PastForward Online 2022
Conference Proceedings:
From Vision to Action
Hello, PastForward 2022 attendees. I’m Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. I’m wearing pink in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I’m honored to be here with Paul Edmondson, CEO and our host at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Advocates and architects, city planners and historic site directors, students and elected officials, and commissioners and Main Street directors—everyone here has a role in preservation.

This is especially true in Miami-Dade. As we continue to grow at a record pace, we must reimagine how to preserve and enjoy our historic places for future generations. We face some unique challenges here and therefore a unique opportunity to be on the forefront of solutions. Our community, and with that our historic places, have been the first in the country to experience the effects of climate change—more severe storms, heavy rains, and extreme heat, to name a few.

As one of my first actions in office, I appointed our county’s Chief Heat Officer and Chief Bay Officer, the first positions of their kind in the world, and an acknowledgement of how important these issues are for our residents and our structures. Countless structures in Miami-Dade speak to our rich and vibrant history as a cultural center and converging point for people from around the world. It’s essential to preserve historic places amid climate change so they can bear extreme heat or weather events, and better yet, help alleviate the problem.

In 2019, the county’s Office of Historic Preservation conducted a historic site vulnerability assessment for designated historic sites. This assessment evaluated the risk level of our county-designated
sites to factors like flooding and sea level rise. It enabled us to understand which sites are most at risk and could benefit from elevated attention. The assessment informed policy coordination with other county departments regarding resilience and preservation, recommended a pilot project around preservation and resilience at the Deering Estate, and suggested pursuing grant projects related to the intersection of preservation and resilience.

We also are conducting a Historic Heritage Survey of our historic and cultural places. This multi-year surveying effort is enabling the county to track and prioritize at-risk historic and cultural sites, from properties at risk of gentrification and development pressure, to climate change and sea level rise. We are focusing on historically excluded communities. Anticipated to be completed next spring, this community engagement process will engage citizens in sharing information about the spaces and places most important to them.

An outcome of these assessments has been that our Office of Historic Preservation has coordinated with partners in the community to achieve a common goal of preserving our future. The Deering Estate, a lovely historic park in our county, obtained a

Birds eye view of the Deering Estate Stone House, Richmond Cottage and Boat Basin
PHOTO COURTESY MIAMI-DADE COUNTY
grant from the Florida Division of Historical Resources to conduct a sea level rise study, which will be completed in collaboration with the county by June 2023.

The next step was to take assessment into action. In February 2022, the Board of County Commissioners adopted an updated historic preservation design guideline document for the county called “Resilient Rehab: A Guide for Historic Buildings in Miami-Dade County.” This document is the first update to the guidelines since the 1980s, and it has a focus on preservation through a resilience lens, understanding that we must balance preservation with the realities facing historic properties, like flooding, sea level rise, and increased storm events. With a first set of guidelines in place, there is plenty of room for innovation and revitalization.

The county is on its second year of providing $1 million to Dade Heritage Trust, a local nonprofit focused on historic preservation. They execute our vision to purchase, rehabilitate, and historically designate historic structures and preserve affordable housing.

Historic preservation goes beyond the colonial frontier days of America as we know it. In Miami-Dade, we are here on the land of the Miccosukee people and doing our best to respect and honor that history. Our county has a longstanding archeological ordinance and program, which ensures the preservation of indigenous sites in the county. Centering equity in everything my administration does is key, especially throughout our preservation programs. We’re just getting started with these indigenous history and historic designation reports; making information more accessible through a website update; ensuring our materials are available in English, Spanish, and Creole; and identifying and implementing broader community outreach opportunities.
My own Miami-Dade County staff is participating in two sessions today where you can learn more about our efforts through, number one, a panel on diversity and inclusion in Florida preservation, highlighting efforts around the state. And second, a session on historic preservation standards and how they can be more flexible and adaptively utilized to support equity efforts and expand the preservation narrative. The collaboration happening throughout this conference is sure to inspire decades of new work. I thank each of you for your dedication and commitment to the preservation of history throughout your communities. Thank you for the honor to join PastForward 2022, and I wish you all a fantastic conference. FJ

DANIELLA LEVINE CAVA is the mayor of Miami-Dade County.