

Overtown Collaborative Network of Community Leaders (OCNCL) Sustainability Report

January 2025

Introduction

The Overtown Collaborative Network of Community Leaders (OCNCL) made up of resident leaders and representatives from Overtown organizations convened regularly to administer, support, and sustain the Overtown Parks Group (OPG), a subcommittee of the Overtown and Children and Youth Coalition (OCYC) Healthy and Safe Committee led by Overtown residents and consisting of a general membership of mainly Overtown residents, parks staff, and partner organizations.



The Overtown Parks Group has grown to a membership of 75 participants that include primarily Overtown residents and organizations, as well as other community stakeholders from the Miami-Dade County area. During the grant period, the members of the OPG expressed a variety of concerns and priorities for the five Overtown Parks. Many of these members participated on an ongoing basis, some emerging as resident leaders that stayed heavily involved with the Overtown Parks Group since its beginnings, and others that focused their efforts around advocacy initiatives that reflected their unique priorities, but nonetheless staying regularly involved when activities pertaining to their priorities came to the forefront. As such, the members of the Overtown Parks Group sustained support from residents for numerous activities by ensuring the activities reflected many differing priorities and as a result leveraging the support of many different Overtown residents.

Community Liaisons from UHP, OCYC, and Catalyst Miami served as the Overtown Parks Group's core leadership, representing Overtown residents at public meetings of key importance to the Overtown Parks Group's Community Action Plan objectives, and participating in capacity building opportunities as Community Liaisons and advocates for their community.



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Successes of the Overtown Parks Group

This section highlights the major successes for the Overtown community that were a direct result of the efforts of the Overtown Parks Group.

Gained commitments from local government agencies to have representatives join OPG meetings - The OPG secured commitments from the City of Miami Department of Parks and Recreation Director, the Southeast Overtown Park West Community Redevelopment Agency (SEOPW CRA), and City of Miami District 5 Commissioner Christine King to have a representative from each of these agencies attend OPG meetings and provide information and support to the group.



Improved the community involvement for the redesign of the new Henry Reeves Park playground - The OPG requested that the City of Miami's Parks administration increase public involvement in discussions around the redesign of the replacement equipment for the playground at Reeves Park. The project was already underway and the public involvement effort had already passed with OPG members expressing little knowledge of the meetings about the design. Their efforts resulted in additional community meetings, and the City consulting with Touching Miami with Love to get feedback from the children. The park design option selected by the children is the option that the City of Miami moved forward with. The new playground opened the following year, and Overtown Parks Group attended the ribbon cutting ceremony.



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Successes of the Overtown Parks Group (cont'd)

Successfully advocated for additional older adults programming at Williams Park - Through months of advocacy and key conversations with City of Miami Parks administration to explore avenues for new programming, the OPG was able to convince Parks administration to leverage their existing partnership with FLIPANY in other parks to provide older adult programs at Williams Park. As part of this effort, the OPG provided increased outreach through the Going Overtown newsletter and canvassing of the senior centers by the Community Liaisons to ensure Overtown residents were aware of the program.



Reopened the Williams Park Pool after 2+ years of closure - OPG members spent months discussing the barriers to reopening the Williams Park Pool with City of Miami Parks and Recreation staff. The pool had been closed for over 2 years, with some residents estimating its closure was up to 4 years long. Through many conversations, the OPG members learned that the main issue was a lack of trained lifeguards. Once these issues were resolved, with the assistance of OPG, the pool reopened in summer of 2023.

Improved lifeguard recruitment for improved pool hours and access - Secured additional funding for the City of Miami to be able to provide stipends for lifeguard training and successfully advocated for the City to increase lifeguard pay to \$19-\$22 per hour, and implement an active campaign to hire lifeguards that included flyers, promo video, social media, and e-blasts.



