

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items G-1
November 9, 2021
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

Public Speaker(s)

Joe Jimenez

Agenda Item G-1[Start: 4:10 p.m.]

Discussion regarding reduced-density PAD bonus in Central Business District core, in properties of a certain size. (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson and Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Can we bring up G-1, discussion regarding reduced-density PAD bonus in Central Business District core, in properties of a certain size, sponsored by Commissioner Anderson and myself – Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes. This is a rough draft, a discussion item at this time for you all to ponder what we can do to help improve our downtown area with high-end development and we had a project here earlier today that reduced the density, but this helps also solve a problem because we have an unlimited density in our Central Business District, while theoretically unlimited, it still in the same kind of property at least reach 300 units. This proposes to do several things; one, we bring down the number of units per acre to 100 units per acre. Directly outside the CBD, we have 125 units per acre right now. We increase the green space requirement, something that we've been trying to get in the Central Business core for an additional five percent of green space; 75 percent

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of which must be actually green, so I know there are some sidewalks and hardscape that people would like to include in there, if you guys have a different percentage in mind or want a higher percentage, I'm certainly open to having that discussion. It limits where these projects with the lower density can be to areas that are not bordering LeJeune Road, Ponce de Leon will not face Miracle Mile or Douglas Road. So, it's truly in the middle of our Central Business District, so an additional amount of height on there is an incentive for these projects to take place will not impact, greatly impact our area. Now I know that there are pluses and minuses to everything, and staff is prepared to address some of the pluses and minuses, but I'm going to go ahead and jump that a little bit by discussing some of those detriments, if people want to call it that. The drawbacks listed in staff's presentation talks about encouraging aggregation in multiple properties, diminishes the city's urban fabric of small buildings, and that problem already exists, because people are aggregating properties now as we speak without this incentive; and adds significant building height on a 60-foot wide downtown. This is required to be Mediterranean, and we have to have the step-backs, and we have to comply with the Mediterranean code, so its not going to be like a modern building can be, like we just considered, with zero step-back situation, and we get for it a reduction of density, a high-quality development of the best degree, and a more walkable, livable downtown core in our area. Mayor, do you have some additional comments?

Mayor Lago: Yes, thank you Commissioner. First off, I wanted to say thank you for working on this. I know you've been working on this very hard and I appreciate you taking a leadership role on this. I want to give you a little bit of news, which I'm very proud of, which we've been working on, the Manager and myself, we've been working on one of the projects that is asking for this legislation to be considered to reduce the density, but have that a little bit of additional height, which is very minimal, its 14 feet, 14 ½ feet to be exact. I don't want anybody to say that I left out 6 inches. I want to be very, very clear on that. One of the caveats that Commissioner Anderson and I had was, if you want that additional height of 14 ½ feet, you've got to reduce the density, and I want some more green space, as the Commissioner just mentioned. And not only do I want really green space, not just a little liner, I want something world-class that we can hold our teeth, we can be proud of, and we can say this is something in the downtown that will be a legacy project where people can say, we delivered a green space that everyone in perpetuity will be able to enjoy. So, in this project which will be presented to us in the near future, we've been working on figuring out how to get that green space, and the Manager and myself, along with the applicant have worked on securing a 12,000 square foot lot in the downtown adjacent to this parcel of land, which is going to be a park. What? – 10,000, excuse me, 10,000, but it has a beautiful oak tree, two oak trees in the back, right, I think it has two or one?

Unidentified Speaker: One.

Mayor Lago: One – looks big. It's a pretty big oak tree, but it's a 10,000 square foot lot. Find me a 10,000 square foot lot in our downtown and we were able to secure that at no cost to the city, and that's why I think we need to tie in with the legislation to make sure that the green space that we are requiring for consideration is significant, and maybe can leave that up, that significance, for once we can leave it up a little bit arbitrary, so we can negotiate like we were able to negotiate in this case. Think about the cost of a piece of property in our downtown of this magnitude and

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being able to secure it to build a nice area of solitude for people to enjoy in our downtown. So that's where we are headed in this, at least I am, since I can't to you about this matter unless we have a Sunshine meeting, which we should, that's where I'm headed in regards to this project in finding opportunities like we did with Valencia, where the residents weren't in favor and then when we were able to secure a beautiful neighborhood park on the corner, everyone came out in support of the project, and this project is in the same vane and I think that the legislation that we are crafting will pay dividends.

Commissioner Anderson: You think the percentages that I put in here, it says PAD site shall provide an additional five percent ground level of open space beyond the minimum PAD requirement, 75 percent of which shall be green space. Does that number work?

Mayor Lago: I think it works, but I think we are going to pass it with this additional 10,000 square feet.

Commissioner Anderson: Going forward do you think 75 percent is the line you want to draw?

Mayor Lago: Listen, its great. I don't have an issue with it, because again, as the building gets more vertical, you are going to open more green space on the ground floor, which is exactly what we want. In your experience, correct me if I'm wrong, your experience is at the ground floor, your experience is not at the top of the building.

Commissioner Anderson: Right. That's where I want it. I want the green space at the ground floor.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Mr. Trias.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Just for transparency's sake. We do have that size specific of 16 stories. Its your opinion that it should be waived to any number of stories – 18.

Mayor Lago: I don't think we should waive anything.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I think that that project was trying to do 18 stories and unfortunately the site specific only allow 16, so that's a significant issue that we need to discuss.

