

Coast to Coast - Episode 16 - English

[00:02:03] Welcome to Coast to Coast.

[00:02:08] Hi, welcome to Coast to Coast. My name is Lily Weinberg. I'm here joined by my colleague Raul Moas. How's it going? Raul. Hey. Doing well. How are you? I'm doing well. How is quarantine life treating you this week?

[00:02:21] It's good. We just started a learning pod. And today was our day to host. So we had two kiddos over in the morning.

[00:02:29] And was it loud? Was it active? I'm sure that the kids are thriving.

[00:02:34] I really think I'm holding off and thinking about number two for a while now. We've got one kid, three years old. He's adorable. And he's so much more door going. He's by himself.

[00:02:44] I feel you. I think a lot of people feel that way.

[00:02:46] And, of course, as you know, as a parent, it is it's been a challenging time. And I know many of our audience members have felt that way. It's just such a dynamic time of a 19.

[00:03:00] And we're dealing with so many issues. Right. And that's really the point of Coast-to-coast is really looking at the future of cities and really bringing real life topical issues to the forefront for our community of practitioners across the country. And so last week we looked at what does civic engagement look like during a pandemic, which was pretty interesting. You know, what are those different models of person engagement versus virtual engagement? And this week, we are talking with one of my favorite leaders and projects in Miami. Anthony, tell us a little bit about what we're going to chat about today.

[00:03:41] I'm super thrilled to participate. So thank you for having me. You're chatting with your friend, who is also the CEO and founder of Friends of the Undermind. So Migdalia is the vision behind transforming of underutilized kind of man ten miles of underutilized land below my means, Metrorail the Empire and turning it into a World-Class kind of world leading public park. Urban trails. Linear Park Transit Corridor. And so I love it for multiple reasons. One, she's an amazing person too. She's she saw something that others hadn't seen and that impact had been there for 30 something years more and she something and then she went for it. Right. And it's so Miami. Right. We kind of put the hashtag. So Miami usually used in a derogatory term. But this

is so Miami, right, that Miami folks who have vision, folks who see something want to build that can go for it and can do it, because in our community, the barriers were for that kind of change or a lot lower than in other places. So, Meg. Welcome. We're thrilled to have you with us.

[00:04:50] Happy to be here, I'm also with two of my favorite people. So I love sharing time and space with both you and Lily.

[00:04:58] We appreciate that immensely. So just to kind of teed up for it, for those who are joining us, we're gonna have a conversation with Maggie for about fifteen minutes. And afterwards, we're really gonna save a lot of time for Q&A. So if you have any questions, feel free to put them into the Q&A box here directly in Zoom. Or you can if you're watching on Facebook, you can drop them at Facebook as well. Or if you're on Twitter, you can use that as well. So different platforms, different ways to kind of put a question out there. And you can also use the hashtag Night Live to help us track that down. After our discussion, Lilly will jump in and be curating these questions so we can have a discussion with Meg fun on the things that you all elevate for us. So, Meg, if you're good for, let's drive in. I think the first thing is just to help us set the context. Can you give us a little bit of a sense of what is the underlying first and foremost really kind of quick synopsis there. And then when you think of resiliency, how do you define that? What does it mean to you as it relates to you as a leader? But read us the underlying uses, public space and this reflection of Miami. So what does the underline and how do you think of resiliency in the worker meeting?

[00:06:04] So what I love about Zoom is I can have this picture behind me.

[00:06:08] And this is one of the renderings of the underline, which is a 10 mile linear park and trail below Metro Rail right in the urban core. Those 10 miles are very different by neighborhood. So I can be in Brickell or I could be in Coconut Grove, West Village, or I could be in Coral Gables. And the underline is mean, you know, sort of meant to be many things to many different people it serves.

