

# City of Coral Gables

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

2024



PREPARED BY



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan* serves as a guide for shaping the economic growth and development activity in the city now and over the next ten years through the adoption of realistic, cost-effective, sustainable, and resilient economic development plans and policies. The plan is supported by the *City of Coral Gables Competitive Assessment (Report I)* which served as the data-driven platform for the plan providing analytics and supporting narrative of the city's economic strengths, opportunities, and challenges that need to be addressed.

The Competitive Assessment concluded the City of Coral Gables has significant economic competitiveness based on its brand, quality of life, and strategic location within the heart of Miami-Dade County. The city has a strong presence of advanced and targeted industries that will help propel innovative and sustainable economic growth in Coral Gables in the coming years.

The plan identifies four “Economic Development Enhancement Strategies” that focus on expanding the city's competitive advantage, amplifying the vitality of existing districts, promoting quality development and redevelopment, and improving connectivity to each district. The Economic Development Enhancement Strategies include:

1) *Expand and Strengthen Coral Gables' Economic Diversification*

Focusing economic development strategies on the growth of target and advanced industry sectors and occupations including:

- Creative design
- Information Technology
- Life Sciences & Healthcare
- International Banking & Finance, and
- Hospitality & Tourism

2) *Expand and Enhance Coral Gables' Placemaking*

There is substantial evidence, both nationally and locally, that healthy and vibrant city districts and neighborhoods can significantly impact the growth of the larger local economy. The City of Coral Gables is well-positioned to expand its placemaking know how and capacity to further its economic development strategic planning efforts in districts of the city that have been targeted for future economic growth.

### 3) *Focus on Competition through Innovation & Creativity*

Continuous innovation, even in mature industries, is a hallmark of local economic competitiveness. Innovation even at the small business level is critical, separating business winners from losers. The City of Coral Gables has a strong mix of knowledge-based, advanced industry sector businesses. Knowledge-based industries include those with extensive involvement in new technologies such as pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, information technology, software, medical equipment, and advanced manufacturing. Coral Gables has a good share of knowledge-based businesses in several of these sectors.

### 4) *Focus on Economic Development Enhancement Areas*

To advance an overall economic development theme of expanding and enhancing city commercial districts, the City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan focuses on program activity and resources in four Economic Development Enhancement Areas identified in the Competitive Assessment that offer unique redevelopment opportunities. The following districts were chosen because they offer significant opportunities for economic growth, expanded placemaking, and improved connectivity with adjoining districts.

- Ponce de Leon Boulevard / South Downtown District
- Design & Innovation District
- Flagler / SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street District
- U.S. 1 District

The success of the *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan* will be dependent on the city's ability to establish a management function that can operate in the competitiveness and demands of the innovation environment. . The city has significant capacity in place with an Economic Development Department and Economic Development Board who have both been instrumental in the completion on the plan. This is important, as the leadership role in ensuring the plan is supported and implemented over time should rest with local government. Local governments have the ability to create the internal planning and management capacities that are necessary for building on-going support, coordination, communication, and oversight of the plan's implementation. The city also has the capacity to elicit support from community partners including business and community leaders, institutions, and organizations needed to provide long-term support of the plan.

## CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan 2023 was prepared by the Florida International University Jorge M. Pérez Metropolitan Center, South Florida's leading urban policy think tank with support from the City of Coral Gables.

### Elected Officials

*Mayor* – Vince C. Lago  
*Vice-Mayor* – Rhonda Anderson  
*Commissioner* – Melissa Castro  
*Commissioner* – Ariel Fernandez  
*Commissioner* – Kirk R. Menendez

### City Management

*City Manager* – Amos Rojas, Jr.  
*City Attorney* – Cristina M. Suárez  
*City Clerk* – Billy Urquia



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# I INTRODUCTION

## A. Background and Purpose

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The stated purpose and intent of the *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan* is to guide Coral Gables' efforts to shape the city's future economic growth through the adoption of realistic, cost-effective, sustainable, and resilient economic development plans and policies. The plan consists of two documents, the *City of Coral Gables Competitive Assessment (Report I)* which served as the data-driven platform for the plan providing analytics and supporting narrative of the city's economic strengths, opportunities, and challenges that need to be addressed, and the *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan (Report II)* that will guide economic growth and development activity in the city now and over the next ten years.

The Competitive Assessment concluded the City of Coral Gables has significant economic competitiveness based on its brand, quality of life, and strategic location within the heart of Miami-Dade County. The city's competitive advantage is supported by a strong presence of advanced and targeted industries that will help propel innovative and sustainable economic growth in Coral Gables in the coming years.

Competitive advantage is having the capacity to create and sustain a favorable or superior standing in relation to known "competitors." In economic development, competitive advantage includes the capacity to grow a local economy, create new economic opportunities, and build economic resiliency. Competitive advantages refer to a community's distinct conditions, characteristics, and assets. The City of Coral Gables' competitive advantages include:

- "City Beautiful" historical narrative and brand recognition;
- Significant presence of business establishments in the advanced industry and targeted industry sectors providing economic diversification, business growth opportunities, and higher paying jobs;
- A leading U.S. Smart City; and
- A city filled with a range of shopping and dining opportunities including high-end restaurants and retail all within the city's walkable Downtown District.

## B. Economic Development Goals

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The Coral Gables economic development strategic planning process included valued input throughout from the city's Economic Development Board comprised of business and community leaders. The Economic Development Board provided critical input and guidance at the outset of the planning process and at two important junctures – release of the draft Competitive Assessment, Report I and presentation of the "Economic Development Planning Concept Areas."



Combining the above analytics from the Competitive Assessment with input from the Coral Gables Economic Development Board and professional city staff, the following set of guiding principles were established for the economic development strategic plan:

- *Enhance the Coral Gables Brand*

The Coral Gables brand and accompanying historical narrative are distinct competitive advantages. Brand recognition allows Coral Gables to tap into the broad base of entrepreneurial activity occurring in the city and surrounding trade area.

However, the city cannot rest on its laurels as competitiveness can be fleeting in a dynamic regional economy. Coral Gables will need to explore ways to enhance its brand recognition through targeted technological innovation, expanded placemaking, and innovative land use policies that can create new redevelopment opportunities.

- *Support Local Innovation*

All communities grow through the expansion of local businesses and a steady supply of new businesses to maintain employment and competitive advantages. All successful businesses need to continuously innovate, invest, and update to remain competitive. Successful communities support local business capacity to innovate and adopt new technologies to improve performance and competitiveness. Coral Gables Smart City Hub can be a driver of technological innovation.

- *Plan for Sustainable Long-Term Growth*

Large swings in business and housing market cycles can be especially damaging at the local level. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how severe economic shocks can impact local and regional economies. Competitive communities support diversified employment, industry, and occupational growth that are less susceptible to economic shocks and normal business cycle fluctuations, thereby protecting local businesses, workers, and household wealth during such economic downturns.

- *Focused Implementation Strategies*

Coral Gables must develop implementation strategies, incentives, and performance targets that are market responsive, highly prioritized, specific, realistic, and attainable.

