

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items F-7 and G-15 are related
August 24, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant City Attorney, Gus Ceballos

Public Speaker(s)

Felix Pardo

Agenda Items F-7 and G-15 are related [4:22 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida authorizing an extension through September 28, 2021, of a Zoning in Progress related to the incentives and/or bonuses provided in Section 5-200 of the Zoning Code “Mediterranean Standards,” for new commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family projects; and providing for an effective date.

(Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Discussion regarding the future direction and projects for the Blue-Ribbon Committee of architects.

(Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

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Mayor Lago: Moving on to F-7.

City Attorney Ramos: Yes, Mayor. F-7 is a resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida authorizing an extension through September 28, 2021, of a Zoning in Progress related to the incentives and/or bonuses provided in Section 5-200 of the Zoning Code "Mediterranean Standards," for new commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family projects; and providing for an effective date. This is a public hearing item. It's also related to G-15, which is an update from the Blue-Ribbon Committee.

Commissioner Anderson: Mayor, I'd ask that we hear G-15 first because it makes no sense to discuss F-7 until we discuss G-15.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. Assistant City Attorney Gus Ceballos. So, I had circulated, I believe yesterday, a copy of the red-line draft for the proposed amendments to Section 5-200 "Mediterranean Standards." It is a draft, nothing more, so I'm sure people are going to ask for copies of it. It is a draft. It is still a work in progress. I suspect we're going to need at least another two to three meetings before we can get some sort of a final draft put together. The board has been working diligently. They have been going beyond the scheduled hours on almost every meeting. They're putting in a good amount of effort, even outside the bounds of our meetings individually. They prepare notes and they come in and they make a lot of suggestions, and they have some great points. And I think we've done good work so far, but it is taking a lot longer than originally anticipated. I think we'll have something, hopefully, in the next couple of weeks. We have our fifth meeting this Thursday, and I believe hopefully by the 7th, and if necessary, an eighth meeting, we'll go ahead and get it wrapped up. The Chair of the committee is here, if you have any questions. Also, if you have any

questions specifically on the draft, we'll be here to answer any questions that you may have. Just let us know.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes. Mr. Pardo, if you please could give us a brief summary of where you're at and where you would like some direction from this Commission.

Felix Pardo: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, staff and the public. It's quite a responsibility, but quite a pleasure to be here today because we have seven board members that have worked very, very diligently. We have one appointed by each one of you, and then of course, we have a representative of the Board of Architects and also the City Architect as the seven members of this committee. And I also wanted to personally thank Gus Ceballos, the Assistant City Attorney. He has not only been gracious enough to answer any questions that we have during our deliberations but represents the legal staff in a very professional way to say least. Also, the City Clerk has nodded off a couple times, though he still managed to stay awake for most of it. And he's also transcribed a verbatim record of our comments, which is not easy because we have gone on for hours and hours. Just so you know, you know, one individual could probably do this work in a fraction of the time. But when you have seven individuals in a committee setting, it'll take more time. But the great news is that we started off with a mission, it was explained, it was discussed clearly. It was discussed among all the committee members and also the public, and we've also opened up to the public for their comments, both in person, and in Zoom. So, it's been very inclusive to say the least. So, when we first started, I tried to put something together so we could all focus on this because I was not sure if all the committee members, first of all, understood what had happened at the Sunshine meeting, and then after that, at the regular Commission meeting. So, the key issues that we were addressing was the lack of compatibility between the existing neighborhoods and new development. Number two, the failure of -- to implement the existing Zoning Code, specifically design standard Section 5-102(b), which is solely the responsibility of the Board of Architects that are the design standards for all projects in the City.

Number three, to provide more emphasis on the preliminary Board of Architects review process at the project conceptual phase in order to provide direct Board of Architects guidance at proper - - at the project inception. Number four, to address discontent of the citizens who are affected negatively by the impact of incompatible development. And number five, to return to the original purpose of the Coral Gables Mediterranean architectural regulations. So one paragraph that was written many years ago, known as Article XXX -- 30 -- of the Coral Gables Mediterranean architectural regulations, the purpose said, "The purpose of these regulations is to encourage and expand the creative use of the Coral Gables Mediterranean architectural style, the use of Coral Gables Mediterranean architectural design in the construction of new buildings and in the renovation of additions to the existing buildings, which will enhance the image of the City by providing a visual linkage between the contemporary development and the City's unique historic thematic appearance." Two-thirds of that paragraph were eliminated in the new code when it was re-written by an outside consultant. Sometimes you take a paragraph -- and most of you are lawyers -- and you take a paragraph, and you just change one word, and it changes the entire intent of that paragraph. Taking two-thirds of a paragraph of that purpose that was succinct was deadly to what we were trying to do. You have a draft of the changes that were made so far by the committee. It is pretty impressive because when you look at it, you see the amount of red on there. It's very important that you understand, you read it, and you see those nuances of what the Board of Architects does. And sometimes we add words like conceptual review, conceptual approval by the Board of Architects. In other words, so the soufflé is not cooked -- completely cooked by the time it gets there. And sometimes when you have that kind of initial review by the Board of Architects, the developer and their architect will be able to understand what would be acceptable for a particular project on a particular site. Now, we have agreed to most of these things, and that's pretty impressive, when you talk about seven architects. It sounds like the punch line of a joke, but to have seven architects agreed to something -- or seven people of any profession agree to something is very, very unusual. Now, there has been a large break in what should qualify and what should not qualify. And one of the things is I want to have complete clarity from this Commission, because in my mind, I know what it should be, but I want to make sure that this is reinforced by the Commission. And that is that this is called the Coral Gables Mediterranean style

design standards and the Mediterranean standards of Article 5. So, I wanted to briefly show you just a few photographs of examples of architecture because each one is worth a thousand words, so I'll be very brief. And by the way, these are not award-winning photographs. I took them myself off my iPhone. It's a miracle that I was able to get them this sharp. The first one is this glass box that's on Alhambra and Ponce. It's very symbolic, because what you see in the reflection of it is what happened in the future, which was part of the response to the glass block and also to the concrete block architecture that was going up in the early 80s. And you see there in the reflection a more Mediterranean, modern but more Mediterranean-inspired style of architecture compared to this glass block. This is what was the answer to the glass block at that time in the early 80s, the Bank of Coral Gables, which is now the Amtrust Bank, and that's on Almeria and Ponce. It looks a little different than a glass block. And that was -- there was a historic building there which was about, I'd say a third the size, and -- I mean a fifth the size and a third the height. And when you look at these types of details on this building, you would think that it's been there for a very long time. Here you have another building that was restored, which was a nondescript building, and then in the background, you see some of the Mediterranean architecture in the CBD area. Here you see another building that was a commercial building that was completely nondescript. It looked like a warehouse, and all of a sudden, it has that type of theme that the City of Coral Gables and George Merrick created. And here you go on, and here you have Alhambra, which is a very wide street, you have a building that must be now 20 years old, and that's the Giralda building that's on Alhambra. And again, that's a great example of Coral Gables Mediterranean style. And here you have the Colonnade, which was also an interpretation, and this was done prior to the bonuses that were created, but it's timeless, and it sets the stage, and it sets the tone, and you see the step backs, you see the setbacks, you see the colonnades, you see the rustication, you see the articulation, you see the windows, the entrances, the canopies; it's all there. And it's a high rise. Now you see your own City projects, parking garages that look Mediterranean and that costs money, but the City wanted to make sure that those buildings represented what they had envisioned to keep the same theme going. You had more modern...

Mayor Lago: Mr. Pardo, may you go back to the previous slide?

Mr. Pardo: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: I'm not expecting you to know. I know one of the architects, but who was the architect on the first and second slide, on those two?

Mr. Pardo: I think that was Willy Bermello.

Mayor Lago: No, Willy -- I know Willy for a fact was the one -- was the Aragon parking garage.

Mr. Pardo: Okay.

Mayor Lago: I don't know -- I'm just intrigued because it -- just to understand...

Mr. Pardo: I think maybe that was Eddie Llamas. I think it was Eddie Llames.

Mayor Lago: Eddie, who worked -- who when I was at B&A, worked at B&A also.

Mr. Pardo: Correct, correct. And Eddie was a classmate of mine.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Pardo: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Great guy.

Mr. Pardo: Very good guy, very talented.

Mayor Lago: Very soft-spoken.

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Mr. Pardo: Right. And he worked for many years with Ferendino Grafton Spillis Candela, which also includes the Vice Mayor's selection, Mitch Alvarez -- oh, sorry.

Unidentified Speaker: The other beard guy.

Mr. Pardo: Sorry, I...

Mayor Lago: No, but I think it's -- Mr. Pardo, I think it's -- maybe we can ask the Manager. It's worth finding out, just for context, just to understand.

