Resident Participation in Urban Redevelopment Initiatives in Miami, FL USA

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Miami's recent designation as the "least civically engaged city" in the United States reflects the prevailing preoccupation with civic participation and engagement as a vital urban resource. The diagnosis of Miami's poor civic health follows and reinforces nearly two decades of the implementation of community-based, participatory governing techniques thought to help revitalize the city.

In this research we ethnographically investigates how neoliberal urban restructuring has "actively reshaped both subjectivity and the regulatory strategies of state and local governance" (Fairbanks and Lloyd 2011) through an examination of the deployment of "participation" as a strategic governing technique associated with redevelopment and gentrification in the historically Puerto Rican neighborhood of Wynwood in Miami, Florida. The Miami case allows for an appreciation of the normalization of comparatively extreme tendencies. Community development policy and practice in Miami's *hyper-entrepreneurial* context defines stakeholders and structures participation so as to privilege financial stakeholders over territorially-based residents. The research finds that participation shapes the subjectivity of residents more than it shapes the redevelopment initiatives in which they participate, and forecloses on the possibility of oppositional or critical engagement.

To investigate whether and how "active" and "participatory" citizens may "shape and influence the new spaces into which they have been invited" (Taylor 2007, p. 297), we explore the logics and practice of neighborhood-level participatory processes through the perspectives of new and longtime residents, staff and leaders of community organizations, and government officials. Based on ongoing ethnographic research and analysis of secondary sources (meeting minutes, policy documents, news archives), we focus on resident engagement in: (1) a major public-private partnership to redevelop land and housing; (2) a developer-led initiative to create

an Art and Cafe District; and (3) in community-based policing. The "relational ensemble" (Jessop 2007) that structures residents' participation in urban development processes is comprised of state welfare and policing agencies, an array of nonprofit and grassroots organizations, and small and large real estate developers. We draw on the Foucauldian view that participation in decentralized, neighborhood-level initiatives enables both social control and governing "at a distance" (Taylor 2007).

Community based organizations (CBOs) are vehicles through which residents engage in the political processes that shape their neighborhoods, whether by linking them to state or private sector resources (Betancur and Gills 2004; Martin 2004; Kirkpatrick 2007). Many analysts have located the disappearance of conflict from urban politics in the proliferation of "community-based" governance processes designed to generate "social capital," "social cohesion" and consensus (Jessop 2002; Elwood 2002; Mayer 2007; Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008; Lees 2008). The Wynwood case reinforces prevailing assessments of the broad changes that have reshaped CBO practices, particularly the depoliticized nature of participation and the absence of conflict (DeFilippis 2004; Newman and Lake 2006) in the "post-political" city (Swyngedouw 2011; Macleod 2011). As was the case with Wynwood's oldest community organizations, "the politics of identity and difference that energized the community development movement of the [1970s] has been replaced by an accommodationist politics in which the celebration of difference is antithetical to the dynamics of urban capital investment, the exchange-value denomination of urban neighborhoods, and the operational requirements of bureaucratized community development institutions" (Newman and Lake 2006, p. 45). But beyond representing the collapse of what once appeared as potentially oppositional politics, CBOs also contribute to community-based governance and its attendant practices of "citizen participation." Before addressing community-based governance practices in the gentrification of Wynwood, we provide an overview of the historical context of the neighborhood's political development.

[Figure 1about here]

The Making of Wynwood's Puerto Rican Community Politics

Established as one of Miami's first suburbs in 1913, Wynwood was home to middle-class Anglo-Americans for most of the first half of the 20th century. The post-World War II period of deindustrialization, immigration, urban renewal and highway construction led to the physical deterioration and social stigmatization of the neighborhood as it was increasingly populated by Puerto Rican migrants (Feldman 2011). By 1970, about 42 percent of Wynwood residents lived at or below the poverty line (Ibid).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Puerto Rican activists, in response to the opportunity of federal antipoverty funding, pressured City Hall to create lasting organizations in Wynwood that provided jobs, services and other investments (Ousley 1993). During the 1970s leaders effectively mobilized CBO service clients as voters through the Puerto Rican Democrats Organization or ODP. The area was home to more than 2,500 Puerto Ricans whose mobilization in the transient and high-growth Miami context gave the ODP infuence among local, state and national politicians (Inclan 1973). The 1980s saw the establishment of two Wynwood Community Development Corporations (CDCs) to implement business and housing development programs and the rise of faith-based activism in response to increasing violence and a declining population. Through the Corpus Christi Parish , thousands of residents mobilized to resist environmentally harmful public projects and demand building code enforcement and slum clearance. These campaigns pressured a response from the city government, leading to the creation in 1991 of the Neighborhood Enhancement Teams (NET). The NET offices, located inside neighborhoods and deemed "mini city halls," housed a community-based police officer and decentraled other city services to helpresidents and businesses navigate permitting, building code enforcement, and other city services.

