

# 40 Years MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024

A Singular Voice in an Evolving City

WWW.MIAMITODAYNEWS.COM \$4.00

1,000-SQUARE-FOOT PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE TO LINK MORNINGSIDE BUILDINGS, PG. 20



**HOW RAPID THE TRANSIT?:** The group overseeing use of the county transportation tax may vote to send operating plans for a 20-mile South Dade Bus Rapid Transit system back to the drawing board. The Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust was to vote this week on urging the county transportation department to revise operating plans for the bus corridor "to include local, limited and express BRT routes and to allow all BRT buses to

employ traffic signal preemption for all BRT bus routes in both directions throughout the service day every day of the week, in keeping with its commitment to provide true Gold Standard BRT service." Last June the trust learned that plans for Gold Standard buses had been limited to just part of the day in one direction at a time. Rollout of BRT has been delayed from its original 2022 planned start.

**REDISTRICTING RESOLUTION:** The Miami City Commission authorizing the city attorney on Jan. 25 to start settlement talks with plaintiffs of a redistricting lawsuit. The suit was filed in December 2022 by local advocacy groups including Engage Miami, Grove Rights and Community Equity (GRACE) and the South Dade and Miami-Dade NAACP branches, which are represented by the ACLU of Florida. It alleges the city's voting map was gerrymandered to maintain one Black district, one white and three Hispanic districts. Commissioner **Damian Pardo**, who introduced the resolution, said the city should exhaust all options to settle the suit and avoid accruing significant legal costs if the case goes to trial. The city attorney is to hold confidential negotiations with the plaintiffs and bring back proposed settlements for commission approval.

**NO DEBATE LIMIT:** After deliberation, the Miami City Commission decided not to limit the length of debates and discussions by its members to five minutes. While the resolution was intended to streamline meetings, some commissioners expressed concern that it would interfere with creating legislation that supports the community, which sometimes requires lengthy conversations. Instead, commissioners agreed that respectful debate, including passionate discussions, is important to creating sound policy. If a member goes off-topic or strays too far from the agenda, the chairperson can redirect the conversation.

**ID CARDS DEBATED:** A Florida Senate committee has approved a bill that would prevent cities and counties from accepting identification cards issued to undocumented immigrants. The issue focuses on what are known as "community" identification cards that have been issued in some areas to undocumented immigrants and other people.

## THE ACHIEVER



Photo by Cristina Sullivan

**Steven Meiner**

Miami Beach mayor targets open government, public safety  
The profile is on Page 4

## Work force down, more jobs around

Jobs grew in most categories last year in Miami-Dade, new US Bureau of Labor Statistics data show, with the largest percentage growth in manufacturing and a catchall of "other services."

End-of-year figures reaffirm the shortage of workers to meet demand as unemployment here was just 1.6% versus 3% for all of Florida.

Still, total employment pulled back 24,203 workers from November, the county's all-time high, leaving Miami-Dade down 1,071 jobs for the year. Unemployment did tick up from its record low 1.4%, also set in November. But because the county lost 6,148 persons from its labor force during the 12 months as many moved to lower-cost areas, joblessness fell from 2% last December to 1.6%.

Manufacturing gained 7.5% jobs in Miami-Dade, adding 3,300 in the sector and ending 2023 with 47,500 workers, most in a decade but still far below 90,000 in 1990.

The category of other services gained 8.3% in workers, adding 4,000 jobs to 52,200. That nears the county's all-time high of 53,400 in April 2016.

Finance jobs grew 3.9% last year to a record 94,900 workers in the field, aided by the flood of financial firms arriving starting with covid and the subsequent executive inflow. That's a leap of 11,700 jobs from December 2019 in a more-or-less continual rise.

The ultra-broad area of trade, transportation and utilities added 4.1% in jobs in 2023 to a record 337,600, a gain of 13,400 workers in 12 months.

Leisure and hospitality added 1.9% to jobs in the year to 146,100 at work, still 3,600 below February 2020, highest ever – the month before the pandemic devastated tourism.

Education and health services jobs combined grew 2.8% to 217,200, just 600 below the record high in November.

Construction added 2.1% to jobs for the year, ending December at 52,600.