Mr. Pardo: Oh, sure, sure. And again, you know, there's no doubt on my mind that most architects could do this.

Mayor Lago: You said it.

Mr. Pardo: As long...

Mayor Lago: You said it; I didn't say it.

Mr. Pardo: And most architects can do this, but you know how it is. You got to give someone the parameters and you have to tell them these are the parameters, not these are the parameters. So, this was also another Mitch Alvarez project, and you know, this is the Regions Bank building, which was originally Union Planters. And that's also on the circle, very delicate the way that it was designed. And it's funny, it's the same company, same architect that did the Shops at Merrick Park, did the Colonnade, did the...

Commissioner Fors: Douglas Entrance, no?

Mr. Pardo: I'm sorry?

Commissioner Fors: Douglas Entrance.

Mr. Pardo: The Doug -- yeah. I was reaching for the word because it was actually a historic restoration, and then they also did the contemporary buildings where MasTec is headquartered in, but they had to do that also because it was a historic building classified under the Secretary of the Interior. They had to make it pop out a little bit different, but they did it in a very delicate way. They did quite a great job. And again, you know, just great architecture. So, there you see some of the details. And people say, "Well, how?" But then you see the details, and the devil's in the details sometimes. And then, you know, the Mediterranean bonuses came in. Some of these projects got bonuses, and in fact, this project got a Mediterranean bonus.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

Mr. Pardo: And it's very modern. And here we go. So, one of the issues is that in the code, it says any style, but when you look at something this modern, and then you look at this, and you look at this, and you look at those detailed work, and then you have that. You have the full circle in 30 some odd years from the Bank of Coral Gables to the Codina headquarters. It takes a lot of money to make something like this work, and then we have an issue, which is historic buildings like this one. That was where my office was on the second floor, 2901 Ponce. It had two streets that ran through it, which were on the original grid. And the project that's built there now has marginalized that history because of the setting. And visually, what you do with historic properties is also very important to be able to preserve the character of it. When you see this, it looks like a historic building was placed in front of somewhere else, and also, the scale of the building behind it also reduces the historic value of it. These -- there are technical terms that are used. And the Historic Director is here, and we were talking about -- what was the name that we...

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

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Mr. Pardo: Right. These are called view sheds. And the view shed is -- just imagine you've got Mount Vernon in this open space, and now you put a high-rise right behind it or right in front of it, and you take away that view shed. You really do hurt the value of that historic structure. So, we've gone full circle from the 20s to what we did in the 80s, 90s, 2000, and here we are. And the adjustments that we've done so far, we've already gone through tables, et cetera. But going back to the original intent of this code, if you say we're promoting any style compared to -- we are promoting Coral Gables Mediterranean style, and it has the umbrella of fitting something like the Colonnade and the parking structures that the city has built and other things that don't necessarily have to be as classic, but in my opinion, bonuses are earned. And I just want to make sure that we don't have a discussion on the committee floor about any style. It all has to be great, but I think without a doubt, it has to be Coral Gables Mediterranean style because that's why these bonuses were set in place. That's why this ordinance was written originally 35 years ago. And I think the reason that we have so many of those styles as examples now to continue George Merrick's vision is very important because the last thing we want to do is do something that is not in keeping with that, or just have humongous white boxes with windows in them. Anybody could do that. T

Vice Mayor Mena: Just a quick logistical question.

Mr. Pardo: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: And then just to clarify something. The -- how do you anticipate if you guys get to issues that you disagree on -- right? -- you know, you're split down the middle maybe. Is it your anticipation that you guys will bring us sort of -- because I'm open to how we approach that, right? You could bring us alternative kind of ideas on a given topic or you could tell us, "Hey, you know, we landed on this, but it was, you know, X vote," kind of five in favor, two -- you know, however, you're -- I'm open to how we deal with that. I'm just curious how.

Mr. Pardo: That's a very good question. And the funny thing is that on the technical end about giving the Board of Architects, you know, more relevancy, especially at a conceptual level with a developer -- because you know, for the developer, the developer is going to play by, you know, the game that is being played. And this is what we expect from you, and this is what we do. And normally, you're talking about, you know, five, seven people there to be able to grant these bonuses. These bonuses increase in feet. It increases almost 30 percent in feet, in height, up to. It increases 17 percent in additional FAR, and that's something you have to earn. But if you say, this apartment building or this shopping center or this office building looks like it was built in Seattle or Minneapolis or Dallas, why call it Mediterranean?

Vice Mayor Mena: Agreed.

Mr. Pardo: Okay, so that's the first issue. And I understand that there are other styles of architecture, and that is great, If you're on Brickell and you see something, you know, out of glass and the thing turns and it does that, or in Miami Beach and it's Art Deco, I get it. I have all the respect in the world for all these styles of architecture, but Coral Gables had a theme created by that gentleman. And these bonuses were in a direct response to the glass block and the Brutalistic concrete architecture that was going up. And I think we're the better for it 30 years later. But the problem is that it has strayed because of certain words in the code. I said that from the beginning, and I say it again. If you don't want to continue to promote Coral Gables Mediterranean architecture, take all the bonuses out, all of them; height, FAR, all of them. They have zoning and then they do have a matter of right. But what's been done recently, as I said before, it's a matter of wrong. And I think that the board has done a great job, but the board -- because so many times it said there "any style" -- there is a lack of direction. Now recently...

Vice Mayor Mena: Oh, can I ask you a question about that though?

Mr. Pardo: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: The -- taking the example on the screen -- right? -- we can have a discussion about the scale of that project...

Mr. Pardo: Sure.

Vice Mayor Mena: But I don't think there's any doubt it's in the Mediterranean style, and it's probably -- from a style perspective, it's probably a good example of Mediterranean architecture. I think the chief complaint about that particular project is the size.

Mr. Pardo: No one complains about the details of that project.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mr. Pardo: In fact, they have spent tremendous amounts of money on the details.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right. And so, my question for you is, when you say that things have gone wrong -- right?

Mr. Pardo: Correct.

Vice Mayor Mena: And as to your, I think, current question about are we talking Coral Gables Mediterranean, or are we talking any style -- right? -- that's an example, a recent example, maybe the most recent example where it clearly is Coral Gables Mediterranean style, but I suspect -- or I know, actually, from prior conversations with you that you don't agree with the scale of the project, which is fine.

Mr. Pardo: Correct.

Vice Mayor Mena: And so, my question is, you have a bonus structure that's designed to incentivize a certain style...

Mr. Pardo: Right.

Vice Mayor Mena: Which the style is right here, the style, but in exchange for that, provides certain bonuses. So, on a project like that, where do you view the issue as having occurred?

Mr. Pardo: If you look at that, and that is the succinct point of what can go wrong...

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mr. Pardo: Or what can go right. So, the point is that we inserted under Table 1 the only little paragraph or the only sentence in red up above it. It says, "Applications shall be required to satisfy all the requirements of Article 2 and 3," which are the uses, you know, in the zoning. And then we inserted "And Section 5-102 Design Review Standards A and B." That's the one that has 20 things, which include massing, step backs, compatibility with neighborhood uses. All these different things...

Vice Mayor Mena: And that section is housed where, the one that you just referenced?

Mr. Pardo: The one -- it's already in the Code.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right, but...

Mr. Pardo: Now it's like this is flagging to the designer...

Vice Mayor Mena: But it's in the...

Mr. Pardo: Design standards.

Vice Mayor Mena: But it's not in the Mediterranean bonus.

Mr. Pardo: Correct.

Vice Mayor Mena: It's elsewhere in the Code.

Mr. Pardo: Correct.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mr. Pardo: It should be all inclusive, but this way, there's no doubt. In other words, you have to look at massing, step backs, compatibility, setbacks; all these -- there's 20 things in there, and they're supposed to be looked at for all design. So, by putting that in there is giving any developer, any architect the heads up, you have to comply with that. Now, how could that project have been different? Well, it could have been maybe broken up vertically. It could have been maybe reduced a little bit more, maybe stepped back in a different way. There are a million ways of doing all of these things.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure.

Mr. Pardo: But the point is that they did spend the money on the details and these things, but at the same time, you know, if you put a set of earrings on an elephant, it's still an elephant, and that's the problem. If you can split it up, the massing, and if they would have gone in early on and had several meetings with the Board of Architects to look at the massing, to look at the step backs, et cetera, it would have been better. And the other thing is, this last photograph that you have here, in my personal opinion, the plan of the streets did not have to be deviated the way that they were.

They could have been maybe altered, but parts of this historic street, especially with this historic building, it could have been paid homage instead of making it irrelevant.

