

10 Ways To Make Miami A Real Paradise

An Educational Coloring Book



Karina Castrillo

Illustrations by Krystal Rodriguez

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Miami is famous for its party scene and beaches, but the tropical paradise tourists see is another world entirely from the one locals know. About 20% of Miamians live in poverty compared to the national rate of 13.5%.

Miami residents are experiencing a diminished quality of life due to a housing affordability crisis, low wages, increased traffic congestion, insufficient public transportation and deep wealth inequality.

The city we know and love has become almost unlivable, and it's time we considered possible solutions and pressure our leaders to enact them. Miami has all the potential to become a real paradise for everyone.

1

Solve Housing Affordability Crisis

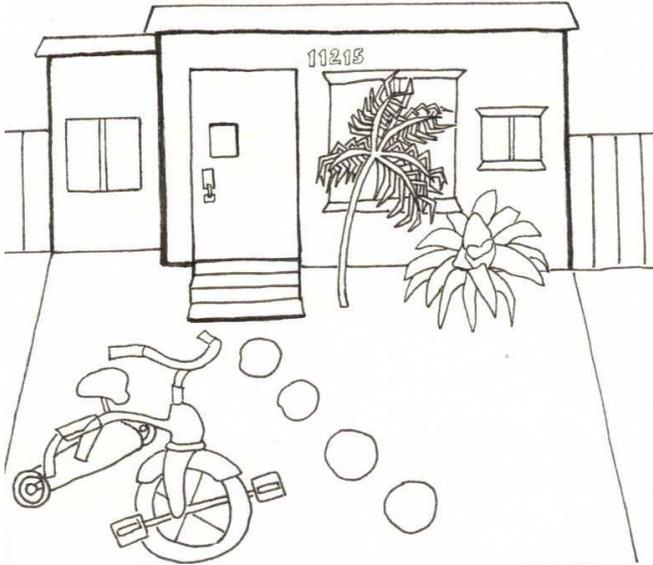
Living in Miami is expensive, but just how much? A new report finds Miami is the seventh least-affordable large metro area in the world. Six out of ten Miami-Dade residents spend over 38% of the median household income on rent— the highest rate in the United States. (Those who already spend 30% of their income on rent are considered “cost-burdened” and Miamians are past the margin.)

Because wages are much lower in Miami than the average metropolitan city, the income to rent ratio is so severely out of balance that it makes living in Miami more expensive than counties in Los Angeles and Brooklyn. That means Miamians are forced to move out of the city or keep living with their parents. 27% of Miami locals between the ages of 25-40 are unable to move out of their parents’ houses.

Rent costs have increased due to speculation, and the rampant land purchasing to build million-dollar condos that attract wealthy out-of-state renters thus inevitably leaving locals to compete for a very small pool of affordable housing. (Meanwhile 17% of Miami’s homes are vacant.)

What can be done to fix the housing affordability crisis?

Miami-Dade can introduce a vacancy tax to those who buy property in Miami, but do not live in the area. According to the Miami Herald, there are 31,779 vacant homes in Miami-Dade owned by out-of-town buyers which could generate an estimated \$98 million to use towards affordable housing. It wouldn’t be the only city to do so.



In Paris, for example, the French government introduced a new tax law for those homeowners renting their second home on Airbnb. Those who used the site to earn rental income for an extra property would pay taxes with a cap of €23,000 per year. This encourages property owners to rent their properties to local residents who are in need of a place to live in the city.

Miami-Dade can also increase the amount of affordable homes by incentivizing developers with perks such as expedited permits and lower taxes in order to invest in affordable housing units. Offering grants for rent deposits will also help ease the burden of expensive deposits many new renters can't afford thus reducing homelessness. Leaders can also explore the option of rent control.

2

Common Sense Gentrification

Gentrification is a controversial issue. Certainly all communities want progress, but usually because developers are so focused on making the most profit, the buildings created are not meant for those living in that area so they slowly displace that community.

