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City of Coral Gables  
427 Biltmore Way  
First Floor Conference Room  
January 13, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

SPECIAL MASTERS MEETING  
Re: 110 Phoenetia Avenue

Special Masters

Willy Bermello, Chairman  
Javier Font  
Aramis "Mitch" Alvarez

City Architect

Juan Riesco

City Attorney's Office

Gustavo J. Ceballos  
Assistant City Attorney

On behalf of the Applicant

Jorge Navarro, Esq.  
Greenberg Traurig

1 MR. CEBALLOS: Good afternoon,  
2 Everyone. I apologize for the echo. I  
3 may not use this microphone.

4 My name is Gus Ceballos. I'm  
5 Assistant City Attorney for the City of  
6 Coral Gables and I will be sitting as  
7 attorney for the Special Masters at this  
8 hearing.

9 This is an appeal of the decision of  
10 the Board of Architects' decision on  
11 October 10, 2023, which approved the  
12 design of the proposed project at 110  
13 Phoenetia.

14 The first order of business is the  
15 Special Masters need to elect a Chair, if  
16 you would like to do so.

17 Any volunteers?

18 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: Yes. I'd like  
19 to elect Willy.

20 MR. CEBALLOS: Willy, do you accept?

21 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Only if Mitch is  
22 satisfied.

23 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: I'm also  
24 known as Mitch.

25 MR. CEBALLOS: Mitch, do you accept

1 the nomination for Willy to be the Chair  
2 for the purpose of this meeting?

3 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Yes.

4 MR. CEBALLOS: Very well. We'll go  
5 ahead and move forward.

6 So as I said before, this is an  
7 appeal from an approval. This appeal is  
8 only on the design approval by the Board  
9 of Architects.

10 This Special Masters hearing will not  
11 discuss items dealing with the historic  
12 nature of the property, what's currently  
13 on the property.

14 The only thing that is before the  
15 board or before this panel today is what  
16 was approved on October 10, 2023, which is  
17 the design of the new project.

18 Public comment will start. We'll try  
19 to limit it to two minutes. We do have a  
20 sheet coming, so if you can, once the  
21 sheet does arrive, just please put your  
22 name and address. That's the only  
23 information that we need.

24 So we'll go ahead and get started  
25 with anybody for public comment.

1 MS. BOLTON: Yes. I'd like Steve to  
2 speak first.

3 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Before we start,  
4 in terms of a timeline --

5 MR. CEBALLOS: So in terms of time  
6 management, I'll give a quick, brief  
7 overview. Public comment is limited to  
8 two minutes per person. Then the  
9 appellant will be afforded 15 minutes,  
10 which they can reserve up to five minutes  
11 for rebuttal; same for the city architect,  
12 15 minutes, 5 minutes can be reserved for  
13 rebuttal and the property owner also has a  
14 limit of 15 minutes, 5 minutes can be  
15 reserved for rebuttal.

16 At that moment, the Board of  
17 Architects Special Masters have the  
18 ability to ask any questions of staff or  
19 any of the parties present, and then there  
20 can be any additional questions and  
21 deliberation by the Board of Architects  
22 and then you can make a determination  
23 whether you believe to uphold or overturn  
24 the decision of the Board of Architects.

25 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: So we have two

1 options.

2 MR. CEBALLOS: Yes.

3 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Can we agree that  
4 we will hear from the public first, and  
5 that they have one hour. And that we ask  
6 each member from the public to not  
7 necessarily be repeating comments already  
8 made. We can certainly take hands, and  
9 people can say, "We agree", you know,  
10 "Ditto", otherwise, we will spend more  
11 than an hour just hearing from everybody.

12 So the question is, can we agree on a  
13 timeline management that public will be  
14 heard first, we have one hour, and then  
15 the second hour, we will have the city,  
16 the applicant and we will hear and ask  
17 questions of the appellant.

18 MR. CEBALLOS: Of the appellant,  
19 correct.

20 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And that last  
21 hour, we will get into comments and  
22 questions.

23 MR. CEBALLOS: As part of the Chair,  
24 that's fine.

25 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Does that make

1 sense.

2 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: It does.

3 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Otherwise, we're  
4 going to be here until tomorrow, and I'm  
5 out of here at 4 o'clock.

6 MR. CEBALLOS: Madam court reporter,  
7 will you be able to swear everybody in?

8 THE COURT REPORTER: Yes.

9 MR. CEBALLOS: If we can, anybody who  
10 will be providing testimony today, please  
11 stand and rise and raise your right hand  
12 to be sworn in.

13 THE COURT REPORTER: Everybody stand  
14 and raise your right hand, please.

15 "Do you swear or affirm that  
16 everything you will testify to will be the  
17 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the  
18 truth."

19 COLLECTIVELY: Yes.

20 MR. CEBALLOS: I believe there was  
21 one person that wanted to speak first.

22 MS. BOLTON: Yes, Steve Pearson.

23 MR. CEBALLOS: If Mr. Pearson can  
24 step forward.

25 MR. PEARSON: Thank you for asking me

1 to speak on this important issue. I'm  
2 Stephen Pearson, and I'm a native of  
3 Miami. Botany of agriculture has been a  
4 lifelong occupation of mine. Former  
5 director of the University of Miami  
6 Gifford Arboretum. I was on the Board of  
7 Fairchild Gardens for 22 years. Today,  
8 I've been on the Board of Montgomery  
9 Botanical Center for at least 10.

10 I have personally seen this tree, and  
11 I, based on a formula that's used to  
12 determine the lives of trees, and special  
13 purpose for genealogy, the species of this  
14 oak, I estimate that the tree is probably  
15 about 200 years old. Patrick Griffith,  
16 who's the director of the Montgomery  
17 Botanical Center, he has also studied the  
18 tree and he estimated it was between a 100  
19 and 155 years old. Chad Husby, who's the  
20 director of horticulture at Fairchild  
21 Tropical Botanic Garden, spoke with me  
22 this morning. He has viewed the tree with  
23 me, and I said, "Chad, how old do you  
24 think the tree is?" He said, "Well, I  
25 think it's at least 100, probably 150."

1           And then I was told that Ian Simpkins,  
2           who's the director of Viscaya's  
3           horticulture program, and an expert, he  
4           had estimated it was at least 200 years  
5           old. When I told Chad that, he said, "Ian  
6           is the expert, we should go with what he  
7           says. He knows more than anybody about  
8           this kind of stuff".

9           But the point is, this is an old  
10          historic tree, and if you look at it in  
11          different ways, it looked wider or  
12          skinnier, it's definitely an old tree. I  
13          think you can safely say it predates Coral  
14          Gables, in fact, by a significant amount.  
15          It's not easy, and maybe impossible to  
16          move an oak tree like this successfully,  
17          you know. To cut the roots of a major  
18          tree that's been there this long, and trim  
19          back the branches so severely to keep the  
20          balance between the canopy and the roots  
21          when you move the tree would be an extreme  
22          hardship on this tree. It could expose  
23          the tree to disease. And even if you have  
24          the best care possible, with watering it  
25          and giving it the nutrition it needs to

1 pull through that really very, you know,  
2 life threatening surgery, we live in a  
3 hurricane area. It's going to take years  
4 and years for that tree to get roots that  
5 would withhold -- you know, withstand  
6 hurricane force winds like we get  
7 normally. We've been very lucky lately  
8 not to have hurricanes, and hopefully that  
9 continues, but, you know, in Miami,  
10 anybody that's been here, you can count  
11 the hurricanes are going to come sometime  
12 in the future, and the chances of a  
13 freshly moved or even recently moved tree  
14 of this stature and size surviving that I  
15 think is very small. And I don't think it  
16 would even survive the move anyway, but,  
17 you know, even if it did, I think the  
18 chances for a long-term prognosis and  
19 health are very minimal. Thank you very  
20 much.

21 MS. BOLTON: Thank you, Steve  
22 Pearson.

23 MR. CEBALLOS: Just as a reminder, if  
24 we can, to stay focused on the subject  
25 matter at hand, which is the appeal of the

1 design.

2 Next person can please stand up,  
3 please walk up to the podium, and write  
4 your name.

5 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Was that sound od  
6 two minutes?

7 MR. CEBALLOS: I'm going to put the  
8 sound for you. It's up to you to enforce  
9 it.

10 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: So that was the  
11 two minutes?

12 MR. CEBALLOS: Correct.

13 MS. LONGO: Good afternoon. Thank  
14 you for being here and participating in  
15 this very important cause. My name is  
16 Maria Cristina Longo, and I live in the  
17 same street as the proposed project, at 16  
18 Phoenetia Avenue, a significant historic  
19 home.

20 I want to be very clear, I am not  
21 against development. I'm actually a  
22 boutique developer myself, and this has  
23 never been about the school. There were  
24 92 letters submitted, and I know that it's  
25 a lot, and I'm not sure if you had an

1 opportunity to go over them, 92, and some  
2 people are reading some, opposing the  
3 project and none of them talk about the  
4 school. This is not about the school. It  
5 has never been about the school.

6 The overarching theme in all those  
7 opposing letters is the design, the scale,  
8 the massing, the volume that are not  
9 compatible and not in context with the  
10 neighborhood. The photos --

11 MS. BOLTON: The photos are supposed  
12 to be shown now while my people are  
13 speaking. This is Phoenetia Avenue.

14 MS. LONGO: There's several photos  
15 that are being shown. Who's showing them?  
16 Is somebody --

17 MS. BOLTON: Yes.

18 MS. LONGO: It is also important to  
19 understand that the developer before you  
20 today is not the developer who bought the  
21 site in 2021. The current developer,  
22 Fifield, is a large regional firm that, by  
23 their own website, has completed over 7  
24 billion in developments. We have also  
25 been told by the developer that the site

1 is under contract and has not closed yet,  
2 and will not close until zoning is  
3 approved.

4 The biggest developer had already  
5 agreed to redesign this project and had  
6 began working with me, Mrs. Bolton and  
7 architect Ralph Portuondo. I met with  
8 Ralph Portuondo and Tatiana Pino at the  
9 site last year, and I was shown a  
10 different site plan, a much better, much  
11 reasonable and sensible site plan. And  
12 this site plan that I was shown, I was  
13 happy with it. And the reason why it was  
14 better, the school was a separate  
15 building, there were larger setbacks. I  
16 don't know if you're aware, but they're  
17 trying to bring a zoning from a commercial  
18 area, Ponce, to a residential area, which  
19 has MF2, which would make a lot more sense  
20 for them to put an MF2, with a setback of  
21 MF2, and the same type of structures that  
22 are similar structures that are there now.  
23 It placed the school in a separate  
24 building, and included more walkways, more  
25 green space, and more integration and more

1           -- basically, you're able to have more  
2 public green space for the community and  
3 is more pedestrian friendly, the site plan  
4 that I was shown a year ago.

5           I also would like to reference a  
6 letter written -- this is amazing. This  
7 time, for the first time opposing a  
8 project many, many prestigious architects  
9 have written letters against the project  
10 with reasons. I have a letter in front of  
11 me by the renown architect Maria De La  
12 Guardia, who was so upheld by the site  
13 plan, that she's never done this before,  
14 that she wrote a letter. And I cannot  
15 read the entire letter. I'm just going to  
16 read little excerpts. "In my professional  
17 opinion" -- this is from Maria De La  
18 Guardia -- "the massing, scale and all  
19 sections of the proposed structure are  
20 entirely out of context and incompatible  
21 with the character of the surrounding  
22 neighborhood. The Northbound Neighbors  
23 Conservation District Overlay was  
24 specifically established to protect this  
25 area from developments of this nature.

1 Section 2402.2 of the Coral Gables Zoning  
2 Code clearly allows the development under  
3 the multifamily, MF2," which would be  
4 reasonable.

5 By the way, I met with them, and they  
6 told me I was unreasonable. And I think  
7 they were not able -- they were not  
8 flexible at all. They didn't make any  
9 concessions and in their website, they say  
10 that they're thoughtful developers, so I  
11 hope that they will be more reasonable,  
12 and bring the MF2 zoning, with larger  
13 setbacks and more green space into my  
14 neighborhood, in my street.

15 And I ask you respectfully, and I  
16 thank you for being here, to firmly please  
17 reject this project. Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: So, Mr. Attorney,  
19 the last speaker --

20 MS. BOLTON: Cheryl Akerman.

21 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Hold on a second.

22 I did not stop the last speaker after  
23 the two minutes, because so far, your  
24 comments have not been repeated. If I  
25 find that you're past two minutes and your

1           comments are starting to be repeated, I  
2           will ask you politely that your two  
3           minutes are up.

4           MS. AKERMAN: Good afternoon,  
5           Gentlemen. My name is Cheryl Akerman,  
6           resident from the Gables on Sorollo  
7           Avenue, which was the northern boundary of  
8           Merrick's original plantation.

9           AUDIENCE: Could she please speak up  
10          a little?

11          MS. AKERMAN: Are you understanding  
12          me?

13          CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Get a little  
14          closer to the microphone.

15          MS. AKERMAN: Okay. I'm trying.

16          I'm reading a letter from Maria  
17          Hernandez, who lives at 127 Phoenetia  
18          Avenue, apartment 1, and she respectfully  
19          requested that you deny the plans of the  
20          project proposed for the Garden of Our  
21          Lord, because they fail to comply with the  
22          building code, talks about the setback of  
23          25 feet and it's only 10 feet in the  
24          plans. Also, the developer is receiving  
25          two more floors, because they received the

1 Mediterranean bonus and at that time the  
2 regulations were strict -- were not as  
3 strict. The project is not worthy of the  
4 Mediterranean bonus as its facades are  
5 also very generic. And where it also  
6 fails to comply, it's not compatible with  
7 the neighborhood. And it's also the tree  
8 canopy. I love our tree canopy, and it's  
9 irreplaceable. Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you.

11 Next speaker.

12 MS. BOLTON: This is Gina Guilford.

13 MS. GUILFORD: Good afternoon, Ladies  
14 and Gentlemen. My name is Gina Guilford.  
15 I am president of The Villagers. The  
16 Villagers is the oldest historic  
17 preservation group in Miami, entirely run  
18 by volunteers, and this is the letter that  
19 I have submitted.

20 "Please accept this letter regarding  
21 110 Phoenetia Avenue, Coral Gables. This  
22 one-and-a-half property is a historic,  
23 charming green space that has been part of  
24 the surrounding residential community for  
25 74 years. 110 Phoenetia, built as St.

1 James Lutheran Church in 1951, was  
2 designed by noted architect Robert Fitch  
3 Smith. The former church is located  
4 across the street from historically  
5 designated Coral Gables Woman's Club, and  
6 tells a story of a peaceful mid century  
7 life in the city of Coral Gables. The  
8 property is special use with existing use  
9 as office one story. The land use is  
10 zoned religious institutional and is  
11 included in the North Ponce Neighborhood  
12 Conservation District Overlay. The North  
13 Ponce Neighborhood Conservation District  
14 Overlay includes the greenway connection  
15 between Ponce De Leon Boulevard and  
16 Douglas entrance, a historic northern  
17 gateway to the city of Coral Gables. This  
18 designation was created in 2016, by the  
19 city, with the enthusiastic support of the  
20 residents to find a balance between the  
21 old and the new in the North Ponce  
22 neighborhood. The Coral Gables  
23 commission, at the time, had the foresight  
24 to create laws to protect the historic  
25 northern corner against overdevelopment.

