

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-3**  
**June 14, 2016**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Jim Cason**  
**Commissioner Pat Keon**  
**Commissioner Vince Lago**  
**Vice Mayor Frank Quesada**  
**Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark**  
**City Attorney, Craig E. Leen**  
**City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman**  
**Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias**

**Public Speaker(s)**

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Agenda Item F-3 [12:23:03 p.m.]  
Discussion regarding open space requirements for developments in Coral Gables  
(Sponsored by Commissioner Lago)

Mayor Cason: One last thing, F-3, which I'm assured be done in five minutes by Commissioner Lago.

Commissioner Lago: Mr. Trias if you may. I'm sponsoring this resolution, this discussion item, excuse me, because I've become a little bit concerned in regards to the open space requirements when it comes to development in our City. I want Mr. Trias to kind of give a quick, as quick as possible definition of what currently constitutes open space, and what I think could be an opportunity to really change the paradigm in reference to the proposed projects that are coming in the City.

Mr. Trias: Commissioner, I think the briefest presentation I can make is to refer you to the two charts that we prepared and I tried to provide some information, just factual information about what the current requirements are; and if you look at, for example, Table 1, the range of open space depending on the type of project is from 40 percent to 5 percent and everything in between. If you look at Table 2, the types of space, we call it the types of characteristics of that open space is multiple. It goes from pavers to grass to many things.

Commissioner Lago: And this is where my concern comes in. When you talk about open space, there's a common misconception that what defines open space. I view open space as grass, as an area where there is significant shade, where there are trees, where there is mulch, where there is some low-lying brush where individuals can sit down and truly have a relaxing experience where the climate actually drops to a certain extent. What you see, and again, I don't blame developers, but they take advantage of a Code which is a little bit ambiguous. I know that Mr. Trias is currently in the process of working diligently to hopefully rewrite the Code and bring it before the Commission. What I'm looking at is potentially having some buy-in from my colleagues and asking the City Manager to have staff review and basically rewrite what is open space. I look for open space to be extended from 20, these are not static numbers; I would love to see an increase above 20 percent and then I would like to take a component within that 20 percent, I don't know if it's 30 percent, 40 percent, and have it be real green open space. For example, I know we talked about the project about Villa Valencia and Mr. City Attorney, I don't know if I'm able – can I have a discussion now or no?

City Attorney Leen: I mean if it's very general in a legislative type way. If you get really into the specific property and like the site plan then no.

Commissioner Lago: Then let me not discuss it. Just want to be very careful, I know it's coming before us. What I want to try to do is make sure that when projects come before us there is a real attention to having the opportunity where we could have actual parks on the buffers of the property; on the buffers of the property where people can actually sit down and enjoy, and it's not all pavement, and it's not all pavers, and by the way, arcades fall under open space, second and third floor terraces, which have open spaces fall under open space that, in my opinion, is not open space. And I think that we need to redefine what open space is; and again, I just want to put this out there, this is just for discussion, you have some instances where we get caught up in the minutia and we get caught in the weeds and we start talking about height, height, height. I think that that is a major problem, because when you look at a building, and again, the Code calls for a building to be 96 feet, if it was 106 feet no one would notice the difference from the floor, you can't notice the difference, there is no way. Anybody that tells you that, I'm sorry I have to disagree with you. Now the reason why I mention that is because you could potentially offer a building, not increase the FAR, not increase the density or the intensity, that all remains the

same. Instead of having a building that goes lot line to lot line, you could have a building that maybe is one floor taller, but at the end of the day allows you to have an 8,000 or 9,000, 10,000 square foot open space park on the property and that is what, in my opinion defines quality of life especially in urban living like we are talking about in the downtown area. So, I'm asking you to consider potentially having staff review this open space portion of the Code and bring to us different ideas without increasing density, without increasing intensity following the Code in those measures, but see how we can increase the open space plan while at the same time within that component increasing actual green space.

Commissioner Keon: I'd like you to consider permeable ground as well as green space. I mean I think – I don't like seeing asphalt or something where the water can't run off or run through or whatever else, but a lot of times for green space like that really nice bench sitting in the middle of that green space for somebody in high heels you destroy your shoes, you know and if it's all pebble rock for a lot of women that wear very high heels, you kill them, you destroy the leather on your heels. So, I think its fine for men, but I think you should give some consideration also to other people are using them and their footwear is not always, and particularly in a downtown setting, their footwear may not always be the best for walking through a lawn.

Mayor Cason: I agree with the idea that to the extent we can get away from the cement and an open space and count as open space. I like the idea of landscape and then permeable hardscape. I think one of the reasons I like planned area development is it allows you to tell a lot more flexibility we've seen and most of our projects we've been getting, one coming up has got almost six acres of green space. So, I think we've managed as we move forward, at least this Commission, to get from the developers a lot more green space even with what we have. I certainly agree if we can look at it and see if any of this should be changed, but I think most of us want green trees, shade, given the heat around here.