[Figure 2 about here]

As is detailed elsewhere (see Feldman 2011), the Wynwood CBOs' influence at City Hall was limited in several ways: (1) The unity of Puerto Rican voting was always precarious, as the ODP was run by middle-class Puerto Ricans spread across Miami-Dade County who had limited solidarity with their poorer Wynwood counterparts. (2) The Puerto Rican leadership became internally divided and increasingly accomodationist as it was integrated in the community development funding system. (3) New leaders did not share prior generation's vision. For example, in the 1980s and 90s, the Corpus Christi church rarely collaborated with the Puerto Rican CBOs. Collaborations occured only in circumstances in which Puerto Rican identity had been depoliticized (Feldman 2011).

Wynwood's community politics also reflect the city, state and national "entrepreneurial turn" of community development and shift toward "supply-side" economics since the 1970s (Eisinger 1988). In the 1980s Miami's CDC system was established through state financing mechanisms that emphasized small businesses loans with restrictive underwriting and set rules governing low-income housing tax credits that favored large development companies (Von Hoffman 2001). Miami-Dade County's administration of community development funding also followed an entrepreneurial approach by distributing almost three-fourths of available grant monies to for-profit businesses and leaving more than 40 CDCs to compete for the rest (Ibid, p. 66). With relatively little local foundation funding and a rigid state policy for affordable housing finance, few CDCs have been able to make a significant impact in neighborhoods without partnering with private real estate developers and maintaining a sharp focus on the bottom line at the expense of community organizing (Von Hoffman 2001; Lowe 2004).

Stakeholding and Participation in the Production of Gentrification

By the time gentrification was in full force in the early 2000s, Wynwood CBOs found themselves to be junior partners in governing arrangements with developers and city officials. In

the creation of the Midtown complex and the Art and Cafe Districts, the Wynwood NET office was an essential conduit for developers to shape the physical and social landscape of the neighborhood. NET linked outside investors to CBOs in the manufacture of legitimacy and support for gentrification. In the remainder of this paper we focus on how the manufacture of support for these projects was made possible by definitions of *who* could participate and *how.* This "stakeholderism" privileges property owners, delegitimizes renters and seeks to minimize conflict and negativity from participatory processes.

Stakes on the Urban Frontier

The gentrification of Wynwood through the creation of an arts "scene," with its monthly "art walks," was not led by artists or "incumbent upgraders" but rather by real estate developers and major art collectors. In the "Miami Model," large private art collections serve as "de facto museums" inside Wynwood warehouses, linking real estate to art consumption. By opening their private collections to the public and coordinating monthly events, Wynwood's early promoters were instrumental in drawing a growing number of arts consumers to the neighborhood (Feldman 2011). The rise of the Wynwood Art District confirms that "SoHos are now made, not born, in culture-based economic redevelopment strategies" (Zukin 1989, p. 202).

The primary investors behind the art district are David Lombardi and the late Tony Goldman who own more than 80 properties in Wynwood's warehouse district (Figure 3) and in 2003 united gallerists to form the Wynwood Art District Association (WADA). By 2011, WADA included more than 50 galleries and 100 arts-related businesses.

[Figure 3 about here]

Lombardi promoted the area to prospective investors by giving tours of the neighborhood's "collection of nondescript facades with cherry filling."[1] His tour included a stop in the NET office to introduce prospective investors to its administrator, Christine Morales. "He would bring them to the NET office," recalled Morales, "[to] show that there was engaged government and people who cared and who could help if you were an artist [since] artists aren't really into all this licensing and permitting stuff."

The help provided by NET office went beyond licensing and permitting. It supported two crucial processes that form a dialectic of "creative destruction" shaping the neighborhood: the creation of the "social scene" that supports the arts economy and the destruction of physical and social obstacles to neighborhood redevelopment. On the creative side, the city selectively enforcedcertain regulations and helped to create new ones. This facilitated a popular party scene that boosted sales in Lombardi's live/work projects (Feldman 2011). On the destructive side, the city made demolitions, homeless removal and other displacements extraordinarily easy.

