

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
September 26, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro (On Zoom)
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Arts and Cultural Specialist, Catherine Cathers

Public Maria de le Guardia(s)

Jenny Ducret
Roberto Behar
Rosario Marquardt
Maria de le Guardia

Agenda Item G-1 [11:00 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving the concept and commissioning of a work of public art by R & R Studios in conjunction with The Village development project, encompassing the city block bordered by: Segovia Street, Malaga Avenue, Hernando Street, and Santander Avenue, in fulfillment of the Art in Public Places requirement for public art in private development (unanimously recommended by the Arts Advisory Panel approval/denial vote: 6 to 0; unanimously recommended by the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 4 to 0).

Mayor Lago: Moving onto G-1, time certain for 10:30.

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City Attorney Suarez: G-1 is a Resolution of the City Commission approving the concept and commissioning of a work of public art by R & R Studios in conjunction with The Village development project, encompassing the city block bordered by: Segovia Street, Malaga Avenue, Hernando Street, and Santander Avenue, in fulfillment of the Art in Public Places requirement for public art in private development.

Ms. Cathers: Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Catherine Cathers, Arts and Cultural Specialist with the city. MG Developer with The Village Development Project is coming before the Commission today with a petition waiver request of the Art in Public Places fee requirement. We do have a presentation, if we can get that up. So, the site is bordered on Segovia, Malaga Avenue, Hernando Street and Santander Street. The development team worked collaboratively with DLGV Architects and Urbanists to select an artist to design artwork to integrate with the project overall and chose to collaborate with R & R Studios, who they previously worked with on the Balboa Plaza public art installations. So, we have representatives from MG Developers here this morning that would like to just give a little overview of the project.

Ms. Ducret: Good morning, Mayor, City Manager, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, thank you for having us. My name is Jenny Ducret, I represent MG Developer.

Maria de le Guardia: Good morning, Mayor, Commissioners, I think some of you are already familiar with the Village of Merrick Park, the Village at Coral Gables, but I'll just go over it very briefly because this is about the presentation of the artist. So, the Village of Coral Gables proposes residential units, organized around common outdoor spaces, such as garden courts, courtyards, vias, and muse. The Village finds inspiration in the Garden City and the City Beautiful movements that also inspired George Merrick. The four typologies respond to their immediate context which range from duplex on one side to low density, multi-family on the other. Similarly, to our office, R & R Studios art is characterized by their consideration of the place where they are installing, and so, place always informs their work, and their work transforms the place. It's very magical to see their installations. So, I'm going to hand it over to our dear friend Roberto and Rosario.

Ms. Cathers: Okay. So first, I'm just going to tell a little bit about the section of the code, before I introduce the artist and then the developer has asked that the artist present their concept. So, we are following section, zoning code section Article 9, section 9-103(b), which allows petition of a waiver by acquiring or commissioning artwork with an appraised value equal to or greater than the amount of the Art in Public Places fee that is otherwise

required. So, we'll talk about that a little bit later. R & R Studios is the artist team of Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt. Behar and Marquardt received their diplomas in architecture in Argentina. Behar has been a visiting artist at the Geddy Research Center in Los Angeles and received a visual arts fellowship from the American Academy in Rome. He's been a visiting professor at Harvard University, Cornell, the University of Maryland and is now a full professor, so a little update to our side here, at the University of Miami School of Architecture. R & R Studios has created award-winning landmark projects in Miami, Denver, Austin and Phoenix, among others, and their work has received numerous awards, including recognition by Americans for the Arts as one of the best public art projects for 2007 and 2013. So now, I'm going to turn it over to them to talk about the project.

Ms. Marquardt: Good morning. Thank you, Mayor, thank you Vice Mayor for this opportunity to present our vision for the project.

Mr. Behar: Thank you as well to each and every one of you. Our proposal is, we call it Coral Light Way, and very simply stated, it is to embrace the exceptional architecture of The Village by Delaguardia Victoria Architects and Urbanists as well as MG Developers. The idea is to create 22, a series of 22 light sculptures lamps indeed, that create a distinctive and subtle dreamscape within the City of Coral Gables. The project offers residents and visitors a memorable walking experience weaving together public art and everyday life. That's pretty much the intention of the project.

Ms. Cathers: Sorry. I meant to go backwards so you can see the daytime version.