The only sector in Miami-Dade to actually lose jobs was information, which lost 2.9% of its workers and ended the year employing 23,500.

## East-west mass transit pivots to two new paths

A long-standing plan for bus rapid transit from downtown Miami to West Dade has been shelved as planners have decided to try two other paths to reach Florida International University. One is rail, the other an elevated Metromover along Flagler Street.

The plan agreed upon last week is to try both paths and forget the aim of bus rapid transit down the center of SR 836.

The rail line belongs to CSX, a freight carrier that the county has been trying persuade to share its rails with a commuter line whose operator is still unknown. The elevated Metromover option first surfaced last week as an alternative to waiting for CSX to agree.

To accomplish that, the Transportation Planning Organization, which oversees transportation plans in Miami-Dade, voted unanimously Thursday to ask the Florida Department of Transportation to sidetrack a planned study of bus rapid transit using Flagler and use the money instead to look this year at the feasibility of an elevated fixed guideway along Flagler.

No price tags or timetables were attached to either alternative, which remain sketchy ideas to be worked through to finish the east-west

corridor of the county's smart plan for new tax-funded mass transit that was unveiled eight years ago.

Board member Eileen Higgins, who chairs the county's transportation committee, unveiled the elevated Metromover option by noting that "our east-west congestion remains unresolved." She said she had brainstormed with heads of both county transportation and the area's state transportation department, both of whom were present, "about what would be a backup plan in case the CSX project falls apart in a year or two."

Ms. Higgins underlined the need. "We all agree that Flagler is our highest ridership corridor going out to FIU, which I think has 100,000 people working there on any given day, and we do not have a way to get people out," she said. "We have a possible solution with CSX, but they control the tracks. Flagler Street is our street – it's the State of Florida's local street, but it's our street, and we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to figure out."

"Right now," Ms. Higgins said, "it takes almost 90 minutes if you leave downtown to get to FIU or vice versa. If we did a Metromover extension to FIU we might be able to get folks

out there in 35 or 40 minutes, which is really life-changing for the folks, and we have the opportunity to add existing connectivity up on 87th Avenue."

Board member and county Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez said it would impact a full solution to the east-west corridor conundrum "if we could ever get CSX to come to the table" to make a deal. He said he had talked with the freight carrier about the opportunity to get South Dade passengers to West Dade via one of their three spur lines from the south to Miami International Airport and link there to the east-west CSX route.

County Commissioner Anthony Rodriguez replied that studying the CSX solution is already county commission policy even if a Metromover study runs simultaneously.

Ms. Higgins told board members they "need two paths" to an east-west route. She said the Florida Department of Transportation, the federal government and the county's transportation team all agree that a plan for bus rapid transit along 836 is not going to be one of those paths, based on both cost and feasibility. "We're not moving forward with this project, the one that's in the middle of 836."

## AGENDA

HUGE BILLBOARDS MAY IMPERIL STATE HIGHWAY FUNDS... 2

COLLEGE AIMS TO TURN COURTROOMS INTO CLASSROOMS... 3

VIEWPOINT: GOVERNMENT NEEDS A TOURISM REFRESHER... 6

DORAL THE LATEST TO LOOK TO SCHOOL SPEED DEVICES... 9

COUNTY TO SUBMIT PLAN TO CLOSE SOLID WASTE PLANT... 13

BURNING ISSUE: FIRE STATION OR A COMMUNITY CENTER?... 14

IS YOUR UBER DRIVER A SHAM? PENALTIES ON THE ROAD... 16

MIAMI EYES CHARTER REVIEW TO TARGET OUTSIDE JOBS... 20

# Miami Beach Mayor Steven Meiner targets public safety...

In a historic runoff election in November, Steven Meiner was elected the 39th mayor of Miami Beach. His four-year tenure as commissioner was the catalyst for his path to the office of mayor, marked by his passion for promoting the safety and quality of life for residents in Miami Beach.

