

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item E-7**  
**January 12, 2016**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

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

**City Staff**

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

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Mario Garcia-Serra**  
**Edwina Prime**

---

Agenda Item E-7 [10:49:42 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida requesting mixed use site plan review pursuant to Zoning Code Article 4, "Zoning Districts", Division 2, "Overlay and Special Purpose Districts", Section 4-201, "Mixed Use District (MXD)" for the mixed use project referred to as "Gables Ponce III" on the property legally described as Tracts A-C, Block 16, Industrial Section (363 Granello Avenue), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions, and providing for an effective date. (PZB recommended approval, Vote: 4-2)

Mayor Cason: E-7. It's a resolution.

City Attorney Leen: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Item E-7 is a resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida requesting mixed use site plan review pursuant to Zoning Code Article 4, “Zoning Districts”, Division 2, “Overlay and Special Purpose Districts”, Section 4-201, “Mixed Use District” for the mixed use project referred to as “Gables Ponce III” on the property legally described as Tracts A-C, Block 16, Industrial Section (363 Granello Avenue), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions, and providing for an effective date. The Planning and Zoning Board recommended approval by a vote of 4-2. This item is a public hearing item. It also is an item which would require the swearing in of any witnesses.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Thank you. May I have the PowerPoint, please? Thank you. The project is a mixed use project, which is located in the industrial area. As you know, that area is around LeJeune and close to the Metrorail. And the actual location goes from an alley on the west, then there’s Greco Avenue north and Granello in the south. So, there’s a sliver of land that is between the project and LeJeune, so it doesn’t go all the way to LeJeune. The area around it, as you well know, has developed recently as mixed use. There are several mixed use projects all around, and this is a project that fits right in within the same general idea of design, with arcades and public space at the ground level, and then mostly residential upstairs. The zoning and the land use are industrial, and as you know, in this area what that really means is mixed use. Those are the zoning regulations that we have. The ground level floor plan that you can see here shows how the applicant has attempted to maximize the open space and the green areas and the arcades all around the perimeter, located the parking in the center of the block and also has some retail and live-work activities right at the ground level as the project is mixed use. There’s a landscape plan that shows some detail, and then there’s a series of renderings that give you a sense of the overall image of the project. This is the view from LeJeune. So, as you can see, in the foreground is that vacant parcel between the project and LeJeune. And this will be the view from Greco, which shows some of the plaza area at the ground level and some of the landscape that is proposed along the sidewalk, and some images along Granello with the arcade. In your package, there’s some more detailed drawings. As you can see, the (INAUDIBLE), the Mediterranean design and it got -- it was reviewed by the Board of Architects for compliance.

The site information is typical of this project. It generally maximizes what's allowed, but it's, you know, within what's allowed by the Code, 3.49 FAR, nine floors, and a variety of -- a mix of unit types, from live-work, studio, two-bedroom and three-bedroom units; 120 units per acre is the density, which in the MXD district, there's no density limitation.

Commissioner Lago: Can we -- I just want to make sure that we highlight some of the -- that previous slide, which by the way, this is something that I want to commend you, Ramon, for -- I think this is the first time that I see this in two and a half years, and this is something which is going to really make it simple for everyone who's watching today to understand what is permitted by the Code and what is being proffered by the applicant.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah.

Commissioner Lago: And sometimes people don't understand why certain things come before the Commission. They're not asking for a variance. They're not asking for any changes to what's existing or what's permissible as per the Code. And this is something which -- I don't know who came up with this. I don't know if it was the City Manager or one of the Commissioners or one of your staff members or yourself...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: We were trying to follow your lead, and thank you very much.

Commissioner Lago: Okay, I appreciate that, but this is not about us right now. This is about -- I want to make sure that, you know, we understand that this is great because it really gives you a simple, tangible document that for someone who has any questions, it's right there in front of you. They don't have to go hunting for the information or hear it from somebody else who may not have the right information. This is right there and this is clear as day. So, this is something - - so, in reference to this project, they're not asking for an increase in regards to the permitted FAR. They're actually building the height almost five feet smaller -- taller. They're actually

losing a floor. Where they could build ten floors, they're only building nine, so they're falling below what's permitted in regards to this development.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: That is correct. And I guess that we're trying to make it as clear and as simple as possible, and any suggestions you have, we'll incorporate...

