

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item E-2**  
**November 14, 2023**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson**

**Commissioner Melissa Castro**

**Commissioner Ariel Fernandez**

**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**City Planner, Jennifer Garcia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

---

Agenda Item E-2 [1:06 p.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission providing for a text amendment to Article 2 “Zoning Districts,” Section 2-405 “Residential Infill Regulations Overlay District (RIR)” of the City of Coral Gables Official Zoning Code to provide a maximum building length of three hundred feet for all properties seeking approval pursuant to the Residential Infill Regulations; providing for severability clause, repealer provision, codification, and providing for an effective date.(06 06 23, 07 12 23 and 09 21 23 deferred by PZB) (10 11 23 PZB recommended Approval, Vote 6-1)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item E-2.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, E-2.

Mayor Lago: Go ahead.

*City Commission Meeting*

---

*November 14, 2023*

*Agenda Item E-2 – Ordinance providing for a text amendment to Article 2  
“Zoning Districts” Section 2-405 “Residential Infill Regulations Overlay District”*

[Date]

1

City Attorney Suarez: So E-2 is an Ordinance of the City Commission providing for a text amendment to Article 2 “Zoning Districts,” Section 2-405 “Residential Infill Regulations Overlay District (RIR)” of the City of Coral Gables Official Zoning Code to provide a maximum building length of three hundred feet for all properties seeking approval pursuant to the Residential Infill Regulations; providing for severability clause, repealer provision, codification, and providing for an effective date.

City Planner Garcia: For the record, Jennifer Garcia, City Planner. This is looking at the RIR, which is the Residential Infill Regulations, which is just for the North Ponce area. The North Ponce area is just the area south of 8<sup>th</sup> Street, north of Navarre, between Douglas and LeJeune. This is looking at limiting the building frontage on any street of these development options. So, if the RIR is not by-right or it’s not a requirement of the area to redevelop, but it’s an option that developers can utilize to redevelop the area. It was adopted back in 2017. The minimum lot size that you have to have to be able to qualify for it is 20,000 square feet, which is a substantial amount of property. But the concern is that if a developer purchased the entire block that it will create a building that’s not really in keeping with the character. So, looking at that we determined that 300 feet building length for any street would be more in keeping with the character of the area.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, this is an item that actually emanated originally from the Planning and Zoning Board, along with the project at Madeiro. A big, long building and it was a recommendation that the Commission address this matter. So, an ordinance was drafted, and I asked for it to go back to the Planning and Zoning Board for them to discuss; and they’ve had how many sessions on this?

City Planner Garcia: Three, I think.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Three?

City Planner Garcia: June, July with the new board and then most recently at the last meeting in October.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. In October, yes, and I did listen to that meeting. The discussion went between 200-to-300-foot length, okay, and prior to that they needed to have a member of the Board of Architects, I think it was Ms. Cardi as well, went to the Planning and Zoning Board to give them an idea of what the buildings would look like with this 300-foot limitation. Because we don’t want it to look like the Central Business District with big, long, 1,000-foot buildings. It just detracts from the residential fabric and

*City Commission Meeting*

feel of the neighborhood. I remember having long conversations with Felix Pardo. He pointed out, you're losing that grass space in between the buildings, so you're actually losing green space. In this, I think settled on 20-foot minimum space between the buildings to try to make a usable area out of it. And I've seen that in developments elsewhere where you can have a sidewalk down there, some benches, some shade trees, some nature and a nice area to rest and contemplate. So, I'm in favor of this, because I think it avoids a future Madeiro project from this Commission being faced with that. This area has been struggling with, I would say really the Board of Architects has been struggling, as well as Planning and Zoning has been struggling with the impact of Residential Infill District, increase in density, because it's very hard to balance the Garden Apartment District desires and still have these types of demands what developers want with a high number of units on a single piece of property. This would be a matter that would be effective going forward. It's not going to be retroactive type of ordinance. You can speak in more detail as to what the recommendations of the board were on that...aspect of it.

City Planner Garcia: Well, there's some that would prefer to have it, I guess, more restrictive and be 200 feet length, facing the street. However, the property itself to be able to qualify for the RIR regulations has to be 20,000 square feet. So that's very limiting as far as the type of building an architect could design, because they would be very similar, use the word, "cookie cutter" but similar design and typology throughout the area. They thought that expanding that to 300 feet, then that 300 feet would be more flexible as far as the design of the massing and the architecture of the building fronting the street.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's also a parking issue too. By the time you put in a ramp to get in, a liner in front, it's not feasible to design a good building at that point in this area. In addition to this, I am bringing up a few other items on zoning and I do think it would be beneficial at some point for the Planning and Zoning Board and the Board of Architects to sit down and discuss their dilemmas or struggles with dealing with this Residential Infill District and how they can best try to resolve some of the issues. We unfortunately, can't turn back time. I wasn't here. The Mayor, I know didn't vote in favor of it. None of us voted in favor of the level of density that was placed in this area, and it's swallowing our green spaces, losing the flavor of the neighborhoods, the Garden Apartment feel that was designed there. So, I'm going to bring that suggestion that we have – I don't know if we need to do it by resolution, to have them meet and discuss, have a workshop to discuss some possible options to do something positive in that area to address these concerns that they keep telling us about, because it's a struggle. They feel like they're handcuffed to be able to require doing certain things. I know it's a conditional use on the Residential Infill District, but people come in with these large projects and it's very, very difficult to

manipulate the project in a way that gives the residents in the area the green space that they want. You all have any other comments?

