



MARK FREEDS

Jeff Berkowitz is working with Miami Beach to help alleviate the parking shortage.

SoBe's big box project may help tight parking

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A proposed retail center may do more for Miami Beach's gateway than bringing a grocery store and national chains to an area lacking in big-box retailers. It may help end a parking nightmare.

The partnership of Miami developer Jeff Berkowitz and car dealers Alan and Robert Potamkin are promising to build a public garage at their Fifth & Alton South Beach project.

Until now, Miami Beach has formed joint ventures with developers to build public garages on city-owned land. The new approach could be the beginning of a trend, said Kevin Crowder, the city's economic development director. The city has begun similar talks with other developers.

Parking in South Beach is a hot commodity. It is hard to find and prices fluctuate depending on the day and what's happening in the area. As residential towers sprout in Miami Beach's southern tip, vacant lots used for parking are vanishing.

Miami Beach officials hope a plan to buy about 500 parking spaces from Berkowitz's project will help alleviate the shortage. The city is

willing to pay up to \$7.2 million for the parking garage, or \$14,400. The Miami Beach commission is scheduled to discuss the deal April 14.

"For the city, it is a cost-effective way of providing parking," Berkowitz said.

2,246 spaces isn't enough

In the last decade, public and private partnerships built 2,246 spaces, said Saul Frances, the Miami Beach Parking Department director.

The proposed three-story Fifth & Alton South Beach project will be comprised of 180,000 square feet of retail and a 940-space garage, Berkowitz said.

A seasoned developer of shopping centers, Berkowitz opened his first vertical big-box shopping center, Dadeland

Station in South Miami, in 1996.

Berkowitz and Potamkin have been working on getting the site's soil cleaned up and concept plans ready for almost three years. The parcel, bounded by Lenox Avenue, Alton Road and Fifth and Sixth streets, is the first property drivers see on the northern side of Fifth Street off of the MacArthur Causeway.

Berkowitz is negotiating a lease with Publix Super Markets to occupy 45,000 square feet on the first floor of the proposed Art Deco-style building. The retail, garage and supermarket space is estimated to cost up to \$50 million, he said.

He is also talking to other tenants such as Barnes & Noble, OfficeMax, Bed Bath & Beyond and L.A. Fitness, he said.

The developer will retain control of about 400 parking spaces for his tenants' employees and customers, Berkowitz said.

Parking deficit expected to grow

Miami Beach officials plan to operate the nearly 500 spaces to be used by beachgoers and supermarket patrons.

A one-year-old Miami Beach parking analysis shows the area south of Fifth Street seemed to have enough parking, but it isn't well distributed. By 2008, the area south of Fifth Street is expected to have a deficit of close to 608 spaces during the weekend, the analysis shows.

Creating parking in heavily populated cities such as Miami Beach is a daunting task, said Kim Jackson, interim president of the Virginia-based International Parking Institute. Her group provides a forum for parking professionals to exchange ideas.

Land to house freestanding garages is scarce and expensive, she said.

Crowder said it sells from \$100 to \$200 a square foot, Crowder said.

"Given the price of real estate on the beach," he said, "it makes more sense to leverage the money we have for parking with private developers, when there is an opportunity to do so."

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