One recent example is the Magic City development set to break ground in Little Haiti. The mixed-use project akin to a Brickell City Centre type construction, will include condos and retail spaces over 15 acres of land between Northeast 60th and 64th streets and Northeast Second Avenue. This is a great idea in neighborhoods like Brickell and Bal Harbour, but most of Little Haiti's population lives on an income below \$30,000. The residents of this historic neighborhood won't benefit from a massive space they cannot afford to shop or engage with. So what will happen to the community of Little Haiti?

Usually when billion-dollar developments arrive they drive up the price of rent, and local residents are no longer able to afford the retail lease for their indie bookstores and galleries, local cafés and restaurants so they trickle out of business and move out. Little Haiti is a historic neighborhood with a rich Afro-Caribbean culture, one of those few authentic pockets left in South Florida that would be a shame to lose.

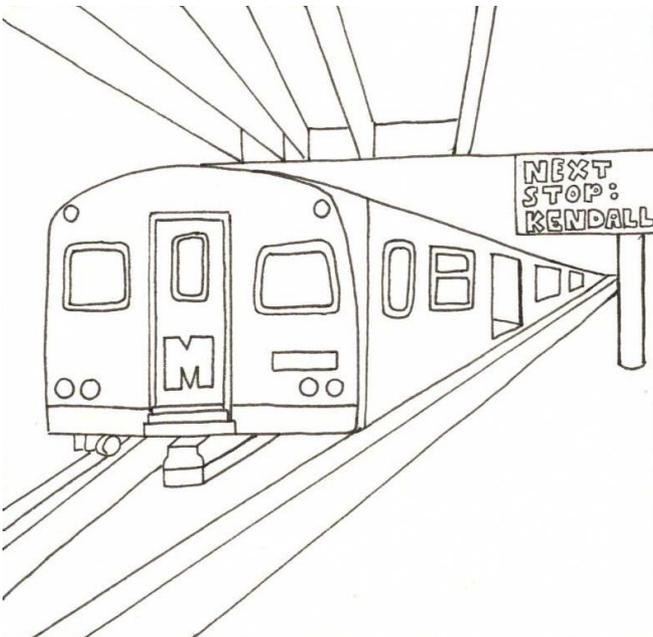
Other neighborhoods are also being threatened. Developers are making plans for skyscrapers and multinational retailers to clutter the village-esque neighborhood of South Miami. Dubbed "The City of Pleasant Living", South Miami is a quaint neighborhood dotted with parks, mom-and-pop shops, and ice cream parlors whose small business shops and identity would be uprooted by poorly planned gentrification. Miami needs developments that match the identity and the income of its historic communities so that it enriches and nurtures the community, not drives them out.

3

Expand the Metrorail/Bus Service

Miami is ranked 6th in most congested cities in the country with drivers spending 30% more time in traffic than in other cities. Expensive tolls, endless road closures and construction, not to mention the high cost of car insurance would not be so burdensome if the county offered another way to get around.

Miami-Dade's public transportation system is infamously insufficient and unreliable. Investing in the expansion of the metrorail system and buses would be a better use of our taxes than endlessly rebuilding expressways. Public transportation will reduce emissions, help our city become more sustainable, and lift communities out of poverty.





More Bike Lanes

Florida is known as the deadliest state for bicyclists in the country according to the National Traffic Highway Safety Administration, accounting for 125 cycling related deaths in 2019. Miami-Dade County has the highest number of bicycle-related crashes in the state with 304 incidents this year just as of June 2020.

Building more bicycle lanes will make our city safer for all residents. In a study of 12 major cities over the course of 13 years, the Journal of Transport & Health found that cities with high bicycling road shares had lower numbers of fatal and severe-injury crashes. Though cycling is a seen as a dangerous mode of travel, it is safer in cities with higher cycling rates and bike lanes. Bike lanes also create a buffer between cars and pedestrians.

Though Miami is not expected to transform its car-dominated streets to a bike-friendly ones like those of Amsterdam, incorporating more bike lanes would decrease congestion, promote safety and encourage physical fitness. Cyclists benefit from increased cardiovascular fitness, decreased stress levels, and prevention of disease.

Biking reduces vehicle costs, air pollution, and saves on parking costs. More and more studies have shown that younger people are opting for biking rather than driving. Among people ages 16 to 34, bike trips have increased by 24 percent, and the percentage of people 16 to 24 with driver's licenses are lower than at any point since 1963.