1           The zoning overlay protects the  
2           residential character of the neighborhood.  
3           According to the city Zoning Code, the  
4           purpose of the North Ponce Neighborhood  
5           Conservation District is to preserve, and  
6           enhance the garden apartment character of  
7           the North Ponce residential neighborhood  
8           properties. The owner of this property  
9           purchased the land with the full knowledge  
10          that it was part of the North Ponce  
11          Neighborhood Conservation District.

12                 "Current zoning does not permit an  
13                 8-story, 177-unit development. As  
14                 proposed, the building would require the  
15                 approval of many zoning variances,  
16                 including setbacks, FAR, height and open  
17                 space. Allowing this project to continue  
18                 would be ignoring the guardrail set in  
19                 place to save historic areas in Coral  
20                 Gables and forever change the integrity of  
21                 the historic neighborhood.

22                 "Also, as president of The Villagers,  
23                 I'm usually up here fighting to save  
24                 historic properties, historic house. This  
25                 is not just about a house, although there

1 is a building there, and it's not just  
2 about a tree. It is about the soul of  
3 this neighborhood that we are fighting to  
4 save. Thank you."

5 MS. BOLTON: The pictures are  
6 supposed to continue to be shown  
7 throughout.

8 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Next speaker.

9 MS. DETOURNAY: Hi. My name is Lisa  
10 DeTournay. I live at 10 Aragon Avenue.  
11 I've been a resident of Coral Gables for  
12 38 years. I've seen lots of development.  
13 Most of it very beautiful.

14 I've been at several meetings with  
15 the Board of Architects also discussing  
16 the architecture of projects that are  
17 coming asking for permission. I have even  
18 been to a meeting where the chair of the  
19 Board of Architects asked for  
20 clarification of what exactly the board is  
21 supposed to be approving when there has  
22 been resident opposition to size and  
23 location. They were told by the City  
24 architect that they were not to consider  
25 location, or size or zoning. Simply the

1 elements of architecture. Therefore, the  
2 approval of the Board of Architects for a  
3 project sitting anywhere in the world  
4 would be approved based on its merits, and  
5 considering codes with additional bonuses  
6 for Mediterranean design. However, that  
7 approval of the Board of Architects, we  
8 believe, has influenced further progress  
9 with the other board, such as Planning &  
10 Zoning. If the Board of Architects  
11 approves the project, it appears as if  
12 they have approved everything, including  
13 site and size. So it will continue to  
14 Planning & Zoning and then eventually to  
15 the City Commission and it will be  
16 approved.

17 This particular area, this particular  
18 building, as beautiful as it may be, and  
19 the design is well within what's permitted  
20 in the Gables, I believe it will stick out  
21 as being extremely oversized for the  
22 current area. And you can consider  
23 housing needs, all kinds of things, but do  
24 we really need that particular size of  
25 building right where it's planned to be?

1           In the future, somebody is going to  
2           use this as an example that they've  
3           approved this building, so why can't we do  
4           another one down the street? And that's  
5           what's happening along our U.S.1 corridor  
6           right now.

7           I'm opposed to the size of this  
8           building. The merits of the architecture  
9           certainly are nice, but it doesn't fit in  
10          with what the residents want. Thank you.

11          CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Next speaker.

12          MS. BOLTON: And these are photos of  
13          Phoenetia Avenue, Antilla, Galiano and  
14          East Ponce.

15          MR. CEBALLOS: Ms. Bolton, I have a  
16          problem with these photos being displayed.  
17          They don't relate to the particular  
18          comments of the public speaker, and it  
19          seems like you are using the public  
20          comment as part of your presentation and  
21          your public comment is limited to  
22          15 minutes. So I don't think that these  
23          photos without any context specifically by  
24          the public speaker would be appropriate at  
25          this time. So if we can, can we just

1 please stop showing these photos. Once  
2 again, Ms. Bolton, the public comment is  
3 limited to the public speaker. Whatever  
4 comment they want, that's perfectly fine.  
5 And if you have any presentation that you  
6 or your attorney would like to present,  
7 you have more than an opportunity to do  
8 that, but I don't believe that using the  
9 public comment time is appropriate in this  
10 particular case.

11 Please continue.

12 MS. BLANCO: My name is Pat Blanco.  
13 I'm also with The Villagers. I have lived  
14 in Coral Gables for more than 47 years,  
15 near the Biltmore. I love Coral Gables.  
16 I'm not against technology. I'm not  
17 against progress. I know some things have  
18 to change, but I do not want the plans for  
19 the garden to be approved. The plans are  
20 a major violation of the building code.  
21 They do not respect the code's  
22 requirements for compatibility and  
23 context. I do believe that they will  
24 destroy the neighborhood. I hate to see  
25 that happen. Don't let it happen.

1                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Next speaker.

2                   MS. MEAGHER: Good afternoon. I'm  
3 Joanne Meagher. I live at 1225 Valencia  
4 Avenue, a house that is celebrating its  
5 Centennial. I am also a longtime  
6 Villager, and I'm participating as a  
7 docent of the Merrick House. So history  
8 and the integrity of our city is very  
9 important to me.

10                   I would like to reiterate my original  
11 letter talked a lot about the North Ponce  
12 Neighborhood Conservation Overlay,  
13 something that the city itself created,  
14 and I'm quite dismayed and absolutely  
15 (inaudible) snapped that that is in  
16 jeopardy, because, as has been stated,  
17 it's designed to preserve and enhance the  
18 garden apartment character of the North  
19 Ponce residential neighborhood properties  
20 overlay.

21                   This project, with its height, with  
22 the obliteration of the trees. And I know  
23 that developments can pay into a tree -- a  
24 tree fund and have trees planted in other  
25 places, but that does nothing to help the

1 neighborhood feel. And the fact that the  
2 setbacks are so tiny is not acceptable, in  
3 my opinion.

4 And I don't want to take up too much  
5 more time. I just want to say -- I'm  
6 wondering how residents can trust that the  
7 city's historic integrity and neighborhood  
8 feel will remain intact if even entire  
9 districts can be compromised by developer  
10 after developer. As Pat Blanco said, this  
11 sets a very dangerous precedent. And like  
12 the city, as I said, my home is  
13 celebrating its Centennial, we don't plan  
14 to move anytime soon, but will we one day  
15 be flanked by multi-story buildings? You  
16 might say that that's ridiculous, but it's  
17 happening right down the street, and I  
18 feel for the neighbors who are speaking  
19 out. They will -- their neighborhood will  
20 be forever changed by this project. And I  
21 think that there are plenty of  
22 opportunities to consider a project of  
23 lesser height, with greater setbacks and  
24 the ability to preserve the tree canopy.  
25 Thank you.

1                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
2 much.

3                   Next speaker.

4                   MS. ENDARIA: Good afternoon, Ladies  
5 and Gentlemen. My name is Maria Endaria  
6 (phonetic), and I am here on behalf of my  
7 son. My son went to Guardian Shepard  
8 Lutheran Christian Day School, back about  
9 32 years ago, a school with no technology.  
10 He was received with a lot of love. The  
11 Garden of Our Lord, what a beautiful  
12 garden he shared, when he visits Miami,  
13 that is the one spot for him. He went to  
14 a school with no technology. He is now a  
15 rocket scientist. He has a PhD in  
16 aerospace. He has worked on Curiosity,  
17 Orion and works as a national rep. And he  
18 begged me, please go. Not the Garden of  
19 Our Lord; it's a sacred space; it's  
20 beautiful. We don't need more technology.  
21 We need the love that he received when he  
22 attended high school. Open your hearts  
23 and look inside the hearts for the love  
24 that you have. Children need that, the  
25 community needs that. We don't need more

1 buildings. We don't need more traffic.

2 I'm not familiar with the project.  
3 I'm not an architect. I just moved back  
4 to Miami two years ago, but this is a very  
5 special place for my son, and for our  
6 family and I'm sure for the residents of  
7 that area, too. Please consider that.  
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
10 much.

11 Next speaker.

12 MR. CEBALLOS: Just a reminder, when  
13 you do speak, if you can, please, make  
14 sure you sign in just so the court  
15 reporter knows who is speaking.

16 MS. LEON FLEITES: Good afternoon.  
17 My name is Maria de Leon Fleites,  
18 architect, also adjunct professor at the  
19 University of Miami. My daughter is a  
20 resident in the neighborhood, who just  
21 come to love how beautiful, and how quiet,  
22 how pedestrian-oriented the neighborhood  
23 is. Her building would be right across  
24 the street from the new construction.

25 We feel that, although the building

1 is not a bad building, it's just not  
2 located in the correct area, in the  
3 correct neighborhood. It's a very  
4 peaceful neighborhood, with a lot of  
5 pedestrians, a lot of dogs, very, very  
6 friendly, and nothing that you haven't  
7 heard before. Just please reconsider the  
8 location, that that building is not  
9 located in the correct spot there. Thank  
10 you.

11 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Next speaker.

12 MS. BLUSTEIN: Good afternoon. My  
13 name is Lynn Blustein. About 2 or 3 years  
14 ago, two vandals cut down the Sycamore  
15 tree in England, and much of the world  
16 responded negatively toward that. And  
17 what I'm saying is, it wasn't just a local  
18 event. We have very few Biblical gardens  
19 in the United States, and it's hard to  
20 imagine that Coral Gables would like that  
21 kind of attention for removing a garden  
22 and a very, very old tree. And your  
23 children and grandchildren can look up to  
24 you and say, thank you for saving that  
25 tree instead of killing it. So there are

1 other things besides all the legal stuff.  
2 Don't do it.

3 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
4 much.

5 We have a gentleman on the right  
6 side.

7 MR. SEGRERA: Hi. Good afternoon.  
8 My name is Carlos Segrera, 100 Southwest  
9 44 Avenue. So I'm here as a parent of --  
10 in strong support of this development.  
11 I'm also as Crystal Academy is there, you  
12 know, going to build a nice school for our  
13 kids, serving with autism. My daughter  
14 has attended Crystal Academy since she's  
15 three years old. She's now 16. And for  
16 more than 13 years, the school has  
17 provided her and many children with an  
18 educational environment specifically  
19 designed to meet their unique journey,  
20 behavioral and emotional needs. For  
21 families like mine, Crystal Academy is not  
22 just a school. It's just, you know, our  
23 lifeline.

24 There's opposition to development  
25 itself. I see that development is very

1 compatible. It meets Coral Gables' strict  
2 standards, and it's very similar to other  
3 developments in the area and it fits the  
4 character of the surrounding area, and  
5 reflects the planned growth of the city  
6 that is known for.

7 As to the Gardens of the Lord that I  
8 see many comments, I've know that 13,  
9 14 years, and I've never seen anyone  
10 inside it. They all talk about it, but  
11 it's not even -- it doesn't have access to  
12 the public. It's just very dilapidated.

13 Most important, I want to speak also  
14 to the real world impact of these debates.  
15 I just see this more of a delay tactic,  
16 and just delay the project. I've been to  
17 two or three of these hearings. And it's  
18 been five years since this property was  
19 purchased and just a way of pushing this  
20 around, and if your opposition of the  
21 development and just not getting the  
22 project done.

23 Finally, from the parents'  
24 perspective, this proposal I think will  
25 strengthen the community, will protect the

1 educational resource that will provide for  
2 our kids. And, you know, we, as parents,  
3 will be very grateful if you guys can  
4 approve this project and move forward.  
5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Next speaker.

7 MR. KOZYROVICIUS: Hi. My name is  
8 Art Kozyrovicius. I'm the owner of 24  
9 Phoenetia Way, from one of the homes that  
10 was shown.

11 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Speak a little  
12 closer to the microphone so that we can  
13 hear you.

14 MR. KOZYROVICIUS: Did you hear what  
15 I said?

16 THE COURT REPORTER: No.

17 MR. KOZYROVICIUS: Art Kozyrovicius  
18 I'm the owner of 24 Phoenetia Avenue, one  
19 of the homes that was shown in the picture  
20 on the street where development is going.  
21 So we've lived here for a little over four  
22 years, and, you know, in our home. We  
23 bought it for the feel, you know, and for  
24 the neighborhood. We love the quiet  
25 streets and what the neighborhood has to

1 offer. And I'm not against development,  
2 but the project, the way that -- what I've  
3 seen in the drawings and renderings. It  
4 really does not go with the neighborhood,  
5 and would be a complete, you know -- you  
6 know, sticking out sore thumb, and  
7 creating lots of traffic and really not  
8 for the, you know, neighborhood. And the  
9 overlay and many of the comments that were  
10 made, actually, over the years, this  
11 development was previous have written  
12 numerous letters, you know, and asked them  
13 to reject that.

14 And, again, it's really not against  
15 the school, not against the development.  
16 Something else fitting in that area, you  
17 know, developed, and use and fitting with  
18 the neighborhood, but not the project as  
19 it stands. Please protect it. Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Next speaker.

21 MS. SMITH: Good afternoon. My name  
22 is Carol Smith, and I'm reading a letter  
23 that Frank Gonzalez wrote. He's an  
24 engineer, and he lives on Greenway Drive.  
25 I've lived in the North Gables area, a few

1 blocks from this project, for the last  
2 20 years and I've walked around the  
3 neighborhood often.

4 Here's Frank's letter. "I've been a  
5 resident of Coral Gables for over  
6 20 years. I am writing to support the  
7 preservation of the Garden of Our Lord. I  
8 believe Bonnie Bolton presents a strong  
9 case of why this should be a decision that  
10 the City of Coral Gables should make, but  
11 (inaudible) the residents near the garden  
12 and the city as a whole. My letter aims  
13 to support her efforts, save the garden.  
14 Along with Mrs. Bolton's points, I think  
15 that from a community planning standpoint,  
16 it would be the right decision for the  
17 City of Coral Gables. The expected growth  
18 and residential development would benefit  
19 from the available open space. The garden  
20 would offer a planned increase in green,  
21 shady areas for residents to gather, which  
22 would help promote a healthy community.  
23 If we lose this open space, the additional  
24 buildings that will likely follow won't  
25 have much green space within walking

1 distance. In my opinion, maximizing open  
2 green space in this part of the city will  
3 demonstrate the City's willingness to seek  
4 development in Coral Gables in a  
5 comprehensive way, rather than the spot  
6 development we often see throughout  
7 Miami-Dade County. I respectfully request  
8 that you preserve the garden and its  
9 mature trees, not only for their  
10 historical importance, but also for their  
11 value to future residents. The  
12 alternative would be a neighborhood  
13 resembling government housing from the old  
14 Soviet Union." Thank you for your time.

15 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Next speaker.

16 MS. SANTOS: Hello. My name is  
17 Alexis Santos. I actually live in  
18 Kendall. I actually helped get letters  
19 for support for this project from door to  
20 door. I do have a letter from a friend of  
21 mine that couldn't make it today. I'm  
22 going to read it to you guys.

