

# CITY OF CORAL GABLES

## - MEMORANDUM -

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor, Vice-Mayor and City Commissioners City Manager Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark	<b>DATE:</b>	January 13, 2015
<b>FROM:</b>	Ramon Trias Director of Planning and Zoning	<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Discussion on North Ponce Study and related planning issues

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At a meeting on October 28, 2014, the City Commission requested that Staff discuss past planning efforts for the North Ponce area, evaluate current challenges for development and redevelopment, and recommend an effective course for Commission discussion and possible future action.

### **Prior Studies, North Ponce Area, 1994 - 2005**

The North Ponce area has been studied by several City boards, task forces and consultants for the past twenty years, as follows:

1. 1994, Findings and Recommendations of the Douglas Apartment District Task Force.
2. 1998, Draft North Ponce District Zoning Review.
3. 2002, Coral Gables Charrette Report (North Ponce recommendations section)
4. 2003, Tri-Board meeting
5. 2005, North Ponce Neighborhood, Strategies for Redevelopment (generally known as the North Ponce study)

### **Current Planning Challenges**

In spite of past planning studies, zoning regulations have not changed significantly in the past two decades. The following topics still require effective approaches to development regulation:

- Mixed-use projects along Ponce de Leon Boulevard including massing, scale and scope.
- Development standards for multi-family projects on MF2 zoning related to parking, density and setbacks.
- Development standards for townhouses, which are currently allowed in MF-2 zoning. However, setbacks and lack of alleys interfere with such projects.
- Parking standards for residential and mixed-use projects.
- Preservation of small apartment buildings.
- Design of streets, public spaces and on-street parking.

### **North Ponce Neighborhood Study, 2005**

The most comprehensive planning effort was performed in 2005 by Siemon & Larsen, Land Use Planners & Attorneys. A summary of its recommendations is provided in "Attachment A".

The consultant divided this area into five study districts and drafted unique recommendations for each of the districts, including comprehensive regulatory changes and numerous capital improvements.

The consultant recommended new zoning designations for each area. These new zoning regulations encouraged mixed-use, pedestrian oriented redevelopment along Ponce de Leon Boulevard and close to the Central Business District, while conserving the character of low-rise apartment districts and single-family neighborhoods. Tables 1 through 5 of "Attachment A" summarize these recommendations.

A major component of the Study was the creation of "Conservation Districts" that focused on preserving existing building stock and ensuring that new development is compatible with the existing character of the area. A Conservation District was proposed for the single family neighborhood north of SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street, and another Conservation District was proposed for the garden apartment district in the blocks between Douglas Road and Galiano Street, and between Salzedo Street and the city boundary.

Another important component of the study was the use of targeted parking strategies that would address parking needs while alleviating the burden of off-street parking requirements. Some of the proposed strategies included:

- Reduced parking requirements for low-rise apartment buildings
- Transferable Parking Rights (ability to buy and sell required parking spaces from neighboring properties)
- Pay-in-lieu parking; contributions made towards public parking facilities in the area
- City-sponsored public parking lots
- Special Assessment district for public parking facilities
- Shared parking for mixed-use projects
- Parking reduction or waiver for adaptive reuse of historic structures

The Study contained valuable research and analysis, and the zoning district recommendations attempted to address some shortcomings of existing regulations. However, the consultant's solutions relied on complex conventional zoning strategies that would have presented challenges for project design and staff review.

The Study was presented to the Commission on January 24, 2006, for discussion. The Commission requested further analysis of the proposed regulations, however shortly thereafter there was a change in City Administration and priorities. No action was taken on the study.

### **Redevelopment and Legislative Changes, 2005 – 2014**

Since 2005, substantial redevelopment has taken place along Ponce de Leon Boulevard and within the MF2 apartment districts within the study area. The following are some projects constructed in the past ten years:

- 1300 Ponce de Leon Boulevard; Mixed-Use, 2009
- 1600 Ponce de Leon Boulevard; Office, 2008
- 1607 Ponce de Leon Boulevard; Residential, 2008
- 1805 Ponce de Leon Boulevard; Residential, 2008
- 888 Douglas Road; Residential, 2007

These projects have followed the adopted regulations of the Zoning Code. Shortcomings of the existing zoning regulations (compatibility among small apartment buildings and large mixed-use projects, excessive parking requirements, and incompatibility with historic properties) are clearly displayed in the design of some recent buildings.

In 2014 the City Commission adopted a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program for

historic MF2 properties in the North Ponce area. This provides enhanced opportunities for property owners interested in rehabilitating multi-family historic properties.

