

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items F-6 and F-7 are related
March 8, 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)

Jorge Navarro

Albert Cordoves

David Bryan

Agenda Items F-6 and F-7 are related [11:35 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission granting approval of a Planned Area Development (PAD) pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-206, "General Procedures for Planned Area Development" for a mixed-use project referred to as "Alexan Crafts" on property legally described as lots 5 thru 27, Block 28, Coral Gables Crafts Section (340, 330, 322, 314, 310, 300 Catalonia Avenue, 301, 309, 317, 323, 325, 333, 341 Malaga Avenue), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (02 09 22 PZB recommended approval; Vote 4-0)

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Lobbyist: Jorge Navarro

A Resolution of the City Commission granting approval for Conditional Use Mixed-Use Site Plan pursuant to Zoning Code Section 2-200 "Mixed Use Districts" for a mixed-use project referred to as "Alexan Crafts" on property legally described as lots 5 thru 27, Block 28, Coral Gables Crafts Section (340, 330, 322, 314, 310, 300 Catalonia Avenue, 301, 309, 317, 323, 325, 333, 341 Malaga Avenue), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (02 09 22 PZB recommended approval; Vote 4-0)

(This Resolution is not for consideration at this time and will be included with the above ordinances on Second Reading if approved on First Reading.)

Lobbyist: Jorge Navarro

Mayor Lago: Moving on to F-6, the Crafts Section.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Lago: I'm sorry?

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Lago: And after F-6, we'll be hearing Burger Bob's item.

City Attorney Ramos: Do you want to make your announcement first, Commissioner?

Commissioner Menendez: Yes. At this time, I need to disclose that I have a conflict voting on this item, as I own several properties in the affected area. Accordingly, I will be leaving the room and will not be participating or voting on this item.

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Mayor Lago: Commissioner Menendez, have a nice coffee.

City Attorney Ramos: Thank you. With that, I'll read the ordinance. An ordinance of the City Commission granting approval of a Planned Area Development pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-206, "General Procedures for Planned Area Development" for a mixed-use project referred to as "Alexan Crafts" on property legally described as lots 5 thru 27, Block 28, Coral Gables Crafts Section, Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. The related item is not to be heard today. That is a resolution that will come when this ordinance comes on second reading. Mr. Clerk, if you can swear anybody in that will be testifying pertaining to this item.

City Clerk Urquia: Anyone who will be speaking on this item, please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

City Attorney Ramos: This is a public hearing item. Anyone appearing on Zoom that wishes to provide testimony should also be sworn in as long as they are visible to the camera.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you, ma'am.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Okay. May I have the PowerPoint, please. Do we have the PowerPoint? Well, maybe not, so I'll start. There are two requests today, a planned area development and conditional use permit to a site plan, as the City Attorney explained. Today, you are taking action on the first reading for the PAD. Next meeting, you will be able to deal with the second reading and also the mixed use site plan. Now, the project before you is Block 28 in the Crafts Section, most of the block, not quite, not all the way to Le Jeune. But it does front Catalonia,

Salzedo and Malaga, and it's in close proximity to some other areas of the downtown that are much higher density and have larger buildings. But it's also in close proximity to a historic building, which is the San Sebastian Apartments. The current land use designation is commercial low rise, and the zoning map is MX1. Now, the reason they're requesting a PAD is mostly that the project is seven stories. As you remember, the last update of the Zoning Code, this area was going to be a maximum of six stories. Thank you very much. Let's see. So, according to the previous City Attorney opinion, within a PAD, the number of stories could be different according to the findings by the City Commission. In addition, we're clarifying that area of the Code with a Comprehensive Plan element that's going through the -- amendment that is going through the process right now. But like I said, the project is a PAD. It's seven stories high, 263 units, and the landscape area is 28 percent, which is the requirement and a bit beyond the minimum. There are 364 parking spaces. As you can see in the ground level site plan, there's some green areas. There's a park in the corner. There are some very, I think, interesting urban design ideas that the applicant will explain in more detail. In addition, if we keep going through this presentation -- Can we --? Can you move it --? It doesn't matter. The review timeline: DRC, Development Review Committee happened in May. Then we had Board of Architects multiple times because the issue of Mediterranean design, as you can see in this image, was debated, and discussed in great depth at different meetings, at least three meetings that I can have in the record. The neighborhood meeting happened in December. Then we have Planning and Zoning. Now, property owners were notified within a thousand feet. And in addition, there were two letters to the property owners. The property was posted three times. There were three times in the website it was posted, and the required newspaper advertisement for Planning and Zoning. The application request, as I said, PAD and site plan approval, and staff recommendation is approval with conditions. Now, there's some additional conditions that will be proffered by the applicant today that I think are very beneficial. And I will let the applicant make their presentation and then if we have any questions, I'll be happy to answer. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: A quick question before the applicant steps up, Mr. Director. What were the findings in regards to the Planning and Zoning Board, and how was that received from the P&Z Board?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: It was 4-0 for the project, so it was received well.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Was there any concerns in regards to the project, the neighborhood, any issues that they were concerned about?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I don't recall any major issues. I -- there was obviously a discussion and so on and public input, but I don't recall any controversial issues.

