



UNLOCKED FAITH- BASED LAND FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN MIAMI-DADE THROUGH *YES IN GOD'S BACKYARD* (YIGBY)

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Housing Affordability and Land Shortage in Miami-Dade County

Housing affordability continues to be a critical issue for communities across South Florida. Not only does this represent a significant burden for households, but it also poses an economic challenge for the region as residents begin to consider relocating elsewhere.¹ The result is not only a decrease in local consumer spending but also gaps in labor supply and demand. In addition, Miami-Dade County is severely constrained in terms of available land due to the region's highly developed urban fabric and competitive real estate market. This has created a substantial affordable housing demand and supply gap. According to research by the Jorge M. Pérez FIU Metropolitan Center, Miami-Dade has an affordability gap of 126,646 rental units for low-moderate incomes households and a gap of 81,022 owner units for moderate income households.

One Policy Solution

In 2023, the Florida Legislature began to address the state's growing housing affordability crisis by passing the Live Local Act. Live Local provided new funding, tax incentives, and zoning preemptions for affordable housing developments on industrial, commercial, or mixed-use zoned land. The Act was later amended through SB 1730 to include land owned by religious institutions. The legislation known as "Yes in God's Backyard" (YIGBY) allows for affordable housing development on religious properties, provided that at least 10% of the units are affordable. Unlike industrial, commercial, or

mixed-use land - where approval is mandatory for housing projects that include at least 40% affordable units for a minimum of 30 years - approval for developments on religious land was authorized but not required. In other words, up to this point, YIGBY functioned as a permissive tool rather than a state mandate. In fact, discussions relating to building affordable housing on underutilized church land have been going on for years.² With the introduction of HB 1389 - which passed both the Florida House and Senate and took effect on July 1, 2026 - new amendments seek to strengthen the applicability of YIGBY by requiring, rather than allowing, approval for affordable housing developments on faith-owned land when at least 40% of units are affordable for a period of 30 years. This aligns with the original approach of the Live Local Act for industrial, commercial, or mixed-use land. HB 1389 also further defines eligibility criteria for land owned by religious institutions, requiring that the property contain a public house of worship for at least 10 years prior to development and be larger than 3 acres. However, the bill also states that "a multifamily or mixed-use residential development proposed under this section shall not exclude an assemblage of parcels under common ownership or control [...]" This suggests that a parcel under 3 acres containing a qualifying house of worship, together with additional contiguous parcels under common ownership, may be assembled to meet the 3-acre requirement.

In essence, both the Live Local Act and YIGBY are mechanisms that enable infill development, a proven strategy to help contain urban sprawl as well as to bring underutilized land to its highest and best use.

¹ [*FLORIDA TaxWatch Releases Cost of Living in Florida: A Mid-Decade Check-In.*](#) (2026, April 2).

² Molina, A., & Molina, A. (2022, April 26). *Movement to build affordable housing on church land reaches Florida.* [*MinistryWatch.*](#)

However, it remains unclear how much land this new legislation may make available. In fact, the Florida Housing Coalition recommends that “local governments map eligible parcels to understand site characteristics and potential housing development³.” This timely analysis provides a countywide inventory of land and parcels owned by religious institutions that may be made available for affordable housing projects, along with insights into how municipalities can leverage YIGBY to address their affordable housing needs.

Approach and Methodology

Religious Institutions have played a significant role in shaping South Florida’s landscape reflecting the region’s cultural mosaic and its historical development.⁴ Through a geospatial overlay analysis, multiple layers - including land use, parcel records, and municipal boundaries - were intersected using ArcGIS Pro to quantify and understand the spatial distribution of religious-owned land and parcels in Miami-Dade County. From the land use layer, obtained from the Miami-Dade County GIS Open Data Hub, “Houses of Worship and Religious” land uses were extracted and intersected with the parcel shapefile. Parcels with religious land use zoning and an area of 3 acres or more were identified and selected, providing key information on the number of parcels and total acreage suitable for significant

affordable housing development under YIGBY.⁵ⁱ In addition, contiguous parcels zoned religious, sharing a common boundary, and measuring less than 3 acres individually were dissolved and merged into single parcels. Combined parcels totaling 3 acres or more were then identified and quantified, reflecting the legislation’s flexibility in allowing parcel assemblage.

How Much Land does YIGBY Open for Affordable Housing Development in Miami-Dade County?

Currently, Miami-Dade County has a total of 2,137 parcels with religious zoning, covering a combined area of 2,552 acres. Of these, 220 parcels are 3 acres or larger, meeting the primary threshold for YIGBY suitability. These larger parcels account for 1,420 acres, representing a substantial addition of land with potential for affordable housing siting. Of the 220 qualifying parcels, 183 are located within municipalities and census-designated places (CDPs),⁶ while the remaining 37 are in unincorporated areas of Miami-Dade County. When assembled parcels are included, the total number of suitable parcels increases from 220 to 257, and the total acreage rises from 1,420 to 1,568 acres. **Table 1** summarizes the number and total acreage of suitable parcels with religious zoning in Miami-Dade County. In terms of religious zoned parcels of 3 acres or more - including assembled parcels - by municipality or CDP,

³ Glazer, K., & Ankudowich, A. (2025, September 10). Activating YIGBY at the local level. *Housing Action Lab at the Florida Housing Coalition*. <https://flhousingactionlab.substack.com/p/activating-yigby-at-the-local-level>

⁴ Portes, A., & Armony, A. C. (2018). *The global edge: Miami in the twenty-first century*. Univ of California Press.

