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Dorsey Park

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Community Background Report

Dorsey Park

County

Miami-Dade

Boundaries

North: Northwest 20 Street

South: Northwest 14 Street

West: Northwest 7 Avenue

East: Florida East Coast Railway

Community Type

Neighborhood

History

Dorsey Park boundaries encompass an area of nearly a quarter mile, all of it within the area of Overtown. The approximate boundaries of Dorsey Park are Northwest 20 Street on the North, the Florida East Coast railway on the East, Northwest 14 Street on the South and Northwest 7 Avenue on the West. These boundaries are documented in a 1961 City of Miami publication, which list Lummus Park, Dixie Park, and Dorsey Park in the area now recognized as Overtown. This publication divides the entire city into 53 “neighborhood units” without defining Overtown. Some of these neighborhood units continue to exist as neighborhoods today such as Belle Meade, Little River, Brickell, and Coconut Grove. Liberty Manor, Liberty Heights, Liberty Square, and Liberty Plaza are generally recognized as Liberty City.

Dorsey Park is named after Dana Albert Dorsey who migrated to Miami in 1897 and developed Black neighborhoods in Miami through the purchase and sale of small lots. As he grew successful he shared his wealth by donating his time, money, and property to the community. The D.A. Dorsey home was built in 1913 and lived in by him and his family until 1940. Originally the home stood at 250 Northwest 9 Street but was restored and relocated to Overtown’s Historic Village in 1995. The Dorsey House still serves as an important landmark but the high school of the same name no longer exists and the D.A. Dorsey Library is a vacant and boarded up structure.

Through the 1950s and early 1960s Overtown's economic activity remained relatively stable though steadily declining. Civil rights were increasingly recognized in Miami and blacks were more comfortable moving to suburban neighborhoods (Liberty Square) further north and west of the city center because it offered less overcrowding and concrete structures with indoor plumbing. During the early 1960s, state highway engineers, planners, and consultants routed Interstate 95 through Overtown, replacing densely settled land with massive transportation structures. Later, State Road 836 (the Dolphin Expressway) further divided the two parts of Overtown into four. The previous landmarks forming Overtown's boundaries were eclipsed in their significance and no longer acknowledged as relevant to neighborhood transition. The interchange of expressways, standing some 30 feet or more above ground and visible from miles away, became the most obvious structure defining Overtown.

Through the 1970s and 1980s Overtown's population declined and housing in the area suffered from neglect. Area businesses moved out of the area or suffered from a loss of clientele. After a series of riots during the 1980s, renewed efforts were garnered to improve the living conditions in many of Miami's black neighborhoods. Strategies then focused on encouraging businesses by backing loans and creating tax incentives. In the mid-1980s, the Miami Arena opened its doors to the public and shortly after new high-rise apartments were completed. Nearly twenty years later the Miami Arena has been supplanted by the American Airlines Arena just a few blocks further east and the trend of neighborhood development through high-rise construction continues.

Community Dynamics

There are three schools in Dorsey Park: Phillis Wheatley Elementary, the Theodore R. and Thelma A. Gibson Charter School, and the Saint Francis Xavier School. Nearly half of the properties in Dorsey Park are designated for residential land use. Half of these residential properties are designated for low density multi-family units, most likely rental units. Twenty-five percent of parcels in Dorsey Park are vacant. Important community associations in this area include the Poinciana Villas Homeowners Association, Snug Harbor, Town Park Plaza, Town Park Plaza Village, Town Park Plaza North, Village of St. Agnes, Spring Gardens Association, and the Dade Heritage Trust.

A greenway is planned to travel through the eastern boundary of Dorsey Park along the FEC railway. Northwest 17 Street connects D.A. Dorsey Park, Town Park, and Williams Parks to the planned location of this greenway.

Business Landscape

Of the 58 commercial properties in Dorsey Park 19 percent are religious institutions and 30 percent are leased residential apartments. Dorsey Park lies just east of the Health District where there is a cluster of medical and justice institutions. The Camillus House is one of the recent additions to this neighborhood. Recent capital improvements to properties in this neighborhood

have been permitted for the Camillus House, a women's detention center, the Culmer/Overtown Neighborhood Services Center, and the D.A. Dorsey Library, which is an abandoned structure. The population has steadily migrated from Dorsey to more suburban areas since the 1960s. Blight and a lack of services remain.

Sources

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