PARENTHESES)

- Curtis Park
- West End Park
- Douglas Park
- Grapeland Heights Park
- Melreese (Le Jeune) Golf Course
- Fern Isle
- Watson Park (defunct except for Ichimura Japanese Garden)

During a ten-year, $10.5 million capital improvement program sparked by the 1960 recreation plan, a number of new park properties were added to the system. Many of these were small parks meant to provide neighborhood play facilities, but several larger parks were created in different areas of the city. Although land condemnation for the construction of Miami's expressway system presented opportunities for new open space and recreation areas adjacent to and under the new highways, the location of these new parks did not meet the 1960 plan's criteria for neighborhood locations with good pedestrian access. Almost all of the new parks, however, adhered to the 1960 recreation plan's call for the development of active recreation areas. Most provided play-

PARKS CREATED 1961–1972 (OLDER NAME IN PARENTHESES)

- Legion Park
- Belle Meade Mini-Park
- Oakland Grove Mini-Park
- Belafonte-Tacolcy Center
- Range Park #2 (now relocated)
- Range Park #3 (closed)
- Stearns Park
- Magnolia Park
- Martell Park
- Margaret Pace Park
- Juan Pablo Duarte (Allapattah Comstock) Park
- Range Park #1
- Bicentennial Park (FEC Yards) land acquisition
- Wainwright Park (partial)
- Merrie Christmas Park
- Blanche Park
- Dinner Key Marina
- Virrick Park
- Triangle Park
- Coral Gate Park
- Sewell Park
- Orange Bowl Playground
- Grove Mini-Park
- Elizabeth Steele Mini-Park
- Glen Royal Mini-Park
- Robert King High Park/Carlos Arboleya Campground
- Flagami Mini-Park (closed)
- Kinloch Park
- Bay of Pigs (Flagler Terrace) Mini-Park

grounds and playfields for all ages, with the exception of Sewell Park, which was purchased in 1965 with the intent of creating a passive recreation area that would preserve native riverfront vegetation, much as Simpson Park was formed to conserve Miami's natural hammock.

PARKS FOR PEOPLE BOND

After the successful parks capital improvement program of the 1960s, parks advocates sought additional improvements in the system, and in 1972 they backed a $40 million municipal bond that would provide financing for new open space acquisition and recreation improvements. This "Parks for People" bond proposed improvements at over 60 facilities throughout the city and some large projects (several of which will be recognizable to Miamians today): a 13-mile FEC Corridor bicycle path connecting to a trail loop in Coconut Grove; a 1-mile Riverwalk along the north bank of the Miami River; creation of the bayfront Bicentennial Park; and the purchase of three major properties: the bayfront/riverfront Dupont Plaza parking site, Parcel B, and a site for a large community park in West Flagler. The intent behind the purchase of the two bayfront parcels was to combine them with the existing Bayfront Park and future Bicentennial Park properties to create a continuous "total park" along Biscayne Bay. The bond also proposed the creation of smaller parks, such as six pocket parks in downtown Miami and new neighborhood parks in Allapattah, Model City, and Little Haiti.

How To Vote FOR Parks for People
Pull Lever 19, Top Line, Far Right

Special Advertising Section — The Miami Herald — Special Advertising Section

Monday March 13, 1972

$39.8 Million Parks for People Bond Issue
Up to Miami Voters in Tuesday Ballot

Mayor, Citizens Rally to Program

SOURCE: HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF SOUTH FLORIDA

The "Parks for People" bond was passed in March 1972. The most visible result of the bond was the development of Bicentennial Park, but the bond funds also went to the planning

and development of two significant neighborhood parks: José Marti Park and Alice Wainwright Park (completed under the bond). Monies also went to refurbish facilities and equipment at most parks in the system. Most of the new facilities were small parks containing neighborhood playgrounds and, in some cases, a playfield. However, many of the Parks for People initiatives remained unrealized or were unsuccessful for a variety of reasons.

STABILIZATION AND RETRENCHMENT

Municipal financial difficulties in the 1980s and 1990s led to declining budgets and retrenchment for the parks system. A 1982 inventory of Miami's parks and recreation facilities shows that by this time, the park system had essentially taken on its current form. Only a few of today's park properties were not in existence then, and most of the newer parks were under two acres in size. The most significant park property developed between 1982 and 2000 is Antonio Maceo/Blue Lagoon Park (3.65 acres). Although the 1960 recreation plan recommended development of a regional park in the Blue Lagoon area, Dade County never chose this site for a new park.

NEW ENERGY FOR PARKS IN A NEW CENTURY

In 2001, voters approved a $255 million Homeland Defense/Neighborhood Improvement Bond that included $127 million for parks and recreation improvements in the city of Miami. The capital improvement program was developed without the benefit of a comprehensive vision for the city's park and public space system because there had been no parks master plan for more than 30 years. However, a set of several major projects accounted for three-fourths of the parks capital improvement program, including initiatives for the city's waterfront parks; Virginia Key; a new park in Little Haiti; major improvements at Jose Marti, Margaret Pace, and Fern Isle parks; development of a soccer complex; and Marine Stadium and Orange Bowl improvements. Almost a quarter of the funds were designated for neighborhood park improvements and acquisition. This backlog of repairs and basic improvements, resulting from years of constrained budgets, became the de facto basis of this part of the capital improvement program.

Homeland Defense Bond improvements at Williams Park.

The 2004–2005 capital plan provided for a variety of repairs, replacement and improvements at many parks in the system, including Athalie Range; Belafonte-Talcocy; Bryan; Curtis; Duarte; Domino; José Marti; Gibson; Hadley; Kennedy; Kinloch; Lemon City; Lummus; Watersports Center; Moore; Reeves; Riverside; Southside; Triangle; Virginia Key Beach; West Buena Vista; West End; and Williams parks.

The city's 2005–2006 Multi-Year Capital Plan includes a parks and recreation fund of $141.3 million, the second largest component of the overall plan, after streets and sidewalks. The major projects in this plan include:

- *Grapeland Park:* remediation of soil contamination; new water theme park; baseball fields; community center; amenities and parking
- *Little Haiti Park:* completely new park with a full range of recreation and cultural programs, including two soccer fields, a recreation building, playground, domino park, Vita Course, picnic areas, shelters, and splash park
- *Jose Marti Park:* new gymnasium
- *Fern Isle Park:* remediation of soil contamination; new recreation fields and facilities
- *Athalie Range Park:* replacement of baseball/softball fields with a soccer complex
- *Museum/Bicentennial Park:* seawall rehabilitation
- *Systemwide improvements,* including playgrounds, sports fields, landscaping; sports courts; lighting; building renovations; and other site improvements

The capital funds also supported the costs of the system master plan and detailed master plans for Bicentennial/Museum Park, the Coconut Grove waterfront, and Virginia Key.

Master plan created for the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust.

Over the last generation, Miamians have kept alive a vision for continuous public spaces along the city's waterfronts, a connected baywalk and riverwalk, and a greenway trail along the FEC corridor. The Miami River Commission, created by the state legislature in 1997 to "conduct a comprehensive study and review of restoration and enhancement of the Miami River and Biscayne Bay," sponsored the Miami River Greenway Action Plan in 2001. A city plan for the FEC Corridor included a bike trail and proposals for neighborhood parks. Established by the City Commission in 2002, the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust has sponsored planning and moved forward on renovating the beach and creating a museum about the history of South Florida's only public beach for African-Americans during the era of segregation. The Trust for Public Land worked with community groups to create the Overtown Greenprint Plan and, more recently, the East Little Havana Greenprint Plan. City officials, representatives of various agencies and nonprofit groups, and many Miami residents brought these visions to the creation of this master plan.

