



Photo by Maxine Usdan

Chris Cobb's firm is building Grove Station Tower a short walk from the Coconut Grove Metrorail station.

More housing clusters near mass transit stops

BY LIDIA DINKOVA

Homebuyers and renters are increasingly demanding residences in a city center and close to public mass transit. And developers are responding to this growing demand.

"This is really more than a trend. It's a real demographic shift in the world we live in today," said Chris Cobb, principal at Coconut Grove-based real estate investment and development firm Grass River Property. "After World War II, everybody came home and gas was cheap and the American dream was to live out in the suburbs and the country

sprawled. Now, almost 70 years later, the millennials have a different idea. They want to live close to town, higher density where they could walk to the coffee shop and grocery store."

Two multi-block, mixed-use developments coming to Miami's urban core are also slated to rise near mass transit stops. Brickell City Centre is going up attached to the Eighth Street Metromover station, and the upcoming Miami Worldcenter development will be on the east side of Northwest First Avenue across from the Government Center Metrorail stop and from All Aboard Florida's upcoming downtown

Miami station.

Not only are developers building residences in the urban core but they're also eyeing sites outside the urban core and close to mass transit stops. That type of location, while not in the middle of downtown and Brickell, is just a few Metrorail stops away from these areas.

Grove Station Tower, a 184-unit residential tower, is to rise on Southwest 27th Avenue just northwest of US 1 and a short walk away from the Coconut Grove Metrorail station.

"The fact that it is close to the Metrorail station, we feel is a great benefit," said Mr. Cobb, the principal at Grass River Prop-

erty, the firm developing Grove Station Tower. "The city is going to grow now, and there's going to continue to be more traffic and congestion, and for some young professionals – maybe a nurse, or a doctor, or a paralegal – they won't have to deal with a car."

Residences near transit stops would probably lease faster – and for more money.

"Those stations that are county-owned, the land that's around them that's privately owned, all of that land has increased in value because of its proximity to the stations," Mr. Cobb said.

Grove Station Tower will be

a rental community and units will go for market rates. So far, Mr. Cobb said, developers hope units would rent for \$2,000 to \$3,000 a month. Grove Station Tower will include one-, two- and three-bedroom units.

Rental rates “largely depend on the quality, and then second on the location. So there’re definitely more expensive apartments in Brickell and less expensive out west,” Mr. Cobb said. “So we are in the middle there, which is a good place to be.”

The nod toward building residences near mass transit is particularly evident in a Miami-Dade government initiative known as transit-oriented development.

Essentially, a developer builds residences or other uses on county land adjacent to a mass transit stop. The developer would then pay rent to the county and the project, whether businesses or residences or both, is to benefit from the prox-

imity to a mass transit stop.

This practice seems to be gaining momentum.

Miami-Dade County has issued a competitive solicitation seeking private developers to build on county-owned land at the Douglas Road Metrorail station located along US 1.

In early 2015, Miami-Dade might issue another competitive solicitation for private sector companies to compete to develop the Omni Bus Terminal, Albert Hernandez, of Miami-Dade Transit, told a county commission committee recently.

For the county, transit-oriented development would be a revenue source—not only would the county collect rent from the developer but it probably wouldn’t have to pay for maintenance of the property.

“We need to do more of that, and we are in the process of identifying more properties,” Mr. Hernandez, who is the assistant director at Miami-Dade

Transit’s Division of Engineering and Planning Development, told the commission committee. “We only own so much property so obviously there is an end, but there is still some potential of properties we still haven’t developed in downtown and the busway that we haven’t tapped.”

In the future, residential as well as other development might rise not only near Metrorail and Metromover stops but also close to bus stops.

Grass River Property is looking at sites that could be bought and developed along Southwest Eighth Street, Mr. Cobb said. Southwest Eighth Street is serviced by buses, and parts of the thoroughfare are also serviced by the Metromover.

“We have lots of buses coming in the county,” Mr. Cobb said, “and I think you’d find that along that transportation corridor, there is a little bit more value than there is farther away.”