

# Parks & Recreation

JUNE 2012  
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## Masters OF THE Plan

Miami-Dade's Bold  
Blueprint for the Future

Miami-Dade  
County Mayor  
Carlos A. Gimenez

Platte River Restoration | Economic Recovery | Artificial Sports Turf



# Parks & Recreation

MAGAZINE

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Parks and  
Recreation Month  
poster inside!  
SEE PAGE 59

## COVER STORY

### 36 Masters of the Plan

In Miami-Dade County's innovative 50-year master plan, all public spaces are parks.

Phil Hayward

## FEATURE

### 42 A Watershed Partnership

Communities along the South Platte River near Denver band together to conserve the river corridor and provide a steady flow of interconnected recreational trails.

Elizabeth Beard

#### ON THE COVER:

Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos A. Gimenez by Peter Dooling/Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Space

# Contents

## NRPA'S MISSION:

"To advance parks, recreation, and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people."

## DEPARTMENTS

**8 AGENCY SPOTLIGHT**  
San Diego County, California

**11 KIOSK: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, AND HOW—AROUND THE PARKS**

Economic Recovery Predictions, Sprite Spark Parks, California State Park Update, Quarry Redevelopment into Parks

**49 NRPA IN ACTION: NEWS OF THE ASSOCIATION**

Park & Recreation Month 2012, PRORAGIS Waterfront Access Data, New Premiere Agency Membership Package, Volunteer

Spotlight – Tom Venniro, Municipal Golf Institute, National Recreation Foundation Grants Review

**56 OPERATIONS**

Investing Wisely in Artificial Turf Fields

**59 PRODUCT ROUNDUP**

New products and services for parks and recreation agencies

**63 AD INDEX**

**64 PARK BENCH**

Cumberland Park, Nashville, Tennessee

## COLUMNS

**4 PERSPECTIVES**

What Inspires You?

Barbara Tulipane

**6 EDITOR'S LETTER**

Plan on It

Phil Hayward

**23 ADVOCACY UPDATE**

Urban Directors and Advocacy

Joel Pannell

**25 LAW REVIEW**

No Liability for Obvious

Playground Danger

James C. Kozlowski, J.D., Ph.D.

**31 PUBLIC HEALTH**

Walk this Way

Maggie Cooper

**33 FUTURE LEADERS**

Members Matter

Kate Schneider

**BONUS CONTENT**

For additional articles and information from this issue, please visit

[www.parksandrecreation.org](http://www.parksandrecreation.org)



Crandon Park's two-mile beach is one of the most popular recreation destinations in all of Miami-Dade County.

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# Masters OF THE Master Plan

**Miami-Dade County takes parks, recreation, and open space to new levels.**

BY PHIL HAYWARD

**F**IFTY YEARS AGO, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA, sat on the verge of a tremendous growth spurt with the potential to overwhelm the very nature of what attracted people there in the first place. To head off the demands of the anticipated onslaught, the county's parks and recreation department produced a 50-year master plan that concentrated on land acquisition, development, and the kinds of parks that would be built. Today, Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces (MDPROS) department has launched a follow-up 50-year master plan with the potential to radically improve the quality of life in the region and serve as a model for municipalities around the country interested in developing master plans. This article explores the development of the master plan through three key municipal figures: Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos A. Gimenez, MDPROS Director Jack Kardys, and MDPROS planner Maria I. Nardi, chief of planning and research. As you will read, many other people and agencies are instrumental in Miami's grand plan for the future.

**I recognize that parks are essential to the health, well-being, and happiness of every resident in our community.**

—Miami-Dade County Mayor  
Carlos A. Gimenez





—Jack Kardys,  
Director, Miami-Dade County Parks,  
Recreation and Open Spaces

“Unlike it being part of a development plan or development pattern in a community, this open-space plan really does start with the parks,” Kardys says. “It has allowed us, as a park agency, to gain *huge* credibility in a very short period of time. It really influenced why the mayor [Carlos A. Gimenez] ended up taking elements of our public works department and putting them into the parks and recreation department.”

ing body, the South Florida Parks Coalition, which includes two national parks and three state parks. Key to the effectiveness of the master plan is the agreement of the participating municipalities to abide by and adopt the principles of the master plan in their own strategic, zoning, and development plans.