THE CITY OF MIAMI PARK SYSTEM TODAY

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE PARK SYSTEM

Miami's system of public parks and plazas is relatively small for a city of its population size and density. Moreover, the Miami park system developed without the guidance of one of the Olmsted-style master plans that created many of America's best-known municipal park systems between 1860 and 1930. These park plans united neighborhood parks, larger citywide parks, and natural areas into integrated systems connected by a network of landscaped parkways, boulevards, riding trails and walking paths. Many such plans were driven by the need to deal with stream flooding and storm drainage, clean up wasteland areas (known today as "brownfields"), and resolve circulation issues. Exemplified by Boston's "Emerald Necklace," and followed in cities as diverse as Baltimore, Minneapolis, Denver and Portland, this networked approach recognizes that the value of individual parks is greatly magnified when they are connected to each other and to every neighborhood in the city. Today, Miami's parks are united by a common administrative system, but they lack the connections that would allow them to function as a physical system, where each piece is connected to the others, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Current and Future Trends in Population and Development

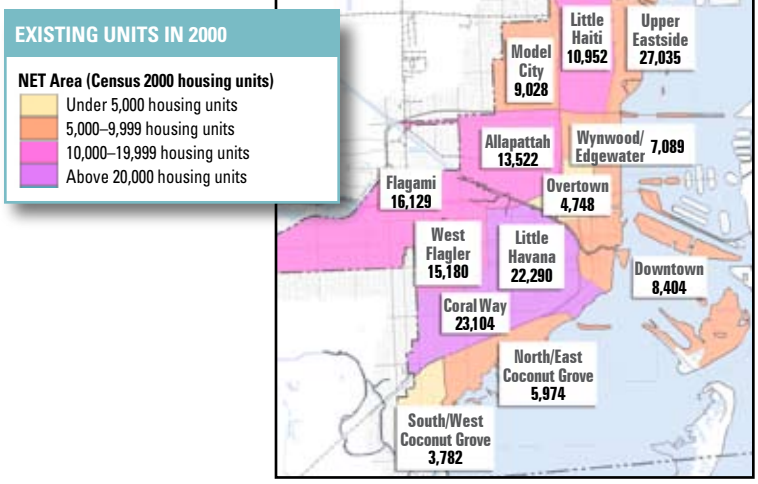
Since the late 1990s, the City of Miami has been experiencing unprecedented development. At the time of the 2000 Census, the population of the city was

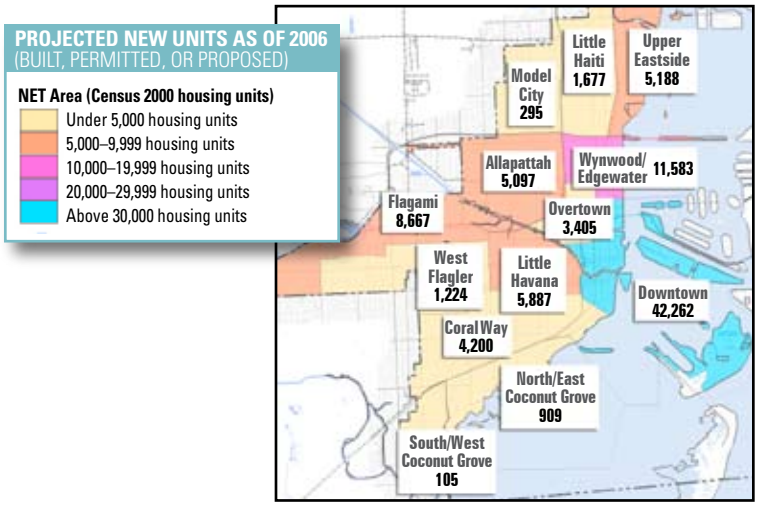
2000 Census: City of Miami Population and Median Income by NET Area

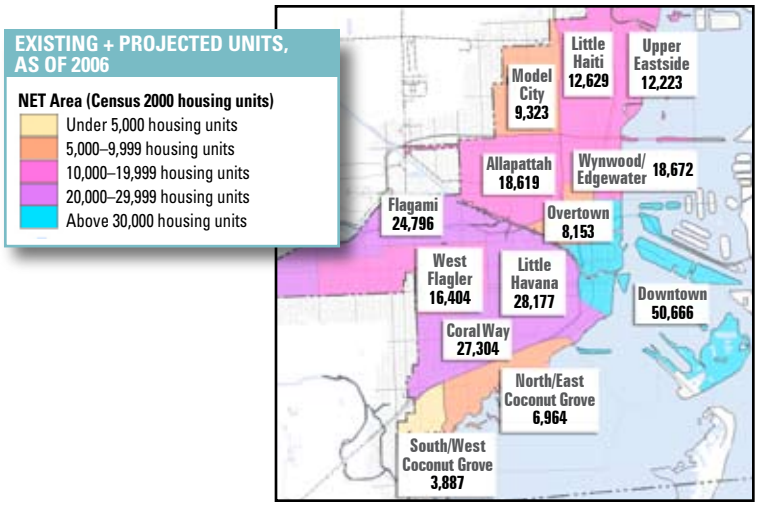
NET AREA	POPULATION	HOUSEHOLDS	FAMILIES	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	PERCENT HISPANIC	PERCENT AFRICAN-AMERICAN	WHITE, NON-HISPANIC	OTHER, NON-HISPANIC
ALLAPATTAH	40,406	12,508	8,224	$19,141.53	72.23%	18.33%	6.89%	2.55%
CORAL WAY	55,951	21,363	14,105	$37,168.89	81.10%	0.41%	17.28%	1.21%
DOWNTOWN	13,932	6,379	2,633	$38,702.66	64.27%	9.17%	23.08%	3.49%
LITTLE HAVANA	49,206	19,341	11,266	$15,213.16	90.08%	3.79%	5.14%	0.96%
FLAGAMI	38,691	13,896	10,141	$26,641.30	90.08%	1.85%	7.68%	0.36%
LITTLE HAITI	29,128	9,368	6,181	$18,887.49	14.74%	64.92%	4.78%	15.56%
MODEL CITY	23,009	7,772	5,428	$18,809.87	3.04%	94.69%	0.59%	1.68%
N.E. GROVE	9,812	5,113	2,221	$63,617.82	35.24%	2.25%	60.96%	1.55%
OVERTOWN	10,029	3,646	2,128	$13,211.99	19.90%	74.77%	3.27%	2.05%
S.W. GROVE	9,141	3,477	2,082	$67,063.36	14.80%	48.27%	35.27%	1.66%
UPPER EASTSIDE	15,056	6,263	3,167	$35,196.16	28.60%	40.10%	25.09%	6.21%
WEST FLAGLER	41,012	14,810	10,490	$26,176.70	90.73%	1.15%	7.61%	0.49%
WYNWOOD	14,819	6,221	2,987	$11,293.93	58.51%	17.51%	21.55%	2.42%
	350,192							

Source: City of Miami Planning Department, based on Census 2000 data

EXISTING AND PROJECTED HOUSING UNITS BY NET AREA







approximately 360,000 and has been estimated at 384,000 in 2005. Detailed population by neighborhood is available only for 2000.

Since the 2000 Census, many new housing units have been built, permitted or proposed. If all of these units are completed and occupied, there will be a very significant increase in the number of residents in downtown, Wynwood-Edgewater, and neighborhoods near the Miami River. Even if some of these residents are seasonal, these neighborhoods will contain many more people.

Income and Poverty

Although Miami's growth has brought investment and new residents, the city still has a high proportion of low-income residents. The 2000 Census reported that the City of Miami had the nation's highest poverty rate; in 2004 it had the lowest median income for cities with 250,000 people or more, and in 2006, Census estimates ranked the city as the third-poorest in its size category. Whatever the city's standing, it is clear that it remains a place where many households and families survive on low incomes.

The Challenge for Miami's System of Parks and Public Spaces

Miami's system of parks, public spaces, and recreation programs faces complex challenges. The city's resurgent economy and the changing face of downtown have revived the focus on creating signature parks and public spaces along the waterfront and advancing the Riverwalk and Baywalk. There

is new demand for park and recreation opportunities for both young families and households without children. At the same time, the system must continue to serve the core of its constituency in recent years, children and families in less affluent parts of the city.

CITY PARK LANDS

To ascertain the precise total acreage of park land owned or managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation would require land surveys, which were not part of the present study. Some documents set the park acreage at over 1,000 acres by including all of Virginia Key's 486-plus acres as park land. In fact, the Department of Parks and Recreation manages the beach and nature areas on Virginia Key, which comprise somewhat more than 80 acres. A conservative inventory, based on city acreage figures for individual parks, appears in the chart at left.