Mayor Cason: One suggestion on this that...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah.

Mayor Cason: In the future, it might be useful to put some colors in. If it's green, it meets it, fine. If there's a yellow or red...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Okay.

Mayor Cason: That way you can focus right in on it.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: (INAUDIBLE) the aesthetics of the presentation. We're following the branding standards of the City, so that's the new standards. Okay, thank you very much. So, there are 416 spaces; 413 are required, so that's about what's required. And then the -- we have some setback information. Basically, in the mixed use project, you can go all the way to the edge of the property as long as you set back further up in the project, so that's what they're doing. We had also a question about open space. There's 10,000 square feet. The requirement is 7,000, so it's a little bit more than is required. In terms of public notices, as always, we've had a public information meeting. We had a notification by mail. The property was posted. There was a legal advertisement. There was a posted agenda on the web, and the staff report was also posted and then there was an additional legal ad for this meeting, as is required by Code. The application history is that the Board of Architects reviewed the project in July. The Development Review Committee had reviewed it in April. And the applicant resolved all the

comments from the Development Review Committee. The findings of fact is that the staff finds that the application satisfies the requirement of the Code, and the staff recommendation was approval and continues to be approval. And there's some conditions of approval that are listed in the report that deal with -- mostly with open space and with some of the contributions that could be made to the underlying improvements and the requirement of LEED certification, many of the issues that have been discussed in comparable projects. If you want to go into some detail, we could do that later. And that's the end of my presentation. Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: There's a dog park in the -- which is an unusual feature. I wonder why you wanted to have a dog park in the middle.

Mario Garcia-Serra: You know, there is some desire certainly on the part of existing residents that we have in phase I and phase II to be able to have that sort of dog park amenity. The configuration of the site lends itself so around the edges of the building, you could put a good amount of open space and green space areas, so we did that. Of course, also, for the benefit of not just the residents in the community, but indeed, there is a demand of the existing residents to have that sort of space where you could go take your dog and, you know, have a...

Unidentified Speaker: And it's open for the public.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: And we have agreed to the condition that that dog park will also be open to the public.

Commissioner Lago: Mario, just, I want to touch on a few items that Mr. Trias brought up in reference to the LEED certification of the project. Can you give me a little more background in regards to what your plans are and what your commitment is?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: You know, we are committed to LEED certification or equivalent.

Commissioner Lago: And what is -- your existing buildings, are they LEED certified? The two buildings that...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Well, no. The existing buildings, Joe...

Unidentified Speaker: Green building.

Commissioner Lago: Florida green building or...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: The existing buildings are -- the existing phase I and phase II are Florida green building.

Commissioner Lago: Okay. Ramon, can we talk a little bit about the open green space and what transpired in the P&Z and what the opinion was of the P&Z in reference to that.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah. There was some discussion about the details of the design, where there's a plaza in the Granello -- no, in Greco. Greco, right?

Unidentified Speaker: Greco.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah, on Greco. If you could show that -- there was some discussion about maybe having additional green space as opposed to so many pavers in that plaza. From my perspective, that's really -- it wasn't a big difference in terms of design. It could go either way. However, because of the fact that this is a fairly urban place, we do need to design some sidewalk and expand the sidewalk and so on. So, I think that the applicant revised the drawing somewhat and maybe they can explain in more detail.

Commissioner Lago: I'd like to just kind of also interject and discuss something that I drive by on a daily basis because I happen to visit the gym that is located behind your building. I always

notice that there's that corner piece, that swath of land in between LeJeune and Granello on the corner, which maybe you can point out for the residents at home. My understanding -- correct me if I'm wrong -- that the developer or the applicant owns that piece of property.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Correct.