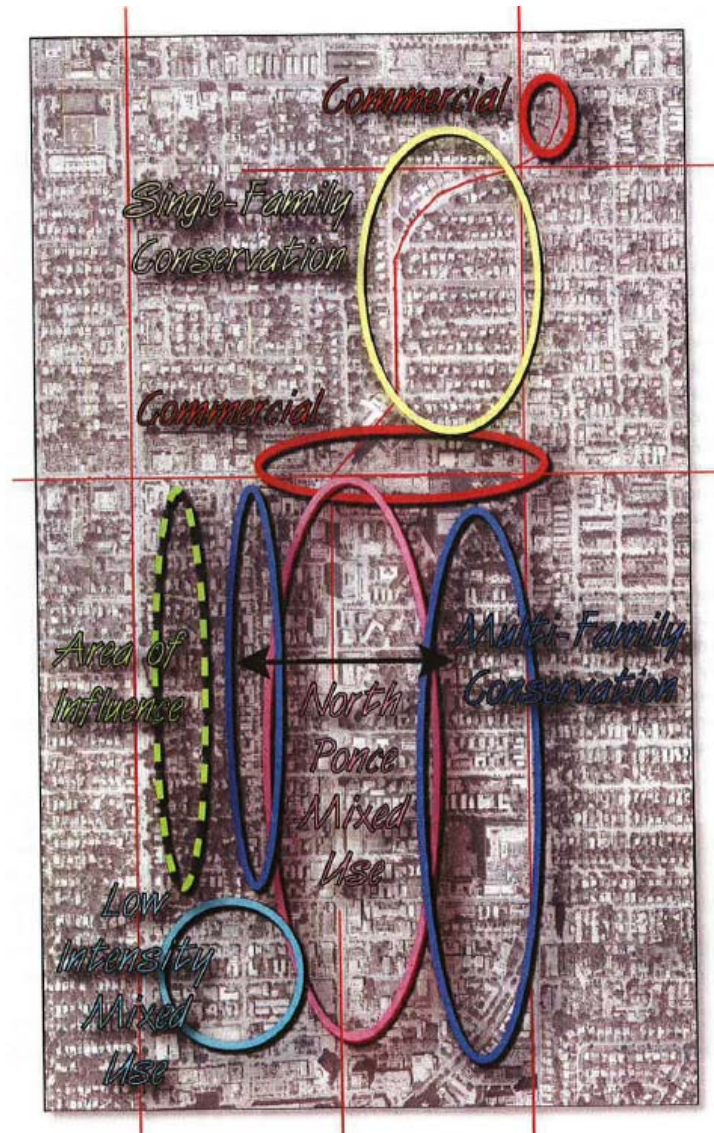
## **Recommendation**

Staff analysis of past planning efforts, and current town planning practice, support an update of the zoning regulations of the North Ponce area. However, as circumstances have changed significantly since the North Ponce Study was prepared in 2005, future zoning updates should focus on the following topics:

1. A zoning overlay that follows a “form-based” structure should be considered for the MF2 and Commercial areas along Ponce de Leon Boulevard, as the area would be best regulated with carefully considered guidelines that emphasize place-making, sustainability and pedestrian activity.
2. Off-street parking requirements should be reviewed, as parking provisions have a major impact on the function and appearance of buildings and must be carefully calibrated to the actual needs of a district or the mix of uses.
3. The preferred scope of Mixed-use and commercial development along Ponce de Leon Boulevard should be studied, as aggregation of adjoining parcels may alter the character of multifamily areas in close proximity.

**North Ponce Study Summary**  
2005 Zoning District Proposals and 2014 Staff Evaluation

The following map is taken directly from the 2005 North Ponce Neighborhood Study document and it depicts the locations of the proposed Zoning Districts:



*2005 North Ponce Neighborhood Study Zoning Districts Proposal: location map*

**Table 1. Single-Family Conservation District (SF-C)**

*Goal: Conserve the character of a neighborhood of small one-story homes while encouraging improved streetscape.*

2005 Consultant Proposal		2014 Staff Evaluation
FAR	Encourages small homes with garages set back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special regulatory changes for this neighborhood are not an effective approach to achieve the stated goals.</li> <li>• Key concepts may be useful additions to the Single-Family Residential (SFR) Zoning District regulations city-wide.</li> </ul>
Setbacks	Larger setbacks	
Height	Encourages one-story	
Roof	Encourages pitched roofs	
Trees	Encourages more canopy, particularly along street	
Process	Requires Board of Architects contextual review for all homes, and special review for large homes.	
Capital Improvements	Redesign neighborhood streets to have a parkway with street trees, and to reduce the width of street pavement. Introduce traffic calming devices. Park improvements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These Capital Improvements address needs that still exist today and they should be implemented.</li> </ul>

