

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
January 14, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias

Public Speaker(s)

Mario Garcia-Serra
Peter Kiliddjian

Agenda Item F-4 [9:41 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida granting conditional use approval pursuant to Zoning Code Article 4, "Zoning Districts," Division 2, "Overlay and Special Purpose Districts," Section 4-208.A.3(a), "Residential Infill Regulations (RIR)," for a multi-family building on property zoned Multi-Family 2 (MF2) legally described as Lots 18 thru 21, Block 23 of Douglas Section (23, 27, 31, and 35 Sidonia Avenue); including required conditions; providing for severability, repealer, and an effective date. (12 11 19 PZB recommended approval with conditions, Vote 6-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: F-4.

City Attorney Ramos: F-4 is a resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida granting conditional use approval pursuant to Zoning Code Article 4, "Zoning Districts," Division 2, "Overlay and Special Purpose Districts," Section 4-208.A.3(a), "Residential Infill Regulations (RIR)," for a multi-family building on property zoned Multi-Family 2 legally described as Lots 18 thru 21, Block 23 of Douglas Section (23, 27, 31, 35 Sidonia Avenue); including required conditions; providing for repealer provision, and an effective date. This is a resolution; however, it's a public hearing item and anyone who wishes to testify on this item should be sworn in.

City Clerk Urquia: Anyone expected to testify, please stand and raise your right hand.

Commissioner Mena: Over there.

City Clerk Urquia: Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you will provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Go ahead.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: May I have the PowerPoint, please? Mayor, Commissioners, this is a conditional use because it is a project that is taking advantage of the infill regulations in the North Ponce area. The location is right on Sidonia, as you can see, right at the heart of the district. If you look at the aerial, you can see that there's a lot of small-scale apartment buildings and this is one of those sites that is over 20,000 square feet, so it's able to do the infill regulations. The zoning is MF2. It's typical of the area. And the request, as I said, is conditional use, which includes site plan review. And this is important because some of the aspects of this regulation deal with the specifics of the site plan and you will be able to see that, and the applicant will be able to explain it further. The benefits of the infill regulations is that the properties that are zoned MF2 could increase density up to 100 units per acre. And that was something that the Commission

passed some time ago. Also, there's an increase of the FAR to 2.5, so it's a significant decision and that's why it was determined to be a conditional use. Again, as I said, it only applies to properties that are over 20,000 square feet. Now, the project information, as you can see, is slightly over the 20,000. It's 22,000 square feet. The FAR is a little bit lower than it's allowed; it's 2.34. They height is lower slightly, and the density is within the project. Now, some discussion has been taking place recently on what the goal or the purpose of this infill overlay was. And one has to be reminded there were several ideas and the fundamental idea was to provide for some high-quality residential infill; that was number one. And then number two, to create some cohesive design for the open space. So, therefore, some of the regulations included a mandatory 10-foot front yard in front of the building, liners along the parking garages so you wouldn't see parking. In addition, there was a height requirement for the level two Mediterranean design. So all of those things put together were the goals of the overlay. And therefore, I think that the project needs to be reviewed comprehensively for the effect that it has on the neighborhood. Now, in terms of the open space, as one can see, the Code requires some additional open space, additional meaning additional to the 25 percent that MF2 requires, and they do comply. But the most important thing is that it has to be designed, like I said, to create that high-quality open space on the sidewalk. That was the emphasis on the requirements. All of those things have been addressed and I believe that the applicant could explain it further. Now, in terms of the review timeline, the DRC committee happened in May; the Board of Architects in October; the required neighborhood meeting in November; and the Planning and Zoning last December. Letters to the property owners were mailed within a thousand feet, as required by Code, three times. And there were three times the property was posted onsite. There were four times posted on the website, and two times with the required newspaper advertisement. Staff recommends approval with conditions, fairly typical conditions. We can discuss them further as the standards of review have been satisfied. I believe the applicant has a presentation, or if you have any questions, I'll be available. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ramon.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Those who want to speak better fill a card. If I don't have a card, I'm not going to recognize anybody. Are there people who want to speak?

City Clerk Urquia: I don't have any cards, Mr. Mayor.