Commissioner Lago: Okay, what are your future plans in regards to that property?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Right now, there are no immediate future plans. They've been concentrating, of course, on this project. For now, we've agreed to maintain this as a temporary open space available to the public. So, as it is right now landscaped, it would continue to be able to be used by our residents and surrounding neighbors.

Commissioner Lago: Let me tell you why I bring it up. Because, as you're aware, that piece of property has incredible value for your residents, the individuals who are renters in your building, and everybody's aware of the quality of the product that you put out in phase I and phase II because that line of individuals waiting to get into that building is pretty significant. As a city, as you can tell, due to the recent, you know, ideas and purchases that this Commission has embarked on in reference to Lisbon, the two lots on Lisbon, we are taking a real interest in trying to preserve as much green space as possible. I would like to see if you could sit down with our City Manager and see if that -- you could maybe potentially strike a deal, if it meets the needs of both your client and the City's needs because I think that's an essential piece of property since we own the adjacent surface parking lot...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Sure.

Commissioner Lago: Which I can only imagine it's not a major generator of revenue, but at the end of the day...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: And we could also...

Commissioner Lago: It could serve the City significantly to own those two properties on LeJeune.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Sure. And we could potentially vacate the alley too, even creating more space.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah. But again, my vision of it is not for the City use of the building. That wouldn't be beneficial. My vision would be to leave it open green space, and that's something -- a discussion that I want you to seriously...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Sure.

Commissioner Lago: Have a discussion with the City Manager and her staff because, from my understanding -- and Ramon, correct me if I'm wrong -- the P&Z's only objection in regards to the project was the lack of open green space.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Lago: Correct me if I'm wrong. That's what I'm saying. I wasn't there, so -- and I read some of the minutes, but that was brought up.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: And you're correct. The discussion had to do with the district -- there was not enough green space in that whole area because of so many mixed use projects being built.



Commissioner Lago: And that's what I'm saying. So, right now you have a situation where I've heard rumors that Merrick Park is going to embark in constructing some sort of hotel on that open lot, which they're the owners of. We just had a project that came before us behind Sir Pizza, which is another little empty swath of land which Merrick Park owned and they sold. So, this is a pretty significant piece of property that I want to make sure that if we can come to some sort of agreement, it would meet the requirement of what the P&Z was so adamant about because I think that those two nay votes were based on the fact that there wasn't sufficient green space.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: We're fine with sitting down with the City Manager and discussing what the possibilities are.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, and we do need...

Commissioner Slesnick: Mr...

Commissioner Keon: Pocket parks and green spaces in places for -- there are so many residents now concentrated in that area, and there really isn't any place to walk your dog, except on the street so it really...

Mayor Cason: Is that being used now as a -- informally by neighbors...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: It is.

Mayor Cason: As a park?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Right now, it is.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: You know, properly -- it's open and there's proper landscaping there so...

Commissioner Lago: And by the way, I just want to make sure that your client knows that we appreciate that because you could have thrown up a fence, you know...

Mayor Cason: Yeah.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Commissioner Lago: And blocked off, because of liability reasons or whatever reasons you may personally have and we appreciate that fact that you keep it open. But in between phase I and phase III, how many renters or residents do you expect to have there?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: The number of units, I can tell you, is short of 600. It's five hundred and...

Commissioner Lago: So maybe 750?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: That's pretty -- around there, yeah.

Commissioner Lago: Would you say a thousand, maybe, in that range?

Commissioner Keon: Between the three phases?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Seven right now.

Commissioner Lago: Besides Merrick Park...

Commissioner Keon: Seven or eight hundred.

Commissioner Lago: I don't know of an open swath of grass in that area, and you have certain projects that are coming up, as you mentioned before and Ramon mentioned. This is becoming a very important part of the City.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Sure.

Commissioner Lago: Due to the fact, obviously, it's adjacent to Merrick Park, which is a very hot area now where people want to live. So, I want to make sure that we really have some serious discussion, so make it a priority, please.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Understood.

Mayor Cason: We had one person that would like to speak, Edwina Prime. And then we'll go back to our discussion.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Clerk, please make sure that Ms. Prime is sworn in.

