

DDA: Businesses still want to move to downtown Miami despite Covid-19

By [Ashley Portero](#) – Reporter, South Florida Business Journal

New businesses are still interested in setting up shop in downtown Miami, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, said Miami Downtown Development Authority Executive Director [Christina Crespi](#).

Financial companies, in particular, are still contacting the DDA with questions about relocating to Miami's urban core, even though the Miami-Dade County leads the state in virus cases.

The Miami DDA has been busy assisting local businesses with reopening preparations after months of closures. Retail shops, hair salons and office buildings were officially permitted to open on May 20, followed by restaurants on May 27.

Those openings were met with a bumpy start.

According to Crespi, more than a dozen businesses in the area **were vandalized over the weekend** after protests in response to the death of George Floyd. The unarmed black man died after a white Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, sparking a wave of nationwide demonstrations.

Crespi discussed the state of downtown businesses and how the DDA aims to assist their recovery in an interview with the *Business Journal*.

How have business closures affected downtown businesses? We're seeing businesses open up slowly, but they are coming back. We're working really hard to support restaurants in particular, since they have to operate at 50% capacity. Our board, for example, passed a resolution to close sidewalks and a lane of parking to give restaurants additional outdoor space. The goal is the extra space will help them reach 100% capacity, while implementing social distancing. But none of this has been easy for downtown businesses.

Are you expecting any permanent closures? I hope we won't see more empty storefronts. We don't have a crystal ball, but I know a lot of local businesses are being innovative with their reopenings and we'll support them as much as we can.

Some downtown businesses were vandalized over the weekend after recent protests. How are they recovering? There were about 20 businesses affected by

vandalism, like smashed windows. Some restaurants, jewelry stores, and an eyewear retailer had their storefronts damaged -- all small businesses. It was really unfortunate, especially given that some of them had just been allowed to open up again. My team spoke to the business owners, who are obviously devastated. We're lending an ear and assisting where we can to help them figure out their next move. We're hoping to set up a program that would offer \$2,500 grants to business owners who had their storefronts damaged. Another idea is a pro-bono legal assistance program to help businesses navigate processes like filing insurance claims, if need be.

Do you expect Covid-19 will make it more difficult to bring new businesses to the area? Our business development team is still getting an influx of inquiries from finance companies in New York and Chicago that are **interested in moving to Miami**. We had 13 meetings with companies just last week. We're getting a lot of questions about quality of life down here. The pandemic is making some companies reevaluate how to do business, and some are considering a greater shift to remote work. That makes it easier for them to set up offices outside of places like New York in a lower-cost metro like Miami.

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