

## Leave Your Car Behind

Written by Erik Bojnansky, BT Senior Writer  
November 2019

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### Meet the 2019 winners of the Miami Foundation's Public Space Challenge



Since 2013 the Miami Foundation has handed out grants to implement ideas that create, activate, or improve public spaces throughout Miami-Dade County as part of its annual Our Miami Public Space Challenge.

But this year's challenge isn't just about building new parks, planting gardens, or jazzing up plazas. All 12 recipients who won a piece of a \$250,000 prize pool came up with viable proposals to get people to move around Miami-Dade County by means other than automobiles.

Those concepts include a smartphone application that offers rewards for people who don't drive; a ferry that travels between Palmetto Bay and downtown Miami; a floating dock beneath the MacArthur Causeway bridge made of recycled garbage; an urban trail through North Bay Village; and three separate proposals for illuminated walkways -- including one along downtown's Third Avenue -- that will encourage people to wander on foot after dark.

Dawn Shirreffs, senior director of public affairs at the Miami Foundation, says the organization's board members and staff felt that past Public Space Challenges were too broad, which led to the same ideas being "presented over and over." Those repeated ideas, Shirreffs says, included community gardens, "which we loved, and we did fund a handful." But what was really desired, Shirreffs explains, was to encourage the community to come up with more unique ideas that would truly improve the quality of life in Miami-Dade and help remediate some of its hardships.

"The real purpose of this program was not only to leverage our most valuable assets, but to really get the community coming up with solutions," Shirreffs says.

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So the Miami Foundation decided that henceforth Our Miami Public Space Challenges should have a theme. Mobility was picked this year because Miami-Dade's congested streets are often a topic of conversation. "It's one of the most Miami things to talk about," Shirreffs says.



Indeed, a study from Florida International University published this past June stated that South Florida has the 12th-worst traffic congestion in the United States. A September study conducted by Insurify, a website that compares insurance rates, was even worse. It ranked South Florida as having the sixth-worst traffic in the nation.

Persuading more people to drive less will not only alleviate traffic congestion, it will also encourage residents and visitors to explore their surroundings and even get to know each other. As Shirreffs put it in a press release: "When people have access to different ways of getting around a city, it becomes easier for residents to connect with one another and the place they live."

One way to entice people to use alternative methods to get around is to offer compensation. And that's what Velocia, which won a \$20,000 grant, aims to do. A smartphone application created by Canadian tech entrepreneur David Winterstein, Velocia gives credits, called Velos, every time a user travels by some means other than his or her own car. Those Velos eventually add up to discounts for Miami-Dade transit services, such as the bus and Metrorail, rideshare like Uber and Lyft, bike and scooter rentals, and even meal deliveries.

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“What we’re doing is rewarding users as a way to change behaviors quickly,” explains Eldredge Bermingham, Velocia’s head of strategic partnerships.

Bermingham, a Miami Beach resident and former chief science officer for the Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science, says the smartphone app has been under development for the past two years. Thanks to the \$500,000 already raised from Miami-Dade County, the Knight Foundation, the Codina Family, and the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, Velocia went live this past August, though it’s still in the testing phase. To carry out these tests, Velocia needs 2000 people working, living and/or visiting Miami-Dade to download the app.



Three of the winning ideas aim to use lighting to make people feel secure as they walk and bicycle at night. One of those applications, called Move on Avenue 3, received \$22,250 to add light (and shade) to NE 3rd Avenue, an inviting two-block-long street just west of Biscayne Boulevard that is lined with restaurants and small businesses. Those improvements will encourage more people to walk and bicycle along this hidden road 24 hours a day, says Glenda Puente, an architect residing in Omni who submitted the Avenue 3 application to the Miami Foundation.

“Well, obviously I’m excited. It’s a big win for our team,” Puente tells the *BT*. That team includes the Downtown Development Authority, the Downtown Neighborhood Alliance, the Flagler Street Business Improvement District, and local businesses.

The Move on Avenue 3 idea originated with Steve Dutton, Puente notes. A downtown resident who lives near that street, Dutton’s husband was killed by a deranged homeless man on NE 3rd Avenue. Thereafter, Dutton became an advocate for proper care of the homeless, as well as making the street more pedestrian friendly. Puente says many of the changes proposed in Avenue 3 came from an application Dutton tried to submit to the Miami Foundation’s Public Space Challenge back in 2017. “The deadline passed,” she says.

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The illumination, which will be provided by LED string lights suspended above the street, is a critical component for NE 3rd Avenue, says Puente. Just before nightfall, most businesses in downtown's Central Business District shut down. But that isn't the case with NE 3rd Avenue, where restaurants tend to stay open after dark. The street itself is also surrounded by condominiums, but the residents often don't venture outside after sunset. "They don't want to come out after dark," she says. "It has the appearance of unsafety."



But with the improvements prescribed in Move on Avenue 3, which also includes parking spaces for Freebee jitneys and Lyft scooters, Puente hopes to attract more attention for this unique street. "The idea is if the street becomes more visited by pedestrians, the cars will slow down," she says.

Puente hopes to get the permitting needed to start installing the new features by February, just in time for Super Bowl. "It will be a month when a lot of eyes are on downtown," she adds.

Florida International University visiting professor Anjana Mishra received \$25,000 for her idea to create a ferry service that would carry residents of the southern parts of the county who need to travel to downtown Miami and Miami Beach.

