

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items F-8 and F-9 are related
January 11, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias

Public Speaker(s)

Jackson Rip Holmes

Agenda Items F-8 and F-9 [Start: 11:55 a.m.]

F-8: An Ordinance of the City Commission granting approval of proposed amendments to the text of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan, pursuant to expedited state review procedures (S.163.3184, Florida Statutes) and Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-213, "Comprehensive Plan Text and Map Amendments;" to provide that the maximum number of floors in the Comprehensive Plan shall not apply to any Planned Area Development (PAD) upon City Commission approval, and to allow an additional height bonus in return for limiting density for qualifying PADs within the Central Business District (CBD); providing for a severability clause, repealer provision, and providing for an effective date. (On 12 08 2021, PZB deferred this item to January's meeting.) (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson) (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

F-9: An Ordinance of the City Commission providing for text amendments to the City of Coral Gables Official Zoning Code, Article 2, "Zoning Districts" Section 2-500 "Planned Area Development," (PAD) to provide that upon City Commission approval, the maximum number of stories in any PAD shall not apply; and to create a "Height Bonus to PAD Minimum Development Standards in the Central Business District (CBD)" providing additional height with a limit of

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density for qualifying properties upon City Commission approval; providing for severability clause, repealer provision, codification, and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson) (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto F-8 and F-9, and then we will be taking a break at 12 for lunch and then 12:30 we will be having a Shade Session.

City Attorney Ramos: F-8 Mayor is An Ordinance of the City Commission granting approval of proposed amendments to the text of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan, pursuant to expedited state review procedures (S.163.3184, Florida Statutes) and Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-213, "Comprehensive Plan Text and Map Amendments;" to provide that the maximum number of floors in the Comprehensive Plan shall not apply to any Planned Area Development (PAD) upon City Commission approval, and to allow an additional height bonus in return for limiting density for qualifying PADs within the Central Business District. In addition, (F-9)An Ordinance of the City Commission providing for text amendments to the City of Coral Gables Official Zoning Code, Article 2, "Zoning Districts" Section 2-500 "Planned Area Development," (PAD) to provide that upon City Commission approval, the maximum number of stories in any PAD shall not apply; and to create a "Height Bonus to PAD Minimum Development Standards in the Central Business District (CBD)" providing additional height with a limit of density for qualifying properties upon City Commission approval. This is a public hearing item. We can take one joint public hearing for both items. Mr. Trias.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: May I have the PowerPoint please. Mayor, Commissioners, there are two items, but they basically overlap, so I'll discuss them together. The Comprehensive Plan Amendment would allow the extra height between the 190, above the 190.5, which is the current maximum, to 205 in the Central Business District, with certain limitations. In addition, the Comp Plan right now does not speak of the PAD directly, so we believe that there was a need to have an objective that explain certain characteristics of the PADs which allow flexibility including specifically the number of stories. To be able to implement this change in the Comprehensive Plan, there is a need to do some zoning text amendments which are the same content. They are slightly different in terms of the legislation. The concept is that within the Central Business District, a PAD may have that extra height, as long as the density is kept at 100 units per acre. The taller area of the project does not face Miracle Mile, LeJeune, Douglas Road, or Ponce de Leon, and that there are some additional ground level open space. Currently as you know, we regulate height and number of stories in some cases. In the PAD, the city would regulate height only. So, the height remains the same, the number of stories is more flexible.

Vice Mayor Mena: Can you go back for a second, just for the benefit of the public and I'm not sure if this is on one of the upcoming slides or not, but the 100 units per acre, will you explain how that compares to what's currently would be required.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes. Thank you.

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Vice Mayor Mena: At the 190 feet, right, which is what you're adjusting the height on, because the point here is, it's a very minimal adjustment relative to.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Very minimal.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right. Can you explain the density part of it?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Sure. Thank you very much. I forgot to explain it in detail. Right now, the Central Business District has unlimited density. So basically, whatever number of units you can fit within 190, you can do, as long as you keep it with the FAR, the maximum FAR. This amendment proposes to cap the density at 100, which is significantly lower than the maximum; and the idea behind the amendment as stated many times by some of the members of the Commission is to limit the impact – traffic, etc., because the number of units is going to be 100. So that, I think is the key point that some of you have suggested.

Mayor Lago: And I think also, I want to make sure we put it on the record, its not only minimizing the density, but you are also requiring open space on the ground floor.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: In addition, yes. At least 5 percent extra open space at the ground level.

Commissioner Anderson: With green space being 75 percent, another clarifying thing.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Make sure there is not a misinterpretation for what we're trying to do here. This is only in a minute area of the Central Business District and not the entire Central Business District.