"Two years ago we spent the entire summer in a public speaking bureau format where we trained all of our folks to go out and give PowerPoint presentations to every civic group...to get this master plan adopted."

PETER DOOLING

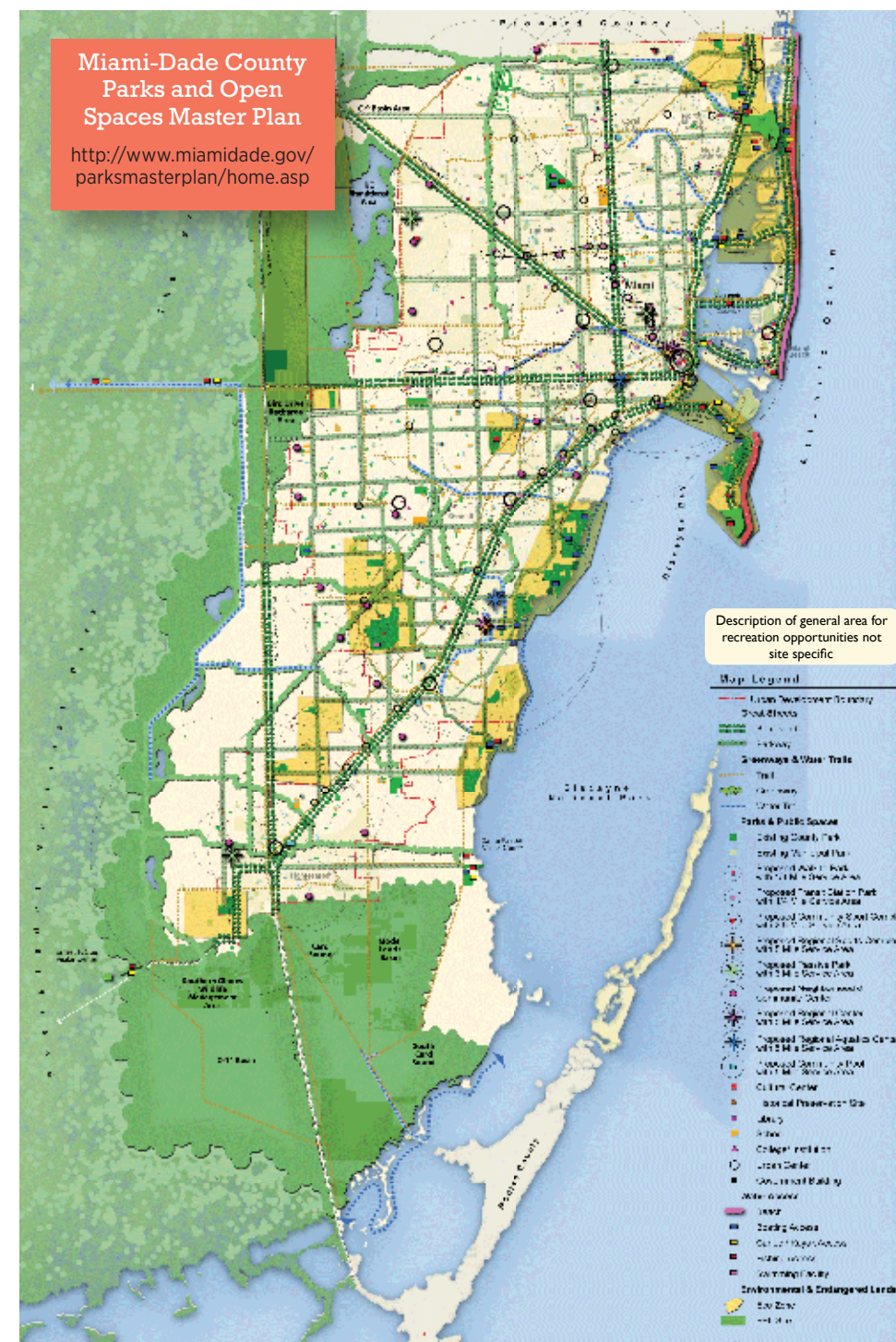
"Was I surprised? I'll say," Kardys recalls. "It was logical, though it still could have been the flip of a coin. But we are the Department of Green...and it made sense to centralize for economies of scale. Say, where equipment could be shared. We've been able to streamline operations, such as sharing tree crews and moving road maintenance into neighborhood parks."