ACREAGE	TYPE OF PARK
684.92	Community, neighborhood, mini, plazas, golf course, waterfront
10.00	City cemetery
98.50	Picnic/Spoil islands
6.00	Watson Island future public park
82.50	Virginia Key historic beach
881.92	TOTAL

The State of Florida and Miami-Dade County also own some park and open space land. The state owns The Barnacle historic site, which contains approximately 40 acres. County-owned park properties within the city limits include:

- Vizcaya Museum, which has ten acres of gardens and a coastal hammock
- Miami Museum of Science Wildlife Center, with 3 acres
- Alonzo Kelly Park, a mini-park in Liberty City, with less than an acre
- Government Center Park, adjacent to the Miami-Dade Stephen P. Clarke Government Center in downtown Miami
- Miami-Dade County Auditorium, which is on 9 acres of land (including parking lots)
- 35 acres on Rickenbacker Causeway (some of which is outside the city limits)

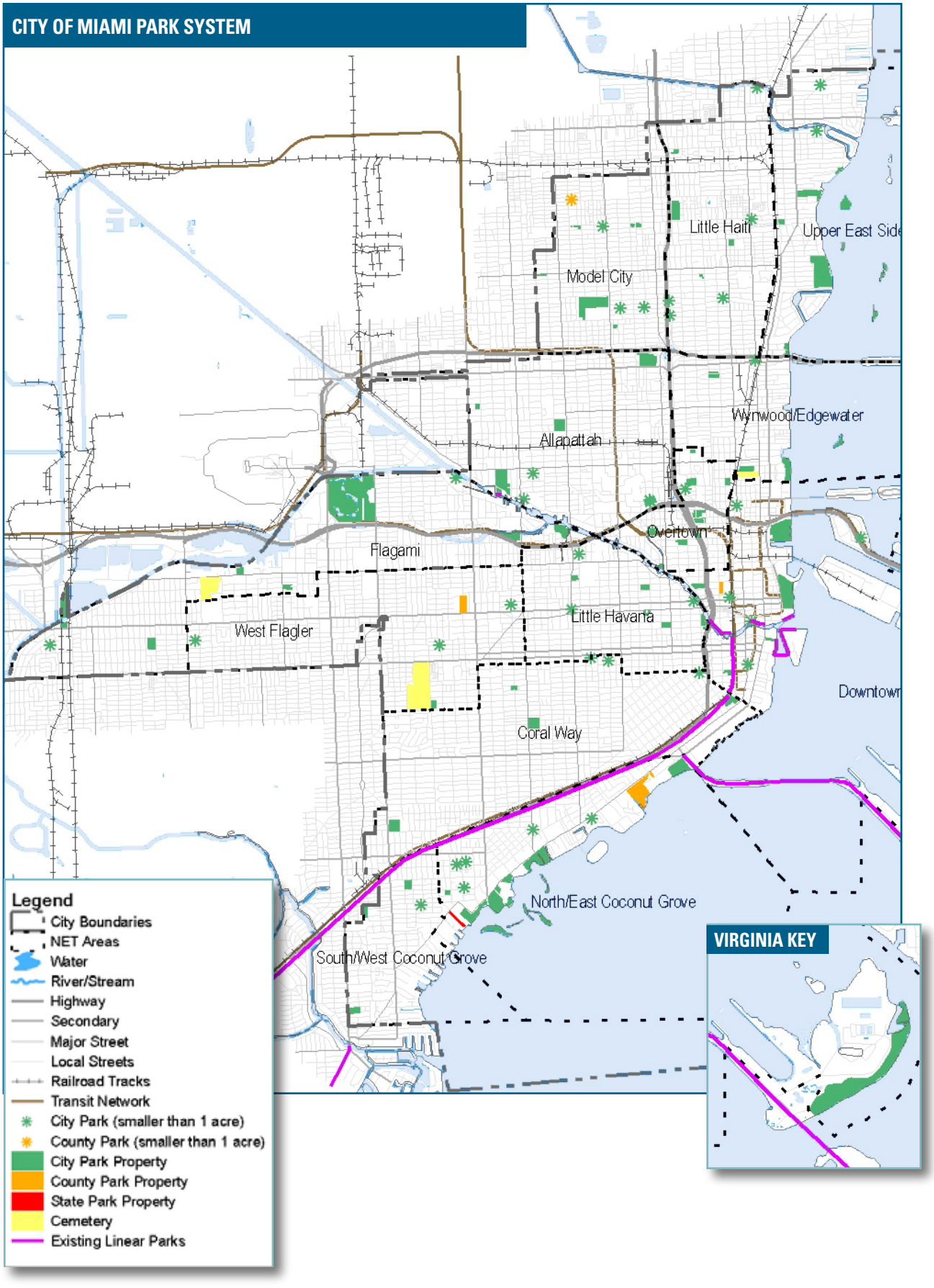
If all of the properties owned by city, county and state park agencies are included, there are approximately 1,000 acres of park properties in the City of Miami. There are additional open space areas in the city that are not parks or managed by a park agency, including open space associated with transportation and other infrastructure (such as the M-Path, and highway verges) and building plazas (such as Wachovia Plaza downtown).

Private developments, such as Wachovia Plaza downtown, provide attractive open spaces as part of the public realm.

Citywide Level-of-Service Issues

From the mid-twentieth century, park systems have typically been judged on the basis of the number of acres per 1,000 population in a system developed by the National Recreation and

CITY OF MIAMI PARK SYSTEM



Parks Association and focused primarily on newly developed areas, rather than existing urban environments. Compared to many other high-density cities, Miami has low park acreage per 1,000 residents.

In a 2003 study by Peter Harnik, The Trust for Public Land examined twelve high-density cities and found that Miami's parks system fell behind eleven cities in park acreage per capita and percent of city area devoted to parks.[1] With a 2000 population of 362,470 and an area of 22,830 acres, the smallest population and land area of the cities studied, Miami was listed as having approximately 1,100 acres of park land at the time of the study, including park land owned by the County and other public entities. (The acreage number was based on approximate information.) This translates to a ratio of about 3 acres of park land per 1,000 persons, which places Miami at the bottom of the cities studied. The average among the study cities is 8.025 acres per 1,000 persons. If two cities with exceptionally large amounts of open space (Minneapolis and Washington, D.C.) are removed from the computation, the average among the remaining ten cities is 6.8 acres per 1,000 persons, a figure that is still more than double Miami's acreage. About 5 percent of Miami's total land area, 22,830 acres, is devoted to park land.[2] The average among high-density cities is 13.1 percent of total land area, putting Miami again at the bottom of the list of twelve high-density cities.

New construction is changing the face of Miami. With greater density comes the need for neighborhood open spaces.