Mr. Behar: So literally, the project Coral Light Way embraces the block itself and in a very subtle but distinctive way lights up this block as a unique experience in Coral Gables. The artwork itself, as I mentioned, is comprised of 22 custom-made lamps. One piece of 22 parts headlight the block and what else can we say.

Ms. Marquardt: The uniqueness of the project and the intention of the project is to create a beautiful walk through the block. It will be one – when we go to Coral Gables and we see the City of Coral Gables we are always surprised – the gateways, the pergolas, it's a city that was planned with the users in mind to be surprised by what they see. You don't see it in any other city. And following that tradition we wanted to create some kind of, wow, this is different and the idea of embracing the block with this unique and never seen before lamps, and to create this walk, we think that it will be some of these unique moments that we see in Coral Gables.

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Mr. Behar: Yes. It's something that in Coral Gables happens often. We particularly enjoy places, like for example, places that were done by the very vision of George Merrick, like Columbus Avenue, for instance where the same kind of tree runs all the way almost to the Biltmore, defining a landscape that is very, very unique to the City of Coral Gables and creates a completely distinctive, distinct experience that belongs to this city and no other.

Ms. Marquardt: Sorry. Even Merrick had this idea and he started with this light, Whiteway, I think was the name, these lamps, it was part of his artistic project for Coral Gables. So, when we saw that it was part of his idea, we were willing to say, okay, let's keep on thinking in that way, that is functional art, that is functional because its needed, we need the lamps that suddenly creating something special for the City of Coral Gables.

Mr. Behar: One of the distinct aspects that we admire the most about Coral Gables that makes it unique among cities across the country is that George Merrick had this vision of integrating art into everyday life, public art as part of everyday life. So, in fact, when you think, when one thinks of the City of Coral Gables, one thinks of public art as architecture, public art as urban design, first and foremost, a gateway, City Hall itself, you know, but also functional elements like pergolas. I think a section of certain streets, like benches that offer themselves to the walker around town, even in one of the houses that George Merrick has, there is underneath a balcony, there is a bench actually that is offered to the people walking around. It's a very generous in a way, attitude, it's not art for those that know about the subject, it's not art for the artist themselves, in this case Rosario and Roberto, but its art that is meant to be one with the city itself and become part of this unique experience that is the City of Coral Gables.

Ms. Marquardt: And part of the neighborhood, for the neighborhood to enjoy, because it's an art that you can use, that you could be part of the art. It's not just that you may like it or not, but this is like a stage where people will be walking around or be surprised, suddenly you're driving and you see, oh, my God, this is different. So that's everyday life in art.

Mr. Behar: Its Oh, my God, but at the same time its subtle, you know, and that combination of subtlety and surprise is something that is very unique to Coral Gables actually.

Ms. Cathers: So, these are just some of the specifications of it, and then a drawing of the lamp itself, a little more up close. And then we just want to talk a little bit about the materials and maintenance for the piece. So, the lamps are going to be constructed of a very durable, high quality stainless steel. They are coated with an acrylic polyurethane

painted custom color. The lamp globes are also going to be handmade oval glass. The electrical components are going to be, you all approved. It's just technical information. The materials are resistant to rust and can withstand exposure to the elements. We want to point out and make sure the developer is aware that they are required to provide for the perpetual maintenance of the artwork in accordance with the City of Coral Gables Art in Public Places Funding Goals and Implementation Guidelines, which will be memorialized in a covenant for encroachment into the right-of-way to run with the land. Approval of the request is also contingent upon the appropriate execution of a covenant acceptable to the City Attorney's Office, including documented coordination with Florida Power and Light in a signed agreement detailing the responsibility for the ongoing maintenance – very important.

