

City of Sunny Isles Beach

County

Miami-Dade

Boundaries

North: Terracina Avenue

South: North edge of Haulover Park

West: Intracoastal Waterway and Dumfoundling Bay

East: Atlantic Ocean

Community Type

Municipality

History

Sunny Isles Beach is located on a barrier island in northeast Miami-Dade County. The city occupies 1.81 square miles, of which .80 square miles is water. It is bordered to the north by the Town of Golden Beach, to the west across the Intracoastal Waterway by the cities of Aventura and North Miami Beach, to the south by Miami-Dade County's Haulover Park, and to the east by the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1920, Harvey Baker Graves, a private investor, purchased a 2.26-square-mile tract of land for development as a tourist resort. He named it "Sunny Isles, the America Riviera". When the Haulover Bridge was completed in 1925, the area became accessible from Miami Beach. This attracted developers who widened streams, dug canals and inlets, and created islands and peninsulas for building waterfront properties. What is now Sunny Isles Beach was part of North Miami Beach until 1931, when it was renamed as Sunny Isles.

In 1936, Milwaukee magnate Kurtis Froedtert bought Sunny Isles. The Sunny Isles Pier was built and became a popular destination. Sunny Isles developed slowly until the 1950s, when the first single-family homes were built in the Golden Shores area. During the 1950s and 1960s, more than 30 motels opened along Collins Avenue, which became known as "Motel Row". The Ocean Palm, the first two-story motel in the US, and a variety of exotically themed motels like the Suez, the Dunes, the Sahara, the Aztec, and the Waikiki vied for middle-class vacationers. Nearly half of them were designed by Norman Giller, a Miami Beach architect most noted for his post-war Miami

Modern style. Live shows were a draw, and celebrities such as Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin were spotted. In the 1990s, nearly all of these motels were demolished to make way for new construction. As of 2024, the Sahara Beach Club still survived as a condo complex.

The half-mile-long Sunny Isles Pier was designated as a historic site in 1982. In the 1980s, it underwent restoration and re-opened to the public in 1986. The pier was severely damaged in October of 2005 by Hurricane Wilma. After eight years, it was remodeled and again re-opened as Newport Fishing Pier in June of 2013.

In 1997, the citizens of the area voted to incorporate as a municipality, and Sunny Isles was renamed the City of Sunny Isles Beach. The city began major redevelopment during the real estate boom of the early 2000s. High-rise condominiums and hotels were built along the beach side of Collins Avenue/State Road A1A, replacing almost all of the historic one- and two-story buildings along Motel Row.

Today, the city is characterized by massive high-rise constructions that line the beach, and large residential developments extending towards the Intracoastal Waterway. According to the 2020 US Census, it was the mostly densely populated incorporated place in the United States outside the New York City metropolitan area. Developers like Michael Dezer have invested heavily in construction of high-rise hotels and condominiums, licensing the Donald Trump name for some of the buildings for promotional purposes.

Sunny Isles Beach operates under a Mayor-Commission-Manager form of government, with a Mayor, a Vice Mayor/Commissioner, and three additional Commissioners. The schedule of meetings is available on the municipal website, as well as agendas and meeting videos going as far back as 2009.

Community Dynamics

As of 2022, City of Sunny Isles Beach had a population of 22,202. The median age was 49.5 and the median household income was \$57,145. Between 2021 and 2022 the population of City of Sunny Isles Beach declined from 22,234 to 22,202, a decrease of .144%. At the same time, the median household income rose from \$51,760 to \$57,145, an increase of 10.4%. Regarding ethnicity in 2022, 47% of the population was White non-Hispanic, 24.8% was White Hispanic, 20.4% was Multiracial Hispanic, 2.32% was Multiracial non-Hispanic, and 2.04% was Asian. None of the households in Sunny Isles Beach reported speaking a non-English language at home as a primary language, and 74.2% of the population were US citizens. As of 2022, 62% of the residents of

Sunny Isles Beach were born outside the US, which is much higher than the national average of 13.6%. In 2021, the percentage of foreign-born residents was 63.4%, indicating that the rate has been decreasing. In 2022, the median property value was \$424,300 and the homeownership rate was 51.8%.

