

### North Miami mayor pushes for development as residents push back



o the losers belong the spoils.

Sound counterintuitive? Consider the back-to-back June 12 meetings of the North Miami Community Redevelopment Agency and the North Miami City Council, where two of the biggest contributors to the failed \$120 million North Miami bond issue got what they wanted.

Dr. Rudy Moise got \$620,000 in CRA tax money to expand his 32-year-old medical clinic at 675 NW 119th St. Moise was the biggest single contributor to the bond issue, at \$5000. The May 1 bond issue failed 3-1 overall and lost in every precinct of the city.

Taubco Development, another major bond issue contributor, moved a critical step closer to its long-sought-prize, a \$68 million, nine-story, mixed-use development east of Biscayne Boulevard along NE 123rd Street, with 297 luxury apartments to attract younger working professionals.

In both votes, North Miami Mayor Smith Joseph, who term-limits out next May, was prime mover and linchpin. He's fighting a sour mood that extends to all parts of the city and the parallel universes of Creole radio and social media. A growing number of residents consider

## Friends with Money

Written by Mark Sell, BT Contributor  
July 2018

---

themselves ignored. Restiveness is growing.

Mayor Joseph nonetheless has prescribed his cure for the electorate's sour stomach -- clinics and cranes, especially the latter.

"When I was elected, one key phrase I used was that I want to see cranes in the city of North Miami," Joseph said. "You go to the right, you see cranes. You to go the left, you see North Miami Beach approving many-story buildings and you see Aventura going off the roof. This is 2018 and I don't want to go down as a mayor who actually came and crippled this wonderful city of North Miami, which I consider an oasis, which I consider being a flower that is among a bunch of thorns."

In that spirit, one surprise item popped up toward the end of the meeting: discussion of a high-density 2000-unit transit district just south of NE 151st Street -- probable site of a train station -- and west of the Brightline tracks. The fates of the track areas around 123rd and 151st streets will bear close watching in the weeks and months ahead.

Back to Taubco. The developer has long sought to develop four acres at 1850 NE 123rd St. just behind Walgreens. In late 2016, the planning commission approved Taubco's plans for a nine-story, 529,000-square-foot Causeway Village, a mixed-use development with retail, parking, and 297 apartments targeting young working professionals. Taubco also developed many other developments in the area, especially Causeway Square with the LA Fitness sign, whose nearly 100-foot height has earned the ire of residents in neighboring Keystone Point.

The Causeway Village project needs a 4-1 supermajority vote on the city council to change the zoning for the four-acre parcel -- from commercial/office, with a 55-foot height limit, to mixed-use/high, or 140 feet high with 125 units per acre.

Taubco had twice tried to get the council to change the zoning. In 2013 the council would not even hear it, and in March 2017, the council voted it down 2-3 amid opposition from Keystone neighbors.

## Friends with Money

Written by Mark Sell, BT Contributor  
July 2018

---

This time, two of the three no votes changed their minds: Mayor Joseph and Phillippe Biene-Aime, now running for mayor.

Said Bien-Aime: "I would rather see a project like this than storage on 123rd Street [where the council recently approved a storage facility just east of the Taubco property]. We are not voting on the project, but the process."

A parade of citizens came to the microphone opposing the process, from Bob Pechon of Keystone in the east to Judy Brown of the Sunkist Grove Homeowners Association in the west.

Only council member Carol Keys opposed it, saying, "I have never seen an item come back and be reheard more than a year later. We're opening up such a Pandora's box for this city that every project, every item that has been voted against will be brought back, and we're going to start rehearing and rehearing and rehearing."

"People were fed up, and they are still fed up," Pechon said the next morning. He is both a planning commissioner and emerging unofficial coordinator for the city's nine homeowners' associations.

At the earlier CRA meeting, Moise argued that his business was doing so well, he needed to expand. If business is doing so well, why does he need taxpayer money to remove slum and blight because his *business is booming*?

Moise is also one of a small group of physicians in Florida certified to dispense medical marijuana to reduce pain. This can also be a highly profitable business that bypasses insurance red tape. While we would not be shocked if Joseph and Moise partner in the future, or if Moise returns to the CRA seeking more money, that is speculation for now. In any event, the clinic passed 3-2, with Scott Galvin and Carol Keys voting no, although the vote busted the CRA's budget for the fiscal year.

The bond issue and its aftermath also reveal a lack of consensus in North Miami's varied Haitian-American community.

## Friends with Money

Written by Mark Sell, BT Contributor  
July 2018

---

Entrepreneur and promoter Ringo Cayard did his bit in April to destroy the bond issue via Creole radio, in a parallel, and entirely separate, effort from the NoGo Bond movement. Cayard organized the city's Mardi Gras festival in early 2017 at a cost of more than \$250,000 in city money. In February he met with city manager Larry Spring, pressing him for more money for affordable housing and an expanded water plant. At some point, they fell out, and Cayard took to the radio, saying the city was ignoring the needs of the poor.

"Retirees cannot even pay the water bill," Cayard says. "I took this stand against this bond in defense of cultural preservation. Issues will affect people in a personal way for a generation to come. This bond by design would have increased people's already growing property taxes. It would have been self-serving for some, but not for the minority community."

Less familiar names and groups are starting to spring up, as well. One is Citizens United for Progress (CUP), a reform-minded fledgling group of Haitian-American professionals, spearheaded by Marcel Denis, a lawyer and Afro-Caribbean historian.

"Some of our members were very active in letting the community know that they should not go for the bond," Denis recalls. "The rationale didn't make any sense. It's a ruse for the city to come into funding so they can pay for the multiple people suing them."

Clinics and cranes alone will not sweeten the mood, but there is clearly a growing hunger for new ideas and fresher faces.

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