[00:06:35] Why did we start doing this? You know, because Miami has some challenges in transportation and safety. One of the most dangerous places to walk and bike in the country. We want to be part of the solution for that. And then you asked about resiliency. So we are really this is all about sustainability. This is an urban reforestation project. It's trying to encourage people to take mass transit as well as walk and bike and make a beautiful experience for that. And then also, I think, you know, gathering people together is really important, I think, for the resilience of a community, something that we've all been struggling with as we've been in isolation. And

then I think the resiliency of an organization is just a whole different conversation.

[00:07:21] They're just lovely. So they're kind of, as we've been, isolation. I've never heard so many folks talk about and speak about public space as a determined soldier out of community health. Nearly kind of in terms of a human right at the peak of the transition here.

[00:07:38] How has that kind of. What does it mean for you? Right. So what does a pandemic meant for you all in terms of residency, but that there's a downside to that for sure. Curious about how you're mitigating and managing against the headwinds of the downside, but also the tailwinds. Like, what does this kind of look at? What has this accelerated? It's what you're gonna be the public consciousness around people seeing public space in a different light.

[00:07:59] I think a lot of us, you know, love our public spaces, but rarely put themselves in a situation of advocating for them. The pandemic has showed us that this is not just nice to have, it's need to have. We have in Miami closed Ocean Drive to making it pedestrian friendly, something that, you know, local advocates for, you know, really publicly wanted for years.

[00:08:23] It just wasn't till we got in crisis that we actually said this would be good for the community. We've seen streets in New York be closed. We've closed parking spaces so people can spill into the street and eat dinner. Something also we never thought would happen. And then we also have some metrics. You talked about the empath when we started. That's currently the path below Metro Rail. Of course, the underlying will completely transform that. But that little counter has been measuring more than doubled the people using that little path because, you know, you have your family. How can I get outside? How can I move? I don't have my jam. I don't. So this is really this. People are saying they're clamoring for open spaces. And we heard a great expression recently, which is the outdoors is the new indoors. This is the one safe place that we can be. And then, you know, so will these will we advocate for these changes in lifestyle and mobility and the way that we connect with each other? Will they be long term changes that that leadership embraces?

[00:09:32] Especially kind of looking forward. Some really tough decisions that lie ahead for communities, regional governments, municipal governments and the budgets. But it's absolutely gonna be under strain in Miami. So much revenue comes in through tax dollars and of hotel occupancy dollars that are driven by tourism. And that's taken you hit. And so when we think of organizational residency, which we touched on originally in the face of anticipated kind of budget cuts, anticipated kind of headwinds of that sort. At

the same time, the community saying we need this more than ever. We've got these countervailing forces that are pushing up against each other hard decisions, budgetary decisions, community saying, we want this, we need this. How are you all thinking about positioning yourselves and to be resilient in the face of budget cuts, to be resilient in the face of increased demand?

[00:10:23] And I think that that's something that we always face. But more now than ever. So our county, the part our partner that we're building on county land and the county transit department and now Parks Department will be working, helping us with our governance. Once we open the underline and we have quite it, almost all public funding for construction and then a combination of private and public funding for ongoing maintenance and management. I'm going to give you and your team a shout out. The Knight Foundation was one of our very first early believers when we opened our basketball court. That will be in part thanks to your organization, believing in our vision. So I think that brings us to this tension of money and desire. You know, we want so many things, but there's only so much that can be paid for. And what I hope for is that when we come out of the pandemic and it's safe again to gather that people remember this moment that they felt safe outdoors and they will continue to demand it. And I know that Lily and I lately and I have talked about this a lot, like where you take your kids to play. And are we going to take our playgrounds for granted now that, you know, we haven't had them for so long. And then in terms of these budgets, I mean, there are significant shortfalls both at the county and the municipal level. I have to give a shout out to that, those leadership to make a lot of things happen in these difficult times. I think we're going to recover the stock market already. Think so. And once we recover, we have to remember our priorities and our priorities are designing and building cities for people first. And once you embrace that, a lot of those decisions become very easy.