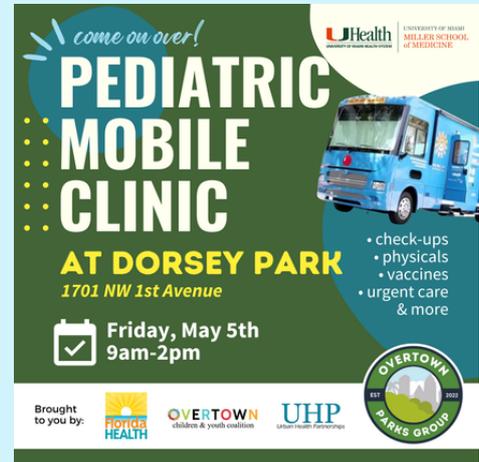
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Successes of the Overtown Parks Group (cont'd)

Brought Mobile Clinic partners to Overtown Parks

- OPG collaborated with the University of Miami Pediatric Mobile Clinic and Southern Birth Justice Network Mobile Clinic to bring health services to Rainbow Village Park, Henry Reeves Parks, Williams Park, & Dorsey Park. OPG helped schedule these services with consideration of school and after school program hours, provided park permitting and coordination, and conducted community outreach through Going Overtown and the Community Liaisons.



Provided movement classes at Williams Park -

OPG partnered with Overtown area fitness instructors to provide weekly Zumba and HIIT fitness classes on Saturdays and occasional breathing and movement classes at Williams Park. These classes were promoted with many of the older adults at the nearby senior centers. The instructors also ensured their classes were inclusive of people of different ages and abilities, often providing adaptive solutions during the class to ensure all could participate. The classes were also attended by the women of the Jessie Trice Rehabilitation center, with these classes sometimes being the only outing all week for the women, and one they greatly looked forward to.

Held two small health fairs at Williams Park -

the two events leveraged the existing Saturday fitness classes and invited the Southern Birth Justice Network Mobile Midwife Clinic, fire rescue to provide blood pressure screening, nutrition partners to provide education, and others.



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Successes of the Overtown Parks Group (cont'd)

Initiated restoration of the historic mural at Dorsey Park and improved maintenance of the baseball field - Community Liaisons, including one liaison who is a well-established Overtown historian, urged the City of Miami to restore the mural for the historic Negro League that once used the park's baseball field. As a result of this advocacy, the City partnered with Wounded Warriors who restored the mural, and had their maintenance crew remove debris and improve the leveling of the baseball field.



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Advocacy Activities of the Overtown Parks Group

In addition to the regular meetings of both the OCNCL and OPG, members also participated in community events, public meetings, and other opportunities to advocate for actions to improve Overtown Parks. Many of these interactions included local government agencies: the City of Miami Parks and Recreation staff (administration, maintenance, park superintendents and staff), City of Miami District 5 Commissioner Christine King, Miami-Dade County District 3 Commissioner Keon Hardemon, the Southeast Overtown Park West Community Redevelopment Agency (SEOPW CRA),



Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works, Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management (DERM), and the Miami-Dade County Department of Parks and Recreation. Below we have included a comprehensive list of the various advocacy activities of the Overtown Parks Group.

Priority enhancements list for the Overtown Parks for planning of investments by the SEOPW CRA

The Overtown Parks Group began regularly visiting leadership at the SEOPW CRA office, and as a result of this relationship-building, the SEOPW CRA Executive Director reached out to the Overtown Parks Group directly and requested recommendations from the OPG for how to prioritize spending on parks and public space enhancements per the communities' priorities. Utilizing the over 3 years of community audits and assessments conducted through Activate Overtown, which included participation from approximately 30 residents and which collaboratively aligned the group's priorities on parks and adjacent public space needs, the Overtown Parks Group updated the Parks Audit report and provided the SEOPW CRA with an updated list of priorities by park and by level of priority for their use in planning the use of received bond money for infrastructure in Overtown. Commissioners King and Hardemon were also informed and in support of the OPG's recommendations. Although the initial meeting was well-received by the CRA Executive Director, and he supported the plan for prioritization, the OPG met with the CRA Executive Director two additional times shortly after the initial meeting to urge the CRA to take next steps, and the CRA responded at these meetings by urging OPG to advocate to the City of Miami Department of Parks and Recreation to have these items included in their budget, stating that bond funds were no longer available and had all been planned for. Commissioner King attended the second meeting in support of the Overtown Parks Group.