Vice Mayor Mena: But -- and I hear you. I guess my -- at the end of the day, we're trying to fine-tune a system or a set of rules to effectuate better, more consistent outcomes. My question is, it sounds like your gripes relating to that project are subjective in nature. In other words, you can say -- which is fine -- but I'm saying, as far as us trying to come up with a system that will effectually the desired outcome that you have...

Mr. Pardo: Right.

Vice Mayor Mena: Your criticism there is with the massing, right? We could have broken up the massing, et cetera. But that -- ultimately, that breaking up of the massing is ultimately going to be at the discretion of the board, right? I mean...

Mr. Pardo: May I give you...

Vice Mayor Mena: Because you're invoking that clause you just referenced that brings in massing, and I appreciate that, I get your point. But you still have to then make -- you're still going to have to apply that, right? And at some point, my -- and again, I keep using this project as an example, because I think it's a good example for this discussion, right? It's a very large project which got a lot of extra development rights, but that is very much Mediterranean, right?

Mr. Pardo: Well...

Vice Mayor Mena: So, I guess my question is, how do we achieve...

Mr. Pardo: Okay.

Vice Mayor Mena: Your desired result of that project would have looked different.

Mr. Pardo: Although this has not been enacted yet, hasn't been approved by the Commission, hasn't been in -- let me tell you what happened last Thursday at the Board of Architects. I came to observe. I did not speak at the Board of Architects. I wanted to see because there was a project that was coming up for Med bonuses. And I sat through the entire thing, and really, what the Board of Architects does -- which I chaired many years ago -- the countless amount of hours that they put in is remarkable. There was a difference of opinion on that board that day, and there were five members, and these members, when they were looking at this, the first pass was, "Well, let's discuss Mediterranean bonuses." And let me tell you something else. I have to take my hat off to the Chair and she did a remarkable job because she said, "Look, the first thing we have to do is talk about the Med bonuses themselves and see if this architecture qualifies as Mediterranean." So, there was a motion by the board. The first motion was to go ahead and approve it, and the motion did not pass three to two. The Chair stated again that in her opinion, the building was too big, too high...

Mayor Lago: Can we talk about that for one second...

Mr. Pardo: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Pardo?

Mr. Pardo: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: I think it's -- I agree with all your comments in regards to the BOA and the unwavering commitment to this community, its selflessness, the efforts to try to ensure that our City Beautiful maintains the City Beautiful and only gets better. The fact that maybe a project doesn't -- shouldn't receive the Mediterranean bonus due to its design -- where I think we make a mistake is when we start talking about height at the BOA. And I've had conversations with Gus -

- excuse me, Mr. Ceballos -- and our City Attorney to reconfirm where there has to be certain limitations. We're talking about aesthetics. And you know this, I have never chaired the BOA. You know this better than anybody. But there isn't a -- the discussion on height starts trending and morphing the discussion into zoning, and starts talking about different things that, in my opinion - and I think it's the opinion of our attorneys -- should not be discussed at the BOA because it muddies the waters in regards to the approvals of a project. And I think that we have to be very careful on that. I have to be very careful on that.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mayor Lago: Because sometimes we talk about things that just should not be considered. That has to -- the zoning is an item that's discussed in the Zoning Board and the P&Z. In the BOA, we're talking about aesthetics. Am I wrong, Mr. Ceballos, or no?

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: No, you're not. You're not wrong. The Board of Architects is an architectural review board, and they should limit their discussions to that. You can make an argument that, in some cases, you have to factor in some...

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Zoning Code, but it is an architectural review board, and for the most part, height is not necessarily an architectural feature.

Mayor Lago: And the reason why I mentioned that is not because I don't want to have a discussion on height. I voted against the Agave project based on its height. I voted against Gables Station based on its height. I don't have a problem with that. I voted against the parking garages based on height. But my concern is that we lose focus about what we're trying to do.

Mr. Pardo: Oh, no. When I say height...

Mayor Lago: No, I know. I'm just -- I'm giving you my opinion, just so you know, because we always have very candid conversations, and I want to be able to not only express my opinions, but also learn, which is important.

Mr. Pardo: Mr. Mayor, I, you know, understand and I respectfully say that mass is a direct response to height, and there are ways of taking care of height. In this particular circumstance, they went for seven floors; only six were permitted.

Mayor Lago: They stayed within the height though.

Mr. Pardo: How can you go -- how can you come up with a design and have it reviewed by the Board of Architects, when all of a sudden, you're asking for not this much, now you're asking for this much?

Mayor Lago: But their height is within what's allowed by the Zoning Code.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Yeah. It's not that it wasn't allowed. It's allowed within the Comp Plan, but they would have to qualify for the Mediterranean bonus to achieve that height.

Mr. Pardo: And again, you know, let's get back to the real basics here. The Comprehensive Land Use Plan is a ceiling. That's not just what I think; it's what everybody understands. Conceptually, it's a ceiling. It's a ceiling of the maximum that could be allowed, and if you exceed it, you have to then alter your Comprehensive Land Use Plan. When it was first initiated in the 80s, it was because it was a state law, and we rushed to get one done for the City. Unfortunately, it's now gotten to the point because of language that's in the Zoning Code, that it is confusing to some people. It's not guaranteed. So, if we say -- back to this particular project -- that the height would be six floors, in this particular case, if you go back to 502 (sic), that has 20 factors in it, which include compatibility, the Chair said, "There's a real issue here." There's an issue of how it's not

stepped back. Because you could take volume and just make it a square or a cube. But if you go a third up and you have a pedestal and then you bring it in 10 feet, that doesn't look as massive as that.

Mayor Lago: And no one's arguing about that.

Mr. Pardo: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: But let me ask you a question since we have you here. What do you think about the new design that's being proposed that the BOA has reviewed for the proposed Fire Station 4 on Sunset? And there's a reason why I'm asking that.

Mr. Pardo: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Because I think that over the last few years -- and this is not -- I mentioned this on this Commission before -- I think the BOA has gotten very loose on the residential approvals of modern and very contemporary buildings. And we're getting more and more and more glass cube-esque Coconut Grove style.

Mr. Pardo: You make a great point. And...

Mayor Lago: So again, I think that not only does it have to do with the Code, but it also has to do with that person's tastes and what they believe is appropriate. So -- because if you talk about compatibility, when you drop a glass cube in a neighborhood that has ranch, Mediterranean, French, Italian, it sticks out like a sore thumb.

Mr. Pardo: Right. And one of the things about that particular design, and going back to your second comment about...

Mayor Lago: But you understand my reasoning, right?

Mr. Pardo: Oh, exactly. And for example, in our neighborhood, which is Coral Gables, we have kind of a set understanding. When we design a home within our neighborhood, we want it to be compatible, not exactly the same. In fact, we are not allowed to make another design exactly the same. The problem is that, you know, recently, there are some designs which are excellent designs, some of them are very well-detailed, et cetera, but they stick out like a sore thumb simply because they are so unusual, because they are not aesthetically compatible with the rest of the neighborhood. Now, that doesn't mean that they couldn't be brought back in there. But I have seen examples where, for example, when you look at the history of some of these particular homes, you'll see that they were more simplified after the Second World War, and you had the ranch house, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But you had certain detailing, certain things that the Board of Architects would always require, and by requiring it, it really made it very compatible. Now, what you have in the example that you've given, which I've seen a few in the City, not one of them looks like it belongs in that neighborhood. Going back to the Firehouse Station, I think the architect did a really great job.

Mayor Lago: I think it's beautiful.

Mr. Pardo: Beautiful, I mean, absolutely beautiful. And in my personal opinion, I think that the fire house should have brought in something of the Coral Gables women's historic building right down the street.

Vice Mayor Mena: It's right next door.

Mayor Lago: It's not down the street; it's next door.

Mr. Pardo: I'm trying to be kind about it.

Mayor Lago: That's okay, but we're having a candid conversation.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, that's a good point.

Mr. Pardo: Yeah, and the whole point is that I know that the designers have tried very hard to keep the scale within a certain point, to buffer and this kind of thing, and the neighbors because they really want that firehouse, which is a great idea that the, you know, City and City Manager, you know, were -- you know, that is just the right thing to put there.

Vice Mayor Mena: There's unique limitations there because you're talking about...

Mr. Pardo: Without a doubt.

Vice Mayor Mena: Fire trucks.

Mr. Pardo: Without a doubt, without a doubt. Keep in mind, I live down the street from the Coral Gables Library. And if you recall, the County was going to do a contemporary, completely contemporary design. The neighbors went crazy. When it was first done, I knew Succop, who was the architect. And when they designed it, they used the travertine. They used -- they kept it low profile. They did certain things to put that library right in the heart of a residential area.

Mayor Lago: They softened it up.