Sharing the road is easier when providing a physical barrier between cyclists, drivers, and pedestrians. Bike lanes will make our streets less chaotic, and save lives.

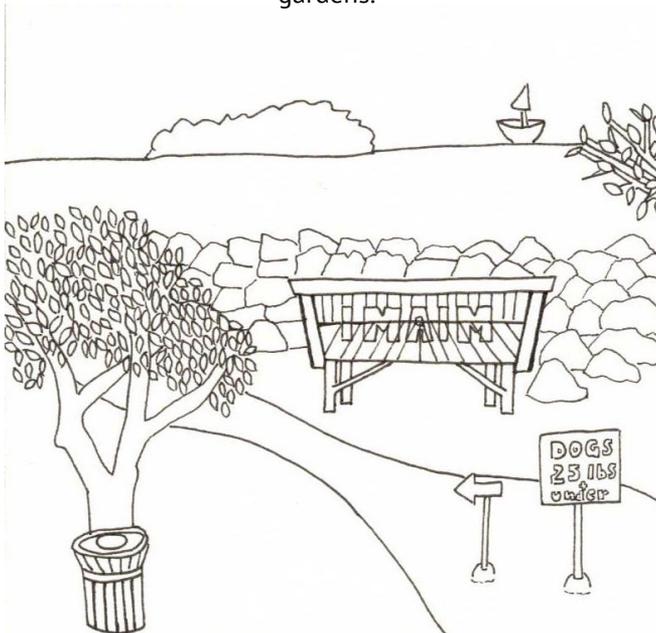
5

Plant More Parks & Gardens

Green spaces improve our physical and psychological health. They serve as places for communities to gather, as a respite from the stresses of city-living, and as a form of protection from floods.

However, many Miami residents have to drive for miles before encountering a park, and with insufficient public transportation, the high cost of parking, and physical distance, many residents do not visit parks often or ever. Building more parks will help our local community flourish while also saving the environment and reducing flooding.

Tip In Portland, an organization called Depave is turning parking lots into paradise with their "free the soil" campaign. Miamians can take advantage of unused parking lots and turn them into community gardens.





Protect the Environment

Miami stands to lose too much if climate change is not addressed. According to scientists, South Florida is experiencing sea level rise of 1 to 3 inches every year. Flooding will impact our ecosystems, water supply, food safety, health, and property value. So how does the city fare on the environment?

For years, the Miami-Dade County aging sewer system has suffered from old faulty pipes that have been consistently breaking resulting in the dumping of wastewater into the beaches, and with leadership failing to place timely warnings for local swimmers.

In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sued the county in 2012 for noncompliance. As recently as 2019, the county reported 108 sewer line breaks spilling more than 5 million gallons of wastewater into the ocean. (Construction projects were to blame for 29 of them).

However, this is all set to improve since as of June, Miami-Dade County and the EPA signed a \$326 million loan agreement to fund new electrical buildings at wastewater treatment plans.

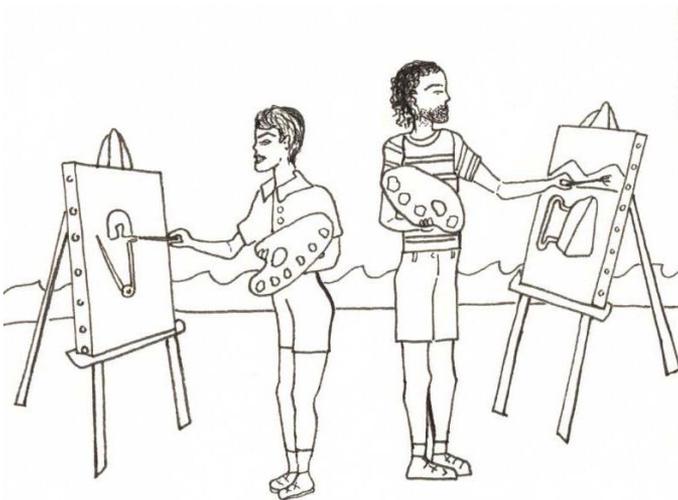
But there's still much to do. Miami needs to invest in cleaner energy, lighten permit restrictions for use of solar panels (after all it's the Sunshine State), keep developers from trying to build in the Everglades wetlands, and build better infrastructure to protect from rising sea levels.

