

Community Background Report

Overtown

County

Miami-Dade

Boundaries

North: Northwest 20th Street

South: Northwest 5th Street

West: Interstate 95

East: Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway and Northwest 1st Avenue

Community Type

Neighborhood

History

Overtown is a neighborhood encompassing approximately 120 blocks just northwest of downtown Miami, totaling 0.2 square miles. Overtown is recognized as one of the oldest Black communities in Miami. Like other older neighborhoods in southeast Florida, its origins can be traced directly to Henry Flagler's efforts to extend train traffic to the area. Black railroad workers came to Miami, taking up residence in one of the few areas designated for them by segregationist Miami. This area was referred to as "Colored Town" and flourished during the Black renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s.

Partly due to its segregation from the rest of Miami, Overtown grew as a center of cultural, religious, business, and civic activity, where churches were established, and schools were built. Businesses located near the edge of and within Overtown prospered, and the community published an alternative newspaper called the "Miami Times." The area became a center for entertainment, rivaling Miami Beach. Famous Black entertainers who were not allowed to stay at the hotels where they appeared in Miami and Miami Beach found accommodation and welcome in Overtown.

Through the 1950s and early 1960s, Overtown's economic activity declined, its population dropped drastically, and the area was considered a ghetto. During the 1960s, state highway engineers, planners and consultants routed Interstate 95 through Overtown, replacing its dense human settlement with massive transportation structures. Later, Interstate 395/State Road 836 (the Dolphin Expressway) further divided the two parts of Overtown into four. The previous landmarks forming Overtown's boundaries were eclipsed in their significance and no longer acknowledged as relevant to neighborhood transition. The interchange of expressways, standing some 30 feet or more above ground and visible from miles away, became the most obvious structure defining Overtown.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the area suffered from neglect. Businesses moved out of the area or suffered from a loss of clientele. After a series of riots during the 1980s, there were renewed efforts to improve the living conditions in many of Miami's Black neighborhoods. In the mid-1980s, the Miami Arena opened its doors to the public, and shortly after, new high-rise apartments were built. Today, the FTX Arena has replaced the Miami Arena, just a few blocks further east. Since the 1990s and 2000s, community gardens have been established, as well as a farmer's market, with distribution of produce to the needy and underserved.

Overtown has several historic buildings, including the Lyric Theater (819 Northwest 2nd Avenue), the Dorsey House (250 Northwest 9th Street), and the Greater Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (245 Northwest 8th Street).

Community Dynamics

According to U.S. 2010 Census and American Community Survey 2015 5-year data, Overtown has a population of 8,601, 62% of which are working age from 18 to 64. The average per capita income is \$11,578, which is much lower than Miami-Dade County's average per capita income of \$28,823. The population is 27% Hispanic and 73% non-Hispanic. Furthermore, 17.5% of the population is White (including Hispanic White), 77% is Black, and 5.5% multi-racial and others. A non-English language is spoken by 6% of the population. Regarding education level, 61% of the population has less than a high school education, which is higher than Miami-Dade County's 48.86%. Foreign-born individuals make up 22% of the population, out of which 36% are naturalized citizens, while 64% are not U.S. citizens. Of the foreign-born residents, 49% are from the Caribbean, 41% are from Central American countries, and 1.4% are from South America.

Business Landscape

Overtown's commercial corridors are Northwest 2nd and 3rd Avenues. The Northwest 3rd Avenue corridor was designated in 1998 by the City of Miami Commission as "The Historic Overtown Priority Business Corridor." Since then, investment in façade improvements have begun to transform the look and feel of this commercial corridor.

The Historic Overtown Folklife Village is a mixed-use marketplace, located between 8th and 10th Streets on Northwest 2nd and 3rd Avenues. Recent redevelopments have brought a variety of local retailers to the district, specifically those offering unique fares inspired by the Harlem Renaissance, West Africa, and the Caribbean. The Folklife Village is host to many Overtown events, including Folklife Fridays, an open-air market that takes place the first Friday of every month. Local vendors sell everything from traditional cuisine and handmade jewelry to clothing and books, with the market running from 11 am to 8 pm.