Mr. Pardo: They did a masterful job in doing exactly what you said, Mr. Mayor. And one of the things is that I think that the architects are very talented. There's no doubt in my mind that they could do something. But the point is that the compatibility that I am boring you with is in the Code. And the whole point is the compatibility is the key issue to making these things go. And I know that, you know, the Chief won't run his sirens and he won't do these things, and this is important. Someone's having a heart attack and we need it, period. But the point is, it can just be

-- maybe the façade can be changed in such a way where it could be just a little more compatible to that. Now, if that design were somewhere else, then it probably would fly. Remember, we have the Luminaire project that was done by Ronnie Mateo...

Mayor Lago: Which, by the way, is a beautiful project.

Mr. Pardo: Almost 30 years ago. It looks like it was done -- built yesterday.

Mayor Lago: Yesterday. It's a beautiful project.

Mr. Pardo: And that's the whole point. But you know what, they didn't get Med bonuses for that.

Mayor Lago: But that's my point. So that's my point, and I'm happy you used Ronnie Mateo's project as an example. That building -- if I ever had the opportunity and I could afford to own that building, that's one of the buildings I would own because of just how incredible and the way the light, you know, just cuts through that building and it's so well done. It's one of the most beautiful buildings in Miami-Dade County. But like you said, we're here to talk about the Med bonus. And if you're going to give a project those type of additional density, intensity and height, I want to make sure that we have an iron-clad equation where when one BOA board looks at it versus another board looks at it, or versus another board looks at it, we can come to as close to a similar response as possible. Because from what I've heard from people who apply it -- and I know this entire Commission has also -- well, some people say, "You know, I went before this board and they had a difference of opinion," and you know, "I went back to another board, and they had a difference of opinion." You know, these people are working -- they're working on behalf of this community for free, and they're giving us their expertise. So, it becomes a little bit difficult to get an entire board to look at one project.

Mr. Pardo: And you're right and it's not easy. And one of the things also...

Mayor Lago: And by the way, Mr. Pardo -- I'm sorry to interrupt you. People have different tastes.

Mr. Pardo: That's correct.

Mayor Lago: Some people may -- who are incredible architects may say, "Listen, I'm not a fan of Med," or "I am a fan of Med." You know, and they're -- and they may like a more subtle Med or a more contemporary Med. And that's why you're seeing the process evolve to where it's at today. But for example -- I won't name who the projects were before -- but you showed some slides where people received Med bonus that should have never received Med bonus.

Mr. Pardo: I don't disagree with you.

Mayor Lago: So -- but if you told me they had some subtle Med influences....

Mr. Pardo: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: You could get away with it.

Mr. Pardo: And look, you all are very focused. You understand. And the reason I just wanted to show you not the technical words, I wanted to show you pictures, because there's a reason for that. You can go as far as the Bank of Coral Gables or Codina's headquarters. Or you can go more in a sleeker way, such as, you know, let's say, for example, the Colonnade or the Regions Bank building, and there's a subtle difference there. But the detailing, et cetera, and the expression are clear, are crystal clear. And they have to be earned. And the problem that we have is we're just getting boxes with sliding doors into balconies, and they look like pigeon coops, and that's not what we should -- in my opinion -- be promoting, just speaking for myself.

Mayor Lago: No, but -- and Mr. Pardo, and I will say this again on the record. The buck stops with the Commission.

Mr. Pardo: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: And if you approve projects that are gargantuan in nature, which should not be -- which are requiring, you know, 30, 40 percent height increases so they can fit the FAR that they're allowed to fit, which is restricted as a result of parking requirements, you know, lots that are not possible to configure, cost of lots that are prohibitive to develop something in the style or magnitude that should be built on that lot -- so you got to go vertical because of the massing. It's all about square footage. You got to get to your 4.375. You got to get your 3.75 FAR. This Commission has to make a decision.

Mr. Pardo: Right.

Mayor Lago: And make a decision whether you grant significant variances in height for projects that are out of scale. And that is -- again, at the end of the day, it stops here. So when you say about massing, when you have a lot that's a certain dimension and you got to go vertical to maximize every last bit of FAR, if not, it doesn't make any financial sense with the cost of construction and the cost of land acquisition, and the cost of design, the lawyers, everything inside the deal, there's no way to make it work, so you got to go vertical. That's where we -- no matter how good you design it or how good you articulate it; it's got to go up.

Mr. Pardo: Well, and sometimes -- you're right, Mr. Mayor. And sometimes you got to lose units, and sometimes you got to lose FAR. And the other -- and look, and there's some other inherent problems that I don't want to muddy the waters, but you know, people are getting relief also on parking because...

Mayor Lago: On top of -- and I'm sorry to interrupt you. On top of the relief that we just gave...

Mr. Pardo: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: For remote parking -- and by the way, this is the second time that we do a parking reduction in less than five years. And then you doubled the density in North Gables from 50 units to 100 -- which I voted no on -- and we got nothing in return in hopes that we would see a redevelopment to put more units so that people could come in, and young people, professionals, you know, the elderly could stay.

Mr. Pardo: Mr. Mayor, I sat on that blue-ribbon committee over 30 years ago on the north apartment district area. And that was exactly what we were trying to do. And the point is that once you start taking up blocks and you start...

Mayor Lago: Aggregating.

Mr. Pardo: The whole point is that it changes the neighborhoods forever. It changes the entire structure forever.

Mayor Lago: And what happens is -- I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I want to add more credence to your statement. You doubled the density from 50 to 100 units an acre, then they come at 135. And then what happens when you approve at 135? Your massing explodes and your articulation in your building is basically lost.

Mr. Pardo: Right. And then on top of that, you have buildings that don't have on-site parking, and they have to park parallel on those streets, and the streets are small.

Mayor Lago: And we have to have projects. We have to have development. We have to continue to evolve. We can't stop construction. We can't stop the evolution of our housing, but there has to be -- and these are -- I bring these things up because these are things that I want you to talk on the board. There has to be real -- like a real set of parameters to understand if you want the Med bonus, it needs to be this. And the Vice Mayor has said it before, and I say it again, if you

want -- if you don't want to get -- maybe we don't do Med bonus. Maybe we do -- if you want to do -- if you want to get those -- that FAR or that height, then you got to give me a park, and it's got to be 20,000 square feet, or it's got to be an energy-efficient building, or it's going to be something -- I'm not saying that's what we're doing, but if we're really going to give Med bonus, let's make sure it counts and it looks like it's Mediterranean.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, I think that (INAUDIBLE) that part of the discussion though because I agree with you.

Mayor Lago: Is another...

Vice Mayor Mena: No, it's our -- that's a decision we need to make.

Mayor Lago: That's our decision.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, separate, I think, from what you're doing.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Mena: You know, because to your point, you know, you're focused on the actual -- the existing bonus, the Med bonus.

Mr. Pardo: And that's the whole point. I want to make sure it's for Mediterranean architecture or...

Vice Mayor Mena: But I want to circle back because I think -- you guys aren't done, right? And I think part of what you're looking for at least is direction.

Mr. Pardo: Some guidance.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right, and certainly, we want to give you that so that when you come back it's a productive exercise. And so, I circled back to -- it doesn't have to be that example we were talking about about the Plaza, but give me other examples, if you like, and show me how the proposed amendments would have yielded a different result than what was yielded. Because if at the end of the day -- my concern is that if it still comes down to the exercise of that subjective, you know, authority, like you said -- I'm glad you incorporated that provision about massing, that's great. But your opinion on massing may be different than the opinion of the people on the board that day, right?

Mr. Pardo: No, actually, actually, one of the things is that most of the times, by the time the Board of Architects has a project before them, it's done, you know, so there's very little wiggle room with that. So, one of the issues -- for example, the people that were not -- that were basically deferred and told to go back to the drawing board, they put a lot of time, effort and money into that. But one of the things that we added under the review process, it says, "Number one, obtain conceptual review approval from the Board of Architects." Conceptual is before preliminary. That gives you a really good compass setting, and that's extremely important, and that is missing from the process. And there are other things here too, and we have discussed from setbacks to all the different elements that create what are called the public pedestrian amenities, which is the second part. So, the first part is what was done traditionally was that the first part had to do with the style. And once you had the style approval, you've got -- you could -- you didn't have to take it, but you could get up to one floor and up to .2 of FAR. Then to get to the second one, then you had to go for the public pedestrian amenities purposes is because, as Mitch said, when the building lands on the property, what are you offering the public. So, if you wanted now the second part of the component, which was up to .3 of the FAR, up to another floor, that was something else. So, keep in mind that these things are bonuses that are earned. Now, you're earning additional height. So, you have to first cross that stage of qualifying and the style of the architecture was the original intention of it. If you all want to change it, that's up to you. But in my opinion, that's why the bonuses were put in there. And these bonuses, I think, are clear to promote a particular style,

because if not, it is very possible that now you could have entire commercial neighborhoods that have a completely different style. And you wouldn't be able to tell -- unless for the color of the sidewalks -- if you're in Coral Gables or City of Miami or Unincorporated Dade County or anywhere else.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, but that particular style is expensive, it's more expensive. And so, this promoted that style by allowing bonuses because Mediterranean architecture -- if done properly -- is much more expensive. And Vice Mayor made a very good point about Agave; outside of the massing, that it's a very high-quality job. Let's leave them massing out of it. And so, conceptual design, I think we would -- certainly, any architect -- as you know, Felix -- can come for a conceptual design and we welcome it. And it probably should be -- the Board is doing a much better job. I think we're doing a good job right now in looking at that Mediterranean concept because it is more expensive. So, if you want a more -- so that bonus was originally done to promote that more expensive style of construction.