[00:12:22] Yeah, there's so kudos. Thank you for all for it, for all you do. Kudos to our team and partners and friends in government. I think often times don't get enough credit for enabling and supporting these kinds of work. So kudos. Good. I think there's actually been an exemplary kind of public private partnership that I hope inspires more. And it's kind of kind of generative in that sense. There's where you and I were to get to do today, identifying, checking out construction. I hadn't been in that part of town in a few months since Clinton started in March.

[00:13:04] And I can understand the difficulties in such as socialization with I was like, oh, look, I really want to stay here forever. I listened for hours. I almost didn't go home for a few hours.

[00:13:13] My wife is starting to say, Where are you? I need help with it. But it was incredible to see it right. To actually see the underline coming into fruition. So I guess that one of the questions I had left with that day was, I wonder what's gonna happen to the psyche, the psyche of community now this year. There was a promise made. They want this kind of politics more than ever before. And it's actually happening in the fall, sometime in the fall. We'll be having phase one of the Undermind opening up. And so have you got any early feedback from community as a kind of the landscaping that's gone in as it becomes real us to kind of a like? This is changing my view of what it means to live in the urban core of Miami and what's potential what the potential of that?

[00:13:58] Yeah, there's actually a number of buildings that directly connect to the underline the first phase, which is from the Miami River to Coral Way. Buildings like Neo Vertica, Reach and Rise. There is a development by PINNACLE as well. Mary Birchall Village and all of those were sort of looking out their windows. You know, they're seeing more and more and more green every day as the plants fill in. To the biggest surprise to me was our area called the River Room, which is right by the river in Southwest 7th, which is sort of meant to be this sort of soft Lomi green space for you to walk your dog. And we had plants, so many plants that attract pollinators and butterflies. And you go in there and it's like magic. It's like nature at work. Well, we were all staying home. Nature was reproducing and very happy. So you experienced it. You saw the butterflies, the bees, the birds. I mean, people have said there's no way that nature can grow underneath train tracks. It absolutely does. And, you know, when we Fairchild Tropical Botanic Gardens, one of our partners, I remember asking them, what's the success rate of our plantings going to be? And they said, you know, maybe we're not really sure everything you're doing is an experiment. So kudos to being a 10 mile lab. I love that. And thankfully, it's working that. And that's what people are really excited about. Miami Dade County doesn't have a lot of dog parks available to people, particularly in the Brickell area. They're very excited about that. We've planned the first dog park in Coral Gables will be on the underline, but it's also just this green space to connect, to walk, to bike in this rendering behind me. This is the area that connects to Southside Elementary, one of the oldest schools in Miami-Dade County. Those eight hundred kids can cross the street safely, get into the underlying, you know, maybe even take Metro Mover Metro real home. So the promise that we made to the community to see it growing and coming to life is really inspiring to me.

[00:16:07] I left there was Multipack subquestion. So when I left the first, I was like, I don't think I ever recall seeing a monarch or any sort of butterfly in Brickell. And I saw a ton second. All you're milkweeds are exceptional, Argin,

like, totally dried out, not looking great. Players are really looking good. So that was like the first aircraft to go.

[00:16:26] Like, there's there's actual life you like. This is the native species that are coming back. And then the second was that you all like it's not just the actual public space and the landscaping, but there's crosswalks now. I see it feels a lot safer across a street at the Empire than before. So it's also it's not just kind of beautifying the space. It's actually enhancing the space for pedestrians.