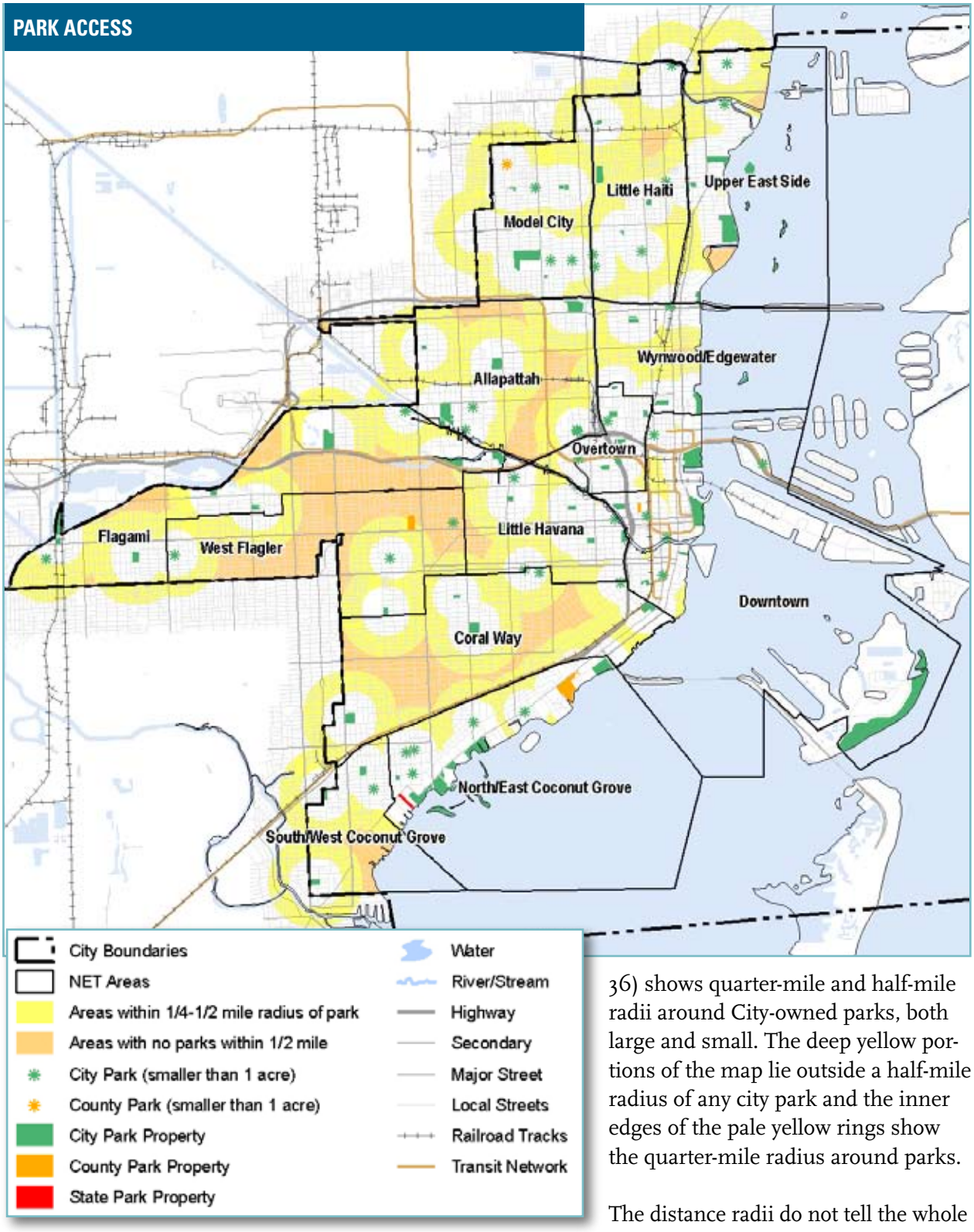
However, this very general rule of thumb is inadequate as a way to evaluate urban park systems. The provision of a distributed hierarchy of park types to population groupings and the ability of residents to get to park land is increasingly viewed as more important in an urban setting than average number of acres per 1,000 persons citywide. Large parks on the perimeter of a city may provide a level of service that seems good on a citywide basis, but if significant numbers of the population cannot get to them easily, or can visit only infrequently, these parks do not serve the population well.

Access to Parks

Good access depends on two fundamental characteristics: location and ease of mobility to the location. In Miami, parks are not equally distributed around the city, particularly taking into account population in different areas. Certain areas of Miami are very underserved, especially parts of the West Flagler, Coral Way, and Flagami NET Areas. Most people are willing to walk a quarter mile to a desired destination, and many will walk a half mile. The park access map (page

[1] Peter Harnik, *The Excellent City Park System* (Washington, DC: The Trust for Public Land, 2003), Appendices III, IV.
[2] This also includes all park land within the city owned by another entity.

PARK ACCESS



36) shows quarter-mile and half-mile radii around City-owned parks, both large and small. The deep yellow portions of the map lie outside a half-mile radius of any city park and the inner edges of the pale yellow rings show the quarter-mile radius around parks.

The distance radii do not tell the whole story, however. In many cases, these radii contain very significant barriers to access. If a resident needs to walk on unshaded sidewalks along heavily traveled streets, must cross without signals or crosswalks, must pass through a gatehouse, or needs to detour to cross the river—then the access shown on the map is effectively and significantly compromised.

Access for children and seniors

Park access is particularly important for children and senior citizens. Safe walking and bicycle routes to nearby parks widen opportunities for children to engage in organized recreational activities and free play. Parks provide seniors with opportunities for health-enhancing exercise, socializing, and recreational activities. The Park Access for Children and Seniors maps show the relationship between park-access radii and the percentage of children, youth, and seniors in census tracts at the time of the 2000 Census. Although these data provide a snapshot of areas where these age groups are more or less present, the rapidly changing nature of Miami's demographics means that these maps may look quite different after the 2010 census.

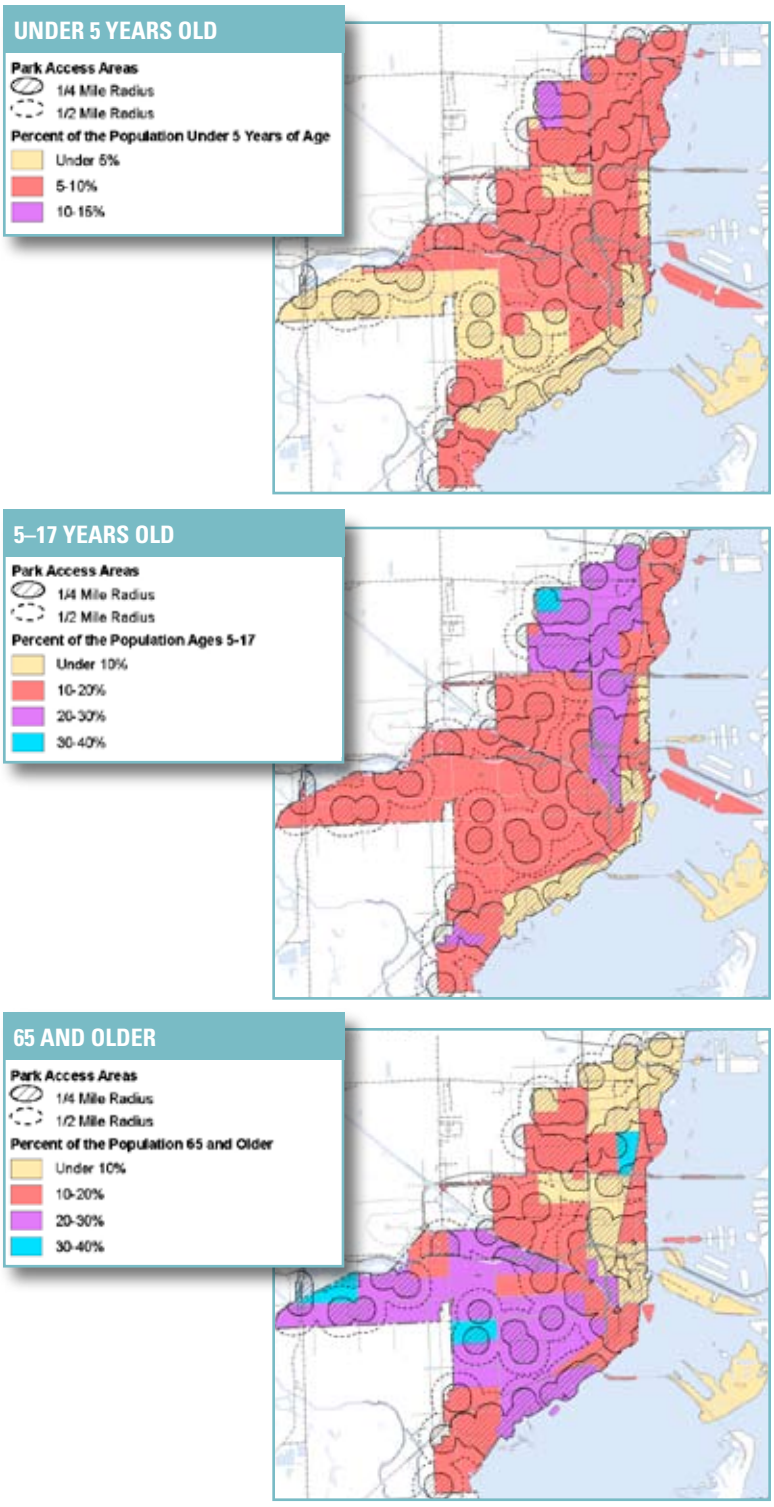
PARK ACCESS, PARK FACILITIES, AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

In creating the population and access maps, we used the best available population data at the neighborhood level, which is still census data from 2000. However, information on development trends, presented earlier, makes it clear that Miami's population numbers and composition are very dynamic, matching the real estate environment. Miami's changing demographics and incomes will bring both new demands and new opportunities for parks, recreation, and public spaces.