Mayor Lago: I think we need to discuss that, and I'll defer to Commissioner Anderson on that and my colleagues, but I think we should discuss it. When you have options like we have right now with great pieces of open space, great design, a significant reduction in density, which will reduce traffic, which will reduce congestion, those are the things that we need to take into consideration when making these types of decisions.

City Attorney Ramos: So, I wouldn't include it necessarily in the ordinance because this is going to apply to many others. However, I will remind the Commission that in a PAD you have room to make concessions for better projects.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes. And just to clarify. The code regulates feet, and it also regulates stories. So, what happens is that those two things, you need to be very aware of what your goal is, and I think that if your goal is to say that a PAD may have additional stories, we probably should include that language specifically in the PAD, I think.

City Attorney Ramos: We can include it, or we can just rely on the interpretation that we've always had, which is, the Commission has in the past added stories within the same footprint.

Commissioner Anderson: Do we need to have that?

Mayor Lago: I don't see it as an issue. I defer to you, whatever the way you'd like it.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: For transparency and just being clear on what the request is.

Mayor Lago: We haven't crafted legislation, so its going to come before us.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Sure.

Mayor Lago: So why don't we work on that, why don't we work on that between first, before we get to first reading, you speak to the Commissioners and then we move forward.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: We can do that.

City Attorney Ramos: The other thing I think you need to note, Ramon, is whether it's coming here first or going to Planning and Zoning.

Vice Mayor Mena: If you are giving them direction – you are talking about the general.

City Attorney Ramos: The ordinance itself.

Vice Mayor Mena: Ordinance?

City Attorney Ramos: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay. I think we want to push it for Planning and Zoning, right?

Mayor Lago: Let's go to Planning and Zoning. Let's do it the right way.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Follow all the necessary transparent.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: That would be my recommendation just to follow the process.

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City Manager Iglesias: We recommend following the process, going to Planning and Zoning and then come to the Commission.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: I would agree with that. Let it go to Planning and Zoning first.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Technically just to remind you, this will be included in Table 3 of the Mediterranean Bonus, which I think is the cleanest way to deal with this.

City Attorney Ramos: We talked about an alternative PAD ordinance, have we moved away from that idea?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes. The answer is yes. My recommendation is to include in Table 3 of the Med Bonus table, and that allows for all the language that we added on and very clearly explained, and that's what we provided to you.

Commissioner Anderson: The drafts that's been going back and forth on. Anything else anybody?

Mayor Lago: I want to see if we want to bring up Mr. Jimenez one second, he wants to speak.

Mr. Jimenez: Thank you Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. Manager, Madam City Attorney, Joe Jimenez, Galena Partners, 2020 Salzedo Street, 5th floor. There are certain things I want to make clear on. We intend to bring forward an application which we've already submitted, with the full knowledge that this particular section of the code, we do not comply with, with our project because this hasn't been lifted. This is certainly not because Ramon was referring to, Mr. Trias, excuse me, was referring to a site specific that is a site specific that is already in the code for this neighborhood, not for my site in particular. This ordinance or Comp Plan amendment is not specific to our site. We had the idea, we've worked with it, but anybody could do this for this particular ordinance that would have to go forward. So, to address, Mr. Trias' correct comment, we would come then if we had to come with a different application for our specific zoning and our specific PAD, like a PAD that you had here earlier today, that would take those into consideration, but what we would ask is that this legislation move forward through the process because we're admittedly coming up behind it, and anyone in the community, anyone on the Commission who wants to sit down with either me or more importantly Armando Codina, and I don't blame you if you'd rather talk to him than to me, and hear about this project or organize something, because we can put, like I said the last time I was here, we can give you a concrete example of the kind of project you would get with this change, minor change as far as we're concerned, a drastic reduction in zoning, excuse me, in density for a relatively minor increase in height. You can only do one kind of building with that height bonus. You are not putting in more units. You've got to put in fewer and they've got to be spectacular which is what we would prefer.

Mayor Lago: And a beautiful park on the ground floor.

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Mr. Jimenez: It was one of the harder pieces of all of this we worked, and I want to give a lot of credit to Mercedes Benz. We had a complicated transaction that had taken place long before this and it was very important to both Commissioner Anderson and Mayor Lago and City Manager Iglesias, and as part of this PAD we will be proposing a 10,000 square foot, entirely public green space that will upon PAD approval be dedicated to the city as a city park on a corner.

Mayor Lago: On the corner of main and main and we negotiated it in multiple meetings, and we closed the deal, was it Thursday or Friday?

Mr. Jimenez: It was Thursday, and we will paper that today, but I've been working with the Mercedes people for a long time, I've been working with you for a long time, and I know everybody's agreement at that meeting. I'm willing to go on a handshake, but I'm a lawyer so I can't, so they are going to make me do a contract.

Mayor Lago: So, moving forward – go ahead Mr. Trias.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I forgot to mention that there is also an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan that is going with this.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Jimenez: Thank you very much for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Anderson: Spoke to some of the neighboring people that are around you and they are really excited about that park.

Mr. Jimenez: We are very proud of this project. We feel that its unique and as my bosses said repeatedly, its not a secret, he's going to live there, he believes in it, and to steal his joke, if he's wrong, he'll have the biggest house in Coral Gables, because he's living there no matter what. We're building this thing if you guys let us. So, hopefully you can build it for everybody else too. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for delivering on that park.