The Overtown Transit Village (OTV) is the site of a pair of Miami-Dade County high-rise towers, completed in 2009. The towers house offices and retail space at 601 and 701 Northwest 1st Court, with a large parking garage adjacent to the Overtown/Lyric Theater Metrorail Station.

The Overtown Service Center, located at 1490 Northwest 3rd Avenue in the Overtown Shopping Center, is a hub for policing, special projects, code compliance, and other administrative services. Contact information for these services is available in the City of Miami governmental website.

The Overtown Community Oversight Board is an organization instituted in 1980. The purpose of the OCOB is to encourage and support housing, job creation, economic and business development, educational opportunities, and historic and cultural preservation. The OCOB provides written recommendations to the City Commission regarding activities, developments, and improvements within Overtown, or substantially affecting the residents of the Overtown area. The Overtown NET Administrator serves as the supervisor of the OCOB liaison, assists with the dissemination of information throughout the Overtown community, and provides information to the liaison on everyday functions, community initiatives, construction projects, and other quality-of-life matters to report to the board members.

Overtown has a wide variety of neighborhood associations, listed in the City of Miami governmental website. The list includes the Dade Heritage Trust, several condominium and apartment complex associations, the local youth coalition, a neighborhood environmental health and safety group, and the District 5 Commission. Contact information is given for each organization.

Overtown shares a Community Redevelopment Agency with the adjacent Park West neighborhood, the Southeast Overtown/Park West CRA. The CRA's main mission is to enhance the quality of life for residents within the redevelopment area by expanding the tax base, creating job opportunities, promoting dynamic economic growth, and fostering safe neighborhoods. In furtherance of this mission, the CRA has implemented a variety of new development and redevelopment undertakings, mainly to increase accessibility to quality, affordable housing for residents of low and moderate income. The CRA sponsors the Folklife Friday open-air market events that are held in the Overtown Folklife Village.

Transportation

Miami-Dade Transit buses serve Overtown, running on Northwest 20th Street at the northern boundary of the neighborhood, and on Northwest 5th Street, which forms the southern boundary. Bus stops are also concentrated on Northwest 2nd and 3rd Avenues, which are commercially important, as well as on Northwest 17th Street and on Northwest 1st Place. Metrorail has a station in the southeast corner of the neighborhood, the Historic Overtown/Lyric Theatre Station.

The MiamiCentral train station, located at 600 Northwest 1st Avenue, serves the area at the southeast corner of Overtown. It is a hub where the Brightline high-speed train, the Metrorail, and the Metromover converge.

Interstate 95 and Interstate 395/State Road 836 dominate the neighborhood with their enormous structures, serving to move heavy volumes of traffic through the area. A major, long-term road construction project is in process, and is of concern to Overtown residents. The I-395/SR 836/I-95 Project is a partnership between the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX). Construction limits on State Road 836 begin at Northwest 17th Avenue and continue through the SR 836/I-395/I-95 (Midtown) Interchange to the MacArthur Causeway Bridge. The construction limits on I-95 are from Northwest 8th Street to Northwest 29th Street. Construction is expected to be completed in the fall of 2024, at a cost of \$818 million. Improvements in traffic flow and overall infrastructure are planned, as well as a flamboyant bridge designed to enhance the Miami skyline. According to the FDOT project website, “The signature bridge with its high vertical clearance will transform the area beneath I-395 into 30 acres of vibrant, open communal spaces for the enjoyment of Overtown residents, nearby communities and visitors.”

In-person and virtual public outreach meetings were scheduled in the spring of 2021, regarding the planning of the Overtown “Underdeck Greenway” that will be created as part of the project, connecting Overtown to Biscayne Bay via the space below I-395.

An FDOT/MDX website offers project details, a map with construction updates, a form for requesting a presentation on the project, a gallery of photos, videos and renderings, and project documents. A calendar of traffic alerts is also available.

Reference

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