City Clerk Foeman: Would you raise your right hand please so I swear you in? Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you will provide this morning will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Edwina Prime: I do.

Commissioner Lago: Mrs. Prime. It's a pleasure to have you.

Ms. Prime: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Good morning.

Ms. Prime: Good morning.

Mayor Cason: Morning.

Ms. Prime: Mayor, Commissioners, and staff, I'm secretary of the Lola B. Walker Homeowners' Foundation, Inc. This morning I am here to speak in favor of the project and its development. Several members have been present at previous meetings, planning sessions and reviews. (INAUDIBLE) includes the City and the fundraising campaigns for renovation and preservation of homes in the historic MacFarlane and Golden Gate Homesteads. We fully recognize the good nature of this corporate citizen. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: Ms. Prime, is the funds that were originally -- that were earmarked from the beginning -- or the initial development, the initial Ponce -- Gables Ponce development, there was an escrow account set up.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Correct.

Commissioner Keon: Is that right? There is an escrow account. How much is in that?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: A hundred thousand, plus whatever interest has been collected...

Commissioner Keon: Okay, there's a hundred thousand dollars that still remains. Where is that?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: That escrow account is actually held by me.

Commissioner Keon: You're holding the escrow account.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Yeah.

Commissioner Keon: And it is -- those dollars are to go to...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: The purpose of the escrow agreement originally entered into -- and that was in connection with phase I -- was for purposes of furtherance of affordable housing in the -- what was called the target area, which was the MacFarlane Homestead district and the -- what's the name of the other subdivision?

Commissioner Keon: And Golden Gate.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Golden Gate.

Commissioner Keon: Right. But who is the recipient of those funds?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Ultimately, the cause to which the Lola B. Walker Homeowners' Foundation, Inc. designates or the project which they designate.

Commissioner Keon: Okay, so the funds would be -- I mean, we have some -- we have funds for the renovation of those homes that would come to us through the County, so would this be -- or Ms. Prime, would this be an additional 100,000 that could be added to those funds for the renovation of the homes that we are -- have been identified in the community?

Ms. Prime: I think this is the way it's supposed to be, yeah.

Commissioner Keon: They are?

Ms. Prime: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

City Attorney Leen: Although, if I may add, Commissioner.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

City Attorney Leen: We may want those funds to be -- even though they go for the same purpose, not to go through the program because that would be -- there are some houses that may not end up qualifying under the County's regulations or restrictions.

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

City Attorney Leen: But this would give us another source of funds to address those homes.

Commissioner Keon: Okay, so we want to -- you know what it is, we really want to make sure that we don't -- and I know that you and the homeowners' association won't lose track of them, but we had a discussion about it and nobody seemed to know when we were -- you know, a while ago when we discussed it, you know, where those funds sat or who had those funds so...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: They're still there.

Commissioner Keon: They're still -- and Mario has them in your firm's escrow account.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Correct.

Commissioner Keon: Okay, thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much. So I don't think we have any more speaker cards...

Commissioner Slesnick: I want to ask Mr. -- go ahead.

Mayor Cason: Any other speaker cards?

City Clerk Foeman: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Cason: If not, we'll continue with our discussion.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Mr. Caso, who's also a...

Mayor Cason: Okay.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Neighboring property owner wanted to say a few words.

Commissioner Slesnick: He needs to be sworn in. Doesn't he need to be sworn in?

Commissioner Lago: Yeah.

Mayor Cason: Can you fill out a speak card?

City Clerk Foeman: No.

Mayor Cason: Mr. Clerk, is that necessary, as long as he's sworn in?

City Clerk Foeman: As long as he's sworn in (INAUDIBLE)...

Julio Caso: Mayor and Commissioners...

City Clerk Foeman: Raise your right hand please. Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you provide this morning will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Mr. Caso: I do. My name is Julio Caso. I own a building at 4539 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, in Coral Gables. My building is directly next to Gables Ponce II, in front of Gables Ponce I. I am in support of the project of Gables Ponce III. I think that it will continue to improve the area. It will be a high quality project, like Gables Ponce I and II. We had a good experience while Gables Ponce I and II were being built. They were very accommodating and listening and work with us regarding any concern we had. We are very happy with the results and do feel that they improve the area tremendously. Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you, sir.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you for being here.