Mayor Lago: Okay, thank you very much.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Navarro, good morning.

Mr. Navarro: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. For the record, Jorge Navarro, with offices at 333 Southeast 2nd Avenue. With me this morning are members from the (INAUDIBLE) team, our project architect, Corwil Architects is here. We have our tree relocation expert, Mr. David Bryan, here, who's going to be helping us with this project with some of the specimen trees on site, as well as our landscape team from Witkin Hults. We're very excited to be here this morning to present the new project in the Crafts Section. This is a low-scale pedestrian-oriented residential project that will really complement a lot of the office, shops, and restaurants that you currently have in your downtown. Regarding the request, your director has said that we are asking for a PAD. We're over an acre in size. And the PAD's a mechanism in the Code that allows us the flexibility to create additional public benefits, which I'll get into what the public benefits that we're proposing are as part of this project. There's several neighbors here today in support. We've submitted 74 petitions from the business owners in the area and 44 homeowners in the area in support of the project. And as your Planning Director said, this project was reviewed multiple times by your Board of Architects. It was ultimately unanimously approved by the Board of Architects in accordance with the new Coral Gables Mediterranean Style Standards that were

adopted by this Commission a few months back. So, these projects were actually reviewed in accordance with your new standards. It received full board support. It also received the unanimous recommendation of approval from the members that were present at our last Planning and Zoning Board meeting. And I think the Planning Board echoed how this design was much more favorable in that it allowed for a reduced massing while increasing the amount of ground level open space, which is something that I think Albert will go into during his presentation, showing you how we've been able to maximize the amount of ground level open space. With that, I'll let Albert walk you through the plan, and then I'll come in and highlight some of the public benefits that we're proposing and commitments that we've made. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Morning, sir. Thank you for being here.

Albert Cordoves: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. Very happy to be here today. Albert Cordoves, with Corwil Architects. We're truly excited. This is a project that we have been working for an extremely -- quite some time together in a very collaborative effort. I want to thank today the City staff, our City Architect, the Board of Architects. I think it's truly been an incredible effort to get here today in what we truly feel is an amazing project and a different boutique project for this community of Coral Gables. So, we started -- looked at the site, of course. It's almost a city block. And truly, when we saw this, it's a truly urban design dream to be able to make something totally different. And we started with the goal of increasing and taking the pedestrian realm to another level. And what I mean with that is we exercised an H form in order to properly take the massing and articulate it and be able to increase the green space throughout the entire project. We increased the green space, first and foremost, at the promenades, the sidewalks. The sidewalks are extended. The extension of additional green spaces along the sidewalk so that we can plant larger trees that can grow better, a true pedestrian-friendly environment. We also took the percentage of open space not to 10, not to 20, as regulated by the PAD projects typically, but we took it just under 30 percent. We have three -- at ground level, we have three paseos, one to the west of the property, running north-south. We have a central vehicular and pedestrian paseo, and we have our pedestrian realm all the way to the east that culminates into an open park just