New development and areas of high residential density

At the time of the 2000 Census, the Little Havana NET Area had the highest population density in the city, with 40 or more people per acre. Moreover, because this neighborhood has many

PARK ACCESS FOR CHILDREN AND SENIORS BY 2000 CENSUS TRACT



recent immigrants, it is likely that the population was undercounted and population density may be even higher. With the construction of significant numbers of high-rise apartment units downtown, along the Miami River, at Midtown Miami, and in parts of Edgewater and the Upper Eastside, however, by the time of the next census these neighborhoods will have much higher densities than they do now. New higher-density, multifamily development is also under way for sites in other parts of the city, including Little Havana.

This new development will produce substantial new demand for parks and public open space, but clear projections are difficult because of a number of uncertainties about the number and types of households that will occupy those units. Several factors are likely to influence the demand for parks:

- Most of the units are designed for small households. Although there will undoubtedly be some families in these buildings, the majority of the units are likely to occupied by single persons or couples. The Miami-Dade School District uses 0.25 children per high rise unit as a rule of thumb.
- A substantial number of the units are likely to be occupied seasonally. This means that the demand for parks from North American and European residents is likely to be higher between November and March. Residential patterns of part-time residents from Latin America are less likely to be directly seasonal.
- Most high-rise luxury developments include on-site recreational facilities such as swimming pools, exercise facilities, and gardens.
- In some neighborhoods, such as Little Havana, increases in the density of housing units may not affect overall population density because the average household size in the new units will likely be smaller than in current housing. New development may yield higher densities in other Miami neighborhoods as immigrants and others seek more affordable housing.

Taking these factors into account, we can expect that most of the demand for parks, recreational facilities, and public spaces resulting from new city residents in high-rise buildings will be for green open space to contrast with higher neighborhood densities and for adult activities rather than for youth recreational programs. Opportunities for safe walking and running; areas for informal play, such as with Frisbees; rentals of canoes, kayaks, and other water sports equipment such as sailfish; areas for off-leash dogs; and similar self-organized recreational activities are likely to be of interest. Some new residents may also add to the pool of adults interested in tennis, soccer and rugby, softball, and other games—whether pickup matches or in organized leagues.

In many cases, the kinds of demand for parks and recreation that can be expected from residents of the new high-rise neighborhoods are completely congruent with the interests expressed by Miami's current residents in the master plan survey.

Generational turnover

Another demographic change that appears to be occurring is the generational turnover in some single-family-home neighborhoods. Census tracts that showed high numbers of senior citizens in the 2000 Census, such as many parts of the West Flagler and Flagami NET Areas, are beginning to see younger families moving in. Although these NET Areas are not as densely populated as, for example, Little Havana, from an access point of view they are among the most underserved in the entire city. As younger families move in, demand will grow for "walk-to" parks with children's play areas. Although many families in these neighborhoods elect to pay for recreational programs in nearby Coral Gables, more children in these neighborhoods will likely increase demand for the City's youth recreation programs.

Incomes and parks, recreation, and public spaces

The residents of Miami's new luxury condominium towers and other new development with higher-than-average incomes will look to the park system for adult recreational opportunities and green open spaces, but Miami's large population of moderate- and low-income households will continue to need the youth-oriented park and recreation programs that have been the City's focus. Adolescents and seniors, who are currently underserved, will also remain an important constituency for park and recreation activities.

MIAMI COMPARED TO OTHER CITIES

For decades, Miami has served a larger population in a smaller area than comparable Florida cities. For this plan, Miami was compared with four other waterfront, tourist-oriented cities, three in Florida and Honolulu, Hawaii. Although one of the smallest cities in this group, at 35.7 square miles, in 2000 Miami had the largest population and double the population density of the next closest city. Miami was also more culturally diverse than the other cities. Although rich in diversity and culture, Miami had the highest level of unemployment (11.7%), the greatest percentage of population under the poverty line (28.5%), and the lowest median annual household income ($23,483) of the benchmark cities. The residents of the city not only have a great need for the services and activities provid-

CITY	2004 POPULATION	2000 LAND (SQ. MILE)	2000 POPULATION DENSITY (PER SQ. MILE)	2000 % AFRICAN-AMERICAN	2000 % HISPANIC OR LATINO	1999 % BELOW POVERTY LINE	1999 MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	2000 % UNEMPLOYMENT
FORT LAUDERDALE	164,578	33.0	4,618	28.9%	9.5%	17.7%	$37,887	3.9%
HONOLULU	378,155	85.7	4,337	1.6%	4.4%	11.8%	$45,112	5.9%
MIAMI	**379,724**	**35.7**	**10,153**	**22.3%**	**65.8%**	**28.5%**	**$23,483**	**11.7%**
ST. PETERSBURG	249,090	59.6	4,165	22.4%	4.2%	13.3%	$34,597	5.2%
TAMPA	321,772	112.2	2,707	26.1%	19.3%	18.1%	$34,415	8.6%

ed by the Department of Parks and Recreation, but these needs are wide-ranging due to the breadth of economic and cultural backgrounds within the community.

DESIGN, FUNCTION AND CONDITION OF MIAMI'S PARKS

Every Miami park was visited during the preparation of this master plan, and the condition and functionality of the parks varied considerably. The plan was prepared over the course of a year with several destructive hurricanes, but the impact of the hurricanes was separated from other park conditions. In addition, the capital improvement program funded by the Homeland Defense/ Neighborhood Improvements Bond was under way and some programmed improvements had not yet been implemented when some parks were visited.

Given the challenging budget and staffing conditions that have faced the park system for many years, however, it is not surprising that an informal "triage" system seems to have been in place, and under that system design issues have often been neglected. Most parks receive a basic level of maintenance and care, with more resources focused on the larger, staffed parks that serve more people. A few parks that have been transferred to the Department of Parks and Recreation over the years—notably those created as part of public housing projects, such as Athalie Range Park #2 near Village Homes and Rainbow Village Park—appear to receive almost no care. Piecemeal park improvements made in recent years were often carried out without careful consideration of overall park design or functionality. For example, Vita Course installations in some parks are clustered in one spot rather than ranged along a route around or in the park. Similarly, new handicapped-accessible play structures or other facilities are sometimes not connected to accessible paths.

USE OF PARK LAND FOR NON-PARK ACTIVITIES

Miami's financial difficulties in the last two decades exacerbated the tendency common to many municipalities to look at park land as "free" land for municipal buildings and other activities. Miami's relatively small amount of park land has been diminished over the years by the siting of buildings for other municipal uses as well as other activities. Listed below are land and buildings nominally under control of the Department of Parks and Recreation but partially or fully occupied by other municipal departments or activities:

- Shenandoah Park (day care, library, and temporary fire station)
- Gibson Park (library)
- Athalie Range Park (library)
- Range Park #2/Victory Homes (Head Start building)
- Police Simulator Site
- Flagami Mini-Park (used as community parking)
- Orange Bowl Playground (parking)

- Virrick Gym (storage)
- Miami River Rapids Mini-Park (leased to a home for troubled adolescents and not open to the public)
- Moore Park (day care)
- Eaton Park (day care)
- Lemon City Park (day care)
- Fort Dallas Park (historic building)
- Lummus Park (historic buildings and police horse stables)
- Carlos Arboleya Campground (police maneuvers)
- Brickell Park (temporary use as construction staging area)
- Martell Park (temporary use as construction staging area)
- Curtis Park (Allapattah NET Area office)
- Peacock Park (N/E Coconut Grove NET Area office)
- Roberto Clemente Park (Wynwood/Edgewater NET Area office)
- Legion Park (Upper Eastside NET Area office)

Proposals for additional non-park uses
- Shenandoah Park (permanent fire station)
- Virrick Park (branch library)

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC SPACES IN MIAMI

In addition to formal parks and recreation areas, Miami's public realm includes a variety of other spaces open to public use. Some of these are publicly owned, while others are privately owned but open to the public—for example, building plazas and segments of the Miami Riverwalk that are required for public access in zoning but remain privately owned.

In downtown Miami and Brickell there are a number of public plazas associated with office buildings, such as the Wachovia Bank plaza; with institutions, such as the Miami-Dade College Wolfson Campus plaza; and with government agencies, such as the Government Center plaza and the Cultural Center plaza. On Brickell Avenue, many of the high-rise banks, office buildings, and hotels have plazas and wide sidewalks. The new Mary Brickell Village retail development includes generous plaza space.

Private plazas along Brickell Avenue enhance the city's public spaces.

The Plaza de la Cubanidad design protects users from the impact of a high-traffic intersection, but it needs updating. The Cuban Memorial Plaza and walkway (far right) needs marked pedestrian crossings or raised intersections to make it safer for pedestrians.

