

LOCAL & STATE B

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MIAMI



PETER ANDREW BOSCH/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

TAKING A STAND: Protesters on Biscayne Boulevard in Miami hold up signs showing their desire to preserve royal palms that line the road, many of which could be wiped out by a road project.

Protesters are fighting to save royal palms from road project

■ Are the royal palm trees on Biscayne Boulevard an important part of its history? A group of passionate palm fans think so, and they are taking their case to Miami City Hall

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The battle for the royal palms of Biscayne Boulevard has returned.

Concerned that a state transportation project would wipe out almost 100 of the palms, a group was on the boulevard Saturday holding signs and handing out fliers — recycled, of course.

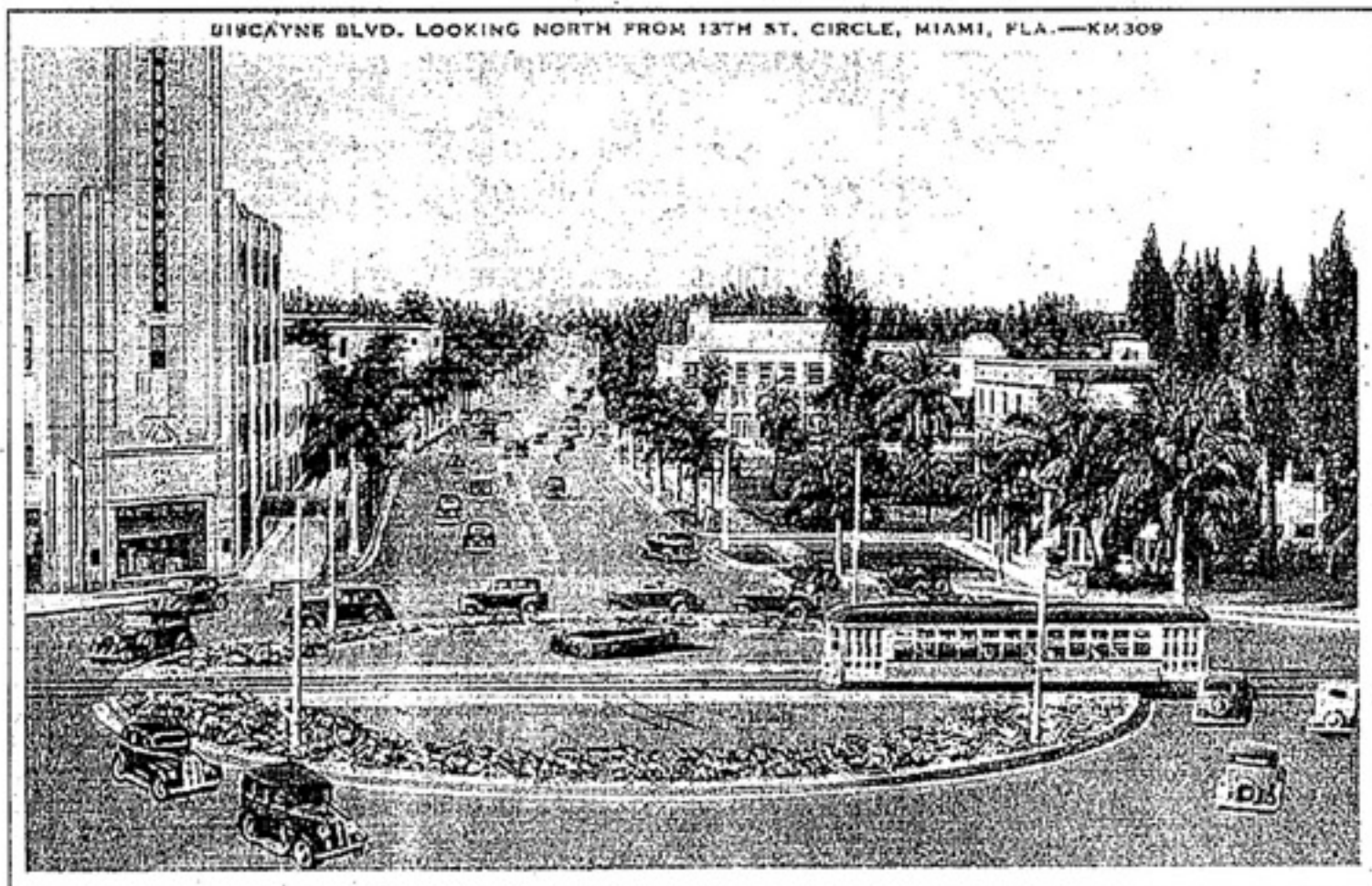
“Miami is so young. We have so little history,” said protester Sean-Paul Melito. “We need to preserve what we have.”

Melito came across a 1926 article in which the city of Miami dedicated the boulevard as a memorial to all U.S. war veterans. That, he said, includes the 324 royal palms that lined it.

“The state has a memorial,” protester Elvis Cruz said, “and forgot about it.”

During one stretch of the boulevard project a few years back, dozens of royal palms were lost. They were replaced with oaks, which provide more shade and don’t pose the threat of giant palm fronds falling.

In the coming months, the Florida Department of Transportation will work on a section of the boulevard between Northeast 15th Street to about Northeast 35th Terrace.



VIEW FROM THE PAST: A postcard shows the royal palms lining Biscayne Boulevard in the 1940s. Dozens already have been lost.

According to a city of Miami report, about 230 royal palms would remain.

A transportation department spokesperson with knowledge of the project could not be reached Saturday.

Miami City Commissioner Marc Sarnoff’s district includes the affected area.

Sarnoff said he supports saving every royal palm possible. But he also worries that making changes now to the project, after it has been set in motion, could cost the city money.

Miami can’t afford to do that, he said.

“I support the royal palms,” Sarnoff said, also noting, “We just don’t have the money to change course.”

The royal palm supporters are going before the City Commission Thursday to voice their support for a proposal to declare the boulevard a scenic transportation corridor.

That title, they hope, will save their beloved trees, which they say contribute to making the boulevard special.

“The very thing that makes it important is those palms,” Cruz said. “If it becomes a hodgepodge planting of palms mixed with oak, it loses its identity.”