under 7,000 square feet. So, all these elements are inclusive of what we are doing. For example, the parking garage structure is totally internalized by active spaces, completely liner from public view. The loading access to parking facilities are through that main internal paseo, again, minimizing the impact of curb cuts on the pedestrian realm. So, we are extremely proud in all. We are essentially having -- counting with about 90 percent of this project's perimeter and truly active pedestrian spaces at ground level. If you come up the floors, you'll find that it is the definition of true articulation in the Mediterranean style, which as Jorge said, it was very well received by the Board of Architects and the Planning and Zoning Board. We are truly, truly excited for this project. It's one that I think should, in our minds, truly set an example because it is a City Beautiful project in our view. I'm here for any questions you might have. I'll keep my presentation brief but hoping for your support today. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Navarro: Commissioners, one of the items I wanted to highlight that even though we are asking for a PAD, we are providing less building height and less FAR than is allowed, so we're not maximizing either of those two items. We are also providing significant public benefits, and I'd like to highlight some of those. The first -- and Albert mentioned -- is improved streetscapes and traffic calming. Currently, you have very small sidewalks here with very limited landscaping. What we've done is we've pushed the building back. We're creating large 18-foot pedestrian areas, which is going to be landscaped, and it's going to have areas for walkability. And what that allows us to do is also to plant some larger shade trees along the sidewalk. In terms of being a good neighbor, we have committed -- the applicant has committed to work with the City to study and implement traffic calming on the west side of Le Jeune. The City conducted a traffic study, and the traffic study provided that there would be no impacts to traffic to this area. But either way, we understand in speaking with these residents that's important to them, speed and safety are important to them, and we want to try to work to alleviate that. So, we are asking, and we've worked with staff to put a condition that we will work to implement and study -- traffic study in that -- sorry, traffic calming in that neighborhood. Another big item is a community open space and green

space. I know the Commission adopted some legislation a few years back that required the open space to be provided at the ground floor as opposed to the upper levels, and we really adopted that and implemented that. We have over three times the amount of open space that's required, and we have an approximately 7,000 square foot park that we're going to be improving and donating to the City as part of our project as a public benefit. I'm also pleased to announce that we have three large specimen trees on site, and we've designed special areas within this project to accommodate these trees. We're going to be relocating them to create these passive shaded public areas. We've engaged Mr. David Bryan who's here with us today. He has led three large relocation projects in the University of Miami, successful relocation projects in the University of Miami. He's going to be leading our efforts to relocate these trees to the public park. Another item that was discussed previously was -- you know, Coral Gables really has taken a big initiative in leadership in terms of public art, and we're excited to announce that we also will be furthering these efforts. We're going to be featuring world class contemporary art within the park. We've been working with internationally recognized artist (INAUDIBLE) to create a sculpture piece that will be displayed in the park, and we're actually working with Catherine and the Cultural Department in order to get that artwork reviewed by the appropriate committee so we could bring it back to you in the near future. Both the artwork and the park are going to be dedicated to the City as additional public benefits. You know, we've worked very hard on this. We've spoken with many neighbors and residents. We've gone through the process, addressed all the comments from all the various boards and obtained support from all these residents and boards throughout the process, and we ask for your support here today as well.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. Navarro. I appreciate the presentation. It has been very thorough and impressive. Do we have any questions from the Commission, any...?

Commissioner Anderson: A couple comments.

Mayor Lago: Further requests, comments, whatever you'd like.

Commissioner Anderson: A couple -- I have some questions, but I just wanted to make some comments. You know, we've, just this past month, had the report from the International Council regarding climate change, and there as a silver lining to it. And this project, I think, exemplifies what's happening here because you're preserving the canopy. And they're finding that what's changed in the past couple years is that development in cities are being much more sensitive to preserving their canopy and it's no small feat to do that. The last report that we had from the County on canopy loss did show that Coral Gables did lose some canopy, but this is going to be the game changer when people have thoughtful developments such as this. So, I do have a question for your relocation expert because I know, at least from my experience, it takes a lot of love and time to move these significant trees. So, I'd like some insight from him.

Unidentified Speaker: Sure.

Commissioner Anderson: The amount of time and commitment because the usual thing is the developers come in and say, "Well, you know, there wasn't enough time to prep that tree to be able to move it," because there's the time value of money. This is a significant public benefit moving these specimen oaks. And I think we all need to understand just how much of a commitment it is. So, if Mr. Bryan could...

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Commissioner Anderson: Fill us...

Mr. Navarro: Yeah, and just...

Commissioner Anderson: Educate us on that, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. Navarro: Yeah, definitely. And we intend to start early with it so that we make sure that we do it ahead of time. So, as soon as we get the okay from the Commission on the approvals, we'll -- David I think is ready to go. So, I'll let David come up and...

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Navarro: Address some of your questions.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay, thank you. Thank you for being here today. So...

David Bryan: It's a pleasure to be here.

Commissioner Anderson: From a -- you know, these are significant specimen oaks that you'll be commissioned to move. What is the time commitment that's required for you to begin this process and for these special trees, which I refer to as babies, to be moved?

