

Miami poised to name new director of city downtown development arm

BY GABRIEL POBLETE

After the Downtown Development Authority's national search for its new director culminated with the selected candidate resigning from the position, the authority is moving forward with the person who has been leading the authority during the transition.

City commissioners are set to vote today (4/9) on the appointment of Christina Crespi as executive director of the Downtown Development Authority. The authority's directors passed a resolution in February approving the appointment.

Ms. Crespi has been acting executive director for the better part of two years, she said. Alyce Robertson, the longtime executive director, officially stepped down at the end of last year.

The authority is funded by a special tax levied within its boundaries that encompass most of downtown Miami and Brickell as well as an area north of I-395. The authority had a budget of \$12 million last fiscal year.

Ms. Crespi has been with the authority for over five years. She said that during her time at the authority, she helped with the expansion of Southside Elementary School, which will include a middle school facility, and to obtain funds from the city and county for the Flagler Street reconstruction, as well as working to address downtown's homeless situation.

Prior to joining the authority's staff, she was with the county for about 10 years, including working as an assistant to former Miami-Dade Deputy Mayor Alina Hudak,



Christina Crespi has supporters.

who was the first woman to serve as county manager.

Before Ms. Crespi's selection, the board had voted to appoint John Elizabeth Alemán, former Miami Beach commissioner, as executive director, after the authority engaged in a national search process that included hundreds of interviews. However, Mrs. Alemán resigned before being formally appointed by the city commission, citing the tumult in city hall.

In a statement to Miami Today, Philippe Houdard, DDA board member and co-founder of Pipeline Workspaces, said he had opposed Ms. Crespi's nomination. Mr. Houdard was the sole no vote among the agency's board of directors.

"We had a difference of opinion regarding the selection for the new executive director. I opposed the nomination, I felt it necessary to make my voice heard, that's democracy," he said. "The decision was made, it's behind us now and I've given Christina my full support. The goal is to help Christina be successful so that the DDA can get its work done, and I've been pleased to see

how she's been driving the agency so actively, especially during this time of crisis."

Mrs. Crespi's yearly salary will be \$185,000, and benefits include medical, dental, vision and life insurance, as well as car and cell phone allowances.

Commissioner Manolo Reyes, who chairs the agency, said Ms. Crespi deserves to be promoted. He said she has been helpful in implementing the plans he has for the area.

"I didn't see any need to start a national search to bring someone that doesn't know the community, that doesn't know the problems that affect us, and will have to be learning on the job," he said. "I am very pragmatic and I believe in promoting from within."

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the authority has carried out several initiatives to help mitigate the effects of the virus.

To help restaurants losing dollars to third-party delivery services, the authority launched the Go Local, Go Direct campaign, encouraging consumers to order straight from restaurants. The authority also established a small business task force to help small businesses navigate the available relief options.

To provide entertainment to downtown residents, the authority created DWNTWN Vibes, a virtual Friday happy hour series that features a DJ livestream, and a virtual book club is to be rolled out later this month.

"I feel very humbled and grateful to serve my community during the crisis and to help move Miami forward," Ms. Crespi said.