> **Lombardi: When I was new here, [Morales] was invaluable at getting shit done. An example: I had a building where the tenants ... weren't paying me, they were selling drugs out of there, prostitution, and I did a quick and dirty analysis with my partner and said, you know, we should tear this fucking building down. We'll lose less money without them there. And this building was a big problem for the police. ... I called Morales [and] said, "I want to tear the building down." She goes, "When?" I said, "As soon as possible." She goes, "Let me get [Officer Gonzalez]."[2] The policeman comes over, he goes, "Lombardi, realistically, when?" I said, "A week from today." He said, "Great." I said, "I'm going to park a backhoe in front of the building tomorrow." I parked a backhoe, I told 'em [my tenants], "I'm tearing the building down. You're all going to have to fuckin' move."**
> **Feldman**: Did you have to do a formal eviction?

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1 This is Lombardi's marketing slogan.

2 Not his real name.

Lombardi: Nothing. Parked the backhoe. The demolition guy pulled a permit.[3] **Took him five, six days to get the permit. I called [Officer Gonzalez] and said, "I got the permit." He goes, "Great, I'll be there in 20 minutes." We knocked on every door, told them to pack their shit and get out, that the demolition was starting in three hours.**

This "creative destruction" made possible the production of Wynwood as a "clean canvas" (Del Campo 2006) of large blank warehouse walls to be "wrapped" in grafitti murals by world-famous artists. The neighborhood became a "frontier" with corresponding notions of who does and does not "have a stake." Homeless persons and renters are lowest in the stakeholder hierarchy. The NET administrator explained her rationale for clearing homeless encampments:

> Do you remember the lands of like, fiefdoms and manors and all of that stuff? You had the people that lived within the manor. But then you had the people who lived in the forest, right? And they lived in the forest because they weren't happy with the rules of the manor or the fief. There you have it. We ain't got no forests. But we have ignored spaces and that's where those people gravitate to. Ignored spaces, frontier spaces.

Here the imagery of the frontier individualizes the symptoms and causes of disorder, rationalizing interventions upon individuals. Noted above, rental housing is also a site of intervention: "I was taking buildings full of animals and I was evicting 'em all, cleaning it up, rebranding it, repositioning it, bringing in better tenants" (Lombardi). For Morales, the high rate of renter occupancy in the warehouse district is a key structural component of the frontier. "**You've got a big industrial part that doesn't have a lot of residents nitpicking about… you know, you've got a lot of renters, so you don't have a lot of people with the traditional stake in American civics." With renters relegated to the background, the frontier was a place for** "developer types and people who carry guns… **It was private sector, art, and government on the frontier," said Morales.**

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3 Records from the City of Miami Building Department confirm the permit and "total demolition" of the building late in 2004.

These pioneer characters and the mythical frontier have long been part of the gentrification narrative (Smith 1986; Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008). The arguments about disengaged publics without a stake in their community function as a justification for ignoring them and transforming the spaces they once used into something else.

Privileging Commercial and Financial Stakeholders

The Wynwood Art District Association (WADA) lobbied for the creation of the Wynwood Café District in 2008 to liberalize liquor license regulations (Bojnansky 2008) and relax parking requirements for new restaurants. The boundaries were gerrymandered around the main cluster of properties owned by Goldman, who submitted maps detailing plans for developing bars and restaurants (City of Miami 2008c). There was hardly opposition from residents or the long-standing Latin cafeteria owners who were unaware of the district ordinance that excluded them. Still, the area's city commissioner insisted that the Goldmans conduct "community outreach" to obtain the support of other neighborhood "stakeholders," saying:

> While I am approving this on the first reading, there is a serious fear [of residents] being pushed out. It's extremely important… when this item comes back to us, we should have those area residents [and small] businesses supporting this particular issue. (MCC 7/24/2008)

The Goldmans implemented a letter-writing campaign that delivered 32 letters of support to the Commission (MCC 7/26/2008). The letters were from eight art galleries/museums, four Puerto Rican CBOs, 16 business and property owners, and four residents. Most of the businesses were WADA members. Every letter focused on the lack of pedestrian traffic in the Art District area, most invoking Jane Jacobs' notion of "eyes on the street" to argue that a consumer crowd would reduce crime on the otherwise "desolate streets." The following paragraph appeared in six letters:

> The new influx of people will not only help my business, but also reduce crime. I truly believe that the desolate streets keep people away from the District. The new establishments will infuse life to an area that is on the verge of realizing its potential.

