

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-1
February 11, 2025
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Alberto N. Parjus
City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Suzanne Dockerty
Michael Ehrling
Maria Cruz
Gloria Pastoriza

Agenda Item E-1 [10:52 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending Ordinance No. 2997 to add a new multipurpose building, and increase the Maximum Student Enrollment from 881 to 945 students for St Theresa Catholic School located at 2701 Indian Mound Trail, Coral Gables, Florida; all other provisions and conditions of approval contained in Ordinance No. 2997 shall remain in effect; and providing an effective date.

Mayor Lago: Moving on to the next item, I know we have a time starting at 11. We have 10 minutes. Do you think we can hear Item E -- E-1? I kind of feel bad having the church here waiting.

City Attorney Suárez: Do you want to do E-1?

Mayor Lago: Yeah, let's do E-1.

City Attorney Suárez: Okay, I think we need Jennifer also. E-1 is an ordinance of the City Commission amending Ordinance No. 2997 to add a new multipurpose building and increase the maximum student enrollment from 881 to 945 students for St. Theresa Catholic School, located at 2701 Indian Mountain Trail, Coral Gables, Florida; all other provisions and conditions of approval contained in Ordinance No. 2997 shall remain in effect; and providing an effective date. This is a quasi-judicial item, so Mr. Clerk, can you please swear in any individuals who will be testifying today?

City Clerk Urquia: Those who will be speaking on this item, please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Unidentified Speaker: I do.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Suzanne Dockerty: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Madam Vice Mayor and Commissioners. I'm Suzanne Dockerty from the law firm J. Patrick Fitzgerald & Associates with an address at 110 Merrick Way. We represent Archbishop Wenske, the owner of the property, Father Manny Alvarez, the pastor of Little Flower, and Sister Rosalie, the principal of St. Theresa Catholic School. We're pleased to present our application, and we thank you for your thoughtful consideration. The approval being sought is to amend Ordinance No. 2997, the approval for a one-story multipurpose building for indoor athletics in a gym and performing arts facilities and to include basketball, volleyball, performing arts, music room, theater, special purpose classrooms for arts and office and storage areas. And also, to approve an increase in maximum student enrollment that was established in 1992 from 881 students to 945. Please note, improving the school campus with a multipurpose gym building is a requirement for the school's accreditation issued by the Florida Catholic Conference. It will also allow for all school classes and performances to be located within the school campus so students no longer need to cross Sevilla Avenue to participate in those activities in the church sanctuary and Comber Hall. It's also important to note that the school enrollment has averaged 953 students for the past 33 years. It was not until the current application was submitted that the City Commission uncovered the 1992 ordinance that capped the enrollment. The staff report acknowledges that neither the City nor the school administration were aware of the enrollment cap. The request to amend the ordinance is

more a housekeeping item to better align the enrollment with what the actual numbers have been over the past 33 years. The school will submit yearly enrollment figures each year with its certificate of use, and it will not exceed the 945 maximum being requested. The current drop-off/pickup operational plans and patterns will remain because there is no increase in students. The Students Traffic Engineers Trip Count Analysis confirmed the adequacy of the current pattern. The drop-off/pickup will remain under the supervision and facilitation of the City's Police Department. In particular, attention will be paid to monitoring unauthorized parking on the swales surrounding the school, especially along Valencia Avenue. The new building will actually improve the number of afternoon pickup trips because more students will be able to attend afternoon sports and arts programs and will be picked up later in the afternoon. The school retains the City police officer to be located all day at the school campus during school hours for the safety and security of the students, staff and occupants at the campus. The multipurpose building will not be used to increase evening events but will be for those that are already being held at the school and church. Those functions will be relocated to the new building and include home and school meetings and occasional theatrical performances, meetings and workshops, and choir practices. The uses are passive uses and will run no later than 3 p.m. at -- 9 p.m. at night. There will be no evening sporting events or tournaments in the gym. Use of the gym and field will be for the school and church purposes and events and will not be utilized by third parties or events unrelated to the school or church. The new building will be located within the northwest quadrant of the school field. The ball fields will shift to the east, the current basketball and volleyball court will be relocated from the most eastern side of the field into the indoor gym. These sports are more intense in terms of players and noise volume. Relocating those sports from this area to the indoor gym will result in quieter field activities such as soccer. Soccer has less players and they spread out over a larger field. The soccer field will actually be set back a greater distance from Palos Street than where the current courts are located. Baseball will be located directly east of the new building to avoid balls being thrown or hit outside the field's perimeter. Track and field will remain on the perimeter of the athletic field. There is no request for field lighting. There has never been, nor will there be field lights for night games or tournaments. The height of the new building is 24 feet around the perimeter and steps up to 37 feet within the interior to accommodate the gym and is substantially lower than the allowable maximum height of 45 feet. All HVAC transformers and other mechanicals will be located on the roof and/or at ground level of the new building and will be screened and landscaped in accordance with the City's code requirements. All building lighting will be contained within the campus and will comply with the City's lighting code requirements. The school will meet green building certification upon completion. The construction entrance will be off Valencia Avenue and into a secure and camouflaged fence construction staging area located within the field. There will be no access to the construction staging area by any others than those working on construction. Upon completion of the construction, the sidewalks and swale areas will be restored to the City's Code standards and requirements. In addition, landscape will be installed and enhanced for beautification and security along the entire perimeter of the school campus and around the new building in compliance with the City's robust landscape requirements. The school's perimeter fencing will remain screened and landscaped. Commencement of the construction will be upon approval by the City of the construction plans and specifications and