23 "Good afternoon. My name is Natalie  
24 Marquis, and my address is 45 Antilla  
25 Avenue, Coral Gables. I am the department

1 head of academics for Crystal Academy,  
2 but, for the record, I live directly  
3 across the street. Yes, I walk about  
4 50 feet to work every day. My bedroom  
5 window would look at this new building, if  
6 approved, as it is currently looking  
7 directly at the entrance of the school.  
8 To be honest, I was concerned when I first  
9 heard about the building itself. It  
10 wasn't what I had signed up for when  
11 choosing my place of residence. Then I  
12 saw the actual renderings and fell in love  
13 with it. This could have been a place I  
14 would have chosen had I seen it and  
15 understood it from the start, classic  
16 Coral Gables with all the amenities. I  
17 moved here from Kendall mid-2025, and  
18 adore the rich George Merrick inspired  
19 feel of the project. In comparison to  
20 Kendall, there is no comparison. As for  
21 the benefits to the school, clearly it  
22 goes without saying, how this upgrade will  
23 help generations of our most needy  
24 children. As for the current building, it  
25 needs help. Although it feels like a

1 second home, truth is repair after repair  
2 are causing precious funds that instead  
3 can go to the children -- sorry -- and  
4 ability to offer more than we already do.  
5 As for the so-called garden, I won't say  
6 it's rundown, because it's cared for, but  
7 I will say it isn't anything to write home  
8 about. As a neighbor, who wants to see  
9 what's best for our community, I believe  
10 this is a win/win, a beautiful building,  
11 and even more secure state of art,  
12 beautiful school, with all the needs for  
13 our students, right in the same place  
14 where it currently is, the place our  
15 students also associate with a second  
16 home. Please accept this letter instead  
17 of my personal appearance as my health  
18 doesn't allow me to appear before you  
19 today, therefore, I have asked an old  
20 friend and neighbor to read it to you.  
21 Thank you."

22 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
23 much.

24 Next speaker.

25 MR. FLEITES: Good afternoon. My

1 name is Victor Fleites (phonetic). I've  
2 lived in Coral Gables just shy of my 5th  
3 birthday, so I've seen a lot of change.  
4 Up until now, there really hasn't been any  
5 personal impact to the development that's  
6 occurred in the city since I can remember.

7 Recently, I've had the pleasure of  
8 walking this neighborhood, and the charm  
9 that it contains is unprecedented from  
10 other areas that I've walked through.

11 I've been a resident in North Gables  
12 for the past 30 plus years, and my family  
13 moved into the Gables when I was just  
14 about five years old.

15 So I do want to state that I think  
16 that the charm that this area has right  
17 now is going to be affected. I know that  
18 it is not without precedent. There are  
19 multi-story buildings in the area. I just  
20 don't think that anymore is going to  
21 benefit the neighborhood. Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
23 much.

24 Next speaker.

25 MR. CABRERA: Good afternoon.

1           Members of the special masters, we  
2           appreciate you taking your time out of  
3           your busy day to be here for us today. My  
4           name is Nicholas Cabrera, and I reside at  
5           45 Antilla Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida.  
6           And for context, this is -- as the  
7           previous speaker mentioned, my neighbor  
8           and I live in the building directly across  
9           the street from this proposed project.

10                   As a resident, I would like to  
11           express my concern and my frustration  
12           regarding the misuse of the appeal process  
13           for the purpose of opposing a project that  
14           is not only compatible, but will  
15           contribute to the City of Coral Gables in  
16           a multitude of ways. Many of the comments  
17           spoken today in opposition to this project  
18           are outside of the scope and purview of  
19           this special masters' board, and further  
20           demonstrate the misuse of the appeal  
21           process. As I'm sure you all know, and as  
22           much as I respect your expertise greatly,  
23           and thank you, again, for being here --  
24           the Board is here to address architecture  
25           and architecture only.

1           I'd like to express my support for  
2           this project in all aspects. I look  
3           forward to the vast contributions it will  
4           make for Crystal Academy, for my  
5           neighborhood, for their community and for  
6           our community as a whole. Thank you for  
7           your time.

8           CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
9           much.

10          Next speaker.

11          MR. PACKARD: Hello. My name is Omar  
12          Packard. I live at 911 East Ponce De Leon  
13          Boulevard. I'm a lifelong resident of  
14          Coral Gables, and I'm here to speak in  
15          opposition to the proposed development at  
16          the Garden of Our Lord. This project does  
17          not comply with the city's building code.  
18          The code exists to ensure proper scaling,  
19          spacing and separation between structures,  
20          especially in established neighborhoods  
21          like this one.

22          In this case, the development -- the  
23          developer is requesting deviations that  
24          significantly reduce the required setbacks  
25          and ignore longstanding zoning standards.

1           This project is also not compatible with  
2           the surrounding neighborhood of historic  
3           low-rise homes. Its size, scale and  
4           design are completely out of place and  
5           undermine the character and image of Coral  
6           Gables. Quite frankly, the building looks  
7           cheap and generic. It doesn't belong in  
8           this setting.

9           Additionally, the plan jeopardizes a  
10          historic garden and a century's old tree  
11          that cannot survive relocation. These  
12          elements have cultural, environmental and  
13          community value that deserve full  
14          protection.

15          Coral Gables has earned its  
16          reputation from careful planning and the  
17          respect for its code. Approving a project  
18          that so clearly violates those standards  
19          would set a harmful precedent and weaken  
20          the integrity of our city. I respectfully  
21          ask that this proposal is denied. Thank  
22          you.

23                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
24                   much.

25                   Next speaker.

1                   MR. MOONEY: Good afternoon. For the  
2 record, my name is Thomas Mooney, and I  
3 reside at 601 Navarre Avenue, in Coral  
4 Gables. I've been a resident of Coral  
5 Gables since 2000; homeowner, since 2002.  
6 I'm very familiar with Coral Gables in  
7 this area.

8                   My son, James, has been attending  
9 Crystal Academy since 2010. He was  
10 actually one of the first students when  
11 Crystal Academy basically consisted of a  
12 few small therapy rooms. And the school,  
13 like a lot of neighborhoods, has evolved  
14 over the last 16 years, and as a lot of  
15 people have attested to, has become an  
16 integral part of the neighborhood.

17                   One of the reasons for the proposal  
18 and its design iteration is to accommodate  
19 Crystal Academy within a new structure. A  
20 school like Crystal simply doesn't have  
21 the financial means to purchase a property  
22 like this and just build a school.

23                   I think it's also important to point  
24 out in terms of what your role here is  
25 today how neighborhoods evolve over time.

1           And that's not just this neighborhood, but  
2           that's neighborhoods all over Coral  
3           Gables. Areas evolve, new types of  
4           building typologies are introduced. And  
5           the role of, in this case, the land use  
6           board, the Board of Architects, is to  
7           ensure that the adopted standards of  
8           architecture are met and adhered to, and  
9           clearly that is what happened when the  
10          Board of Architects approved that. And so  
11          I would urge this group to uphold that  
12          decision. Thank you.

13                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
14                   much.

15                   Next speaker.

16                   UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Hello. My  
17                   name is (inaudible). I live in 888  
18                   Douglas Road, Puerta de Palmas. I've been  
19                   living in Coral Gables for three or four  
20                   years now. I know the area. I know how  
21                   the scene looks. But respecting that, we  
22                   need to be the city that -- we need to  
23                   know, understand that the city is still  
24                   growing. And it makes the more better  
25                   opportunities for people in the area that

1 is growing. You know, we have kids we  
2 have growing up, the ones who stay in the  
3 area.

4 As I'm here, I believe the design and  
5 the development of the project complies  
6 with all the requirements that the city  
7 needs, even in design, style and space.  
8 Okay. Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you.

10 Next speaker.

11 MS. PALACIO: Thank you so much for  
12 the opportunity to speak and thank you for  
13 my time to be here. My name is Marie  
14 Palacio. I'm a resident and I'm also the  
15 founder of Crystal Academy. Crystal  
16 Academy has been deep rooted in this  
17 community for 16 years. We serve children  
18 with autism and severe other  
19 neurodevelopmental delays.

20 And we call Coral Gables our home.  
21 And for the past five years, we have been  
22 living without a north. It's like our  
23 compass is broke. Our children rely on  
24 stability and predictability. And knowing  
25 that we would need to move will help our

1 parents and students to have that north  
2 that we need, and knowing that we're  
3 coming back to our home here in Coral  
4 Gables.

5 The current developer, I feel, is  
6 honoring an agreement made with Century  
7 Builders years ago, where Mr. Pino, once  
8 he met us at Crystal Academy, actually  
9 changes your life once you see our  
10 children. That's why Crystal Academy  
11 exists. He made an agreement with us  
12 saying, "When you come back to the Gables,  
13 you will not pay rent. You will use that  
14 money to continue helping the kids that  
15 you're helping, and for 90 years you'll be  
16 rent-free. It doesn't matter if you're  
17 not here or I'm not here, it happens  
18 because you are building the children's  
19 future".

20 MS. BERMELLO: Excuse me. Sir, can  
21 we keep it down so we can hear the  
22 speaker, please? Sorry.

23 MS. PALACIO: I know that we're  
24 passionate about the tree and the garden.  
25 I'm passionate about also leaving a legacy

1           where these families can continue to grow.  
2           We're not even here. 1 in 31 children are  
3           being diagnosed with autism now. When my  
4           son was diagnosed, it was 1 in 215. This  
5           number keeps growing, and we need  
6           something here in the Gables that continue  
7           to actually grow and really continue to  
8           build a future for the families that need  
9           the most. Thank you so much for your  
10          time. And, really, respectfully, I'd ask  
11          you just to move forward with a decision  
12          today.

13                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
14                   much.

15                   Next speaker.

16                   MS. PACKARD: My name is Judith  
17                   Packard. I've been a resident in Coral  
18                   Gables for 42 years, the last 42 years.  
19                   I'm here to oppose the proposed project of  
20                   the Garden of Our Lord. This development  
21                   is fundamentally inconsistent with the  
22                   city's building code, which was adoption  
23                   to safeguard open setbacks, building  
24                   massing, compatibility with established  
25                   neighborhoods. The proposal relies on

1           substantial departures from those  
2           standards, creating a structure that bears  
3           no relationship to the scale and intent of  
4           the surrounding area. Such deviation  
5           underline the purpose -- deviations  
6           undermine the purpose of the code and  
7           weaken the predictability of the fairness  
8           of our planning process. Behind these  
9           regulatory concerns, the project fails to  
10          respect the new character of its setting.  
11          The Garden of Our Lord is not an isolated  
12          parcel, but a part of a cohesive  
13          neighborhood defined by historic low-rise  
14          buildings and carefully maintained open  
15          space. Introducing a building of this  
16          size disrupts a balance and diminishes the  
17          architectural harmony that Coral Gables is  
18          known for. The plan also places at risk  
19          the irreplaceable natural and historic  
20          resources, including a century's old tree  
21          that experts have stated cannot survive  
22          relocation. Once lost, such features  
23          cannot be replaced and the destruction  
24          would represent a permanent sacrifice that  
25          would seize heritage of a project that

1 does not meet our established standards.

2 Coral Gables has earned its  
3 discipline for respect towards its  
4 history. Approving this proposal would  
5 signal a permanent departure from those  
6 values. I respectfully request that the  
7 city deny the application. Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Thank you very  
9 much.

10 Next speaker.

11 MR. VERGARA: Hello. My name is  
12 Giancarlo Vergara. I live in Antilla,  
13 Coral Gables. I have many comments about  
14 the school, but what it's actually about.  
15 This is a classic and beautiful Coral  
16 Gables design to support the original  
17 Board of Architects' approval. Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Thank you very  
19 much.

20 Next speaker.

21 MS. MUNROE: Hello. My name is Irene  
22 Monroe. I'm a member of the pioneer  
23 family of Ralph Middleton Munroe, who came  
24 here in the late 1870's, and built his  
25 home, the Barnacle, which is the oldest

1 house in Miami-Dade County on its original  
2 location. It is now a Florida state park,  
3 but we're thankful that he left this  
4 legacy to us to remember our history.

5 And I'm requesting that you reject  
6 the plans for this project that include  
7 the Garden of Our Lord. The garden  
8 exemplifies the qualities which George  
9 Merrick had in mind when he designed this  
10 garden city, and it must be preserved.  
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Thank you very  
13 much.

14 Next speaker.

15 MS. MEYER: Hello. Good afternoon.  
16 My name is Karen Meyer, and I've been  
17 living in the Gables for about five years  
18 on Douglas Road. It seems pretty simple.  
19 We're talking about the architecture of  
20 the building, and it's something that's  
21 going to benefit the community, and it's  
22 beautiful and I'm here for it.

23 SHUSA: Good afternoon. My name is  
24 Shusa (phonetic). I'm reading this letter  
25 for Sandra Pino. She lives at 3627 Ponce.

1 "This plan for the Garden of Our Lord must  
2 not be approved, because they seek to  
3 demolish and permanently alter treasure  
4 features of this neighborhood, which is  
5 currently being studied to officially  
6 designate as historical district. They  
7 also violate a city ordinance known as the  
8 North Ponce Conservation District Overlay,  
9 created to protect and preserve the  
10 character of this residential  
11 neighborhood, with historical homes, a lot  
12 of trees and a dense trees canopy. The  
13 developer's plans are a clear violation of  
14 the echoes of our city and this  
15 neighborhood.

16 I am requesting that you do not  
17 approve the plans of the Garden of Our  
18 Lord, because they do not comply with the  
19 building code for the City of Coral  
20 Gables. The plan failed to abide by  
21 setback requirements. Our code requires a  
22 25-foot setback at the main entrance, and  
23 15 feet on the other streets, yet the  
24 developer provides only 10 feet at the  
25 main entrance, less than 10 inches on

1           Phoenetia Avenue, and Galiano Avenue and  
2           zero setback on Antigua. These are  
3           tremendous deviations from our code, and  
4           should not be allowed.

5           Additionally, the developer is  
6           receiving extra height with the Med bonus,  
7           which was granted under very lax rules.  
8           The bonus now is much stricter and it  
9           requires authentic Mediterranean design.  
10          This project, as designed, would never  
11          have qualified under the current  
12          guidelines. Please reject these plans and  
13          refer the developer to redesign the  
14          project. Thank you.

15          CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Next speaker.

16          MS. ARANGO: Hi. Good afternoon. My  
17          name is Lizette Arango, and I reside at  
18          4152 Southwest 13 Street, Unit 3, Coral  
19          Gables.

20          And so they knocked on my door. I  
21          wasn't aware of this project. After  
22          looking into it, I wanted to -- you know,  
23          I wanted to show my support for both the  
24          school and the project. I look forward --  
25          and I said, I have to go over there doing

1           whatever for the community, whatever  
2           they're doing, which is what they should  
3           do, which is really great. Thank you so  
4           much.

5                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
6           much.

7                   Next speaker.

8                   Right now its' 2:58, just to keep  
9           time management going. So we have plenty  
10          of time for the appellant, for the city  
11          and for the applicant.

12                   Thank you. I'm here on behalf of the  
13          historic preservation association. I am  
14          serving as president. First, let's take a  
15          reality check. This area, this project  
16          has not been zoned for what we're now  
17          discussing. The area is zoned for  
18          institutional religious. So all these  
19          plans and all the effort are really up in  
20          the air, so I think we need to do a  
21          reality check on that, 'cause nothing is  
22          guaranteed at this point.

23                   So with that, I will like to read  
24          just a short statement from our  
25          organization. Also, an additional point

1 is, there's nothing against the school.  
2 Crystal Academy is a wonderful neighbor  
3 and has nothing to do with the  
4 preservation of the area. Actually, it  
5 would benefit them, because they would  
6 stay in their area. The kids will have  
7 green space. The kids will have a garden.  
8 So, you know, this is the reality that,  
9 you know, we should all focus on. No way  
10 is this against the school.

11 The project is an encroachment -- so  
12 this is the statement from the historic  
13 preservation association. The project is  
14 an encroachment into the North Ponce  
15 neighborhood. The developer bought the  
16 parcel zoned as institutional religious.  
17 Now they want to build a residential,  
18 10-story building and have a school. You  
19 can't have it both ways. You either have  
20 a school or you have a development. So,  
21 again, I think that's something that we  
22 need to think through. And it seeks a  
23 variance to build its mixed-use  
24 development. Also, this area is under a  
25 commission-funded study and its

1 consideration for historic designation.