**Table 2. Multi-Family Conservation District (MF-C)**

*Goal: Conserve the character of a neighborhood of 2-3 story garden apartments while encouraging improved streetscape.*

2005 Consultant Proposal		2014 Staff Evaluation
FAR	Limits FAR to 1.2. Does not allow Med Bonus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The provisions of this zoning district strongly resemble the Multi-Family Special Area (MFSA) district.</li> <li>• These regulatory changes do not address the stated goals and require further study.</li> <li>• Eliminating use of Mediterranean Architectural Design requirements would result in a change in character and a reduction in pedestrian amenities.</li> </ul>
Setbacks	Reduces setbacks substantially to encourage townhouse-style development	
Height	Maximum height of 60', but encourages 40' through incentives. Does not allow Med Bonus.	
Parking	Reductions for small buildings, historic buildings	
Streetscape	Requires improvements to public streetscape	
Transfer of Development Rights	Encourages small buildings and parks by allowing property owners to transfer development rights to properties in the NPMU District.	
Uses	Residential, some commercial in historic buildings.	
Capital Improvements	Redesign all streets to have a parkway with street trees, and reduce the width of street pavement. May require loss of on-street parking. Construct public parking lots and garages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations are appropriate, but loss of on-street parking should be avoided.</li> <li>• Off-street public parking facilities merits further study.</li> </ul>

**Table 3. Low Intensity Mixed-Use District (LIMU)**

*Goal: Encourage mixed-use development for a walkable neighborhood close to Downtown.*

2005 Consultant Proposal		2014 Staff Evaluation
FAR	Limits FAR to 1.2. No Med Bonus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The provisions of this zoning district strongly resemble the Multi-Family Special Area (MFSA) district.</li> <li>These regulatory changes may no longer be appropriate for this area and require further study.</li> <li>Eliminating use of Mediterranean Architectural Design requirements would result in a change in character and a reduction in pedestrian amenities.</li> </ul>
Setbacks	Reduces setbacks to encourage townhouse-style development or attached mixed-use building types.	
Height	60' max, but encourages 40'. No Med Bonus.	
Parking	Parking incentives for contextual buildings and preservation of historic buildings.	
Streetscape	Design standards for mandatory improvements to public streetscape for buildings over 40' in height.	
Transfer of Development Rights	Encourages smaller buildings and parks by allowing property owners to transfer development rights closer to the NPMU District.	
Uses	Residential with ground level retail and limited office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommendations are appropriate, but loss of on-street parking should be avoided.</li> </ul>
Capital Improvements	Redesign all streets to have a parkway with street trees, and reduce the width of street pavement. May require loss of on-street parking.	

**Table 4. North Ponce Mixed-Use District (NPMU)**

*Goal: Encourage more intense commercial development along Ponce de Leon Boulevard while conserving the mid-rise neighborhood character of side streets.*

2005 Consultant Proposal		2014 Staff Evaluation
FAR	Ranges from 3.0 to 1.2 max based on proximity to Ponce. No Med Bonus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NPMU functions as 3 different zoning districts, with unique requirements based on proximity to Ponce.</li> <li>These regulatory changes may no longer be appropriate and require further study.</li> <li>Stated goals more effectively achieved by zoning map amendments using existing zoning districts.</li> <li>Eliminating use of Mediterranean Architectural Design requirements would result in a change in character and a reduction in pedestrian amenities.</li> </ul>
Setbacks	Increase as the height of the building increases.	
Height	Ranges from 150' to 40' max based on proximity to Ponce. TDR program replaces Med Bonus.	
Parking	Parking reduction incentives to encourage more contextual buildings and historic preservation.	
Streetscape	Design standards for mandatory improvements to public streetscape for larger buildings.	
Open Space	Encourages the dedication of pocket parks.	
Uses	Office and retail fronting Ponce; residential and neighborhood commercial further from Ponce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposals are generally appropriate, except for the Catalytic Project.</li> </ul>
Capital Improvements	Improve Ponce streetscape. Construct public garages. Acquire park land. Assemble land, close streets to create a mixed-use "Catalytic Project."	

**Table 5. Commercial Areas**

*Goal: Prevent the further expansion of SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Flagler Street-oriented commercial uses into residential areas.*

2005 Consultant Proposal		2014 Staff Evaluation
Zoning & Capital Improvements	No changes proposed. Enforcement of the Zoning Map and Future Land Use Map recommended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommendation is appropriate.</li> </ul>