

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items E-3 and E-4
October 14, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Joe Jimenez

Agenda Items E-3 and E-4 are related [Start: 11:17 a.m.]

E-3: An Ordinance of the City Commission amending the Future Land Use Map of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process,” Section 14-213, “Comprehensive Plan Text and Map Amendments,” and small scale amendment procedures (SS. 163.3187, Florida Statutes), from “Religious or Institutional” to “Multi-Family Low Density” for Lots 15, 16, 17 and 18, Block 33, Coral Gables Biltmore Section (627 and 635 Anastasia Avenue), Coral Gables, Florida; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (09 17 25 PZB recommended approval with conditions, Vote 5-1) Lobbyist: Joe Jimenez

E-4: An Ordinance of the City Commission making zoning district boundary changes pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process,” Section 14-212, “Zoning Code Text and Map Amendments,” from “Special Use(s)” to “Multi-Family 3 (MF3)” for Lots 15, 16, 17 and 18, Block 33, Coral Gables Biltmore Section (627 and 635 Anastasia Avenue), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an

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Agenda Items E-3 and E-4 are related – Ordinance amending Future Land Use Map Comprehensive Plan pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process”

effective date. (09 17 25 PZB recommended approval with conditions, Vote 5-1)
Lobbyist: Joe Jimenez

Mayor Lago: Moving on to items E-3 and E-4, which are time certain, 11 o'clock. Wow, we're on time.

City Attorney Suarez: E-3 is an ordinance of the City Commission amending the future land use map of the City of Coral Gables comprehensive plan pursuant to zoning code article 14 process Section 14-213, comprehensive plan text and map amendments and small scale amendment procedures from religious or institutional to multifamily low density for lots 15, 16, 17, and 18. Block 33, Coral Gables, Biltmore section, Coral Gables, Florida, providing for repeater provision severability clause and providing for an effective date. E-4 is an ordinance of the City Commission making zoning district boundary changes pursuant to zoning code article 14 process section 14-212, zoning code text and map amendments from special uses to multifamily three for lots 15, 16, 17, and 18. Block 33, Coral Gables, Biltmore Section, Coral Gables, Florida, including required conditions, providing for repeater provisions, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. Mayor, we would consolidate E-3 and E-4 for purposes of public hearing, and this is a quasi-judicial item, so individuals who will be testifying should be sworn in.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes. All those who will be testifying on this item, please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm the testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth? Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Sir, good morning.

Mr. Joe Jimenez: Morning, Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission. Joe Jimenez, JMZ Group, address of 2020 Salzedo Street here in Coral Gables. If I can ask the TV to please put up the presentation. Thank you. The project that we're talking about this morning is what Ms. Pierce and Mr. Chenoweth came to speak to you about. The request, it's platted, this is four lots along Anastasia across from the Baptist Church. In 1983, the properties were MF3, and they were rezoned once the church purchased them to their current special use and religious zone. Oddly enough, and I still haven't been able to figure out why, three of the lots were rezoned. One of them is actually still MF3. So, what we're asking for is to simply now that the church has sold the property, to get rid of the designation that usually comes from that type of entity owning that property and revert it to MF3 and re-flum it accordingly. Property highlighted here in red, the other property, the other purple property on that side is also owned by the church, but otherwise this entire block and the six corresponding blocks approaching LeJeune, seven if you count that one building, are all MF3. As we all know from the City of Coral Gables, there are pockets of multi-family surrounded by, yes.

Mayor Lago: If I may, I'm sorry to interrupt you. I'd like to understand. By the diagram that you're giving us, it is very clear, very clear, that obviously you have six blocks that are, would you say 95 percent?

Mr. Jimenez: If not 100.

Mayor Lago: Almost 100 percent.

Mr. Jimenez: With the exception of the two properties that were at one point or currently owned by the church.

Mayor Lago: Yes, and I apologize, my eyesight is not that good. MF3, correct?

Mr. Jimenez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Why do you think, and I know you, I'm not asking you to have a crystal ball, but why do you think those two properties were purple instead of orange?

Mr. Jimenez: Because they were owned by the church.

Mayor Lago: That's the only reason why. So let me ask you a question. Why do you think there wasn't a unanimous vote on the Planning and Zoning Board?

Mr. Jimenez: I actually did think about that.

Mayor Lago: These are things I want to understand because the person who voted against this is an architect and is a person who is a seasoned professional and understands that if you have seven blocks that are all MF3, and the only reason why the two properties that are excluded from that MF3 designation are because they're owned by the church, and obviously when this area was zoned, they took into consideration all the church's property. Why would they vote against it?

