

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 2-2
January 12, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Sue Kawalerski
Rhonda Anderson
Gordon Sokoloff

Agenda Item 2-2

A Resolution of the City of Coral Gables Transportation Advisory Board requesting that the City Commission delay the approval of any Zoning Code changes affecting the City's Crafts Section until a comprehensive traffic study has been conducted detailing the potential impacts of those zoning changes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright, then let's go to Item 2 -- 2-2.

City Attorney Ramos: 2-2 is a resolution of the Coral Gables Transportation Advisory Board requesting that the City Commission delay the approval of any Zoning Code changes affecting the City's Crafts Section until a comprehensive traffic study has been conducted detailing the potential impacts of those zoning changes.

Commissioner Keon: I would hope that we wouldn't take action on this either because we don't know what the plan is for that section of the Crafts Section that we're talking about, so we don't have a plan to evaluate. So until there is a plan to evaluate, there isn't a need to do a traffic study because there's nothing -- there's no parameters to study. So once there's a plan included in the plan, we'll be -- then we'll address the traffic issues related to that. But to my knowledge, Mr. Trias, there's no plan yet for that is there?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: No.

Commissioner Keon: There is no plan. So until there's a plan, there isn't anything to really talk about, so I wouldn't take action on that either.

Vice Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: So...

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, we do have members of the public who want to speak on this item as well.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Go ahead.

City Clerk Urquia: First we have Ms. Sue Kawalerski. She's a member of the Transportation Advisory Board.

Sue Kawalerski: Hello. Good afternoon, Commission. I'm Sue Kawalerski. I'm the vice chair of the Transportation Advisory Board. And for the record, I do want to clarify the record. I am not a bicycle shop owner, as the Mayor indicated. I wish I was; I'd be making a lot of money these days. But I am not a bike shop owner. Representing the Transportation Advisory Board on this resolution, we consider the Crafts Section to be part of an entire area of enormous development, which includes the Plaza, which is now under construction, the proposed Ponce Park Tower, which far exceeds current land use and Zoning Code for that parcel, and now the Crafts Section under consideration for upzoning. We have heard from many, many concerned parties and residents in that area, particularly across Le Jeune, who are very concerned about the traffic deluge they believe they will face on their residential streets if that is being -- that which is being proposed is approved. And what we heard from, for example, Commissioner Mena at the Sunshine meeting, you know, he had some concerns about height and use of that property. We want to be a little proactive here. Therefore, the TAB is asking for a holistic traffic study of the entire area, including adjacent residential sections using the maximum possible build out of that area versus a project-by-project study or singling out just the Crafts Section for upzoning. We would like an entire comprehensive proactive study, which will also guide the Commission when it comes time to voting on upzoning and what that upzoning could look like. And again, this is because of the numbers of residents who have contacted us. And I have to say, I'm very happy to be on this board because residents are actually coming to us. They're finding us. They're hearing that we are actually proactive in taking their concerns to the Commission. But it's because of the residents coming to us that we're coming to you to ask for a comprehensive traffic study of the entire area.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: Are you also -- Ms. Kawalerski, how do you distinguish between the feedback you get as vice chair of the Transportation Advisory Board and the feedback that you get as the president of the Riviera Neighborhood Association? I know you also sent a letter as -- in your role as president of that association, very similar -- I think almost the identical topic, if not a

very similar topic. So how are you distinguishing between those two roles because you're here today as the vice chair of Transportation Advisory Board, but we've also heard from you as the president of that association. And I'm curious, when you say you get feedback from all these residents, are they reaching out to you in one role or the other?

Ms. Kawalerski: They're reaching out in both roles.

Commissioner Mena: Okay, so there's no distinction.

Ms. Kawalerski: Well, yes, there is a distinction because in my private life as the president of the Coral Gables Neighbors' Association, they have a means to contact me. As the vice chair of the Transportation Advisory Board, they also have a means to contact me. They're duplicative in many instances -- this one is one of them -- but by no means is it being filtered through an association to the board. This is pure direct contact, residents to board.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, Ms. Rhonda Anderson would also like to speak on this item.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, Ms. Anderson.

Rhonda Anderson: Good afternoon, Mayor and Commissioners. This is another one of those instances, just like the appraisal that you're doing for Miracle Mile, where more information will help you make better decisions. These are big decisions that you need to make. While you might not want to do the impact on just the maximum allowed for the Crafts Section, you may want to have it in a proposal with incremental differences. So, at the highest, at the medium, at the lowest, it'll help you make the proper decision when this matter comes in front of you. And as I've noted, you know, these traffic studies that only occur on a single parcel for a single development don't account for the cumulative impact that that traffic from all those different properties that would be resolved within the, you know, Crafts Section, the impact that traffic would have on the surrounding residential areas. What we don't want to do is we don't want to create another section