Mario Garcia-Serra: Good morning, Mr. Mayor and Commissioners. Mario Garcia-Serra, with offices at 600 Brickell Avenue, representing the various applicant entities, which are all ultimately owned by the Baron family. I'm joined today by Alina and Cesar Baron, our clients, as well as our project architect, Peter Kiliddjian, and our traffic consultant, Joaquin Vargas. The four existing apartment buildings on the property are not historically significant and to a great extent are not as economically viable as they were at one point in time when they were first built 70 years ago. The need to essentially improve and refresh, let's call it, the North Ponce apartment district is what led to the adoption of the North Ponce residential infill regulations. The city continues to need high-quality multifamily housing for the portion of its population that needs it, such as young professionals, empty nesters, and others who might be in a transitional stage of their lives and for whom apartment living is appropriate. The building which Peter has designed has been very well received by City staff, the Board of Architects and the Planning and Zoning Board. And I think it is an example that should be realized in the implementation of these residential infill regulations, the prime example of how to implement these regulations. It is an eight-story building with 51 apartment units and generous ground floor landscape open areas and amenities fit for modern living. It'll well serve the city for another 70 years, just as the existing buildings have so far. With that said, Peter, if you could go through your presentation.

Peter Kiliddjian: Can you get the PowerPoint up?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Just walk through the building.

Mr. Kiliddjian: Morning.

Vice Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Mr. Kiliddjian: Peter Kiliddjian, with PPK Architects. We are the architects for the project, 23 Sidonia. We have a very brief presentation that hopefully addresses any of your concerns, and we'll answer any questions that you may have. I'm going to run through some of the three-dimensional images of the building to kind of explain the building in that form. This first image is an elevated view, looking west on Sidonia. And from this distance, we can appreciate the overall massing of the building, the look and the feel of the building. And the first element that really stands out is that element that Ramon spoke about, which is that two-story element that has the pool on its roof. It has the pool deck and the amenities. This North Ponce Neighborhood Conservation District ordinance encourages the smaller lower element to line the front facades of buildings on the street. This required volume creates a pedestrian scale architecture and conceals the parking behind. In this two-story space in our design we have the central main entrance, first floor lobbies, and a pair of symmetrical one-bedroom apartments with balconies overlooking the street. In this view, we can also appreciate how the main body of the building is forced to step back further away from the street. This is another requirement of the ordinance. Furthermore, in our design, we have reduced the seventh-floor footprint to create trellis terraces at the corners of the building that accentuate and define the corners of the building. This also creates a step silhouette that reduces the visual height impact of the building. And with that same strategy in mind, we have embedded the top three units of the eighth floor beyond the roof lines, so they're barely noticeable from the street. This is a perspective looking east on Sidonia from about a two-story height across the street. And at this distance you can start to appreciate the level of detailing in the trellis structures, balconies, terraces and entrances. The architecture of these elements reinforces the layered massing approach of the design. This view illustrates what I've been speaking about, the use of materials and architecture create a pleasant pedestrian environment on the ground floor. This is an aerial view of the west and rear of the building. And we are treating the four facades of the building with the same level of care and design as the front facade of the building so the building is cohesive throughout. The images in these vignettes really highlight the principles that I've been discussing. One, Mediterranean-inspired detailing, the layering of