Mayor Lago: But we got away from that. We got away from that.

City Manager Iglesias: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: And you could tell -- I mean, again, you look at the Agave project, for example. I'm not a fan of the height but look at the finished level. Look at the finished level and look at the copper. The copper -- everything is copper.

Mr. Pardo: Stone.

Mayor Lago: Everything is stone, and it's not just six feet up. It's to a level -- again...

Mr. Pardo: The developer has spent the money.

Mayor Lago: They spent the money.

Mr. Pardo: There's no doubt, but...

Mayor Lago: But they got the bonus.

Mr. Pardo: And the thing is -- and the Manager's right. That's how this thing was done originally. We just off the cuff said, "It's going to cost 20 percent more."

Commissioner Anderson: Right.

Mr. Pardo: And that's how we came up with the .2. That's how it was done. It was like, you know, you got to be kidding me. No, that's how it was done. It's going to cost more. When you look at that Bank of Coral Gables building, the structural system is PSI joist concrete.

Commissioner Fors: Mr. Pardo.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fors, you have some comments.

Commissioner Fors: Mr. Pardo -- mainly questions, because what I've been focusing on here initially is the concept of compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods. So -- and I know this is just a draft -- when we say subject to capability with the surrounding neighborhoods, it's -- and we've touched upon it, but jumped around a bit. It's compatibility in terms of what?

Mr. Pardo: There are many issues. Let's think about this for a minute. When you look at compatibility, let's say you have low buildings on one side. You have the ability of stepping down or stepping up from that area. So, you're looking at the neighborhood saying, "What is there?" You know, or not just what can go there, and that's how you have that compatibility. You're respecting that. I'll give you a great example. When the Bacardi headquarters was built, originally

that building was going to have the high-rise right on Le Jeune Road, and the step back was on the back side. And I had already chaired the Planning Board. I was off the Planning Board, and I went to a citizens' meeting at the War Memorial Youth Center. And I said that that was a huge mistake because it should step down to the immediate and be compatible to what was across Le Jeune Road, which are duplexes and single-family homes. That's compatibility for you. So, what they did was that they took the high-rise component and simply swapped it around, and that's what's built there. You see the high-rise back there, and then it steps down.

Vice Mayor Mena: Isn't all of Le Jeune subject to that though?

Mr. Pardo: I'm sorry?

Vice Mayor Mena: Isn't all of Le Jeune there subject to that step back?

Mr. Pardo: No. Once you go south of Bird Road, the Coral Gables High School is considered S, Special, and it's called something else now. So, it's not considered residential, so there's no step back required.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, but the entire -- and maybe this happened after that building, but the entire corridor of Le Jeune...

Mr. Pardo: Correct.

Vice Mayor Mena: Between Miracle Mile and Bird...

Mr. Pardo: Correct.

Vice Mayor Mena: I shouldn't say the entire, but that commercial portion, at least...

Mr. Pardo: The first...

Vice Mayor Mena: Is subject to a step back.

Mr. Pardo: The first 100...

Vice Mayor Mena: (INAUDIBLE) to the Bacardi building.

Mr. Pardo: Right. The first 100 feet are limited to 45 feet.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mr. Pardo: But the Planning Director at that time -- not our Planning Director now -- the Planning Director at that time was insisting on having the high-rise there. He also insisted on having -- I can't remember the name of the building, but where Tarpon Bend was, he also wanted the high-rise on Miracle Mile with a step back behind it.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, what was being proposed at that time was against that existing...

Mr. Pardo: Exactly, exactly. And I remember Armando Codina walking past me and I was with my wife, and he says, "That's exactly what I wanted to do from the beginning, step it down there."

Commissioner Fors: Mr. Pardo, just to follow up on the compatibility. Okay, so compatibility in terms of -- you said one example is the transition...

Mr. Pardo: Correct.

Commissioner Fors: Through neighborhoods.

Mr. Pardo: Right.

Commissioner Fors: Is that -- and I think is what we were getting at before -- a Board of Architects function?

Mr. Pardo: Absolutely.

Commissioner Fors: Because I...

Mr. Pardo: It is under the design standards. And with all due respect to counsel that's here tonight, with all due respect, I think what they can't do is say, "Well, you've got to put in a two-story building," when you're allowed six stories. You can't do that, but you can mollify the height to make it look less. In this particular case though, the seventh floor of that building within 250 feet from the San Sebastian Hotel -- or San Sebastian Apartments, with the north side, which is only three stories without any tower element whatsoever -- it's only three stories -- having seven stories there...

Commissioner Fors: What building are we talking about?

Mr. Pardo: We're talking about the one that came up at the Board of Architects.

Vice Mayor Mena: But that's not adjacent to the San Sebastian.

Mayor Lago: That's a block off.

Mr. Pardo: No, it is one block. It's still 250 feet away. That's not a big distance.

Commissioner Fors: But what I'm having trouble reconciling is that we -- I mean, during the zoning update, we deliberated extensively on that transition there. In fact, I think it was going to

be -- where that building is going to go now was going to be higher. I think Commissioner Mena proposed an amendment to bring it down to MX2 -- is it, right?

Mr. Pardo: I addressed this Commission via Zoom specifically about that because of the historic building.

Mayor Lago: But let me ask you a question. Let me ask you a question because I think that there's still work to do.

Mr. Pardo: Without a doubt.

Mayor Lago: So, there's still work to do, right? So, I think what the purpose of today's conversation was, an informal update and an extension to the next Commission meeting so that we can have the committee under your auspice come before us and give us a final recommendation on how to take our City development to the next level.

Commissioner Anderson: Mayor, if I...

Mayor Lago: To really -- Go ahead.

Commissioner Anderson: Sorry.

Mayor Lago: No, just on how to apply the Mediterranean bonus in the context and the intention that was considered 20, 30, 40 when George Merrick founded our city. So, I think that's what the intent of what we're doing here today.

Commissioner Fors: And if I could give some...

Mayor Lago: Because I don't want to let the cat out of the bag on everything you guys are talking about when we're still -- that's still in flux and it's still being discussed and you're asking for an additional two meetings -- correct? -- two or three.

Commissioner Anderson: You want to make a comment, and then I'll close up?

Commissioner Fors: Yeah, just the -- if you want some concrete guidance for me, the "subject to compatibility with the surrounding neighborhoods" is something that if what we're seeking is less subjectivity, which I think it's impossible to eliminate the subjectiveness period, because to some degree, it's very technical, but it's an art. That clause there, which appears twice now, to me, needs to be sort of defined. You know, compatible -- what's missing for me is in parentheses, compatible in terms of what, and that's for you to work on.

Mr. Pardo: Let me...

Commissioner Fors: Because, as written now, I think it opens -- it's a little bit of a catch-all to...

Mr. Pardo: Oh, no, but...

Commissioner Fors: Potentially be...

Mr. Pardo: But let me address that. I mean, you know, that's what architects are trained for, you know. And at the end of the day, engineers are trained a little different, you know. For them, two and two is exactly four. I guess for lawyers, the old joke is, you know, "What do you want it to be?" But the point that I'm trying to make is, when you look at a particular project on a particular site and you see the adjacent uses and you see these adjacent neighborhoods, for example, it could be that they put the loading zone right across the street from a school. Keep in mind, the Greek church is there with a school. Let's say there's a big building right in front of it, and you put the

loading area backing out into the thing. That Board of Architects should see that like that. I don't have to write that into the...

Commissioner Fors: Well, that's a good example, but some of what you're talking about sounds more to me like City planning, no?

Mr. Pardo: Well...

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, that's the...

Mr. Pardo: That's a different story. That's a different story for another day.

Commissioner Fors: And that's what I'd like -- that clause, that's what I'd like to do with it is sort of differentiate what are you talking about and what's a different story.

Mr. Pardo: Mine is more specific as the example that I just gave you of the Greek church and school, you know. Who in their -- not who in their right mind. It may just work out because they could get another two units somewhere else, so therefore, they just put the loading zone there, you know. And you have -- you know, that doesn't make sense. But the Board of Architects can suggest put the loading zone somewhere else, and it's the same thing as commercial, or it's the same thing as a park. The Mayor is very keen on parks. And I think that is a great thing to put in there, but sometimes you want to put the park where it does the most good to make the building better in the neighborhood.

