

Miami Herald

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In Miami Beach Group V, the Herald recommends longtime preservationist / Opinion

BY THE MIAMI HERALD EDITORIAL BOARD

OCTOBER 20, 2023



In the Miami Beach election, the contest for the Group V commission seat includes one candidate with deep roots and a long track record on historic preservation and another who, more recently, has made a name as an activist against short-term rentals. We recommend Mitch Novick, a long-time resident and hotel owner who has served for years on historic preservation boards.

Novick jumped from the Group IV race Group V shortly before the qualifying deadline to challenge David Suarez. Until then, Suarez, a political newcomer, had been running uncontested for the seat now held by term-limited Ricky Arriola.

Group V is one of four races on the ballot in Miami Beach on Nov. 7. Early voting starts Oct. 23.

Novick ran unsuccessfully last year in the special election to fill the late Mark Samuelian's seat on the Miami Beach Commission. Laura Dominguez [won that election](#).

Novick moved to Miami Beach in 1988 and has been a force for historic preservation for many years. He has chaired both the Miami Beach Historic Preservation Board and the county's Historic Preservation Board. He has remained on the board of the Miami Design Preservation League since 1994 but also has been active on lower-profile task forces and committees on topics including the structural integrity of buildings, Ocean Drive and bond oversight.

That kind of resume demonstrates commitment to his community. We think that will serve Miami Beach well. Historic preservation is central to the existence of South Beach, where Art Deco buildings have driven tourism for decades. Novick has been a Miami Beach real estate owner for many years and currently owns about 80% of the co-op units in the Sherbrooke All Suites Hotel, an Art Deco building on South Beach. He has seen Miami Beach change and understands its challenges.

Novick, a frequent critic of the city at its meetings, said he supports a 2 a.m. alcohol sales cut-off on the Beach and said he is ready to crack down on spring break partying that has spawned violence and residents' ire. On public safety, he said that rather than continuing to "throw money" at police, the city should address the "crime-ridden circus" on Ocean Drive and focus on businesses that "exploit the public realm" by blasting music. While he didn't offer any new ideas on sea rise, an existential issue for Miami Beach, neither did his opponent.

Suarez, a marketing director for a skincare company, has a much thinner record in local politics. He's been on the board of the Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority since 2021. He launched a "Save Sofi" campaign a couple of years ago to push back against short-term rentals — many residents feel they harm neighborhoods — and was sued in Miami-Dade Circuit Court by one developer who [accused Suarez of defamation](#).

Though Miami Beach Commission seats are non-partisan, Suarez's history of [supporting far-right Republican political candidates](#) raises red flags. He gave money to anti-Muslim activist Laura Loomer, when she ran for Congress in Florida, and to

last year's Arizona Senate campaign of Blake Masters, who has promoted "replacement theory," the baseless idea that there's a plot by Democrats to diminish the influence of white people through immigration. Since 2021, Suarez has switched his registration from Republican to independent and then to no-party-affiliation last year.

He said that he has given money to "both left and right organizations," adding that he's most proud of contributions to Equality Florida, an LGBTQ advocacy organization. He objected to being painted "as some sort of right-wing extremist."

In a 2020 divorce and custody case, a judge order Suarez to surrender temporarily several guns after seeing photos of his child "in close proximity to a variety of different weapons while in the care of his father," according to court records.

Suarez complied, turning over seven handguns and five long guns — including an AR-15 — plus his concealed-weapons permit. He said his weapons had locks and that only part of a gun was in the photograph of his child.

Novick is not a perfect candidate. His 2017 feud with David Wallack, who owns Mango's Tropical Cafe on Ocean Drive, near the Sherbrooke, led to Novick's arrest on grounds he stole some towels from Mango's. The charges were dropped a month later.

A bigger issue, though, is how well he can focus on Miami Beach issues beyond historic preservation and Ocean Drive. If elected, he will need to bring sustained attention to the budget, arts, traffic, over-development and the spring break problem. Criticizing the government is fine but, as commissioner, he would have to turn his attention to solutions.

With his long track record in the city, we think he has earned this opportunity.

The Herald recommends MITCH NOVICK for Miami Beach Commission Group V.