"I recognize that parks are essential to the health, well-being, and happiness of every resident in our community," Gimenez says. "They are public spaces where *we* as a community of diverse individuals can come together as equals to enjoy family, friends, civic life, and nature.

Throughout the various changes in leadership in the county Maria Nardi had directed the creation of its Open Space Master Plan. She came to the county highly regarded for her work initiating Miami 21, a re-writing of the city's land-development regulations to make it a more walkable, pedestrian-oriented community. Nardi regards the county master plan as unique among cities grappling with their futures. For starters, she considers the Miami plan an "urban design."

Nardi didn't lack for inspiration and models. She says the master plan was born out of smart growth principles and the ideas of the new urbanism. "It all boils down to creating walkable communities," she says.

Nardi also cites the influence of the Miami-based







design firm Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. for its work in designing new and existing communities. DPL uses a “transect” approach to evaluating human habitat, just as a biologist would determine the optimum habitat for a particular species. For human habitats, DPL considers the transect in terms of the most urban to the most rural. “[In Miami-Dade County] we offer a wide diversity of open space,” Nardi says.

Miami-Dade's master plan is more than just a “plan,” Kardys and Nardi stress. Because the participating municipalities and the county commissioners approved the plan in votes, the program has teeth behind it. Nardi says the creation of two “manuals” provides the guidance to steer development in accordance with the plan.

“They really explain this relationship we have grown with other departments through this vision of

the master plan,” Nardi says. “We worked with county departments of planning and also with [the department for] rights of way to develop a manual for private development and for public development. It’s really the first time that I know of in the country where the standards for an open space master plan and its principles are being included in the master plans for departments within a county.”

The MDPROS recently incorporated a component into its Open Space Master Plan that promises to greatly accelerate its vision of interconnected parks while also addressing the issue of blighted strip malls and other distressed commercial real estate. With the support of Mayor Gimenez, the county is working with the Redfields to Greenfields program founded by Michael Messner of the Speedwell Foundation (see articles in the March 2011 and February 2012 issues of *Parks & Recreation*).

Miami-Dade became one of 12 regions in the country to partner with the City Parks Alliance to work on converting distressed real estate into sustainable parks and open space. The county’s Redfields to Greenfields program received a \$40,000 grant from the Knight Foundation and Speedwell to lay the groundwork for a pilot project within the next year. The initial premise for being able to partner with these groups rested on the question of what the county could do with \$5 billion in hypothetical money for developing park and open space. The county’s master plan fit well with the Redfields to Greenfields approach.

Kardys explained the Redfields to Greenfields component this spring at the Great Parks Summit, which biannually addresses its master plan. The program made Redfields to Greenfields the thematic centerpiece of this spring’s conference for professionals and citizens. Fundamental to the Redfields program is the current market for inexpensive real estate which Kardys points out won’t last for long. He uses the example of a 10-acre piece of distressed real estate, which when converted to a park and mixed-use development, can annually generate upwards of \$500,000 in property taxes. That’s enough to cover \$200,000 in annual park maintenance and operations with the remainder going to the county’s general fund, Kardys explained in an article in the *Miami Herald* in April. The commercial section of the 10-acre tract would be financed and developed by private developers who may be helped through the creation of a special tax district.