2 Second. The neighborhood is  
3 protected under the Zoning Code, Section  
4 2-404 North Ponce Neighborhood  
5 Conservation District Overlay. This code  
6 was passed to preserve and enhance the  
7 garden apartment character of the North  
8 Ponce residential neighborhood properties.  
9 George Merrick's historic city plan -- and  
10 I urge you to read it; I would love to  
11 share it with you; it's actually a zoning  
12 ordinance -- refers to this area as the  
13 Douglas section. Also, the proposed  
14 project's density will have an adverse  
15 impact on the quality of life and wellness  
16 of the residents living -- is my  
17 microphone on? Okay. Living on the  
18 abutting streets, and the historic  
19 landmark surrounding the area,  
20 specifically the historic and nationally  
21 recognized Coral Gables Woman's Club and  
22 the Douglas address.

23 Finally, the proposed project will  
24 not only raise the Garden of Our Lord,  
25 which is deemed a cultural landscape by

1 two nationally recognized prominent  
2 University of Miami School of Architecture  
3 professors, but it will remove the  
4 historic green canopy, green canopy, and  
5 heritage trees surrounding the property  
6 that are original to Merrick's garden city  
7 planned neighborhood.

8 So with that, I urge you to really  
9 think through the reality of what we're  
10 discussing, which is no zoning variance.  
11 The school -- we love the school. We want  
12 it to stay there. And also the impact on  
13 the neighborhood.

14 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you very  
15 much.

16 Mr. Attorney, we've now gone past an  
17 hour. I wanted to ask if there's anybody  
18 here that has a burning desire to say  
19 something that has not been said by  
20 anyone? Is there anybody that has  
21 something that has not been said on either  
22 side? Because, if not, what I would like  
23 to do, is to move to the second part,  
24 which is to hear from the appellant,  
25 15 minutes; to hear from the City, and

1           then to hear from the applicant and then  
2           allow us some time to ask questions and  
3           make some comments from our side. Does  
4           that seem right? Okay.

5           So can we have the appellant go  
6           first?

7           MS. BOLTON: We want the photos to be  
8           played sequentially and you'll see there's  
9           a photo of the tree.

10          SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Excuse me.  
11          Before we conclude this session by  
12          participants, the public, I suggest that  
13          maybe that's already well taken care of,  
14          but, just in case, it will be very  
15          interesting to hear the residents'  
16          addresses of each one of these people here  
17          and equally to the people here. At a  
18          glance, I would possibly say that some of  
19          these people are not even very close  
20          residents of the area. They just simply  
21          have opinion, which is perfectly correct  
22          for residents of the city, but it seems  
23          like there's people in this area that have  
24          a close proximity to the residence and  
25          have perhaps a better sense of what is

1 good or what is not good to affect the way  
2 they live now.

3 So I would suggest to the committee  
4 that all these participants be recorded  
5 home addresses.

6 MR. CEBALLOS: And I believe they  
7 already did that.

8 MR. WINKER: We're happy to do that,  
9 because I think almost everybody that  
10 spoke lives close to the neighborhood, so  
11 if you'd like to have everyone come up,  
12 everyone that spoke could come up and give  
13 their address.

14 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: That will take a  
15 half hour just on this. May I suggest  
16 this, they all sign in, make sure next to  
17 your signature, you have your address of  
18 where you reside, on both sides.  
19 Everybody, I think -- so for the public  
20 record, somebody hasn't done it, go ahead  
21 and mark it. In many cases, I will tell  
22 you, it was difficult to hear the actual  
23 address of some of the persons speaking,  
24 so I, too, was left wondering are these  
25 persons from out of town, et cetera.

1           So, before you leave, so we make part  
2 of the record, make sure your name and  
3 address is shown on either side.

4           MS. BOLTON: And I must mention a  
5 number of people that had to leave.

6           CHAIRMAN BERMELO: We understand.  
7 We understand.

8           MS. BOLTON: We don't have their  
9 addresses.

10          MR. WINKER: So I think this will  
11 help too, is that everyone that lives,  
12 let's say, within a mile of the project,  
13 please raise your hand over on my side of  
14 the room. My understanding is everyone  
15 that spoke lives --

16          MR. CABRERA: Ask the question of who  
17 lives in Coral Gables?

18          MR. WINKER: Who lives in Coral  
19 Gables? I think every single person that  
20 spoke. Yes. I think many of the people  
21 that spoke on that side, who are parents,  
22 do not live in Coral Gables.

23          MS. PALACIO: Yes, they both live in  
24 Coral Gables. Mr. Mooney.

25          MR. WINKER: No, there was --

1                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Let's not get  
2                   into the mathematics. It's not based on  
3                   how many persons spoke one way or the  
4                   other.

5                   Please introduce yourself and go  
6                   forward.

7                   MR. WINKER: May it please the panel.  
8                   David Winker, 4720 South LeJeune Road.  
9                   Thank you for being here. Thank you for  
10                  doing this process. Thank you for  
11                  allowing residents to be heard on this.  
12                  This is an important issue.

13                  I would like to bring the Board's  
14                  attention to the code provision we're  
15                  under here. This is Section 14103.1 of  
16                  our Zoning Code, and it states that, "A  
17                  Board of Architects is a design review  
18                  administrative board created to ensure the  
19                  City's architecture meets the design  
20                  review standards of the Zoning Code, is  
21                  consistent with the City's regulations and  
22                  to preserve the traditional aesthetic  
23                  character of the community.

24                  You heard from the residents. The  
25                  evidence is there. It's not consistent

1 with the code and it's not consistent with  
2 the neighborhood. This 10-story building,  
3 the amount of parking, the amount of units  
4 is completely out of character.

5 I'm going to turn this over to Bonnie  
6 Bolton to present our side of the case,  
7 but I would like to emphasize where this  
8 comes from. I've been involved in this  
9 project I think for over four years. I  
10 was reflecting on this the other day.  
11 When Sergio Pino committed suicide, after  
12 trying to have his wife murdered, we were  
13 reflecting on how we were sitting in a  
14 room with Sergio Pino negotiating this  
15 project, attempting to negotiate the  
16 changes here. This project now has gone  
17 from that to now an out-of-town developer  
18 coming in and bringing this into our  
19 neighborhood.

20 Please listen to the residents.  
21 Please listen to the evidence. This  
22 project has been ill-fated from the  
23 beginning. This garden needs to be  
24 preserved. And, more importantly, this  
25 decision of the Board of Architects needs

1 to be overturned based on the evidence  
2 presented. With that, I'm going to turn  
3 it over to Bonnie Bolton.

4 MS. BOLTON: Hello. Good afternoon.  
5 I want to thank the Special Masters for  
6 volunteering their time to serve our city.  
7 The photos -- excuse me. The photos  
8 should be displayed in sequential order,  
9 please.

10 THE TECHNICIAN: Yes, I am displaying  
11 the photos.

12 MS. BOLTON: The photos being  
13 displayed are of Phoenetia Avenue, Antilla  
14 Avenue, Galiano and East Ponce. You'll  
15 see from the photos that they're all,  
16 almost without exception, 1-or-2-story  
17 buildings. There's only one 4-story  
18 building on Phoenetia Avenue, and that's  
19 at the corner of Douglas Road, and there  
20 are six historic structures on Phoenetia  
21 Avenue alone.

22 And I'm showing these photos, because  
23 nothing demonstrates context and  
24 compatibility better than actually seeing  
25 the homes and structures on that -- on

1           those streets. Context is a word that  
2           appears nine times in our city code. The  
3           word compatibility appears 12 times.

4           And I also want to just reiterate, we  
5           have 92 letters of residents who oppose  
6           the project. Ten of those letters are  
7           from very, very prominent architects. And  
8           I know you know the names of these  
9           architects. They're some of the best  
10          known architects here in South Florida,  
11          and in our nation: Robert A. M. Stern,  
12          Joanna Lombard Hector, Elizabeth  
13          Plater-Zyberk, Maria De La Guardia, and  
14          Rafael Portuondo. They're all opposed to  
15          this project. And we're opposed to the  
16          project because it seeks to demolish the  
17          Garden of Our Lord and move the ancient  
18          tree.

19          The Garden of Our Lord is one of the  
20          first three Biblical gardens in America,  
21          and it has trees and bushes that grow  
22          there today that came as seeds from the  
23          garden of Gethsemane. The garden of  
24          Gethsemane is the garden where Jesus was  
25          the night before the crucifixion.

1 I'm going to devote my presentation  
2 to reading excerpts from letters written  
3 by some of the 10 architects who are  
4 against this project.

5 This letter is from Nereida Lopez  
6 (phonetic). She writes -- an architect  
7 who's written, "I urge you to reject the  
8 plans. The project is out of context with  
9 the neighborhood. Its mass, and scale and  
10 density are out of proportion. The  
11 setbacks fail to follow the city code."

12 I'm going to read from --

13 MR. NAVARRO: Mr. Chairman, for the  
14 record, I need to object. None of this  
15 testimony should be taken as expert  
16 testimony. There's a requirement to  
17 submit an expert notification letter five  
18 days prior to the hearing.

19 MS. BOLTON: These are not experts.

20 MR. NAVARRO: I just -- for the  
21 record, I need to put that on there.

22 MS. BOLTON: These are architects who  
23 are opposed to the project. They're not  
24 my architects. They're not experts on the  
25 project.

1 Daniel Quintana is a professional  
2 architect, and Coral Gables resident, who  
3 lives on Phoenetia Avenue, and still lives  
4 on Phoenetia Avenue. He writes, "My  
5 unique perspective, to my professional  
6 expertise with direct personal experience  
7 of the site's context compels me to submit  
8 this formal objection and urgent request  
9 the city immediately deny the proposed  
10 development. This project represents an  
11 existential threat to irreplaceable  
12 historic and environmental assets and  
13 constitutes a flagrant wholesale violation  
14 of the city's own codes, design principles  
15 and stated preservation goals. The Garden  
16 of Our Lord is a nationally significant  
17 site, and it's not part of a standard  
18 development site. It is a sacred  
19 multilayered landmark. The garden is also  
20 a military memorial and cemetery. It's  
21 designed by a famed architect Robert Fitch  
22 Smith to complement the historic woman's  
23 club. It contains flora with direct  
24 lineage to Gethsemane, the ancient tree, a  
25 living monument, unanimous expert

1 testimony from Viscaya, Fairchild, the  
2 Giffords and Tropical Audubon Society, all  
3 state authoritatively that this ancient  
4 tree will die if it's moved. This  
5 imminent destruction has spurred a  
6 lawsuit." He goes on to write, "This site  
7 was explicitly identified in the Coral  
8 Gables visioning workshop as a critical  
9 priority for city purchase to serve as  
10 needed park space in our most densely  
11 populated area." He goes on to say, "As  
12 an architect, I must emphasize that this  
13 project is technically incompatible with  
14 the legal and planning frameworks  
15 governing our neighborhoods. It's also a  
16 violation of the North Ponce Conservation  
17 District Overlay ordinance, which was  
18 enacted to preserve and enhance the garden  
19 apartment character. This project, its  
20 proposed density, massing and typology  
21 overtly contradict the ordinance. That  
22 area is also under pending historic  
23 designation, and it's being studied to  
24 potentially be designated as the historic  
25 garden apartment district. So in

1 approving this project would preemptively  
2 undermine this preservation effort and  
3 lush canopy character it aims to protect."

4 He also quotes from Section 5-103 of  
5 our code, the section on context and  
6 compatibility, which these pictures are  
7 meant to convey, to demonstrate. "The  
8 code defines context by height, scale,  
9 massing, separation between buildings and  
10 style. Having lived nearby, I can attest  
11 that the project is grotesquely out of  
12 context with the surrounding 1920's  
13 single-family home, historic bed and  
14 breakfast and the low-scale apartment  
15 buildings. Its bulk and design are alien  
16 to this intimate residential area. It  
17 received an inappropriate bonus  
18 allocation. The project received a  
19 Mediterranean bonus under outdated lax  
20 standards. Under the current revised  
21 standards, it would not qualify for the  
22 Med bonus. It also has an approval based  
23 on a loophole violates the code's intent,  
24 inadequate setbacks and infrastructure.  
25 The project ignores code requirements for

1 setbacks and imposes a massive scale on a  
2 residential street lacking the supporting  
3 infrastructure. Fraudulent public  
4 benefit. The PAD requirement. The  
5 offered planned area development green  
6 space is an insufficient interior  
7 courtyard, functioning primarily as a  
8 private school playground. Public access  
9 is relegated to limited hours. This is a  
10 cynical noncompliant attempt to meet a  
11 requirement for meaningful public space."  
12 So he says it's a fraudulent public  
13 benefit.

14 He goes on to state, "The proposed  
15 project is a deeply flawed plan that  
16 disregards sacred history, destroys a  
17 living ecosystem and violates multiple  
18 layers of city code. It is an act of  
19 vandalism disguised as development."

20 He concludes his letter by stating,  
21 "As an architect, who understands both  
22 design and regulation, and as a former  
23 neighbor, who knows the soul of this  
24 street, I tell you this project is wrong  
25 for Coral Gables. Uphold your laws,

1           respect your heritage." That letter was  
2           written by Daniel Quintana, a Coral Gables  
3           architect and former resident of the  
4           street.

5           I'm now going to read a letter from  
6           an architect by the name of Linette  
7           Martinez, who resides on Phoenetia Avenue,  
8           and she has lived on Phoenetia Avenue for  
9           many years, and is intimately aware of  
10          this project and its plans. She says,  
11          "Unfortunately, the proposal before you  
12          disregards the architectural, cultural and  
13          urban value of this historic garden and  
14          does not meet the basic standards of  
15          compatibility required by our city. The  
16          garden was designed with intention and  
17          respect for its surroundings, particularly  
18          the historic Coral Gables Woman's club  
19          immediately adjacent to it. Together they  
20          form a cohesive architectural dialogue,  
21          one that reflects the scale, rhythm and  
22          open characteristic of this residential  
23          neighborhood. From an urban design  
24          standpoint, the garden functions as a  
25          critical bringing relief in a corridor

1 otherwise defined by small-scale historic  
2 homes and garden apartments. The proposed  
3 project breaks that dialogue. Its  
4 architecture's scale, massing and overall  
5 volume are fundamentally incompatible with  
6 the character of Phoenetia Avenue and the  
7 surrounding streets by overwhelming the  
8 woman's club and the nearby historic  
9 homes, the project disrupts the  
10 proportional balance and human scale  
11 fabric that define the North Ponce garden  
12 apartment district. The thoughtful  
13 development should strengthen context, not  
14 contradict it. Any proposal for this site  
15 must honor the established character of  
16 the North Ponce Neighborhood Conservation  
17 District Overlay ordinance and align with  
18 the city's own visioning efforts  
19 identifying this garden and its ancient  
20 tree as assets worthy of preservation.  
21 Replacing a historically design landscape,  
22 an irreplaceable old oak tree, with a  
23 project to scale, massing and  
24 architectural language disregard their  
25 surroundings is inconsistent with both the

1 scale and the letter of the law."

2 And then this letter is from Rafael  
3 Portuondo.

4 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Can you wrap it  
5 up?

6 MS. BOLTON: Sure. Rafael Portuondo  
7 says that you have to take scale and  
8 proportion into account.

9 I also have a letter from Elizabeth  
10 Plater-Zyberk, who says, "It's surprising  
11 that the design of the proposed  
12 development does not take advantage of an  
13 already established landscape."