Three of the four resident letters are identical, typed templates signed by tenants wholive in the same rental property. Although these four letters hardly stand as evidence of resident support in a neighborhood of more than 5,500,[4] at the second hearing the district commissioner commended Goldman's outreach: "I'm glad that you guys are now making sure that the community, *the whole entire community*, is participating" (emphasis added).

The policy process that created the Café District exemplifies how a new community organization has inserted itself into the political decision-making that affects Wynwood. Both the Goldmans and WADA were recognized as stakeholders with the authority to make claims about what is good for the neighborhood and its residents. Moreover, WADA's organization occurred just as government services were contracting. During the last decade, the Wynwood NET office lost its public service aide, a key liaison between residents and government, and eventually was consolidated into the NET office of neighboring Allapattah. **The current NET administrator revealed that responding to WADA and covering the rest of his terrain is overwhelming, noting that "**I receive maybe three, four, five, six emails a week from [WADA]. So [we're] very close." He explained that WADA is better able to deal with government retrenchment than the lower-income residents of Wynwood.

> I think [by] removing the NET office from there, groups like WADA do not suffer because... there is communication by email, phone, and they're very aggressive. But definitely, Wynwood, you know, I'm seeing a great absence. Definitely there is a lack of enthusiasm... not by the 'cultural part' [art district] of Wynwood but rather the residents that live there.

4 According to the 2010 U.S. Census data for the two tracts that comprise Wynwood.

There is a widespread perception that Wynwood's residents are disengaged from government processes. Increasingly, organizations like WADA step into the space provided by such disengagement by providing private street cleaning, for example, creating a "win-win situation," since "the city is cleaner" and city agencies "have more control." according to the NET administrator. In exchange for its assistance in securing the neighborhood, WADA is increasingly accepted and supported as one of Wynwood's CBOs.

The scene at a May 2011 Town Hall meeting at the neighborhood park revealed the shifting balance of power. The city mayor called the meeting to hear from Wynwood residents, but the most vocal participants were realtors, developers and gallerists. At the start of the meeting, the mayor summarized in English and Spanish how his staff had responded to residents' complaints and solved some of their problems, such as trash in the streets, drug sales and downed power lines. During these exchanges , the other participants grew restless and began talking loudly among themselves, causing the Mayor to physically move closer to the residents until he took a seat in the row in front of them. For the remainder of the meeting, commercial property owners raised their own concerns and even proposed to create a special taxing district to improve infrastructure and support the expansion of restaurants. When the discussion turned to crime prevention and the area police commander asserted that "policing the area is difficult to do with the current resources," one commercial realtor said, "You got to understand that because of the Arts District, taxes have gone up, values are up, so we're entitled to extra policing." Then Goldman sought a consensus: "We cannot expect the city to do it all. We're proposing to be partners in watching out for crime. If you find $100,000 in the next city budget, we have property owners [WADA] who will match it. We will supplement that with eyes on the street."

The meeting was a microcosm of the changes in Wynwood. Spaces traditionally used by residents, such as the park, increasingly become venues where art district stakeholders can make claims to entitlements, such as increased police protection. Such claims ignore the capital investment required to raise property values; yet, investment and property value impacts are cited

as the rationale for increased police protection. This logic slips into the implicit argument that poor people, lacking the capacity to raise property values, may not be entitled to increased protection. While these local political shifts may be characteristic of gentrification generally (e.g., Ghertner 2011; Martin 2007), we argue that Miami's hyper-entrepreneurial context has historically shaped community development policy and practice to privilege financial stakeholders. This uneven structuring of "stakeholding" makes it easier for political and financial elites to assert that the "whole entire community" has been consulted when in fact most long-time residents are excluded.

Including us Out of the Making of Midtown Miami

As developers and gallerists were creating WADA, the City of Miami was completing a planning process for the parcel of land that would become the Midtown shopping and residential complex, which now includes 34-story residential towers and four-story shopping centers mixed with ground-level retail. Total construction costs were estimated at $1.2 billion including $170 million in public subsidies.