Nardi says the county is especially well suited to leveraging the benefits of the Redfields program because of the groundwork laid by its master plan. Through partnerships with various agencies, the parks department is promoting healthy lifestyles and increasing the community’s access to parks by

## It all boils down to creating walkable communities.

—Maria Nardi,  
Chief of Planning and Research,  
Miami-Dade County Parks,  
Recreation and Open Spaces

eliminating barriers in the built environment that influence physical activity, obesity, and chronic disease. With the county’s health department, they have developed access and equity strategies for parks, open space, and recreation programming policies; urban design manuals—walkability and active living standards to guide the design of private and public developments; and a countywide recreation facility and program inventory to assess gaps in the system and coordinate service delivery among 35 municipalities, as well as state and federal agencies. With the University of Miami-Miller School of Medicine, the parks department is working to provide physical and nutritional evidenced-based recreation activities for children to improve their health and fitness. And in partnership with the South Florida Health Foundation and the Trust for Public Land, the department is providing Enhanced Fitness programs for seniors and implementing fitness zones (outdoor fitness equipment).

The parks department expects to concentrate its Redfields to Greenfields efforts in improving connectivity along the Biscayne-Everglades Greenway—a 42-mile multi-purpose trail that links communities in South Miami-Dade to Biscayne and Everglades National Parks. Nardi says they plan to create local TOPS (Transit Oriented Parks) around the stations and connect stops of existing and future transit lines, to parks in neighborhoods of health disparity.

“These projects [can] rescue vulnerable places and restore economic, social and physical health, assure a future of environmental and economic sustainability to restore community health, put people to

work, and jump-start the future,” Nardi wrote in an article in the February 2012 digital edition of *Parks & Recreation* ([www.parksandrecreation.org](http://www.parksandrecreation.org)) announcing the Redfields program.

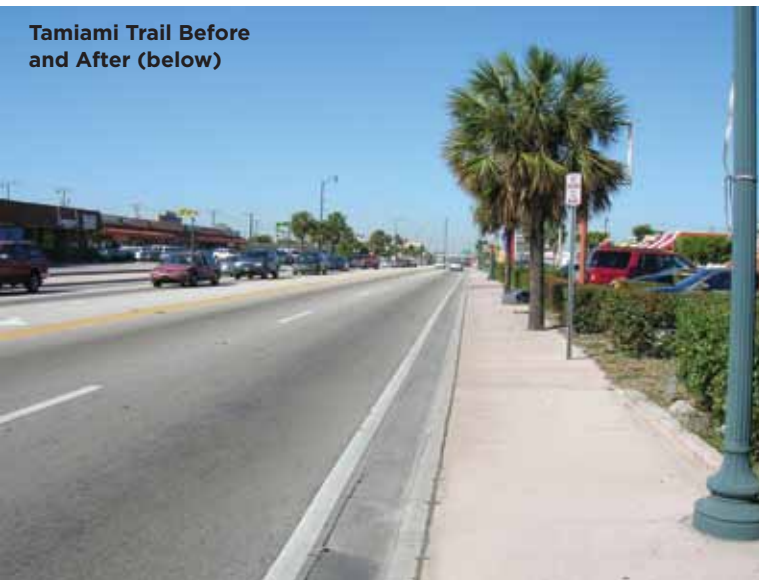
“We’re in the process of mapping the entire area to see what’s needed,” Nardi says. “We have at least 12 parcels and are pursuing another 12. We’re constantly looking.”

Nardi says they expect to acquire tracts in a variety of ways: impact fees (one of the largest sources), donations, fee simple acquisitions, through other agencies, and through the Parks Foundation of Miami-Dade County.

Nardi points out two notable approaches to working with open space to create parks. Transit-oriented parks are particularly exciting, Nardi says. “It’s a way to use existing infrastructure to support parks,” she says. “It’s one of the most meaningful approaches. The Biscayne-Everglades Greenway will be the first time these two National Parks will be connected.

“It’s really about connecting a cross-section of people to parks,” she says. 🌟

**PHIL HAYWARD** is Editor of *Parks & Recreation*.



**Tamiami Trail Before and After (below)**

ROCCO CEO