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Advocacy Activities of the Overtown Parks Group (cont'd)

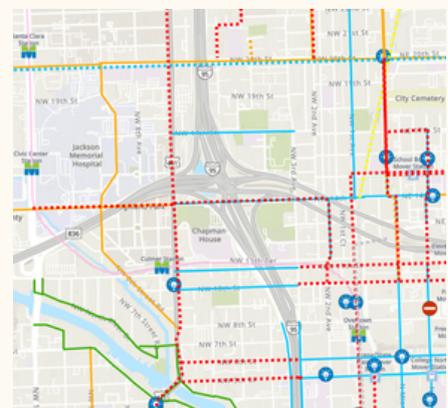
Request for investment at Overtown Parks during City of Miami budget hearings -

Community Liaisons attended and made public comment at both City of Miami budget hearings for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Their requests for funding included high priority items from the OPG Community Action Plan including a master plan for ADA accessibility for Overtown Parks, increased pool hours and season, and funding of additional programs such as fitness classes. This effort included collaboratively strategizing on which high priority items to advocate for with the Overtown Parks Group members, coordinating with the University of Miami Environmental Justice Clinic students to develop talking points and guidance for reviewing and speaking on the City budget, and a preparation meeting to provide time for Overtown Parks Group members to practice and/or ask for guidance on their public comment.



Providing Overtown input for the Miami Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan -

Members of the Overtown Parks Group met with the City of Miami Bike and Pedestrian Coordinator and planning consultants to explore the proposed plan for Overtown within the City of Miami Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan. During the meeting, OPG members were provided an overview of the mapping application for exploring the proposal and for making public comment, so that they can share this information with other community members. The overview also included discussion on the specific plans for Overtown and resulted in members advocating for modifications to the plan to change where investments are made or modified based on current usage.



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Advocacy Activities of the Overtown Parks Group (cont'd)

Advocating for improved pedestrian and bicyclist safety near Overtown Parks –

Many Overtown residents voiced concern over the lack of safety for pedestrians and bicyclists coming to and from the Overtown Parks, noting that certain locations have recurring issues that place people at increased risk.

Over several meetings, the Overtown Parks Group developed a list of priority locations for improving the safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. Each location on this list was then visited with photographs taken and diagrams provided about the roadway jurisdictional ownership, notes on the specific issues observed, and recommendations to consider for improving safety.

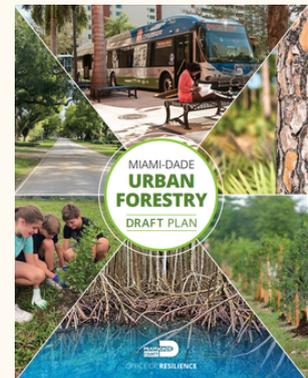
This report of Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety Enhancements was brought to Commissioner King and the SEOPW CRA to explore inclusion in future projects.

Commissioner King took an interest in this effort and noted that Miami-Dade County staff from the Department of Transportation and Public Works had in the past gone on ridealongs with concerned residents to learn about issues in their community. Commissioner King suggested the OPG should also go on a ridealong with the County, and connected OPG to County staff to schedule the event.

The meeting was scheduled and then postponed by Miami-Dade County on two occasions. Since then the OPG has been unable to secure a third date to be scheduled for this ridealong despite several attempts to communicate with various County staff.



Miami-Dade County Urban Forestry Plan – Miami-Dade County held a public meeting to present the Urban Forestry Draft Plan. Members of the Overtown Parks Group met prior to this meeting to review the plan's intent, proposed actions, and plan for community involvement. The OPG then strategized talking points to advocate for specific measures and actions to be included in the final draft of the plan, and to urge the County to include language for community involvement. The members also noted to the County that Overtown has several areas with very little shade while being a community with many pedestrians and transit users, which poses increased risk during extreme heat periods.



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Advocacy Activities of the Overtown Parks Group (cont'd)

Partnership established with University of Miami Environmental Justice Clinic (UM EJC) - The OPG established this partnership in light of various environmental concerns heard from Overtown residents, including concern over a lack of buffer between Dorsey Park and the neighboring cement plant's retention area, cement dust scattering from the plant onto the park and nearby homes, and soil conditions for all parks given their former industrial uses and likely brownfield soil conditions. The UM EJC was able to help the OPG navigate information discovery through air quality monitoring, map imaging analysis of cement dust residue patterns, public records requests of soil testing, and resident surveying to understand concerns and impacts. The EJC also provided several opportunities for capacity building to the OPG, and often accompanied the OPG at public meetings to lend support.