[00:16:48] Well, thank you for that, because the crossings are probably one of the more difficult implementations that we have. Let's all be honest. Our city was built as a modern city. It was built for people to drive. And how do you retrofit that kind of hardware? And so our proposal is these very wide, bright green, no traffic movement as people are walking and biking. And we have a couple of little demonstrations, not little. They're substantial in Southwest 16th, 17th and Teens along U.S. one and people are getting really excited like this could actually change not just the underlying but other areas that can throughout our county that can be safe to walk and bike as well as be greener, you know. So there's a lot of areas that are that are desert and hot spots and no going back to resiliency. That's a very important part of our part of my formula. But before we run out of time, I did just want to talk about one things that I don't want to forget. You know, when we open this fall, we're probably the largest part of our scale opening during a pandemic. So there are a lot of things we have figured out. But a lot of things we still need to figure out. So what's that 50 foot dining table going to look like? How are we going to sit next to each other? How are we going to feel safe? Because we'll still be under pandemic conditions. And that's actually really increase the cost of maintenance. If you're constantly sanitizing to the tune of 20 percent. So, again, you talked about this issue of budget shortfalls and constraints and also increased cost. So talk about that tension. That's something that, you know, we're really trying to figure out. And also remain within our operating budget.

[00:18:47] I can imagine you're better at keeping time than I am. This flew by. I didn't want to kind of touch on one thing. Lily, Lily will kill me if I go over, done what I do want set. And one thing that's really important. And that is when we do have residency, that means different things to different folks, especially based on socio economic status. You mentioned the underlying goes through a very different kind of neighborhoods, and it does go from Brickle all the way down to the south. Could you give us a little bit of the taste of a couple of things? One of the neighborhoods that might come through, they're not homogenous. Right. So who was affected by it? Who has access to it? Who can benefit from it? Right. That's the first thing. The second piece

is, as you think of resiliency, as you think of how many bounces back and you think of equity in resiliency and equity kind of being integral towards resiliency or not or not being resilient. Could you give us a taste of what you're all what you're also thinking is poor for the benefits of the underlying being enjoyed by more people, and so does having a world class public space in a neighborhood kind of further gentrified. Does it increase development, displacement? How might we think of helping folks who are longtime residents or neighborhood that now awesomeness is hot because it has this amazing kind of amenity next to it. How about we think of keeping those folks in place, a resident that see through the kind of use of the equity and who does the underlying kind of serve?

[00:20:14] So to me, accessibility is equity. And if you don't have access, then that's excluding people. And there's history throughout the country of policies so that people don't have access. And that's another show that I'm sure you guys are going to have in the future if you haven't already. I'm sure you've already explored that.

[00:20:36] We've touched on a few episodes.

[00:20:39] Yeah. And so connectivity is very, very important. One of the things we've looked at and, you know, we are part of the Highline Network and we spend a lot of time looking at what the unintended consequences are of not planning for potential gentrification. But since this project goes through eight transit stations, which are county owned properties and redevelopments to the stations already, Douglas and Coconut Grove have substantial opportunities for affordable housing, workforce housing baked into them. We go through these very beautiful bedroom communities. Shenandoah's silver bluff. The roads in those single family residential areas need to feel like the underlying servicing and then not threatening them. But I think the connector points making sure that people coming off, you know, for Rickenbacker down twenty seventh feeding in Grand Avenue down to South Miami, which is we go now through to see our is that it's not just about looking at the green space, but how, how things are built next to it. And that's really another project unto itself. One of the challenges we have as we go through those three missing municipalities, which there are zoning codes, each one of them are very different. So we're really looking at how do we be part of making not just green spaces in our cities better, but how allowing more people to live alongside them are our first thought. And I know I have to sort of summarize here is to really look at something called soft density so that the transit stations, we have very tall up zoned areas connecting to these single family homes that we think if you can sort of phase into them sort of quietly from the height into the lower buildings, it's much like Little Havana did, which has

worked for a very long time. So two, four, six, eight story tops that phase into those neighborhoods. So people don't feel threatened by height and density.

[00:22:48] I appreciate that. Thank you. So that's such a nuanced and kind of custom kind of view as it should be, right. There is no one size fits all for front end of this work. Lily has been curating some awesome questions for us. I want to bring her back into this. Where should we go next? What's what are pressing burning question, folks? I dropped a bunch of gems here.

