

# **Local leaders went on a tour of Palm Beach County to view examples of mixed-use developments they would like to see built in South Miami-Dade.**

**BY JONNELLE MARTE**

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Miami-Dade Commissioner Katy Sorenson recently took local officials and business people on a tour of a few young neighborhoods in Palm Beach County, where shaded sidewalks and proximity of key establishments make walking inviting.

The trip highlighted Sorenson's Vision 20/20 project, which aims to transform some South Miami-Dade neighborhoods into more active and close-knit town centers.

It's part of the New Urbanism trend, which merges housing, workplace, shopping and recreation into compact, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighborhoods linked by transit and set in a larger regional open space.

"It's important for people who are making these kinds of policy decisions to see different examples of what can be done," Sorenson said on the Jan. 20 trip. "I think people are finding what they see very interesting and are starting to think about how they can apply these concepts locally."

Sorenson's project has support from Cutler Bay Mayor Paul Vrooman, Palmetto Bay Mayor Eugene Flinn, the Economic Development Council of South Miami-Dade and the Unique Coalition of Minority Businesses and Chamber South.

Some of the places where they and residents would like to see town centers developed include Palmetto Bay, Cutler Bay, Naranja, Perrine, Goulds, Princeton and Leisure City.

Residents, city leaders and county planners have hashed out specific visions for those areas in a series of meetings called charrettes.

Their plans call for infill housing on vacant land, civic centers, and more pedestrian-friendly streets. The plans also promote public transportation and better landscaping.

By marketing the neighborhoods to developers, Sorenson hopes to shape urban growth in South Miami-Dade and make the visions reality.

On the Palm Beach tour, architect Victor Brandon Dover led about 50 people, including Community Council members and county staff, through Abacoa, City Place and Mizner Park -- all relatively young and vibrant mixed-use developments that model what Sorenson and others want to see in South Miami-Dade.

In Abacoa, Dover pointed out the community's civic center, which is within walking distance of stores, restaurants, a movie theater and most of the homes. In Mizner Park,

the tour-goers liked the large amphitheater and concealed parking garages.

The group spent most of its time in City Place, a \$600 million development constructed over the past 10 years that gave a new face to 72 acres in downtown West Palm Beach.

"It's amazing to see what a little bit of vision, a little bit of time and a lot of money can do," said Barry Johnson, president of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce.

At the core of the development two stories of condos loom above major shops and restaurants.

"You see it in pictures and think it's pretty, but it will never come true," said Tim Meerbott, a member of the Cutler Bay Town Council. "Seeing this in person takes a little bit of the fear away from the change."