issuance of building permits. It is also contingent on funding being raised by the School and Church's ongoing capital campaign. Construction is expected to last about one year from commencement. Father Manny and Sister Rosalie extended invitations to meet with neighbors who notified the City that they had questions or concerns about the school expansion plans, relating mostly to school enrollment, drop-off/pickup queuing, parking in the swales, and field activity noise. Sister Rosalie and Father Manny extended personal invitations to each family to meet to discuss the plans and the neighbors' concerns. Many, but not all, took the opportunity to meet, and we believe the parties have come to an agreement to continue open dialogue about concerns on an ongoing basis. Noise by the children while out on the field was an issue brought forward at the Planning and Zoning hearing, and the school agreed to install a noise mitigation wall along the length of the field area on its eastern boundary, as well as enhanced landscape in that area. The school is in agreement to comply with the approval conditions by staff and the Planning and Zoning Board. We would like to call your attention, however, to the fact that the school's current landscape along Palos Avenue [sic] south to the end of the field has a lush, mature 10-foot hedge and then meets up with root structures of an old banyan tree. Installation of a sound mitigation wall will result in the removal of the mature hedge and will encourage the -- encounter the banyan tree root structure. The school respectfully requests flexibility in working with City staff, including the arborist and landscape experts in designing the noise mitigation barrier wall that will result in the least negative impact to the existing landscape while enhancing noise mitigation. We thank you for your time and respectfully request your approval of our application. I do request rebuttal time to address any public comment or board comments. Now I'll turn the presentation over to our team of architects led by Michael Ehrling from Zyscovich.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Michael Ehrling: Thank you, Honorable Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, City Attorney, Clerk, and the community both here in chambers and on Zoom. It's an honor to be here today to take you through this presentation for a fantastic project that will serve both the community, and frankly, the students of this great school in your community. If we could bring the PowerPoint up.

City Clerk Urquia: Is there a particular slide you would like them to place or...?

Mr. Ehrling: I believe that was the City's prior one. Let me see if I can get it. There, there we go. Thank you very much. So, here's a view from Indian Mound Trail you can see as people will be driving past the front of the new gym facility for the students. And you can also see it is a gym so it does have a certain height, but what we have done in working with both the Board of Architects, the City Architect, Planning and Zoning, and everybody else would be to step it down as it comes down to the community by providing loggias and walkways along the building, creating an elegant entrance that would be then facing the school on the other side. And then, as you can see here from the plan, we've -- it is located in the corner to also maintain the play fields for the students. And you can kind of see the before and after locations there as it kind of goes in that area. It should be noted that this facility is a requirement for the school by their accreditation

board. And we're working with them to provide the facilities that are needed for the students at the school. Here you can see a site plan and how the fields would be located there up along Valencia with the school and the open courtyard in front of the school facing the existing facilities that is also used for play during the day but is used for drop-off and pickup in the morning and afternoons. Here you can see overall site plans. What we will be doing is not providing just landscaping at our project, but all the way around the perimeter of the school site to infill any gaps that are there, but also beautify the school itself and along the community. So, here you can see landscaping along these edges, the two large banyan trees there at the lower right, but then we're also taking new landscaping all the way down and around the school. And here are some of the trees that our landscape architect is working with. And then it also should be noted, as also mentioned by staff here and others, that what we are doing is we'll be moving a lot of the activities that are outside today, the basketball courts and others, into the building. And then we'll have outside recess and a soccer field there, but this will be much less intensity than there is today, which I think also will help out for the community. Here you can see, as mentioned, the current location of the hedges and pieces along Valencia and Palos. We will be working with City Architect and others in order to beautify this area and have it all set up so that the neighbors and everybody feel like they got the best project at the end of the day. Here's the site plan or floor plan of the building. Again, it's a gymnasium with additional classrooms and some admin space that will overall augment the school's needs for this location. Here you can see a section through the building showing the requirements and the height, but also how -- you see the renderings above -- how it steps down to the community. Some views around it and then the front door facing the school. And with that, we thank you and humbly request your consideration for this project.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Jennifer?