14 I have a letter from Joanna Lombard  
15 Hector, another prominent architect, who  
16 talks about Robert A. M. Stern's support  
17 for the project, and she was the one that  
18 included Robert A. M. Stern's letter. He  
19 wrote -- Robert A. M. Stern said, "I'm  
20 writing to support the efforts to preserve  
21 the Garden of Our Lord, which regrettably  
22 I remember only once having seen, but I  
23 got to know it better through its site  
24 plans, its elevations, its history and  
25 photographs." And he says from those

1 documents and his encounter with the  
2 garden, he thinks that the garden is an  
3 asset and should be preserved.

4 So I'll conclude today by saying, as  
5 Special Masters, you are obligated to  
6 ensure that our building regulations and  
7 ordinances are upheld, and this project  
8 grotesquely violates our code and our  
9 ordinances. So I'm hoping you have the  
10 courage to deny these plans and uphold our  
11 building code. Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Thank you, Ms.  
13 Bolton. Thank you very much.

14 MS. BOLTON: And, additionally, one  
15 more thing, I have a letter from Don  
16 Slesnick, the former mayor, who's  
17 supporting my efforts. Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Thank you very  
19 much.

20 There will now --

21 MS. BOLTON: And there's 40 letters  
22 from people who live in Phoenetia,  
23 Antilla and its surrounding --

24 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: I want you to  
25 know that all of us have received copies of

1 all the letters received. The City has  
2 provided them.

3 MS. BOLTON: Okay. Good. Good.

4 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And now we will  
5 hear from the City.

6 MR. RIESCO: Good afternoon,  
7 Everyone. My name is Juan Riesco. I'm  
8 the City architect. I'm gonna state some  
9 facts that probably been stated already,  
10 but I want to enter this in the record.

11 The project was introduced to the  
12 Board of Architects for preliminary design  
13 review by Crystal Residential Mix-Used  
14 Development. The applicant was Century  
15 Crystal Group, LLC. The address is 110  
16 Phoenetia Avenue. And the BOAR number is  
17 22080326.

18 The proposed project is a 9-story  
19 residential mixed-use building featuring  
20 ground floor live/work units, a private  
21 school, a central courtyard, a pedestrian  
22 and vehicular Paseo, open space and  
23 upper-story parking structure with  
24 residential units. The design  
25 incorporates traditional architectural

1 elements consistent with Coral Gables  
2 architectural standards, including a  
3 defined base with an arcade, a middle and  
4 a top, articulated facades and an approved  
5 architectural style.

6 The following is the chronological  
7 history of the project as it proceeded  
8 through our system. The project was  
9 originally submitted for BOA preliminary  
10 design review on August 22, 2022, and  
11 subsequently on December 7, 2022, using  
12 physical copies. We were not virtual yet,  
13 and we were dealing with hard copies at  
14 that time.

15 The BOA reviewed the project during  
16 multiple meetings and on the following  
17 dates:

18 The first meeting at the BOA was on  
19 December 15, 2022. The project was  
20 reviewed by a full board and a motion to  
21 defer was provided with the following  
22 comments: Restudy the design elements to  
23 be more Mediterranean bonus compliant.

24 The project was seen again by the  
25 Board on February 9, 2023. The project,

1 again, was reviewed by a full board, and  
2 two motions were discussed. The first  
3 motion was dealing with the approval of  
4 the Mediterranean bonus as it was applied  
5 to the project and the second motion was  
6 provided for the design of the project and  
7 the project was deferred with the  
8 following comments: Rework the southeast  
9 and east elements and design, including  
10 the entry to the school. Comment #2.  
11 Restudy the elevations around the green  
12 areas; comment #3. Restudy the metal arch  
13 elevation, the window muntins and the  
14 lower brackets at the balconies; comment  
15 #4, add headers over the doors, under the  
16 balconies, and comment #5 was to remove  
17 the faux arches.

18 The project was resubmitted again on  
19 April 27, 2023, at the BOA meeting, and  
20 the project was, again, reviewed by a full  
21 board and a motion to defer was provided  
22 with the following conditions: Comment  
23 #1, restudy the north elevation service  
24 functions; Comment #2, restudy the  
25 undermost balcony elements; Comment #3,

1 restudy the integration of the playground  
2 area into the design; comment #4, add  
3 material to upper section of the school  
4 entrance.

5 The project came back again a fourth  
6 time, on June 29, 2023, BOA meeting. The  
7 project was reviewed by a full board  
8 again, and two motions were discussed.  
9 The first motion was to approve the  
10 design, but it was not successful. A  
11 second motion was provided to defer it  
12 with the following comments: Restudy the  
13 north elevation service functions, restudy  
14 the southeast corner mass, including the  
15 arcade; lower the mass to match the west  
16 end of the elevation; comment #3, remove  
17 or deepen the arch transom above the  
18 window on either side of the tower;  
19 comment #4, look at adding roof  
20 (inaudible) to the east elevation wall  
21 fronting the playground and comment #5 was  
22 to look at the blank wall on the north  
23 elevation mass.

24 The project returned one final time  
25 to get its approval on October 19, 2023.

1 The project, again, was reviewed by a full  
2 board, and it was approved with the  
3 following conditions:

4 Number 1 was to remove the arched  
5 trims that are not part of the  
6 fenestration; Number 2 was to relocate the  
7 FPL both doors to the inside of the  
8 driveway and Number 3 was to use the same  
9 finish material on the inside edge of the  
10 central towers.

11 On October 30, 2023, the project was  
12 appealed. The appeal was filed by Bonnie  
13 Bolton based on a failure to provide  
14 full-time green space and the design plan.

15 On January 30, 2024, in accordance  
16 with our standards, a conflict resolution  
17 meeting was held. The meeting was held  
18 with the city staff, the developer, the  
19 appellant and their legal counsel to  
20 discuss potential changes to the approved  
21 design. The appellant requested reducing  
22 the building height, maintaining the  
23 existing Garden of Our Lord wall and  
24 saving the existing 200-year-old tree.  
25 The developer agreed to discuss these

1 issues with his architect and to review  
2 the proposed design.

3 A second conflict resolution meeting  
4 was held on April 26, 2024. This meeting  
5 was held with city staff, the architect,  
6 the developer and his legal counsel, and  
7 with the appellant and their legal counsel  
8 to discuss the potential changes to the  
9 approved design. The appellant requested  
10 removing the arcade for larger green  
11 space, the relocation of the existing  
12 large trees and a more classical building  
13 design. They also referenced the site  
14 plan prepared by another architect.

15 Due to the substantial design  
16 changes, the city architect remanded the  
17 revised design to be reviewed by the Board  
18 of Architects again.

19 The project was resubmitted to the  
20 Board of Architects on August 7, 2025.  
21 The project was reviewed by a full board,  
22 and the applicant, during the meeting,  
23 requested to withdraw the project.

24 The project was scheduled for a  
25 special master hearing on December 8th,

1 and was subsequently rescheduled for  
2 today's meeting.

3 That is the chronological history of  
4 the project and how it went through the  
5 process.

6 This is a summary of the staff  
7 report. The Applicant seeks Board of  
8 Architects preliminary approval for the  
9 design of a residential mixed-use project  
10 located within the proposed MX2 District.  
11 The Board's review is required pursuant to  
12 Article 5 architecture to determine  
13 compliance with the applicable design  
14 review standards, architectural style  
15 requirements and Mediterranean standards.

16 Staff findings. The City staff  
17 reviewed the application for compliance  
18 with Article 5 of the Zoning Code, and  
19 finds the project consistent with the  
20 intent of the requirements of Sections  
21 5-100, design review standards, and  
22 Section 5-200, Mediterranean standards.

23 The final staff recommendation is  
24 that staff finds the proposed residential  
25 mixed-use project complies with the

1 applicable design review standards of  
2 Article 5, it's architecturally compatible  
3 with the surrounding areas and  
4 incorporates high quality design  
5 consistent with the City's architectural  
6 regulations.

7 Staff, therefore, recommended  
8 approval of the proposed design as  
9 submitted, with minor modifications as may  
10 be identified by the Board of Architects.

11 That's all I have, Counsel.

12 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: I have a  
13 question.

14 MR. RIESCO: Yes, sir.

15 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Mr. Riesco, I was  
16 trying to keep track on the project  
17 history. It's not easy to follow the  
18 bouncing ball. If -- I was writing this  
19 down. It looks like this project went  
20 before the Board of Architects on five  
21 different occasions.

22 MS. BOLTON: Six.

23 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: On October 19th,  
24 it was approved with conditions. That was  
25 the fifth time.

1 MR. RIESCO: That was the fifth time  
2 at the Board of Architects.

3 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Before there was  
4 an appeal.

5 MR. RIESCO: Correct.

6 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And what we are  
7 considering here today is the Board of  
8 Architects' decision from October 19,  
9 2023?

10 MR. RIESCO: That is correct, sir.

11 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: That is correct?

12 MR. RIESCO: Yes.

13 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And as you stand  
14 here today, there was a full board?

15 MR. RIESCO: There was always a full  
16 board on every one of the five meetings.

17 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: They deliberated  
18 on this from December 15, 2022, when it  
19 was heard the first time, to October 19,  
20 2023, almost a full year had gone by.  
21 Four times it was deferred with actions  
22 and modifications.

23 I'm just trying to understand.

24 MR. RIESCO: Yes.

25 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: That the

1 applicant agreed to and made those  
2 modifications.

3 MR. RIESCO: Yes, sir, they responded  
4 to all the comments.

5 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: They responded.  
6 And the last time, there was an approval  
7 with a number of conditions that I'm going  
8 to assume they're minor conditions, and  
9 are administratively, that you, yourself,  
10 as City architect, would approve with the  
11 applicant?

12 MR. RIESCO: That is correct.

13 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Is that correct?

14 MR. RIESCO: Yes, sir.

15 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Will the project  
16 require -- and I realize this is not -- I  
17 just want to understand the following  
18 process. This project is going to require  
19 any kind of variance from the planning,  
20 board of adjustment or any zoning changes  
21 of any sort related that when the  
22 approvals were made, it was subject to  
23 these other things happening later?

24 MR. RIESCO: There are --

25 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: I just want to

1 understand.

2 MR. RIESCO: There are six -- there  
3 are six zoning requests from the  
4 applicant, some modifications to the  
5 existing code. They're part of their  
6 request.

7 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And these will be  
8 heard by the city?

9 MR. RIESCO: And these are decisions  
10 done by the commission, not by the Board  
11 of Architects. Again, I want to be real  
12 clear that the Board of Architects is  
13 looking at aesthetics, architecture,  
14 style, and with the supposition that these  
15 things are in line.

16 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Are in line, and  
17 at some point they might be --

18 MR. RIESCO: But they will not be  
19 approved by us. We have nothing to do  
20 with any of that. It will be approved by  
21 the commission only.

22 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Correct.

23 And when the commission approves  
24 those modifications, will the project, as  
25 approved on the 19th, be consistent with

1 all of those modifications, with respect  
2 to any setbacks, respect to any of the  
3 issues that are commented.

4 MR. RIESCO: That depends on the  
5 commission meeting, and what the  
6 requirements are based on that meeting and  
7 what conditions they impose on the  
8 applicant. If there are changes and  
9 conditions that the commission puts on the  
10 project, those will be discussed and  
11 reviewed, I think, on the -- moving  
12 forward on the project.

13 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Did any Members  
14 of the Board of Architects submit, like, a  
15 minority opinion, because they were really  
16 upset? You know, anything of that sort  
17 happen?

18 MR. RIESCO: No, sir, not to my  
19 knowledge.

20 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Okay. I've got  
21 my history perspective.

22 MR. CEBALLOS: If you have nothing  
23 else, you can turn it over to the property  
24 owner.

25 MR. RIESCO: The appellant.

1 MR. CEBALLOS: Property owner.

2 MR. RIESCO: I'm sorry, the  
3 applicant.

4 MR. NAVARRO: Good afternoon, Mr.  
5 Chair, Special Masters. My name is Jorge  
6 Navarro, with offices at 333 Southeast 2nd  
7 Avenue. I'm here today on behalf of  
8 Crystal Academy and Fifield, to defend the  
9 approval of the project by the Board of  
10 Architects.

11 As our lead designer will show you,  
12 this project incorporates ground work/live  
13 units, upper level residences, but, most  
14 importantly, what it does is, it  
15 constructs a brand new 5,500 square foot  
16 educational facility for Crystal Academy.  
17 This is being built at the owner's expense  
18 and will be leased back to the school rent  
19 free. I think you heard from Marie  
20 Palacio and several parents earlier, the  
21 school today operates at an outdated  
22 facility that really doesn't let them meet  
23 the needs of the children. This project  
24 is going to be a permanent home for them  
25 and it's going to allow this vital

1 community resource to ensure that the  
2 children there can thrive, but also that  
3 they can continue to receive the care,  
4 education and support that they need.

5 I know you've heard from some of our  
6 supporters today, but I have 497 petitions  
7 in support of this project, which were  
8 obtained within eight blocks of this  
9 project, which shows that there is  
10 community support, not only for the  
11 school, but for this project and what it  
12 achieves.

13 Before we begin, it's important to  
14 clearly define what is and what is not  
15 before you today. There are many items  
16 that have been presented today that are  
17 not part of the architectural review  
18 criteria, and, respectfully, fall outside  
19 the scope of this appeal, as they're  
20 governed by a completely separate  
21 regulatory process and are under the  
22 jurisdiction of other boards and  
23 jurisdictions that are not the Board of  
24 Architects.

25 One of these inconsistencies that I

1 want to clarify for the record is the  
2 characterization of this area as a  
3 low-rise area is factually inaccurate.  
4 The North Ponce overlay is a broad  
5 overlay. It applies to the majority of  
6 North Ponce. And while it was intended to  
7 help incentivize existing garden-style  
8 developments to redevelop and expand, it  
9 does not impose a blanket low-rise mandate  
10 nor does it preclude high-rise  
11 development. It never extinguished the  
12 initial and always existing MF2  
13 development rights.

14 So this overlay allows today a height  
15 of 97 feet in height for multifamily  
16 buildings, and as Albert Cordoves will  
17 show you, our building is at 93 feet, it  
18 transitions to 83, so it's right within  
19 the height that's allowed by the existing  
20 zoning.

21 You'll also see that when you look at  
22 the actual context of this area, it's not  
23 just the 10 garden style apartments that  
24 were put on the screen by the appellant.  
25 They're actually already existing and many

1 approved high-rise multifamily buildings  
2 right in this immediate area all  
3 surrounding our property. And the BOA  
4 carefully considered this context  
5 architecturally when it reviewed and  
6 approved our project.

7 One thing I want to highlight is that  
8 tree preservation and relocation are also  
9 not listed as one of the criteria in your  
10 architectural review standards. These are  
11 governed by a separate and unrelated set  
12 of city and state permitting requirements,  
13 and they're not relevant to these  
14 proceedings. That said, our project does  
15 include a robust tree preservation plan.  
16 It preserves the existing large mahogany  
17 that's on the northwest corner of our  
18 property and we have committed to relocate  
19 the onsite mature oak tree. Our certified  
20 arborist, Mr. Michael McCoy, is here. He  
21 has over 25 years of experience in tree  
22 risk assessments, impact evaluations and  
23 tree relocation planning. He's been  
24 certified as an expert in the field based  
25 on the record that we've provided, and he

1 has actually gone out to the site,  
2 inspected this tree and has confirmed that  
3 it's an candidate for relocation. And  
4 while it's a separate process that we're  
5 going through, obviously with a different  
6 department, we wanted to clarify that for  
7 the record.