surfaces to reduce volume impact, symmetrical organization, vertical proportioning and an overall traditional approach to the design of the building. On the site plan drawing, you can see our effort to minimize vehicular impact on the site. We separated accesses into two smaller one-way drives. There's also a great effort to remove the vehicular circulation from the front part of the building. As you can see in the drawing, the ramps that lead to the three levels of parking are pushed to the extreme rear of the building. All the circulation occurs in the back, keeping it away from the visibility of the pedestrian. As Mario mentioned, our building is below all of the zoning -- most of the zoning thresholds. We're below the maximum height by seven feet. We're under the maximum FAR by about 3,200 square feet. We're over the open space minimum requirement. We have additional four-and-a-half-foot setback on each side of the building, and we are providing approximately 10 percent additional parking spaces on site. At the ground floor level, we have lobbies, a small management office, mailroom and bicycle storage. All this program is key to line the parking on the street. The second level houses two one-bedroom apartments that also line the second level parking. And on the third level, we have the pool deck amenities, a small gym, a rec room, all facing the street and activating the pedestrian realm. This is the typical apartment floor. It's floors four, five and six. There's 12 units per floor. The apartments range between 650 square feet to about 1,160 square feet, and they're all one- and two-bedroom apartments. This is floor number seven with the reduced footprint. There's only 10 units on this floor, and the corner units benefit from the large trellis terraces that I spoke about at the beginning. And on floor eight, there are only three apartments; two of the apartments feature exterior decks. And it's clear that this minimized footprint, how the building's (INAUDIBLE) roof kind of envelops it so it's hidden from the street. When you alter typical footprints in a building like this, this generates a nice variety of apartment types. I think we have about 10 different apartment types. These are a few of them. And again, we feel that the project exemplifies in a creative fresh approach, the Coral Gables Mediterranean aesthetic, but most importantly, we feel that it illustrates the planning principles set forth by staff, the North Ponce District ordinance and the regulations. We're here to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you, Peter. As you can see, Mayor and Commissioners, much thought has gone into the design of this building. Important to note that it realizes the purposes of the residential infill regulations without maximizing necessarily all of the development parameters. The building is shorter, has less floor area than what would normally be permitted and has greater landscape, open space, setback and parking than what is required. It is well designed, and in some ways, a restrained building that will continue to serve the city well. City staff is recommending approval of the site plan. We would ask that you follow their recommendation and help us to take this important step in the future of the North Ponce area. Thank you very much. I reserve time for rebuttal, if necessary, and we're here to answer your questions, of course.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Are there any questions? Commissioner Fors.

Commissioner Fors: I have a question. By the way, I think it's a very good-looking project.

Mr. Kiliddjian: Thank you.

Commissioner Fors: I was just reviewing the transcript from the Planning and Zoning Board, and I saw that there was a discussion about street lighting and whether or not it was being contemplated, first of all. Second of all, the idea that we're currently working on a master plan for that North Ponce area and the idea of whether the developer would work with the City staff to ensure that, you know, it meets -- or not meets, but is congruent with this master plan. Have you given any thought to the street lighting question, A; and B, do you intend to work with City staff on sort of making that congruent with the master plan for North Ponce?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Certainly. Whatever work is required by any master planning process or the City in front of our property and the right-of-way, we will take care of. There is lighting on the property itself, which Peter could probably go into more detail as far as how much lighting it is.

We do want it to be well lit, and we're certainly willing to do our part in order to realize the vision of the City in this area.

Mr. Kiliddjian: There is no way to move forward with a project like this without working with City staff, so we will be working with City staff to meet whatever requirements are in place for, you know -- and I think a project like this will set a precedent for future projects. So, we definitely want to make sure that it's congruent with any ordinances or any design specifications that the City comes up with.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, go ahead.

Commissioner Keon: I want to congratulate you on your building.

Mr. Kiliddjian: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: And thank you for following the infill regulations. This is only the second -- we spent -- for Commissioner Fors, I think, wasn't here at the time. We spent, with the Planning staff, with Ramon, almost a year meeting with all of the people in that neighborhood, in the North Gables -- what we came to know as the North Gables infill area on how we would begin to spur redevelopment of a deteriorating housing stock and...

Mr. Kiliddjian: Correct.

Commissioner Keon: Allow us to provide appropriately-sized housing for young professionals, empty nesters, and as Mario said, people in transition. And in order to do that, we increased density and set in a number of regulations to do exactly what you have done here. Your building is a very, very attractive building, and so it's exceedingly important as we start this process, this infill process, that we see and we are assured that those projects actually meet the goal of the infill

regulations and they do exactly what we are hoping they would do. And your project does that. So, I'm very pleased to see it and very supportive of what you're done.

Mr. Kiliddjian: Thank you very much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Commissioner Mena.

Commissioner Mena: I don't have anything.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Vice Mayor Lago.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you. First off, I congratulate you on your project. It's beautiful.

Mr. Kiliddjian: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Lago: I think it's exceptional, and I think that it sets a real benchmark for the...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: We sure hope so.

Mr. Kiliddjian: We hope more are to come.

