

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-3
January 13, 2026
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Planning and Zoning Director, Jennifer Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item E-3[Start: 11:34 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission granting approval of proposed amendments to the text of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan pursuant to expedited state review procedures (S. 163.3184, Florida Statutes) and Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-213, "Comprehensive Plan Text and Map Amendments," to modify the required mix of uses when developed within the "University Station Rapid Transit District Overlay," to allow a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 3.5, and to provide for policies to implement the "University Station Rapid Transit District Overlay," providing for a repealer provision, providing for a severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (12 10 25 PZB recommended approval, Vote: 6-0)

Mayor Lago: Item E3, ordinances on first reading.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: E3 is an ordinance of the City Commission granting approval of proposed amendments to the text of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan pursuant to

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expedited state review procedures and Zoning Code Article 14, Process Section 14-213, Comprehensive Plan Text and Map Amendments to modify the required mix of uses when developed within the University Station Rapid Transit District Overlay to allow maximum floor area ratio of 3.5 and to provide for policies to implement the University Station Rapid Transit District Overlay, providing for a repealer provision, providing for severability clause, and providing for an effective date.

Mayor Lago: Madam Director.

Planning and Zoning Director: Good morning again. I have a brief PowerPoint. Wow, they're fast. Perfect. So, as you know, the county did approve and adopt the expansion of the RTZ, the Rapid Transit Zone, with the creation of the Gables University Station Subzone in September. This should grant authority for the county to review and impact fees and control any property that's going to be entered into the subzone. Today, right now, there's only one property that's part of this subzone with the county. There's been a lengthy review process of this. It started May of last year with a discussion by this Commission. Plans are in board that recommends approval of zoning and comprehensive plan map amendments as well as zoning amendments, and that went to the Commission here in October. So, what we're looking at today actually is our amendments to the comprehensive plan text. Let me get to that. So, the overlay itself has not changed as far as the boundaries go. It's between Turin and Caballero on U.S. 1. There's an aerial looking at it. It's directly across the street from the University Metro Rail Station. Another aerial, another map, is showing the location of this. In October, this Commission did approve on first reading the proposed future land use map amendment to Commercial High Rise, as well as proposed zoning map amendment to MX3 for these properties within the overlay district. And that's what that would look like looking at 3D. This would make it comparable to the existing Paseo project, which is on Caballero and U.S. 1, but more setbacks. Today, you're looking at three text amendments to our comprehensive plan. The first one is increasing the FAR to be 3.5 as a magnified, excuse me, FAR within the overlay district, as well as simplifying our mix of uses for just this district to only require two uses, a minimum of two uses, for just this district. And also incorporating a policy specific just to the university station of a transit district overlay about mixed use, walkability, encouraging housing near transit stations, being consistent with the smart plan of the county. And as you know, this was reviewed by Planning and Zoning Board for the map amendments and the zoning code amendments in July of last year. First reading for, again, those map amendments and zoning. Today, we're looking at the comprehensive plan text amendments. And we're hoping to come back on January 27th with all of these amendments, the comprehensive plan text and map amendments with the zoning code text and map amendments. We sent out notices, within 1500 feet as required by the zoning code, including all of the pieces of this legislation four times, July, October, December, as well as for today's meeting, our website posting, and newspaper advertisements.

Staff is recommending approval is consistent with the comprehensive plan as it is encouraging development on transit corridors of our city right now, recommend approval. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Manager, just very quickly, can you provide in the next minute, 30 seconds, kind of a recap of the many meetings, phone calls that we've had in regards to the Mark, where we are, you know, all the effort that we've put in the negotiations that we sat with the team, and all the positive, positives, you know, that we've been able to kind of bring back to the City of Coral Gables. I had a very nice conversation with Commissioner Regalado this morning before I got on the dais. She was happy to see the success that we've had with the Mark, and also to see that we were able to negotiate a few things that again, we're going to, we're bringing, we're going to paper them up right now and bring it to the Commission for ratification. But as the Commission has placed me to negotiate this along with the Manager and our incredible zoning team who's here, I think we've made a lot of positive headway, a lot of positive headway, and I think that the Commission is going to be very satisfied, not only financially, we're talking about millions and millions and millions and millions of dollars that would have gone to the county, but also in regards to usage, signage, design, height, a lot of different things that again are more in line now with the city and not with the RTZ. Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, thank you Mayor. I think we realized back in May of last year that the RTZ was coming. We acted very, very quickly. Our Assistant Director did a marvelous job in getting everything done, and we were in an effort to bring this project back to the City of Coral Gables. I believe that these overlays that we've done in this RTZ area, and that we've all worked very hard on them. We've had very good negotiations. I believe that through this effort, we've been able to, I think, bring this project back to the city, which means that this project will be permitted through the City of Coral Gables. The impact fees will come back to the City of Coral Gables, and more importantly, uses and signage and all these other issues that were later would be of county control are back to our city. So, Mayor, I thank you for your efforts and incredible work on this. Our Assistant Director did a phenomenal job in getting this overlay and getting this report done, and great work with our Planning and Zoning Board. They quickly realized what was going on and what the issues were. So, I think we have a very good, I think we can bring this project back, and I think we can get a much better project from the developer and work with them to make this project successful. I don't see why not, and thanks to your efforts and our Development Services efforts, we were able to get this, what I believe is this project, back into the city.

