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Tax breaks meant to lure new business

Enterprise zones are created to reduce blight in older urban areas. Within the zone boundaries, tax incentives are offered to stimulate the location of new commercial and residential projects. The key word is "new." So why is Miami-Dade County's enterprise-zone program poised to give up to \$47 million in tax breaks to new condo projects in downtown Miami that are already there? These projects, many built by major developers in the county, have been in construction for years. Some projects getting tax breaks are completed or nearly so. One is already occupied. These businesses don't need to be lured to the area. Senseless decision At the same time that the county is willing to authorize millions of dollars worth of tax breaks to condominium developers, the city administration is discouraging a struggling section of small businesses along a historical section of Biscayne Boulevard known as MiMo from applying for entry into the zone. This makes no sense. The MiMo historical district, named for the Miami Modern architecture of once-glitzy motels along Biscayne Boulevard, is slowly revitalizing itself. Part of this historic district has already been included in the enterprise zone. Why not include the entire district? For too long, the city has allowed Biscayne Boulevard, starting north of downtown to beyond 79th Street, to go to seed. The consequences of this neglect turned Miami's main thoroughfare into a haven for prostitution, drug dealing and transient rentals. The neglect moved westward and crippled the Design District. Now, partly because of progressive projects like Midtown, a county-owned train yard converted into a shopping mall and residences on Miami Avenue, both the Design District and parts of Biscayne Boulevard are revitalizing. The city should be doing all within its power to encourage this redevelopment. Enterprise-zone boundaries can change only every three years, so the city did some contortions within the zone in order to include some new high-rises sprouting in and near downtown. For instance, the city swapped out the city cemetery in exchange for including in the zone a Miami River-front tower and another along Biscayne Bay that already is occupied. Too high a price The county defends including these projects in the enterprise zone by pointing out that the condo builders will each contribute 10 percent of their tax breaks to the county's new affordable-housing trust fund. We're all for the housing trust fund, but filling its coffers by awarding \$47 million in tax breaks to wealthy developers seems a steep price to pay. This is especially true when not-so-wealthy, would-be developers in MiMo are told to look elsewhere for government help.

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