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FIVE QUESTIONS WITH ELIZABETH PLATER-ZYBERK

Trailblazer Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk talks about Miami 21

BY MATTHEW HAGGMAN
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Architect and planner Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk has won worldwide acclaim as a pioneer of the New Urbanism movement, which seeks to undo suburban sprawl and promote walkable, neighborhood-based developments that mix residential and commercial components within close proximity, puts a premium on public spaces like parks and accommodates mass transit.

She is dean of the University of Miami School of Architecture and heads up the architectural and planning firm Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. with her husband Andres Duany. The two are co-founders of the Congress of New Urbanism, which The New York Times called "the most important collective architectural movement in the United States in the past 50 years."

It's a movement very much in the spotlight now, with scores of mixed-use developments underway or on the drawing board for South Florida's urban and suburban cores, including renewed discussion about improving Miami's business district.

Plater-Zyberk's firm is active around the world, with projects from India and Saudi Arabia to Turkey and Argentina. Headquartered in Miami's Little Havana, the firm is now seeking to bring big change to the city in which Plater-Zyberk works.

She is the lead consultant for the City of Miami's much-awaited rezoning plan, called Miami 21. Last week the first phase of the four-part plan was presented to city commissioners. After nine hours of discussion, commissioners deferred a vote until a later date. Plater-Zyberk spoke to The Miami Herald before presenting the plan to the Miami Commission:

Q: What is Miami 21?

A: It's an update of the city-wide zoning code, which envisions a city of protected neighborhoods and commercial development that enhances the neighborhood. Focus is on pedestrians, public spaces, access to open spaces like the waterfront, transitions in density and height between buildings, and mass transit. It envisions a city of coherent urban fabric. It incorporates many of the things that some taller buildings are already being asked to do in the MUSP process [the current zoning review by the city; the acronym stands for Major Use Special Permit]. But under the new code, smaller buildings which previously could be built by right, must do it too. These are things like requiring that liner units [habitable spaces like condominium units] be built around a parking garage to conceal it, requiring ground-floor retail or lobby, so you are looking at doors and windows from the street level. And transitions from high buildings to low buildings.

Q: Is this a down-zoning of the city?

A: It's not at all a down-zoning. There is no intention to reduce development capacity in the city. It is understood that this is an urban core of a growing region. In translation from the old code to new code, we erred in generosity. But there are areas where that has occurred, certain areas where neighborhoods have long expressed a desire for change to bring commercial corridors more into scale with residential neighborhoods located behind. Yet it is neighborhood by neighborhood and not an overriding pattern.

We will continue to see high-rise buildings in the city. The tallest ones are downtown. And taller buildings that run along corridors will be asked to behave much better. Parking garages must be lined so you won't be looking in to see pipes and lights; it must have a broad sidewalk out front and tall buildings must "step down" to residential neighborhoods.

Q: Do other cities have a code like Miami 21?

A: There are a number of cities that have form-based codes [like Miami 21] and a number that have produced the desired results through building-by-building negotiations. There are as many approaches and conditions as cities in the U.S. But places like New York, San Francisco, many of our metropolitan cities, have codes that are similar to this in terms of how buildings form the public realm, which is essentially



Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk

• **Positions:** Dean, University of Miami School of Architecture; Principal, Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co.

• **Education:** Bachelor of Arts in Architecture & Urban Planning, Princeton University, 1972; Masters of Architecture, Yale University, 1974.

• **Experience:** Designed more than 40 buildings and more than 100 town plans. With husband Andres Duany, she has co-authored several books, including, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* and *The New Civic Art: Elements of Town Planning*.

• **Home:** Coral Gables

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