In his new role, Mr. Meiner wants to continue serving his community as an active and engaged representative and work progressively to achieve his campaign priorities. He is primarily focused on public safety, prosecuting crime, traffic mitigation, countering overdevelopment, proactively addressing the homeless situation, protecting Biscayne Bay, quality of life improvements, and increasing transparency and openness in government.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Mr. Meiner was instilled with a sense of duty to public service and community by his parents. They both served in public service roles, with his father dedicating nearly four decades to the Internal Revenue Service and his mother contributing to public education as a teacher and guidance counselor.

Mr. Meiner pursued a legal career in public service, earning a J.D. Cum Laude from Brooklyn Law School and graduating Summa Cum Laude with Phi Beta Kappa honors from Brooklyn College. Since moving to Miami Beach in 2007, he has served as an enforcement attorney with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), handling high-profile cases for prestigious international law firms.

He has been married to his wife Shanyn for 22 years, and together they take pride in raising their two children, Matisyahu and Michal, in Miami Beach.

Mayor Meiner spoke with Miami Today reporter Genevieve Bowen.

**Q: What was your upbringing like, and how did it shape your decision to pursue a career in public service?**

**A:** My dad worked for the Internal Revenue Service for almost 40 years and my mom was a guidance counselor in the New York City public school system, so I was around public service from a young age. My parents donated their time to their community. My dad was president of our synagogue for four years and I saw a lot of civic engagement.

I was personally in private practice as a lawyer for 11 years, and seeing that public service, I joined the federal government and then ultimately ran for elected office. Giving back to the community was something I observed that was ingrained in my parents. I don't even know if they talked about it so much, I just saw it and realized how important it was.

**Q: How has your experience as an attorney informed your approach to governance in Miami Beach?**

**A:** I ask a lot of questions. Especially as a litigator, which is my training and background, you read a lot, you become informed on the issues and then you ask a lot of questions. I have that same style as an elected official and the residents have noticed that.

I come to commission meetings and I'm prepared. I read the agendas, I read the memos and then I ask questions. Much of it is behind the scenes, but then I will



Photo by Cristina Sullivan

Mayor Steven Meiner has deal with the county to add two dedicated drug technicians.

## The Achiever

### Steven Meiner

Mayor  
Miami Beach  
1700 Convention Center Drive  
Miami Beach, 33139  
(305) 673-7035  
Born: Brooklyn, NY  
Age: 52  
Education: Juris Doctor, Brooklyn Law School  
Personal Philosophy: "Treat every person with respect and dignity, listen with empathy, lend a helping hand, and let G-D be the guiding light in your journey."

do it publicly as well because, for one, sometimes I want to hear the answer said publicly and I want to make sure I know all the information, but also our residents should know all the information. We're better when our residents know more.

**Q: How did your four-year tenure as a commissioner prepare you for your role as mayor?**

**A:** In some ways, it's been seamless. I was an active commissioner in every aspect, especially legislatively. I have flyers here and four binders worth of my initiatives. Some of them I believe, were transformational for our city, which our residents noticed.

I'm also very engaged with the residents. During the campaign, I answered over 50,000 emails and text messages. I personally read what residents send me via email, text message or whatever way it comes in, and I respond to it, which helps me a lot.

Sometimes people ask why I don't have someone on my staff answer the emails. Well, if I'm not answering it, it probably means I'm not reading it. I want to read it because I want to know all the issues and I also want to have that personal touch with the residents. It's time-consuming, but it's important to know the issues well so you can form solutions.

As a commissioner, I was an active legislator from a policy standpoint, engaged

in communication with residents, and went to all the neighborhood associations, and I'm continuing that as mayor.

There are differences between being commissioner and mayor, though. The volume is greater, there are more events to go to and I do find the reaction of people is different. It's interesting. They look at me as the leader of the city, the face of the city. I want to keep working hard and making positive changes.

**Q: Speaking to your campaign priorities, how do you plan to ensure transparency and accountability in government decision-making?**

**A:** One is that things have become publicly available that weren't before and they're initiatives that I brought while I was commissioner. For example, our city audits were not publicly available. Our city contracts were not publicly available. Our conditional use permits, which are if a business gets approved to do something outside the four corners of generally what would be allowed, weren't publicly available. They were in an archive and it could take weeks to pull. That's now publicly available.

