

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C - Public Comments
January 26, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

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

City Staff

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

Public Speaker(s)

**Jackson Rip Holmes
Josh Goodman
Javier Banos
Daniel Ceraldo
Maria Cruz
Mayra Joli
Rhonda Anderson**

Agenda Item C – Public Comments [Start: 9:13 a.m.]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Public Comments, Mr. Urquia.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor, we do have several speakers that have signed up to speak. The first-person would-be Mr. Jackson Rip Holmes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Holmes the floor is yours.

*City Commission Meeting
January 26, 2021*

Mr. Holmes: Trying to get on board here. I guess you all can hear me.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Not very well.

Mr. Holmes: Not very well. Let me see if I can turn the volume up. Are we better now or not?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, we're better now.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you all. Thank you, Mayor, City Commissioners, City Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk, everyone who is in attendance. I am obviously going to speak about the proposed changes to the Coral Gables Zoning Code. I apologize if I've been in any way juvenile or too emotional in the past. Please accept my apology. I feel that the city is not engaging truly in the community meetings and there are very substantial questions that are going unanswered in two major respects, for which reason, I believe that because of the failure by the city to address the specific questions, we need two more meetings. One is relating to residential. Vice Mayor Lago has been good enough to inform everyone that there are major changes in residential FAR and these need to be examined in detail. Coral Gables residents are capable of processing detail and the devil is in the details and we need to know how much this expands developer's rights in the residential area that needs to be its own separate meeting, because we haven't gone into the FAR, in my opinion. Number two, with respect to remote parking, which is a cornerstone of...the enabler of the proposed changes on Miracle Mile, that is something which I've repeatedly asked for a specific meeting about. There are more questions than can possibly be verbalized by me now, but just to mention a couple of them. There are so many obvious ones. Nobody wants to remote park. In the summer, if someone remotes park, by the time they get wherever they are going there may be in a pool of sweat. It actually just happened to me, as happen to any of you, you are out in the summer on Miracle Mile and no...This is not a good thing. We are going to lose a lot of people, not to mention that there is no – the whole system doesn't add up, and we are using downtown Miami and the City of Miami Beach as our model, those are hardly models. City of Miami downtown parking is a disaster; the City of Miami Beach, South Beach is a nightmare. We need to have a separate meeting addressing the whole remote parking question. I want to, I guess write to you all, I'm so happy that candidate Tania Cruz Gimenez seems to be sympathetic to these concerns and I think that that tells us, the people who are with us on this, please take this seriously. We need two more meetings. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next we have Mr. Josh Goodman. He seems to be unmuting.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let's go to the next one.

*City Commission Meeting
January 26, 2021*

Mr. Goodman: Can you hear me now? My apologies – excuse me. I’m here on behalf of the Gables Accountability Project. It’s a newly formed Florida non-profit organization made up of concerned Coral Gables residents and parents of children attending George Washington Carver Elementary and other schools serving the community. On January 22nd we filed a lawsuit against the City of Coral Gables over the construction of a WAWA gas station, across from my children’s school, on the corner of U.S.-1 and Grand Avenue. Following is a statement about the lawsuit issued by the Gables Accountability Project that I would like to submit for the record. We are appalled that the City of Coral Gables has repeatedly ignored our request to be heard about a construction project affecting safety and welfare of more than 1,500 students at George Washington Carver Elementary and Middle Schools. We felt compelled to file this lawsuit as a last resort, after City Commissioners took no responsibility for approving a settlement agreement with the land’s developer that, among other things, granted no public hearing on the proposed gas station and a promise to fast track all zoning modifications. In this manner, parents have legitimate concerns about increased pollution, traffic and safety within close proximity to the school were silenced. We understand the importance of developing this valuable property, but the failure to include public input from parents and the schools, located less than 300 feet from the proposed gas station is incredibly troubling. We once again urge the City of Coral Gables Commissioners, the Miami-Dade County School Board, and the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners to take action to prevent the project from moving forward and find a creative solution that takes into account the perspective of all community members. I’m going to submit to you a copy of our statement and I would like it submitted for the record. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you sir. Next.

City Clerk Urquia: Next is Mr. Javier Banos.

Mr. Banos: Good morning City Commissioners and to all the residents listening and all the other interested parties. There are several items that are very important on the agenda. First, I want to congratulate and offer my support to the Carver parents. I think this is an important step to bring transparency and clarity to what actually happened and how this project ended up occurring. I think, agreeing with Mr. Holmes, it does seem to be the case that we need to have at least two more hearings on the issues that are going on, on the downtown, as far as zoning is concerned, as well as looking at whether or not it’s in the best interest of all the residents to have the Craft Section zoned as well. I think more input should be brought into that issue and I commend Commissioner Lago for bringing those items for recommendation. I understand Commissioner Fors, who has been supportive for this position of delaying and having more meetings, once this meeting is done before the second reading happens, but I think more input might be required and maybe the input of the voters after the election occurs, might be more important than whatever other input can

*City Commission Meeting
January 26, 2021*

come in. And lastly, I wanted to offer my support for the Preservation Board who made the right decision to preserve the Coral Gables property that is going up for appeal today, which I will be speaking later on, and I want to encourage the Commissioners to go ahead and support the Historic Preservation Board and maintain this property, which is one of the more important properties, one of the historic properties here in Coral Gables. Thank you very much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next is Mr. Daniel Ceraldo.

