

Last-minute package would change downtown leader's post

By CATHERINE LACKNER

John Elizabeth Alemán has been named incoming executive director of Miami's Downtown Development Authority when Alyce Robertson, the current executive director, leaves at year's end.

Ms. Alemán, a Miami Beach commissioner with an impressive background in the private sector, was chosen from among 400 applicants, said Philippe Houdard, authority board member and founder of Pipeline Workspaces and Skybank Financial. He was involved in the selection committee.



John Aleman

"The search process was exhaustive and exhausting," he said. "What has emerged is a candidate we feel strongly about, and we're very fortunate to have her."

"I've never spent so much time on anything, either in my business or personal life," said authority board member Nitin Motwani, managing principal of Miami Worldcenter and search committee member. "This organization is going to continue to do great things."

The group researched executive salaries in similar positions



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in Austin, Boulder, Nashville and Atlanta, and found the salaries ranged from \$250,000 to \$350,000, he said. Ms. Alemán will earn \$198,000 with a 17.5% bonus each year.

"I didn't know her except as a commissioner from across the bay," said Ken Russell, authority chair and Miami commissioner. "But when we reviewed her qualifications, we all looked at each other. No one had any doubt. It ended up not being a hard decision."



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Philippe Houdard

"I cannot think of a day when I don't hear about Miami Beach getting what it needs from the county," said Eileen Higgins, authority board member and county commissioner whose district includes downtown. "She will bring the kinds of solutions we need for downtown. I'm thrilled."

"I know John Alemán and I've seen her in action," said Neisen Kasdin, authority vice chair and office-managing partner of the Akerman law firm. "She's always going for a goal, and she's some-



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Alicia Cervera

one who can tell people what they need to hear. We're very fortunate to find her."

Ms. Robertson will receive her present \$198,000 salary for one year and act as a consultant on an as-needed basis during that time.

While Ms. Higgins questioned the need for a one-year transition, Mr. Russell defended it and the separation package. "We have to be responsible in what we do. I'm 100% willing to stand behind this package. Alyce is worth it."

"Alyce has given more than 10

years to this organization, and she is due a level of compensation," Mr. Motwani said. Other board members praised Ms. Robertson's long tenure at the authority and her dedication.

Several board members complained they received the agenda package, with details on Ms. Alemán's selection and Ms. Robertson's compensation package, only the night before the meeting.

"This is completely unacceptable; I feel I'm being broad-sided," said authority board member Alicia Cervera, managing partner of Cervera Real Estate. "No level of this feels right to me. It's incredibly upsetting."

She suggested the hiring decision be tabled until board members could familiarize themselves with the committee's recommendation.

"To the extent possible, we tried to update the board," Mr. Houdard said. "Waiting comes with risk, because she will receive numerous offers, some more substantial than ours. It's a risk we don't want to take. We won't have another chance."

"I agree with Alicia," said authority board member Suzanne Amaducci-Adams, a partner in the real estate practice group at the Bilzin Sumberg firm. "But I have to trust my fellow board members." She voted in favor of Ms. Alemán's hiring.