

Magic City, a tech innovation district, coming to Little Haiti



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The Magic City will get a namesake innovation district with art, entertainment, technology and sustainability at its core, if the vision of a group of real estate developers, investors and entrepreneurs comes to fruition. In Brickell? Downtown? Wynwood? Nope. Little Haiti.

Bob Zangrillo, a Silicon Valley investor and CEO of [Dragon Global](#), and Tony Cho, a Miami real estate developer and CEO of [Metro 1](#), will announce plans Wednesday for Magic City, a 15-acre mixed-use development focused on creating an innovation district in the historic Miami neighborhood once known as Lemon City.

“Four years ago, Tony and I teamed up because we had a shared vision for an innovation district in Miami,” Zangrillo said. “We want to embrace the history. We want to create jobs in the community and foster companies that want to give back to [community] education programs and support the kids. That’s our goal, and we’re out there, and we think this is going to be transformative for Miami.”

The first phase of Magic City will bring art and entertainment to the emerging district and will include a sculpture garden, the 30,000-square foot-Magic City Studios and the 15,000-square-foot Factory, both of which will initially be used for events, an innovation center and an amphitheater, with the aim of creating a walkable campus-like neighborhood.

Initial tenants include Salty Donut, Aqua Elements, Photopia, Baby Cotton, ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art), Wynwood Shipping and etnia Barcelona. The project so far has been self-financed. Cho and Zangrillo, co-founders of Cho Dragon Management, say that are seeking strategic capital from private investors and will likely seek public financing.

Their team plans to renovate a 15,000-square-foot building as an innovation center for incubating startups, co-working and entrepreneur collaborations, aiming to open it by early 2018. But the building will also be an incubator for a much larger built-from-ground-up innovation center they plan further along in the project. More office and retail space, affordable workforce housing, including micro-units, and possibly a boutique hotel are in the longer-range plans, they said.

At an event at 5 p.m. Wednesday at 401 NE 62nd St., Cho and Zangrillo plan to accompany the announcement of their Magic City vision with the unveiling of five large art pieces including artist Laura Kimpton's "Magic." Zangrillo commissioned the piece for Magic City (also Miami's nickname) and it was first shown at the Burning Man festival this summer. They will also kick off a partnership with the [III Points Art Basel Concert Series](#). [More information at the end of this article.]

III Points will be producing a series of nightly concerts at Magic City Studios and the Factory through Sunday. "Tony provides the right energy we need to work with," said III Points CEO David Sinopoli. "When he revealed to us the whole scope of [the district], we felt very confident that our visions are aligned with what were trying to do in a city that is evolving and growing in areas that are not very discovered."

Drive around the properties today, roughly between Northeast 60th and 64th Streets and Northeast Second Avenue and the railroad tracks, and you'll see a gritty area with a number of industrial buildings slated for adaptive repurposing under Cho and Zangrillo's plan. The property Cho Dragon owns also includes the century-old Magic City Trailer Park, which today is a demolition zone but soon will be a "beautiful green space and a sculpture garden," Zangrillo said. They hope to renovate the adjacent historic but dilapidated Dupuis building, he said..

You may need to put on your visionary glasses to see what they see, but the area today is not unlike Wynwood a decade ago, said Cho, who has been heavily involved in the development of Wynwood into the artsy hipster neighborhood it is now.

"We are investing money, cleaning things up, bringing more street lights and security in the neighborhood; we're bringing in art, creating jobs," Cho said. "I see Miami melding as an urban node. These are all becoming very interesting neighborhoods."

Zangrillo, who lives in Miami, is a veteran investor and executive in the social networking, entertainment media, e-commerce, mobility and software industries and has diversified in Miami commercial real estate development. As the founder of Metro 1, Cho has been a pioneering force in the redevelopment of Miami's urban core neighborhoods.

“One of the things I am super-passionate about is creating unique, interesting neighborhoods that have a positive impact on the environment. Bob brings a unique perspective to the real estate game ... and that is supporting innovative companies and bringing in the technology component,” Cho said. “We are combining our talents in an area that is up and coming and really trying to offer something that is new and exciting.”