Commissioner Castro: Yes. How come we chose 300 feet, why not 200?

City Planner Garcia: So, 300 feet, we were looking at different zoning codes in the area. We looked at Miami 21, they have a 300-foot length maximum for some of their districts in the area. We studied a lot of the approved buildings, and they range between, I think it was, 200-and some change, to 300 feet, that's kind of the range, except for...which was potentially longer. So that's more or less where the 300 feet came from. 200 feet, as you mentioned is very restrictive, because if you have to provide 20,000 square feet for actually having a building to be built on a site, you are limited to 10-foot setbacks on your sides, so you are really limited as far as the different typologies, different types of buildings you could have in this area. So, you would only have the same massing throughout the whole entire area. If you have 300 feet, you can play with it architecturally more and so the massing and have a little more variety in the area.

Commissioner Castro: So, you feel 200 would be small.

City Planner Garcia: Not that 200 feet is too small. It's just the fact that if you have to provide four or five lots in the area anyway, you can't get any smaller than 180 or 150, that's the minimum you have to have to be able to even apply and be able to qualify for the area. So, you are really limited as far as development rights go, but you also limiting this massive, this building type can actually be produced on that property. If the minimum lot size was removed or if it was minimized then you could have more flexibility as far as the massing architecture goes, but right now since the minimum is 20,000 square feet, 200-foot building frontage is very limited as far as the variety you can create.

City Manager Iglesias: I think, Commissioner, it would help as far as the articulation of the building, different heights, and I think from an architectural perspective it gives the architects a lot more flexibility to design better buildings in the area.

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

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: How many public comments do we have?

City Clerk Urquia: Just one.

Mayor Lago: Can we listen to the public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Welcome back.

Ms. Cruz: Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I have two concerns. Number one, I know that it says it's only in this area, but if this is such a good idea, why don't we do it everywhere – limit the size of the buildings, the length of the buildings anywhere, because you know it seems like we're picking and choosing areas. If we agree that this is a good idea, then that should be the size of the length of any building in the City of Coral Gables. Period. The end. Now, that was the first concern. The second concern is, do we have, because I know people have been buying property with the hope of building. Do we know as a fact that there's nobody who has already bought property that thought he could build bigger than this and now we're going to be told by the Legal Department that, oh, you know, you can affect that because you know there's a right. They already have the property. You're changing the rule after they bought it. Isn't that where Bert Harris comes in?

Mayor Lago: Can we address it after she's done with the second question. Anything else.

Ms. Cruz: I asked the question.

Mayor Lago: Is that it.

Ms. Cruz: Sir, could you please. She was ready to answer my question. I stopped.

Mayor Lago: But what I would like to do, if possible, if I may, if I'm allowed to run the meeting is, you can give your question, your statement and then I'll allow her to answer so we can get through the meeting as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Ms. Cruz: Okay. Let me just make a side comment.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Ms. Cruz: I just got a comment from Jessica Keller that her questions were not properly answered. I want to make sure that my questions are properly answered. Okay. That's the

whole thing. I've made two comments. One was the question. She was ready to answer it. I don't know why it had to be interrupted, but that's okay, you're running the show.

City Attorney Suarez: So, Mayor, I am not aware of who owns property or who has assembled any site. I don't know if staff is. When you do impose a restriction there is always a risk that someone could challenge it. In this case, it seems like we have a good basis for this regulation, based on the 300 feet. This is only in this area, in the RIR, and so, again, is there a risk of a legal challenge? – anybody can always sue, but with 300 feet, the risk is obviously less than if we were to go down to 200 feet.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Ms. Cruz: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do we have anybody else that would like to speak.

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Is there anything else from the Commission. Anything else to add?

Commissioner Fernandez: I haven't had an opportunity to comment yet.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Please take advantage of it.

Commissioner Fernandez: Was there any conversation about maybe doing 250 instead of 200 or 300? I didn't see any at the last Planning and Zoning Board meeting. I don't know if there was any prior to that.

City Planner Garcia: No. I think the only number that kind of came out was 200 feet, not the 250.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. Would you see any adverse effect to doing 250 versus 300? Would the same issues as the 200 apply?

City Planner Garcia: Its just limiting as far as the design capacity you can have on any project, that's all.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

*City Commission Meeting*

City Planner Garcia: You're not able to articulate or mass the building differently from park to project, so you are going to have a neighborhood of – I mean, if it gets built-out, I guess envisioned by the former Commission, a neighborhood of very similar building types and massing.

Commissioner Fernandez: Most of the blocks in that area are how wide?

City Planner Garcia: How long are the blocks in the area?

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

City Planner Garcia: I think it was about 600 feet.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. So, this will basically split it into two.

City Planner Garcia: Right.

Commissioner Fernandez: Got it. Another question.

Mayor Lago: Anyone else?

Vice Mayor Anderson: No.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I just don't want any sugar cubes in our city. So, I went with the recommendation. I listened to the entire meeting and the majority was only one person who voted against. I think the Planning and Zoning Board thoroughly, thoroughly went through this and it was their ideas. I'll move it.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

*City Commission Meeting*

(Vote: 5-0)