## II APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

### A. Approach

The Jorge M. Perez FIU Metropolitan Center study team worked with business and community leaders over the past year to complete the *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan*. The plan consists of two elements: 1) a “Competitive Assessment” – a data-driven assessment identifying the key trends, issues, and strengths defining the city’s economy, and 2) the “Economic Development Strategic Plan” detailing key policies, strategies, and investments to position the city’s businesses and workers to benefit from future economic growth and opportunity.



*Coral Gables Downtown Trolley; photo courtesy of City of Coral Gables City Beautiful.*

Economic development policy plays out in an increasingly complex environment characterized by interrelated issues including growing competition among cities and regions, accelerating industry, technological, and market changes, and high land and construction costs. As such, creating and implementing effective economic development strategies must rely on a process of understanding important industry and real estate market. The search for new and expanded economic opportunities requires knowing where to look to uncover opportunities that at first blush may not be obvious. The Competitive Assessment’s detailed analysis provided a fuller understanding of the existing economy of Coral Gables and where the city can potentially grow based on the following analytics:

- *A dynamic trend analysis:* Rather than a static snapshot of current economic conditions, the study’s analytical approach incorporated historic and projected economic trends linking changes in national, regional, and local economies to the dynamics effecting shifts in demographics, employment, real estate activity, innovation, and technology;
- *Connecting key systems & markets:* Analytics that connects economic performance with land use, transportation, and redevelopment and how they interact to develop more effective economic development strategies;
- *Placemaking opportunities:* Efforts to create districts that are inviting, well maintained, and vibrant are often referred to as “placemaking.” Areas with high levels of placemaking efforts help attract new businesses, bring more customers to



establishments, spark investment, grow younger populations, and appeal to employment growth. The qualities of placemaking are often qualitative and reflective of perceptions;

- *A focus on opportunity & strengths:* The analytical approach identified community economic development challenges, impediments and opportunities that escape traditional economic development analysis. The focus must be on identifying and capitalizing on emerging economic opportunities; and
- *Comparative benchmarking:* Understanding economic history and performance is complemented by comparative benchmark analysis against peer cities in Florida and nationally.

## B. Methodology

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The *City of Coral Gables Competitive Assessment* provided data-driven analytics of the city and regional economy and a platform for developing economic development policies including short- and long-term planning strategies for the city's major commercial corridors and districts. The analytical assessment applied a variety of public and proprietary data sources to provide the most thorough analysis of the city's population trends, economy, real estate markets, and industries. Data sources include the U.S. Census, American Community Survey, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), Current Employment Statistics (CES), Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Occupational Employment Statistics and Wages (OES) and Employment Projections 2019-2027. Proprietary data and information sources include Costar, EMSI, the Florida Association of Realtors, Zillow, and RealtyTrac. The Competitive Assessment incorporated a variety of industry, real estate, and employment data that captures both current and projected economic conditions and trends. Benchmarking methods were used to compare the City of Coral Gables with comparative municipalities both nationally and in Florida. The use of benchmarking performance characteristics with similar communities provided valuable insight into the city's relative strengths and weaknesses and a performance-monitoring tool for Coral Gables' city officials and business leaders.

## III COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT: KEY SUMMARY POINTS

### A. Background

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The *City of Coral Gables Competitive Assessment - Report I* provided the analytical platform and direction for the city's economic development strategic planning process. The Competitive Assessment of Coral Gables and larger Miami-Dade County "trade area" helped guide strategic planning discussions and decision-making throughout the process. The ultimate objective was to identify the potential economic drivers that can attract private investment and enable business and population growth, job creation, increased tax revenues, and expanded economic opportunities for businesses and residents of Coral Gables.

The Competitive Assessment focused on the economic advantages and challenges of the city's districts, major corridors, and economic opportunities based on the presence of growth industries, including advanced and targeted industry sectors in the trade area that could help drive the city's economic development in the future. The Competitive Assessment relied on a robust community engagement process led by the Coral Gables Economic Development Board and larger group of community stakeholders to generate input and receive guidance from community and business leaders.

### B. Summary Points

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The following "summary points" highlight the key findings from the Competitive Assessment.

#### The City Beautiful

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Few cities in the U.S. have the brand recognition of Coral Gables. In 1925, city founder George Merrick carefully planned a "City Beautiful" and a "Garden City," during the City Beautiful Movement of the early 1900s. Merrick's dream village in Mediterranean architectural style included elegant plazas, fountains, entrances, and public buildings which have withstood the test of time and the boom of amorphous commercial and residential development that has overtaken Miami Dade over the past few decades.



*Alhambra Gate; photo courtesy of MapQuest.*

The Competitive Assessment found Coral Gables possessing the following qualities:

- Historic landmarks, gardens and neighborhoods including the world-famous Biltmore Hotel and the Venetian Pool, both built in the 1920s, the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, and historic villages
- Best-in-class placemaking, public realm, and customer experience
- A national reputation and brand as a premiere shopping and dining destination
- Multiple clusters of vibrant mixed-use activity throughout the city
- The University of Miami serving as an anchor institution in the city

## Regional Context: Strategic Location

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The City of Coral Gables is strategically located in Miami-Dade County. Having a strategic, centralized location within a defined economic geography is important for a city like Coral Gables. This competitive advantage serves as a starting point for economic development strategy formulation. Understanding and capitalizing on the surrounding economic structure of the county is fundamental to the city's economic development strategies as economies continually shift with increasing competition between regions and technological and labor market developments within economic sectors accelerating these changes and raising new challenges for policy makers.

## Smart City: Connecting the Community

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A major focus area of smart cities is optimization of operational efficiency and economic development, while improving living standards of the people through smart technologies. The City of Coral Gables has earned the title of one of the world's "Top7 Intelligent Communities of the Year," awarded by the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF), an international network of cities and regions. This recognition highlights communities that showcase best practices in areas such as broadband connectivity, workforce development, digital inclusion, innovation, community engagement, and sustainability.



*A Smart City; photo courtesy of City of Coral Gables Innovation & Technology Department.*

The City of Coral Gables Innovation & Technology Department (CGIT) created the “Coral Gables Smart City Hub” a public platform for exploring and downloading open data; for discovering and building apps; and for engaging to solve important local issues. The CGIT “supports the creation of an ecosystem for smart cities that uses technology to communicate between consumers, organizations, institutions, events, and frameworks to drive innovation.” By highlighting the use of innovative and integrated technology, CGIT can provide local businesses with cutting edge data in support of the city’s economic development strategic planning objectives.

**Benchmarking Coral Gables**

Benchmarking provides information about how a municipality compares to peer jurisdictions across a variety of performance metrics. Benchmarking performance characteristics against other similar communities provides valuable insight into the city’s economic strengths and challenges. The benchmark analysis compared Coral Gables with 17 other municipalities in Florida and the U.S. based on brand, quality of life, and competitiveness. Benchmark comparisons are structured to serve as the basis for long-term performance review and future planning endeavors.

The benchmark analysis found the City of Coral Gables among the top municipalities for such economic indicators as young professionals with college degrees, median household income, private sector job growth, and job earnings. However, Coral Gables is less competitive than most benchmark communities in terms of population growth, percentage of population in the working age group, and labor force participation.