Mr. Bryan: We're going to have four to five months in a two-phase of a prune.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay. So, to be ready to move -- be moved from start at the beginning, you're talking about a delay in the project of four to five months or...

Mr. Bryan: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Bryan: I'll actually take maybe a week, week and a half to relocate them.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay, so thank you.

Mayor Lago: That's a big commitment.

Commissioner Anderson: It is a big commitment.

Mayor Lago: It's a big commitment and we have to put that on the record.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Because it sends a message that, you know, they're committed to saving the canopy.

Commissioner Anderson: And...

Mayor Lago: The canopy is something critically important. And by the way, it costs money because...

Commissioner Anderson: Oh, yes.

Mayor Lago: You got to pay a bank. You own a property, construction loans. The more you're extended, the more fees you incur. But I want to commend you for taking that step because it's important that we save the canopy, as Commissioner Anderson was saying. And by the way, Commissioner Anderson deserves a lot of credit. We've walked the site. She's been there. She's been very active. She's been advocating, you know, and talking to the developer and saying, "Listen, this is a non-starter. I want to make sure that we save these trees." And the developer...

Mr. Navarro: We had a great on-site tour.

Mayor Lago: Said, you know, we'll do what we need to do to make you and the Commission happy. So, I have to -- it was a good partnership on that front.

Commissioner Anderson: So, I just wanted to highlight a couple of the other additional commitments you've made over and above the typical public benefit. I walk the area directly west of Le Jeune that will be impacted or already is impacted by a tremendous amount of speeding cars. The shield (INAUDIBLE) has been up, and the speed coming off Le Jeune Road is 45 miles an hour. So, this is not your normal commitment that you've made to work with the residents to try to make reducing the speed in that area happen. And just want to let you know that the residents in that area have told me they truly appreciate that as well.

Mr. Navarro: Our pleasure. I know that our residents for this area dealt with similar issues, so we're cognizant of that, and we're committed to help.

Commissioner Anderson: And the other commitment that you've mentioned is to work with the City to try to coordinate the landscaping on both sides of the street. Not all of it is your responsibility, and I'd appreciate it if staff would follow through with the -- whether impact fees or whatever that we collect so that we have not a lopsided street for the future where one side's planted beautifully and the other side comes in 10 years, and you have this canopy that looks like this. So, while we're digging it up, maybe we can dig it up once and make the mess once and get it done with, whatever it's drainage or whatnot that needs to be done on both sides. So, thank you.

Mr. Navarro: We could work with the City Manager during the permitting process on the street design and work on the, you know, bulb outs and see the landscape elements that we could put in there. And we get impact fee credits for that, and we'll definitely work through the Manager's office on that.

Commissioner Anderson: So, thank you to the entire team that's worked on this project for being sensitive to the requests that we have made. Thank you.

Mr. Navarro: Our pleasure.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Navarro, just a few questions to kind of clarify them for the record. Number one, when you talk about the issues of traffic calming, can you give us a little bit more color in regards to what...

Mr. Navarro: Sure.

Mayor Lago: Is your planning...

Mr. Navarro: So...

Mayor Lago: For traffic calming?

Mr. Navarro: Definitely. So, we have undertaken a preliminary study and we've identified three streets which are the basically -- it's the area between Salzedo and Le Jeune corridors, between Malaga and Palermo. And what we're committed to is to providing speed humps within that -- there's two segments of street, so a total of six speed humps in that area to slow down traffic.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Navarro: Similar to what you have on Giralda on the residential side.

Mayor Lago: By the way, thank you for that. I mean, that takes stress off the City for us to have to provide it, and I imagine you're going to do a wonderful job ensuring that we slow traffic down in those neighborhoods. I also want to commend you on the art. It's a big commitment. I know that it's taken a lot of work to deal -- not saying that the artist is difficult to deal with it, but you're dealing with a world-class artist, multiple different galleries. And so, I want to say thank you for making that commitment. It's incredibly important. And I also want to thank you, more importantly, one of my visions and the vision of this Commission, along with the Manager and City Attorney, City Clerk, and all the directors, is to step up -- when there is going to be a new

