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REAL ESTATE NEWS

Transformation of scruffy Coral Gables-area Douglas Road transit stop began 20 years ago

BY ANDRES VIGLUCCI

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The massive Life Time Coral Gables residential and commercial development, at right, stretches between U.S. 1 and the Metrorail tracks along Ponce de Leon Boulevard in Coral

Gables. At bottom left is the Gables Ponce apartment and office complex. At top left, the new Cascade and Core Link apartment towers rise at the Douglas Road Metrorail Station on the city of Miami sides of the neighborhood. AL DIAZ adiaz@miamiherald.com



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Residents are living, working and shopping around the Douglas Road train stop around Coral Gables. This is a new model of development for Miami-Dade amid a severe and seemingly relentless housing and transportation crisis.

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In 2001, the Merrick Village mall came to Coral Gables, replacing the old funky municipal maintenance yard with something far more befitting the City Beautiful: An open-air collection of fancy shops, restaurants, apartments and offices with a park-like garden at the center.

It took some time to catch on. But what's known today as the [Shops at Merrick Park](#) marked the start of [a long and deliberate transformation](#) that gradually turned the Gables' hidden backside — a warren-like industrial district best known for automobile body and repair shops straddling the Miami city line — into a dense new urban neighborhood designed to promote walkability and public transit use.

In the past decade, more than a dozen major developments, typically mixing apartments and condominiums with ground-floor shops and, often workspaces, have gone up along the blocks surrounding the [Merrick Park](#) shops and [the neighboring Douglas Road Metrorail Station](#), on the Miami side of the line. The first was The Residences at the Shops of Merrick Park.

The metamorphosis has been propelled by zoning changes enacted by the Gables, the city of Miami and Miami-Dade County to foster a livable mix of commercial and residential, walkable streets and a variety of ways of getting around, so that residents don't have to always rely on a car.

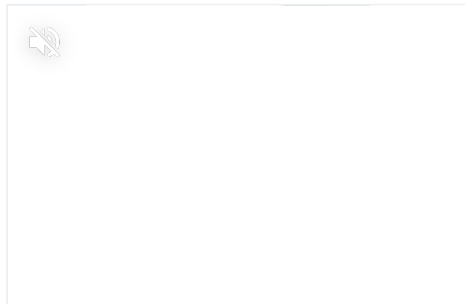
At the metro station, people can board Metrorail, Metrobuses and the free and popular Coral Gables trolley. Once it's finished, by 2026, [the Underline](#) trail beneath the Metro tracks will allow residents to bike to Brickell or to the Dadeland South station, the elevated rail line's endpoint.



The Shops at Merrick Park, which includes apartments on one side, was the first new development built in Coral Gables' old industrial district. It set the stage for creation of a new neighborhood centered around public transit and walkability. *Miami Herald file*

Yes, the new buildings have big parking garages, but some residents use cars sparingly, and others are doing entirely without them.

For the budding neighborhood — bounded by U.S. 1 on the south and Bird Road on the north, and LeJeune Road on the west and Douglas Road on the east — that has meant not just a few thousand new apartments, but new neighborhood grocers, boutiques, a drycleaner, a convenience store and a co-working coffee shop. The most recent additions are a **Trader Joe's**, a **Milam's Market** and a sushi spot called **Belly Fish**.



Development in the area surged in the mid-2010s, with the opening of two low-scale apartment complexes on the City of Miami side, **Modera Douglas Station** and **Berkshire Coral Gables**.

On the Coral Gables end, recent years saw the addition of the **Merrick Manor** condos, **The Henry Apartments**, **Gables Ponce** and the massive, wellness-centered **Life Time Coral Gables** on U.S. 1.

Opening now are:

- **Cascade**, an amenity-laden 37-story tower, sitting next to a 22-story apartment building, **Core Link**, that opened in late 2021. The two towers boast 733 apartments between them, including 92 workforce units with reduced rents for those who qualify. The new Milam's occupies the ground floor by a new public plaza facing Douglas Road. Belly Fish just opened at Core's ground floor around the corner, on Peacock Avenue.



An architectural rendering shows the newly opened Cascade apartment tower, at right, with a pair of companion towers scheduled to start construction at the Douglas Road Metrorail station next year. Miami-based Arquitectonica is the design firm. *13th Floor Investments*

Built on what was once the station parking lot, Core and Cascade are the first of four planned towers of the massive **Link at Douglas** development, which is bringing 1,600 new apartments to the formerly underused rail station property. It's part of a Miami-Dade County plan that aims to turn the station and its surroundings into a hub for urban living — and a feeder for the elevated Metrorail line that runs through it.



- **Avalon Merrick Park**, a 21-story tower on the next block just to the west of Core with 254 rental apartments that just started leasing.
- **Platform 3750**, which sits across U.S. 1 at the edge of Coconut Grove but is connected directly to the Douglas Road station by a pedestrian bridge, is a public-private development leasing and getting ready to open its doors to tenants. It's the only new building in the burgeoning neighborhood with apartments set aside for low-income residents. Its 250 apartments include 78 income-restricted studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom units that are identical to the market-rate apartments and rent for between \$1,038 to \$1,290 a month. That compares to \$2,850 to \$3860 for the market-rate equivalents. An **Aldi** grocery store is slated to open May 31 on the ground floor, to be followed soon after by a **Starbucks**.
- **The Watermark at Coral Gables**, on the other side of the invisible Coral Gables-Miami municipal line, is a luxury senior housing complex that occupies a full, wedge-shaped block. Its 198 apartments provide everything from fully independent and assisted-living to memory care for those with Alzheimer's or dementia.



The Watermark at Coral Gables, a new luxury senior living complex, occupies a full block in the city's rapidly changing old industrial district. Whitney Cox *Watermark Retirement Communities*

And there is much more coming.

- Next year, in the final phase of **Link at Douglas**, construction will start on two companion 40-story apartment towers next to Cascade. The new towers will include 106 workforce apartments.
- **Belmont Village Senior Living**, another luxury senior housing development, this one co-developed with Baptist Health, will open later this year next to the Merrick Park shops. Its 232 apartments offer independent and assisted- living, as well as memory care, and a clinic staffed by Baptist doctors.
- **The Avenue**, a planned boutique 54-unit condo building next to the Merrick Park shops, would be the first residential building in Coral Gables to allow short-term rentals.



Chef Francisco Bartillo prepares a torched salmon nigiri at the recently opened Belly Fish sushi restaurant in the CORE Link apartments at the Douglas Road Metrorail Station, the hub of a bustling new urban neighborhood. Al Diaz adiaz@miamiherald.com

- **Merrick Parc**, a planned rental apartment project, would include 450 luxury units and office and commercial space in two towers near the mall.

▪ **Shoma One**, another planned project, would replace Deel Volkswagen's service center and used-car lot on the south side of Bird Road near U.S. 1 with two 18-story towers with 391 rental apartments and the Shoma Bazaar food hall. Miami developer Shoma Group bought the 2.5-acre site last year for \$34 million.



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