**Table I.I: Benchmark Municipalities**

City	Population	Median Income	Labor Force %	Young Professionals Growth/Decline Rate ('10-'20)
<b>Florida Cities</b>				
Boca Raton	97,422	\$84,445	58.1	23.1
Coral Gables	49,248	\$103,999	60.9	6.5
Doral	75,874	\$75,138	67.5	26.1
Fort Myers	86,395	\$48,848	54.9	71.3
Jupiter	61,047	\$87,163	63.6	26
Melbourne	84,678	\$51,934	56.9	51.6
Miami Beach	82,890	\$57,211	69.4	-6.3
Naples	19,115	\$118,141	36	-5.1
Palm Beach Gardens	59,182	\$89,736	57.1	30.1
Sarasota	54,842	\$56,093	54.5	40.1
Weston	68,107	\$113,032	64.8	-10
<b>U.S. Cities</b>				
Alexandria, VA	159,467	\$102,227	78.2	21.2
Annapolis, MD	40,812	\$87,897	72.4	13.4
Aurora, IL	180,542	\$74,659	72.4	-7.1
Bellevue, WA	151,854	\$129,497	67	53.6
Car, NC	174,721	\$107,463	70.9	27.1
Franklin, TN	83,454	\$100,169	70.8	38.4
Santa Monica, CA	93,076	\$98,300	69.4	6.8

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2010, 2020; table created by Jorge M. Perez FIU Metropolitan Center

### The Advanced Industries Sector in Coral Gables

An important measure of economic competitiveness is the presence of a growing mix of businesses in the “advanced industries” sector. Characterized by its deep involvement with technology research and development (R&D) and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) workers, the sector encompasses 50 industries ranging from manufacturing industries such as automaking and aerospace to energy industries such as oil and gas extraction to high-tech services such as computer software and computer system design, including for health applications. Each of the industries in the Advanced Industries Sector has levels of technology, research and development spending that are well above averages for the rest of the economy.

Advanced industry employment in the City of Coral Gables generally compares with Miami-Dade County. The city is home to a significant number of establishments (349) and workers (3,152) in the advanced industry sector. City jobs in the advanced industries sector are largely found in management, scientific, and technical consulting services (1,786 jobs), and computer systems design and related services (773 jobs)

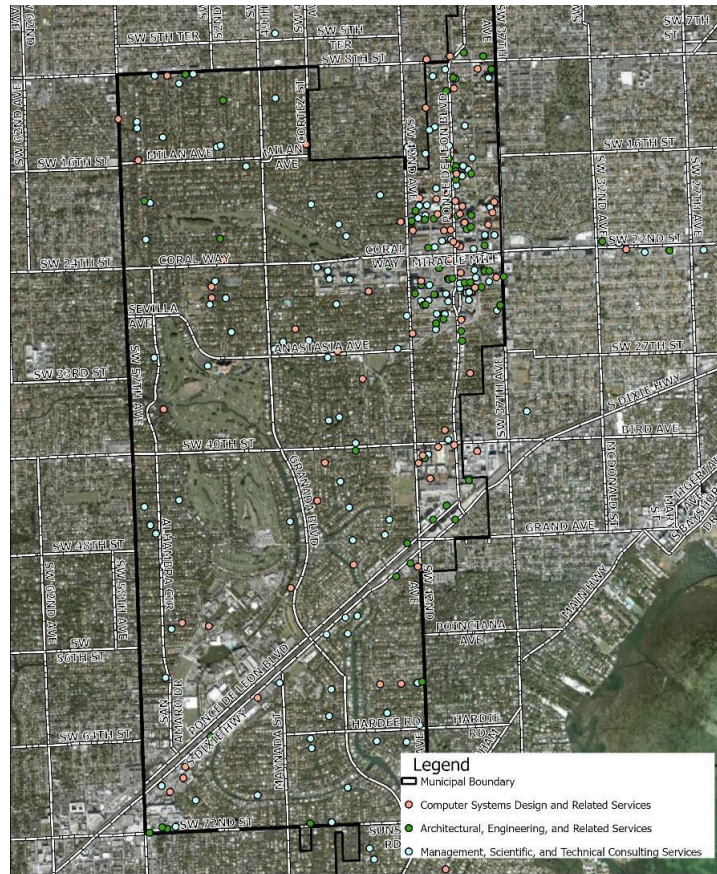
**Table 1.2: Top Advanced Industry Sectors by Employment**

Miami-Dade County			Coral Gables		
Description	Q1/2022 Jobs	Q1/2022 Wages	Description	Q1/2022 Jobs	Q1/2022 Wages
Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services	18,614	\$511,243,120	Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services	1,765	\$74,154,654
Architectural, Engineering, and Related Services	10,794	\$220,435,280	Architectural, Engineering, and Related Services	994	\$23,793,011
Computer Systems Design and Related Services	10,019	\$319,315,443	Computer Systems Design and Related Services	477	\$13,552,158
Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	2,909	\$43,300,011	Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	254	\$3,427,621
Scientific Research and Development Services	2,351	\$76,289,739	Navigational, Measuring, Electromedical, and Control Instruments Manufacturing	208	\$4,455,160

Source: FL Dept. of Economic Opportunity, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages



## City of Coral Gables Leading Advanced Industries by Location



### Target Industry Clusters in Coral Gables

Competitive and resilient local economies are characterized by the spatial concentration and organization of production and services among industry growth sectors. These concentrations or clusters consist of companies, suppliers, and services that complement and support one another. Industry clusters are a central component of economic competitiveness — they bring together technology, information, specialized talent, competing companies, academic institutions, and other linkages and organizations in close proximity to yield better market information, pools of specialized talent, and faster deployment of new knowledge. Improving the performance of clusters, not just individual companies, is a central feature of leading economic development policy.



*Miracle Mile; photo courtesy of City of Coral Gables City Beautiful.*



The City of Coral Gables' current and longer-term economic development opportunities and competitiveness will largely result from the growth of the city's advanced and targeted industries. Building on local and regional clusters involves tapping powerful external economies of information, skills, image, infrastructure, and markets. A cluster-based approach also leverages private and public investments in skills, technology, and infrastructure. The analysis found the City of Coral Gables targeted industry near term growth potential exists among five sectors: 1) Creative design, 2) Information Technology, 3) Life Sciences & Healthcare, 4) International Banking & Finance, and 5) Hospitality & Tourism.