development, step up the green space. I wrote that piece of legislation that increased the footprint of green space on the first floor and that required the green space to be on the first floor. So, that's very close to my heart. But what I'm trying to achieve -- with the support of my colleagues on the Commission that I know they're on board -- is to have every development, even if it means that you got to give an additional floor in height, I want every development -- and hopefully we can connect them as things happen in the downtown -- to have a green space. So, your 7,000 could turn into 14,000, and we're doing that. You're seeing it in Villa Valencia. You're seeing it in this project. You're seeing it in the Agave project. You're seeing it in different projects that are coming in that we're starting to install these pocket parks in the neighborhoods, which I think are going to pay significant dividends in the future as more and more people started living in the downtown, and that's something that will be our legacy. Instead of having a building setback to setback, you're going to have a nice little pocket park, something where people can come and enjoy and just have a moment to themselves, you know, toss a ball, spend time with their dog, spend time with their family, and I think that's creatively important. And that took a long time and a lot of effort to reconfigure that building in a way that you can get us that park in the corner. So, I...

Mr. Navarro: Yeah, our project completely transformed from the first day we submitted. I think that public park initiative is very important. Every major city has, you know, little pocket parks throughout their downtown. It adds to that pedestrian feel -- right? -- the pedestrian connectivity. So, hopefully, this could be the first of many in the downtown area.

Mayor Lago: Not only that, you have Villa Valencia's about to deliver one now on the corner. And by the way, those are assets that, again, going to the City, and it just strengthens the City's not only financially, but it strengthens the City also based to our quality of life and what we're offering. If there is going to be a development, let's make sure it's as green as possible on the first floor. So, I wanted to commend you for that, along with all your efforts and the neighbors. You've got the support of all the neighbors. You got the support of all the businesses. That makes it a lot easier for us. And let's be honest, you've done a good job on that as an attorney. You've sat with your client. You made your client understand that this is what's going to be acceptable. We're not going

to use up every single inch, you know, of square footage, of FAR. We're not going to use all the height. We're going to do what we can to deliver a project that makes financial sense, obviously, but also, you're a community partner. You're going to build this building and you're going to own this building for a long time. Let's make sure we do something that we're proud of. You went back to the drawing board and BOA multiple times, and you worked with staff, and you found -- you delivered on a design that staff approved. You got unanimous approval, and obviously, you have one of the best architects in town, Corwil Architects, and there's a reason why. But you were able to deliver unanimous approvals at BOA and unanimous approvals at P&Z. So, I can't ask anything else of you. This is in the downtown. This is an area where there's a lot of traffic in the sense of people coming to business, you know, in that area. I think it's going to warrant families living there, young professionals living there, retirees. So, I'm looking forward to seeing something that, again, activates that area. So, I want to say thank you to you and your team for putting a good presentation together, and to our staff. Our staff deserves all the credit also. They have worked with your team, and you know, they've refined the project, and I think that's what we have here before us today.

Mr. Navarro: We've worked very closely with your Planning and Zoning Director. He's given us a lot of guidance and helped us through this process. But thank you very much. We appreciate the kind words. I know that (INAUDIBLE) is very excited to be in Coral Gables and to deliver something that everybody could enjoy and to make a difference in that neighborhood.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Fors: Mayor Lago.

Mayor Lago: Of course, please. The floor is yours.

Commissioner Fors: I'm very satisfied with the development of the project as it has evolved throughout the various iterations at the Planning and Zoning and Board of Architects. But more

than anything, I want to congratulate the residents. When I first was elected, they came to me on an unrelated issue regarding street improvements and explained to me that for some time they had been getting the short end of the stick in terms of that street because everybody knew I had been speaking about it for decades that the ultimate vision for this area was a large-scale residential that fit better within the commercial district. And I did see with my very own eyes back then that, in fact, they were getting the short end of the stick in many respects because it just didn't make sense because we knew we'd eventually arrive at this point that we are today. So, I'm very happy for them, and I congratulate them on finally being able to make this transition in this area to what it was ultimately supposed to be.

Mayor Lago: If there's no further questions or comments...

Commissioner Anderson: Well, just one point of clarification. I think one point you said that the traffic calming was between Salzedo and Le Jeune. I think you meant to say between Le Jeune and Segovia.

Mr. Navarro: Segovia, sorry. You're right.

Commissioner Anderson: Yeah, the S's. I understand.

Mr. Navarro: Yeah, Segovia. That's right, sorry.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Navarro: Thank you for clarifying that.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. With that being said, I'll entertain a motion.

Commissioner Anderson: I'll make the motion.

Commissioner Fors: Second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 4-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Mr. Navarro: Thank you.