8 I think one issue that's very  
9 important to clarify before we get into  
10 the architecture is to address the issue  
11 of the private garden, which has already  
12 gone through a long and extensive review  
13 process. Your historic preservation  
14 officer, Historic Preservation Board and  
15 City Commission have all reviewed this  
16 property and the garden and determined  
17 that it is not a historical resource. In  
18 fact, the City's own landscape department  
19 went out and confirmed that there are no  
20 Biblical trees on this property. It's  
21 actually a private garden and it's been  
22 abandoned for many years. Those  
23 determinations were appealed by Ms. Bolton  
24 to court and the court upheld the findings  
25 of the historic preservation officer,

1 Historic Preservation Board and your City  
2 Commission. So four separate authorities  
3 have already reviewed the historic  
4 eligibility of this property and  
5 determined that it is not historic. This  
6 architectural review process cannot be  
7 used as a means to try to relitigate that  
8 historic preservation issue.

9 So having clarified what is not  
10 before you today, let's focus on what is.  
11 Article 5 of your code provides very  
12 specific criteria for what is to be  
13 reviewed for architectural design  
14 approval. These architectural standards  
15 cover design like materials, color,  
16 windows, fenestration, roofing elements.

17 Your BOA, which is comprised of  
18 highly experienced professionals, who know  
19 the City very well and who apply these  
20 regulations daily, reviewed this project  
21 on five separate occasions, provided their  
22 input, we took months responding to those  
23 comments on all the elevations and facades  
24 and, ultimately, approved the project,  
25 finding it fully complied with the

1 criteria in your code.

2 With that, I'd like to introduce our  
3 lead designer, Albert Cordoves, who will  
4 walk you through the project and show you  
5 how we meet this criteria.

6 MR. CORDOVES: Thank you, Jorge.

7 Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Members  
8 of the Board, Albert Cordoves with Corwil  
9 Architects, at 4210 Laguna Street, Coral  
10 Gables, Florida.

11 We're very happy to be here today,  
12 because this has been truly an extensive  
13 effort, a collaborative effort, between  
14 us, city staff, and, yes the Board of  
15 Architects, which we came five times, and  
16 was a truly collaborative effort that we  
17 feel culminated to an incredible project  
18 for the city and for the community. We  
19 welcome it.

20 In terms of our design, we are  
21 proposing -- just briefly, let me go to  
22 the location of the site. We're bounded  
23 on the north by Phoenetia, on the west by  
24 East Ponce, on the south by Antilla and  
25 Galiano to the east.

1           And has been already referred to,  
2           this particular area within the site, land  
3           use and zoning maps, if you go there,  
4           Mike, for example, very quickly, as you  
5           can see, it's bounded completely in red to  
6           the north, to the west and to the south by  
7           a zoning district permitting 190 feet with  
8           Med bonuses obtained.

9           The brown area directly to the west  
10          is also a zoning district permitting  
11          97 feet with Med bonuses as well.

12          Our project is below that. In its  
13          highest condition, it's only 93 feet.

14          So when we looked at the onset of  
15          this project really forward, establishing  
16          a concept, we found ourselves with an  
17          incredible opportunity, incredible  
18          opportunity to be an excellent neighbor to  
19          design truly something that had a higher  
20          degree, another level of pedestrian realm.  
21          And in doing that, we started by  
22          essentially providing our complete  
23          perimeter, almost our complete perimeter,  
24          with active use spaces, as you can see on  
25          this site plan.

1           We have the 16 work/live units, with  
2           two stories in height. We have the 5,000  
3           plus square feet school, which is dear to  
4           this project. And we anchored the  
5           northeast corner of the site with a  
6           beautiful open space totaling almost 4,000  
7           square feet.

8           It wasn't enough, so we took back and  
9           we said let's further articulate the realm  
10          on the outside. And you see that the  
11          colonnade, the cortical features are  
12          broken up, only to extend that particular  
13          realm area a little bit further and expand  
14          the required setback into the proposed  
15          building footprint. We did that.

16          And, in addition to that, we also  
17          created the same quality of openness on  
18          the interior. We have a almost 6,000  
19          square feet corridor, which is linked by  
20          north/south pedestrian corridor, linked to  
21          the courtyard for, again, maximizing the  
22          pedestrian activity, taking that realm to  
23          yet another level.

24          Again, all and all, culminating with  
25          the required, under the proposed Zoning

1 Code, to be attained is 20%. We are  
2 proposing 32% open space on this project.

3 In addition to that, just to further  
4 enhance that ground floor realm, we have a  
5 connecting thru-street vehicular access,  
6 which the purpose of that was to minimize  
7 the curb cuts on the street, as required  
8 by the code and as enhanced by the code.  
9 So in doing this, we have access to our  
10 parking garage from the interior. We have  
11 actually access to drop-off to the school  
12 without stacking area and we have  
13 internalized loading to the service areas  
14 from this side as well.

15 In the upper floors, as you can see  
16 real quickly, go to the upper floors, if  
17 we can, Mike, we have the balance of the  
18 200 units. The floors are pretty typical  
19 with the exception of all the articulation  
20 that happens in the elevations in order to  
21 establish the standards. And, as you can  
22 see, if we go back to the parking garage  
23 for just a second, we were careful to make  
24 sure that the parking garage was entirely  
25 fully liner parking areas from the street

1 frontages. Very important to us.

2 At the end, we culminated at the very  
3 last floor with essentially half a volume.  
4 That's why essentially it consisted from  
5 an 8-story volume to a 9-story volume,  
6 although it's all 9 stories. This is  
7 where we have our contact area open to the  
8 sky and we have our amenity package on  
9 that particular floor. It really  
10 transitions very well in terms of massing  
11 element for the entire project.

12 In terms of the elevations  
13 themselves, obviously, there is great work  
14 and collaborative effort with Board of  
15 Architects, city staff, and truly adhere  
16 to all the design standards, Mediterranean  
17 standards, that we both formulated and  
18 accepted. You know, we have essentially  
19 the use of accentuating a strong  
20 continuous expression line, the corticals,  
21 the brackets on the balconies, the use of  
22 keystone veneer throughout the ground  
23 floor areas, the pre-cast architectural  
24 elements throughout the building  
25 vertically and horizontally and obviously

1 culminating on the top with the Spanish  
2 tile roof.

3 All and all, I can tell you that this  
4 is one of the those dear projects to us.  
5 It houses a beautiful school. And we have  
6 worked extensively in this project, and I  
7 think it truly, truly becomes an amazing  
8 project for the city, and amazing facility  
9 for the residents to be and welcome your  
10 approval to continue forward with this  
11 amazing project and development.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: I have a  
14 question, Mr. Cordoves. Did you take  
15 advantage of the Mediterranean bonus  
16 provisions in your design?

17 MR. CORDOVES: Yes, we did.

18 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Was that a Level  
19 1 or Level 2?

20 MR. NAVARRO: We obtained Level 2  
21 Board of Architects approval, which is a  
22 heightened standard.

23 Mr. Chair, I'd just like to briefly  
24 qualify Mr. Bob Chisholm as an expert  
25 witness in architecture. Mr. Chisholm

1 holds a bachelor's degree in architecture  
2 from the University of Florida, a master's  
3 degree from the University of Miami, and  
4 has more than 45 years of experience  
5 working directly in projects similar to  
6 this and we need to qualify to opine on  
7 this project.

8 MR. CHISHOLM: Thank you, Jorge.

9 Mr. Chairman, Members of the  
10 Committee, staff. My name is Robert  
11 Chisholm. My office is at 782 Northwest  
12 42nd Avenue and my -- I live at 737  
13 Jeronimo Drive, in Coral Gables. I've  
14 been living in the City of Coral Gables  
15 since 1975. I've been involved, in terms  
16 of at this level and scale, we did the  
17 original restoration of the Biltmore  
18 Hotel. We're part of that team in 1986.  
19 And I was brought in privately to evaluate  
20 Merrick Village when it was proposed. And  
21 we've done several projects in the Gables  
22 in addition to that, Gables waterway. We  
23 just finished up a house on the water near  
24 Doctor's Hospital.

25 Even though I'm here as an expert

1 witness, I don't -- I don't usually market  
2 that sector or discipline. I only do it  
3 upon request, and I just don't provide my  
4 opinion or my support that easily. Only  
5 on things that I feel are truly in need of  
6 such involvement. So I take these public  
7 hearings very, very seriously, or legal  
8 hearings, for that matter.

9 I was brought in very recently, so I  
10 had to quickly move and see what the  
11 project was all about, et cetera.

12 And, first of all, let me say that I  
13 go before the BOA here and in other cities  
14 and jurisdictions all over South Florida,  
15 as north as Orlando and south of Key West.  
16 And I want to applaud the cooperation and  
17 the teamwork between the architect Corwil,  
18 and the BOA and the city staff to achieve  
19 this. When I first heard that they had  
20 been five times at the BOA, I said, "Oh my  
21 God," but then I started looking, after I  
22 had the time to look carefully at all the  
23 documentation for the BOA and the Med  
24 bonus, the process, I saw the quality and  
25 the product that was brought about by that

1 process, which it's truly paid off. By  
2 the way, my master degree is in planning  
3 and urban design. I was lead principal  
4 planner for neighborhood planning with the  
5 County manager's office in the beginning  
6 of my career. I practice urban design as  
7 we speak.

8 I just want to make a statement that  
9 I think the scale, everything here has  
10 been thoroughly documented. Everything is  
11 as permissible and allowable procedures  
12 and process, which the City of Coral  
13 Gables has dutifully enforced. And I  
14 think that I can tell the neighbors and  
15 the community that they have nothing to  
16 fear, because I think this project truly  
17 is very well-planned.

18 And if it's executed in the way it's  
19 shown, as I see it, it should be very,  
20 very successful. And I'll tell you why.  
21 Because whenever anybody opines, they need  
22 to know why and they need to know the  
23 subject matter.

24 So that being said, it has all the  
25 elements that are generally prescribed in

1 terms of Spanish Mediterranean components  
2 and as dictated by the City of Coral  
3 Gables. Now, one thing is the elements,  
4 how they're prescribed, but the other  
5 thing is how do you use those elements  
6 appropriately. And the more I looked at  
7 this project, and the empirical amount of  
8 documentation that Corwil Architects has  
9 provided for general use and public  
10 documents, it's -- I am very, very, very  
11 pleased to tell you that I think the  
12 scale, the rhythms, the use of vertical  
13 and horizontal elements, the use of  
14 ornamentation and materials, everything,  
15 it's conducive for what the City of Coral  
16 Gables stands for and its residents.

17 I think it's the use of colors and  
18 materials, which is a lot of people is  
19 what they look at, is very elegant. A lot  
20 of projects -- and I've been doing -- I've  
21 been an architect since 1973, and the  
22 first thing that your client usually asks  
23 you is what color are you going to paint  
24 it? Which is their standard.

25 But I feel that the execution of this

1 project has been very professional, very  
2 responsible. The execution of this  
3 mixed-use project, which has live/work, it  
4 has a school, it has housing and it does  
5 have all the requirements that the City of  
6 Coral Gables needs. And it's a classic  
7 development in execution of what an  
8 architectural practice as defined  
9 academically and professionally worldwide.

10 And I've seen -- you know, we were  
11 part of the team. I was head of the Miami  
12 team, Boston/Miami team that did the Art  
13 Deco historic preservation plan, so I put  
14 22 buildings in the national registry. We  
15 are doing, like, three circa projects in  
16 my office right now. So I have defended  
17 historic buildings and I have opposed  
18 buildings that were not historic that were  
19 pursued by other parties that were taking  
20 advantage of the situation.

21 So thank you very much for your  
22 attention. I appreciate it.

23 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Mr. Chisholm,  
24 question. You can leave that slide or one  
25 of the aerial ones, that has an aerial.

1           When the public was speaking, if I were to  
2           have gone home and not know anything about  
3           the area, which I do, because I used to  
4           live at 103 Mendoza when we first moved  
5           into the Gables almost 60 years ago, that  
6           slide, I would have seen -- I would have  
7           been thinking this project is out of  
8           scale, but when you really know where the  
9           project is, and you realize you're  
10          basically, you know, across the street  
11          from possibly walking distance to where  
12          Mitch used work, Douglas entrance, and you  
13          look at that slide, can you point to the  
14          -- can you point to the property.

15                 MR. CHISHOLM: (Indicating).

16                 Question?

17                 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: So the question  
18                 is, in your opinion, is that a --

19                 MR. CHISHOLM: To scale?

20                 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Is that a garden  
21                 apartment scale within the north, south,  
22                 east and west of the property, in your  
23                 opinion?

24                 MR. CHISHOLM: It's not a garden  
25                 apartment scale project, it's not, but

1 when you see the adjacent buildings, which  
2 are 12 and 15-stories high, and this one  
3 is 9 and 8, and you see what the proposed  
4 approved projects are in the neighborhood,  
5 because you also have to look at what is  
6 already in the pipeline, you can see that  
7 that area is in transition. And the key  
8 here is not --

9 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: The overlay of  
10 the North Ponce district.

11 MR. CHISHOLM: That area over the  
12 project site.

13 CHAIRMAN BERMELO: Okay.

14 MR. CHISHOLM: So we should not --  
15 fear is lack of the unknown, and I  
16 understand exactly how residents can feel,  
17 because they don't understand the process  
18 or they don't understand the situation, so  
19 I -- you know, with all sincerity, change  
20 is part of life. The key here is how the  
21 community leadership and the people with  
22 good intentions try to do the best  
23 possible solution in spite of the needs of  
24 the community.

25 And I believe strongly in tradition

1 and history. Don't get me wrong. I am a  
2 strong believer of that. And I think that  
3 with the ability to -- and the knowledge  
4 that we have in today's world, in today's  
5 society, great things are capable. And I  
6 think the City of Coral Gables is poised  
7 to go to the next phase in the future, and  
8 I think it's going to be great, because I  
9 think the people that care for the city,  
10 including the residents, are a very strong  
11 part of this process.

12 And what we need to do is look at  
13 things in reality. I always say to my  
14 staff, my favorite color is clear. So  
15 I -- you know, in light of the things, I  
16 think the building, in and of itself, the  
17 execution in relationship to the ground  
18 plain, and the pedestrian and the scale as  
19 it relates to that, the articulation of  
20 the massing, the articulation of the  
21 building as it goes, the comments that  
22 were made by the BOA, Corwil paid  
23 attention and delivered.

24 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you, Mr.  
25 Chisholm.

1           I have a couple more questions, and  
2           I'm done. Mr. Cordoves, can you come back  
3           up a second?

4           The City architect mentioned that, in  
5           the collaborative effort working with you  
6           over a period of five BOA reviews, you  
7           have been able to establish a base, a stem  
8           and a crown for the building. Do you mind  
9           taking us quickly through that and  
10          mentioning what are the materials and the  
11          color theme pallets that you utilized.  
12          Working with the BOA, I would assume that  
13          what we're looking at is not the way it  
14          started. This is a process that was a  
15          year and a half in the making, and that a  
16          lot of what we're seeing has the hand of  
17          actually the City architect, who I'm sure  
18          if everybody gets to their comments on the  
19          moldings, the color of the glazing.

20          Can you just describe the base, the  
21          materials? I can see the colors, but is  
22          that architectural precast or is it only  
23          in the moldings? And the mullions.  
24          Describe for a second the detail,  
25          aesthetic detail, that has been put into

1           this project.