Mr. Ceraldo: Yes. Hello everybody. This is Daniel Ceraldo on behalf of the Miami Design Preservation League. I'm here, first of all, thank you all for what you do in service to the community. I'm here to speak in support of upholding the historic designation of 649 Palmarito Court. Palmarito Court is an example of a Neo-classical architecture. We have many of these throughout Coral Gables, as well as Colonial-Revival and Coral Gables is known as the City Beautiful and single-family homes from various parts of architectural history help inform and help make it the City Beautiful. Your Preservation Board voted unanimously on specific criteria that it is historic, and of course, we welcome an appeal, everyone has the right to appeal, but we hope that you all uphold the very stringent code that has made Coral Gables so beautiful. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor next speaker is Maria Cruz.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Who?

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Who? Boy, how soon you forget. This is Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, and I'm here to tell you that its very nice to have those two meetings to inform the community, but we are far from being informed. A lot that we haven't been able to cover; there are a lot of questions and I think its premature to decide how many number of meetings. Last meeting we had Ramon Trias mention that it could mean 4-5 meetings, because you have the way we are going trying to understand what the rewrite is, because now is not what the Mayor asked when he approved, when he went along with hiring Ms. Plater-Zybert and he made it very clear that he did not expect this to be a Miami 21 project, the changes that Ms. Swanson very clearly stated that no, this was to clean up and make it easier to understand, but there would be no changes, and now we see that there are changes and we need to figure out what the changes are with very more transparency. So, I support the request to have one more meeting now, but also leaving the door open to have as

*City Commission Meeting
January 26, 2021*

many as we need for the people that pay the taxes, for the people that live in the city, for the people that are committed to keeping the city the City Beautiful, to be able to understand and make a very educated decision before we agree or disagree with the plans. Thank you very much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Maria.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor we have Mayra Joli.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Ms. Joli.

Ms. Joli: I'm muted now.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We can't hear you. We could before. I don't know what you did.

Ms. Joli: Can you hear me now?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, we can.

Ms. Joli: Alright. Okay. As I see – Mayra Joli, 700 Jeronimo Drive, it's the house – Palmarito ends up at my house, right outside my kitchen. There are three issues here. The gas station that apparently people hands are tied and that's for sure. We have the 649 Palmarito Court restructuring, and we have a rezoning meeting. People say 2-3, whatever. So, the common denominator that we see right here is that the developers have targeted Coral Gables. We have been the City Beautiful. We have been too family oriented; we've been to tranquil for comfort. So now the developers have their eyes on Coral Gables, and we can see that everybody is willing to accommodate the developers to disturb my kitchen. Right now, all we have here is that the developers have the money to give to even us while running for Commissioner. They are willing to put their money there, so they know that when they knock on our door, we won't be able to say no. So right now, are these developers living in Coral Gables, because I can see that the main issue is to accommodate them. I don't need two meetings or one meeting, I need 20 seconds. Walk into my neighborhood and I don't want to stay on Brickell. I don't want the business community and Miracle Mile with the pretext that its going to be good for me, good for my dog, good for my family. That is what is going to be good for whomever is benefiting from all of these big developers. People, we are a community of families. We are not a community of big high-rises. We don't want Brickell in Coral Gables. We don't want New York in Coral Gables, and certainly, we don't want Miami Beach in Coral Gables. We want to be able to go home and stay home and enjoy our home. What is the big deal? There are more...everywhere. Why we have to be the target of all of these bulldozers? Think, who do you represent, and its us. And make a commitment not

to take any money from these developers, because they are not our friends, at least they are not my friends. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you ma'am. Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, next speaker is Ms. Rhonda Anderson.

Ms. Anderson: Good Morning Commissioners. Just a few comments I'd like to repeat some of the requests for additional meetings and give you some additional reasons why those meetings are necessary. With regard to remote parking for buildings that are six to seven stories tall, which I think its pretty clear that I oppose going to those heights on the face of Miracle Mile, given the density for residential behind Miracle Mile that will adequately service that. The traffic impact of doing remote parking on small businesses and the desirability for folks to go to our Miracle Mile will decrease substantially. Pre-Covid, I've been walking that area, and post-Covid, I've been walking that area and currently now the amount of parking that is existing on some of those streets is inadequate and it deters people from wanting to visit the restaurants, go downtown to our little downtown at the current time. I understand for small buildings, these 2-3 story buildings like we have on Giralda, remote parking is appropriate, but for tall buildings it is not. The FAR issue, something that staff has represented during zoning hearings as being something that would not impact the size of the building, I think its something that was not clearly, not accurately represented to either the Board or the public. We need additional hearings on that matter as well. And with regard to preservation of our historic buildings, I think that those are gems that we need to protect, because it is part of the character of Coral Gables, and while I understand folks have property rights, the rights of the community to be able to have the historic views that we've had, things that I loved when I came to Coral Gables 33 years ago was the uniqueness of the various structures that we've had and as well as our tree canopy that set us apart from every other community that I am familiar with around South Florida. So, thank you for the time to be able to speak briefly this morning and have a great day.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Ms. Anderson. Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's it. Thank you very much. The Public Comment section is over.