I'm a big proponent of the Inspector General's office. There was a move by a couple of former commissioners to weaken the office and its function, remove it and put the audit function into the city manager's office. I opposed all that. I think it's important to have the inspector general. I said at a public commission meeting that there are probably people who don't like it, but everyone should know that someone is watching over them.

That's the public trust that we want to have. Getting the information out of our hands and into the public domain and to the residents is important, but it's also giving them the ability to digest the information in a timely fashion.

We've seen times where something will come out, but then there's a commission meeting the next day voting on that very item. I've stated when that happens that I object to it. Now that I'm in a position as mayor to be in more control of the agenda, that to me is so important, that residents have the information and get to voice their opinions at the commission meeting, so I'll continue to do that.

**Q: How do you plan to enhance quality of life and public safety?**

**A:** There are many components of public safety. One is that we're continuing to transform our municipal prosecution team.

Just a little history, we're the only city in Miami-Dade that has its own prosecutor. We only handle misdemeanors. The State Attorney, Kathy Fernandez Rundle, and her team handle all felonies and many of the misdemeanors, but we have the others.

A couple of years ago, I started asking questions because our police officers and our residents were telling me that people were getting arrested over and over again and they were back on the street faster than the officer could get back from booking them. I delved in and the data wasn't available. I had to push to get the data and it showed that we had an 8% successful conviction rate, which is not good.

Arrests can have a meaningful impact on someone's life, so I am not downplaying that. But we're generally talking repeat offenders here who are arrested many times. The arrest in itself is not going to be of consequence and the judge can never consider that without a conviction. So, I introduced and our commission passed a series of legislation and now we are close to a 90% conviction rate.

Another initiative we have coming up at the Jan. 31 meeting is related to the level of drug dealing here. One of the issues is that the county has to test the drugs because you can't prosecute a drug dealer without proving that it's a narcotic. They have 34 cities under their jurisdiction and they don't always have the bandwidth to test. So, often, our drug arrest did not get prosecuted.

I ultimately figured out because I asked our chief at the time about four arrests that were not prosecuted. It was a felony so it had to go to the state attorney. I went to the state attorney and I asked why the cases weren't prosecuted. They came back to me and said that the county didn't test it so they couldn't prosecute.

Now, we're going to be entering into an agreement with the county where we're going to hire two drug lab technicians who can be embedded in the county, but their priority is Miami Beach. There shouldn't be ever a situation where we make a drug arrest and it's not tested.

The benefit to the county is that they are two full-time employees and they'll have some time when there are no Miami Beach drugs to test and they'll help other cities. There's so much to public safety.

We also just passed legislation, I was one of the sponsors, that we could arrest someone who's homeless and refused shelter. It was a close vote, it was 4-3. I think it's a good law because it gives our police an added layer and they have the discretion.

There are homeless people who are not harming anybody and not committing any crimes, but there are homeless people who do commit crimes. The numbers were at one point 25%, 30%. They're even higher, right now.

But on the flip side, we're also offering a lot of help. We spend millions of dollars every year offering rehabilitation, mental health and addiction programs.

## WHEN FACTS MATTER, DON'T RELY ON YOUR MEMORY

Much of what happened in Miami-Dade County in the past 17 years was reported only in Miami Today. Search every word in second in Miami Today's digital edition archives.

Those reports appeared **only in Miami Today.**  
Only \$60 a year at **MIAMITODAYEPAPER.COM**

**MIAMI TODAY**  
A Singular Voice in an Evolving City



Scan the QR Code  
for a **FREE demo**



# ...traffic, overdevelopment, quality of life, open government

have employment opportunities for the homeless.

As part of the municipal prosecution program I mentioned, we are going to offer what's called a diversionary program, a rehabilitation program. We will potentially knock down some of the charges or dismiss the whole case, depending on the case and the discretion of the prosecutors, if they complete the program.

One story I'm proud of is that we had a situation where a defendant was offered a deal contingent upon him being drug-free after six months of consistent testing. He successfully completed it and he told the prosecutors and defense attorneys it was the first time he'd been drug-free in over a decade. We're looking to help people as well, but also help our residents and make sure we're minimizing crime.