Mayor Lago: And I think also, Commissioner, what we're sending is a strong message that we want to see a green downtown. We want to see a walkable downtown, and our partners who, at the end of the day they are our partners, just like the business community is our partner. If you are going to develop in the City of Coral Gables, we want to see like you see in Villa Valencia, for example, like you are seeing in the Agave Project. You are seeing a level of green space that is being provided – small pocket parks, which once you put two or three, or four or five of those together within a half mile radius, I think it will really bring our downtown to life, where a lot of the community and a lot of the residents, a lot of the visitors can have an opportunity to sit down to enjoy. They don't have to attend one of our parks, Phillips Park, for example in the North Gables, they can live in the downtown and enjoy a beautiful green space. That's another part of this legislation which, we are sending a very strong message to our partners, to those developers, please, bring projects that are considerate of the City of Coral Gables standards and what we're looking for in regard to development. Don't just bring a project that goes setback to setback and has minimal green space. That's not going to work anymore. We are looking for something exceptional.

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Planning and Zoning Director Trias: So, I wanted to go over the review timelines slightly, because Planning and Zoning reviewed this request and defer action. The discussion had to do with some of the details. I think once they see the record from this discussion, they will probably understand it better. So, we have it scheduled for tomorrow, Planning and Zoning again, so we are doing first reading today, Planning and Zoning; and then, because this is a Comprehensive Plan Amendment it has to be sent to the Department of Economic Opportunity at the State, so it will take a little bit longer than some of the other map amendments, for example, that we have done. This is a text amendment, and it requires some more time. And then once that process is done, it will come back to you for second reading. Letters were sent to property owners within 1,000 feet, and twice the request was posted on the website three times; three times we have newspaper advertisement; staff, I believe is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and recommends approval, and the standards have been met for the request.

Vice Mayor Mena: My understanding was, some of the comments from Planning and Zoning related to, they wanted to see more than 100 units per acre, is my understanding correct?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes. Some of the members disagreed with the idea that less density was better. They believed that density should be...

Vice Mayor Mena: But to be clear, well first of all, it's a policy decision. I think that this Commission really is the one that makes, and I think that we need to be careful that the Planning and Zoning Board doesn't get into the business of policymaking and sticks to what their role is supposed to be. But you could still do more than 100 units per acre within those 190 feet, right.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Within that 190, yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: That's the project that somebody wants to do, that's okay, they can do it within the confines of what we already have.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: The specific policy objective here was to allow a little more height, keep the density at a very reasonable number, and the goal here is have a higher quality, I don't want to say quality, but a higher-end product where you have bigger units, therefore the units per acre works, a little more height, because that's what's required for that level of unit to sell at the market. And so, again, I appreciate the comments from Planning and Zoning, but the stated objective, policy objective from this Commission from the beginning on this item has been basically a slight trade-off on height, but for a much more significant consideration on a reduction of the density at 100 units per acre.

Mayor Lago: And the green space.

Vice Mayor Mena: Correct – sorry, which is very important, yes, exactly.

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Mayor Lago: A huge amenity and a huge component of quality of life. Sorry to interrupt. And if I may, I want the Vice Mayor to finish.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, no, that was basically it. So, I just to the extent someone who's watching or has been following this, is concerned that Planning and Zoning wasn't on board, there is a little bit of gap between what we were saying and the policy objective of this and what they were focused in on, which was more of like an urban planning type concept where they want to see higher density in the CBD, and that's fine and they are entitled to that opinion, but that wasn't the stated policy objective by this Commission here.

Mayor Lago: So, I wanted to add a little bit more to the Vice Mayor's comments and this is something that I had a conversation with the Manager and the City Attorney yesterday in my briefing, and I'm happy that the Vice Mayor brought it up. I wasn't going to bring it up, but I'm happy he brought it up. I found it a little bit distasteful, in my opinion, some of the comments that were made in the Planning and Zoning Board, especially by certain individuals who own property in the downtown, and who are saying that they wanted to see a lot more density in regard to what was available. You heard residents before, they want less density, they want a better product, they want more green space. You are still allowed to build unlimited density as per the zoning code. Has never changed. We are talking about adding an additional 14.5 feet in height and I challenge anyone who is standing on the first floor to look up and tell me whether one building is 190 and whether one building is 205, but at 205, for example, you get a corner park adjacent to that property. You'll get a project that potentially has 40 percent less, maybe 45 percent less density than the regular zoning code calls for. So, like the Vice Mayor said, you have two opportunities that you can run concurrently. Either you can go by the current standard zoning code, which allows you to have unlimited density, or you can take this approach which will allow you to build larger units, provide more green space on the first floor, reduce your density, not by 5, 10, 15 percent, significantly reduce your density, just for about a 14 percent increase in height. You know that we all have our own interest, but we need to be very, very careful and very thoughtful when we serve on these boards that your own interest doesn't fog your decisions. And to me, I was very intrigued, and I served on the Planning and Zoning Board, to be exact for 19 months, and I think that this Commission is the one that dictates policy. We are very grateful for all the boards; we give everyone the opportunity to speak. We are extremely excited when somebody wants to serve on a board, but we are not taking away your ability to do anything. We are just offering you a different route to, in my opinion, offer a much better product for the City of Coral Gables as-a-whole. So, moving forward, I don't know if anybody, excuse me Commissioner, I know you wanted to say something. I don't want to speak for the Commission, but I think that.