[00:23:08] Yeah. And this is such a good conversation. I mean, we've touched on so many topics and including around the equity piece and the engagement piece. I want to dig a little bit deeper there and on a couple levels.

[00:23:24] So. So there was a question around operations and maintenance and kind of what that looks like. And there's also a question around, you know, the value increasing around which role you pointed out. And so, so so how are you thinking about capturing that value, Mag? Can you comment a little bit about about about that for the underlying.

[00:23:55] So there's a lot of things that go into that. I mentioned the Highline Network and those organizations, all infrastructure reuse projects throughout North America have said we know that green spaces create value. I mean, look what happened at Central Park. I mean, all these great parks, the skyline, the values go up and everybody sort of hindsight 20/20. What we fail was not capturing the value that we create in terms of not just economic activity, but real estate value. Right. So we would like to do that. Yeah. And it takes time. It's a very involved process, considering the complexity of our makeup, which is municipal and county. But we have some partners in place that will help us explore that. But I did want to just ping back on the question of of equity, because I think equity is a is a commitment that this long term and taking care of not just the people who live alongside the underlying, but the people who work for us, the organization that will be managing and maintaining will have a living wage of over 17 dollars an hour. We have SBA, which is small business, disadvantaged business requirements for the organizations that work with us. So we've been very self reflecting. How are we taking care of ourselves, of the people who work for us in the community that we serve? So equity goes you. There's lots of arms and legs to it. And value capture that you mentioned is very important because there are very few foundations, people, families that want to pay for operations and maintenance for a green space. They will have to have it. But they really feel like that's the realm of the public sector. So really, the only way you can get that very expensive but very, very necessary piece paid for is through value capture or just capturing a sliver of the value that you've created and directing it back to Operation and Bright and putting it back into the community.

[00:26:12] So so that. That's right. And putting it back into that underline and maintaining which is really, really hard to fundraise for a couple of guys there.

[00:26:22] Carol Coletta, when I interviewed her, she said the exact same thing, Magg, where she said, you equity has to start with your organization, making sure that you're affected of the community and that you're treating your employees right. Which will be incredibly important when we build out the management organization. And then the second part that I thought was really interesting, two weeks ago, I talked with Dan Biederman, who, of course, is an expert in activating public spaces and value tafsir, and he said that he believes post pandemic that that value capture peace will be more important than ever because we're seeing the demand for green spaces, you know, at ostracod astronomical levels. And that will continue. And the private sector will be well, we'll be willing to pay for that. So just interesting thought there. So a couple other questions I want to get to. There's a question around on how you're thinking about leveraging the arts for the underlying and activation there and the engagement piece there.

[00:27:28] So the underlying is many layers. What you see behind me is trail. You see I see the greenery and landscaping is another layer. We haven't talked about the technology piece, which we're very excited about. That's a layer that's connective tissue for the project. And we see art. And we've had on our own, we did a little copycat thing called Miami Voices because we were so inspired by coast to coast. And we had a great group of artists talking about how treating the underlying is a 10 mile outdoor art gallery with a combinatio of local, national and international artists. The curator for that is he met a Camino's from Fine and I have to give her a shout out. She's also a pro bono. As am I. I'm a full time volunteer. So I think it really shows the power of our volunteerism. But the artists came into our project early. Through a grant from Art Place America. We had four installations that were temporary. We had so much excitement around that because there was no one who sees the world like an artist does. And the way they express this space is so different than I would see the world or the two of you would. And so they are they are baked into the vision of the underlying is that 10 mile outdoor gallery.

[00:28:52] Right. Right. That the arts. It's just gonna be fantastic and of course, there is there's overlap with the technology piece, too, so.