Regular attendance of community meetings to advocate for park improvements - The OPG regularly attended several public meetings to build presence and relationships with fellow community members, City and CRA staff, and elected officials while advocating for the priorities outlined within the Overtown Parks Group COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN. Meetings included CRA Town Halls, regular visits to the CRA staff, and frequenting Commissioner Christine King's Constituent Tuesdays.



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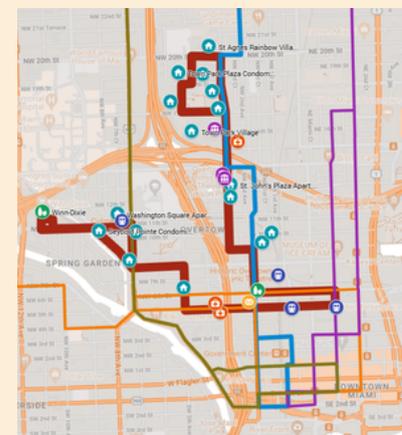
Better Bus Network launch and Urging Miami-Dade Transit to reinstitute the 211 Overtown Circulator Bus

- The Overtown Parks Group reviewed materials and attended events related to the launch of Miami-Dade Transit's Better Bus Network. The launch was the first major overhaul of Miami-Dade County's bus system in 30 years.

The launch of the Better Bus Network included the discontinuation of the 211 Overtown Circulator bus, which was an Overtown-specific bus that connected residents to different areas of Overtown and other nearby key community resources. The change resulted in many residents, and in particular older adults whom are dependent on transit, no longer having access to the two major grocery stores in Overtown, several clinics, the post office, and other community resources.

Members of the OPG prepared a letter to the mayor along with backup mapping analysis demonstrating the disconnection between residents and critical community resources and how the new bus network does not provide adequate connection.

Numerous meetings between OPG members and Miami-Dade County staff have been held to discuss solutions, and discussions have been ongoing to resolve the issue.



Public Record Request for Reeves Park soil tests - Public Records Request of soil testing results for Henry Reeves Park were requested by OPG after adjacent County-owned public housing on the same block was determined to have contaminated soil and tests were determined to include park areas. Additionally, the Overtown Parks Group regularly conferred with City of Miami, Miami-Dade County, Reeves Park staff, and Culmer Place residents to confirm details and improve transparency between residents and agencies. OPG used this increased outreach with residents to better understand their experience and assist with advocacy during the evacuation of the former public housing complex and construction of the new buildings directly adjacent to the park (completed).

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Community Meetings Held by the Overtown Parks Group

The OCNCL & OPG met several times a month to strategize and support the success of the OPG. Below is a list of the types of meetings and their purpose:

- **Monthly Overtown Parks Group meetings** - The OCNCL met monthly with the Overtown Parks Group general membership comprised of Overtown residents and stakeholders to discuss, determine, and plan advocacy actions. Through these meetings, the Overtown Parks Group developed the OPG Community Action Plan that has been used to guide advocacy actions, updating the plan annually based on successes, challenges, and evolving priorities.
- **Monthly updates to OCYC's Healthy and Safe Committee** - The OCNCL provided the committee with updates on the Overtown Parks Group's activities, requests for advocacy support (testimonials, presence at public meetings, technical assistance), and opportunities to participate in the various activities of the Overtown Parks Group.
- **Bi-weekly OCNCL meetings** - The OCNCL met Bi-weekly and as needed to strategize the Overtown Parks Group's technical assistance needs for successful advocacy actions and activities, and to provide administrative support in the Community Action Plan development and update process including planning meeting agendas, group activities, discussion prompts, and key updates for the group on advocacy items and community happenings.



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Sustainability Plan for the Overtown Parks Group

Updates to the Overtown Parks Group Community Action Plan

In light of the various activities of the Overtown Parks Group, the OCNCL guided the larger Overtown Parks Group in updating the Overtown Parks Group Community Action Plan in mid-2024. This plan has become the framework for guiding future advocacy actions and will continue to be regularly updated for the evolving needs of the community.

The Overtown Parks Group Community Action Plan remains an essential element of the Overtown Parks Group as it transitions into continuation as part of Overtown Children and Youth Coalition's (OCYC) Healthy and Safe Committee.

