

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-10
May 23, 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

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-10 [5:40 p.m.]

Discussion and memo regarding prior design ideas presented for Garage 1/Mobility Hub. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson) (Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto G-10.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Now the fun starts. I sent you all a memo just to try to abbreviate this presentation somewhat to give you an excerpt on some of the presentations I've done in the past. We saw the chia-pet version of the garage. I've also passed down to you this, City Clerk, I'm going to ask you to bring up in color because it does it more justice. There's the chia-pet or one of the versions of the chia-pet. You've got air flow and you've got some green; and then I have this art-deco building as well. It's not in that package. You can go through a couple of those pictures. I was concerned about the...on the old design, but I think everybody here knows that. Another green garage. A lot of residents like the green garages, there's a lot of different ways to do it.

Mayor Lago: I like the green garage, but my only concern is, we'll talk about it in the Sunshine meeting, is the maintenance, you've got to be really on top of it, because if you look at PAM, Perez

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Art Museum, they had to remove a lot of those hanging gardens because of the cost to maintain them and they weren't maintaining them, then they were just dead and it looked horrible.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There's ways to do it.

Mayor Lago: I know. I know.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We have an excellent landscape architect; I think with drip irrigation you could do it. That is an art-deco garage on the Beach, and the reason I brought this up its because if you look at our zoning code and you search for compatibility in the zoning code, you'll see it highlighted throughout the code. And compatibility is like one of the key aspects that we look for when we're talking about architectural design. That block, go drive around it or you go do the Google drive around it, you'll see that where Super Cuts was, what's there now, I don't know, you have a rounded face.

Commissioner Menendez: Starbucks is now.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's where Starbucks is now. Then you go to the Miracle Theater, you have the rounded sign. It's an art-deco block. So, this would be a nod, as you were talking architectural poetry as I call it, to the rest of the block and you have a restaurant on the opposite corner also, you can see the Board of Architects required this rounded front to the restaurant. So, my suggestion is a combination of and give some direction to the architects to bring stuff back to us that is satisfying some of the desires of the residents that I've heard. They wanted something green; they wanted something art-deco. This would be open enough air-flow-wise, likewise, to be able to satisfy those needs. You all have some other design ideas. We can skin the cat a different way.

Commissioner Menendez: Through the Mayor. Again, going back to earlier discussions, architectural forum on Mediterranean, within that classical architecture style, there's art-deco and there's Mediterranean and others, and the one that they said that lends itself to light, air going through is an art-deco inspired structure. The three main arguments were, with regards to the Mobility Hub, height, and we discussed that last time in terms of the John Martin's parking garage; the architectural outer style; and they always refer to the Miracle Theater. It's incompatible. Well, if Miracle Theater is art-deco inspired, then it would make sense to me to make an art-deco structure next to it, so it sorts of homage to that style, to that vision of the past, but it also provides what we've been talking about, like making it welcoming to patrons. So, I think it covers, definitely something to explore and maybe give guidance to, but it really addresses almost every single issue or concern that was discussed on many occasions.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor. I actually had a conversation with the Manager about the possibility of maybe making it somewhat artistic, making the side that's on Miracle Mile

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art-deco, maybe the other site can be brutalist, which is similar to what's their now and with construction on that street, or some adaptation of what's there now of the design that we currently have, where its seen from Miracle Mile but it can be on the other side for some of the adaptation that the Manager and the Mayor have been trying to secure in that building. That's just a topic of conversation for the future. As far as the height, there may be something that can be done by just removing the park on the roof and still keeping the same number of parking spaces. So, just things to consider when we are discussing design.

Mayor Lago: I look forward to the Sunshine meeting. Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I think one of the key issues that...in that series is classical architecture was the finishing of Mediterranean, and the incompatibility of Mediterranean with a parking garage, and as you mentioned, has to be shoebox, and they talked about Mediterranean being dictated by solidity, by small openings by certain verticality of those openings, which is truly not compatible, and the fact that articulation cannot happen because of the shoebox effect. And we've been saying this for some time that Mediterranean is not really compatible with an open airy usable garage, and so, the art-deco concept was actually discussed and we have contacted Gensler to provide us some cost for looking at an art-deco solution, in addition to the modern solution, but I think it was clear through that series and there were very good questions that were asked by Commissioner Menendez and the Vice Mayor did a great job. At the end, in discussion with three major architects as to what constituted a good parking garage. The parking garage across the street done by a great architect who is a friend of ours who told me that the only reason he did that was because there was a program provided by the city and he didn't like it, and he allowed to say this. So, we've been saying this, it doesn't work, unless we want a garage similar to the one on the other side.