[00:29:00] So maybe there's there's a question around building upon this momentum with the underlying I mean, of course, the underlying has been, you know, one of the most premier public space projects and in Miami-Dade, arguably also in the country. Thanks. Thanks to your leadership. But there's also a question about what? About other green spaces. What about the you

know, we can think about it as a corridor, but also a spine, you know, and how can we add a network for four other green spaces? And I do want to say before you answer this question, what I think you've done such a good job when we talk about the underlying is, is that this isn't a zero sum game that we can we can think about investing and underlining and also elevating, you know, green spaces all over Miami-Dade. So we'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

[00:29:57] Asked about the Miami Dade County, the Parks and Recreation master plan, and the underline was one of the many trails that they've mapped for the county to really improve county wide access for walking and biking. And they had a couple of great articles, but one specifically about their blue ways is Greenway.

[00:30:25] Megale last year for a second.

[00:30:32] OK.

[00:30:35] I think we might have a role. Do you can you hear me? I can hear you. I thought I did something. I was like, look, I think we allowed. Yeah, I think we I think we lost Magg.

[00:30:46] We are one minute short of one. But but to me, this has been a really, really fantastic conversation that that really makes me so proud of what's going on in Miami. And I think a lot of organizations can learn from what's happening. Any takeaways that you had?

[00:31:09] I couldn't agree more. I think I feel a sense of pride seeing it. It was a really awesome privilege the last couple of weeks I was ever going to see kind of this intermediate phase where it where it starts with.

[00:31:18] It's actually real. It's happening. I think that's going to do a ton for the city and for communities of changing the psyche and the take away. I think we're gonna get, you know, a good way. I think you're going to say this is what world class public space does. How it feels. What it means to us and how it changes our community. And I think in the same way that the arts and the investments, my my movement in the arts school, about two decades have changed the way that community appreciates the arts and wants more of it. I think the underlying is going to do that for public service. I think this is going to be the reference point that a lot of folks point to in the coming years and say, no, we want more of this. This is the level of excellence that we expect in our community.

[00:31:57] Absolutely, Magg. I was I asked Admiral, what was his favorite thing that he learned today? And did you have any closing? Did you want to finish your thought? And then we can we can close out our conversation. Sure. I'm back, right?

[00:32:11] Yes, you're back. This is the reality that we live in. I'm sure everybody forgives us. We've done this five times a day. Yeah.

[00:32:20] So there are big visions. Implementing a big vision is very difficult. It's also very expensive. And I want to go back to investment and I think we need to look at the money we spend as an investment and not just an expense. One of the questions I have is why would we invest all this money for construction if we don't have an investment plan for ongoing operations and maintenance? So that's back to your value capture. But I think that the speed and the momentum of this project has really inspired and sort of lifted all these other great projects up, including Ludlam Trail, which we connect to on the south in the Miami River Greenway, the Bay Walk, the Rickenbacker project called Plan Z. And then all the money spurs off of that. So people are there's also a great project coming our trail. So this is not our sandbox has gotten much bigger. The demand for these projects. I think our voices are louder and I hope that that continues. We inspire this throughout the community that a champion, one champion, but can do a lot more, can do more. And so I think all of us need to sort of lead the charge. I would say that we do have this if you haven't seen are really cool underline mask. They were designed by Hamish Smyth of Order Design and. And if anybody makes a donation of fifty dollars or more, you'll get an underline mask. They're very comfortable. And you can get one of the underlying duck or forward slash support.

[00:34:02] And we just link to it and our chat and our Q&A chat box so that folks can get it there. With that, we are over time. Thank you, Magg. And thank you.

[00:34:14] Roll on. This was a great conversation. And I think that, like I said before, I think our audience really learned a lot about what it what it takes to continue to be resilient during this pandemic and also post pandemic. And I'm just so excited to use the underline very soon this fall. So thank you again for it for joining us. And next week, we're all I think you're going to be really interested in this one. We'll be talking with a leading expert on leveraging public spaces and park spaces for schools, how we can be thinking about.

[00:34:53] Yeah, I know. You take my toddler. Yeah. Yes. And so how we can really keep our schools open, but really leveraging public spaces. I'm excited

about that conversation. And we'll see you next Tuesday at 1:00 p.m. Eastern. Take a good time.