7

Support the Arts

Nurturing a literary and artistic life in the community dramatically improves a city. Libraries provide access to information and resources that improve education and revitalize depressed neighborhoods. Similarly, local artists and art projects nurture a cultural exchange of ideas including of political expression. These kinds of community projects promote interaction in public spaces, drive tourism, inspire minds, and bring people together. It's been found that arts and culture also have a positive influence in public safety. Expanding the arts beyond just Wynwood into every neighborhood would reduce crime.

Tip A trendy community project in New York City is the installation of stocked fridges. Hand-painted by local artists and installed on street corners, these fridges carry fresh food for the specific community to enjoy. Miamians can follow in this trend and help feed those in need.





Rethink the Justice System

It's evident that mass incarceration has not succeeded in making our communities safer. The recidivism rate in Florida after five years of prison release is 65%. Why do people involved in the justice system commit crime again after being released?

When you consider that prisons are a place of violence and not rehabilitation, and then couple that trauma with an unwelcoming society where they are turned away from jobs because of their record, cannot afford rent, and wind up homeless, there really is little opportunity. As a country we need to rethink the prison system, fix racial injustice, and remove barriers that hinder those trying to straighten their paths.

In Miami, our leaders need to do more to support residential reentry facilities like Riverside House which provides people formerly involved in the justice system with shelter and career tools so they can safely rejoin society. Riverside provides programs such as substance abuse counseling, job search and placement, life skills lessons and even family reunification.

We also need to push harder to invest in community organizations that prevent crime in the first place. Intervention programs like Pace Center for Girls helps at-risk teenagers keep out of the juvenile system through education and counseling.

It's crucial that society realizes at last, that the path towards safety is not more jails and prisons, but rehabilitation and access to education. Uplifting at-risk individuals and supporting community programs is the way to make our neighborhoods and families safer.

9

Vote

Local elections have a direct impact on our daily lives (even more so than presidential elections). Miami-Dade County Primary Elections are on August 18, and voters will choose a new county mayor after more than a decade. Other seats on the ballot include State Attorney, County Commissioners, Circuit Judges, State Representatives, School Board Members, among others. Visit MiamiDade.Gov.



In the Spotlight:

Daniella Levine Cava for Miami-Dade County Mayor

A Miami native, Daniella founded the non-profit organization, Catalyst Miami to empower low-income families with tools to lift them out of poverty. As a Commissioner of District 8 she has secured over \$2.6 million for pollution cleanup in parks and water supply, reversed state rules on chemical dumping, and passed a county-wide ban on fracking. Her vision of Miami as a #MayorWhoCares focuses on building effective county-wide transit, solving the housing affordability crisis, preparing for sea level rise, and improving residents' quality of life.

10

Get Involved in Activist Organizations

Making a difference in Miami begins with showing up. What would you improve in Miami? Below is a list of organizations to join, but you can always start your own.

Engage Miami aims to build equitable civic leadership through voter registration, civic education, and organizing campaigns on the issues that matter to young people in Miami. Engage.miami

Transit Alliance advocates for walkable streets, bikeable neighborhoods, and better public transit. Transitalliance.miami

Miami Climate Alliance works to reach solutions addressing the causes and effects of climate change. Miamiclimatealliance.org

SMASH advocates for the creation of a community land trust that will adequately address the needs of inner-city Miami residents affected by the symptoms of gentrification. Smash.miami

Catalyst Miami aims to solve issues affecting low-wealth communities throughout Miami-Dade County. Catalystmiami.org

Miami Homes For All aims to end and prevent homelessness in Miami-Dade County. Miamihomesforall.org

Dream Defenders organizes Black and Brown youth to advance their vision of safety and security away from prisons, deportation, and war towards healthcare, housing, and jobs for all. Dreamdefenders.org

New Florida Majority works to create an inclusive multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural movement that seeks to unite people across economic, racial, religious, and gender lines through a shared love of a democracy that serves all. Newfloridamajority.org