Mayor Lago: I think, Mr. Manager, if I may, Vice Mayor, I don't want to overstep. You've been talking about this for two years. We all came to the conclusion that this is needed, so we're beyond that. Now we're moving to have a Town Hall meeting, Sunshine meeting, whatever it is, at this point we can call it anything, just to kind of discuss a little bit about what is the next step moving forward. I think we are going to also have a discussion about parking fees and have your team with Kevin Kinney, I don't want to have it now, trust me, there are a lot more stuff to talk about, Kevin Kinney and our Finance Director to talk about literally in comparison to where we are in regard to parking rates throughout Miami-Dade County. I don't want to raise rates, but obviously, we are looking for money to do projects. We are looking for money to do other things. I want to make sure, and we've talked about this a bunch of times that when we embark on this, that this is a facility that everybody wants to use, and that it is an asset to the downtown, that property values go up; property values go up, we get more taxes. This is going to be a ripple effect, we make more money on the parking, and we make more money on the tax revenue, people are safe, they come

and spend more money in our downtown. So, I think the design we can really massage the design, find a design that doesn't make everybody happy, but at the end of the day, it's a design that is competitive in regard to what we are looking for. It's not ultra contemporary and it's not Mediterranean, it's something where in the middle and something that I think we'll be very proud of. Now's the time to when Gensler tells us, listen, we'll be ready with some renderings, finalize the Sunshine meeting. I'm in no hurry, what I want to do is right. Have a Sunshine meeting, have a conversation, invite the public, people can sit there, people can talk, show some of the renderings. We've always done things in the public in a transparent way and start moving in a way that we find out, also talk to Gensler. If we move with a redesign what is the cost for a redesign. There's a cost, bottom line. What does it cost for removing, like we talked about, the park. I don't want to lose the park, but again, what is it going to be the results of doing A, B, and C. What if we can't do A, B, and C, what if we can only do A and B. Those are all things that I would love to see answered at the Sunshine meeting, so that we can really take advantage of it and start moving on this.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we are working on all those issues. I actually, we have a lot of it already. We are working with Gensler to give us some timeframes and some costs as to the alternatives. There is also the issue of usage. If we look at a facility that's easy to use, comfortable and safe with security, our usage is going to skyrocket, which will also pay for parks.

Mayor Lago: My mom who has Parkinson's will not use a parking garage; she's told me. She told me, Vince, I won't park in the parking garage. She shops on the Mile. She either valets, she doesn't feel comfortable parking in the Aragon parking garage. She's in her early 70's, she has slight Parkinson's. So, you want to make it as inviting for everybody, that's the key, and I would love to take a field trip so people understand, but I know more than anybody else about parking garages but can become more immersed. Like when you're there, you're inside a parking garage. Not saying we are going to use the one in the Design District, we're not saying that we are going to use the one in Aventura, not saying we are going to use the one – just to look at a new parking garage and get an idea of what is nine feet versus ten feet, what is eight feet versus ten feet. What is less concrete, what is more steel, what is more aluminum, what is more metal. Those kinds of ideas so people can see it. It's a lot easier when you're sitting in front of it. Yes, its going to take a few hours and we'll take a trolley tour, not really a trolley tour, we'll take a van, but I think its important to do that with licensed architects, our consultants, so that we can say, let's visit four spectacular, the latest new parking garages with the latest technology so we can see it like the tangible outcome.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to say with the art-deco, whatever the design doesn't mean we have to settle for something that isn't iconic. I think as long as its done well, tastefully, well thought out, it could be one of those iconic buildings that Coral Gables has, that actually draws

people towards the Mile, just not one of many other parking garages, but one, and I'm all for trying to do everything possible to maintain what was planned for inside the parking garage – Uber and the charging stations. If we can find that balance, I think we could have one amazing opportunity to do something long-lasting that really draws people in, makes coming to Coral Gables not only a pleasure, but makes people really want to come and enjoy what we offer.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Commissioner Castro: How much would the new designs cost? Have we spoken about that or not?

Mayor Lago: May I answer that Mr. Manager. There is no way we know yet.

Commissioner Castro: So, we haven't spoken about it at all, so they are already working on design, and we don't know how much?

Mayor Lago: No, no, no, they are not working on designs, but the Manager is going to get a number for them too, once we embark – they are going to give us conceptualls, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor, as soon as we have developed an adequate program that we can say, because I would not like to go there without really knowing where we're going a little bit better, because these designs, some people think its like picking shirts off, its not. It entails a lot of work, and so, if we want to redesign, we are already in discussion with Gensler. We discussed about a Mediterranean option about an art-deco option. I think we've realized by this series in classical architecture the Mediterranean option is probably not a good option, so maybe we can opt out of that. So, I want to make sure that we have a program that we can provide them. We have a little bit of time, because construction right now is not the time to start, so it gives us a little bit of time to get this done, as the Mayor said correctly.