⁵ Cemeteries, which are often associated with religious land uses, were excluded from the analysis, as such uses would be highly controversial and impractical to relocate or redevelop.

⁶ A CDP is a statistical entity comprising a densely settled concentration of population that is not within an incorporated place. Examples include Kendall CDP, Princeton CDP and South Miami Heights CDP

Miami Gardens ranks first with 21 suitable parcels totaling 98.90 acres, followed by Kendale Lakes CDP (17; 85.03 acres), the City of Miami (15; 96.95 acres), Kendall CDP (13; 77.59 acres), and Hialeah (8; 50.71 acres) (see **Appendix B**). **Appendix A** provides a map of the spatial distribution of parcels Suitable for

YIGBY in Miami-Dade County. Although unincorporated Miami-Dade County (excluding CDPs) contains 42 parcels that are 3 acres or larger, most are located outside the Urban Development Boundary and are therefore not suitable for development.

Table 1: Snapshot of Parcels Suitable for YIGBY in Miami-Dade County

	Religious Parcels	Total Acres- Religious Parcels	Parcels≥ 3 Acres	Total Acres for Parcels ≥ 3 Acres	Parcels Assembled ≥ 3 Acres	Total Acres for Assembled Parcels
Municipalities and CDPs	2,060	2,169.42	183	1,089.26	32	123.68
Unincorporated Miami-Dade County	77	382.85	37	331.30	5	23.82
Miami-Dade County Total	2,137	2,552.27	220	1,420.56	37	147.51

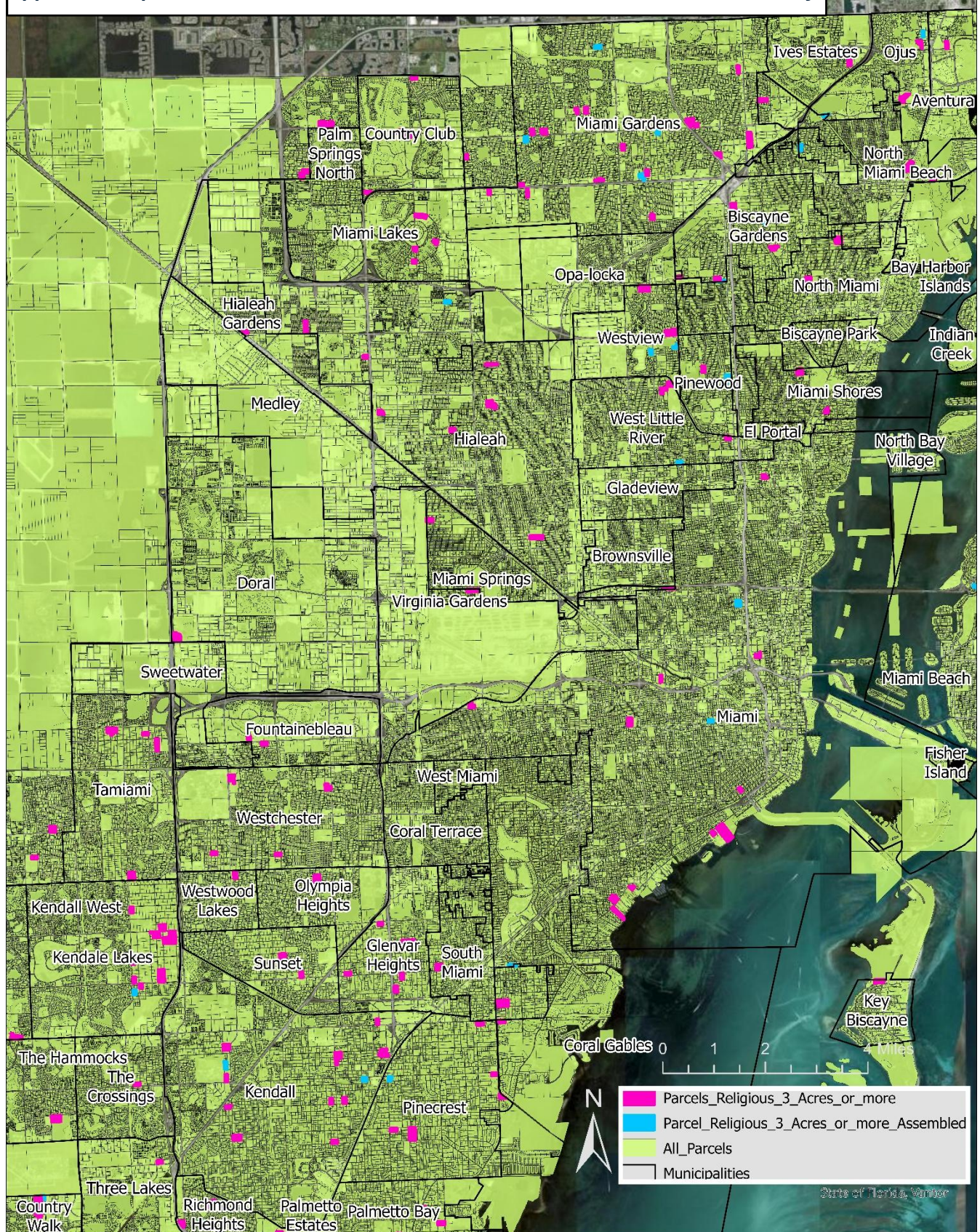
Calculations Computed by the JPMC. Source: Miami-Dade GIS Land use, Miami-Dade GIS Parcel Shapefiles