**Table I.3: Coral Gables Targeted Industries**

Sector	Establishments	Employment
<b>Aviation</b>		
Nonscheduled Chartered Passenger Air Transportation	1	32
Other Support Activities for Air Transportation	2	8
<b>International Banking</b>		
Commercial Banking	50	991
Real Estate Credit	20	515
<b>Creative Design</b>		
Architecture, Engineering and Related Services	114	994
Advertising, Public Relations, and Related Services	72	768
Motion Picture and Video Industries	12	131
Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers	15	16
<b>Information Technology</b>		
Custom Computer Programming Services	42	283
Computer Systems Design Services	31	284
<b>Life Sciences &amp; Health Care</b>		
Offices of Physicians	202	1,701
Home Health Care Services	21	1,134
General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	6	6,358
<b>Trade &amp; Logistics</b>		
Freight Transportation Arrangement	13	39
General Freight Trucking	7	54
Scheduled Air Transportation	2	94
Warehousing and Storage	2	97
<b>Hospitality &amp; Tourism</b>		
Full-Service Restaurants	94	2527
Limited-Service Restaurants	37	371
Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	26	213
Hotels (except Casino Hotels) and Motels	16	757
Golf Courses and Country Clubs	4	360

Source: FL Dept. of Economic Opportunity - Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Q1/2022.

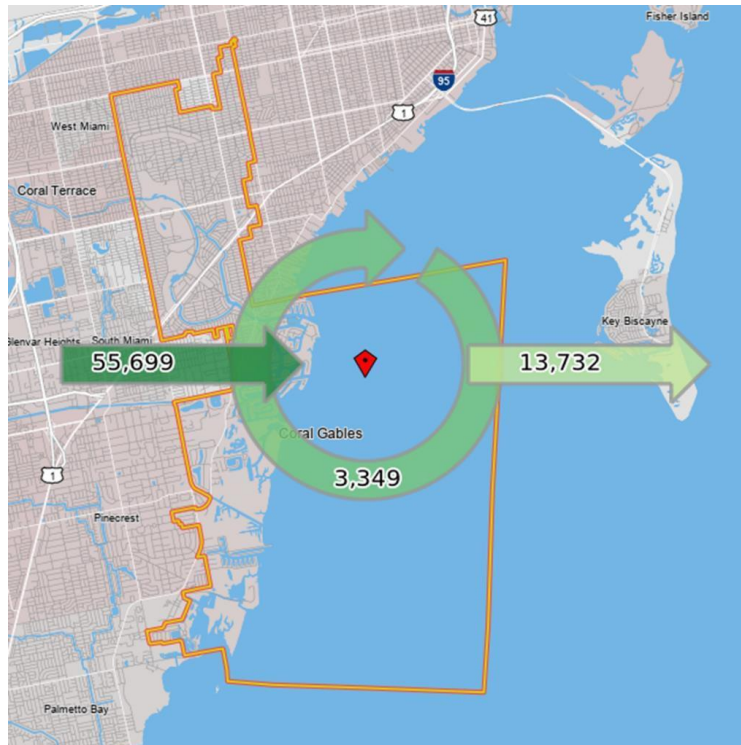
### A Resident Worker / Jobs Base Mismatch

The City of Coral Gables has a considerable economy, employing approximately 59,000 workers. However, despite the size and strength of Coral Gables' economy, of its estimated 17,081 employed residents, only 3,349 (5.7 percent) of the resident labor force work in Coral Gables. This means 13,732 resident workers are employed by businesses somewhere else in the county or beyond and 55,699 jobs within the city are filled by workers who live outside the city and commute into the city.

Given the high earnings and incomes of Coral Gables residents versus the compensation levels paid by establishments in the city, it is logical to assume that a high percentage of the working residents leaving Coral Gables each day are in higher skilled, higher paying occupations. This daily exit of skilled workers is a lost opportunity in terms of the tax base that would otherwise be captured in Coral Gables, as well as lost daily secondary and tertiary spending that would

otherwise accrue to businesses in Coral Gables. This mismatch between Coral Gables' jobs and its residents' education and skills also exacerbate both the city and county's traffic problems.

**Figure 1.1: City of Coral Gables Employee Inflow/Outflow**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Worker Reports, 2019

### **Coral Gables Transportation Network**

One of the most important factor conditions for a city's economic growth is its transportation infrastructure. The transportation infrastructure functions as an economic regulator providing the critical connection between consumers and producers. The Competitive Assessment included a description of the city of Coral Gables' existing transportation network and the surrounding roadway network. Within the City of Coral Gables study area, there are several major and minor roadway segments which provide key points of access for commercial, industrial, and institutional land uses of the city. The major corridors of the city are connected via three main metro stations: Douglas Road Station, University Station, and South Miami Station.

The City of Coral Gables has taken an innovative approach towards integrating technology to improve road-transport structure and use smart city technologies to boost movement, parking problems, and protection. These initiatives will only continue to enhance the opportunities to improve the overall transportation infrastructure. However, there are gaps within the city's pedestrian and bicycle networks that need to be addressed. A more comprehensive gap analysis and public outreach initiative is needed to determine the best locations for physical improvements.

### **Coral Gables Future Economic and Population Growth**

The City of Coral Gables, the “City Beautiful” has long been a highly preferred place to live, shop, and visit. City leaders have had the foresight to balance firmly entrenched quality of life matters with economic activity by funding the development of improved pedestrian transit, connectedness, and high-quality public spaces and facilities that continue to attract the region’s most skilled and educated workers as a place to live. However, sustained economic growth and quality of life are never guaranteed.

Further, due to changes in the workspace and where and how workers actually work each day, future job growth will come almost exclusively from the expansion and formation of small companies employing 50 or less, and not from larger-scale projects or headquarter relocations. This means that traditional land development-based economic development practices will become less important, while a focus on enhancing the technological, innovation and knowledge and skills capacity of its network of small business will become much more important.

The City of Coral Gables can write its next chapter by focusing on the quality of future economic growth, stabilizing the city’s economy against future recessionary swings and providing a coherent redevelopment framework that will attract and sustain a population of young, professional workers.

## IV ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The following citywide “Economic Development Enhancement Strategies” are intended to jumpstart the implementation of the City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan by creating sustainable, long-term solutions for stimulating investment along the city’s commercial corridors, districts, and industrial areas.

As previously noted, the City of Coral Gables is already a highly competitive city with strong brand recognition. Coral Gables has long been a preferred location for multinational companies coming to Miami-Dade County. The city is strategically located only 15 minutes from Miami International Airport and 20 minutes from the Port Miami. Coral Gables’ vibrant and scenic downtown, history, and architecture are unrivaled in South Florida.



*Biltmore Hotel; photo courtesy of Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau.*

The Economic Development Enhancement Strategies focus on expanding the city’s competitive advantage, amplifying the vitality of existing districts, and expanding quality development and redevelopment, and improving connectivity to each district.

The Economic Development Enhancement Strategies include:

- 1) Expand and Strengthen Coral Gables’ Economic Diversification
- 2) Expand and Enhance Coral Gables’ Placemaking
- 3) Focus on Competition through Innovation & Creativity
- 4) Focus on Economic Development Enhancement Areas

### **Economic Development Enhancement Strategy #1 – Expand Coral Gables’ Economic Diversification**

Focusing economic development strategies on the growth of target and advanced industry sectors and occupations is fundamental to the *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Plan*.

The city’s current and longer-term economic development opportunities and competitiveness

will largely result from the growth of these sectors.

