

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items E-6 and E-9
April 14, 2026
Public Safety Building, CMR
2151 Salzedo Street, 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)

Mario Garcia-Serra

Agenda Items E-6 and E-9 [Start: 3:53 p.m.]

E-6: An Ordinance of the City Commission amending Ordinance No. 2024-11, which approved a Planned Area Development for a proposed Publix grocery store and liquor store on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 48, Block 8, Coral Gables Crafts Section (2551 Le Jeune Rd), Coral Gables, Florida; modifying certain conditions of approval due to revisions necessitated by flood zone requirements and to remove or modify certain offsite traffic improvements and bicycle lanes requirements. Lobbyist: Mario Garcia-Serra

E-9: A Resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution No. 2024-59, which approved a site plan for a proposed Publix grocery store and liquor store on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 48, Block 8, Coral Gables Crafts Section (2551 Le Jeune Rd), Coral Gables, Florida, to modify certain conditions of approval due to revisions necessitated by flood zone requirements and to remove or modify certain offsite traffic improvements and bicycle lanes requirements. (This Resolution is not for consideration at this time and will be included with the above ordinances on Second Reading if approved on First Reading.) Lobbyist: Mario Garcia-Serra.

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Mayor Lago: Now item E-6 and E-9, the final items before we move on to City Commission items.

City Attorney Suarez: E-6 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending Ordinance No. 2024-11, which approved a Planned Area Development for a proposed Publix grocery store and liquor store on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 48, Block 8, Coral Gables Crafts Section (2551 Le Jeune Rd), Coral Gables, Florida; modifying certain conditions of approval due to revisions necessitated by flood zone requirements and to remove or modify certain offsite traffic improvements and bicycle lanes requirements. E-9 is related it's the resolution regarding the site plan but that will not be voted on today, so it's just on for your information, but it will be considered at the time of second reading of the ordinance.

Mayor Lago: Councilor.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, my name is Mario Garcia Serra with offices at 600 Brickle Avenue and also now 901 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, representing Publix Supermarkets Inc., the owner of the site located at 2551 LeJeune Road there has been a Publix store at this location for many decades and in 2024 the City Commission approved a new state-of-the-art store, which would include an enclosed garage, a liquor store, and very importantly a 20,000 square foot public park on the east side of the block. All of these components remain the same in the project. What we are requesting today is a modification of certain conditions of approval, which we cannot comply with because in one case we are located in a flood zone and in the other the county has provided certain comments, requests for information and denials regarding certain off-site roadway improvements. If we could bring up the presentation, please. Here are some images of design right now. You see the park on the right-hand side on the east end of the block. Here we'll refer back to these as necessary, but there are proposed red lines for the conditions of approval we're going to have some modifications based on discussions we've had today. There's basically two categories or topics that we should discuss. The first one is base flood elevation and the need to elevate the buildings to a height that both the height to the roof, as well as to the top of the architectural feature, and then the off-site traffic improvements. I'll go first into detail on the flood zone and base flood elevation issues. As you can see there before you, that's a flood map zone of this area of the city and while the vast majority of the Central Business District is not within a flood zone, there is a sort of flood zone that creeps into the Central Business District here and covers the block where Publix is located right now. Originally the project was designed to be at grade, but because the base floor needs to be at a minimum of a 10-foot elevation that means that the other components of the building need to go higher. So up to the flat roof before was 36 feet three inches, now it's at 42 feet and the very top of an architectural feature, which was before at 61 feet, is now at 67 feet. These heights are all well within the 190 feet of height for which the property is zoned. Additionally, the transition from sidewalk into building for the pedestrian, also needs to be modified because we are no longer a grade, but elevated certain stairs and ramps need

