

Dining barricades eyesores, downtown team says

BY LAUREN LAMB

Orange, water-filled barricades have stood outside of downtown Miami restaurants since May 2020 to create space for outdoor dining during the pandemic. At the Downtown Development Authority meeting Jan. 28, the barricades were branded eyesores.

The City of Miami Department of Public Works worked with Miami Parking Authority on a program to assist restaurants in outdoor dining. Barricades were placed on parking spaces to give restaurants room for tables and chairs.

"We had 21 restaurants using them and 143 barricades being rented," said Neal Schafers, planning, transportation and resiliency senior manager at the development authority, called the DDA. "Many were donated from Maurette Construction for free, but then other restaurants began applying. There are only so many barricades to stretch from downtown to Coconut Grove and to Wynwood," he said. More barricades were rented from RoadSafe Traffic Systems.

"It has been great and very successful," he said. "There are DDA umbrellas, tables and chairs. A lot of restaurants really gussied up their outdoor areas with plants and lighting."

While the water-filled, orange plastic barriers are giving restaurants space, many board members at the meeting agreed "they are hideous." The DDA said there are options for temporary barricades that are attractive, although the plastic barricades have wraps with the restaurants' names as some décor.

"We have to figure out what the Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works allows," said Mr. Schafers. There are options of concrete barriers, but to continue renting the water-filled barricades, \$4,300 is needed per month.

The question of whether this is a permanent solution for downtown dining then came up. If the barricades are there to stay, authority board members agreed they should match downtown's aesthetics while still protecting outdoor customers from traffic.

Barnaby Min, a deputy city attorney, told the board that the program is already permanent. The city commission passed it in November.

If the program is permanent, how it should be implemented is still "up in the air," according to the board. The Miami Parking Authority (MPA) controls the program.

The DDA would be paying for the barricades that are rented monthly if the park-

ing authority helps them move forward, the board was told. Implementation of a permanent program has not been done, like when renting the sidewalk through the city. It's typically in Miami-Dade County Public Works, but since these are parking spaces, it's been extended to the parking authority and the paperwork has yet to be done, the board was told.

According to Zerry Ihekwa, deputy city manager, when the temporary rental space plan was introduced, permit fees were waived to enable restaurants to start using the space immediately.

"We're no longer under those orders," said Mr. Ihekwa. "Everyone has to come back and turn in insurance paperwork and pay permit fees. This is why we are coordinating with MPA to see at what extent we are willing to waive these fees."

It was suggested that a full briefing at the next board meeting give the DDA, the city and the parking authority a chance to develop a cohesive plan. The board was told it's an opportunity to beautify after two years of orange barriers with the help of Eulois Cleckley, director and CEO of Miami-Dade County Transportation of Public Works, to help design a pedestrian-friendly outdoor space.