**Q: How do you plan to ensure the Beach's resiliency as a city on the forefront of climate change and sea level rise?**

**A:** I brought an initiative probably eight months ago already that we need to upgrade our stormwater and sewer piping. The time is now. We can't wait anymore, for a number of reasons.

Our city code requires when we do these projects that we elevate the street level. What happens is the residents get concerned, especially where there are residential homes, that the water is going to spill over if we raise the street.

There are other efforts, we have pumps, drainage, harmonization, but at the same time it's difficult and the residents get concerned, rightfully so. I was not in favor of this uniform street level because I feel that every neighborhood is different and it should be a case-by-case basis.

That's what we're grappling with, but at the same time, we have to upgrade. It has to be done. If we don't do it, one, it's going to have an environmental impact. When there are leaks, and there are already some, but if we continue going down this road, there'll be more leaks and that impacts Biscayne Bay. That is why part

of my initiative is that we need to follow the Biscayne Bay Task Force report. That is a top priority.

Also, the sea walls. We have initiatives and even offer grant funding to help people raise their sea walls and comply with our laws. It has to be done for so many reasons, but if we don't do it, it's going to become more expensive in the long run. Those pipes are going to bust and we're going to have to fix them. If it happens enough, the state is going to come in and investigate us. Then we're going to have to defend that and then do emergency repairs. It's not going to be good, so I'm committed to making sure we get these projects done now.

**Q: How will you counter overdevelopment and maintain a balance between necessary development and preserving residential quality of life and the character of Miami Beach?**

**A:** You hit it on the nose, because some people have talked about the term moratorium and I don't think that's the appropriate word. The key is countering overdevelopment and making sure we have responsible development.

One issue with overdevelopment is that traffic has become at times unbearable in our city. Also, the aging infrastructure. There's only so much our city can handle and overdevelopment certainly puts a strain on that.

We're working to get an ordinance passed that in order to have the floor area ratio increased, which is our zoning height density, it would require a six/sevenths commission vote. It's currently five/sevenths, so what I proposed makes it a little harder. It will still make sure that we have some good responsible development that will pass but makes it tougher for development that shouldn't.

The ordinance passed unanimously at our December meeting. The second reading is in January, I can't imagine it won't pass. It's popular among our residents.

Another initiative that I'm proud of is related to the BayLink. I was the first one

to bring to the forefront that if the BayLink came, it would be a rapid transit zone and the county's zoning would preempt Miami Beach. Their zoning allows for a lot more density and potentially height than our zoning allows, within a half-mile radius.

Compounding that is that right now the rapid transit zone just goes down the MacArthur and a little bit down Fifth Street, but there's been a lot of talk that it will go down Alton Road. It doesn't even have to get finalized. If that is the plan, the zoning of the county would then go down Alton Road. It would transform our city, and not in a good way.

I brought a resolution to the commission which passed unanimously and we sent it to the county asking them to exempt us from the zoning that comes with the rapid transit zone. That has not happened yet.

**Q: That touches on my next question, which is how are you working to tackle traffic congestion?**

**A:** A proposal that I'm pushing hard is a ferry, or water taxis. We have a pilot program that's with an entity, Poseidon. My vision is different, though, than what is offered. I'm picturing a service that goes to Miami, that goes north and south throughout Miami Beach and that you can hop on and off and is seamless.

Picture, maybe a more frequent trolley, but on the water. I think can be a game-changer for people. People enjoy it, they want to be on the water.

I grew up in Brooklyn and Staten Island, and the Staten Island Ferry was fun. I'm picturing something that would be free. I don't always say that we should offer everything but for free, but for people to get to work, it has to be.

There's grant funding out there and we're working actively on submitting those grants. A lot of this, if not most of or maybe all the infrastructure could be paid through grant funding.

We're also working on traffic management software and will be opening a traffic management operational center. We're going to have somebody from

Miami Beach embedded in the county now, which we never had before. It will be helpful because a lot of the issues, traffic synchronization, all the traffic lights, you have to work with the county.

Right before the election, I called for a traffic workshop. It was the first of its kind. We had state representatives here, we had the county, FDOT, and the Coast Guard because there are so many layers that deal with management.