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to be incorporated to comply with FEMA and ADA. You see the stair areas in yellow and the ramps in blue. Again, this is not our win, this is to comply with FEMA and ADA. The look of the project remains the same as I'll show you now in some before and after renderings. This is the southwest corner of the property. Take a look at the area where the umbrellas are, that's what goes from grade to elevated with stairs. Here is the northwest corner, the entrance to the liquor store, you try to look in the corner there that building right now at grade and then there's a stairwell there with the proposed new design, but still the overall design and aesthetics of the building remaining the same. Here is the Andalusia frontage before and after. As you can see there's a ramp at a very low slope that's coming up on the on each side of the main entrance. The park side of the property remains the same. No modification done here, the only difference between before and after is that we incorporated more green space consistent with a recent amendment to the to the code. You know the use of stairs and ramps for this purpose is common in Coral Gables, both within and outside the flood zone. It is really the only practical way to get a pedestrian from a sidewalk to the elevated floor. Here we're just pointing out various buildings within that same flood zone as you go west, including buildings very familiar to you like City Hall, Development Services Department, Sanctuary of the Arts, etc., all of which have stairs taking you from ground to base floor. Here are some more as you go further west and then even outside of the flood zone you have certain circumstances where the buildings also have stairs just for the sake of resiliency and sustainability to be at a higher elevation. For those of you who are on the Commission at the time of approval you remember there was a lot of incorporation about incorporating bike lanes. We ended up submitting the proposed bike lanes as well as certain other off-site traffic improvements to the county. The county responded with some comments which made compliance problematic, such as the fact that a City Master Plan for the bicycle lanes was required and that is not ready yet. We are pledged to continue working with the city on that. We have talked about preserving and leaving enough sort of pavement in an area for future bike installation. We are also, based on discussions today, going to include the city in the continuing discussions with the county. As we said at the original approval we're saying today what the county approves we will cooperate with and implement, but there is still considerable disconnect between county and city, and the same goes for what was proposed as a sort of road diet limiting or narrowing Valencia and reducing the lanes of traffic and trying to incorporate a last hand turn lane at the intersection of Salzedo and Valencia. Feedback from the county has not been positive on that, but we will continue to work with them on that the most important thing is that we cannot have building permit held up based on those discussions. All these conditions were premised on county review and approval and that's where we are right now, but we're experiencing some roadblocks with county, not to use a pun on words and I would just conclude by saying thank you for your patience. This project has had a lot of, perhaps technical challenges, but we've been working through them, including today in discussions we've had with Mayor, Manager, Vice Mayor. Importantly as part of the project and trying to address the concern that's been coming through when we've been talking about

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conveyance of the park, we are proffering today a 35,000 square feet of development rights that correspond to the park will be conveyed to the city, so that the city could ultimately sell and monetize those development rights, but on the condition that they be used for the advancement of historic preservation that Publix be recognized as part of that effort of historic preservation and that as I mentioned before, that the issuance of the building permit not be tied to finalization on the agreement for the conveyance of the park and that issuance of TCO and not be tied to the completion of the park, similar to the previous project you had today we're expecting that will probably be a CO deliverable, the completed park; and lastly the park would be conveyed in fee simple. There's an old condition that caused concern on the part of the city that perhaps the park wouldn't be conveyed in fee simple that we would give an easement. We are agreeing that it's definitely going to be a fee simple conveyance and the city has agreed and reiterated what was discussed before that that land will always be a park and perpetually be a park subject to a restriction agreed upon. And that is the conclusion of my presentation. Thank you for your patience today, especially considering that it took more discussions, but this is a very promising project and we're confident that it's still going to be the great project that we've always envisioned and importantly we're going to have an oasis of green space in the middle of the Central Business District now.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. Garcia Serra. So, if I may just add a few points. If you notice, we had multiple breaks during this Commission meeting where myself and the Manager and Mario and his team from Publix held two separate meetings to finalize some final points to this negotiation. As I said before in the project that we dealt with Armando Codina and Manny Cadre, where we're getting a 10,000 square foot park about two blocks away. This has been a vision of mine to deliver with Publix hand in hand to bring a 20,000 square foot park to the City of Coral Gables. This is one of the six parks that has already approved and now will be fee simple given to the city. This is what defines a world-class park, and this is accomplished with a partnership of Publix and the gentleman and the young lady who I'm sorry I said gentleman, I didn't see you there, who are here with us from Publix today. Thank you, thank you. This has been, Mario, if I may, four years that I've been working on this.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Yep.

Mayor Lago: So, Mario will tell you, I was at my cousin's wedding in North Carolina sitting at a restaurant with my father at a sandwich shop and we were on a Zoom call with Mario and the Publix brass trying to get to consensus in regard to a design for this project. There have been many, many iterations, many, many meetings to the point where we had two final meetings today. I want to thank you for indulging my final request. My final request that you indulged was I requested 35,000 square feet of TDRs. What is the value of that, just a rough number, what do you think Mario?