Wynwood's Puerto Rican CBOs that backed Midtown benefited from lucrative relationships with the developers in exchange for the manufacture of neighborhood support for the project. In 2003, a key initial supporter was William Lopez, the Puerto Rican Neighborhood Resources Officer (NRO) for the Wynwood NET, who became the Midtown developer's community outreach program by generating support from Wynwood's CBOs. Soon after the Midtown developers purchased the land, they visited the NET office and told Lopez of their plans. He suggested they incorporate "crime prevention through environmental design" and bragged of his extensive neighborhood connections. Lopez recalls that the Midtown developers told him, "'You know, you're really good with the community… We need a guy like you...' So next thing I know, I'm having meetings, and I went out and I got them some real positive press" (Ovalle 2003, 2004a; Swartz 2004). The developers then doled out hundreds of thousands of

dollars to neighborhood organizations at Lopez's suggestion. Midtown later hired him as its security chief. The crucial piece of Lopez's community outreach came in April 2004, when he organized busloads of elderly residents to appear at city and county votes in support of the Midtown financing package. After the developers broke their verbal promises of local hiring and affordable housing development, Lopez reflected: "Who knows, maybe the developers did set me up for this. But truly in my heart, I believed we were doing the right thing." By this point the damage was done not only in terms of a lost opportunity to leverage a major redevelopment project into benefits for area residents but also because the integration of the ad-hoc arrangement of seniors, NET and Puerto Rican CBOs excluded and delegitimized negativity and conflict.

Pa'lante: Thinking Positive and Minimizing Conflict

When Midtown's construction began, residents and community organizations complained about developers' broken promises, the project's unaffordable condos, its impacts on property taxes and rents, and a rising tide of evictions and speculative investment in the area surrounding the complex (Menendez 2005; Nahed 2005; Vasquez 2005; Viglucci and Haggman 2005; Sohn 2006a, 2006b; Morales 2008a). Opponents seized on Lopez's entanglement with the developers, accusing him and complicit city agencies of manipulating neighborhood support for private real-estate development.

The Wynwood Historic Homeowner Association (WHHA) filed complaints with Miami-Dade County's Community Action Agency (CAA), accusing its staff of misinforming area seniors about the costs and benefits of Midtown (Sohn 2006). The WHHA activists also sought to change the CAA by joining and becoming leaders of its resident advisory board. In 2006, the WHHA sought to establish a subcommittee on the advisory board to investigate the agency's conduct and compel it to adopt citizen participation requirements. Eventually, the County granted both requests and replaced a key organizer position in Wynwood (Sohn 2006b). One WHHA leader, America Medina, who was elected board chairwoman in 2008, said that her activism on

behalf of seniors had resulted in elected officials “starting to give us attention, respect [and] more notice.”

But Medina was not reelected to the board two years later.CAA organizer Maggie Nieto complained about how the “negativity” at the advisory board meetings had deterred other institutional leaders from attending, including new NROs and NET administrators. “When I came to CAA [in 2010]” recalled Nieto, “there was a lot of static in the room, accusing people personally, ’You didn’t do this and you didn’t do that,’ and that kind of atmosphere I think is totally unacceptable, that’s not a professional way to handle yourself.” Nieto was not the only person who wished to eliminate negativity. A local park manager who also attended CAA meetings disapproved of the WHHA because “they are very negative. Most of the people that sit on the board don’t even live in Wynwood. They’re ex-residents.” Nieto also deligitimized Medina because she no longer lived in Wynwood, although she worked there.[5] “How are you going to be a chair when you are not even a resident, you are not a stakeholder?” A key feature of attempts to enforce a positive, consensus-oriented approach was to discredit “negative” views as belonging to outsiders who do not have a stake in the neighborhood.

Nieto took steps to bring in new advisory board members, telling her CAA supervisor, “I would like to see some new people [with] new ideas and some new perspectives and have good people on the board.” Prior to the 2010 elections, she amended the board’s bylaws to require members to be area “stakeholders,” meaning those who live, work or own a business in Wynwood. The subsequent election resulted in a shake-up of the advisory board leadership, which now lacked affiliation with the WHHA. “The dynamics were changing in a positive manner, and people liked that,” said Nieto. The newly elected chair -- a former Wynwood police officer who, like Medina, lived outside the neighborhood -- proposed a slogan for her tenure: *echando pa'lante,* or moving forward.

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5 She lived in an adjacent neighborhood in the early 1990s but moved out of Miami in 2006.