Mayor Cason: Any other comments from the audience? If not, we'll close that portion. Discussion.

Commissioner Slesnick: Mr. Trias, I wanted to ask -- I thank you for the clarity in presenting this today. It's really what I've been asking for, where we can see exactly what is already zoned for that area and what is proposed. And I like -- Mario, I love the dog park because several people have asked for dog parks, and especially if that's a very populated area, you need some space for the doggies. On the Planning and Zoning Board, two people -- two members voted against it. Is that because of the pavers, the amount of paving? Can you tell me why they...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: What happened is that there was some confusion and it was probably my fault. There was a typo in the staff report, and that confused the discussion a little



bit in terms of setbacks and so on. But the issue of the green space was also raised, and I don't think anybody voted necessarily against it because of the green space, but that was a very good suggestion, the fact that district wide there's a real need to enhance the green space.

Commissioner Slesnick: But it was the green space because so much was -- so many pavers were in that one courtyard area?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: That was just one of the discussions. That was one of the specific ways to enhance the trees and the coverage and so on of the landscape, you know.

Commissioner Slesnick: So, do you think the concerns of those two members that voted against it in Planning and Zoning, their issues have been resolved

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I believe so.

Commissioner Slesnick: Okay.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I believe so, and in a good way, yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: Okay.

Vice Mayor Quesada: This is just an aside. It's not a requirement, but just something to look at. Those areas where you want to put pavers, nowadays, in a lot of different locations they're using, you know, the artificial turf in those areas, the high traffic areas, that looks great. I'm just saying keep it in mind. It's not a requirement, but just don't be close minded to that as an option.

Commissioner Lago: I mean, also...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Other than that, I want to say Gables residential in that neighborhood I think has done a tremendous job. I think you guys have hit it out of the park, way out of the park there just because the first two phases have been so incredibly successful. You know, a lot of residents that are living there, you know, it's rental. I've known a lot of people that have moved through there. They've been very happy with it. You know, I know the University of Miami's been happy with that. I know they've had a lot of students and professors, you know, visiting professors live there as well. Everyone's been very happy. I (INAUDIBLE) Epicure didn't really make it there. I don't think the product really -- working with the prices and what they have there. I hope the Robb & Stucky does well in that project. But I just think it's -- I know you guys had a lot of trouble the first phase. I know it was quite a winding road with us, but I think it's really worked out great. I mean, the surrounding neighborhood, traffic has been dealt with properly, you know; site lines have been dealt with properly. I mean, I think everyone is really happy. And it's tough because sometimes this was a tough project for you guys to get through the first time. And people don't really talk about the projects that have a lot -- you know, have trouble getting through, but once they're in, they're performing perfectly. So, we know we put you through, you know, the wringer, but it really has worked out. So, I just want to say thank you for, you know, continuing to work with the City because it really is a, you know, type of product that I think everyone is happy with.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: And something for all of us to be proud of...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yeah.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: The Gables Ponce project was actually ranked as the fourth best place for student living in the entire country.

Mayor Cason: Wow.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: So, you know, it says a lot considering how many universities are out there and how many -- you know, what the housing options are.

Commissioner Slesnick: It's also near the Metrorail, which we're encouraging traffic - - construction along the Metrorail sites.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yeah, it's worked out great.

Mayor Cason: So...

Commissioner Lago: Yeah, it's a win-win. With that, I'll make a motion.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Second.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Lago makes the motion. The Vice Mayor seconds. City Clerk.

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you so much.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Lago: One thing, Mario, make sure...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Next week. I'm already setting up the meeting with the Manager to talk about...

Commissioner Lago: I would appreciate if you could make that phone call today, if possible.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Understood.

Commissioner Lago: I would really appreciate it. Thank you, sir.

[End: 11:13:14 a.m.]