The *City of Coral Gables Competitive Assessment* found the city poised to expand and attract a range of targeted industries including businesses in the advanced industry sector. As such, the plan includes the economic development strategies that will help grow and diversify the city's economic base and provide expanded economic opportunities for city residents and businesses. The analysis found the City of Coral Gables targeted industry near term growth potential exists among five sectors:

- Creative design
- Information Technology
- Life Sciences & Healthcare
- International Banking & Finance, and
- Hospitality & Tourism

The growth of businesses and jobs in these competitive, higher-skilled industries will provide:

- ▶ Greater spin-off with economic multipliers
- ▶ More opportunities for upward mobility
- ▶ Support for the growth of other service jobs
- ▶ A higher return on investment of public and private dollars
- ▶ A more efficient allocation of public resources, and
- ▶ Better resistance from cyclical economic swings

Expanding and attracting key industry sectors will require building the necessary economic development capacity to address the needs of individual business establishments. Creating public/private partnerships with specific industry sectors and businesses is a proven effective industrial development strategy. City-led public/private partnership can help accomplish the following:

- ▶ *Relocation and expansion assistance* – the city can partner with new and existing businesses looking to relocate or expand in target locations in the city. A city business relocation and expansion assistance program would be coordinated with local commercial brokers who work with new and existing businesses in locating commercial leased space and acquisitions;
- ▶ *Target infrastructure improvements*– the city can target public infrastructure, municipal services, and utility improvements to high priority business expansion and development locations;



- ▶ *Regulatory relief* – the city can provide regulatory relief i.e., zoning, permitting, fees, to businesses that meet specified capital investment and job creation thresholds;
- ▶ *Economic incentives* – the city can provide various economic incentives i.e., tax abatements, loans to target industries, looking to relocate or expand in Coral Gables;
- ▶ *Incentivize live/work opportunities* – the city should assess home office regulations to ensure current workshifting trends are being considered. A very high proportion of workers in the advanced industry sector are independent contractors or work from home-based offices; and

## Economic Development Enhancement Strategy #2 – Expand Coral Gables’ Placemaking

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*“Placemaking is the process of creating quality places where people want to live, work, play, shop, learn, and visit.”*

Efforts to create districts that are inviting, well maintained, and vibrant are often referred to as “placemaking”. Areas with high levels of placemaking efforts help attract new businesses, bring more customers to establishments, spark investment, and appeal to employment growth.

As noted in the *City of Coral Gables Competitive Assessment*, Coral Gables is a pedestrian haven in the downtown area, encouraging more people to frequent its businesses and stay longer, both contributing to more economic success and strong retail activity. Miracle Mile’s recent streetscape improvements and the pedestrian activation of Giralda Plaza contribute to the identity and public life of these commercial corridors. Palm trees and outdoor seating contribute to the inviting nature of these pedestrian-oriented environments, making them comfortable places for people to linger and connect. Giralda Plaza, which was recently renovated into car-free pedestrian plaza, adds vibrancy to the city’s public realm by embracing outdoor dining and serving as a gathering place and destination for residents and visitors alike.

People crave in-person experiences and creating quality places where people want to live, work, play, shop, learn, and visit are highly popular among populations of all ages. Cities should still have sufficient foot traffic to support a fair amount of “retail experiences” combined with a mix of cultural and recreational attractions in walkable environments.

There is substantial evidence, both nationally and locally, that healthy and vibrant city districts and neighborhoods can significantly impact the growth of the larger local economy. Neighborhoods and districts, in fact, are the building blocks of the broader local economy. Small businesses, which can serve as the engine of the city's economy, need to be concentrated along and within the neighborhood commercial corridors that districts and neighborhoods are typically home to most of a city's important business assets such as hospitals, medical facilities, transit hubs, educational facilities, libraries, parks, community centers, and other amenities.



*Giralda Plaza; photo courtesy Coral Gables Community Foundation.*

The City of Coral Gables is well-positioned to expand its placemaking know how and capacity to further its economic development strategic planning efforts in districts of the city that have been targeted for future economic growth (See Economic Development Enhancement Strategy #4). The businesses and residents of Coral Gables are poised to benefit from expanding placemaking investment within existing and proposed districts by targeting these locations as part of the plan. The economic development enhancement strategies include four distinct target areas with significant redevelopment capacity and expanded opportunities for growth, connectivity, and placemaking.

In targeting these districts, Coral Gables will need to establish “design principles” that promote investment activity that is functional, aesthetic, and compatible with surrounding residential communities and adjoining districts. These design principles should include the following criteria:

- Articulate a vision for mixed-use and redevelopment for each economic development target district that is sustainable, functional, and attractive;
- Intentionally guiding the development of mixed-use districts with optimal balances of traditional retail (GAFO), food and beverage, and service-oriented businesses is a strong best practice.

Optimal mixes and specific merchandising should also reflect the given customer base of particular areas. i.e., destination sub-zones that attract visitors (such as Giralda Plaza and Miracle Mile) will be best suited for specific merchandising sub-zones compared to more neighborhood-oriented zones;

- Invest in capital improvement projects in these areas that both beautify and improve mobility/transportation and fill sidewalk gaps; Invest in both broadband and fiber infrastructure investments to help support businesses. This is especially true in the post-pandemic work-from-home hybrid and remote landscapes that require these amenities in residential areas in addition to commercial environments;
- Encourage intensification of land use on redevelopment opportunity sites and in areas appropriate for higher densities;
- Ensure that all mixed-use projects within revitalization areas - such as streetscape improvements, new development, adaptive reuse and rehabilitation - meet standards for design quality standards; and
- Incorporate gateway improvements that are welcoming to motorists and pedestrians and complementary to the character of the district and architecture.

### Economic Development Enhancement Strategy #3 – A Competitive Focus on Innovation and Creativity

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Continuous innovation, even in mature industries, is a hallmark of local economic competitiveness. Innovation even at the small business level is critical, separating business winners from losers. According to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), innovation is a central component of economic competitiveness for all businesses:

*Innovation...is fundamental for building prosperity today and in the future... One of the most important keys to a strong economy is continuous innovation. Having the ability to create new ideas, products, and services is a critical element in economic development, at the local, regional, and state levels. In today's connected world, innovation can take place anywhere; it is not limited to large metropolitan areas. [U.S. EDA]*

The City of Coral Gables has a strong mix of knowledge-based, advanced industry sector businesses. Knowledge-based industries include those with extensive involvement in new technologies such as pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, information technology, software, medical equipment, and advanced manufacturing. Coral Gables has a good share of knowledge-based businesses in several of these sectors.

Having a strong local culture and innovation support network already in place will benefit all businesses. Companies that compete in high knowledge-based industries stay at the leading competitive edge, and businesses offering traditionally lower-value services and products can

significantly raise the value of the products and services through new technology and practice innovation.

Innovation drivers are research and medical institutions, large firms, start-ups, and entrepreneurs focused on developing cutting-edge technologies, products, and services for the market. Due to countywide variations in industry strengths, each district is comprised of a unique mix of innovation drivers. Tech driven industries are most likely to be found in “innovation districts” including high-value, research-oriented sectors such as applied sciences and the burgeoning “app economy”; highly creative fields such as industrial design, graphic arts, media and architecture; and highly specialized, small batch manufacturing.

