

June 11, 2024

To: Planning and Zoning Board, City of Coral Gables  
From: Sheryl Gold  
Re: The George Residences - Public Hearing June 12, 2024

Planning and Zoning Board Members:

I'm writing as a neighborhood resident and long time urban forest advocate to express my serious concerns about the proposed project and its Impacts. While I admire the architectural design of MG developments, there are consistent adverse consequences that fall into three categories: clear cutting of the mature tree canopy, including decades old specimen trees; loss of residential on street parking, and the destruction of affordable housing.

I was out of town so was unable to participate in the developer's May 20 neighborhood meeting since there was no zoom option. I reached out to Jose Mata, MG project Manager for the George. We had a good conversation but he never got back to me with answers, as he had promised.

### **TREE CANOPY**

1. The proposed elimination of all 91 trees on the property while only 12 were identified by the arborist as in poor condition and recommended for removal.
2. The code requires 24 large shade trees on the property; 0 are being provided.
3. The loss of shade tree canopy in a high density neighborhood that includes Biltmore Way (one of the largest heat islands in the city) exacerbates the urban heat island effect, causing higher temperatures than surrounding areas, increased energy use, less effective storm water management, decreased carbon sequestration.
4. Mitigating the loss by contributing approximately \$100,000 to the tree fund does little to offset the loss of benefits of mature trees and does not provide for replacement in the neighborhood—the area where it is most needed.
5. Transplanting the live oaks into bump outs is misguided. It does not provide shade for sidewalks. This species is at the southernmost part of its zone and with rising temperatures most likely will not thrive or survive. (Source: UM Prof Ken Feeley's study of 200 tree species) The city has over planted live oaks (51% over a recent eight year period). This isn't best practice during normal times (monocultures are susceptible to disease, infestation, decimation). It is even worse when facing the climate crisis. In addition, planting in the ROW will result in the loss of 9 on street parking spaces.
6. The gumbo limbo and silky oak (it is not an oak) should remain or be transplanted.
7. The 90 Ft ficus at the west corner could live many more years If properly pruned and maintained. Surprisingly, I was informed it has decay at the base of the trunk. This is Inconsistent with it being described in "moderate" condition and not being included in the arborist's recommendations for removal.
8. It is time for the review and revision of the city's Tree Ordinance and policies that are weak in preserving, protecting and enhancing the tree canopy.  
(I know since I helped to rewrite the Tree and Landscape Ordinances in the City of Miami Beach, some of the strongest in the nation.)

### **ENDANGERED SPECIES**

Florida bonneted bats are endemic to South Florida and are found mainly in Miami,

Coral Gables, and Ft. Lauderdale. These bats have been observed over the years in our neighborhood. This endangered species has been granted critical habitat protection across the state. Where is the developer's bat survey?

## **RESIDENTIAL PARKING**

There is a shortage of on street parking in the 600 and 700 blocks of Biltmore Way, Coral Way, Valencia and side streets.

1. It is wrong to assume that the 14 spaces serve the residents and guests of the existing buildings on Valencia.
2. The loss of 9 spaces *will* cause an undue burden to the residential parking needs of the area.
3. With increased development and population, and the approximate 40% loss of on street parking on Biltmore Way (in blocks 600 and 700), there is a substantial shortage of parking in the area under normal conditions.
4. When the underground garages of the condos on Biltmore Way and Coral Way frequently flood, hundreds of cars must be relocated (sometimes for weeks), while on street parking spaces are no longer available.
5. The MG townhome development on Biltmore Way and Anderson eliminated 6 on street parking spaces to install an extra wide swale with trees in the ROW because they did not provide shade trees on their property. This resulted in visitors, service vehicles, deliveries and the USPS having nowhere to park.
6. Will the alley really be able to accommodate visitors, staff, service vehicles, and deliveries to the townhouse project?

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

While cities across the country are incentivizing the preservation of existing structures and the creation of duplexes, garden apartments and small buildings, Coral Gables is enabling and encouraging the destruction of existing affordable housing to be replaced by luxury units that sell for millions or vacant lots when a project fails to materialize (i.e. 719 Biltmore Way); with the demolished buildings ending up in landfills.

The Planning and Zoning Board is charged with the responsibility to review individual projects. Unfortunately, no one is responsible for evaluating the bigger picture and the *cumulative effects* of development. How is the ongoing loss of mature tree canopy, on street parking and affordable housing affecting the sustainability of the City Beautiful and resident quality of life?

Every new development reviewed and approved in the City should meet sustainability requirements. Your decision to require large shade trees on this property and the retention of all existing on street parking would be a first step in this direction.

Sincerely,

Sheryl Gold  
721 Biltmore Way