Planning and Zoning Director Garcia: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Planning and Zoning Director Garcia: Jennifer Garcia, Planning and Zoning Director. Could I have the PowerPoint, please? There should have been a PowerPoint that was emailed, I think last week. So, as you know, there's two requests -- a two-part request. The first one is about the amendment to the site plan for that building that they are proposing to be on the north side of the site. The other one is the amendment to the enrollment. I think we all know where it's located along Sevilla and Indian Mound Trail. The land use is educational use and zoning is special use. Should I just go with this one? Okay. Alright, so the enrollment right now is capped at 881 and that's Ordinance No. 2997. It's okay, we can keep going through that. They've already seen the building. And as you can see, in the last 30 years, the enrollment's kind of been all over the place. An average of, I think they said, 950 -- 55, it's somewhere around there. So, their request today is going to amend it to 945. Go down. This started with a review by Development Review Committee in December of 2023. It was reviewed several times by the Board of Architects. It was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Board, and they approved it back in December of last

year. And Planning and Zoning Board recommended approval last month in January. Next slide, please. Letters were sent to the property owner to within a thousand feet of the property. I believe that was sent four times. The property was posted eight times. The website was posted four times and then twice for newspaper advertisement. And staff has opined it be consistent with the comp plan as it relates to education in our community, and it does comply with the findings of facts and recommends approval. All the conditions of approval are not to be changed in Ordinance No. 2997, but additional kind of conditions, such as an annual letter of intent -- sorry, in a letter of student enrollment for -- as each year when the school renews their certificate of use, we'd be asking for an annual letter of what their enrollment is, make sure it stays at that 945 number. Sidewalk improvements on the north side of Valencia to widen that sidewalk, as well as the green building certification. Off-duty police officers for special events to make sure everything is moving smoothly. Underground utility lines as approved by FPL. And then that wall and landscaping to limit the noise along the east side of the property. No Sunday use of the field, except for special events, and then outdoor lighting would be prohibited. And then the use can only be done by the school and not by third parties. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, do we have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Maria Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Let me first of all say this is not my parish, but I think the project is beautiful. I think the only thing that I'm here to strongly support the project, but also what they're asking about the tree and the landscaping. I think we believe in canopy. It'll be a shame if that tree gets damaged and we lose it. So, please, if that's the only thing they're asking, everything else seems very reasonable and the project looks beautiful.

City Clerk Urquia: Gloria Pastoriza.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Gloria Pastoriza: Good morning, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. I'm here because I live at 2601 San Domingo Street. I'm about 120 feet from the fields of the school. So, I've been there for 46 and a half years, not going anywhere, I'll be there. So, I am here to support the building. I think it's going to look beautiful. It's going to be great for the children. There's a lot of sports going on. My granddaughter just graduated two years ago. My daughter went, my other grandson went. I went to St. Theresa for two years. So, I'm very much involved and love the school. But the gym is so important. I used to go to my granddaughter's games at Epiphany, at St. Brendan's, St. Thomas. Everybody has a gym except St. Theresa and it's the oldest school. So, I think it is

extremely that we all support that. Mr. Fernandez has a child there, I know he does, and I know you had kids there, so it's just something that is extremely important for all of us. As far as the number of students that are going to be increasing, I think that's minimal, and to me, it feels like it's probably going to be siblings that are going to be going there. So, I support everything, and I just think it's going to look beautiful. It will be great for the spirit. I've never had a problem with St. Theresa. Sure, people park on the swale and things like that. Big deal. So, I'm all for it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

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

Mayor Lago: Okay. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think it's just long overdue that we have a gym for this facility. And I agree that we should have some flexibility with regard to the wall. I had an occasion to work on a project before I was elected, and we were able to allow trees to remain by using pins on the wall. But there needs to be some flexibility because we don't want to lose the canopy. It helps not only keep our areas cool, but it helps deaden some of the noise as well. So, I'm also going to ask for some flexibility with you all. I remember looking at this package about a month ago, and there was an arborist report in there, and I'd like to walk the area with you, and we can determine if we're going to be able to save any more canopy and relocate it, you know, within a movable distance so that we can maintain a tree canopy in there. But by no means is that a reason to stop progress on this. And I look forward to meeting with you. So, I'm a yes on this.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner?