Mishra's proposal notes that nearly 10,000 people travel daily from the south to downtown Miami for work. "Every day approximately 5000 commuters are on the major arterial roads leading to the downtown area.... Travel during peak times takes about two hours and 23 minutes. This time wasted in transit is a waste of human capital," wrote Mishra, who teaches at FIU's Steven J. Green School of International Studies and Public Affairs.

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To reduce the number of commuters clogging the highways, Mishra proposes that South Miami-Dade residents travel to the Palmetto Bay Library or Black Point Marina and catch a ferry north. Mishra says she's worked out a partnership with Poseidon Ferry, a company registered with Rhode Island resident Jonathan Silvia that already has authorization to start ferry service between the county's Haulover Park and downtown Miami. Mishra aims to test her proposed ferry route by February 2020.



Besides helping congestion, Mishra indicated that the venture will make money, at least over time, and perhaps even expand its service to Key West. "As per the business plan, it is expected that the venture will be profitable and will be self-sustaining after one year of operation," she wrote in her application to the Miami Foundation.

Shirreffs of the foundation found the ferry idea to be interesting and potentially educational. Its success, or failure, could also help future efforts to look at water transit. "It's an idea that people have talked about, but government hasn't moved it along," she says.

Adriana Savino, a principal at Savino & Miller Design Studio (architecture and landscape architecture), just wants to help people walk along the downtown area's waterfront. In her application to the Miami Foundation, Savino noted that the MacArthur Causeway creates a barrier that prevents a continuous baywalk from downtown Miami's Maurice A. Ferré Park (formerly known as Museum Park, see "Park Patrol," page 60) to the former Miami Herald property in Omni and, further north, to Margaret Pace Park. "This disconnection separates the Omni area from Greater Downtown, which, if linked, would benefit all the locals and tourists residing or staying in the area," Savino wrote.

Savino's solution to the problem, for which she was awarded \$25,000, was the Garbage Floating Dock Under MacArthur Causeway. Savino and Coral Gables-based civil engineering

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firm Coastal Systems International plan to build a floating bridge with discarded plastic water bottles. “This link will make the Miami experience more pleasant, people-centric, and engaging for locals and tourists alike,” she stated.

The goal is to have the floating dock completed, which is planned as a temporary installation, in time for Art Wynwood on February 13, which takes place on the old Miami Herald property. Savino cautions that the details are still being worked out, but once it’s finished, she says she hopes the installation will motivate people to recycle discarded plastics. “We’re trying to do something to inspire people,” she tells the *BT*, “but it’s going to be a little extra work.”

There were other mobility-oriented proposals to improve or create walking and biking paths that received grants. Among them was the North Bay Village Urban Nature Trail, which received \$20,000. Proposed by the City of North Bay Village, the Urban Nature Trail would connect pedestrians and bicyclists through the municipality’s three parks -- Vogel Park, Schonberger Park, and the soon to be open Village Dog Park.

Toward that end, the city will plant new shade trees, widen sidewalks, and add green striping to the bike lanes on John F. Kennedy Causeway. The city will also install a 3400-foot walkway along Biscayne Bay, place water fountains at the three parks, and add “bike racks that double as art installations,” according to NBV’s application. In an effort to generate more attention toward this municipality in the bay, situated between Miami’s Shorecrest neighborhood and Miami Beach, the city also plans to host a “Bike Rodeo or Tour de Parks event,” the application states.

Resiliency will be the theme for next year’s Public Space Challenge, Dawn Shirreffs says. Applicants can conceive ideas ranging from combating sea level rise and creating hurricane-resistant public spaces to addressing income inequality and fighting mosquito-borne viruses like Zika.

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Says Shirreffs: "So there really is a wealth of ideas that the community can come up with."

*Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)*

### Other Public Space Challenge Winners

**Name** : The Underline at SoMi: Let's All Paint a Rainbow  
**Description** : Recruiting volunteers to paint rainbow colors on pillars beneath the Metrorail at SoMi  
**Applicant** : Holly Zickler and Mari Chael  
**Amount** : \$20,400

**Name** : Opa-locka Light District  
**Description** : Placing streetlights along Opa-locka's darkened sidewalks that will project both light and color  
**Applicant** : Opa-locka Community Development Corporation and O, Miami  
**Amount** : \$18,000

**Name** : Another One Rides the Bus  
**Description** : Placing slender benches at Little Havana bus and trolley stops where sidewalks are darkened  
**Applicant** : Urban Health Partnerships  
**Amount** : \$19,122

**Name** : Miami-Themed Crosswalks at Public Schools  
**Description** : Inviting students to paint Miami-themed crosswalks at Sunset Elementary, Fairwinds Elementary, and Fairwinds Middle School  
**Applicant** : Kerry Schabacker  
**Amount** : \$22,000

**Name** : Improving the Condition and Safety of the Commodore Trail  
**Description** : Widening and cleaning the Commodore Trail at Douglas Road and Ingraham Highway  
**Applicant** : Friends of the Commodore Trail  
**Amount** : \$25,000

**Name** : Miami Lakes MiGlo Walking and Biking Trail  
**Description** : Calls for turning the pedestrian and bike trail at NW 170th Street into a glowing trail  
**Applicant** : City of Miami Lakes  
**Amount** : \$25,000

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**Name** : Make Hidden Lake More Walk- and Bike-Friendly  
**Description** : Organize homeowners by Hidden Lake in West Kendall to advocate for bike la  
**Applicant** : Wendy Carabello  
**Amount** : \$6200