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Panorama Towers now the tallest building in Florida. But for how long? 0:32

Panorama Towers is now the tallest building in Florida standing at 868 feet tall, however, there are other planned buildings looking to take the throne. **Matias J. Ocnor and Andres Viglucci** - Miami Herald Staff

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## What's the view of Miami like from 1,000 feet? You may soon find out.

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One thousand feet: For builders aspiring to put a gargantuan architectural exclamation mark on the Miami skyline, piercing past that symbolic pinnacle has long been an elusive grail.

Now the [on-again, off-again race to the top](#) appears to be very much on again — though no one's quite owning up to it yet.

After years of planning, several so-called “supertall” downtown towers appear closer than ever to actually breaking ground. About the only question now is, who'll be first?

One developer, Property Markets Group, has quietly filed plans with the city for a 1,036-foot hotel and condo tower on Biscayne Boulevard that the developers say will be the tallest residential building south of New York City.

Picture a slender column of unevenly stacked glass bricks protruding from the downtown skyline like Gulliver among so many Lilliputians, and you get the idea of the design by Miami's [Sieger Suarez Architects](#).

Another developer, Jeff Berkowitz, says he's ready to start construction next spring on his outlandish [SkyRise Miami](#), a hairpin-shaped observation tower and vertical amusement park behind Bayside Marketplace, designed by Miami's [Arquitectonica](#). It boasts the world's longest bungee-cord jump.



A rendering of the planned SkyRise Miami observation tower and vertical amusement park behind Bayside Marketplace in downtown Miami. [Arquitectonica](#)

A third, Florida East Coast Realty's Tibor Hollo, is the current local titleholder. His Panorama tower topped off earlier this year at 849 feet to become Miami's current tallest. That's still short of official supertall status, which is generally accepted to start at 980 feet.

Hollo might next follow up by also claiming the first-to-1,000-feet championship belt. His FECR has not just one, but two supertall buildings on the CAD (Computer Assisted Design) board that reach up to 1,049 feet, each complete with planning approvals and, Hollo says, financing. They are:

- Twinned condo towers on Brickell Bay Drive, designed by [Foster + Partners](#), one of the world's top firms, and named after them.

- One Bayfront Plaza, a scoop-shaped, mixed-use tower on Biscayne Boulevard by [Kohn Pederson Fox](#), the prominent New York firm that's already designed one iconic Miami tower — the Brickell Arch building, which has that concave parabola on its reflective-glass facade.

Then there's Swire Properties, the Hong Kong-based conglomerate that built Brickell Key and just finished the multi-block [Brickell City Centre](#). Swire won city zoning approval in 2014 for a 1,049-foot tower on Brickell Avenue as an expansion of the City Centre project, though it has yet to submit building plans for review.

Perhaps leery of raising expectations prematurely, Berkowitz would not say much beyond affirming that he's got all the necessary approvals and is ready to build. Likewise, PMG said through a spokeswoman that it's not ready to talk about its plan but expects to reveal more in the first part of next year.

PMG has created a [website for 300 Biscayne](#), but it contains little information beyond some renderings. According to its city application, the tower would have 93 stories, 640 dwellings, a hotel and a restaurant on a terrace on the 18th floor. The super-tower would be a companion to its much lower X Miami apartment tower, now under construction on the back portion of a lot PMG owns on the Boulevard.



A rendering shows the planned 1,036-foot 300 Biscayne Tower, designed by Sieger Suarez Architects, in downtown Miami. Property Management Group

The PMG project is actually a total makeover of a previous supertall, twin-tower project that would have reached 110 stories on the same site. Approved a decade ago, it foundered when developers Maurice Cohen and Leon Cohen went to federal prison for fraud and tax evasion.

For his part, Hollo downplays any notion that he's striving to be the first to go sky-high. He noted he's been working on plans for several years, since before the condo-construction recovery that appears to be winding down again. FECR might break ground on its towers in 2018, but more likely in 2019, he said.

If there is in fact a race, he's not in it, Hollo demurs. If he's aiming for supertall, it's because that's where development in Miami is inevitably trending.



“It is not a competition for height,” the veteran developer said. “Height is an evolution. It’s an evolution of the demography rather than the desire of

developers to do tall buildings. Now there is no room to build horizontally, so you have to go vertical. You have to utilize the land that we have to its maximum extent.”

That said, Hollo allows that he’s glad, at age 90, to still be expanding his horizons upward.

“I *am* proud of it, of course,” he said. “Thank heavens I have the ability to produce them. But it’s not running the marathon — you don’t need to be first.”

Such supertall towers are proliferating in cities around the world, including New York, where some super-thin, supertall ultra-luxury condo towers have been controversial for the way they alter — or, in critics’ opinion, mar — the skyline. Some urbanists believe “going vertical” is the logical option for dense cities at a time when the world population is expanding and increasingly moving to urban places.

Miami’s coming relatively late to the game because heights in and around downtown are effectively capped by the Federal Aviation Administration and Miami International Airport to maintain clear lanes for planes landing and taking off over the area, especially in case of an emergency. But in the last few years, under pressure from the city and developers, the FAA agreed to lift its cap over 1,000 feet for the first time — but only just over, at 1,049 feet.

That means Miami is unlikely ever to come close to the tallest of supertalls, which exceed 2,000 feet. The world champion, for now at least, is the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, which reaches an astonishing 2,717 feet.

Miami-based architecture critic Alastair Gordon said he’s impressed with Miami developers’ “crazy” optimism in planning for supertall towers in the face of the threat that sea-level rise poses to the city. But he said they also make sense, given that the alternative would be to push development ever closer to the Everglades dike out west.

“That’s not a bad thing. You are talking about a city that will otherwise sprawl to the edge of the Everglades,” said Gordon, who occasionally writes for the Miami Herald. “In a classic urbanistic sense, the taller, denser tower is to be applauded.”

But, he added, he doesn't believe Miami will develop the efficient, super-dense clusters of supertowers that cities like New York and, lately, London have developed. Those need expansive public transit to function, something Miami lacks. And so far Miami's tallest towers have been arrayed in a long line along Biscayne Bay.

"Transit is what makes a dense, really centralized urban center work. I don't see how it clusters together in downtown Miami in the same sense as in Boston, Philadelphia or even London," Gordon said.

"But it *is* changing the skyline in a very interesting way. You drive by on the highway, and it's a very different-looking city than it was 10 years ago. If you can forget climate change for a minute, in 50 years this could be an incredibly dynamic city that really has a center, instead of spreading out to the Everglades. I like the idea of Miami developing into a real city."

But at that distant point, he adds, only half in jest, "are you then going around in gondolas from tower to tower?"



A rendering shows Florida East Coast Realty's 1,049-foot One Bayfront Plaza tower, designed by Kohn Pederson Fox, in downtown Miami. Courtesy of Florida East Coast Realty