The other thing that's going to be coming online soon is traffic officers. They're not full-fledged police officers. They're under the police department, but traffic is their job. They can also work in crowd control when we have events, but their job is going to be traffic management. Police officers can get pulled in many different directions, but the traffic officer's job is to be at those critical intersections, especially during rush hour, making sure traffic keeps flowing.

**Q: How do you plan to maintain the city's reputation as a top tourist destination while also meeting the needs of the residents?**

**A:** If you have the quality of life for the residents that's public safety, you're helping the local businesses. When I speak in front of business groups, as commissioner before and now as mayor, I tell them that if people feel safe, they're going to come. I always say that I want us to be the most resident-friendly city in America and the safest city in America. They're lofty goals but I think they're achievable.

We are a safe city, and that shows by the level of tourism we have. We have residents from all over the country and the world moving here constantly because we're a great city and a safe city. It's continuing to do that and being that city that our residents are attracted to and it's going to bring in business.

We're a great draw. The beaches, our restaurants, we are an incredible city. We have so much to offer and we're in a great position, but we're looking to enhance that in a big way.

Miami Today has always been  
a reliable vehicle for your

*Legal*  
ADVERTISING

And now, we are making it easier  
for you by providing forms for your Legal Notice

ONLINE 

Visit

[www.miamitodaynews.com/advertise/legal-advertising](http://www.miamitodaynews.com/advertise/legal-advertising)

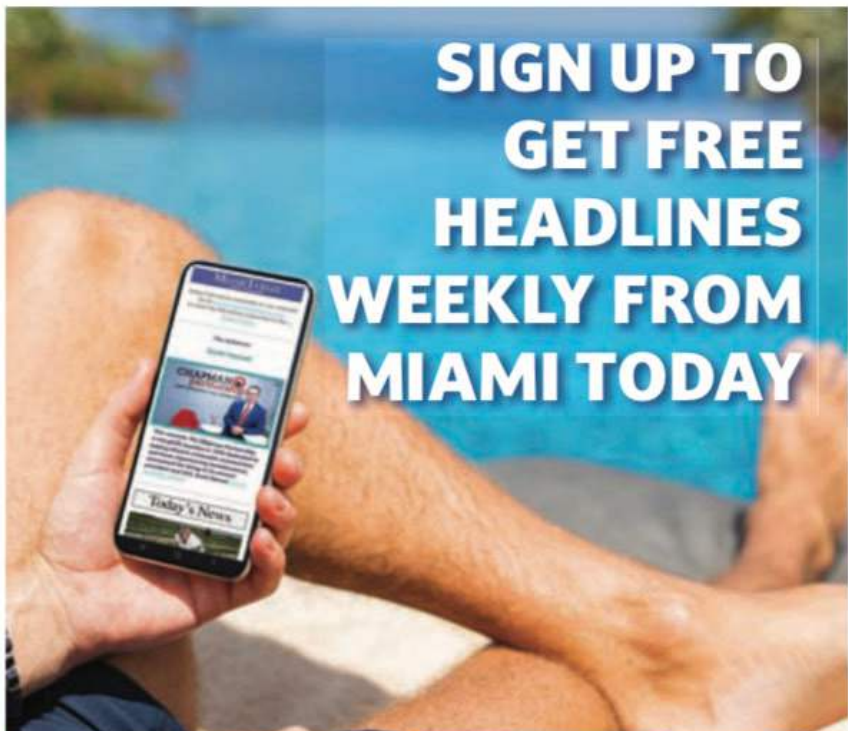
- FICTITIOUS NAMES
- NOTICE TO CREDITORS
- NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION
- NOTICE OF PUBLIC SALE
- DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE
- AND MORE...



Contact Angela Lee  
for more information at  
305-358-2663 Ext. 1004 or at  
[legals@miamitodaynews.com](mailto:legals@miamitodaynews.com)

**MIAMI TODAY**  
A Singular Voice in an Evolving City

**SIGN UP TO  
GET FREE  
HEADLINES  
WEEKLY FROM  
MIAMI TODAY**



Contact [people@miamitodaynews.com](mailto:people@miamitodaynews.com)  
and write Headlines in the subject line

**MIAMI TODAY**  
A Singular Voice in an Evolving City