Mayor Lago: So, I want to thank you for that, but again, it was our effort, and I also want to thank the developer. The developer came to the table on multiple occasions. They understood that we had to negotiate, and the RTZ is about negotiating, and, for example, Art in Public Places, impact fees that would have gone to the county now are remaining in the City Beautiful. So, you know, some people may say, what, you know, the project changed. Guess what? The project was going

to change through the RTZ, but at least we have control over the project. We are presenting now, we're working on a schedule for deliverables in regard to approvals, which is part of the agreement that will be brought before the Commission. I requested a schedule with a detailed breakdown for approvals so that we can be held accountable, and also the developer be accountable. They already submitted that schedule. The Manager is reviewing it, and he's basically revamping the schedule. We had a long conversation over the weekend to talk about the project, but this hasn't, this has not been one meeting. This has been an extensive amount of meetings. The developer deserves credit. Staff have lifted this beyond measure. The Manager has done an incredible job. This project was already in the county, not coming back to the City of Coral Gables. It took a lot of heavy lifting. The DCM, the ACM, staff, they all deserve the credit. So, thank you for having trust in us to bring this back, and I think you will be very satisfied that, you know, we're going to have a project within our scope that we control as a city with, obviously, a negotiation that took place with the developer to make sure. By the way, for the viewers here, let me be clear, a no vote here is going against a 6-0 vote by PNZ, because Planning and Zoning Board understands that we don't have control with the RTZ. We don't. You just can't say, oh yeah, you know, vote no against it, and you think to yourself, you know, we're going to somehow, somehow, you know, magic wand is going to be, and they're going to do what's, you know, in the city's best interest. It's not going to happen that way. They're going to do what's in their financial best interest, and what it takes is a negotiation. So, Madam Vice Mayor.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm just going to add on to it, to add additional praise to City Manager, because I thought this ship had sailed, okay, and you put your talent into bringing this back, because what would have happened with the RTZ in the county would have been a horrific project. Okay, sorry. I don't mean to disparage you in any -- but I mean, by Coral Gables' standards, it would have been a horrific project. We're able to bring back that 20-foot, 5-foot setback against the mixed-use area. There's condos back there. It's, you know, it's not single-family homes, but it's mixed MF area where multifamily is. We're able to get the wider sidewalks. We're able to control the architecture. We're able to get the impact fees which go to our parks department to create parks. Millions and millions of dollars, plus the Arts in Public Places, the permitting fees. These are dollars that were being taken out of taxpayers in the City of Coral Gables and were going to be given to the county. And I also have to applaud Commissioner Regalado, because she was willing to listen, and a developer, because they were willing to listen. I really thought this ship had sailed, and we weren't going to be able to get this one back. But thank you for being here, and for steering this ship around, and turning it around, and bringing it back into our city.

Mayor Lago: And if I may add something else, I think it's important that the Commission understand, we're not talking about one project. We're talking about the neighboring project, Three Acres. It was sold, and that project has the same owner. And as we've been negotiating in good faith, working hard, they've agreed, moving forward, that they're going to allow the project to stay in the city, as long as we meet the same requirements, in regard to expanding their permit. So, this is called a negotiation. If not, they could just take their ball, and go home, and go to the county, and go the RTZ route, and avoid having to go through our standards. But at the end of the day, this is what happens when you negotiate in good faith.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: The Commissioner wanted to say something.

Commissioner Castro: This is a question to the City Manager. What are we giving them in exchange, in comparison to RTZ? What other benefit are we getting, or informing more about the negotiations?

