

So what's the point of pop-up parks like Biscayne Green?



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You might have noticed something strange on Biscayne Boulevard in Downtown lately: There are people hanging out there, and they're not tourists trying to get to Bayside.

It's because of something called Biscayne Green, a pop-up park meant to get people thinking about what one of Miami's busiest corridors could be if it was developed with people in mind, not just cars.

From Jan. 6 to Jan. 26, Miami's Downtown Development Authority has taken over three parking lots in the Biscayne Boulevard median. They're hosting concerts, yoga, brunches, co-working hours and more.

The whole project has a budget hovering around \$200,000 — \$145,000 from the Knight Foundation, \$10,000 from the Miami Foundation's Public Space Challenge, and about \$45,000 from in-kind donations and some funds from the Downtown Development Authority.

We all love a good puppy brunch or outdoor movie. But we've heard a lot of you asking the obvious questions: Is it really worth it to spend all that money on something that's going to disappear in a couple weeks – and while it's happening, take away parking on one of Miami's busiest streets?

Basically, you want to know, "Why are these people doing this?"

Let's explain

Number one: it demonstrates.

"They show what's possible and that can change perceptions about a place," said Stuart Kennedy, the director of program strategy and innovation at The Miami Foundation. "It's a big idea and hard for people to wrap their heads around when it's just a parking lot, but doing it as a pop-up demonstrates what's possible."

He also says it's a way to implement something bit by bit, so you can make changes as you gather data and get community feedback – rather than when it's done, when it's too late to make major changes.

OK, demonstration, got it. But why not hold all these yoga classes, movie nights, and concerts at the nearby permanent parks, like Museum Park and Bayfront Park?

Kennedy says Biscayne Green is a piece of that puzzle because it connects Downtown to the parks.

"Biscayne Boulevard is a terribly scary street to cross as a pedestrian. [It's] a desert of parking lots and six to eight traffic lanes. We're creating a space for people to cross the street, and connecting them to existing resources," he says.

Define 'temporary'

Tony Garcia, the Miami-based urban planner who helped design Biscayne Green in collaboration with design firm David Font Design, is an expert in pop-up spaces. Maybe the materials are temporary, he says, but the mindset shift lasts much longer.

Besides, not all pop-ups are just 20-day experiments.

Consider Omni Park. With roughly \$300,000 of investment, some of that from the Omni Community Redevelopment Agency, is going to take **seven acres of empty land next to the Adrienne Arsht Center** and convert it into a public park. The park will stay up until the land is developed. (It's slated to be the site of a new bridge expanding I-395.)

The park opens on Feb. 17, according to Brad Knoefler and his partner on the project, Mark Lesniak. They expect it to be up for about two years.

And in the case of Biscayne Green, Garcia thinks the pop-up might eventually become a permanent fixture of the busy car-centric boulevard.

The first phase of Biscayne Green happened several years ago as a five-day pop-up called "Bayfront

Parkway.” Garcia’s firm worked with local urban planner Ralph Rosado to transform a 60-space parking lot into a parklet.

He hopes that this turns into a conversation with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and Miami Parking Authority (who manages the parking lots) about converting Biscayne Boulevard permanently.

“The long term play is to take the parking there and replace it with parallel parking spots. You’ll have a loss of 20 to 30 percent [of parking spaces] but that has to happen” he said.

FDOT is funding a study on the impact of reducing lanes and putting parallel parking spaces on the sides, rather than right in the middle of the parking pods, according to Alyce Robertson, the executive director of the Downtown Development Authority.

Following a lead

It wouldn’t be the first time a temporary, pop-up park became a permanent pedestrian fixture.

“The most high profile example of this is Times Square,” Garcia said.

By using the pop-up mentality, slowly over time, **one of the most car-centric streets in the city** was transformed into “one of the best pedestrian spaces in the world,” he marvels.

He sees this “little test” as a part of the “long arc in terms of transformation of the space.”

If you’ve got any feedback on Biscayne Green, you can let the DDA know your thoughts at their Facebook page [here](#).

[Editor’s note: The Miami Downtown Development Authority is a client of Whereby.U.S, The New Tropic’s parent company, but was not involved in the planning or production of this story.]