Mayor Lago: If I may just talk about maintenance since we're touching on that. Madam City Attorney, the word that was used in describing the responsibility was developer. Once a developer sells all the units, the developer leaves the premise, unless they are going to manage the project. I think we should make sure to include HOA, homeowners' association, because the developer is an entity that produced the project but once they are finished with the project, since it's not a rental project, they will be selling the project individually, a developer can do a rental project and sell the entire project, but I want to make sure that it's the HOA. Tell you why – these lamps are going to require – they are beautiful, just going to require a lot of maintenance and I think that the maintenance in the sense of you just want to keep it clean and I'll give you an example. The other work that you did in the city, the lamps are beautiful, but the location of the lamps are not the best location, and you're kind of having to balance something that we talked about before, a tree that produces a lot of little berries and fruits, which again, requires that your sculpture which is a conceptual sculpture, have extensive maintenance and have to be cleaned a lot. I think that we need to really, really address the maintenance on that sculpture itself. I know it's our city's responsibility. It looks great when it's clean, but when it's not clean and it gets dirty very, very quickly, as a result of the tree. We're not cutting the tree down. We're not cutting that tree down. I'll tell you that much. If it's up to me, we move the sculpture. We move the sculpture, but we're not cutting that tree down. I don't want to see the same situation happen here with Black Olives, because there are Black Olives there, and I can already foresee a maintenance nightmare where you have these beautiful sculptures giving off a beautiful light and then having an issue where they don't look so nice, because they are covered in that tar. Just putting it out there, besides the fact that it shouldn't be a developer, because the developer builds it and is long gone. It should be, in my opinion, but I leave it up to our attorney who has a lot more experience than I do. It should be the HOA or some sort of entity to provide that perpetual maintenance. That's my opinion.

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Ms. Cathers: We agree completely.

Mayor Lago: Yes, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Talked about Columbus Boulevard as being a beautiful street and you have the tree-lined street, they are all basically the same tree, all basically the same lighting. We have a similar condition on Segovia. We have oak-lined street with oaks in the middle of the street, and in this one block we're proposing to put different types of lights. We don't have exactly Whiteway lights on Segovia, but they are of that same motif. You have the glass globe on the top, they are city light, silver pole, they kind of blend in. That's part of my concern and as the Mayor brought up, there are Black Olives on either side. This is a residential neighborhood; these are huge trees. So, in context of the way the photos are shown, its not clear that the sides of the trees, the staining that they do and that they will indeed do this. These are single-family homes, not a commercial district that this is in, and I noticed that the poles are red. It kind of clashes with the rest of the neighborhood, and perspective, I guess, is everything. I walk my dog down that street almost every single day, depends on which direction I head out more towards Biltmore Way or more towards the Youth Center; and if this was in the interior of the property, I would not have these concerns. I don't see anything in here covering a Calvin rating, the warmness of the light, the brightness of the light. We have apartment buildings across the street. All these things have to be considered. We criticize parking lot signs over their color and try to have the Coral Gables motif. These poles are red, look orange/red.

Ms. Marquardt: Coral to be precise.

Mr. Behar: The idea is for them to be coral color in order to celebrate one of the motifs of the city, Coral Gables. It is to quote the color that Merrick refers to when naming the city Coral Gables. I understand that perhaps in the presentation it appears to be red. You can rest assured that it's not red. It would be totally out of place. You are right.

Ms. Marquardt: Coral color and it will be the same color that is painted on the sidewalk. It's very subtle that it's different and that is the idea. And regarding doing the art project inside the building or outside the building, we discussed that alternative and we thought we are using this money that Coral Gables Art in Public...why are we going to do it inside the building. Let's do something for the neighborhood, to create something that is not just for the owners of the building, but for the neighbors. This is a very unique street, it has kind of a different constituency that lives around the neighborhood, and we say, why we

cannot try to make the street a little bit more beautiful. Just a touch to say here we are, and we are thinking about the neighbors. We want to surprise you with something that you haven't seen to go to a mall to celebrate to see something...This is very subtle; the lights are – the lumens are the lumens required by the city. They will be very, very soft, but it will create a dreamscape...[inaudible]...its going to be completely different, but its familiar because of the repetition. It will become fantastic, something that you haven't seen, and you will say, oh, my God, this is different, but I can assure because we know Coral Gables and its very subtle, like when you see a gate that it blends. One of the Coral Gables gates or pergolas that is extraordinary when you see it in a drawing, but it blends with the character of the city and that is our point of departure, but we really wanted to do it for the neighbor, not just for the owners.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let me just interrupt you. In order for me to evaluate whether or not this is something that the neighbors would like, number one, we need more information; the color is quite bright looking here. There is no information about the Calvin or lumen ratings, and we already have some lights on Miracle Mile that folks have expressed their displeasure in the brightness of those lights. These are single-family homes across the street. I would like more information to be able to provide to those neighbors who go door to door and get their input. This is going to be out their front doors, and then you have the impact on Segovia. We're talking about streetscapes and so forth, and we have all the same lights and all of a sudden, we have this change. Okay. It's inconsistent with the typical planning process we do on these major boulevards and Segovia is one of our major boulevards.