Commissioner Fors: If -- can I ask you one last question? It's completely off-topic -- not completely, but a little bit off topic -- before Commissioner Anderson brings it home. Do you have any opinion on -- I guess I would say public comment at BOA meetings when they're performing their analysis?

Mr. Pardo: You know...

Commissioner Fors: Like if I'm getting surgery, I want anybody who's not a surgeon outside of the room and keeping their mouth shut.

Mr. Pardo: There's no -- I think...

Commissioner Anderson: Life or death though.

Mr. Pardo: I think, without a doubt, you know, one of the -- there are a lot of bad things about the, you know, access to all this information that we have, but it's a great thing too. And I think that public, if they're basically addressing a specific application and the design, et cetera, I think that the public should have a right because they've always been noticed.

Commissioner Fors: No, I agree. I agree.

Mr. Pardo: There's always a notice. But they should do it -- in my opinion, they should do it in writing. There are other formats. When it comes before the Commission, the public could come and speak. And when they go to the Planning Board, the public could come and speak. But the Board of Architects or the DRC, there's nothing wrong for them to be there and listen to the deliberation.

Commissioner Fors: Agreed.

Mr. Pardo: That's key so they understand it. But the point I think is that those comments, there are some very bright people that can make great observations and they aren't necessarily registered architects.

Mayor Lago: So, Mr. Pardo, let's...

Mr. Pardo: But do it in writing.

Mayor Lago: Let's hear from the sponsor of the item so that we can make a decision on moving forward...

Commissioner Anderson: Right, right.

Mayor Lago: What you would like to do. What is your vision moving forward?

Commissioner Anderson: Okay. First, I'm going to dove-tail on the written comment issue because we can wrap this up here pretty quick. Mayor and I both have had the opportunity to sit on the Planning and Zoning Board. Written comments were received, and I found them...

Mayor Lago: By the way, just to be clear, I sat on the Planning and Zoning Board for 19 months. I just want to be clear that everybody gets that on the record.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, I didn't count my days and months as closely as you did, but I gained a lot of appreciation for what architects go through because you're looking at these drawings and you have a -- they have a large load of work to do.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Anderson: The comments are valuable because -- and I looked at them from the Planning and Zoning Board standpoint -- drainage and parking and things of that nature. I don't live in that neighborhood. I can't visualize necessarily what the loading zone is going to do to that neighborhood. So, things in writing, I could review ahead of time before sitting down, and look - - and pair it together with the drawings. So, that's why my preference was in writing by a certain

time before the Board of Architects meet, so they can do their homework before sitting down and deliberating. So...

Mayor Lago: And I think that's perfectly fine. And whoever is in the meeting, maybe we can have somebody from the Clerk's Office and just read the comments into the record.

Mr. Pardo: Yeah, at the time...

Mayor Lago: And they can be considered, or a copy can be given to every single person.

Mr. Pardo: And Mr. Mayor, at the time of the application -- because I got here a little later on Thursday, and apparently, what they did as best they could, is they had people from the public all talk about different applications, and that doesn't make any sense.

Mayor Lago: But that's the way the City of Miami does it. For example, they have public comment in the beginning. That's why we do public comment.

Mr. Pardo: Right.

Mayor Lago: Which is something that I instituted with this Commission.

Mr. Pardo: Right.

Mayor Lago: And then we move on. Then, you know, if you speak about an issue, you speak about it once. So, either you speak at the moment the hearing...

Mr. Pardo: Right.

Mayor Lago: The item's going to be heard, or you can speak at public comment because you may have to go to work, and you want to put your comments...

Mr. Pardo: Right.

Mayor Lago: On the record.

City Attorney Ramos: Mayor, the BOA rules actually preceded that, and it says all public comment at the beginning.

Mr. Pardo: Right.

City Attorney Ramos: For BOA.

Mayor Lago: No, but I'm just saying, the City of Miami's been doing that for a while.

City Attorney Ramos: In their Commission meetings, yeah.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

City Attorney Ramos: But our BOA rules forever have said it's at the beginning of the meeting.

Mr. Pardo: What I would suggest that I think would be effective for the Board of Architects to use as a tool of comments that they may not have thought of is simply, if they're in writing, simply have them read at the time of that particular application. It could be that you have 30 applications that day for the Board of Architects, and there's only one project that has comments. And then that way it's fresh. It's been read into the minutes. The board has already heard it, and then they could deliberate.

City Manager Iglesias: I just want to say that the Board of Architects does a fantastic job for our City. They come in three to five hours every week, pro bono, and there should be consideration for their time to make sure that we have a good robust board, and that we don't have issues with an excessive amount of work that will take more time than what they can do in one day. So, I'm always concerned about that because that is a pro bono board, and they come here three to five hours every week.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, it's a lot. It's a lot. And we have to be very thoughtful and cognizant of that. So, Commissioner, you want to bring it home, like Commissioner Fors said?

Commissioner Anderson: Oh, I want to bring it home. What I think this board -- what this blue-ribbon committee needs is direction from us. Do we want to get the design style that is awarded the bonuses in Section 502 (sic) just to Mediterranean design, or do we want it for any and all design? My respectful suggestion is that we go back to the origins of this Code and apply Mediterranean bonus to that. If we want to consider exceptional architecture in another section of the Code and deliberate over what is exceptional architecture and what we want to incentivize and promote in a way of that type of architecture, we can deal with that next.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, I think -- I agree with you. I think the scope of this exercise is the existing bonus, which is the Med bonus.

Commissioner Anderson: Right. And for -- not...

Vice Mayor Mena: If we want to talk about some other kind of bonus for -- which I'm open to the discussion amongst us, but that's our prerogative at another moment in time, I think. This exercise is about the Med bonus, at least that's my understanding of it.

Commissioner Anderson: Right, but...

Mayor Lago: Also, if I could just take a moment. I'd like to recognize one of the blue-ribbon committee members is here, Robert Behar, who joined us here a moment ago. Thank you. Thank you for your hard work for years serving on many different boards and giving us of your time and your expertise.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, if I may say. I agree that the board should be focused on Med bonus. If we go into what is a good architecture and what bonuses for good architecture, that is really a very in-depth subject. And if the board wishes to continue after resolving the Med bonus, I think it's something that we can look at. But I do think we should be focused so that we don't have mission creep and get something done.

Mayor Lago: I'm with you. I'm with you. I want to avoid mission creep, and I want to have an answer. I want to have an answer that's written down in a document that says, "This is what we're requiring for the Med bonus," to make it clear for people, so it's not ambiguous, and so that people are not saying that we're giving out the Med bonus -- or not us, the BOA's giving out the Med bonus. And it comes before the Commission -- even if it's an as-of-right project -- as a result of the mixed-use, you know, designation that these projects are following a certain criteria, and this is what we're expecting. And I want to hear from the professionals. I want the professionals to tell me what their recommendations are. Because I think that you can have an exceptional building, and it doesn't have to be Med. And I want to understand what they believe to be Mediterranean. What do they believe is going to be the future of Mediterranean in this community? So -- but I think what we need to know -- and I think they've known that since the beginning, and we've -- that's what we've been saying since the beginning here. And Commissioner Mena, I think, has been talking about it for three years. And maybe three years is too much, but he's been talking about it for a few years now.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, let's get it done and...

Mayor Lago: So, I think we need to know -- okay, when is our next Commission meeting?

City Attorney Ramos: September 14.

Unidentified Speaker: Yes.

Mayor Lago: You are asking, as per this resolution, to extend to September 28? Excuse me, no.

Vice Mayor Mena: The second meeting.

Mayor Lago: The second meeting, until September 14th, correct?

Commissioner Anderson: To September 28th. So, we get an ordinance; we have to have it go before Planning and Zoning. We need to review it ourselves, and then we have to -- on second reading -- pass it, which would be the 28th.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: I want to keep this ball moving.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so I would like to see the two or three meetings that this committee needs to bring this in for a landing. I would like to see something brought before the Commission on September 14th where the committee presents to the Commission and says, "These are our recommendations," and then we move forward to Planning and Zoning, and hopefully, bring it before the Commission on September 28.

City Attorney Ramos: So, a note on that. The Planning and Zoning meeting for September is the 8th.

Mayor Lago: Well, then bring it...

City Attorney Ramos: So, it would have to go to them first, and then to you all on first and second after that.

Mayor Lago: I don't have a problem with it.

City Attorney Ramos: Okay.

Mayor Lago: We've done that before. But let me -- go ahead, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Mena: What is it that you're looking for from the...

Mayor Lago: Me?