City Manager Iglesias: I don't think we're giving them anything more than RTZ. I think we're giving them, as a matter of fact, what I've been trying to ask through the Mayor, is to thank the developer for working with us, and providing a better project than would have been done through the RTZ process. The project will be more in line with what we expect in Coral Gables than what could have been done through the RTZ. And we have a commitment to make that project work, and we will make it work, because this project does not give more than RTZ. What it does is, it brings the project back into a more Coral Gables type project. Whereas the other project could have been simple box. This project brings it back into a Mediterranean style project. It brings it back to a slightly lower project. It gives us certain setbacks. It's not giving them anything. It's getting, one of the things that we, a major thing that we've done is speed up the project, which is one of the things that Commissioner Regalado has asked for, and we've complied. So, have we given up anything to RTZ? No. We've gained from the RTZ. And I think it's actually a better project for the developer. I think the Mayor and Commissioner, I think it's a better project for the developer, how this building is going to end up. I think it will be a more successful project, and we'll make sure that we deliver it on time, and deliver a good project for our residents.

Mayor Lago: In an effort to get the project delivered as quickly as possible, and the director can speak to it, is they have relinquished usage, signage. When I say relinquished, they're meeting our standards. We're getting Art in Public Places. We're getting impact fees. We're getting the setbacks, which are not required by the RTZ. They could have gone the RTZ route, circumvented the city, and gotten a much bigger project, a much taller project, different setbacks. They could have designed it not in a Mediterranean way. This is at least how it goes through the BOA. It didn't have to go through the BOA before. So, you will see it in the negotiation. It'll come for ratification here

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before the Commission. And I'm just proud to say that we worked hard. We sat at the table with the developer on multiple occasions, and staff had many, many more meetings than that. And we were able to bring this in and keep control of a project that next door will now have to go through the same process and not go to the RTZ at the county. And I think that goes to show you that we're here to negotiate. We're not just here to vote no, because at the end of the day, they could have gone through the RTZ, and then you have a project that is not in line, even with the way the city standards are.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, this overlay can be applied through the RTZ, through the entire RTZ area. So, I think that we've not only brought back one project, I think we brought back multiple projects to back into Coral Gables, instead of having basically a big county building inside Coral Gables.

Mayor Lara: Commissioner.

Commissioner Lara: Yeah, so we find ourselves in these days very much in a football mind, state of mind, with all the successes of the University of Miami, and hopefully that continues. But when we were last discussing this at the previous Commission meetings, I think we were referring to these efforts, ultimately successful efforts, as being a Hail Mary, a Hail Mary Pass. And I know that the Vice Mayor referred to it as ship sailing, I agree with that, but I think we were calling it a Hail Mary. So, this Hail Mary seems to have connected, and I want to also thank all, and congratulate all involved in a Herculean effort to try and get something done that I really think was appropriately referred to as highly unlikely to be charitable about it. And amazing things have been done for the benefit of the residents of the City Beautiful. I wholeheartedly support this, and I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this ordinance, granting this approval of the proposed amendments, because we were able to take back what I believe was decidedly a fumble by the previously constituted P&Z, and fixed with very little time left on the clock. So, a vote for this is a vote for the residents, a vote against this is a vote for what I believe all those against overdevelopment stand for. I think the choice is clear.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think the days of perfection are long gone. I think the days when we can dictate as a city, this is what it's going to be, regardless of what a developer wants to bring to the table, have been changed by the dynamics in Tallahassee and in the County Commission. And it's important for residents to understand that it's a new game. It's new rules that have been brought to the table, and municipalities are at the lower end of the totem pole. And what our zoning code

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is, is no longer the end all, be all of what's going to happen. Developers have a way to go to a different, I guess, the next level up and say, hey, I didn't get this, I want this, and they can get it. And I think I echo the sentiments of my colleagues, and I commend the developer for coming back to the table in Coral Gables and wanting to be a good partner with the city and finding a path forward where we will have a project that may not be exactly what we wanted, but it's more to the lines of what Coral Gables is, the identity of the City of Coral Gables, and now knowing what the Mayor was saying about the project next door also being in line with this legislation.

Mayor Lago: And if I may, if I may interrupt you, and the subsequent property, so it's three properties in a row now, the one on the waterway, which if not, again, you know, sorry to say this, but this project's happening. It's happening. RTZ or Coral Gables standards? Let's keep it Coral Gables standards.

Commissioner Fernandez: I agree, and I think that's the importance of getting this and moving it forward, ensuring that we have a say in this, we are able to get the resources that we need to provide the services for this project, and ensuring that we still have an ability to say this is what it should be, making sure it goes through the Board of Architects, which to me was one of the biggest concerns, because it goes to the county. You don't know what the county's going to approve. You can have an ultramodern building that comes to that property, and whatever the county standards are, going through the Board of Architects will ensure that we still have a say in what the design of that building is, and bringing back those impact fees is extremely important, especially knowing what's going to be happening in Tallahassee in the next session with property taxes. These are revenues that we're going to have that are going to be able to provide the services residents in these buildings are going to need.

