

# Miami Herald

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

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## Mayor Gimenez endorses \$307 million rebuild of Liberty Square

### HIGHLIGHTS

Related Urban Development Group would build 1,572 units of mixed-income housing, including 745 units of public housing

Commissioners have final say on a proposed development agreement

A vote could come as early as June



A rendering of Related Urban's plan to rebuild Liberty Square presented to the county in February. Courtesy Related Urban Development Group

BY DAVID SMILEY

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After months of turmoil, Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez has endorsed a \$307 million plan to redevelop Liberty Square, the county's oldest public housing project.

Gimenez sent a memo to county commissioners Friday recommending that they approve an agreement with Related Urban Development Group to build 1,572 units of mixed-income housing at the "Pork n' Beans" and nearby Lincoln Gardens property. The affordable housing developer spent the last several weeks [negotiating with Gimenez's administration](#) after winning a tumultuous competitive solicitation.

By signing the recommendation to commissioners, Gimenez for the first time endorsed a specific plan to carry out his high-profile "Liberty Square Rising" project, which has become a [political lightning rod](#) in the African-American community as he campaigns for re-election. He also effectively lifted a procurement "cone of silence" gag order that kept county commissioners, the mayor and members of his administration from responding to [criticisms](#) and publicly discussing details of the polarizing project.

"People have waited a long time, not just for this initiative, but a long time to get the kind of attention needed at the Square," said Michael Liu, the county's head of public housing. "We'll be reaching out to the residents and community stakeholders across the board."

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Miami-Dade Public Housing Director Michael Liu

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The full text of the development agreement proposed to county commissioners was not immediately available Friday. But a summary created by Liu's office explains the agreement is based off 75-year land leases. The county's \$46 million contribution to help finance the project will be fully reimbursed by the developer through a loan repayment, lease payment, profit sharing and development fee reimbursement. In total, Related Urban's financial commitment to the county is valued at \$48 million.

"To my knowledge, that's not something that's ever been done on any other affordable housing development agreement in the county," said Albert Milo, senior vice president of Related Urban Development Group.

The proposed agreement lays out in writing that Related Urban must build 745 units of public housing — an increase over what exists today at Liberty Square, a sprawling complex off Northwest 62nd Street and 12th Avenue. The developer is also committing to work with Gimenez’s Employ Miami-Dade training program, give 20 percent of construction jobs to low-income workers and public housing residents, and award an estimated \$90 million in contracts to small and women- and minority-owned businesses.

Additionally, Related must build a 40,000-square-foot supermarket and 20,000-square-foot community center at Liberty Square. Other amenities include free wireless Internet, security cameras, and the preservation of one Liberty Square row house converted into a museum.



**LIBERTY SQUARE RISING IS A PROMISE MY ADMINISTRATION AND I INTEND TO KEEP.**

County Mayor Carlos Gimenez

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Friday’s decision is the most significant development since Gimenez announced his plans more than a year ago. Persistent gun violence and substandard living conditions demanded the New Deal-era housing project be rebuilt into a more functioning community for its existing tenants, he said.

“I know that our residents have heard broken promises about redevelopment efforts before, but Liberty Square Rising is a promise my administration and I intend to keep,” he said.

Liu said the proposed development agreement is expected to be introduced to the county commission’s economic prosperity committee next month. As commissioners consider the agreement, the county and Related Urban will begin reaching out to Liberty Square residents to explain and promote the project. It’s likely they’ll have competition, as critics have questioned both Related’s proposal and the county’s handling of the process to select a developer.

Liu said that if commissioners quickly endorse the agreement, Related Urban could break ground by the end of the year. Renovations to uninhabitable housing units at Liberty Square would begin even sooner, he said.

”You have to show people by action that you’re committed,” he said. “The community deserves that.”

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