The Latin Quarter Plaza connects neighborhoods to the lively activity of Domino Park and Calle Ocho (SW 8th Street).

Some downtown plazas are successful, attracting office workers and others at lunchtime, and they presumably will continue to attract more use from visitors and residents as downtown Miami continues to develop. The successful plazas tend to adhere to well-known principles of good design, management, and programming for public places: they are accessible, provide visibility and security, have comfortable places to sit, are clean and cared for, and provide attractive amenities or activities. Others have not been successful because they do not adhere to one or more of these basic principles. On Brickell Avenue, nonresidential buildings tend to function as fortresses, each sited on a plaza disconnected from its neighbors. With additional residents in new high rises in the Brickell Village area and the increasing presence of ground-floor uses like restaurants, the value of a continuous, pedestrian-friendly expanse of plazas along Brickell Avenue will become more obvious.

Outside of downtown, most plazas tend to be associated with privately-owned retail development. However, the many Miami residents of Latin American origin are accustomed to the social uses of public plazas—that is, defined areas that are predominantly paved, surrounded on at least two sides by structures and including amenities such as trees and shrubs in planters, seating areas, and water features. A successful example is the Latin Quarter Plaza at SW 8th Street and 15th Avenue, next to Domino Park. A few other parks also contain plaza-like spaces. The Cuban Memorial Plaza and walkway in the median of SW 13th Avenue south of SW 8th Street is less successful because it does not provide well for pedestrian crossing of intersections. The Plaza de la Cubanidad, on SW 17th Street, also needs updating and improvements to make it more inviting. As demonstrated in the master plan survey's results, there is great demand for gathering spaces, such as large picnic areas and shelters, where residents can enjoy themselves informally with large groups of family and friends.

CITY PARKS AS PART OF A REGIONAL SYSTEM

Miami parks function as a system for administrative purposes, but they lack the physical connections to function as a physical system. In a true system, each park would be part of an interconnected and recognizable whole—a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Likewise, while there are parks and greenway trails in surrounding communities, a few of which extend into the City of Miami, there is little continuity and connection to the city's parks.

EXISTING TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

The Riverwalk and Miami River Greenway

The Riverwalk concept dates at least to the 1972 Parks for People effort. The 2001 *Miami River Greenway Action Plan* serves to guide ongoing implementation efforts and has been updated twice, most recently in February 2005.[3] As part of the action plan, existing conditions along the river were mapped, and these uses, along with user groups, were defined as a series of "greenway themes":

- The river is home to a diverse, multicultural population.
- It is a working river whose businesses handle 2 million tons of cargo every year and collectively serve as one of the largest employers in downtown Miami.
- The river is a potential destination landscape for tourism.
- It is an important environmental resource at risk from pollution and overdevelopment.
- It is an economic resource, the improvement of which will catalyze development of residential, commercial, and retail development in adjacent neighborhoods.
- The river is part of the city's heritage as a focus of human activity for more than 2,000 years.

The Miami River is a major environmental, economic, and recreational resource.

The City requires a 50-foot setback to accommodate the Riverwalk for all development along the river up to the new 5th Street Bridge. Design standards and guidelines have been prepared for the Riverwalk to promote design continuity. The City and the Miami River Commission promote and oversee implementation of the Riverwalk. Substantial segments exist or are under construction downtown;

[3] Sponsored by the Miami River Commission and prepared by the Trust for Public Land and Greenways, Inc.

where new development is under way elsewhere along the river; and at public locations like Curtis Park. The Greenway concept also includes on-road segments, many of which have seen improvements downtown and in Little Havana.

The Baywalk

Like the Riverwalk, the Baywalk has been the subject of planning and discussion for decades. Conceived as a continuous pedestrian corridor along the waterfront, many segments, such as the promenade at Bayfront Park and a waterfront walkway at Margaret Pace Park, already exist. Other areas, such as Bicentennial/Museum Park, are currently being redesigned to accommodate the Baywalk, including a connector across the boat slip to Parcel B east of American Airlines Arena that will link the entire downtown waterfront. A critical connection between the Baywalk and the Riverwalk/Greenway is being developed as new mixed-use construction continues at the mouth of the Miami River.

The Commodore Trail

The Commodore Trail was named after Commodore Ralph Munroe, a Coconut Grove pioneer whose home, The Barnacle, is now a state historic site. It already exists in the form of sidewalks, pathways, and on-road bike lanes in a variety of conditions, and residents have been pushing for several years to advance trail upgrades. The trail begins in the south at Cocoaplum Circle (the end of the Old Cutler Road Bike Path) and extends to the intersection of Miami and Brickell avenues. From there, cyclists can continue across the Rickenbacker Causeway to Key Biscayne. The trail is probably the most heavily-used bike route and jogging path in Miami, connecting all the waterfront parks and civic features in Coconut Grove and already connecting fairly easily with neighboring communities. A concept plan detailing proposed improvements was completed in March 2004.

The M-Path

The M-Path is an existing paved bicycle/pedestrian path that follows portions of the MetroRail right-of-way. It provides a neighborhood pedestrian connection to the MetroRail stations, and serves as a green landscaped buffer to Route 1. Its functionality as a long-distance bike trail is limited by a large number of street crossings and the fact that it dead-ends at the Miami River. In addition, residents report concerns about maintenance, poor lighting, and lack of “eyes on the street” to enhance security.

As important as these growing greenway links are to the future of the Miami park system, they are only part of a larger potential network extending throughout the city. This citywide system of parks and greenways could in turn be linked to greenways in neighboring communities to create a regional system that would rival any in the world.

CITY PARKS AS PART OF A NATURAL SYSTEM

In a little over 100 years, Miami has been transformed from a city with "too much nature," to one where nature has been marginalized. For much of its early history, the wilderness surrounding Miami was treated as an obstacle to progress: the Everglades needed to be filled in and tamed as soon as possible so that the city could grow and prosper. The dynamiting of the Miami Rapids and conversion of the Miami River from a free-flowing bayou to a shipping and drainage canal symbolizes this approach, and is part of the larger tale of the development of South Florida.

The city is not far from the natural world of the Everglades.

Today, however, Miami may be unique among American cities, with a continuous urban grid surrounded by near-wilderness, the protected Everglades and Biscayne national parks. From the "river of grass" at the west to the shining waters of Biscayne Bay at the east, these dramatic contrasts have always been an important part of the image of Miami, celebrated in postcard views of the skyline from the bay and alligators swimming in the Everglades. It is a theme that can and should be celebrated throughout the park system.

While nature can be most readily found at the edges of the city, some natural systems survive within Miami. The most significant remaining natural systems follow the waterways that connect the Everglades to Biscayne Bay. The best-known of these, the Miami River, has been well documented as habitat for the manatee, and is a key link uniting remaining natural areas from Biscayne Bay to Palmer Lake. Branching off the Miami River, the Tamiami Canal connects an even larger collection of natural sites, from Fern Isle Park to the Blue Lagoon Ponds. At the northern border of the city, the Little River lacks the extensive development that lines the banks of the Miami River and is wrapped for much of its length in a thick growth of vegetation.

NATURAL AREAS IN CITY PARKS

Several city parks have conservation areas designated for preservation of Miami's natural landscape: Simpson Park and Nature Center, Wainwright Park, and the Virginia Key Nature Area and Trail. Simpson is the only park given over entirely to nature. Set aside in 1913 to preserve a small piece of the hardwood hammock that was fast disappearing from Miami and originally called Jungle Park, it was later renamed in honor of conservationist Dr. Charles Torrey Simpson. It has endured ups and downs over the years (including the hurricanes of 2005) but is now one of two parks that are the focus of the City's efforts to restore natural ecosystems. The other large restoration project has been on Virginia Key. There, the City's parks naturalist and his staff have been removing Australian pine and other invasive species and restoring the native plant community. This conservation area includes examples of all three South Florida ecosystems—coastal hammock, dunes, and mangroves—and is home to several endangered plant species, such as the beach star and Biscayne prickly-ash. An interpretive trail provides education about Miami's native ecosystems, as well as a practical primer on restoration techniques. In addition, Miami-Dade County's Department of Environmental Resources Management (DERM) has been actively restoring native plants on the spoil islands and working to preserve the sea grass beds in Biscayne Bay.

