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To: Board of Architects
Cc: Riesco, Juan
Subject: Hello My comments - 110 Phoenetia Avenue proposed project

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Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to meet with the development team for the project at 110 Phoenetia Avenue, who shared a different design by architect Ralph Portuondo. I want to begin by saying — that design was excellent. It thoughtfully integrated the very principles I will share with you today: human-scale massing, permeability, and meaningful public green space.

That version demonstrated how we can achieve a win-win — supporting both the long-term success of the developer and the quality of life for residents and the broader community.

Unfortunately, even though the original project was appealed. The developer is now returning not with the Portuondo concept, but with essentially the same project as before, with only slight modifications.

Today, I want to encourage the same level of ambition and community-minded design for this proposed 9-story development. This is a pivotal opportunity — particularly at a time when thousands of new rental units are entering the market.

Massing and Scale: Current Concerns

The current design creates a solid 9-story wall that wraps the entire block. The internal courtyard is fully enclosed, and from key streets like Galiano and E. Ponce de Leon, the building presents as massive, heavy, and visually impenetrable.

While the Mediterranean architectural language is appreciated, the bulk and scale of the project conflict with the finer-grained texture of Coral Gables and do not invite engagement.

Recommendations: Massing Breakup Strategies

1. Introduce Midblock Breezeways

- Provide pedestrian cut-throughs between Phoenetia and Antilla or through E. Ponce
- These voids bring air, light, and community connection to the site

2. Step Down the Massing

- Step back upper floors and reduce height away from corners
- Use the full 9-story height only at strategic nodes

3. Façade Articulation and Rhythm

- Break long walls into smaller visual segments every 40–60 feet
- Add texture through material changes, balconies, and recesses

On the Placement of the School

A key strength of Mr. Portuondo's design was the decision to house the school in a separate structure, rather than merging it with the residential massing.

This is good planning. From both a residential and marketing standpoint — particularly for younger renters — it is simply not appealing (or “cool”) to live inside the same complex as a school.

Separating the school gives both uses clarity, identity, and appropriate privacy.

Greening the Development

1. Open Up the Courtyard

- Convert portions to semi-public open space accessible through breezeways
- Add shaded seating, pollinator gardens, and native trees

2. Perimeter Green Relief Zones

- Create deep setbacks along sidewalks with large canopy trees
- Add benches and shaded areas to support pedestrian activity

Smart Density: Design Adjustments

- Reduce block coverage through open-air breezeways
- Make courtyard access semi-public instead of fully enclosed
- Step down height toward edges to reduce visual weight
- Enhance street interface with landscaping and active edges

The Importance of Permeability

High permeability means many paths, routes, and entry points through a site. It promotes walkability and accessibility, allowing for flexible, natural pedestrian circulation. This is especially attractive to young residents and visitors who value safety and fluid movement.

Low permeability — such as gated communities or buildings with few access points — restricts movement, limits connectivity, and creates psychological barriers that isolate developments.

The design vision I am advocating embraces high permeability through:

- Midblock breezeways
- Separate school access
- Open courtyard connections

This creates a site that breathes with the neighborhood rather than turning its back on it.

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