Vice Mayor Lago: For the area. I just have two comments that I want to make. Three comments, and I'll be very brief. I always make the same comment about the trees that are going to line the street. You know, just in an effort to reduce solar reflective index, you know, put some canopy in that's going to benefit the residents in your building that are going to be living there, and it just pays off starting day one. The second one was the comments that Commissioner Fors made about lighting. I know that we can't require, but we can ask that you work with staff because I know you're going to put together a great lighting plan for your building...

Mr. Kiliddjian: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Lago: But it would be nice to, you know, kick off that area with some nice street lighting that'll compliment the beauty of the building and the amount of effort -- because I know -- from looking at the renderings, I know the amount of money that you're spending on all the -- all that woodwork and all that additional concrete and articulations that you're doing. So, I congratulate you, and I think that that additional investment on the lighting is going to pay tenfold. And the final comment that I had was for our director, was in the issue of the IRR and the requirements for open space. I'm a big proponent of open space when we discussed that issue on properties and when they're redeveloped. But there's a -- there's been a tie-in and be in the IRR - - in the RIR in reference to open space. The requirement is 25 percent, and then to jump up from 50 units an acre to a hundred units an acre, they're requesting for additional open space. When you look at the breakdown of the open space that's -- I just want to get more clarity on the fact. We're seeing that the city swale is being included in their calculation, correct? Or am I wrong on that?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: If you remove that...

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: They're still beyond the 20...

Vice Mayor Lago: By one percent.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: By one percent. Let me tell you what I would like -- and I know that you're not going to come back on a second reading. And if my colleagues deem it appropriate -- I'm not putting it as conditional approval, but we need to set some sort of parameters. It just can't be in

flux where one developer comes in and they're producing, you know, 10 percent additional on top of the 25 and then one is producing and getting the same benefits. I'd like to see some uniformity. And I know that certain sites make it difficult, but if we can play with the fact that, look, he's seven feet below the available height. Maybe there's a way that we could add additional square footage on the ground floor by maybe squeezing the building a little bit. And I know that it's late in the game. I know it's late in the game, and I'm not asking you to do anything to your building. I'm just saying that I think that we, as a city, we need to set parameters so that developers know early on that we can't -- because when we vote and approve this today, which I'm going to vote in favor of it because I think that it's good for the area. It's good. It's a beautiful building. But we can't ask one developer to think outside the box, and you know, give us 10 or 15 percent above the 25 percent that's the mandatory, and then another developer comes in and gives one percent when you remove the city swale. Do you understand what I'm saying? I think you agree with that, right?

Unidentified Speaker: No, absolutely, absolutely. You guys set the -- you set the benchmark and we'll meet it.

Vice Mayor Lago: Well, we have to set a realistic benchmark.

Unidentified Speaker: (INAUDIBLE).

Vice Mayor Lago: Realistic, and I want to be realistic on the -- on that fact. Ramon.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Vice Mayor, there are two ideas that are in the Code that are required, one is the 10-foot front yard and the other one is the paseo that will transition between the commercial on Ponce de Leon and the residential. So, when that applies, the project shall design accordingly, and all the projects have the front yard. So, those are the two ideas. Now, if you want to have further ideas or further -- specific requirements, we could certainly have that discussion.

Vice Mayor Lago: I just want to be clear. If certain developers are using the swale and certain developers are not using the swale in their calculation, let's remove the swale. Let's get to a number that doesn't hide the actual numbers. I'm not saying you're doing that. I'm just saying that -- I'm just saying I want to be very clear. Because if we give them direction -- they've already spent a lot of money. They spend a ton of money on design. They've entitled the project. We need to, in the beginning, when the developer or a potential land purchaser walks into the City and says, okay, what are my requirements? What are we looking at? And if I want to take advantage of the RIR and jump from 50 to a hundred units an acre, what are your requirements? It can't be so ambiguous because -- and then I think it'll push other developers to do a lot less. So, what I ask -- my ask of you today is you -- I'm not asking you to go back to the drawing board and start all over again. But just look and see where you can find areas to potentially increase your green space. Because I think it -- like I said about the lighting, like Commissioner Fors said about the lighting and I said about the trees, it's just going to benefit you at the end of the day. It's going to benefit you. It's going to benefit your clients that are going to be living in that building. Everybody now wants more quality of life and open space. It's just a direct, you know, definition of that. So, if you take a look at it, can we maybe put that on the next -- not the next agenda, because it's going to take some time. But can we clearly define what is open space moving forward and if the minimum is 25 percent and one percent gets you double density, I'm opposed to that.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: That's one of the requirements. In addition, there's the design...