Vice Mayor Mena: Planning and Zoning Board?

City Attorney Ramos: It's a text amendment, so it...

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, but we have to -- don't we first have to decide what direction we want to go before we...

City Attorney Ramos: That's what I'm asking.

Vice Mayor Mena: Before we hone in on the actual amendment?

City Attorney Ramos: Because if that's the case, it's not until October.

Mayor Lago: But listen, you can do it between first and second reading, right?

City Attorney Ramos: Yes, but then you're looking into October because the meeting...

Mayor Lago: That's fine.

City Attorney Ramos: Is in September.

Mayor Lago: But that's fine. That's fine. But I need to bring this in for a landing September 14th. And I want to be very clear because I've gotten a lot of phone calls, and I know that you have too. We continue moving forward as a City. We're addressing our concerns, but we move forward. We move forward and we address projects that are brought before us. They continue to go to the DRC, they go to Planning and Zoning, and they go to BOA, and that is critical. As an architect, you know that very well, and as a community, we have to move forward. People have property rights. But I want to be clear -- and I think I speak for the Commission. We want to see an actual treasure map on how to figure this out, so where we don't have properties getting Mediterranean style bonuses and they look like glass cubes. Which, I don't have a problem with glass cubes, by the way. I think some of them are very beautiful. But if you're going to apply for a Mediterranean bonus, then we need to really figure it out and get it right.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, I don't -- I guess my -- my -- this is sort of -- was an idea that was brought forth by this Commission. We formed this blue-ribbon panel. They were going to come back with ideas. I think they're not yet crystallized on exactly what the ideas all are, and I just think we need to finalize whatever the objective is going to be before going to Planning and Zoning, because otherwise, it may go -- it's not a building going through the stages of a project. This is an amendment to our Code, and I think we need to decide what we want the amendment to be before going to Planning and Zoning. Because I just don't want to waste time on Planning and Zoning maybe approving something or commenting on something that we don't even agree with yet.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, we can reject it, but I think that what Mr. Pardo was looking for is some direction for the committee to -- instead of looking at any and all architecture as deserving a bonus, to just focus on Mediterranean design for right now.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think that's...

Mayor Lago: That was the intent from the beginning.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Right.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor...

Vice Mayor Mena: I think we all agree on that.

City Manager Iglesias: I think we can -- and Vice Mayor, I agree. I think that we can go in between the first and second meeting to the P&Z to make sure the Commission agrees with what we're doing, and then take it to -- between first and second reading.

Vice Mayor Mena: The response -- listen, we don't know what direction we're going to go with this, right?

Mayor Lago: Right.

Vice Mayor Mena: The response to this entire exercise from this Commission might be, "Hey, this doesn't work. Let's not do Med bonus. Let's do some other kind of bonus."

Mayor Lago: Yeah. It may be...

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm not predicting that, or that's not my goal. I'm just saying, like until we get like what you're proposing and really hash out some of these details and questions about compatibility, what's within the scope of Board of Architects, what's not, then we'll be in a position. So, I think we need to give you the time to finish your exercise. To my point earlier, I would welcome sort of knowing where members of the Board -- if you differ on something, right?

Commissioner Fors: Sure.

Vice Mayor Mena: Let's talk about that, right? You know, let's -- if there's -- you know, try to fine-tune what those issues are for us and say, "Look, some of us think this should go this way, and some of us think this should go that way," and guide us in making that decision.

Chairperson Pardo: And on the committee, in all fairness, we had that discussion. That's why I brought it up.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Chairperson Pardo: And like the Manager said, you know, it could be, you know, for exceptional architecture, creating an incentive. Remember, part of this particular bonus, the first part is on a particular style to promote. That was the original intent. The second portion has to do with the public and pedestrian amenities. You could apply that to another style of architecture, but the point is it's not in the Mediterranean portion of it.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure.

Chairperson Pardo: Because like I said, in the one example that you looked at, you said, "How can you have Mediterranean bonuses for that?" You know, where do you stop the definition? You know...

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Chairperson Pardo: Where do you apply this definition? Then the other thing is that everything else, it would have to be something exceptional. And for example, we talked about the Luminaire project. You know, that, you know...

Vice Mayor Mena: Right, but that's a different decision for us to make.

Unidentified Speaker: Right.

Chairperson Pardo: Exactly.

Vice Mayor Mena: That's not within, I think...

Chairperson Pardo: It's a different story.

Vice Mayor Mena: The zone -- I just want to just quickly -- Commissioner Fors made a point earlier, and I actually agree with him, because it's an issue that I'm also caught up with, this notion of compatibility and what is the extent of that analysis. I get the concept...

Chairperson Pardo: Right.

Vice Mayor Mena: But you gave some examples of compatibility dictating, say a step back, right?

Chairperson Pardo: Right.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay, that's pretty clear. But like is it your position or the committee's position that compatibility could dictate, for example, not only a step back, but that the whole building be kept at a certain height?

Chairperson Pardo: Not necessarily because, you know...

Vice Mayor Mena: Even though the Zoning Code says you can build to X height...

Chairperson Pardo: And...

Vice Mayor Mena: Can the Board of Architects say, "We believe that going to the height allowed by the Zoning Code is incompatible?"

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: If you...

Vice Mayor Mena: I don't think you can.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: If you follow the proposal being proposed today, if you took this, that application would be accurate for the purposes of Mediterranean bonus. That make sense? So, if the Code allows you...

Vice Mayor Mena: And you're saying the Board of Architects would be able to...

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: To...

Mayor Lago: I just can't...

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: For the purposes of Med bonus. So, let me define that. If you have an as-of-right site that you can build to five stories...

Vice Mayor Mena: You can build to five stories.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: You can build to five stories. Now, if you come in for Med bonus and you wanted more FAR, but you don't necessarily need more height, the board to grant you the Med bonus, following the new proposal, could say, "Your building can only go up to four stories."

Mayor Lago: But you do understand -- and we have an architect in front of us -- two architects -- that will tell you, you need the height to better articulate the building.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: No disagreement. I'm just simply...

Mayor Lago: If not, you're just basically...

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: I'm simply...

Mayor Lago: Taking...

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: I'm only providing...

Mayor Lago: Taking a building that's just, you know...

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: I'm only providing the...

Mayor Lago: Expanding the building.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: The legal opinion.

Vice Mayor Mena: But can they say -- I guess to make sure -- I want to make sure I understand you because I think this is a very important point that needs clarification. The -- if that five-story building -- if getting the Med 2 bonus lets you go to, you know...

Commissioner Fors: Six.

Vice Mayor Mena: Let's call it -- or maybe even higher, right? I don't -- you know, in certain instances. Because you have the Level 1 and Level 2, right?

Chairperson Pardo: Level 1 and Level 2. It would be one or two more stories.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right. So -- okay, so that five-story building could go to seven stories, hypothetically, right? Is it your position that Board of Architects could say, yes, everything about this building -- like the Plaza, for example -- you're doing all the things that are Mediterranean in style are what we're looking for, but you can't get to seven stories because that's incompatible with, in our opinion, with this neighborhood?

Chairperson Pardo: No. I think if you, again, fall back on the massing, I personally believe that if they would have had several buildings on that site, it would have reduced the massing substantially. The proportion...

Vice Mayor Mena: But some would still have gone to...

Chairperson Pardo: Well -- and...

Vice Mayor Mena: The full height?

Chairperson Pardo: Correct, and the Comprehensive Land Use Plan allowed for that because it was zoned that way.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Chairperson Pardo: The same as in the CBD. But again, you know, that is -- you know, that was already something that you cannot take those rights away from those particular landowners. But if you take all that massing and you put it in one building, it's not the same as if you have four buildings. It's not the same as if you have three buildings. It's not the same if you step them down. It's not the same as if you have setbacks. You know, one of the things that we've discussed on the committee is the terrible use of zero setbacks. Sometimes it's good, but sometimes it's really, really bad. And the whole point is that this second part of this is the public pedestrian amenities purposes and applicability. So, you know, we've discussed from -- everything from arcades to canopies, to awnings, to all sorts of things at certain levels. Sometimes you can go into the right-of-way; sometimes you can't go into the right-of-way. It's complicated, it's three-dimensional chess. And the point here is that the detail shouldn't just cut it. You know, the -- it has to be everything; the massing and everything else, and that's why the design standards are so clear. So, as far as the compatibility is, you have to look at what's too big and what's not too big. It's not so much necessarily the height, but how you use the height as far as the massing is concerned.