Maria de le Guardia: We are required, the project is required to provide street lighting around the perimeter of the block, and that street lighting has to meet a very, very specific criteria, in terms of lumens, and so, photometrics have been done, have been produced in order to establish how much light each one of these fixtures has to give. The advantage of these lights is that they will be able to control the lumens at each fixture. It was actually very challenging to find locations for all these lights because of one, the trees; two, the root system of the trees, all the infrastructure and utility coming into light. So, we have very carefully tried to create sort of even spacing around the block in order to get, sort of even lighting. One of the complaints of the neighbor across the street on Malaga was that when we demolished the existing apartments, the street went black, and she wanted the developer to provide lighting while the project was getting built because her street had suddenly just gone completely black; and so, she was sending us messages, can you provide lighting, can you provide lighting, this is very dark. And so, I think the neighbors will welcome and the other thing that I wanted to point out is, if we put Coral Gables street lights, which is what

we would be required to place, I think that it would be the city who would be required to do maintenance on the street lights and here you're taking that out of – now you're giving that maintenance, not to the city, but now the developer is responsible for that maintenance. Whatever problems we were going to have with the artwork, we would have had with the regular streetlights, and so, it's no longer the City of Coral Gables responsible for the maintenance, but now as an art piece, it's the developer and homeowners' association who will be in charge of maintaining this. So, we're actually taking some scope of work off of the city.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I understand.

Maria de le Guardia: But the neighbors are complaining about darkness.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It happens in every single project. It happened over in the Craft Section when the lights went down and they put in some temporary lights, but that's a construction project issue, not a long term issue and based upon what I'm seeing here now in the presentation that was done now, I'm unprepared to vote in favor of this, because I need to have better representation of what this color is. You're telling me it's some coral and it doesn't stand out that brightly, but that's not what I'm seeing in the pictures, okay, and to get the buy-in for that; and again, we're talking about the streetscape on Segovia. I'd like to hear from the neighbors. They live and walk there. They are going to be looking at this. I don't want to say, well, you know the developer said that it wasn't going to be that bright, but it ended up being that bright. What were you thinking. Why didn't you reach out to us. I want to do that outreach now, because an ounce of effort now is worth 30,000 pounds of it later.

Maria de le Guardia: The brightness, we're not even – we have to meet the minimum code and that's what it will be, is the lumens required.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm talking about the brightness of this.

Maria de le Guardia: Oh, the brightness of the color, not the brightness of the light.

Vice Mayor Anderson: This color just stands out like a sore thumb. I'm sorry to be blunt about it, because we keep going on about it, I need to make sure you understand what I'm talking about.

Maria de le Guardia: Okay. I misunderstood.

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Ms. Marquardt: [Inaudible]

Mr. Behar: We can provide a sample of the color that maybe will help you. One thing that I want to share with you Vice Mayor is that I don't live in Coral Gables, but I do work in Coral Gables. I work at the University of Miami. I'm here every single day for 35 years ago. I'm also the author of a book, perhaps the most important reference book on the City of Coral Gables – Coral Gables as an American Garden City published in 1996, I believe, or around that time, and I'm very, very familiar and love this place. That's why for us, for Rosario and I, it's an honor to be working with the architects and the developer on the City of Coral Gables, in this very place that we love and that I spent five years doing a book about it. I don't know if you have a copy of the book, but it's a really good one. I'd love to share it with you, if you don't have a copy. So, rest assured that only goes to say that I'm not only familiar with the city, but that I love the city, because I'm here every single day of the most part of my life, 40 years, approximately, and that the work that we do is to actually, not only preserve, but perhaps also enhance just a little bit in the tradition of this very place. We don't work against the tradition of places. You can see it already in Balboa Plaza, I think, you can see that our work is not about ourselves, but about the neighbor and the city, and that is in every single place we worked at, from Seattle to Coral Gables and beyond.

