

Wynwood Norte Neighborhood Revitalization District wins preliminary commission approval

By [Helena Poleo](#)
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Wynwood Norte revitalization plan would impact a 140-acre area west of Midtown and north of the Wynwood Arts District.

With a vote of 5 to 0, City of Miami Commissioners recently approved on first reading the Wynwood Norte revitalization plan.

The plan is intended to protect the neighborhood's character while improving the area's housing stock and creating economic opportunities for small business as well as new jobs for residents. The Wynwood Community Enhancement Association (Wynwood CEA) — comprised of residents, business owners, property owners and established community-based organizations like the Bakehouse Art Complex — shaped the plan and won support from local officials and the overall community over the past two years.

“The Wynwood Norte Neighborhood Revitalization District provides real solutions for Miami’s affordable housing crisis that are uniquely tailored to the neighborhood,” said Wynwood Norte advocate Steve Wernick, whose law firm is located in Wynwood.

“Particularly with the county being one of the largest landowners in the neighborhood, it could, under the proposed zoning, generate an additional 1,400 affordable housing units in the future, where today there are only about 150 aging units.”

The neighborhood, once home to a vibrant ethnic community of Puerto-Rican and Cuban garment industry workers during the 1950s-’80s, has changed a great deal during the past 35 years, losing more than half of its 10,000 residents. Today, there is little homeownership, with rentals making up nearly 90 percent of its remaining housing stock.

Neighborhood schools with expansive green spaces also sit empty as student populations have dropped to 50 percent capacity.

Restrictive zoning and rising land values have resulted in little new housing construction and the exodus of local businesses. The neighborhood now is at risk of losing its culture and character, because of demolition and development pressures from surrounding neighborhoods, and because it has had no tools in place to change course.

In response to ongoing changes and strong community support, the City of Miami Commission directed administrators in November 2019 to study the implementation of the Wynwood Norte Community Vision Plan for the 140-acre area west of Midtown and north of the Wynwood Arts District.

The City of Miami Planning Department in September released legislation for creation of the Wynwood Norte Neighborhood Revitalization District (NRD-2). The legislation incorporated changes to the city’s land use and zoning map that primed future development for a mix of housing that is responsive to changes in demographics and market conditions, while keeping the existing scale of the neighborhood. Recently approved by the city’s Planning and Zoning Board, the NRD-2 focuses primarily on infill development and new housing supported by available capacity in neighborhood schools, community services, transit, and underutilized green space.

The NRD-2 is not just about growth. The changes include protective measures that cut down on the ability of developers to pull a demolition permit prematurely, to prevent displacement of current residents and stop the proliferation of vacant lots.

The NRD-2 also allows for activation of small community gardens to be open to neighborhood residents in concert with community-based organizations. The goal is two-fold: to promote healthy eating and address vacant lots that have been a source of crime and blight in the neighborhood.

Building on the community vision plan, the new zoning and Neighborhood Revitalization District includes strategies for keeping families together, retaining legacy structures, and facilitating compatible mixed-use buildings along the commercial corridors. These mixed-use buildings will provide neighborhood-oriented retail and other important services that residents depend on, and opportunities for local entrepreneurs to access micro-retail with lower rents.

Wernick, who has been representing the Wynwood CEA and working with City officials, points to the COVID pandemic as a litmus test for the community.

“The current pandemic reinforced the challenges identified through the Community Vision Plan. Without an intervention, it became clear the neighborhood will continue to decline.

The NRD-2 creates a platform to strengthen the community, better serve families and seniors, and spur reinvestment to support Miami’s economic recovery,” Wernick said.

Wil Vasquez, a Wynwood CEA board member who has been in the neighborhood for over five decades, has experienced the ups and downs in the neighborhood.

“Wynwood Norte is a neighborhood patiently waiting to get the attention it deserves.

Finally, we have a real plan in place and can make the neighborhood a safe place to call home once again,” Vasquez said.

The plan will now be sent to the State of Florida for review by state agencies and could return to the City of Miami for final approval as soon as December.

About

The Wynwood Community Enhancement Association’s mission is to provide a unified voice for neighborhood improvements and for enhancing the quality of life for current and future residents. Wynwood CEA stakeholders seek a vibrant, walkable neighborhood with a mix of quality housing opportunities and neighborhood services for current and future residents.