The City is working to restore the native plant community in Virginia Key's conservation area.

Many of the other city parks, especially those along the rivers or the bay, include significant natural areas. Along the Miami River, Sewell Park and Fern Isle Park both contain a mix of large and small trees and ground covers—though both also include introduced exotic species. Upstream from Fern Isle Park along the South Fork of the Miami River, the Tamiami Canal borders the Melreese Golf Course, which has extensive grasslands and wetland habitat. Continuing west along the same water system, Robert King High Park and the adjacent Carlos Arboleya Campground contain some significant natural areas along their edges. Along Biscayne Bay, several parks retain some natural landscape, including mangroves. These include Morningside Park in the Upper Eastside and Kennedy Park in Coconut Grove. Each of these parks has a long history of multiple uses in which nature tends to get squeezed out, but each also presents many opportunities to include restoration of natural areas in future enhancements.

URBAN WILDS

Small pockets of "urban wilderness" can be found throughout the city, including vacant lots, rail corridors, and neighborhood drainage corridors. Often comprising leftover spaces around the edges of larger properties and public institutions, these areas lie in a mix of public and private ownership and often are not big enough or continuous enough to use for development or parking lots. One substantial area includes the grass surfaces surrounding the airport runways and service roads. Other natural zones often overlooked are the extensive highway medians and embankments along the interstate highways that traverse the city. These areas form a network connecting the bay to the interior, and intersect and parallel the river and canal corridors. Largely free from human disturbance—except for the cars that run through them—they contain many wetlands and drainage areas that have grown up with natural vegetation.

The grassy areas around the airport are among the "urban wilds" that can contribute to a network of natural places in Miami.

Finally, thousands of street trees create, in many areas of the city, a continuous canopy of vegetation that provides rich habitat for a range of animal life. Protecting and expanding this "urban forest" is a simple way to bring many native species back to the city, as well as provide shelter for many that are just passing through.

PARK CATEGORIES AND TYPES

The purpose and value of creating a hierarchy of different park categories is to assist in planning, design, and maintenance of parks. Different types of parks can provide green space, facilities, and programs to different population groupings and users. The Department of Parks and Recreation currently categorizes parks as community, neighborhood, mini, and specialized parks, following common practice among park and recreation professionals. Although size and facilities are among the criteria for assignment to specific categories, there is some inconsistency in the way that parks are assigned to categories in park documents, and the usefulness of this hierarchy and the park assignments is questionable. At the same time, the City's new impact fee ordinance uses different criteria to separate the parks subject to development impacts that can be eligible for funding from impact fees.

CURRENT PARK CATEGORIES

Community Parks

Twenty-one parks fall in this category, and most have on-site managers and offer active recreation and computer access programs for children and adults ("eParks"). Ten of these parks have swimming pools. One is the Virrick Gym/ Bayshore Gym that is rented to the Shake-a-Leg youth sailing program. They range in size from the 3-acre Belafonte-Talcolcy Park to 42-acre Morningside Park, though most are among the larger recreational parks in the system.

Neighborhood Parks

Twenty-one parks are classified as neighborhood parks, ranging in size from 0.3 acres at the Coconut Grove Tennis Courts to 8.41-acre Fern Isle Park. Almost all of these parks have at least a play structure for children, though most have at least one other recreational resource as well, such as a basketball court.

Mini-Parks

Twenty-eight parks are classified as mini-parks, but not all of these are maintained or open for public use. Many mini-parks have play structures for children, but some are passive green spaces. Two are closed, four are not maintained by the city, and two function as median strips. They range in size from 0.11 acres at Range Park #1 to the 5.4-acre Stearns Park.

Specialized Parks

The remainder are categorized as "specialized parks," with the following subcategories:

- **Dog Parks:** 2 (portions of Kennedy and Blanche parks)
- **Nature Parks:** 8. These include the three city parks with conservation land, Sewell, Simpson, and Wainwright; the spoil islands known as "Picnic Islands" off Dinner Key and off Pace, Legion, and Morningside parks; David Kennedy Park; and Antonio Maceo/Blue Lagoon Park. Brickell Park is also sometimes classified as a nature park. Brickell, Kennedy, and Antonio Maceo parks appear to have been designated as nature parks because they do not have active recreation, but other parks that are also passive parks, such as Baywood Park, do not appear as nature parks.
- **Special Use Parks:** 7 properties, most which are under the control of other entities. These are the Police Simulator Site, which does not function in any way as a park; Allen Morris (AMCO) Park, which is managed by the abut-

ting Perricone's restaurant; Bayfront Park, managed by the Bayfront Trust; Bicentennial Park, being planned by the City's Planning Department as Museum Park; Paul S. Walker/Flagler Street Park downtown, a passive park with a sculpture; Miami River Rapids Park, leased to a youth-development program; and Watson Island, which includes the small Ichimura Japanese Garden (managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation) and which will have an approximately 6-acre public park as part of a planned resort and mega-yacht development.

IMPACT FEE ORDINANCE CATEGORIES

For the purposes of the City's recently enacted change in impact fees assessed on residential development, certain parks and facilities are characterized as "citywide" and eligible to receive impact funds for improvements related to development impacts. The criteria used to designate "citywide parks" are that they be at least 3 acres in size and include active recreation facilities and/or buildings with recreation programs. The waterfront parks, including trails linking waterfront parks, the city swimming pools, and future gymnasiums, were also designated in the impact fee ordinance as facilities serving a citywide constituency and are therefore eligible for impact fee improvements. A total of 40 parks and pools are included in the "citywide" category: 21 community parks, 8 neighborhood parks, 4 nature parks, and 7 waterfront parks. The designation of what constitutes a "waterfront park" seems somewhat arbitrary, including as it does Antonio Maceo, Bayfront, Bicentennial/Museum, Kennedy, Myers, Virginia Key and Watson Island, but not Peacock, Wainwright, Morningside, Legion, or other parks located on Biscayne Bay or the Miami River. However, these parks are designated as "citywide parks."

PARK SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

The Department of Parks and Recreation endured many years of tight and reduced budgets while its responsibilities increased through the acquisition of land and demands on its staff to support other City initiatives. The department staff made do with limited resources, but programs and services were strained. Fortunately, in recent years the City's circumstances have improved considerably. Since 2003 the department has been under the leadership of a new director, and its annual budget nearly doubled. The City's improved circumstances allow for a redefinition of level-of-service standards to match citizens' desires and expectations and new management practices.

The strengths of the Department of Parks and Recreation include new leadership with a focused mission, a dedicated staff committed to serving Miami residents, and improved technology. After many challenging years, the department can point to many recent accomplishments:

Operations, facilities, and programs

- New free programs, including eParks, which makes computers available to the community
- New or expanded programs; more quality special events in parks; expanded programs for seniors
- New or renovated facilities: indoor buildings, gym, and theater; state-of-the-art physical improvements to keep up with trends; shade structures; new rowing facility on Virginia Key; poured-in-place surfaces versus sand in playgrounds
- New accessibility equipment (wheelchairs)
- New restoration program for the natural environment on Virginia Key
- Management of golf course operations at Melreese Golf Course

Service delivery and communications

- New director with open-door policy
- Increased operating budget with a lesser percentage devoted to staff salaries
- Increased production of a program guide from once a year to 3–4 times per year
- Upgraded department Web page
- Increased frequency of staff meetings to twice monthly with directors, division heads, senior staff
- Employee newsletter and employee-of-the-month recognition
- New logo, mission statement, and department slogan
- New, consistent signage in parks with new image
- Progress toward performance measurements

Support services

- New staff, including public relations and information technology positions
- Technology for park managers, providing computers, e-mail, printing, and copying capabilities

Parks and Recreation Department budgets have improved since the early 2000s. In comparison to Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, Saint Petersburg, and Honolulu in 2004, the Department of Parks and Recreation served the largest population but had the smallest annual budget ($11.85 million). Miami had a budget of $31 per resident, compared to the other cities, which had an average per capita budget of $130. A comparable budget for Miami's estimated 2005 population of 384,000 would be $49,920,000, a little more than Tampa's 2004 budget. Moreover, in comparison to the other cities, the department brings in

PARK SYSTEM COMPARISONS							
CITY	PARKS & RECREATION ACREAGE	2004 TOTAL P&R BUDGET	BUDGET PER CAPITA	2004 P&R ANNUAL REVENUE	P&R FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES	P&R PART-TIME EMPLOYEES	P&R CONTRACTED EMPLOYEES
FORT LAUDERDALE	973	$26,327,074	$156	$8,110,116	232	101	n/a
HONOLULU	6,108	$47,216,334	$125	$21,012,000	839	23	244
MIAMI	**800**	**$11,850,384**	**$31**	**$3,308,314**	**190**	**482**	**n/a**
ST. PETERSBURG	2,400	$24,878,000	$100	$6,509,000	159	23	n/a
TAMPA	1,774	$44,066,000	$137	$6,689,000	n/a	n/a	n/a

the smallest amount of annual revenue because it charges very low or no fees for services. In the other cities, revenues represented from 16% (for Tampa) to 44% (for Honolulu) of the annual budget. Miami's Department of Parks and Recreation ranks at the high end of the range for full-time employees per acre of land, and it is also at the top of the range in terms of full-time employees as a percentage of its budget, leaving limited funds with which to respond to resident needs and desires. The budget has increased substantially since 2004 to $20 million in 2007. However, this is still only about $50 per person, well below comparable cities.