To be successful, an innovation district needs economic assets, physical assets, and networking assets. Innovation districts reach their potential when all three types of assets, combined with a supportive, risk-taking culture, are fully developed, creating an innovation ecosystem. Universities are often drivers for innovation districts; for this reason, many districts that did not originally include universities have convinced universities to build satellite campuses. Innovation districts should be physically compact, transit-accessible, and technically-wired and offer mixed-use housing, office, and retail.” Coral Gables’ Smart City Hub can play an integral role in planning the city’s innovation districts.

A challenge with the concept of planning and implementing innovation districts is that the term has become more associated with design and has gotten away from being measured in terms of economic activity and growth. While design plays an important part of the placemaking surrounding innovation districts, the overall economic development plan must include a focus on metrics like job creation, firm creation, and investment returns are truly functional and successful innovation districts.

To jumpstart Coral Gables’ focus on innovation and creativity as part of the city’s economic development planning, the following strategies are recommended:

- Identify the mix of the advanced industry sector businesses identified in the plan and their potential district locations within the city
- identify the intermediaries who will enable networking and programming to happen on a regular basis. The intermediaries will need to be identified as part of the creation of public/private partnerships that will help drive the implementation of the ED plan. They could be some combination of existing business associations or organizations, a committee of the chamber of commerce, or a university-led research partnership.
- Solicit institutional partners to participate in development of innovation district (universities, research institutes, accelerator operators, venture capital investors)
- Review the city’s zoning code to ensure specific innovation districts provide for the intended mix of uses, density, parking, and other benefits to attract development
- Solicit private and nonprofit developers who specialize in the creation of innovation districts

## Economic Development Enhancement Strategy #4 – Create Economic Development Enhancement Areas

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Many factors contribute to the creation of a vibrant, safe, and healthy community. Coral Gables has a strong foundation of characteristics that “could” contribute to the livability of commercial districts that have underachieved, including proximity to transit, job opportunities, walkability, and a mix of uses. Building on this foundation, Coral Gables has another significant competitive edge to achieve this level of sustainable development – Urban Design. The City of Coral Gables already has in place a national and global recognition of its architecture, public spaces, districts, and streetscapes. Urban design can play an important role in working to achieve this goal of creating a vibrant and more livable community by further improving public spaces and connectivity.

To advance an overall economic development theme of expanding and enhancing city commercial districts, the City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan focuses on program activity and resources in four Economic Development Enhancement Areas identified in the Competitive Assessment that offer unique redevelopment opportunities. The areas were selected because they offer significant opportunities for economic growth, expanded placemaking, improved connectivity with adjoining districts.

The City of Coral Gables has in its Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Element (FLUE) and Zoning Code the tools to create more economically viable and livable districts. The stated purpose and applicability of the City of Coral Gables the (MX) Mixed Use Districts (Future Land Use Plan Section 2-201. Mixed Use 1, 2 and 3 (MX1, MX2 and MX3) Districts) is to accommodate various forms and densities of mixed uses, including commercial and residential, to serve the needs of a diverse community, while ensuring that there is a transition to single-family and duplex neighborhoods that protects the integrity of these neighborhoods. The city’s MXD Districts “are intended to provide a continuous, pedestrian-friendly urban environment, bringing together the activities of daily living, and reducing dependence on vehicular mobility”.

The city’s MX Districts are differentiated by their intensity and location. The MX1 District allows a low intensity of development and is located along some of the City’s primary corridors, such as Eighth Street, Grand Avenue, Ponce De Leon Boulevard and Giralda Plaza, and often has an adjacency with single-family residential areas. The MX2 District allows a medium intensity of development and is located on Miracle Mile, the Design/Industrial District area, and in the southern and northern-most reaches of the City. The MX3 District allows the highest intensity of development and is located in the City’s downtown area, along North Ponce de Leon Boulevard, Biltmore Way, and U.S.1 (Federal Highway).

The general intent of the MXD is to promote a multi-faceted pedestrian friendly environment comprised of an assortment of uses, including the following:

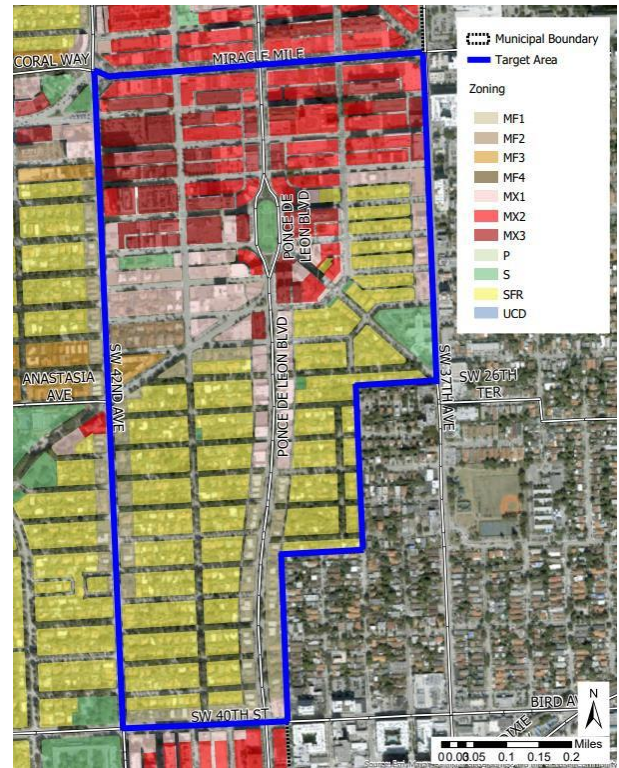
- ▶ Residential
- ▶ Retail/Commercial
- ▶ Office
- ▶ Industrial
- ▶ Public Open Spaces

The proposed *Economic Development Enhancement Areas* provide both freestanding and mixed-use development opportunities that will generate business development, job growth, housing, and more functional and attractive public right-of ways. The proposed *Economic Development Enhancement Areas* in the northern and southern ends of the city's incorporated limits will also provide opportunities for the creation of gateways that will complement the Coral Gables' placemaking and improve connectivity within Coral Gables' commercial street network. The four proposed Economic Development Enhancement Areas include:

- Ponce de Leon Boulevard / South Downtown District
- Design & Innovation District
- Flagler / SW 8th Street District
- U.S. 1 District



## Ponce de Leon Boulevard / South Downtown Economic Development Enhancement Area



### Geographic Description

The Ponce de Leon Boulevard / South Downtown Economic Development Enhancement Area is bordered by Miracle Mile on the north; SW 37th Avenue and the corporate boundary of the City of Coral Gables on the east; SW 40th Street on the south; and Lejeune Avenue (SW 42nd Avenue) on the west.