Mayor Lago: Do you remember -- if I may interject. Do you remember the conversation we had about Miracle Mile, about how if we go to four stories and Terranova -- I forget the gentleman's name -- wanted eight stories? And I said, "If we go to four stories -- and I'm perfectly fine with going to four stories -- make sure you use the 3.0 FAR." Because if you can have a significant setback on the fourth floor, and you can have a staggering profile, it's a lot more beautiful, like they have in other incredible cities throughout this country. But we went to 3.5, and that is going to result in a very, very limited fourth floor balcony, because you're going to have four floors that are going to be like a box with a very limited setback. Where if you would have gone to 3.0, you would have forced that setback even more because you wouldn't have given them the density. I

think we need to be very, very careful when we're talking about height because you're talking about limiting height at the BOA, and those are, to me, I think we're treading on people's property rights.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: It's just the Med bonus. So, you could...

Mayor Lago: But the Med bonus is a lot.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: But if you can build five floors, BOA cannot come in and tell you, "You can't build five floors."

Mayor Lago: But that's not...

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: They can make your five floors need to be a certain style.

Mayor Lago: Ceballos...

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Maybe you can make them prettier...

Mayor Lago: But that's not up for debate.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Okay.

Mayor Lago: I think that limiting the height is a problem, and I'm a height person. But again, let's be smart and not clip our wings, okay. Stop approving projects with a 65 percent height increase, like the one in front of Behar Font's window. When you're only allowed 100 feet, and you gave them 165 feet. Stop approving the Agave project. Stop approving projects like that that have massive 60, 70 percent height increases, and you won't get into the situation you're in right now. But now you're talking about reducing the heights that are applicable in regards to the already-approved Mediterranean bonus. What I'm here to talk about and what I think we need to really

focus on are design standards, not whether we're reducing height in buildings. That to me, we missed that boat a long time ago.

Chairperson Pardo: Well...

Mayor Lago: We missed that boat. And I don't -- I mean, we may disagree on that, but...

Chairperson Pardo: Mr. Mayor...

Mayor Lago: People have property rights, and I think that we need to respect those property rights. And we need to say if you want to apply for the Med bonus, you need to follow the following design standards which have been revamped to make sure that we get beautiful Mediterranean style buildings.

Chairperson Pardo: The massing, again, is important how you articulate it and how you don't articulate it. The other thing is the example that you gave, which is great, is Miracle Mile. At the end of Miracle Mile, the focal point is this historic building, hence the view shed of a historic building. If you put high-rises throughout the face of Miracle Mile, you destroy the view shed of this historic building.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Pardo, but you're saying what I fought so hard for two years...

Chairperson Pardo: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: And had basically my own personal -- my business career almost ruined over somebody not getting an eight-story building on Miracle Mile.

Chairperson Pardo: I am agreeing 100 percent with you, and I'm saying here, you know, that the view shed, you know, is extremely important when you look at the plan. So, when you do have

large buildings, when you do have enormous projects, it's critical to look at the street pattern, the widths of the streets, what they're focusing on, and also to see how they're compatible with other things. So, as far as the compatibility concern, it's not made it all look the same, but is it compatible where it goes? Is this -- the Allen Morris project on Alhambra, that is one of the widest streets in the City. The height doesn't bother anyone because it has separation there, it's compatible there. Now, if you put that on a tiny street and you put it across the street from a single-family or two-story area, it's going to be incompatible. We all know what's compatible and incompatible. And if you forget what it is, just knock on the door of the person that's going to get that thing built right in front of them and ask them if it's going to be compatible.

Mayor Lago: So, those are just my two cents. I mean, I think we've talked about this for almost two hours now. Commissioner, please.

Commissioner Menendez: If I could chime in. I have actually a question, procedural question, and then a suggestion for the City Attorney. So, it would come to us September 8th?

Mayor Lago: 14th.

City Attorney Ramos: September 14th.

Commissioner Menendez: 14th. How can we arrange it that if it comes to us first time, then it comes back the second time, whatever the P&Z decides doesn't all of a sudden create a reset and then we're...?

Mayor Lago: Because we can do that between first and second reading, and we can adjust what we may have to in the legislation on second reading.

City Manager Iglesias: We can also have a special P&Z meeting if necessary. This is a very important item. We could have a special P&Z meeting just for this item.

Vice Mayor Mena: I just think it's probably ambitious to think we're going to agree on anything on the 14th.

Mayor Lago: I just think that we should have that meeting -- I think we should have that meeting on the...

Vice Mayor Mena: To finalize, you know.

Mayor Lago: I think we should have the meeting on the 14th.

Vice Mayor Mena: There'll probably still be some questions.

Commissioner Anderson: It doesn't mean we don't...

Mayor Lago: No, no, no.

Vice Mayor Mena: Let's have a presentation, but we might not...

Commissioner Menendez: And my suggestion for the first meeting when we address this the first time -- I don't know if we can have a time certain, a perhaps...

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: A joint meeting and have the Blue-Ribbon Commission present because we will have a lot of questions, and there may be questions about are there other alternatives, you know, and...

Mayor Lago: Would you like to do a time certain at 5 o'clock?

Commissioner Menendez: If -- I would ask the members of the Blue-Ribbon Commission if they...

Vice Mayor Mena: Why don't we vote on the other item first?

Commissioner Menendez: Could be present.

City Attorney Ramos: We have a special assessment public hearing at 3 PM.

Vice Mayor Mena: Oh, yeah.

City Attorney Ramos: So, we would...

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Attorney Ramos: I guess, have the...

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, yeah.

City Attorney Ramos: Commission meeting, go to 3, and then take this at 5.

Mayor Lago: Perfect, okay. So, we have marching orders.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: If I may, if I could just recap it just so that we're all on the same page real quick.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: That's what I was attempting to do.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: So, guidance wise, we're going to limit to Mediterranean. We want to further define what compatibility is with surrounding neighborhoods.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: And we want to work on the design standards as a whole, but only limited to Mediterranean standards.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Is that correct?

Unidentified Speaker: Um-hum.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: And then we're going to have -- we're going to come back with first reading September 14th, then go to Planning and Zoning?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Planning and Zoning wouldn't happen until October, unless we have a special meeting.

City Attorney Ramos: Correct.

City Manager Iglesias: It's October 13th, but we can have a special meeting.

Mayor Lago: Let's have a special meeting.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: And then it would come back for a second reading the 28th, assuming Planning and Zoning happens in between those two periods.

City Attorney Ramos: And on the 15th, it will be time certain at 5.

Mayor Lago: Okay. And the process we have in the City continues as normal. We move forward through the process for projects, and we ensure that the process is upheld, which is critical.

City Attorney Ramos: So, we need a vote on the zoning in progress. We now have direction on G-15.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Anderson, would you like to make a motion?

Commissioner Anderson: I'd like to make a motion just to the September 28th. Let's get this ball rolling.

Mayor Lago: September, okay. Who's the second? Anybody second it?

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. Before the vote is taken, we do have two members of the public asking to speak on F-7. First is Ms. Sue Kawalerski. (INAUDIBLE), okay. Second speaker is through Zoom, is Ms. Bella Smith.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Pardo, before you leave, and also to Mr. Behar, thank you for your commitment to the City.

Chairperson Pardo: You're welcome.

Mayor Lago: You're taking a lot of your own time, personal time, family time, business time to do this, and I just want you to know that we're very, very grateful. And please send the message to the entire committee.

Chairperson Pardo: And I would just say one thing, since Robert Behar is here, is on the previous Planning Board meeting that I was at -- and Robert sits on the Planning Board meeting -- I have to tell you that the Planning Board looked at a particular project that was before them with great care as far as compatibility is concerned. And being former chairman of the Planning Board, I was very proud to see what they had done, the same as with the Board of Architects last week. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: Mayor, can we just make sure that the community --? Because last time -- and I know we're going to vote -- there was a lot of misinformation in the community. A lot of folks got the impression that what we're voting on now was basically a signal that -- I know we've referenced it twice -- that the City was actually closed for business.

Mayor Lago: You know, and I'm happy -- and I'm so happy you mentioned that about misinformation.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: And it's true.

Mayor Lago: It's very, very critical because there's a lot of misinformation out there, and there's a lot of comments that are being put on the record, a lot of emails, a lot of things that are going on where what I've spoken to the residents and I've spoken to the interested parties. Let's work together to find real solutions. Let's not do things which could potentially hinder, you know, the great things that we're trying to accomplish here. This is a new Commission. This is a new day in the City of Coral Gables. And I want us to take, all of us, everybody in here take pride in what we're doing here today. So, Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Smith is on Zoom, and she can go ahead and give her comments.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Smith, good afternoon.

City Clerk Urquia: I don't think we can hear her.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Clerk Urquia: She's there, but we can't seem to hear her.

Mayor Lago: Do you want to proceed with the vote?

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. Commissioner Anderson?

Commissioner Anderson: Did Ms. Kawalerski still want to speak or--?

Vice Mayor Mena: No.

Mayor Lago: No.

Commissioner Anderson: No? Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)