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Mr. Garcia-Serra: Well, \$35 a square foot, so let's figure it out.

Mayor Lago: It's close to about \$40 a foot.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: \$1.4 million.

Mayor Lago: So that request and thank you for Publix for indulging my request is going to be done the following way, with the support of my colleagues of course. We're going to put it into a bank account; the bank account will only be used for historic preservation. Case in point: if we're short on the Water Tower, if we're short on the building on the Biltmore Golf Course that we're hopefully going to move if we're short on some areas of historic preservation we will add this money. Publix will play a major role, they will get credit for it, we'll add a plaque with Publix' name on it, along with all the elected officials and staff, the architect, the engineer, whoever was involved. I also want to make sure, please, this is for staff to make sure that it's memorialized. I don't want to later find out it's not, that Publix receive all the credit that they get public relations, they're giving \$1.4 million dollars' worth of funds that will only be used for historic preservation. I want to make sure that at the ribbon cutting at the historic preservation, whatever money that's used for, if a little portion of it's used for City Hall, say \$500,000, which is something that I would like to do and I will tell you what it is today and hopefully my colleagues will agree with me. If you go to City Hall today and you walk in and you see the stairs that go up to the second and third floor, that is not real stone, that is not real stone, correct Mr. Manager. What is that?

City Manager Iglesias: It's cast white concrete.

Mayor Lago: What I would like to do and asked the Manager about a year ago, and the DCM is to get a price, get a price to do that in natural stone, maybe a portion of that can be paid for by this monies and we can put a small plaque thanking Publix for that donation. Publix is a community partner that is involved from Key West all the way to Tallahassee on multiple different fronts really engaging in charity, giving back in philanthropy. They're a community partner. They have four stores in the City of Coral Gables, five stores, four or five, four, four and he thinks he's going to get maybe five. Four stores in the City of Coral Gables, so this is beyond a partnership we're family. So, I want to thank you for stepping up, fee simple on the park, stepping up in regard to the design, stacking the parking, because remember this was when we started talking about this, we were going to build another Publix on LeJune and then demolish the existing building and move seamlessly. What we did was we decided to build a Publix in the middle of the lot and have the parking stacked on top of it. What did that open up? – that opened up a 20,000 square foot park that I requested Publix to do. So, Publix has stepped up to the tune of millions and millions and millions and millions of dollars. This will be transformational, along with what you just saw right now from Armando Codina and Manny Cadre. It took leadership, it took patience, but I'm proud to say that this is part of not only my legacy, but our legacy. This is what real leadership is. This

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is what leading by example is pushing to push the city to the next level and protecting our city. So, I want to congratulate you, Mario. I know that it was not easy, in that conference room right now...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: It took some effort.

Mayor Lago: It took a lot of effort. I want to thank the Manager for holding firm and always you know making sure that the integrity of the city is always upheld. I want to thank my colleagues on the Commission, especially the Vice Mayor, who's also been played, I don't want to say hardball, but she's played hardball in regard to landscaping, infrastructure, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and if I forget, I apologize. Thank you for our City Attorney's office, our DCM or ACM, our Public Works team and especially Publix. So, I don't know if I have left anything out. You're going to get credit on the buildings as the donations are made with a small plaque, you're going to be part of the public relations campaign and marketing as we announced that we're let's say cutting a ribbon for the Water Tower, if we use money for that project, for City Hall, you will be invited and we'll give you the necessary, the necessary recognition for your hard work, but I just want to say thank you. Thank you for putting up with our requests and thank you for delivering on something that is going to be way beyond Publix, this is not about groceries. There's a reason why you have four stores in the City of Coral Gables. This is going to be transformational and the reason why its transformation is because of your commitment to deliver a 20,000 square foot park. Mario, thank you, my brother.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Of course, and the park always stays a park.

Mayor Lago: The park always stays the park, which is to me, to me that it's going to be no words, no words. Imagine taking this when I took office 13 years ago and I hate to reiterate this again, we had one park in the downtown, now we're going to have seven parks in the downtown think about. That that is truly, truly transformation, that's why people want to live in our downtown, that's why companies want to move here, that's why people want to open businesses here. Thank you.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: It's also why I prematurely gray.