Commissioner Menendez: I agree with the Vice Mayor. Long overdue. I think the school centennial is coming up soon, just like the City's. And it's -- you know, you have an opportunity to expand the experience for students, for families in our own community. So, I think adding the multipurpose facility, I think is a -- it's much needed, and I think it's something that's going to benefit the entire community for many, many years. Going through the ordinance and Exhibit B that has some of the conditions that were added, I think, along the way, I have a couple of questions on those conditions. And I think not only questions perhaps to have staff come back between first and second readings saying what goes forward. And I'll just highlight them a little bit. One obviously is the wall, and again, none of us want to see banyan trees that have been there longer than any of us harmed in any way. My suggestion is to see if instead of a traditional wall, if there's some other kind of material that can be used that won't intrude or won't impact the surrounding vegetation as much. I mean, I think everybody thinks wall, your typical classic wall, but maybe today there's other materials that are available that will get us exactly where we want but won't have that negative impact. The other is at the Coral Gables Youth Center we have rules in place in terms of who can use the athletic fields at the Youth Center on Sundays. Basically, the rule is

no organized play. So, if you go out there and you have 12 cones and you have flags for flag football, that's organized. I want to see -- I want the staff and everyone to work on the wording on it because, quite honestly, I'm thinking the church has something, the classrooms have something on Sunday, let's say a breakfast, and the kids go to the playground like kids may do informally, or they may have a frisbee and they go on the field, six kids. I don't want somebody calling it, reporting it, that they violated the conditions because the conditions were so stringently written that common sense doesn't kick in. The other issue has to do with, again, it's wording. Athletic fields limited to St. Theresa Catholic School. Well, if you go to any school, especially that has junior high, if they're doing volleyball, they don't do volleyball, let's say, intramural necessarily, they have another school come by. So, I'm sure St. Theresa, like a lot of schools, welcome other schools for soccer or a baseball game, but the way it's written, somebody might say, well, why is Epiphany here or why is this here? And I don't want to tie the hands of the school, but I also don't want it to come back later to then reword it because we didn't catch it on the front end. And then finally, the only other thing I have to say -- and again, between first and second reading, I would appreciate we can work on the wording. The other thing is, I think the point was that by moving, I guess, volleyball, they said, and basketball indoors, that should eliminate probably 30 to 40 percent of outdoor activities. So, if there's ever any concern about this project impacting or increasing outdoor activities, it actually reduces it probably by 30, 40 percent. So, I think it's a perfect opportunity not only to approve this project, but to address issues that we can address now so they don't come back to us later.

Commissioner Fernandez: I agree with the banyan tree. That banyan tree is what provides the shade for the children who play in the playground, or two banyan trees that are there. And if you compromise the root structure on the outside, that's a liability for that tree to potentially fall. And I think that would be a safety concern that I would have. So, I would like to see staff work with them on finding a solution. I have to commend Father Manny, Sister Rosalie, and the team on the design. I followed this process through BOA, and from the original design to what we have today, we've gone from a building that looked like it fit anywhere else to a building that blends in with the 1920 structures that are on the campus today. And I think once it's built, you probably won't be able to tell what the new buildings are and what the old buildings are because of the way that it's been designed. So, I have to commend you on that. It is something that's long overdue. Having stood in those basketball fields at noon or those tennis courts at noon, I can tell you it is impossible and unbearable. It's a hydration risk for the children. And like Commissioner Menendez was saying, the noise that the neighbors may be hearing now will be mitigated exponentially by moving those sports that are louder sports indoors and just keeping the soccer on that side of the field. And I think the design where you're blending in the soccer and the baseball fields where they can both exist, and the use of the space is going to be very beneficial as well. So, I look forward to -- to approving this.

Commissioner Castro: I think this is an exceptional proposal and I'm very excited and I can't wait for it to come to fruition [sic]. And I would be a yes vote for this, absolutely yes. After we're done with this vote, let me have a couple minutes because I want to give you guys something.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: If you're done. Oh, sorry, I jumped you.

Mayor Lago: No, no, go ahead. You moved it?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah.

Commissioner Fernandez: And he second.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk?

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to the next item.

Commissioner Castro: If you could give me a couple minutes. So, every elected official here gets a few Centennial Challenge coins, and they get to pick who thinks is deserving or who they think that the best person or organization would be. You guys, St. Theresa, is one of mine and I have one right here to present to you guys. As a cherished part of our community, St. Theresa has played a vital role in shaping generations with faith, knowledge, and service. May this coin serve as a small token of appreciation for your contributions to our City Beautiful as a reminder of the rich history we celebrate together, Commissioner Castro. And if you want to come take a picture, I'd be honored.

Applause.