

Access Analysis and Free Money

Written by Erik Bojnansky, BT Senior Writer
February 2018

Did a developer just talk North Miami Beach into doing his work for him?



he lobbying team for the City of North Miami Beach is pursuing up to \$5 million from the State of Florida for a traffic analysis that could eventually enable the development of high-rises at Intracoastal Mall.

The disclosure was made January 17 at 1:30 a.m., toward the end of a very long North Miami Beach City Commission meeting, although high-rises weren't mentioned. Instead Mayor George Vallejo portrayed the move as an opportunity to obtain "free money" from the state so that it could study a road reconfiguration project that could improve safety and traffic flow at NE 35th Avenue and 163rd Street.

NE 35th Avenue is the only way in or out of Eastern Shores, an affluent neighborhood of single-family homes and low-rise apartments near the Intracoastal Waterway and facing Lake Maule. The six-lane street is also a means of ingress and egress for the Intracoastal Mall, a 26-acre retail complex that will be redeveloped into a 2000-unit residential community with retail and office space by Dezer Development at some point in the future.

The status of that request for \$5 million in "free" money was unclear at deadline. Kelly Mallette, an associate of lobbyist Ron Book, did not return texts or phone calls for comment. City manager Ana Garcia declined to comment to the *BT*, but in an e-mail to an Eastern Shores activist, she indicated that the request is "in a preliminary state as the legislative session just started."

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Garcia's January 19 e-mail to Chuck Asarnow, legislative liaison to the Eastern Shores Homeowners Association, said, "As I have stated time and time again, if the City of North Miami Beach is fortunate enough to receive funding to address the current challenges of 35th Avenue, we the city will lead the way in the study and the plan via public engagement [and] working with our professional city team and consultants that are subject matter experts."

In an e-mail to the *BT*, Gil Dezer, president of Dezer Development, says he's trying to create a road plan that would accommodate the needs of both his property and Eastern Shores. "If we don't help there, we all get hurt," Dezer states.

Dezer Intracoastal LLC, owned by Gil's parents, bought the 234,000-square-foot Intracoastal Mall in December 2013 for \$63.5 million. Back then the city's zoning allowed 717 residential units in buildings less than 15 stories tall. But two years later, the city changed the zoning of the land, allowing 2000 residential units and 2.5 million square feet of nonresidential commercial space in buildings up to 495 feet tall, about 47 stories.

Last spring a publicist for Dezer Development indicated that it would break ground on this new development project by 2021. Fernando Pettineroli, a listing agent for Dezer Platinum Realty, even announced that Dezer would be creating a community catering to affluent young adults that would include virtual reality rooms, a giant "wine cave," and a high-speed passenger ferry. (See "Welcome to Millennialville!" May 2017.)

Dezer now insists that he has no plans or timeframe "at this point" to start construction. "We are continually investing in the mall, replacing stores with new tenants as soon as the space comes available," he states.

Before Dezer can build, NMB's zoning code requires that roads be built to accommodate the extra traffic the new development would bring.

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