Mayor Lago: But yes, yes, yes. That's why my dad was involved in a Zoom call with the Publix board in the middle of...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: I was on vacation too at the time.

Mayor Lago: And then we were on vacation we were both, so it got done. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So might explain why I'm getting more gray hair too. So you know we spoke about a few things and I'm hoping that Publix will continue to take the lead and set the example for sustainability and safety for pedestrians going forward and I know we have a second reading, so we can have some more discussion about this; and I provided you the example of the number of months and years, quite frankly, that I've been working with you know, FDOT and now

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we're going to be taking even a bigger step with the county on trying to get some of these things done. For instance, with FDOT been having discussions and we'll continue to have more discussions, because I just had discussions yesterday about improving safety along US-1, guardrails, speed radar detection signs, and so, forth going forward on very difficult intersections, much more difficult than we have here to deliver pedestrian safety for individuals that are riding bicycles or disabled or otherwise. So, my ask from you was not to go this alone with the county because it takes a conversation, and it takes a village to get things done. Just because you know you get a no from the county doesn't mean you give up there and just move forward, because our boards our committees, we had a Bike Master Plan, but it needed updated because Valencia was not a good corridor putting a bicycle lane, it needs to move to Andalusia on the side that was requested. City Manager has consult moving forward on that and we'll have a bow on it, but yes, there is a plan and one of our other projects down the street on Salzedo has cooperated by putting in the wider sidewalk that will eventually be both pedestrian and bicycle lane, moving those bicycles in an area that is much safer than what they're doing right now, which is taking the lane and blocking traffic and it's just it's going to be better for the future. So let's work together on all these projects because it is a synergy that will help us move forward and Publix will have the opportunity to be setting the example for everybody from everything from recycling, okay, on down to being able to get to the Publix in a safe fashion, because as I shared with you, a resident right in my neighborhood was hit at the corner of Valencia and LeJeune Road, because we don't have proper safety measures there. We can deliver this together. So, I applaud the fact that we have the green space in the back which is desperately needed and we have set this building back at a distance from LeJeune Road that makes it a comfortable place to walk now, a safer place to walk and then we'll have a two-way cycle track, as they call, it or a bike lane for people to be able to safely transect our downtown community and to be able to go to Publix and go to the Adult Activity Center and be able to enjoy the amenities that we have downtown, including the beautiful park that you're going to have behind the Publix. So, thank you for your efforts there and I'll continue to work with you.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Understood.

Mayor Lago: Before we entertain a motion.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: We're working with the county.

Mayor Lago: Before we entertain a motion, I just want to memorialize your comments. So, the park is going to be used during construction just like we have right now, which is perfectly fine, our downtown is tight. I want to make sure especially now that we're going to have construction at the Mobility Hub, which may parallel or you know interrupt, that's number one; number two, we had talked about the TCO or CO for the park obviously. We have to obviously get TCO for the Publix store and then obviously we can move forward on that. Is there anything else that's pending

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what I missed. I mentioned the fund, I mentioned Publix, I mentioned marketing, advertisement, I mentioned 35,000.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: The issuance of building permit.

Mayor Lago: Yes, but we're not going to have any hindrances we're moving forward right now, that's not a problem. I also, Madam ACM and DCM, please let's make sure through the Manager that we hold everyone to the same standard on trees you know let's not plant six-foot trees on this 20,000 square foot park, it's going to take 30 years for it to be shaded. Let's do this the right way, okay.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

City Manager Iglesias: And also, the issue on the dedication of the park on the on the...

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Conveyed and fee simple to the city period.

Mayor Lago: With that being said – yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I have one more for me to forget and I asked for our Landscape Director to look at trees that are reusable on a lot. For instance, the Gumbo Limbo there, if our city staff makes a determination that we can reuse those trees somewhere else in the city, Publix be committed to doing their part on having those trees moved. City Manager, I don't know if your team has had a chance to do that evaluation on what is reusable.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor we will have our arborist, excuse me no, our Landscape Department take a look at that, and we will have our Assistance Director Deena Bell take a look at those trees.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: If you have any use for the trees, they're yours.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Okay. So, we have a motion – do a motion? – no. Can we have a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

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Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Any public comment, we're good. All right, let's go.

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you very much. We'll see you back at second reading.

Mayor Lago: Mario, thank you my friend.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: All right we don't need E-9.