Zangrillo and Cho began looking for property that met certain requirements. Mass transit access and an exit off I-95 were key. Cho wanted high ground and vegetation. It needed to be walking distance to great neighborhoods, but at the same time, have its own identity. It had to be affordable for young entrepreneurs to set up shop.

Rising real estate prices and rents in nearby neighborhoods — such as Wynwood and the Design District to the south and MiMo to the east — opened the door for this emerging neighborhood. In 2014, [artists began leaving Wynwood](#) and moving to the Little Haiti/Little River areas, some of them buying their gallery spaces so they wouldn't be priced out. Developer interest began to intensify, too. In recent months, that has been followed by restaurants, [mixed-use retail buildings](#) and startup offices.

Innovation districts are thriving or developing in Boston/Cambridge, New York, Seattle, Philadelphia and Los Angeles as well as London, Barcelona, Berlin, Stockholm, Medellin and many other cities, according to a [Brookings Institution report](#). Typically, an innovation district is a clustering of tech companies, incubators, co-working and public spaces, services and cafés as a way to accelerate the growth of a tech ecosystem, an effort supported locally by the Knight Foundation and eMerge Americas, among others. Often but not always, these are anchored by a large tech company or a university. Many are in walkable-bikeable urban downtown-midtown areas close to public transportation and contain housing. “These assets, taken together, create an innovation ecosystem — the synergistic relationship between people, firms, and place that facilitates idea generation and advances commercialization,” the report's authors said. Still, the innovation district moniker is prone to misuse, they warned: “Labeling something innovative does not make it so.”

To be sure, Magic City is not the only local team trying to develop an innovation district or a live-work-play-innovate area conducive to entrepreneurs and millennials. Michael Simkins is developing a 10-acre innovation district in downtown Miami with plans for offices, co-working, micro-units, expo spaces and park-like corridors, but the timeline has been held up over plans for the development's controversial Innovation Tower. Meanwhile, the Cambridge Innovation Center leased nearly the entire UM Life Science and Technology Park on the edge of Overtown for CIC Miami, a co-working center and community events space. Founder Time Rowe has said that CIC could anchor an innovation district, citing its location near the urban core and within Miami's health district. The life science park was recently renamed Converge Miami.

Moving north, while not calling it an innovation district, Moisha Mana is developing Mana Wynwood, a 25-acre mixed-use development with office space for tech companies as well as co-working, gathering spaces and housing for entrepreneurs and young professionals. And in Little River north of the future Magic City, there are mixed-use projects as well as the artsy co-working space MADE at The Citadel. Slated to open late next year is The Citadel, a food hall that will house multiple culinary concepts, retail outlets, creative workspaces and a rooftop bar.

Saying he doesn't want a "copy and paste" of another neighborhood, Cho said Magic City should provide solutions for an urban area that needs workforce housing and more infrastructure for entrepreneurs. He said they would like to help homegrown businesses, specifically in food and beverage, health and wellness, sustainability and technological innovation.

"We hope to be involved in incubating and accelerating entrepreneurs and technologies that help to solve the problems for Miami and the U.S and world," Cho said. "We do have issues that are pressing — that's why we chose an area 18 feet above sea level."

Look at what street art and businesses such as Panther Coffee did for Wynwood. "We will find our own vibe," Cho said. "Magic City is going to be its own destination."

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RELATED ART WEEK EVENTS

Wednesday at 5 p.m.: The opening of the Magic City Sculpture Park, at the corner of NE 62nd St. and NE 4th Ave., which will include Laura Kimpton's "Magic," a piece commissioned by Robert Zangrillo for the 2016 edition of Burning Man as well as four additional large-scale sculptures: Laura Kimpton's "@ Sign", Yelena Filipchuk's "HYBYCOZO" and Olivia Steele's "What You Seek is Seeking You & You Are Exactly Where You Need To Be."

Wednesday through Sunday starting at 10 p.m.: Nightly concerts at The Magic City Studios and the Factory @ Magic Studio, hosted by III Points. Headliners include: James Blake, Solomon, Acid Pauli, Guy Laliberte and Magdalena, Mount Kimbie (LIVE), The Black Madonna, Tim Sweeney, Sinopoli and more. Full schedule on iiipoints.com.