Overtown Parks Group Sustainability Planning

In September 2024, the OCNCL met for a half-day event to discuss the Sustainability Plan for the Overtown Parks Group including reviewing and discussing the activities, challenges, and successes to date, and to align on plans for the transition of key Overtown Parks Group functions to administration primarily through OCYC.

At this stage, the OCNCL is no longer meeting biweekly as the Collaborative, but has decided to participate with the general membership of the Overtown Parks Group as part of OCYC's Healthy and Safe Committee beyond the grant period, providing support as needed to continue the Overtown Parks Group's work on their Community Action Plan. As the group transitions to administration primarily through OCYC and resident leaders, OCYC plans to guide the Overtown Parks Group through a reassessment and update of the Overtown Parks Group Organizational Structure outline developed in 2023 for guiding decision-making for the group. The OCNCL is hopeful of having resident leaders increase their involvement since over the last few years a variety of members involved in the various advocacy actions have expressed passion about certain topics and become champions of those topics for the Overtown Parks Group on a more regular basis. Some of these residents were in attendance at the Sustainability Planning event, and were highly encouraged to stay involved.

Instructors at the Sustainability Planning retreat emphasized that their weekly classes had led to boosts in attendees' self confidence, improved health, sense of community and enjoyment, and had inspired attendees to return through a sense of accountability to each other and themselves. The classes were promoted to be inclusive to target populations and as a result brought critical health and well-being interventions to many in the community who are in great need of these services: older adults, people with disabilities, women in rehabilitation programs, and children.



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Efforts to Find Funding to Support OPG

Partners from the University of Miami's Environmental Justice Clinic and Miami Waterkeeper were also present and also committed to seeking additional funding to continue collaborations. Both these organizations have collaborated with one or more of the OCNCL organizations to apply for grants to continue the Overtown Parks Group's work. Although one grant was not awarded, the team awaits results of the second grant application.

The instructors and their class participants in attendance at the retreat noted that highlighting the classes' benefits as noted by the instructors in future grant applications and when advocating to the City for funding would be key to demonstrating the programs' importance and effectiveness.

UHP, OCYC, and Catalyst Miami have committed to continuing to seek other funding opportunities by leveraging the group's successes to date.

Community Liaison (CL) Impact Highlights



1 Community Action Plan updated to prioritize residents' key goals



18 Public meetings to solicit input & share information



5 Community Liaisons (Overtown residents) on the project team

65 New movement classes hosted weekly at Overtown parks



>1000 participants in weekly movement classes



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Links to OPG Resources & Reports

Overtown Parks Group Community Action Plan:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/117hio2MZR3DEv2BuxChe5_iRX3lwacEK5LMHHRDYSWA/edit?usp=sharing

Overtown Parks Group Meeting Minutes (includes all recurring meetings):

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZMwXsOcCtN_XyFpz6D4PtpdUMXJ7OdrZGliy3Jguj_s/edit?usp=sharing

Overtown Parks Group Organizational Structure Outline:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qzcfQmLWoGA9MoKOUQugbCMv3VUowxhzzOGHKUAYDf4/edit?usp=sharing>

Overtown Parks Group Priorities by Park and by Priority Level:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13bToPtK4VQrOh2nlozS4sC4ohLmpV3_gqYyfWpiyESA/edit?usp=sharing

Recommendations for Pedestrian and Bike Safety Enhancements near Overtown Parks:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1YJDp5xznkf8JU6yrG0IHlf-sVJ3kicM-sAmTZk9BsWI/edit#slide=id.g1ad8ee60f5d_0_0

Map of Recommended Pedestrian and Bike Safety Enhancement Locations:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1lVDuzkuLf7kA9ON4l6oMdJQ3GWdxPQk&usp=sharing>

Letter to Mayor Daniella Levine Cava about the Discontinued 211 Overtown Circulator:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/ypmfiw97vqt3da4o6gkzr/Letter-to-Mayor-and-Director-of-Miami-Dade-County-DTPW_Jan-02-2024.pdf?rlkey=jnz0twghshecgu365hxowfx2w&st=nbiif7ae&dl=0

Map analysis for Discontinued 211 Overtown Circulator:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1mlxCXj5FuVTJcZVwEJlLzFAloZHP0c&usp=sharing>