Commissioner Lago: Mayor, if I may, I just want to agree with what Commissioner Keon said in regards to permeable pavers as an opportunity. It's a great surface, I've used it on multiple projects, you have the grass or whatever type of vegetation will grow from it, so again that's a misstep on my part, but I completely agree with you. I think it should be considered.

Commissioner Keon: You don't wear high heels.

Commissioner Lago: I don't wear high heels.

[Laughter]

Mayor Cason: I like your chart because it shows us a lot more complex. We tend to think of big developers when you are talking about your front yard on a home, there are all kinds of...

Mr. Trias: Mayor if I could just make a comment on this. More open space is not necessarily better, it's one of those issues that it depends on how you design it and the type of design they use; and the next project you will see, you will see that the use of grass, for example, the way that it is laid out with the building and the arcade makes a lot of sense in that project. I think that the Code currently encourages that type of very intense design focus solution, which is what the Mayor was alluding to. However having said that, I do think that there is some room for improvement and some room for emphasizing some of the more traditional landscape materials, and I think that if we had some guidelines that provided more clear direction and that could be added into the Code as we amend it.

Mayor Cason: I think it's a good idea and I think that – I don't know how many years ago all these percentages were put it, but it's always good to take another look at things in each of the categories. It may stay the same for a family, for a single family home and it may change, but good ideas on how we encourage, how we define open space.

Commissioner Lago: And if you look at other downtowns, especially here in South Florida and you look at what the City of Coral Gables is known for, what is the City of Coral Gables known for? - we just bought six pieces of private land and we are making them into public parks, passive parks. We are known as a 30-year Tree City U.S.A., we excel in regards to sustainability, historic preservation. I think that we need to really set the benchmark as high as possible in regards to real open space, and again, we are not adding additional density, I'm not for additional density and intensity on this point. I want to make sure that that's not lost in the discussion.

Mayor Cason: So anybody not agree with asking staff to look forward.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes. I want to ask Mr. Trias a question. On a certain hotel that's coming online here in the Gables, there is a covered arcade; does that count as their green space?

Mr. Trias: It counts as open space in certain projects.

Commissioner Slesnick: I mean I don't see any green space around that whole complex.

Mr. Trias: In that particular case, that's an issue, yes.

Commissioner Lago: And I imagine you are talking about the project that's under construction. That project there was a land use change in 2008, for my understanding, I think the ordinance

was 2008-26, I handed it out to everyone here, and there was a land use change which facilitated that type of project being able to be done across from LeJeune, which I remember Commissioner Keon...

Commissioner Slesnick: We are not mentioning addresses, right?

Commissioner Keon: We changed it from multi-family to commercial, which is to introduce commercial west of LeJeune in this City is...

Mayor Cason: But that's water under the bridge.

Commissioner Slesnick: But that's their green space.

Commissioner Lago: But see that's their green space and that is why, why for example, I don't want to talk about another project because the City Attorney mentioned it wouldn't be right, but you are going to see different iterations of a project that is coming before us, and I think you are going to see that – and that's why I mentioned the height, by the way it's not a height request in reference to as out of context which was allowed by the Code, it's a potential conditional use, excuse me, but you see that there is a significant swath of land that's now made available in an area where the cost would be prohibitive, number one; and number two, there are no parks in that area, no pocket parks. So this is something that I want staff to take a look at and really come back to us and say, without increasing density, without increasing intensity, what can we do to really make our City even more green and have the opportunity for somebody to walk their dog, or just sit under a tree instead of having pavers. Pavers reflect sunlight...

Commissioner Slesnick: Except the park benches.

Commissioner Lago: Again, anything possible we are flexible as a Commission. So I just wanted to get your buy-in in reference to that, so that we can get staff to come back.

Mayor Cason: Back to my question. Does anybody disagree with this position?- then if you'll do that and come back to us with your suggestions.

Mr. Trias: What I'll do is...

Commissioner Lago: What do you think Ramon, what timeframe? Don't worry; I'm not going to hold you to it.

Mr. Trias: What I can do, what I can do is come up with a strategy of the different things that can be done beginning with quoting Frank Button and some of the original ideas that were done to design this City, and I think that if we include some more detailed guidelines that would be fairly easy to introduce as a best practices or even in the Zoning Code.

Commissioner Lago: By the way, this goes hand-in-hand with our new LEED ordinance; this goes hand-in-hand.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Absolutely sir. But I'm going to pull Ramon off of by next meeting...

Commissioner Lago: I didn't say that.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: No, but he did.

Commissioner Lago: Did you hear the comment before he made that?- did you hear my statement how I prefaced it before he made his commitment to before next meeting? I'm not holding you to that.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And I understand, but we also want to have the Planning and Zoning Board involved.

Commissioner Lago: We have a lot of things.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: It's an important issue; we understand the intent and we are going to figure out how to best present it to both Planning and Zoning Board.

[End: 12:35:17 p.m.]