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It is not sufficient to say that residents, community organizations or activists are overwhelmed by the power of real-estate investors and the governing arrangements they work through. Since the 1970s, the “citizen” and the “community” have become increasingly responsible for managing their space and place in the world, and the proliferation of programs to advance this community-based responsibility have transformed local politics (Chaskin and Abunimah 1999; DeFilippis 2004). Governing *must* happen in the neighborhood even though the resources for implementing policy decisions are not located there. This leads to the situation noted above in which “residents’ rights to the city become based more on what they do as active citizens than who they are as urban neighborhood residents” and “as residency status loses significance with increased attention placed on civic participation... non-resident stakeholders... gain legitimacy in their claim to place-making rights” (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003, p. 132). The flexible and shifting parameters of *who* can participate and *how* can be understood as “a shift in the meaning of citizenship from being primarily guaranteed as a status (although a status dependent on certain performative acts) to being primarily guaranteed as a performative act (although still only accessible to those of a certain status)” (Ibid, p. 127).

The growing legitimacy of non-resident stakeholders is evidenced by the increasing malleability of the very definition of stakeholder. The creation of the Cafe District reveals the growing importance of investors and commercial property owners as stakeholders. Their ascendance was first made possible by the historic disinvestment that underpinned the frontier narrative. The existing residential base was rhetorically minimized and politically marginalized as “renters without a stake” or even as criminals undeserving of a place in the future of Wynwood. Although it was plain that the “whole entire community” did not participate in the policymaking process, as the District Commissioner had insisted, the contradictory endorsement

of this process as inclusive was made possible by the devolution of planning to WADA and its constituent network.

The manufacture of residents' participation in urban development governance exacerbates inequalities. Not only does it facilitate gentrification, . but it also it legitimizes rules of engagement that privilege commercial and financial stakeholders and disparages the "negativity" and conflict associated with feelings of betrayal and the loss of place-based community. "Stakeholding" is made to be an affirmative performance. These stakeholder definitions are granted legitimacy because they are situated within public agencies charged with facilitating citizen participation, such as the NET offices and the Community Action Agency. The challenge mounted by the WHHA to the obscure approval process for Midtown was rendered insignificant because it took place in the context of state-sanctioned norms of participation that discouraged if not prohibited negativity.

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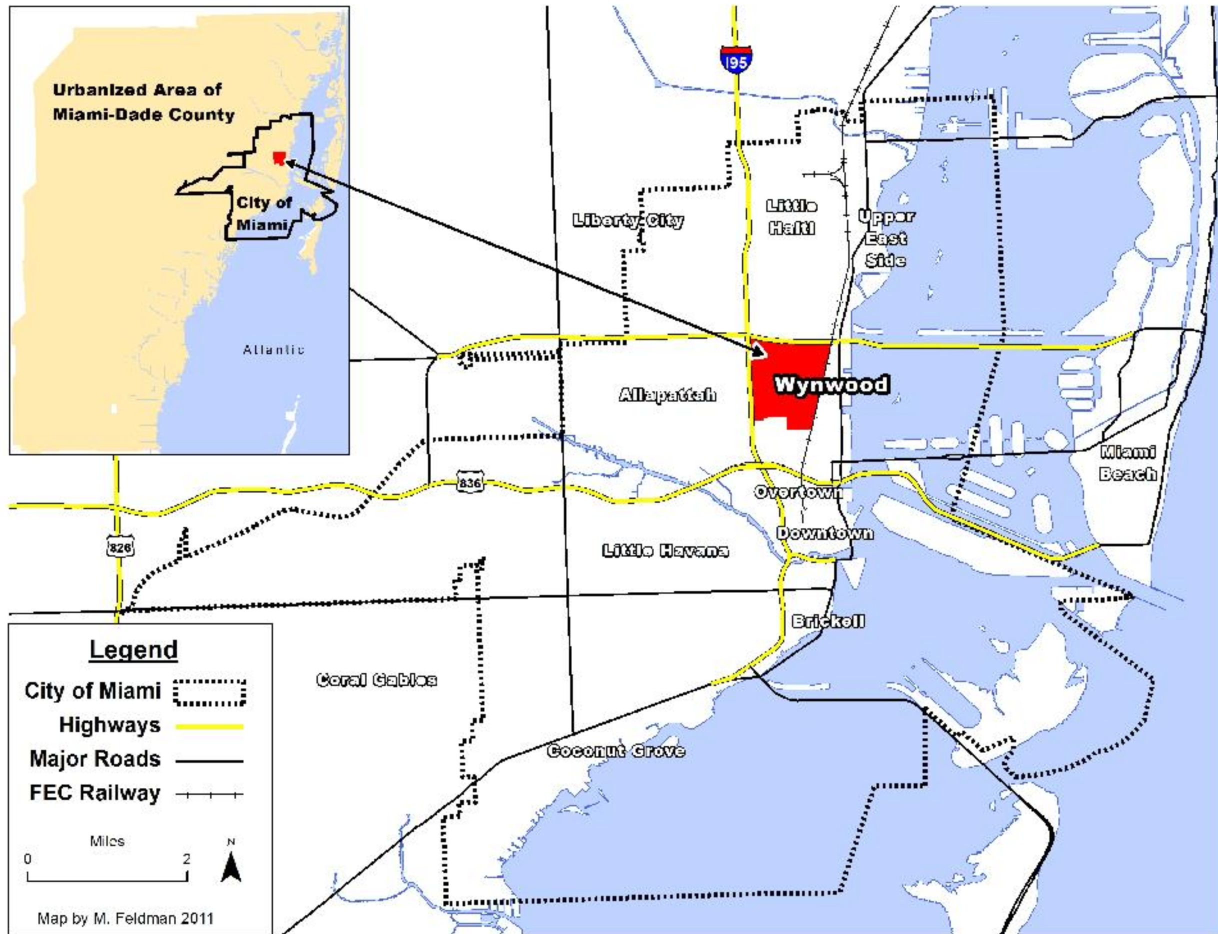

