

City of Opa-Locka

County

Miami-Dade

Boundaries

North: Northwest 151st Street

South: East 65th Street, Northwest 127th Street, and Northwest 135th Street

West: Northwest 47th Avenue

East: Northwest 17th Avenue

Community Type

Municipality

History

Opa-Locka is a city of 4.45 square miles in northern Miami-Dade County, located 12 miles north of Downtown Miami. It is bordered to the north by the City of Miami Gardens, to the east by unincorporated Golden Glades, to the south by unincorporated Westview, and to the southwest by the City of Hialeah.

The area was originally named by the Seminoles “Opa-tisha-wocka-locka”, meaning “a big island covered with many trees and swamps”. The name was shortened to Opa-Locka when aviation pioneer Glenn Curtiss, who had retired to become a real estate developer during the Florida land boom, founded the community. The city’s overall design and layout was conceived by New York planner and architect Clinton McKenzie, who drew heavily from the contemporary “Garden City Movement”. This design trend was characterized by satellite communities featuring residences, industry, and agriculture, but connected to a central hub and interspersed with greenbelts. The city has a unique “Arabian” or “Moorish” architectural theme, inspired by the Middle Eastern folk tales of the *One Thousand and One Nights*. This exotic vision was executed by American architect Bernhardt E. Muller, who was responsible for several Mediterranean and Spanish-style homes in nearby Miami. The designs of more than one hundred new buildings featured domes, minarets, Saracenic arches, watchtowers, and outside spiral staircases. The town boasted a hotel, a zoo park, a golf course, an archery club, a swimming pool, an airport, and a train station which is currently the Tri-Rail station. The city is comprised of a mixture of residential, commercial, and industrial zones. Despite its limited

resources, the city was the backdrop for the making of movies such as Texas Justice, Bad Boyz II, and 2 Fast 2 Furious. Street names like Sabur, Sultan, Ali Baba, Sharazad, Aladdin, and Sesame reflected the town's theme.

Opa-Locka was incorporated as a town in May of 1926. The hurricane that devastated much of South Florida in September of that same year brought the Florida land boom to a halt, but largely spared Opa-Locka. Twenty of the original buildings have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Opa-Locka Thematic Resource Area.

Aviation history is intertwined with the history of the city. In 1933 the U.S. Navy opened a base at Opa-Locka Airport, which helped to drive the community's growth. The German dirigible Graf Zeppelin visited Naval Air Station Miami, which later reverted to Opa-Locka Airport, as a regular stop on its international route. In 1937 Amelia Earhart launched her ill-fated final trip around the world from Miami Municipal Airport, then located in what is now the southern part of Opa-Locka and established by the city's founder and aviation pioneer Glenn Curtiss. Amelia Earhart Park is now located at the city's southwest corner.

The city began to decline during the 1950s when the U.S. Navy air base was closed, but the Miami-Opa-Locka Executive Airport still serves the community and remains one of the city's most important landmarks.

Opa-Locka has a Mayor-Commission form of government, with a Mayor, a Vice Mayor, and three Commissioners. A calendar of meetings, agendas, and meeting minutes are available on the municipal website.

Community Dynamics

As of 2022, Opa-Locka had a population of 16,230. The median age was 35 and the median household income was \$30,101. Between 2021 and 2022 the population of Opa-Locka declined from 16,310 to 16,230, a decrease of .49%. At the same time, the median household income rose from \$27,734 to \$30,101, an increase of 8.53%. Regarding ethnicity in 2022, 48.5% of the population was Black, 22.2% was Multiracial Hispanic, 17% was White Hispanic, 4.12% was Other Hispanic, and 3.21% was Black Hispanic. None of the households in Opa-Locka reported speaking a non-English language at home as a primary language, and 82.6% of the population were US citizens. As of 2022, 36.4% of the residents of Opa-Locka were born outside the US, which is much higher than the national average of 13.6%. In 2021, the percentage of foreign-born residents was 32.2%, indicating that the rate has been increasing. In 2022, the median property value was \$259,600 and the homeownership rate was 32%.

Business Landscape

The City of Opa-Locka's official zoning map shows a significant part of its area devoted to industrial uses, including storage and salvage. Most of this land is in the city's southwest sector. A large area in the northwest corner of the city is for civic use, namely the airport. Residential uses dominate the central sector, with a small area of commercial use at the center of this residential zone.

Opa-Locka has a Community Redevelopment Agency, which focuses primarily on the city's downtown area and the mixed-use corridor running northeast of downtown. In 2021 the CRA published a master plan for the revitalization of its downtown, calling for some rezoning, with commercial uses surrounded by residential and civic uses. The full plan is available on the municipal website.

Southeast of the airport and west of downtown is the Amazon Mega Warehouse, along with the MIA1 Amazon Fulfillment Center.

The Opa-Locka Indoor Flea Market, located south of the airport on Northwest 42nd Avenue, is a large commercial venue featuring a diverse selection of goods, plus restaurants and a supermarket.

Opa-Locka was used as a backdrop for the movies "Texas Justice", "Bad Boyz II", and "2 Fast 2 Furious".

Transportation Characteristics

Opa-Locka has several main transportation arteries. Northwest 135th Street/State Road 916 runs east and west through the center of the municipality. Northwest 135th Street also forms the municipality's southern boundary on its east end, with State Road 916 splitting off and running parallel just to the north, where it is also known as Opa-Locka Boulevard.

Northwest 27th Avenue is a major roadway running north and south through the eastern end of the city, connecting with Northwest 135th Street and State Road 916 at the southern boundary. Northwest 27th Avenue is also known as State Road 817 to the north of its junction with North Burlington Street. Another large artery running diagonally through the eastern end of the city, from northeast to southwest, is State Road 9. As this roadway forms a junction with Northwest 27th Avenue, it splits. The northernmost branch of the split becomes North Burlington Street, with State Road 9 veering to the south and sharing its designation with Northwest 27th Avenue.

The southwestern section of the city is also served by major roadways. Northwest 42nd Avenue/North Le Jeune Road widens just south of its junction with Northwest 135th Street/State Road 916, where it is also designated as State Road 953. In the far southwest corner of the city, this roadway forms a junction with Florida Toll Road/State Road 924 as it runs diagonally from northwest to southeast, just north of Amelia Earhart Park.

According to DATA USA 2022 statistics, most people in Opa-Locka drove alone to work, with an average commute time of 28.1 minutes. The average car ownership was one car per household.

Opa-Locka is served by Miami-Dade Metrobus on its larger roadways.

The Opa-Locka Express Circulator offers free rides on a single route known as the North Link, which includes a stop at the Tri-Rail station. A map of the route and a timetable of stops are on the municipal website. The Circulator operates every day except Sunday.

The Opa-Locka Tri-Rail Station is located in the center of the city, at the intersection of Ali Baba Avenue and Sharazad Boulevard.

The city is served by the Miami-Opa-Locka Executive Airport, owned by Miami-Dade County and operated by the Miami-Dade Aviation Department.

The Sustainable Opa-Locka 2030 Comprehensive Development Master Plan is available via the municipal website, with the Transportation Element beginning on page 74 of the document. Goals are presented and a series of maps is included, showing existing roadway classifications, average annual daily traffic levels, roadway levels of service, transit services, bicycle facilities, existing sidewalks, and evacuation routes.

Sources

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