### Land Use & Zoning

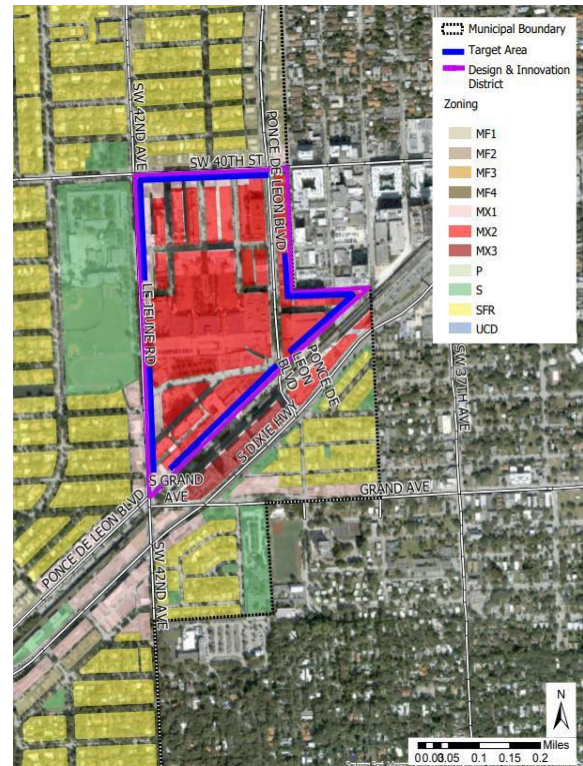
The future land use designation of the Ponce de Leon Boulevard / South Downtown Economic Development Enhancement Area Miracle Mile south to Malaga Avenue is essentially an extension of the Central Business District including “Commercial High-Rise Intensity” to “Commercial Medium Rise Intensity.” From Malaga Avenue south to Camilo Avenue, the land use designation is primarily Commercial Low-Rise Intensity” and “Multi Family Duplex Density” south of Camilo Avenue to SW 40th Street. South of Miracle Mile to Malaga Avenue, the designated zoning in the area is primarily MX2 (Mixed-Use-medium intensity of development) and MX3 (Mixed-Use-high intensity of development). Along the land abutting Ponce de Leon Boulevard from Malaga Avenue south to Camilo Avenue, the area is zoned MX1 (Mixed-Use low intensity of development). The Ponce de Leon Boulevard corridor South of Camilo Avenue to SW 40th Street is zoned MF1 (Multi-Family Duplex). Significantly, density is unlimited in the area north of Almeria Avenue.

### (Re)development Focus

- Mixed use, medium to high intensity development
- Target small-to-medium establishments, i.e., management, scientific and technical consulting services, financial services, and merchandising specific to area needs
- Live-work space
- Improve walkability
- Expand connectivity through public transit and bicycle infrastructure
- Smart City investment
- Streetscape improvements, including street trees and undergrounding of overhead utility lines on Salzedo Street
- Improve accessibility to single-family residences across Le Jeune Road



## Design & Innovation District Economic Enhancement Area



### Geographic Description

The Design & Innovation District is bordered by SW 40th Street on the north; Ponce de Leon Boulevard on the east and south, and Lejeune Avenue (SW 42nd Avenue) on the west.

### Land Use & Zoning

According to the Coral Gables Future Land Use Element (Policy FLU 1.9.4.) the Design & Innovation District was established “to implement Economic Development strategies that promote retail activities, art galleries and other compatible uses found in “Innovative Districts,” (i.e. financial services, bio-medical, pharmaceutical, institutional and advance new technological firms (i.e. analytics, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and robotic process automation). Zoning regulations in place would support and enhance sustainable retail and other compatible uses supportive of pedestrian activities on the ground level of mixed-use buildings. The designated land use within the Design & Innovation District is “Industrial” with “Commercial Low Rise” along SW 40th Street and Lejeune Avenue (SW 42nd Avenue). The designated zoning within the Design & Innovation District is MX2 (Mixed-Use-medium intensity of development) and MX1 (Mixed-Use low intensity of development) along SW 40th Street and Lejeune Avenue (SW 42nd Avenue). Significantly, density is unlimited for properties within the Design & Innovation District.

### (Re)development Focus

- Mixed use, high intensity development
- Target medium to large advanced industry firms, i.e. medical and diagnostic laboratories, scientific research and development services
- Improve walkability by providing pedestrian paseos or passageways that connect San Lorenzo and Greco Avenues.
- Expand connectivity through public transit and the future Underline
- Smart City investment



## U.S. I Economic Development Enhancement Area



### Geographic Description

The U.S. I Economic Development Enhancement Area is bordered by U.S. 1 (Federal Highway) on the north; Maynada Street on the east; SW 72nd Street and Madruga Avenue on the south; and SW 57th Street on the west.

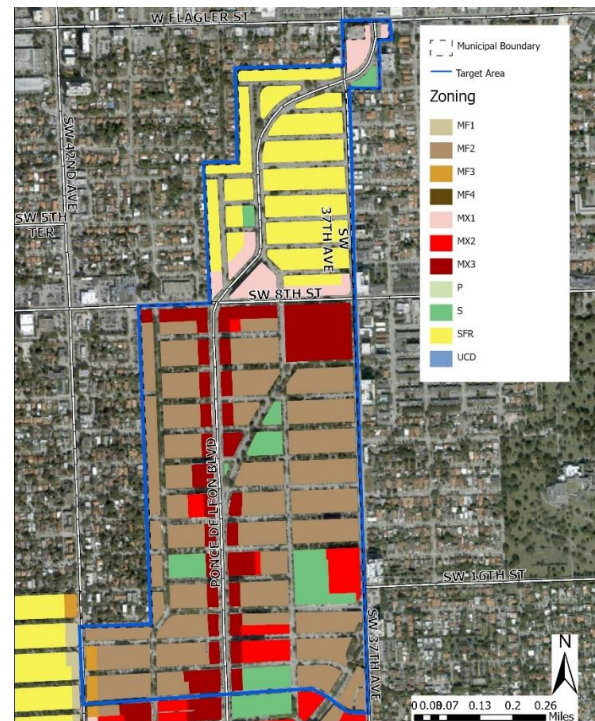
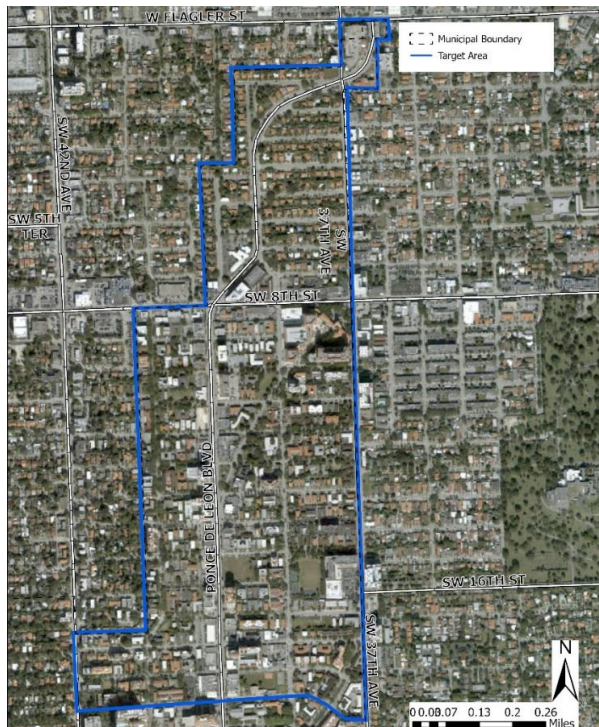
### Land Use & Zoning

The designated land use within the South Dixie Highway Economic Development Enhancement Area is primarily “Commercial Low Rise” along South Dixie Highway and “Mixed-Use” across from the University of Miami Campus and “Commercial Medium Rise Intensity” along SW 57th Street. The designated zoning within the South Dixie Highway Economic Development Enhancement Area is primarily MX1 (Mixed-Use low intensity of development) along South Dixie Highway and MX3 (Mixed-Use-high intensity of development) across from the University of Miami Campus. The designated zoning along SW 57th Street is MX2 (Mixed-Use-medium intensity of development).