of our City that's become unlivable because of the amount of traffic. There is already a significant amount of traffic. So rather than the droplet approach of traffic studies that only look at volumes and don't listen to resident input at all because they don't account for that, we need a holistic study for the entire area, so we can apportion a cost to developers and not lose out on it. If the first one only adds 50 cars, they may not have to do traffic calming. If the second one adds another 50 cars and so forth, we may lose out on the opportunity to have the development do what we've required, for instance, to the Villa Valencia to do, is to deal with the traffic on the intersection of Le Jeune and of Valencia. And with all due respect, Mayor, residents got no notice of Aloft, and I know that that was quite some time ago, but as an as-of-right project -- and I know you don't like it either -- notice to the residents gets better results. Notice to the residents of the Villa Valencia project got the City many benefits in the way of traffic calming and improvements along Valencia and Le Jeune Road because there were missed opportunities when it came to the Aloft. We don't want missed opportunities when it comes to the Crafts Section, and we, the taxpayers, then have to find the money to fix the problems that that entire area being rezoned affects the community. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Can I ask Ramon one question while you call up the next person? Ramon, did Aloft -- did the Aloft go to the Planning and Zoning Board, or was the Planning Department involved in the Aloft?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: No, Commissioner. That parcel had been rezoned some years before...

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: And the development just followed the Zoning Code.

Commissioner Keon: Okay, so yeah, that's one of the problems for everyone that's listening with Aloft is that...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah.

Commissioner Keon: It was done through the direction of an administration that didn't see the need to bring it to the Planning and Zoning Board, nor to work with the Planning Department on it. And so I think it is more an aberration than how we generally practice.

Commissioner Fors: And correct me if I'm wrong, but after passage of the updated Zoning Code, which we've kicked down the road a few times already, that sidewalk space in front of Aloft would be illegal, right?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes. There's a mandatory ten-foot setback in addition to their sidewalk for Le Jeune.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: There is a setback.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: That is the proposal that you need to take action on.

Commissioner Keon: There isn't one, right. But I think that you need to regard Aloft...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Le Jeune, Douglas Road and US-1.

Commissioner Keon: Right, but Aloft is an aberration. And so we can't point to Aloft as how we traditionally and generally deal with development projects in the City. It was wrong. Thank you. I'm sorry, whoever's next.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner Keon, I'd like to (INAUDIBLE) that problem has been resolved.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: And...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Anything else? Go ahead.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I think that's what happened with Aloft, that it was rezoned to commercial as part of a different project, then the project didn't go through, and the zoning remained in place.

Commissioner Keon: It wasn't dealt with appropriately...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: By whoever was leading the City at that given time. So it's not a -- it isn't traditional.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, unlike what we have now which is site plan approval (INAUDIBLE) zoning issues.

Commissioner Keon: Yes, right. We don't do that anymore. But -- right, but we keep hearing about Aloft and I think we all agree that Aloft is not what anyone would have liked, and we have to accept that it is an aberration. It happens to be there, but you can't use that as an example of how we generally deal with development within the City.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And it is commercial intrusion into our residential area.

Commissioner Keon: Yes, it is.

City Manager Iglesias: That project zoning would not occur now under the current laws.

Commissioner Keon: Right, that's right. So, I'm sorry, whoever's next to speak.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay, and lastly, Mr. Mayor, Mr. -- Dr. Sokoloff would like to make a quick comment.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, come on. Doctor, again? Go ahead.

Gordon Sokoloff: I'll make it very quick. I just want to say this too. This is a bit of an abnormal situation also. You have three possible projects, the Crafts Section, Ponce Park Tower and the Plaza. None of it has been voted upon, so we're asking for a -- I like the word holistic, kind of take it as a group. I know it's kind of strange, but these are all within a mile of each other, and if approved, it's going to wreak havoc transportation-wise, we believe, in this neighborhood. So we hope that the Commission takes it under consideration.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Doctor.

Mr. Sokoloff: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright. What is the pleasure of the Commission?

Vice Mayor Lago: Mr. ACM, don't we have a City-wide traffic study for traffic calming already in place?

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Yes, we do. sir. That said, it is targeted just for traffic data for the traffic calming purposes. I believe what we're talking about now is something that cuts deeper, which is to analyze the impact of individual projects when these projects are yet even to exist...

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Number one. And number two, I believe, essentially that this is the function of the City's land use map, and also a comprehensive and master plan of the City. That's what dictates development in the City. Everything builds on that, and so I would defer to the City Manager or the -- or Ramon Trias for further information on this, but that is how this process unfolds in the world of planning.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: The other issue, of course, is that the Comprehensive Plan deals with many of these topics, and that's a process that has been ongoing for many, many years. We are not changing any of that. Okay, none of the changes that are being proposed are altering that until you get to the Crafts Section. The Crafts Section is changing, however, it's going through that process. So we do have processes in place, such as the grid, such as the level of services and so on that deal with those issues. Any additional traffic studies certainly are up to the Commission to suggest.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright. What is the pleasure of the Commission?

Commissioner Keon: To take no action.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: What?

Commissioner Keon: With regard to what?

Vice Mayor Lago: To 2-2.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: 2-2.

Commissioner Keon: I thought it was to take no action.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, there's a motion to take no action on 2-2.

Commissioner Keon: Well, I don't think it was...

Vice Mayor Lago: There's no need for a motion.

Commissioner Keon: I think it was just -- I wasn't going to take action.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, then we'll go...

Commissioner Keon: So if nobody else wants to, then it...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We will not take action on 2-2.

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.