

Will Miami residents push for more public spaces?

By Nicole Martinez



Locals enjoy the offerings at Biscayne Green. | Photo by Andrea Lorena. Courtesy of Biscayne Green.

A city-centric experiment may just become an unexpected new norm, as local residents, officials and business owners push City of Miami officials for more transit-oriented park spaces in the city's urban core.

Earlier this year, Biscayne Green launched to much fanfare and some dismay. The experimental open space park, wedged in a once-parking lot in the dead center of downtown Miami, caused a stir among residents who wondered whether eliminating crucial parking space would severely disrupt traffic patterns.

The temporary public space, spearheaded by the [Miami Downtown Development Authority](#) and funded by the [Knight Foundation](#)'s Cities Challenge initiative, was a ploy to get local city officials to listen up when it comes to public space programming. "While it was designed to entertain, it was also meant to reveal what can be achieved when we put people first and prioritize quality of life at the street level," said City of Miami Commissioner Ken Russell, who serves as the chair of the Miami DDA.

[Biscayne Green](#) debuted on January 6, and hosted an array of special events and public programming during its

nearly month-long run. From tango dance lessons to puppy brunches and pop-up food stands, Miami residents turned out in droves: the DDA estimates that approximately 17,000 people visited Biscayne Green during the special event's stretch. Where some had wondered about traffic and worried that no one would come, the Biscayne Green experiment proved that if you build it, they most certainly would. "We did not get the complaints we thought we might," said Russell. "Every response I heard was positive - people felt it was an evolution of what downtown should be."

Isabella Acker, the founder of [Prism Creative Group](#) tasked with handling programming for Biscayne Green, agrees that the park was an unexpected success.

"Biscayne Green was the beginning of what I hope is going to be the beginning of cultivating community events downtown," said Acker. In programming events for Biscayne Green, the DDA directed Acker and her team to reach out to local businesses first. The initial response, said Acker, was exactly what officials had originally expected for the project. "Honestly, the morale wasn't that high at first. Local businesses weren't sure how Biscayne Green would ultimately benefit their own establishments."

David Foulquier, the owner of popular downtown eatery [Fooq's](#), said he was pleasantly surprised with the turnout. "I sold out during the Biscayne Green food festival, we definitely had a very positive response." Foulquier said there's tremendous value in a community-centric space that drives local residents to the downtown neighborhood. "I would definitely like to see more frequent community programs," he said. "It's really important for us to be in touch with our neighborhood because downtown Miami is definitely not Wynwood or Brickell in terms of the critical mass you're able to draw."

While the project was certainly a success, Russell notes that it doesn't necessarily mean a more permanent public space fixture is a given. "The public response was overwhelmingly positive, but whether the hunger for something like this is pop-up or long-term remains to be seen. My hope is that this one-month run will drive the public will to push the political will."

The possibility isn't totally out of reach. Russell points to the Underline, a celebrated new park project set to [transform a 10-mile linear space](#) under Miami's Metrorail transit system. "Much of what you've seen with the development of The Underline, that push to make it happen has come from the public," Russell said.

According to Russell, local officials are making never-before-seen progress in driving the focus back to public spaces. "I am optimistic that if my fellow city and county commissioners can get past the 'my section first' discussion that's stalled projects like this in the past, we can move forward with a smarter plan for downtown Miami."

And while local residents have long hungered for more public space and better transit within their urban metropolis, Biscayne Green may just be the experiment that kicks off a wave of solutions – if residents continue to ask for it.