### (Re)development Focus

- Mixed use, low-to-medium intensity development including student housing with ground floor designs compatible with surrounding residential uses
- Target small, advanced industry establishments, i.e., medical and diagnostic laboratories, scientific research and development services, architectural & engineering
- Live-work space
- Improve walkability
- Expand connectivity through public transit
- Smart City investment
- Streetscape and gateway improvements as part of a new “branding” and marketing of the area

## Flagler Street / SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street Economic Development Enhancement Area



### Geographic Boundaries

The Flagler Street / SW 8th Street Economic Development Enhancement Area is bordered by Flagler Street on the north; SW 37th Avenue and city corporate boundary on the east; Navarre Avenue on the south; and Salzedo Street on the west.

### Land Use & Zoning

Ponce de Leon Boulevard, south of SW 8th St, is the North Ponce Mixed-Use District Overlay that encourages large-scale mixed-use development and walkability. The designated land use within the Flagler Street / SW 8th Street Economic Development Enhancement Area includes a “Commercial Low-Rise Intensity” designation on Flagler Street extending south between SW 37th Avenue and Ponce de Leon Boulevard and the north side of SW 8th Street and a “Commercial High-Rise Intensity” designation along the south side of SW 8th Street and along the Ponce de Leon Boulevard corridor south of SW 8th Street.

The designated zoning in the Flagler Street / SW 8th Street Economic Development Enhancement Area is MX1 (Mixed-Use low intensity of development) along Flagler Street south between SW 37th Avenue and Ponce de Leon Boulevard and MX3 (Mixed-Use-high intensity of development) along the south side of SW 8th Street extending south along the Ponce de Leon Boulevard corridor to Navarre Avenue.

### (Re)development Focus

- Mixed use, low-to-high intensity development
- Target small, advanced industry firms, i.e., architectural & engineering, computer software, and computer systems design
- Live-work space
- Improve walkability
- Expand connectivity through public transit and bicycle infrastructure specifically on Salzedo and Galiano Streets
- Smart City investment
- Streetscape improvements



## V – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

### Overview

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The successful implementation of the *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan* will be dependent on the city's economic development management practices. The city has significant capacity in place with an Economic Development Department and Economic Development Board who have both been instrumental in the completion on the plan. This is important, as the leadership role in ensuring the plan is supported and implemented over time should rest with local government. Local governments have the ability to create the internal planning and management capacities that are necessary for building on-going support, coordination, communication, and oversight of the plan's implementation. The city also has the capacity to elicit support from community partners including business and community leaders, institutions, and organizations needed to provide long-term support of the plan.

Enhancing Coral Gables' economic competitiveness and resilience will be a leadership challenge given that innovation has become the key driver of local and regional economic development. Having the ability to create new ideas, products, and services is a "dynamic" requiring continual performance upgrades. The success of the *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan* will be dependent on the city's ability to establish a management function that can operate in the competitiveness and demands of the innovation environment.

#### Economic Development Management Activities

A city-led economic development planning function would include the following planning and management activities:

- ▶ **New Public/Private Partnerships** – The plan's economic development strategies will require a heightened level of cooperation, support, and coordination among existing stakeholders and new contributors. Well represented public/private partnerships can help provide support for the legitimacy and sustainability of the plan's implementation over time.
- ▶ **Liaison Activity** – The Coral Gables Economic Development Department can best serve as liaison with organizations outside of the community.
- ▶ **Stakeholder Communications** - When the Economic Development Department acts as the liaison with both internal and external organizations the community can have a clear, single access point for the flow of information and contacts. Outside organizations often prefer to deal with one organization in a community and the more effective the point of contact, the greater the potential impact for the community.
- ▶ **Visibility** – The Coral Gables Economic Development Department is in the best position to be highly visible in the community. This helps promote the work and achievements of the city and encourages business growth and networking.

Community visibility is important so that other organizations and communities, governments and business are aware of the assets of the community.

- ▶ **Promotion** – The Coral Gables Economic Development Department can develop a community public relations program. Effective economic development promotion can be achieved through a wide range of tools, including print and electronic media. Promotional activities would also include encouraging and assisting existing businesses through mentorship, business assistance, and financial support and/or training.
- ▶ **Prospecting** – The Coral Gables Economic Development Department can help prospect for new business, investment, and resources through research, promotion, and personal contacts.
- ▶ **Monitoring** – The Coral Gables Economic Development Department should be able to report on its impact on the community. The department can help monitor programs, services, and projects that allow the organizations to judge the effectiveness of the plan and initiatives.

### Performance Metrics

Adopting and regularly monitoring clear performance metrics is a feature of all good government. Performance metrics are aligned with the *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan* and economic development competitiveness framework. Investing in real-time measurement of performance standards would have numerous advantages, including:

- ✓ Shifting economic development policy and program focus from traditional measures of the number of jobs and square feet developed to standards that stress improving the city’s competitiveness, resilience, and the well-being of businesses and residents;
- ✓ The means for measuring the success of the city’s Economic Development Strategies;
- ✓ A guide for future policy and program development, and course corrections as conditions change;
- ✓ A platform for quickly responding to requests for information from businesses looking to expand or invest in Coral Gables; and
- ✓ A communication platform to receive reviews, complaints, and information from client businesses in the city.

The *City of Coral Gables Economic Development Strategic Plan* includes a clear, concise, and quantifiable “Economic Performance Metrics Dashboard” that can be posted on the City’s web site. Most of the data can be collected from the U.S. Census and workforce statistics from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). Other economic data can be obtained from a variety of proprietary data providers.



The Economic Performance Dashboard would collect at a minimum the following economic statistics, updated according to the indicated time frequency:

<b>Update Frequency</b>	<b>Economic Performance Metric</b>
Annual	Population growth by age group and household income
Annual	Population and business growth within the "Economic Development Enhancement Areas" and surrounding neighborhoods
Bi-Annual	Inventory of city businesses by NAICS, with contact information
Annual	Median Wages by industry and occupation, compared to the county and US
Annual	Median household income by distribution and year-over-year performance
Bi-Annual	New business establishments and employment growth by establishment size across the industry sectors and occupations, including target industries and clusters
Monthly	Employment, labor participation, and unemployment rate
Annual	Educational attainment and age group population trends, especially in the young and mid-worker age segments 20-44 and 45-54 years old
Annual	Reduction in worker commute times
Annual	Increase in tax revenue
Annual	Measuring return on investment from public expenditures in the city