2           MR. CORDOVES: Mr. Chair, a good  
3 question. Yes, it was a process with the  
4 five BOAs.

5           Starts with the podium level itself.  
6 The podium level itself is fully keystone  
7 veneer complete. The precast corners it  
8 permits that express the line above the  
9 second floor throughout the entire  
10 building. We have several --

11          CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Does that also  
12 mark the area where you have the -- you  
13 said you have town homes?

14          MR. CORDOVES: Yes. This is where  
15 the town homes will be two-level,  
16 work/live units are.

17          CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Work/live. And  
18 those units have direct access from the  
19 outside. So the street is activated.  
20 It's kind of, like, the eyes on the street  
21 kind of thing?

22          MR. CORDOVES: That's exactly it. By  
23 code, we have to activate those units, and  
24 provide not only accessibility to the  
25 apartments from the exterior --

1                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Do I also  
2 understand that the service way, where the  
3 trash is picked up, where the deliveries  
4 are made, it's not going to impact the  
5 neighborhood? All that is within the  
6 property by way of the Paseo?

7                   MR. CORDOVES: Correct. That is  
8 correct, Mr. Chair.

9                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And the parking,  
10 you never see the parking from the  
11 outside?

12                  MR. CORDOVES: You never see the  
13 parking from the outside. See, it's fully  
14 lined with active use.

15                  And as we go up the building, we also  
16 incorporated the precast elements, the  
17 keystone elements throughout the vertical  
18 and the horizontal elements of the  
19 project, the cornices, the keystones, the  
20 (inaudible), incorporated the roof tiles  
21 that the Board was adamant about as well.  
22 The configuration --

23                  CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Those small  
24 things are around the upper areas, are  
25 those precast, or is that stucco?

1           MR. CORDOVES: These are precast.  
2 All of them are precast. The ones that  
3 are slightly deeper tone are precast  
4 elements throughout the entire building,  
5 as you can see.

6           CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: I could also see  
7 the play of roofs? It doesn't look like  
8 you have one massive roof. It looks like  
9 you purposely broke the roofs to create a  
10 play --

11           MR. CORDOVES: This shows exactly  
12 what you were referring to, Mr. Chair.  
13 There's different elements on the roof.  
14 We provide an element here. We broke it  
15 up in different heights as well. One of  
16 the Board elements -- one of the Board  
17 comments was to extend the roof elements  
18 throughout the break in height, have a  
19 hierarchy, and that's why you can see some  
20 hierarchy on this particular element. You  
21 can obviously see the hierarchy and the  
22 tower effect on the top of the  
23 (inaudible).

24           CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: When you discuss  
25 the height of the building, what are you

1 measuring it to?

2 MR. CORDOVES: Measuring, as the code  
3 requires, to the height of the roof, of  
4 the main roof of the building. These  
5 elements are architecturally elements that  
6 can extend higher.

7 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: So you're  
8 measuring it to the parapet or to the  
9 actual roof?

10 MR. CORDOVES: To the actual roof.  
11 The parapet was also provided in terms of  
12 height to conceal any mechanical equipment  
13 behind it, so that it's not seen anywhere  
14 on the streets.

15 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: Just one more  
16 quick question. On the corner there, is  
17 that your property line, the edge of that  
18 round piece, is that a plaza within the  
19 site?

20 MR. CORDOVES: The property line is  
21 over here. We provided a small plaza,  
22 before we get to that corner element that  
23 sits over here.

24 Mr. Alvarez.

25 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: I'm not sure

1 I understood clearly the situation with  
2 the parking. Could you clarify that for  
3 me?

4 MR. CORDOVES: Sure. Can we go to  
5 the slide again, please, ground level.  
6 Thank you.

7 So what we have here is, we have a  
8 cross-vehicular access and also a Paseo  
9 access. This vehicular access provides  
10 access to the parking west, circulation of  
11 the parking of all this. When we get to  
12 the parking levels -- can you show this?

13 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: You have  
14 off-street parking you said?

15 MR. CORDOVES: No, no off-street  
16 parking. All internalized structural  
17 parking in the project.

18 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: How many  
19 stories are dedicated to parking?

20 MR. CORDOVES: Seven, 7 stories are  
21 dedicated to parking. This is the parking  
22 layout, so, essentially, as you can see,  
23 it's a liner from the street areas.

24 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: How do  
25 they --

1 MR. CORDOVES: They actually have two  
2 floors directly access to the parking, two  
3 vertical floors. This is the main floor,  
4 this is the secondary floor and this one  
5 has access to ground levels, service areas  
6 and loading areas as well.

7 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Somewhere  
8 there appears to be a garden area in the  
9 ground floor. Is it in the ground floor  
10 or is it -- I mean, is it on the safe side  
11 of the gray area that you have?

12 MR. CORDOVES: It's here.

13 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: No, the  
14 green area.

15 MR. CORDOVES: Can we go to the  
16 architectural --

17 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Does it show  
18 there? It's open to the sky.

19 MR. CORDOVES: Open to the sky. It's  
20 just under 6,000 square feet, and this one  
21 is under 4,000 square feet, entering the  
22 corner open to the sky as well.

23 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: I have a couple  
24 of questions on that. How does it  
25 compare -- the summation of those two

1 green areas, how does it compare with the  
2 required open space?

3 MR. CORDOVES: So the required open  
4 space on the proposed code is 20%, and  
5 between the open areas that we have in the  
6 project, we're proposing 32%, 12 more than  
7 required.

8 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: There you're  
9 counting the area of the right-of-way and  
10 along the sidewalks?

11 MR. CORDOVES: Yeah. We're counting  
12 the open space areas. We also count the  
13 open space underneath here, starting at  
14 the beginning, 25% of it as allowed by  
15 code, but, overall, essentially, 15%  
16 versus 20.

17 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Is the open space  
18 on the northeast corner, is that the play  
19 area for the Crystal Academy?

20 MR. CORDOVES: It is, but it was also  
21 my understanding is a resolution we have  
22 it also for the neighbors' use at the  
23 times that the Crystal Academy is not  
24 being used.

25 MR. NAVARRO: Yes. One of our

1 proffers was that we would have it open  
2 when not in use by Crystal Academy, but  
3 that open space is intended to be used for  
4 the students for the school. It's  
5 critical that they have --

6 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: During the  
7 weekends?

8 MR. NAVARRO: Or after school.

9 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: After school.  
10 Now, when you do like -- I'm assuming  
11 you did, when you went before the BOA, did  
12 you do, like, a shadow study to show how  
13 much light you get into that courtyard,  
14 green area, what will actually grow there?

15 MR. CORDOVES: We did. We did a  
16 shadow study. Fortunately, we have a  
17 little bit between 11 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.  
18 based on the north/south directions here.  
19 Once it gets to the wintertime, we don't  
20 have much, but we do have some actually.

21 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And you submitted  
22 a landscape plan showing the trees both on  
23 street scape and inside the property.

24 MR. CORDOVES: If we can go there,  
25 Mike, the landscape.

1                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: I'm asking only,  
2                   because I haven't seen it, but I know  
3                   there was a comment about a 100-year tree,  
4                   or a 200-year tree, and obviously, you  
5                   know --

6                   MR. NAVARRO: To that point, I think  
7                   that's a great point. We've been working  
8                   with Michael McCoy and David Brian. David  
9                   Brian has relocated the majority of all  
10                  the large trees in South Florida, with a  
11                  lot of experience. We've worked with him.  
12                  Albert has located a site on our property  
13                  where we are going to relocate that large  
14                  oak tree and make it a centerpiece of the  
15                  project.

16                  CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: So that's going  
17                  to go there?

18                  MR. NAVARRO: It's actually going to  
19                  go right there.

20                  CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And you believe  
21                  that that will survive, in your opinion?

22                  MR. McCOY: Yes, sir. For the  
23                  record, my name is Mike McCoy. I'm the  
24                  project arborist for this project. I'm a  
25                  board certified master arborist. I've had

1           experience writing specifications and  
2           participating in oversight with relocation  
3           of hundreds of trees, including many trees  
4           this size, both in Coral Gables and the  
5           surrounding area, just so it's not just a  
6           statement, but it does include sites such  
7           as Magic City, and Northeast 3rd Avenue,  
8           University of Miami, several dozen trees  
9           there, relocation of large specimen trees  
10          to Regatta Park, Miami, several  
11          residential ones, such as 769 Northeast  
12          72nd Terrace, 97 Northeast 53rd, 4241  
13          Aurora, in Coral Gables, and Oaks Enclave  
14          in Miami Gardens.

15                 I know we heard some statements  
16                 about, you know, arborists in saying, you  
17                 know, age of the trees and all that.  
18                 Unfortunately, they're not here today, but  
19                 I actually did a special study for this  
20                 project to determine, you know, age of the  
21                 tree and suitability for relocation. It's  
22                 very clear, if you have access to the  
23                 documents today, but the tree is  
24                 definitely less than a 100 years old.  
25                 It's probably around 95 years old. You

1 can see that very clearly, the historic  
2 area photos of the site and the trees  
3 don't hit a major growth spurt after they  
4 hit a 100, and so you can see the  
5 development of the growth of the tree.  
6 The tree is in healthy and good condition.  
7 It will not be significantly pruned back.  
8 As a matter of fact, relocating it to  
9 where it will be is actually -- just  
10 again, I'm not an advocate for the  
11 project. I'm just here as a technical  
12 expert on the tree, so if it goes forward  
13 or not, my focus is on the tree. And I  
14 would much rather see, with any type of  
15 scale development, the tree moved to a  
16 prominent location, such as this, where  
17 the canopy can remain intact, even if you  
18 were to say break this up in a  
19 single-family home development, which I  
20 work with a lot, you're going to see much  
21 more impact to the tree from the  
22 surrounding, you know, land use. And so  
23 this, you know, I've had experience with  
24 many trees just like this. I would expect  
25 a very high percentage of survival rate of

1 tree. The tree is in good condition.

2 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: So you feel good  
3 about it? I'm sure you coordinated with  
4 the City on this?

5 MR. McCOY: I have. I did a specific  
6 relocation analysis, which was submitted  
7 to there. I told her what were the  
8 factors in consideration, the size of the  
9 root ball, the methodology. I submitted a  
10 very detailed relocation methodology,  
11 where it would go, the conditions, how it  
12 would be treated, even an irrigation plan,  
13 a relocation plan, the size of the crane  
14 that would be used to transport it, so  
15 it's a very detailed analysis.

16 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: How much  
17 area is the total green in the center of  
18 the building and green on the corner?  
19 Let's say you would give me X number of  
20 square footage area, and how does that  
21 compare to the Garden of the Lord physical  
22 area existing?

23 MR. CORDOVES: So between this  
24 courtyard and the open space, we have  
25 approximately 10,000 square feet, 10,000

1 square feet, approximately, between those  
2 two.

3 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: How much do  
4 we have in the garden of the Lord?

5 MR. CORDOVES: So I am not privy to  
6 that specific area, but it's probably a  
7 specific area where they call the garden  
8 of the Lord, that little courtyard.

9 MR. NAVARRO: And this was discussed  
10 at length during the historic preservation  
11 process, but the area that encompasses,  
12 where you would try to consider the Garden  
13 of Our Lord, would be the landscaped  
14 areas, and there is a statue of Christ  
15 that is in there that's very beautiful,  
16 which we've committed to relocate to a  
17 prominent religious institution, church in  
18 Coral Gables. That area is much smaller  
19 than this.

20 Now, this -- the prior church and the  
21 school does have a large -- there's green  
22 area. Obviously, it's never been  
23 developed. It was a church and a house  
24 that turned into a school, but in terms of  
25 the area where the actual -- there is

1           vegetation and the statue, this would be  
2           much bigger.

3                   SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ:    So my  
4           question is very specific.  The garden of  
5           the Lord has been mentioned all along as a  
6           sacred element in the decisionmaking  
7           process, and very influential in all  
8           decisions that were made through this five  
9           years of process.  It looks to me that the  
10          garden of the Lord is an inspiration, a  
11          magnificent space, but it doesn't seem to  
12          me that is very usable.  I don't think  
13          that its design --

14                   MR. NAVARRO:  It's actually private.

15                   SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ:  -- could be  
16          used as a place where you can create a  
17          park, a useful park out of it.

18                   So the next question is, the new  
19          gardens that you're creating, are they  
20          going to become equivalent of public  
21          spaces for the neighborhood or is it in  
22          some manner seen as limited for the  
23          tenants?  When do you return to the, you  
24          know, circumstance of area by creating  
25          these two spaces.  And then you should

1           have this space allocated for the corners  
2           gigantic tree intended position, but, you  
3           know, just clear the air. If we're going  
4           to hold the sacred of the Lord as a jewel,  
5           translate to the rest of the people that  
6           are not in the neighborhood what does it  
7           mean to grant it so magnificent importance  
8           or use it is as a decisionmaking element.

9                        That's why I asked, what are we  
10           getting out of the new green area and how  
11           favorably can that be used or converted  
12           that the neighborhood can bring in  
13           children, either in bicycles, or elements  
14           of toys or whatever?

15                      MR. NAVARRO: So that's a great  
16           point. So one thing that's important to  
17           note is that's what's labeled the Garden  
18           of Our Lord is actually a private green  
19           space. That's all it is, a private --  
20           like if I -- it's like your front yard at  
21           your house. That's what the Garden of Our  
22           Lord is. It's a fully enclosed -- it has  
23           a fence all around it a wall.

24                      So what we've done -- it's not really  
25           usable space today. The internal

1 courtyard, one of the things that we  
2 worked on, is through the Paseo that goes  
3 through the building, that does have  
4 public access to get into. It will have  
5 benches and seating and things that people  
6 can actually use, which is not there  
7 today. And then we have the park that we  
8 have discussed opening up during  
9 non-school hours for the public to use.  
10 There is not a playground there right now.

11 So we are were providing more than  
12 what's there today in terms of use today,  
13 because today no one is allowed on the  
14 property. It's abandoned. I've been  
15 there. It's not an area that you want to  
16 play around.

17 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: We want to  
18 make a suggestion to the developer team,  
19 if they can be handled in such a way that  
20 the neighborhood is receiving the  
21 accessibility consensus of that. So if I  
22 were there, I love to be with my grand  
23 kids that can roll around and play, I hate  
24 to have some neighbor say, "It's noisy; I  
25 don't want kids in here." So, I mean, it

1 will be -- I think it's a positive. A  
2 really green area could be the prettiest  
3 thing in the world. You see golf courses  
4 everywhere, because they're beautiful, but  
5 you don't play on them, they're worthless  
6 for the effort that they're intended to  
7 create. Its compensation I think should  
8 be viewed here.

9 It's beyond us. It's about an issue  
10 for the developer to get back to this  
11 group of people that live in this  
12 neighborhood that they will be accepted as  
13 visitors, I would say.

14 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Mr. Navarro, how  
15 many students in Crystal Academy?

16 MR. NAVARRO: How many students,  
17 Marie?

18 MS. PALACIO: That we have right now?

19 MR. NAVARRO: Yes.

20 MS. PALACIO: Around 7,000.

21 How many students? 40 students.

22 MR. NAVARRO: She said 7,000.

23 MS. PALACIO: No, no, no, no.

24 MR. NAVARRO: It's 40 students, 40.

25 MS. PALACIO: 40 full students, yeah.

1 MR. NAVARRO: And I think we're  
2 expecting about 60 with the expansion.

3 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: These students  
4 are dropped off in the morning and picked  
5 up in the afternoon?

