

Miami OKs \$24M Flagler Street redo. It stalled before — will it be finished this time?

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An architectural rendering shows how a remade Flagler Street in downtown Miami will look under a blueprint backed by entrepreneur and arts mogul Moishe Mana. Mana has bought some 45 properties along or abutting Flagler.

ZYSOVICH ARCHITECTS

The long discussed, once begun but never finished makeover of Flagler Street in downtown Miami will get going again after city commissioners unanimously approved the plan for a \$24.4 million beautification plan.

Work is expected to soon begin on the makeover of Flagler from Biscayne Boulevard to Northwest

First Avenue. The plan, drawn up by Zyscovich Architects and paid for by landowner Moishe Mana, has the backing of a coalition of local merchants and the development authority. Thursday's approval allows the chosen contractor, Lanzo Construction, to begin work.

The need for revamping Flagler Street has been discussed since 2011. In 2016, construction began with another contractor, FH Paschen, but it fell months behind schedule, eroding property owners' confidence. In April 2017, the city [fired the company](#).

Several business owners spoke in support of the elaborate plan to build a curbside road that can be closed for street festivals and covered in pavers instead of asphalt — a popular vision that Mana commissioned and has broad support in the district. The design is meant to be appealing to pedestrians, a point emphasized by business owners who believe the streetscape will attract new merchants and customers in a growing downtown neighborhood.

“The street could be closed and we could manage it so it can be a traditional downtown street, and when we have events, we can close it to cars,” said Terrell Fritz, executive director of the Flagler District Business Improvement District.

The project includes wide sidewalks with planters and improved lighting, and much-needed infrastructure upgrades such as improved drainage.



FDOT officials have declared the rebuilding work to West Flagler Street “substantially complete.” Now, Business owners that survive the construction hope to bounce back.

By [Pedro Portal](#)

Gary Ressler, the principal of the Tilia family of companies that is planning a brewpub concept on Flagler, described the project as a keystone to the future growth of a commercial downtown district.

“Our vision is for a comprehensive revitalization and rebirth of downtown Miami,” he said.



A rendering displaying entrepreneur Moische Mana's vision for a revitalized Flagler Street in downtown Miami.
COURTESY MOISCHE MANA

Downtown boosters were elated to see the unanimous approval for a streetscape that stalled out after construction delays — but the new contractor has encountered its own delays in another Miami-Dade city.

A task force of owners selected Lanzo Construction from a statewide pool of pre-qualified contractors. Lanzo recently faced criticism for its infrastructure work in Miami Beach. In March, Beach commissioners noted issues with the contractor while giving the administration permission to quickly hire additional contractors if Lanzo doesn't meet its deadlines.

“Each of the projects has been under construction for an extended period of time. Certain deficiencies and/or incomplete scope of work exists in each of the projects,” reads a March 13 memo by Beach administrators. “The city administration has been actively working these issues with Lanzo and has established certain obligations and deadlines.”

David Martinez, director of Miami Beach's office of capital improvement, told the city's Sustainability and Resiliency Committee in a February meeting that two projects the city had partnered with Lanzo

on weren't up to par.

"We're having some significant performance issues with this contractor," he said, describing a damaged pump station and "very, very premature" road cracking in the Venetian Islands.

Since that February meeting, Martinez said, a cracked pump station on Palm Island was repaired at no extra cost to the city and is fully functioning. As for prematurely cracked roads on the Venetian Islands, he said the city and Lanzo are working toward a solution, although Miami Beach is still withholding money from Lanzo.

"They have worked through these issues," he said. "Things are moving in the right direction."

Miami Beach's eventual decision — after much back-and-forth between the Beach and contractors — is that Lanzo will hire its own geotechnical advisers to come up with the best solution to have a new road last 20 years.

"They can own their own design and be responsible for it," Martinez said.

Bob Beaty, senior project manager for Lanzo, told the Miami Herald his company faced "design issues" in Miami Beach that they are working through. He acknowledged that the Flagler project has some challenges with underground utility lines that do not appear in city blueprints, though he said they are nothing Lanzo couldn't solve.

"It's like spaghetti down there," he said. "It's going to be a tough job, but it's a good job for Lanzo."

The underground issues are what stymied the last contractor. Fritz said he was not concerned about the Beach memo.

"My sense is that we would only be concerned if the issue hasn't been resolved," Fritz said about the Beach projects, "and then only as a point of information."

The downtown business owners who helped select Lanzo, Fritz said, were impressed with Lanzo's "focus on problem-solving."