Commissioner Menendez: If I may. First off, Gables Village, the villas and the townhomes what I've seen is being planned, this is absolutely gorgeous. I tell people if George Merrick were alive today, he would build that. Conceptually, the concept of uniformity around the block makes sense to me. I do think we need to make sure that all the questions are answered, because they are all, I think, very valid questions. With regards to the color, I recall when they finished the restoration of the Biltmore Hotel, the color that went on the exterior wall, people were horrified. Who came up with that idea. This is horrible. They lost their minds, and then they realized these colors were actually the original colors. They took the paint off the layer after layer after decades of layers they found original colors. So, from a historical perspective, colors sort of grow on us, but I understand. We don't want a shock value either. It's supposed to integrate and include the surrounding areas. I recall when the Coral Gables Youth Center was restored some decades ago, they had these wooden field lights that were short and would light five blocks into residential neighborhoods and the idea was, come up with tall lights that point down and there was pushback and petitions and protests and the day they turned on those lights people go, oh, this really works. So, it's a matter of engaging the neighbors, as the Vice Mayor said, making sure the questions are answered. I think the most important question is maintenance

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and who's responsible, who's not, and how that works. I think conceptually it's something we can work with, but let's just make sure we engage the neighbors, and we answer questions and see how we go forward, in my opinion.

Commissioner Fernandez: First off, it's your artwork and it's a very beautiful piece. I think the Vice Mayor said it well when she said, we probably should be doing this within the property. A lot goes with Coral Gables with continuity block after block and we're bringing in a light feature which enhances the project. The question is does it enhance the neighborhood. You have the light feature on the right-hand side, it's going to be different from the one on the left-hand side. We've had a similar issue about the lighting as well and I share the Vice Mayor's concern about the amount of light that's going to be emanated because you have five bulbs on each one of these lights. Recently on San Sebastian, the Plaza put in new lighting features, and they are under the same requirements as the city has. They are FPL poles which are as required. The problem is that nobody was able to realize when these poles were approved the light is going directly into residents' homes. These projects have an ability to block off some of that light. In this case, we're talking about an art piece. Now we're having to add pieces to your art piece to block which direction the lighting is going in, and I think those are concerns I would have. I think Commissioner Menendez and Vice Mayor Anderson are 100 percent correct. I would like to see a community meeting in that neighborhood where you can present the color of the light pole, maybe have a makeshift pole with five bulbs where you can see the amount of light that's going to be coming out it, in front of a residential area, so you can see how much light is coming into the homes as well, so the residents can really chime in on what their thoughts are. Again, nothing against your art piece. I think it's a phenomenal piece. I like the fact that you incorporated Coral Gables features. I saw the base, very similar to some of our Whiteway light features, but I agree with my colleagues. I think residents should chime in on something that's going to be going on in front of their houses that's quite different from what we currently have.

Commissioner Castro: I actually like your vision. I like the color. I like the coral. This is Commissioner Castro, I'm sorry. I like the coral, but I agree with the rest of the Commission, we need to go ahead and speak with the neighbors, engage with them at least, but I see your vision and I like what you're presenting.

Mayor Lago: Would you like to say anything else before?

Ms. Marquardt: To make sure that each of our lamps advocates exactly where the lamp is required by the city to be located and the five bulbs will have the lumens of one bulb where the lamp was.

Mr. Behar: That really needs to be stated because we don't want to add light to the street, but to comply with the requirement of the amount of lumens that pertain to the current standard found within the city. What you can do is to regulate actually in these kinds of lamps the amount of lumens in such a way that the five lamps that you referred to have only the lumens that would be equivalent to one.

Ms. Marquardt: [Inaudible]

Mayor Lago: In moving forward, I think what's in the best interest of a developer, the residents, Commission, the city is that you sit down with the City Manager and our staff and have a conversation moving forward on how you can get input from the community and address this. Again, I'm going to defer the item, I think it's the best move moving forward and over the next few weeks, you can have a conversation with staff and see how we can either move forward, address some of the concerns, meet with residents and see how we can find some sort of common ground, because I think that right now there is no support to move forward in regards to the artwork. Okay.

Mr. Behar: Very good. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: We are very grateful to have you here. Thank you for coming. We appreciate the explanation, and again, beautiful work, let's see if we can find some common ground moving forward. Thank you very much.

Mr. Behar: Thank you.

Ms. Marquardt: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you so much.