Mr. Jimenez: I can't speak to why. My partner actually realized something after the hearing. When we were looking at old plat maps and before the Youth Center was there, Anastasia was actually a block south. It was under where the church is now. When Riviera was created and when new streets were created, I don't know if the City Commission really liked the name Anastasia, but Anastasia as it was got eliminated and then they moved it because I had a bear of a time actually finding it on a new, it didn't make any sense to me with blocks. So, I realized that after. I can't speak to what his reasons were but given what he was saying that it used to be zoned single family, I'm assuming that that is the problem. This has never been single family since 1949, which is when these were built. And these are the properties that, these are 1949 buildings, they're not historic. We have historic determination letters from the city. They are four-unit buildings, two of them, taking up four platted lots along Anastasia. They're, like Ms. Pierce said, those windows are

actually incredibly rusted. The air conditioning is the old style that just leaks down the old efficiency units that we've all seen and had at one point probably. They take up the corner there and this is what's being proposed. This is not a site plan review. This isn't, given the size of the lot and everything else is an administrative site plan, but to show you what would be going on there, it's eight units, replacing eight units. And this is what I feel is important. Like I was saying before, if you, I actually used to live right off the Granada Circle in the Multifamily District, across from Venetian Pool. The city was designed with multi-family pockets throughout, surrounded by single family neighborhoods. They're not skyscraper zoning, it's MF3. So, these are two- and three-story townhomes, roughly the same size as what's there now, a few feet more or less, but it's not a unique neighborhood with that respect because there's multi-family pockets throughout the single-family neighborhoods in this city. As a matter of fact, immediately to the north is a row of town homes that were built, I think, about eight years ago. The product that has, you see up here, just off LeJeune, all over the area and along Biltmore Way. So, while I appreciate - I always appreciate Mr. Chenoweth and Ms. Pierce, they've come to every meeting. We've also sent out 2,193 notices and we've gotten support from the community. The only issue that we've had, I know there's an issue with the community and the school that's there, that's got nothing to do with us. This has absolutely no bearing on that. And we've spoken to the association, to the head of the association, to the neighbors. We've had a Town Hall; we were the very first project to ever go through conceptual review of Planning and Zoning. And we also had the Planning and Zoning Board meeting. So, this is my fourth time at either a podium or hosting people in my office. We haven't heard anything negative about the rezoning and the reform. In fact, Mr. Chenoweth said exactly what he said in this room at the Planning Board meeting. What they're asking for, I got no problem with. That's fine, that's totally the right thing to do. His issue was site plan review, which I appreciate, that's just not where we are today. And the massings, it's okay. Now they can see it from the city's presentation. So, of all the things that's being asked here, the important highlights are reverting to MF3. We are not rezoning. It's the change of ownership dictates a change of zoning back to when it was owned privately. The density asked for is exactly what's there today. It's eight for eight. And the neighborhood completely is in line with what we're asking for. If it were not for the other church property, 100 percent of the seven adjacent blocks would be the exact same zoning and the exact same floor.

Mayor Lago: And if I may, I just want to highlight something that I think should be critically important. It doesn't really matter. I think you mentioned it very well, Commissioner, before, it'll hit the blogs anyways. But there's some big text right there. It's called preliminary massings. This is not the design, the final design for the project. This has to go before BOA approval. This has to go before other - this will be reviewed extensively to ensure that it complies with our standards here in the city. People will call me, did you see the project that, again, this is not a design review that we're doing today. This is just very preliminary.

Mr. Jimenez: Yes. Just to give you an understanding of the scale of what would go there, the required setbacks. This would go through BOA, and it would go through DRC through an exhaustive procedure, even if it's administrative. But it's always, it's the same procedure as everything else. So yes, I appreciate that.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I just want to touch upon a couple things because it's not far from where I live, walk, and so forth. The existing conditions as those buildings were occupied is you had cars lined up on the swale. And so instead of green space there, you had a row of cars that you were looking at, which would now be brought into the back of the building as townhomes are required to do. And there's only one tree in the way, which I understand you've talked to staff, and the developer is going to be moving that into the swale where there's some sickly trees. So actually, the point of my comment here is the green space will improve.

Mr. Jimenez: The green space will improve. And these lots are, for the day, are incredibly underdeveloped in terms of what you can do and for what land costs and what you would normally put on there. As Mr. Chenoweth said, and I think Ms. Pierce said it as well, the reason it's up to the front, the townhome product is because the townhome product that has the parking in the front is not as attractive to the city and the city requires it in the back. So, it's not that the building is bigger because as you can see where the garages are and the driveway, that's all on private property. That's not an alley. As some can be because they have the benefit of an alley, this does not. That's the private property line. So, the grass and the parking that's there as well now, the grass isn't going to grow there anyway because you have some great mature trees that cast a lot of shade. So, I know there's talk of doing a beautification of that street for parallel and something that is a much nicer pedestrian experience than it is today, because I've personally gone a couple of times when it's raining and it's muddy. So sometimes asphalt actually improves the pedestrian experience, not the opposite. So yes, there's only one tree up here on the northwest corner. It's not shown there because it blocks the driveway. We have an arborist report that says it is a good candidate for relocation, and especially since the area to relocate it has been identified about 20 feet to the south where there is a sickly Black Olive. So that specimen tree, the goal is, and everything indicates that it can be done, is to simply move it, it's the, there's an X. You can see the X there in the northwest corner. It would just move to the south.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Jimenez: And obviously, if you're here to answer any questions, look forward to staff's recommendation.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Madam Director, good morning.