Capital improvements for park properties are overseen either by the Department of Parks and Recreation's Support Services Division or by the City's Transportation and Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and Transportation Department. Smaller-scale improvements are designed and installed by the parks department, while CIP manages larger projects that typically require contracting with outside designers.

Several of Miami's park and open space resources are managed by separate park trusts created by the Miami City Commission or the State of Florida to provide special oversight of key properties. The Bayfront Park Management Trust, founded in 1987 and comprising nine board members, manages facilities and events in Bayfront Park and Bicentennial/Museum Park. The Virginia Key Beach Park Trust was formed in 1999 to guide the restoration of the City's historic Virginia Key Beach property. Similarly, the Florida Legislature created the Miami River Commission (MRC) in 1997 to study and address environmental and development issues along the Miami River, including dredging, improving water quality, and creating new riverfront public spaces. Today the MRC serves as a strong advocate for pollution reduction, sensitive riverfront development that preserves public water access, and preservation of small maritime industries that continue to make the Miami River a working river.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PARK DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT

PARKS ADVISORY BOARD

Created in 2002, Miami's Parks Advisory Board is one of many boards that advise the City Commission. The board is made up of 13 voting members and 6 or more nonvoting members. Voting members are appointed by the mayor (1), the city commissioners (2 each), and by the board's membership (2). The standard qualifications for City boards apply: a designee must be a permanent resident, a property or business owner, or an employee in the city, and must have "demonstrated interest" in the topic of the board. Each of the two voting members appointed by other members of the board must be a "professional, city resident or a student" and a "citizen with professional knowledge of local history." The six nonvoting members of the board include the Director of Parks and Recreation or his/her designee; a landscape architect chosen by the board; an educator chosen by the board; a recreation specialist chosen by the board; and two or more representatives of nonprofit organizations chosen by the board. The board term is one year and no one can serve more than five consecutive years (but former members can return to the board after a two-year hiatus). The board membership system appears to be organized so that the nonvoting members with specialized knowledge will serve as *pro bono* staff or advisors to the board. It is notable that a local history specialist is required among the voting members but not a landscape architect, recreation specialist, or open space professional.

The city ordinance creating the board gives it many responsibilities:

- Advise the City Commission.
- Periodically review budget, programming, beautification, security, and physical improvements for City-owned or -managed parks, recreational facilities, and public spaces.
- Conduct an annual public review meeting.
- Present an annual written report for the mayor, commissioners, and city manager at a City Commission meeting.
- Conduct regular site visits to parks and consult with schools and neighborhood groups on park issues.
- Seek outside funding for park and recreation resources and improvements
- Oversee the creation and function of a Miami Park Trust, if created by the commission, to receive donations for specific park projects.
- Hold periodic meetings and public programs to encourage public participation.
- Assure that park design appeals to persons of both genders, all ages, and diverse class and cultural backgrounds.
- Assure that adequate park space is provided pursuant to the City's master plan.

These myriad responsibilities are not clearly related to actions that the City might take. The board is completely advisory and there are no requirements that the City Commission seek its advice before taking specified actions. The board has no meeting requirements except the annual public review and report to the City Commission. Because the board is completely advisory and the annual report is the only structured way for it to give advice, it cannot fulfill its responsibilities. For example, it is impossible for the Parks Advisory Board to "assure that adequate park space is provided pursuant to the City's Master Plan," since the board does not make final decisions on park acquisition issues. These difficulties in the structure and responsibility of the board have resulted in diminished participation by members and have limited its effectiveness.

FRIENDS GROUPS

Several parks, such as Legion Park and Blanche Park, have organized "friends" groups of park users—usually, but not exclusively, comprising residents of neighborhoods around the park. They advocate for the parks, organize events, and sometimes raise money for park improvements. Especially in the case of parks that do not have a park manager, volunteers have found it hard to coordinate with the parks department. No one in the Department of Parks and Recreation is directly responsible for working with volunteer groups.

The Friends of Blanche Park sponsors events to help fund park maintenance and improvements.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community outreach about park improvements and activities has been irregular in the past but is becoming more consistent. In some cases, such as the redesign of Virrick Park and its gym, community members report a high degree of community involvement in planning the park improvements and design. In other cases, park needs have been assessed on a piecemeal basis or specific segments of the park-user population and neighborhood residents consulted, with the result that park improvements have sometimes occurred without a more holistic understanding of a park's community role and needs. In addition, the capital plan now being implemented as part of the Homeland Defense/Neighborhood Improvement Bond funding was not informed by a process of community discussion. Current departmental management is consulting more frequently and in advance of decisions on improvements and changes. This master plan process also included a systematic effort to survey and engage the community.

ADVOCACY GROUPS

Several groups see their role as advocating for parks on a systemwide basis: The Trust for Public Land, Miami Neighborhoods United, the Urban Environmental League, and Citizens for a Better South Florida.

- *The Trust for Public Land* is a national nonprofit with programs that focus on urban parks. Its South Florida office has emphasized providing parks and greenways in underserved neighborhoods like Overtown and Little Havana, as well as the recuperation of underused resources for park and recreation use, most notably in the Miami River Greenway project.
- *Miami Neighborhoods United* has been active in promoting acquisition of new park land, park improvements, and passive parks. MNU tends to focus more on the parks in the eastern part of the city and has less of a presence in Miami's central and western neighborhoods.
- *The Urban Environmental League*, a regional advocacy group, has advocated for the parks master plan and for preserving park land from encroachment by other uses. In 2005–2006, UEL focused much of its energy on preserving the Miami-Dade urban development boundary.
- *Citizens for a Better South Florida* is a community-based environmental education and action organization. Its programs include Community Science Workshop, an after-school environmental sciences program at Virrick Park and two elementary schools. The organization also promotes planting of shade trees and native plants through its Urban Greening Program and Native Plant Nursery. The group produced *Go Native! Hazlo nativo!,* a guide to native plants that the City supported through funding and through distribution by NET offices.

THE CHALLENGE: PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES FOR A CHANGING MIAMI

Parks and public spaces in Miami have already entered a new era of improvement and expansion. Implementation of a significant capital improvements program, a slowly growing budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation, a new impact-fee ordinance with significant park benefits, contributions by development projects to creation of the Riverwalk and other new public spaces, new management and leadership at the parks department—as well the master plan process—have all created new momentum. But much remains to be done for Miami to achieve its potential to have one of the most distinctive systems of parks and public spaces in the country.

There are many challenges. Miami's rising profile as an exciting center of growth, culture, and international business continues to attract residents to new high-rise buildings and emerging neighborhoods, as well as visitors to cultural and other events. At the same time, the city remains home to a large number of low- and moderate-income households. The ever-increasing diversity of the city, therefore, will require an even greater variety of parks, public spaces and recreation opportunities. Acquisition of land for new parks in a densely-populated city will always be complex, and even with new parks, the city's park system will continue to be relatively small. Municipal government has too often used park land to site other facilities. The per capita budget of Miami's system is still well below the average of other city park systems. Parks and other public spaces are poorly linked, creating barriers to access. To meet and overcome many of these challenges, Miami needs to take advantage of every opportunity to create a strong network of resources that goes beyond the traditional parks and recreation system to create an exciting tropical public realm worthy of a city of international importance.