Vice Mayor Anderson: My last few comments. Many moons ago, I started working with residents in my neighborhood on this project or that project coming in, and the package I sent to you talked about when something is a delight to look at. The height becomes less of an issue for folks when they like the building. Even the feedback that I'm hearing on a particular project that everybody was against, because of the height off of Ponce. Some of the height stuff coming in is not as objectionable to the folks now because it's a delight to look at. So, I don't want to give up on the roof, I don't want to give up on the roof for a couple of reasons; one, it will help draw more people downtown, especially pickleball players would love to be on that roof, and I spend a lot of time, you think the time I spent on this memo this weekend was a lot, the time I spent, what, two years ago, trying to draw buildings, research other buildings and try to stimulate a conversation for a different design was immense and I toured the buildings inside as well. I've also while I was on

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the Sustainability Board, hit on the fact that they are trellises with silver panels involved, so you could dress out the solar panel array on the top of the roof to look like a really elegant looking trellis, which would also provide shade for those playing pickleball who would then come play pickleball and come down to get something to drink or something to eat and activate the Mile more. Not every floor on this building needs to be twelve feet; leave rooftop two, bottom two and the sandwich in between and come down to a less extensive height and we'll save on, you know, materials, it will bring down the height a little bit and create a balance.

Commissioner Menendez: We could rent the pickleball court \$5,000 an hour and make up the difference in about a year.

[Laughter]

Commissioner Menendez: Best pickleball courts in South Florida, overlooking City of Coral Gables.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There's going to be so much space there. We are so short on space for recreational activity, people will come.

Commissioner Fernandez: The conversation I had with the Manager was about maybe creating them as a parking floor at first, until we have the budget to make it into a park and use it as parking. One of the concerns that the Manager shared was nobody likes to park on the roof and that is true, but in the case where there is no other parking option, that's an option. So, it would create an opportunity for us to reduce the height by one floor for the time being and maybe five years down the road we'll have the budget to build a park and if our belief is that eventually we are going to have less cars using the facility, it's a solution that will work itself out. We will still have the 626 parking spaces.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, we're not going to put a ramp up to the roof.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, the Manager said that would not be an issue because since it will be an adaptive, actually I'll let you answer it.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, what we discussed was removing a floor, so it would be the existing ramp. So, we could design that floor to remove the ramp; the building is designed to have the ramp removed.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I understand, but I was here when the pickleball folks came in and they told us what the demand was. I don't think that idea is going to go over very well.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think at the end of the day it's about budget and I think that is the biggest budget item on this project and the estimate was what, \$6.2 million dollars.

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City Manager Iglesias: \$6.2 million.

Commissioner Fernandez: Just for the roof park, so that's why I was giving an option that would – give us the option of having a park eventually when we have the money for it, but if we don't have the money upfront and we're trying to reduce the cost, we are trying to reduce the height because residents want a lower height. It was just throwing ideas out there.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I think 626 we need; the roof is the roof, its not going to be parking and pickleball courts are paint and nets.

Commissioner Castro: We can do that on the first floor instead of retail.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I don't think so. That's charging stations for scooters, places for parking of bikes and it would be interesting, I think we're going to have some rental space for like a bike shop, some grab and go food.

City Manager Iglesias: Our current zoning code does not allow us to – we must have an active streetscape, we want retail and storefront on the first floor, so we don't have a dry floor, so we have streetscape activity. So, what we're doing is the same thing we ask others to do is activate that first floor and activate the streetscape.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: Through your chair, his chair, somebody's chair. Downtown, the school, downtown Doral Charter there's a downtown brand-new school, relatively new, they have all their activities on the roof. You can Google it. They have high walls, but you can see outward, they have basketball courts, they have tennis courts, everything on the rooftop of the school.

Commissioner Castro: They don't lose balls.

Commissioner Menendez: No, because of the height of the perimeter walls. It has like, I don't know what kind of design, but you can see out, but it's safe and all their P.E. and other activities take place on the rooftop. It's amazing. I was in the area, somebody wanted to take me around to see downtown Doral, which was quite impressive, and when they showed me the school when I realized, wait a second, there's the same issue we've been discussing, activating the rooftop and they've got it down. I was very impressed.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We have it right down the street off Sunset at one of our schools, I think it's the Preparatory School down there. I sat on Planning and Zoning what's coming through, and one of the questions we had is, oh yes, you have this Plexie glass there so the balls don't go flying. I've played in Coconut Grove, pickleball on a parking garage, use-type court, it adds an element

of you know you get the wind kind of aspect in there. We had a blast, a bunch of ladies from the Garden Club playing join us. They actually wanted to play tonight.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, the Clerk played after a marathon meeting last time.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You play pickleball?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh, you did. Did you win?

City Clerk Urquia: Always.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Always. I can't play with you then. You'll smear me, right. I'll tie one hand behind your back, right. Any other comments folks on parking garages?

Commissioner Fernandez: No.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

Commissioner Castro: I really liked the picture you showed with...

Vice Mayor Anderson: I figured we can get a hybrid going maybe.

Commissioner Fernandez: There's a lot of great ideas that can be implemented.

Commissioner Castro: That would look nice in back of the Actor's Playhouse, like the backdrop what Ms. Pardo was saying.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I figure you put a piece in there that's art-deco, that picture, some of the other stuff that I haven't circulated, that's art-deco, that's a building now. The idea is the lines in the building will nod to the design of the...and the rest of you can put green, okay, which will block the headlights. Anything else guys.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. We're done with G-10. Alright. So, we're moving onto G-12.