Figure 1

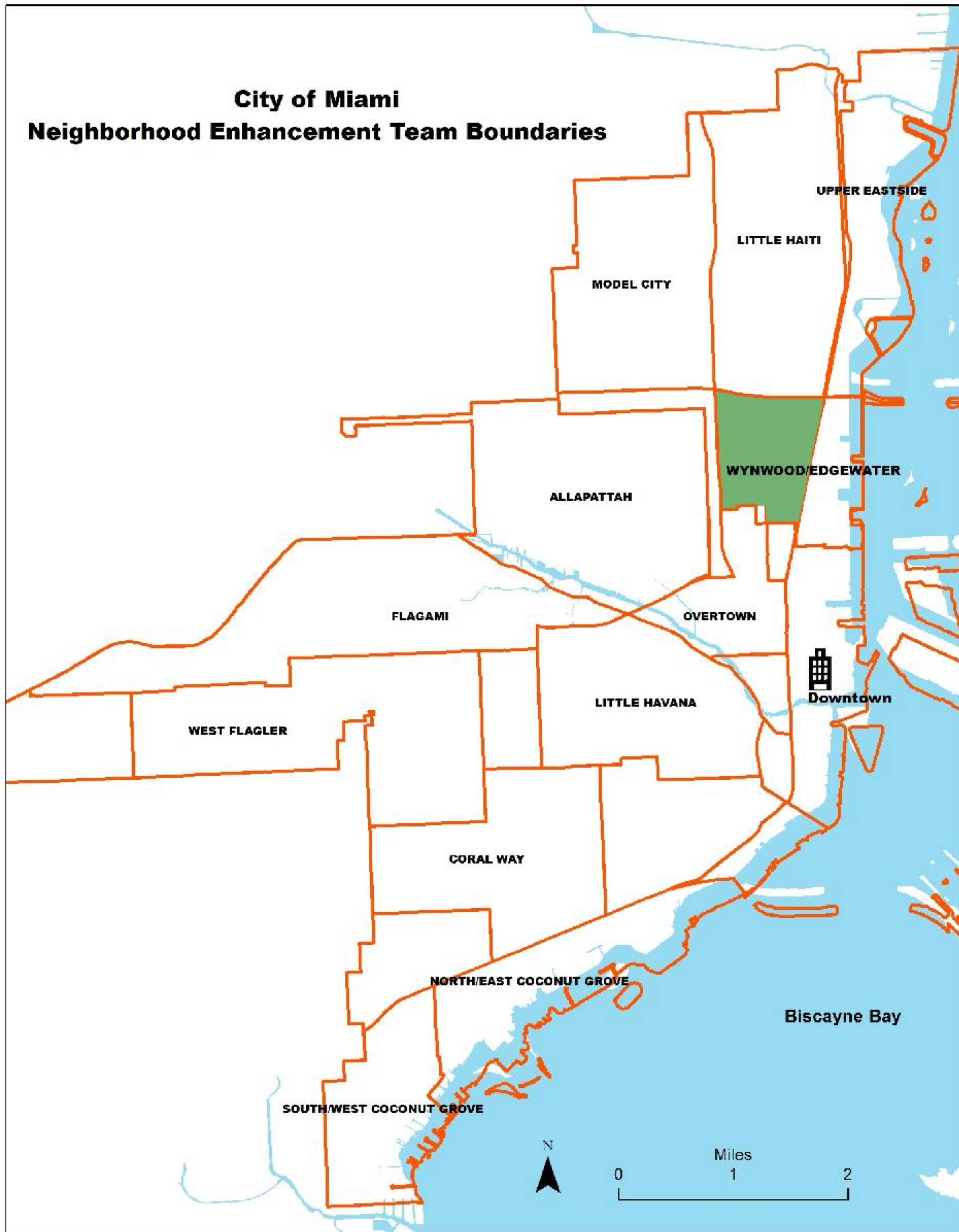