Local Strategies for Implementing YIGBY

In this paper, we explored and quantified the number of suitable parcels and total acreage that could be opened for affordable housing development in Miami-Dade County as a result of SB 1730 and HB 1389 (YIGBY). As our geospatial analysis shows, religious institutions hold considerable amounts of land - an increasingly scarce resource in Miami-Dade County due to the region's highly developed urban fabric and competitive real estate market. Our analysis also identifies which municipalities and unincorporated CDPs stand to benefit most from leveraging YIGBY. While a countywide assessment such as the one presented here provides a useful baseline for understanding the inventory and spatial distribution of suitable parcels, municipalities can take additional steps to better respond to this legislation. First, local

governments can develop a more detailed inventory and geospatial analysis that incorporates existing structures (e.g., houses of worship, educational facilities), surrounding land uses, infrastructural capacity, and ownership records. Second, municipalities can establish a streamlined review protocol outlining how different development scenarios will be evaluated, including classifications for low-, medium-, and high-density projects, as well as applicable zoning standards such as floor-area ratios and setback requirements. With a clear framework in place, municipalities can engage directly with religious landowners to identify institutions whose missions align with affordable housing and begin building partnerships. Non-profit and housing organizations can also engage in this latter step after first identifying their targeted areas which can help narrow down suitable sites and focus outreach efforts.

Appendix A: Spatial Distribution of Parcels Suitable for YIGBY in Miami-Dade County



Appendix B: Municipalities and CDPs by Number of Suitable Parcels (Miami-Dade County)

Rank	GEOID	NAME	All Religious Parcels	Total Acres- all Religious Parcels	Parcels ≥ 3 Acres	Total Acres for Parcels ≥ 3 Acres	Parcels Assembled ≥ 3 Acres	Total Acres for Assembled Parcels	Combined Total Parcels ≥ 3 Acres	Total Acres (Combined)
1	1245060	Miami Gardens	136	159.64	17	80.33	4	18.56	21	98.90
2	1236062	Kendale Lakes CDP	24	92.35	16	81.50	1	3.53	17	85.03
3	1245000	Miami	583	291.81	13	87.24	2	9.71	15	96.95
4	1236100	Kendall CDP	51	122.25	11	68.14	2	9.45	13	77.59
5	1230000	Hialeah	71	113.47	7	46.91	1	3.80	8	50.71
6	1258975	Princeton CDP	26	52.35	7	32.59	0	0.00	7	32.59
7	1256625	Pinecrest	17	54.55	6	38.57	1	3.69	7	42.27
8	1267575	South Miami Heights CDP	22	66.41	6	32.82	2	7.77	8	40.59
9	1232275	Homestead	80	84.23	6	26.61	0	0.00	6	26.61
10	1215968	Cutler Bay	42	56.04	5	41.13	1	3.68	6	44.81
11	1254275	Palmetto Bay	17	41.72	5	36.67	0	0.00	5	36.67
12	1226100	Glenvar Heights CDP	8	38.85	5	35.94	0	0.00	5	35.94
13	1276075	Westchester CDP	17	42.99	5	27.36	0	0.00	5	27.36
14	1226950	Goulds CDP	45	48.43	5	19.69	0	0.00	5	19.69
15	1270700	Tamiami CDP	8	42.05	4	35.55	0	0.00	4	35.55
16	1260225	Richmond Heights CDP	17	28.22	4	20.74	1	3.43	5	24.17
17	1206575	Biscayne Gardens CDP	44	56.87	4	20.43	2	8.25	6	28.69
18	1245100	Miami Lakes	4	8.69	4	20.08	0	0.00	4	20.08
19	1214895	Country Club CDP	6	22.59	4	18.13	0	0.00	4	18.13
20	1215055	Country Walk CDP	10	38.17	3	31.33	1	3.04	4	34.37

Calculations Computed by the JPMC. Source: Miami-Dade GIS Land use, Miami-Dade GIS Parcel Shapefiles

ⁱ It is important to note that a single parcel may have multiple zoning classifications. For example, religious institutions often include educational facilities on the same site (parcel). These mixed-use parcels, containing both religious and other zoning classifications, were included in the analysis, as parcels are typically owned by a single or joint entity - addressing the common ownership requirement - and because YIGBY allows for mixed-use development.