Commissioner Menendez: We've had that discussion here in the past. We've had residents reach out to us. Its clear as day the trend is not even a real estate market trend, its just a life trend, folks are looking for units that are more or less equivalent to what they have in a single-family home, a roomier unit, where its just not a young couple. It's a young couple with two kids, or it's a couple that has an elderly parent that needs attention, and its my understanding that by providing the opportunity for roomier, larger units, now we are providing a product for larger families, for full

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families, options in this market. I've gotten a lot of feedback from the community residents that they would like to see the city go in that direction, so that they have more options instead of staying stuck in a single-family home, they have to do the landscape. They just want opportunities to bring their entire family in and I think this is a good way, a good step in the right direction.

Mayor Lago: And also, if I may add to the Commissioner's comment. The perfect example are my parents. Early 70's, my father is a physician, goes to Coral Gables Hospital, goes to Doctor's Hospital. He lives in a pretty significant house. He no longer has the need for a 7-8-bedroom house. He wants to transition to something which could potentially offer him amenities that he doesn't have in his home. From what I've heard from everybody is that we want our downtown to be vibrant. We've extended our trolleys to Saturdays, we are moving in that direction, we've seen extreme success. We've expanded on our Farmers Market; we have two Farmers Markets now. The next one is opening on January 15th. We are doing a lot of things with the expansion of our theater, with expansion of culture, fine dining. So, you see a lot of people wanting to come into the downtown, but the product doesn't exist. The product that is rolled out is immediately gobbled up. So, there isn't enough product for those elderly retirees, professionals, family members, like the Commissioner mentioned, especially people who have an elderly parent that comes back to live with them. So, this is a good opportunity to be able to build something in our downtown which meets a much-needed need, along with providing significant green space and reducing the density, and I want to be clear, so everybody understands. What the density means is the amount of people living in that building. So, you reduce the density, in turn you reduce the traffic, and that is a big, big proponent of this legislation. Commissioner.

Commissioner Anderson: Just a minor additional point, because we are blessed as a community to be able to attract this high-end quality type of development, and you're right. It doesn't exist and people want to live in our downtown area, but they don't have this product. It doesn't exist at all. Now Villa Valencia is a good example of very large building that went in with low density in it, and this would be similar in that impact. You have a park, you are walkable to the downtown, and that's what people are looking for. So, anybody have any other comments?

Mayor Lago: I'll entertain a motion.

City Attorney Ramos: Is there any public comment Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes ma'am.

Mayor Lago: Oh, there is. I'm sorry, I forgot. I thought I had asked. I apologize.

City Clerk Urquia: So, we do have one speaker, Mr. Jackson Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes the floor is yours. Can we close the public comment after Mr. Holmes please?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes. Mr. Holmes before you begin, would you please raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you will provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth, sir?

Mr. Holmes: I do.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Mr. Holmes: Forgive me, because I was hearing alarm bells like Miracle Mile, you're raising the height on Miracle Mile. Then I heard Mr. Trias say that these expanded height limits cannot face Miracle Mile. Can I ask the City Attorney, is that correct?

City Attorney Ramos: I believe that is correct. I don't think we are affecting Miracle Mile at all sir.

Mr. Holmes: This proposal here is off limits for buildings facing Miracle Mile.

Vice Mayor Mena: It's not facing it's on Miracle Mile. Just to be clear. If its two blocks south, it could be facing.

Mr. Homes: Yes, yes, yes. Immediately on Miracle Mile. So, I don't have to – I'm not going to get gobbled up by developers yet.

City Attorney Ramos: No.

Mayor Lago: And you know the position of this Commission has been in regard to Miracle Mile, we held the line.

Mr. Holmes: Yes.

Mayor Lago: The only thing we removed which I think is very beneficial is the parking, which if anybody...

Vice Mayor Mena: Miracle Mile has its own overlay.

Mr. Holmes: God bless you. I'll leave you alone.

Vice Mayor Mena: Thank you.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: May I have a motion on F-8.

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Commissioner Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Menendez: Second.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto F-9. Can I get a motion please?

Commissioner Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Menendez: Second.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much and I look forward to the adoption of this legislation. I think its going to be something that's going to pay significant dividends. Looking forward to many parks in the downtown, many parks. That's going to be something interesting to see.