

## News

# Biscayne Boulevard Earns Historic Status

## Future of Royal Palms Secured

By Joshua Malina

The Miami City Commission designated Biscayne Boulevard, from the Miami River north to 36th Street, a "Scenic Transportation Corridor" at a December 10 meeting. The designation, which the commission approved after lobbying by local group SavePalms.com, represents a victory in the effort to preserve the boulevard's historic landscape.

According to Sean-Paul Melito of SavePalms.com, the design of Biscayne Boulevard, especially its royal palm landscaping, represents a part of Miami's history that shouldn't be disturbed. Yet an ongoing Florida Department of Transportation project to renovate the boulevard would have made some noticeable changes.

Specifically, FDOT planned to remove 84 royal palms, and plant oak trees and shrubbery in their place. Melito and others, including war veterans, protested the removal of even a single royal palm, claiming it would upset the distinctive look of the boulevard and disgrace veterans, to whom the boulevard was dedicated in 1926 and again after WWII.

With the street's new designation, and a recently convened meeting at the legislative office of State Rep. James Bush III, it is clear that FDOT's ongoing plans for the boulevard will not affect the royal palms, which will remain in place.

"We came up with a middle-of-the-road, agreeable solution," Mr. Bush said.

In a letter to State Sen. Dan Gelber, who requested that the trees be saved, Gus Pego, district secretary of FDOT, agreed to retain "as many royal palms as possible and remove the shade trees and shrubs that were proposed."

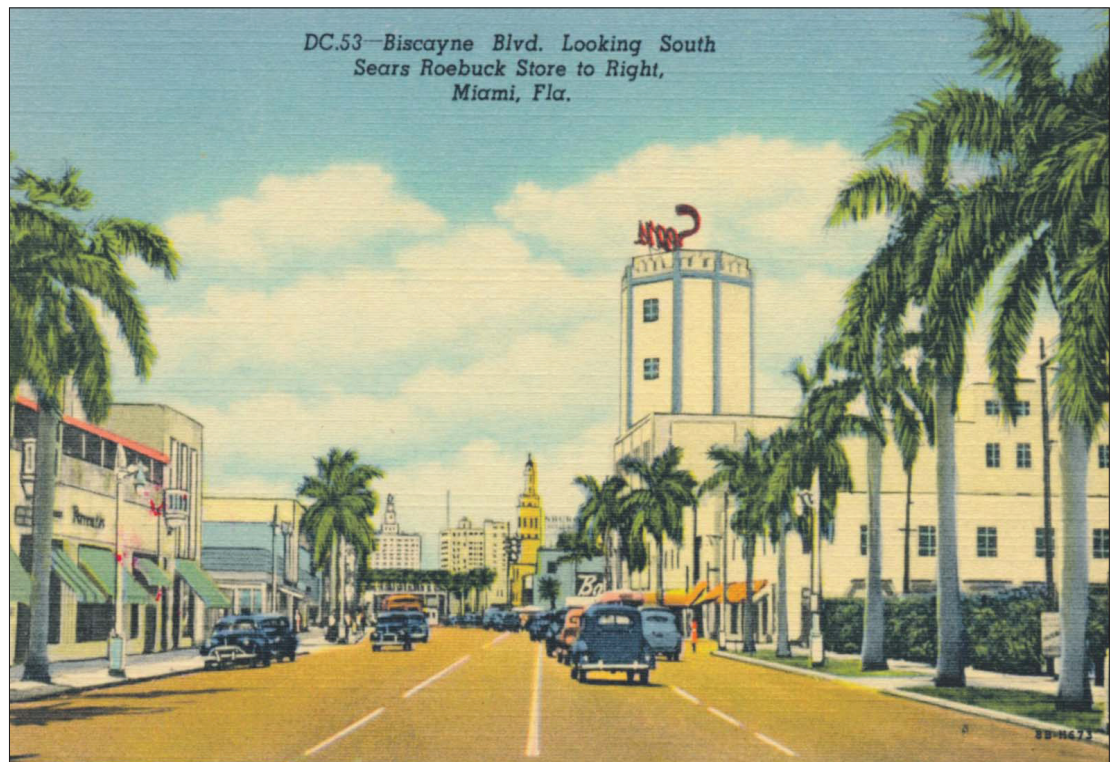
According to FDOT, oak trees were included in the plan for renovation because they provide more shade for pedestrians. Yet area residents were opposed to re-landscaping a veterans' memorial.

"Miami needs shade, but there's no reason to take it out on Biscayne Boulevard," said Melito.

Others present at the commission meeting were concerned that the inclusion of shade trees among palms would have forfeited Biscayne Boulevard's tropical appearance, turning it into

an "Anytown, USA."

The stretch of road undergoing renovation represents the last bit of Biscayne Boulevard to face FDOT renovation.



## Politics cont'd from page 6

pointing people. Commissioner Wolfson inadvertently makes our point more forcefully by observing, "One of the few things that differentiates the mayor from the commissioners is the ability to direct policy, partly via the appointment process."

*We'll say.* Case in point: Ex-Mayor Dermer appointed then-Commissioner Jose Smith to the MPO, an agency that largely determines South Florida's transit future. Smith proved instrumental in misdirecting, turning aside or otherwise obfuscating using streetcars on Miami Beach *despite the commission's being in favor of them, and the fact that the public ratified them over-*

*whelmingly via referendum!*

Just goes to show how even one really square peg can gum up the works in an otherwise round-hole world.

To thwart these kinds of hijinks in the future, let's make the commission the *integral* part of the process. Having oversight or veto powers, or one of their own appointed by consensus — preferably both — will blow away much of the taint of cronyism that hangs over the process now.

Oh, and one more thing. Ms. Mayor, that crack over gender politics? Strictly ham-on-cheese.