Figure 2

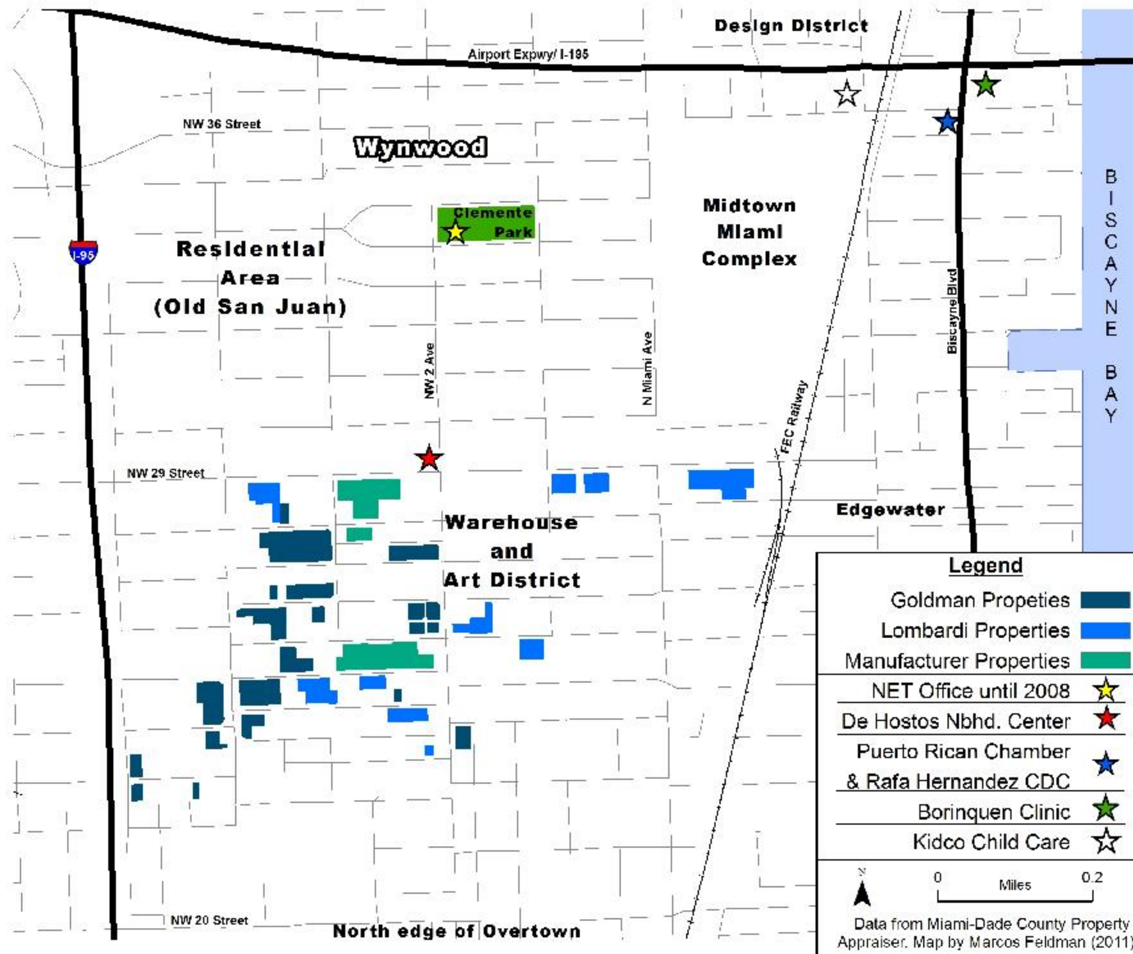

Figure 3