Mayor Lago: And if I may, to bring you inside to the negotiations, which staff was in, one of the most contentious points discussed was whether the project will go through the BOA. And we discussed timeline schedules. We literally had to go back to a construction schedule, to a deliverable schedule, critical path. So that was an item that, along with many other things, if you go down the RTZ, you don't get any impact fees. You don't get any Art in Public Places money. Your setbacks are completely different. Your building is not designed in a Mediterranean style. It's called a negotiation. So, when you vote no on a project like this, you know, across the board, say no, which you just said here according to standards, you're not living in the reality of the moment. The reality of the moment is that the RTZ already exists. They came to us, it says we're moving forward as a result of what transpired of the planning and zoning board. We're done. We're moving. We sat down with them a half dozen times, had conversations, and said, let's start this again. How can we meet somewhere in the middle? Meeting somewhere in the middle is much better than going the RTZ route of Miami-Dade County.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

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Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, the project, instead of going through a new architect, is going through our City Architect, who does a fantastic job and that's a huge plus for this project. It's already been improved tremendously. I think it's a project that we can move forward with. And, you know, I think we have a commitment to move forward with this, a much better project than would have been done had it gone through no review. And basically, we get a box similar to what we see at some other, across the street of some other universities. And this is a completely different project. And we have a great City Architect that will work with their architect, who's also a very good architect, and get us a project that we can, that will be much better. And it'll be a Coral Gables project, not a Dade County project.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: Mr. Mayor, can I just, I just want to clarify that this, what is before you today are the amendments to the comprehensive plan. So, some of what's been discussed is a process, which is in the overlay text amendment, which will come back on second reading at a subsequent meeting.

Mayor Lago: I just wanted to put that out there, so people understand the process of why we're talking about this today. Everything, everything, while not here today in front of you, is part of the recipe that we're trying to bake in regard to the alternative to the RTZ. Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: I have nothing to say. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Okay, perfect. I'll entertain a motion.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: No.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Can you do me a favor, Madam Director, through the Manager. I want to make it very clear for the next time that we're here, because this has got to come back on second reading, right?

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Planning and Zoning Director: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay. I would like for you to provide, please, if we're not provided with this alternative, what we're facing right now on this project, what if it went straight to the county? What would it look like? What would the setbacks be? Because I want people to know, when you vote no on this, what the options are. Because it's very simple to vote no in public and then go out there and say, "I voted no, voted no. But if it didn't go through the city, how would an RTZ project look here? So, I want people to understand the depths and the breadth of a vote of no vote, and what that type of just lack of true understanding of what we're trying to do here would result in. If I may, my vote is yes.

(Vote: 4-1)

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, it would be a box with no setbacks, and a tower with no architectural constraints.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, that also I would like to see, how much of the impact fees you would lose? How much of the art in public places fees that we would lose? What are the uses that can be brought there? Gun stores, pet stores, a litany of different things that are allowed in Miami-Dade County versus what are allowed here in the City of Coral Gables and also the signage. What type of signage would be allowed there that are allowed in Miami-Dade County that are significantly larger than was allowed in Coral Gables? We need to understand and put on the record what a no vote means, and the work that we've done to bring this in. Okay, please.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to add to that.

Mayor Lago: I think it's important. I'm sorry to give you more work through the Manager, I apologize. But I think it's important that people understand that because it's so easy to vote no and just have voted no. But at the end of the day, you know, you got to find compromises.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Also, I think it's important to note the lack of green space. You're not going to have the 25-foot buffer between the neighborhood, the lack of parking requirement, you know, all those things. And the lack of architectural review. And City Manager, you're right, it was a box. And it was not just a box; it was an ugly box.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

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Commissioner Lara: Right. I just want to state that I'm disappointed in the final tally of the vote. So, I just want to stay on the record, that Commissioner Castro, your vote no on this item to me smacks of, you know, you're supportive of further home erosion, Home Rule erosion. You're in furtherance of the RTZ, it's likely in furtherance of Live Local. It all smacks to me of being consistent that that which overdevelopment manifests and looks like is what a no vote today is encouraging. And the Mayor's request that there be a visual created to show what it would look like if this went to RTZ and not through the Coral Gables standards is necessary because we're going to have this continuation, more discussion, more opportunities to express either you're for Coral Gables standards or you're for overdevelopment and further Home Rule erosion. So, I just want to express my disappointment because what I would want is unanimity in the vote to send a message that the Commission on the dais today speaks with one voice on something that stands for what supports what makes Coral Gables unique and in the best interests of the residents.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.