Business Landscape

Types of businesses in Sunny Isles Beach include retail stores, restaurants, real estate and medical offices, and parking concessions. Property owners of shopping plazas, hotels, motels, condominiums, and private homes are the major sources of tax revenue. There is no industry in the City of Sunny Isles Beach. The City has a Tourism & Marketing Council, and participates in the joint West Aventura-Aventura-Sunny Isles Beach Chamber of Commerce.

Sunny Isles has seen intense condominium and resort development. This has fueled the Sunny Isles economy, with many of the area's residents employed in either the retail or hotel and restaurant industries.

The city's Comprehensive Plan has been amended several times, most recently in 2023. The current plan includes a map of Future Land Use 2016-2030. It shows the beachfront entirely dedicated to Mixed Use High Density Resort. There are also substantial areas of Medium to High Density Residential uses, mostly in the west-central section of the city, but also at the northern and southern ends. A large parcel of Low Density Residential use is located at the northern end of the municipality, in the neighborhood known as Golden Shores.

Areas designated as Mixed Use-Business and Neighborhood-Business are concentrated in a narrow zone just west of Collins Avenue, within the city's central section, as well as along Northeast 163rd Street. The Town Center designation is applied to a large area west of Collins Avenue, between 172nd Street and the southern side of Northeast 163rd Street. This Town Center is currently the city's shopping area, dedicated to Mixed Use-Business to the east, along the west side of Collins Avenue, with Medium to High Density Residential uses farther to the west.

Transportation Characteristics

Collins Avenue/State Road A1A/Jimmy Buffett Memorial Highway is the main transportation artery of Sunny Isles Beach, running north and south the length of the municipality. It serves as the commercial corridor, and has a heavy flow of traffic.

Two bridges link Sunny Isles Beach with the mainland, carrying large volumes of traffic. To the north, William Lehman Causeway/State Road 856 runs from Collins Avenue across the Intracoastal Waterway to Aventura, just north of 191st Terrace. To the south, Northeast 163rd Street/State Road 826 runs from Collins Avenue, crossing the Intracoastal Waterway via the Northeast 163rd Street Drawbridge to North Miami Beach.

According to DATA USA 2022 statistics, most people in Sunny Isles Beach drove alone to work, with an average commute time of 34.2 minutes. The average car ownership was one car per household.

The City of Sunny Isles Beach recognizes the need to develop solutions for congestion along Collins Avenue as development continues, and to respond to the community's desire for enhanced multimodal options. The 2016 Transportation Master Plan outlines the city's transportation vision, which prioritizes bike route planning, specialized signalization for emergency vehicles, other adaptive signalization technology, sidewalk improvements, ADA improvements, pedestrian bridges, and a water taxi feasibility study. The public engagement techniques used are outlined, and a multimodal transit summary is given. Included are maps and illustrations on a variety of other topics.

A more recent transit study was conducted in 2023, with a focus on the free SIBshuttle service. The study reviewed many aspects of the transit system, including routes and stops, ridership, hours, and frequency of service. The study also provided opportunities to hear from the public about their transit priorities. A consultant team analyzed and evaluated the information gathered, and proposed strategies to improve transit in Sunny Isles Beach. Maps and illustrations covering many topics are included in the report. A video of the Transit Study Town Hall Presentation is available on the municipal website.

Yet more transportation documentation is available in the City of Sunny Isles Beach Comprehensive Plan (with the Transportation Element beginning on page 35). Information is given on general transportation improvements, bicycle and pedestrian greenways, future bus routes, and future evacuation routes.

Information on public parking is detailed on the municipal website, with parking lot locations and rates, and a map.

Miami-Dade Metrobus serves Sunny Isles Beach, running along Collins Avenue, as well as on the Business Loop Road and Northeast 163rd Street, at the southern end of the city.

The SIBshuttle offers free rides on three routes. The municipal website has a map and a schedule of stops, including stops outside the municipal boundaries at the Aventura Mall, the Intracoastal Mall in North Miami Beach, and the Hallandale Fire Station. Rides are available every day of the week on one route, but weekends days are excluded on two of the routes. Users can download the real-time tracking app free via the webpage.

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