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Planning and Zoning Director: Good morning. Jennifer Garcia, Planning and Zoning Director. I can have the PowerPoint please. Thank you. So, as you know, these are two map amendments, one to the comprehensive plan, future land use map, and the other one to our zoning map. As we know, the location is Anastasia and Cardena on that southwest corner of the block. This is an aerial showing the area. As was stated before, this area is mixed with multi-family as well as single-family. Single family, as you see in the next map, mostly starts along the west side of Cardena and the south side of Riviera Drive. The request is to change the religious institutional land use to be multi-family low density to be consistent with the remaining block and the multi-family uses that are in the area. And also, the existing zoning is special use or S zoning, and that would change to MF3, which would be, again, be consistent with the rest of the block as well as to the multifamily in this area. So, as he said, he was our guinea pig for our conceptual Planning and Zoning Board review in August. The Planning and Zoning Board did review the proposed land use and zoning changes last month, and we're here for first reading. The applicant did mail out notices within 1,500 feet of the property boundaries, and that occurred four times for both the conceptual and the Planning and Zoning Board meeting as well as neighborhood meeting and for today's meeting. Two times the property was posted, three times the website was posted, as well as one newspaper advertisement. So, staff has determined that this is consistent with the comprehensive plan, goals, objectives, and policies. It is consistent with the area as far as the land use and reverting it back to what it was before since before 1983, I believe. And staff have recommended approval as it complies with the finding of fact which is listed in your staff report and the standards for approval are satisfied. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right, we'll close with public comment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

City Attorney Suarez: So, we have two items. So that would be on E-3, the first item, amending the future land use map.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes. I have a couple of questions.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Jimenez, we're talking about the lots north of where the church is currently located. We're not doing, this does not change the current property where the church or the school are, correct? All right, just to clarify that. I saw the notices were sent out four different times. Has there been any community meeting to present this to residents? I just wanted to.

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Mr. Jimenez: Actually, the notice was sent out five times because what's not there is not a notice for a hearing here. There was also a meeting in my office. I don't have the date handy, but there were about five people to show up, including the two leaders of that neighborhood association that is currently, they're the ones leading the issues with the church, so with the school. So yes, they came to the conceptual and they came to my office. They did not come to planning and they're not here today. But we have discussed it with them, and I've emailed back and forth.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. I guess the last thing, this reverts to MF3. What is the maximum height you can build with MF3 at this location?

Planning and Zoning Director: 45 feet - three stories.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. Just wanted to get that on the record. All right, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Anything else?

Commissioner Castro: Yes. Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: I believe it's 45 feet, right?

Planning and Zoning Director: Yes, 45 feet and three stories.

Commissioner Castro: Can you tell me the exact difference of reverting if it stays in the...

Planning and Zoning Director: So, the big difference here is the use. So right now, with the religious institutional land use, you can't have residential on the property, right? So, it's reverting the land use back, so it's no longer used residential for the church purposes, but actual individuals can live there on the property.

Commissioner Castro: So, what about in height? Is there any difference at all?

Planning and Zoning Director: No, social use is 45 feet, so it's very similar height.

Commissioner Castro: Perfect. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: By the way, just a quick point. I drove by, what is it being used for right now?

Mr. Jimenez: Residential.

Mayor Lago: Okay, good point. Thank you for that.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor, real quickly.

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Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Lara: So, 45 feet, question to either of you. This plan is for a three-story building as proposed, right?

Mr. Jimenez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Okay, so.

Mr. Jimenez: Well, I mean, and yes, that is the absolute intent. That's what'll be coming to DRC and the Board of Architects. We don't, we're getting close to finishing, and then somebody looked at it with a lot of power in the project and said, I want to change it, but from an architectural standpoint, not from a massing standpoint or a layout standpoint, which is why we couldn't run the tracks parallel, which I usually like to do, but we're still waiting on the finalized architectural plans for BOA.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry, Mr. Mayor, who second it?

Commissioner Castro: You did.

Commissioner Lara: I did.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Commissioner Lara.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes. I'll have a motion on E-4.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Lara: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

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City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right, we'll close the public comment. May I have a vote, please?

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jimenez: Thank you very much.