Vice Mayor Lago: I understand.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Requirements (INAUDIBLE).

Vice Mayor Lago: But that's the biggest requirement in my...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: In my opinion, the biggest requirement and the why -- why we're moving in that direction to allow for a double in density, I think we need to be very clear with these individuals. We're making significant investments in our city, and I want to be clear with them because that's the minimum that we can do because time is money, as you can tell.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Understand.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

City Manager Iglesias: And Vice Mayor, we can get back...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Do I hear a motion?

City Manager Iglesias: With you on that.

Vice Mayor Lago: Can we -- well, can we...

Commissioner Keon: I'd like Ramon, though...

City Manager Iglesias: Can we get back with you on that?

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah, but can we...

Commissioner Keon: I'd like...

City Manager Iglesias: We will look at that and get back with you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah, just -- it doesn't have to be in the next Commission meeting, maybe sometime in March, but I just -- in March, it could be in March. I just want to be -- I want -- because this is not going to come back to the Commission, by the way. This -- you get your approval today and you move -- your site plan approval and you move forward.

Commissioner Keon: Ramon -- could Ramon just explain -- ? We had a discussion when we did the infill regulations and just recently about the -- including the swale in the requirement from open space because it's already in the Zoning Code. Explain a little bit about why...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: That's...

Commissioner Keon: That is counted because it -- normally, it isn't generally (INAUDIBLE), but when -- in order to maintain the green space and the existing garden district feel, it was included. And maybe if you just explain that it is...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah.

Commissioner Keon: It will help to under -- people to understand why in these instances and in this area it was included. Purposely, it was included.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: The definition of open space, the definition -- the general definition includes the right-of-way and so on. And the reason is is that the best way to design public space is to design both the public and the private. So, if you're able to plant trees on your property and trees on the right-of-way in a coordinated fashion, you end up with a better design and a better quality place. That's the theoretical idea and I think it's a valid idea. Now, the architects have been explaining that their projects have 30 percent open space if you calculate it that way. The staff has reviewed it from the more strict perspective of the 25 percent, so there's that -- if you do more than 25 percent, you have to do more than 25 percent in your property, and all the projects comply. So, in addition, if one wants to follow the definition of the Code, there's

a better a number if you want. But I think the lesson at the end of the day is that the number is less important than the design. The fact that the high-quality sidewalk and the landscape and the building are all coordinated into an overall design. I think that's the real goal. That's the way I understand it.

Commissioner Keon: Right. And it's the maintenance also; is that right? Once you do it, you also maintain that swale...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: And you maintain whatever the plantings are in that swale in perpetuity, so which makes it...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: This...

Commissioner Keon: A very coordinated...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Right, correct.

Commissioner Keon: Throughout that...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: That's correct.

Commissioner Keon: In design.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me make -- bring this to a close, but I think this is a wonderful example of what we sought in the, you know, overlay and whatever we did in North Ponce substituting the 70-year-old, nonfunctional apartment buildings. I've been in some of those apartment buildings and some of them have 16 units and 8 bathrooms, that type of...

Commissioner Keon: But it was a deteriorating...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, but let me finish.

Commissioner Keon: Space.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me finish.

Commissioner Keon: Yes, you're right.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And this is a wonderful addition to North Ponce. It'll bring in younger people and permit empty nesters to stay in Coral Gables. And I'd like to call for a motion.

Commissioner Keon: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Lago: Second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll, please?

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

City Attorney Ramos: I'm sorry. I just...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

City Attorney Ramos: Realized we did not hear from anyone else. Did we have any other speaker cards?

City Clerk Urquia: We didn't have any speaker cards.

City Attorney Ramos: Understood.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no. And I asked before. I asked before and we didn't have any. Thank you very much.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you very much.

Unidentified Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: And Mayor, if I may, I just want to make sure from the Manager that we bring back -- this is a discussion in March...

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, we will.

Vice Mayor Lago: Just to discuss. Congratulations. Good luck on your project.

Unidentified Speaker: Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: And we will do that, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you. I appreciate that.