

Three new directors join Downtown Development Authority

BY LAUREN LAMB

Miami's Downtown Development Authority has added three members to its board of directors. Melissa Tapanes Llahues, Jarred Diamond and Arva Suzanne Graham-Gibson were sworn in Sept. 17.

Ms. Tapanes, a shareholder and partner at Bercow Radell Fernandez Larkin and Tapanes land use and environmental law firm, said "it's a privilege to be on the board because I study urbanism and can affect change."

Ms. Tapanes has been working at the law firm since 2002 and began practicing zoning law in 2003. From 2003 until 2007, their focus was on making downtown Miami more residential, until the recession.

"When the recession happened, these beautiful new buildings just constructed, were empty. People questioned making downtown a residential-mix a mistake," Ms. Tapanes said. "But after the great recession, we saw it flourish. It



Melissa Tapanes Llahues, Arva Suzanne Graham-Gibson and Jarred Diamond being sworn in to Board.

was a place to work, live and thrive."

Ms. Tapanes made it clear that she sees downtown Miami's future as promising because it is

attracting businesses and residents from all over the country.

"But it's not perfect," she said. "The DDA wants to make it the top place to work and live in the

country."

The DDA can do this because it has a multitude of perspectives for the future of downtown on the same board, according to Ms.

Tapanes. "We cover real-world issues like potholes and homelessness all the way to discussing how to innovate downtown and be the hub of economic development. It unifies many different perspectives in one room. It's unlike any other organization I've seen. That's why I'm so proud to be appointed."

Jarred Diamond, the second new member, is executive vice president of the Miami Heat and general manager of FTX Arena. American Airlines used to control the naming rights to FTX Arena in a deal with the owner, Miami-Dade County, but FTX signed a 19-year deal with the county in June.

"The signs have just been put up and we are looking forward to that partnership," Mr. Diamond said.

As for his seat on the development authority board, "I'm looking forward to diving in with the talented group of people," he said. "We are a major anchor downtown, so public transportation is important."

Mr. Diamond has been in Miami for 25 years. "This area is growing. We need leaders to focus on it. There's more businesses, residents and organizations than there were five years ago, and you need people like the DDA to oversee and support that."

Arva Suzanne Graham-Gibson is a third-generation Miamian, with her grandfather Ernest "Cap" Graham moving here in 1920. Her father, Bob Graham, is a former Florida governor and US senator. The Arva G. Historical Consulting company with which she is active focuses on assisting businesses when they want to creatively share their history.

"We help businesses when they want to have their story told and a curation of their historical details. We help share the texture in the background of their story," Ms. Graham-Gibson said.

She began going to the DDA meetings that were open to the public about seven years ago. "I started as a volunteer, making time for the DDA meetings. I went to all of them and left with so much knowledge about the area," she said. "There's so much going on with the DDA, it's an incredible opportunity to have a front-row seat to see what's shaping tomorrow."

She was involved in planning Miami's 125th Birthday LED Light Show that took place downtown. "I added in all of the rich history texture and the historical facts about the founders," Ms. Graham-Gibson said.

The LED show began with a photo and facts about Julia Tuttle, considered to be Miami's founding mother.

"I'm so honored for this position and beyond thrilled to give back to the community, so much for myself and my family," Ms. Graham-Gibson said. "I'm proud to be a Miamian and proud to be a new part of the DDA, which is doing everything from repaving streets to working on high rises."

All three new members share enthusiasm for the potential of what downtown Miami holds and say they are excited to be an influence on the decisions the DDA makes for downtown's future.