6 MR. NAVARRO: So it's a school for  
7 children with autism and learning  
8 disabilities. So there actually is not  
9 like a school where you show up and it's  
10 all first drop-off at 7:30, 7:45,  
11 8 o'clock. It happens throughout the  
12 morning as parents go into work. So  
13 usually between --

14 MS. PALACIO: The drop-off is at 8:30  
15 and --

16 MR. NAVARRO: I'll let Marie speak  
17 about this.

18 MS. PALACIO: So the drop-off is at  
19 8:30 and the pick-up is at 2:30. It is a  
20 therapy center, so we do have students  
21 until 4:30, because they do go after  
22 school for speech education and behavioral  
23 therapy during the day, but after 4:30,  
24 there really isn't anything else happening  
25 in the area.

1           MR. NAVARRO: And one of the things  
2           that we did as part of our architectural  
3           design, is we've created an internalized  
4           pick-up and drop-off area for the families  
5           to drop off their children. That way they  
6           can walk them in. We've created a  
7           dedicated area.

8           CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: I'm saying,  
9           that's why I asked the question, because  
10          it's also the way that you get into your  
11          apartment, and not everybody there may  
12          have their children at Crystal Academy,  
13          and maybe they want to go to their  
14          apartment and all of a sudden, you have 40  
15          parents that are stacking up front to pick  
16          up or drop off.

17          So, you know, I'm assuming that you  
18          studied this with the traffic, with the  
19          width of that Paseo, that it's wide  
20          enough, because you have a lot -- you've  
21          got a lot going on.

22          MR. CORDOVES: That's why we proposed  
23          this and created two lanes, one for  
24          whoever is a resident can go through  
25          without affecting the cars that are

1 stacked, maybe one or two cars at one  
2 specific time, and then allow them to come  
3 up the parking garage. And then a right  
4 turn only, so that, again, they're not  
5 encumbered by that and separated  
6 essentially on both sides to the  
7 (inaudible) side.

8 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Questions? Any  
9 other questions?

10 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: Yes. The Paseo  
11 on the ground floor, that's open 24 hours?

12 MR. CORDOVES: It is.

13 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Any other  
14 comments or questions from the Board?

15 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: One more  
16 comment. Maybe the last one could be, in  
17 one of the renderings, it seems like a  
18 section of the garage show very close-up  
19 walls, with some treatment on the wall. I  
20 would suggest that consideration for  
21 windows on that particular section should  
22 be appropriate. From one degree, lighting  
23 in the garage, but also take away the  
24 severity of that. I mean, plan in with  
25 the language that you're creating with

1 windows and balconies. Let that be  
2 represented. You don't have to be a  
3 see-thru. It can have the adequate  
4 screen. They could put like horizontal  
5 louvres or whatever to the imagination of  
6 the design team would be, but the breakup  
7 of the wall would be beneficial in that  
8 particular area. I saw it briefly in one  
9 of the elevations you presented.

10 MR. CORDOVES: Very good. We will do  
11 that where possible.

12 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: More like a  
13 well-thought out solution.

14 MR. CORDOVES: Very good.

15 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: Is this the  
16 northeast corner? Is that the kids' area?

17 MR. CORDOVES: The northeast corner,  
18 that's correct.

19 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: So that's the  
20 wing of the parking garage?

21 MR. CORDOVES: Correct.

22 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: From where it  
23 steps back, where it recesses to the  
24 street?

25 MR. CORDOVES: Correct. It's

1 fenestrated with four windows, yeah.

2 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: That's --

3 MR. CORDOVES: That's to regulate the  
4 rest of the architecture.

5 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: Okay. Thank  
6 you.

7 MR. CEBALLOS: If you have no more  
8 questions for the applicant, to Mr.  
9 Winker, the applicant did go over by about  
10 2 to 3 minutes. If you'd like to make any  
11 other comments, you're welcome to do so.

12 MR. WINKER: I would give my two  
13 minutes to Ms. Bolton, and also one of the  
14 residents would like to address one of the  
15 issues would like to address one of the  
16 issues concerning the Board of Architects.  
17 Thank you.

18 MS. LONGO: Hi. Thank you for  
19 staying here so late.

20 I just want to reiterate what I said  
21 in the beginning, that they are bringing  
22 -- this Ponce De Leon is a small corridor.  
23 On the north side, you have one historic  
24 woman club, one level, one story. On the  
25 east side, you have I think there are

1 2-or-3-story buildings, but the issue is  
2 that the North Ponce is the densest area  
3 in Coral Gables for residential living.  
4 And this building is self-contained. I  
5 use the visual of a bunker, because when  
6 you talk about green space, I've always --  
7 you know, I lived in Boston. I went to  
8 college in Boston. I just came from  
9 Europe. And when you talk about green  
10 space, especially now -- it's unfortunate  
11 that you haven't driven the area, because  
12 when you live and drive by the site,  
13 there's a lot of green space.

14 I'm not against development, but  
15 these people are trying to bring the --  
16 East Ponce is not compatible. East Ponce  
17 has a different context. They're trying  
18 to bring the MX2 from Ponce De Leon, with  
19 low setbacks, which is an issue, because  
20 this is MF2, and because it's residential,  
21 it has higher setbacks. It's more  
22 friendly. This Paseo is not a Paseo.  
23 This Paseo is a cave inside a bunker, so  
24 this site plan is self-contained. This is  
25 not integrated. This is not pedestrian.

1 This is not urban. I don't care if this  
2 person is an expert. Common sense tells  
3 me and tells me -- I was just in Europe,  
4 this is not at all pedestrian friendly.

5 What we want is a thoughtful,  
6 reasonable plan. I met with them and they  
7 haven't been flexible. Unfortunately, Mr.  
8 Sergio Pino passed. He was already  
9 starting to see the light. We had a plan,  
10 a site plan, with cross and entrances in  
11 the corner so that you can walk around.  
12 You can enjoy the green.

13 This is a bunker with zero setbacks,  
14 the incorrect volume, the incorrect scale  
15 and I'm urging to please have the moral  
16 fortitude to reject it. They have not  
17 been flexible. They have not met with  
18 me -- they met with me, I'm sorry, they  
19 did. They basically said I was being  
20 unreasonable.

21 I want to tell you that I was part of  
22 the team that worked with the developer  
23 Allen Morris. Juan Riesco, I think he  
24 knows that. We were neighbors, who met  
25 with Allen Morris, and the new project is

1 a lot better. What I want and what we  
2 want is a greenway.

3 I just -- I think that having a  
4 separate school, a separate building for  
5 the school is more reasonable. Somebody  
6 -- I'm sorry, I don't remember your name.  
7 You mentioned a thought, it was Mr.  
8 Bermello, the lines -- look, I wish you  
9 were there, I wish you were there when the  
10 women's club had their events, with all  
11 the trucks at night. I have taken  
12 pictures. I have taken pictures of  
13 accidents on East Ponce and Phoenetia,  
14 because they're side and diagonal parking  
15 and you cannot see. This is a nightmare.  
16 This is not reasonable.

17 I feel -- I have been to Cuba twice.  
18 This is all absurd. What you saw, Mr.  
19 Bermello, in the beginning that I saw your  
20 face when you saw that site plan, this is  
21 not in scale. We want something in scale  
22 and reasonable. Let's do MF2. That is  
23 still a multi-resident -- a multifamily  
24 residential building with higher setbacks.  
25 Let's do the public area development the

1 way it was -- it's in the code. You know  
2 what code said with public in a  
3 development? That it should be enjoyed by  
4 neighbors. What Mitch Alvarez was saying,  
5 how are you going to go into a building  
6 with a school and tenants looking down on  
7 you inside this mega block project that  
8 goes all around with a high wall? Not  
9 friendly? How am I going to be interested  
10 in going to that hole?

11 I'm asking you to please have the  
12 moral fortitude. Ask them to be flexible,  
13 to be reasonable and to design like Mr.  
14 Sergio Pino was going to do. Thank you.

15 MR. NAVARRO: For the record --

16 MS. BOLTON: I just want to mention  
17 that when it went before the Board of  
18 Architects in August of this year, several  
19 of the BOA architects asked if the  
20 approval could be rescinded.

21 And I just want to remind you of  
22 context, compatibility, scale, massing.  
23 This street, Phoenetia Avenue, has six  
24 historic structures. All of them two  
25 stories or less. Yes, it's completely out

1 of context for the neighborhood. Thank  
2 you.

3 And you need to have courage to make  
4 the right decision. And if you follow the  
5 code, the only correct decision is to deny  
6 the plans and ask them to be redrawn.

7 MR. NAVARRO: So just to kind of  
8 bring everything --

9 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Rebuttal.

10 MR. NAVARRO: Yes. It's not  
11 rebuttal. I'll call it rebuttal.

12 I know that everybody has their own  
13 subjective disagreements about design  
14 preferences. Everybody has a different  
15 idea as to what would be the best use of  
16 this property.

17 We're here to determine whether this  
18 project meets a very objective set of  
19 criteria. This project is designed with  
20 the zoning that we are seeking. However,  
21 this is not a rezoning hearing. We're not  
22 here to discuss zoning. Those are  
23 legislative policy considerations that the  
24 City Commission has the authority to make,  
25 whether they should be MF2, MX or some

1 other zoning district.

2 What we're here to ask you is did the  
3 Board of Architects get it right, not does  
4 the appellant prefer a different project?  
5 Does this project, the way it's designed,  
6 does it meet the specific criteria in your  
7 code that's required for Coral Gables  
8 Mediterranean architecture? And if you  
9 think of many, many, many projects that  
10 have been built in the city over time, I  
11 think -- and you compare this one to it,  
12 you would say it's either at that level or  
13 higher than what Mediterranean style is.  
14 And the reason is, because this project,  
15 not only received architectural Board  
16 approval, which is the reason we're here  
17 for the design, it also achieved and was  
18 awarded Level 2 Mediterranean bonuses,  
19 which is the highest and most difficult  
20 architectural approval to me.

21 So I know that the neighborhood feels  
22 strongly. I understand that. We've  
23 worked very hard to try to make this  
24 project as community friendly as we can.  
25 We have proposed many changes. We've

1 obviously have been to the BOA many times  
2 making changes.

3 But the reason why we're here today  
4 is for a very specific question: Did the  
5 Board of Architects get it right? Did  
6 your City architect, when he reviewed this  
7 and made these recommendations, get it  
8 right? And do we meet the criteria, which  
9 is not a zoning and land use compatibility  
10 analysis. It's an architecturally  
11 compatibility. It's not a this  
12 stylistically and visually like all the  
13 other, you know, buildings in size in the  
14 area. We can't look in an area that's  
15 redeveloping based on the existing  
16 buildings in that area.

17 Actually, your code, Section 5-100 of  
18 your code, provides in subsection C, you  
19 do not look at the existing buildings,  
20 those existing buildings will eventually  
21 be redeveloped. If you looked at it that  
22 way, there would never have any progress  
23 made in Coral Gables and wouldn't be the  
24 beautiful city that it is today.

25 What makes this city unique is the

1           difficulty that it is to get architectural  
2           approval, because they require best in  
3           class, best in materials, best in design.  
4           And I think that in working with the BOA,  
5           we've been able to achieve that. We  
6           believe we've shown you, through our  
7           presentation and our expert testimony,  
8           that this project satisfies those criteria  
9           and we ask that you please uphold the BOA  
10          approval and deny this appeal.

11           MS. LONGO: Can I say one more thing,  
12          please, the last thing, and I promise you  
13          that I will go home? I haven't had lunch.  
14          Very quickly.

15           CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: This is your last  
16          point.

17           MS. LONGO: Okay. I promise. I  
18          promise.

19           CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Make it.

20           MS. LONGO: Very brief.

21           The last -- I was at every meeting, I  
22          would say every meeting, and the last  
23          meeting with the BOA, I don't know if  
24          you're aware, but there's very rigorous  
25          Mediterranean bonus revisions and they

1           were actually done in front of -- the BOA  
2           was part of the revisions. At the last  
3           meeting, I was there, and because the  
4           revisions were passed by the City  
5           Commission and they were already official,  
6           they had a very difficult time approving  
7           the project. And the majority that did  
8           not like the changes, and they withdrew.  
9           But, again, this project, actually the Med  
10          bonus was started, to avoid -- the new  
11          revisions to avoid projects like this.

12                   And I want to tell you something,  
13                   compatibility and context, like he said,  
14                   in the standard reviews for the BOA, the  
15                   existing does matter. And Mr. Ceballos  
16                   once said in a meeting that the existing  
17                   does matter, that you look at context as  
18                   architects really made. I was part of the  
19                   revisions. I worked with the BOA, and the  
20                   late Phil of Victoria was part of those  
21                   revisions, too, and context does matter.  
22                   Context always matters. You don't go to a  
23                   formal party with a Bermudas and a  
24                   Guayabera. Always has mattered. And,  
25                   here, definitely, it's out of scale, out

1 of context, it's not compatible. And the  
2 standard review you mentioned, like, what  
3 is more than 12 times the word context.  
4 Fortunately, we have a new Med bonus  
5 that's going to make it more rigorous.  
6 This project would have never passed with  
7 any other bonus.

8 So I'm asking you again, please,  
9 please, please reject.

10 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Okay.

11 Mr. Navarro, we're good or you're --

12 MR. NAVARRO: Yes. I think it was  
13 well-stated that those standards don't  
14 apply to this project. This project was  
15 approved before the Mediterranean bonus  
16 standards.

17 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Just a  
18 thought. Some of the ladies here talking  
19 about green spaces in Europe, and it be  
20 interesting for them, if you can carry  
21 them on the ground site plan right there,  
22 how much green space do we have besides  
23 the two bigger spaces that are clearly  
24 defined, peripheral or something. I'd  
25 like them to feel that this summary of

1 green spaces, that they can understand and  
2 relate to as a great architect often  
3 respectfully said this word. The building  
4 is important, but the most significant  
5 part is how exists and touches the ground,  
6 how it interacts in the movement, in the  
7 area in which there's a pedestrian area  
8 and how well does it resolve. It's a  
9 little bit of clarification on that matter  
10 to help them understand your ground level  
11 articulation. It would take you another  
12 10 minutes, but it can be done.

13 MS. LONG: It's not there.

14 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Are you  
15 willing to do that?

16 MR. NAVARRO: So we've -- just for  
17 the record, we are providing more open  
18 space than is required, so we're not here  
19 today -- we go in to Board of Architects,  
20 we get approved, zoning reviews the open  
21 space. We're providing close to 12% more  
22 of an entire block of open space. We're  
23 supposed to all be treating apples to  
24 apples whether it's one project or  
25 another.

1           The project that we withdrew from the  
2           Board of Architects -- when we talk about  
3           the pedestrian, we believe that's very  
4           important as well. We, working within our  
5           legal rights, obviously, and trying to be  
6           a good neighbor, what we tried to do was  
7           to eliminate the arcade that's around the  
8           building so we can create additional  
9           gardening and additional wider street  
10          scapes.

11           SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: To my recent  
12          observation is not to imply that I will  
13          tell the Board of Architects to review  
14          this and go through the filter. I just  
15          think it's for the benefit of these  
16          people --

17           MR. NAVARRO: Yes. I want to just  
18          tell you --

19           SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: I want them  
20          to understand that the City has done the  
21          right thing, and that they can be  
22          convinced or at least presented the data  
23          to satisfy their concern. If it was my  
24          project, and I have been involved in many  
25          large projects, I would take five minutes

1 and walk them through and satisfy that  
2 question.

3 MR. NAVARRO: Definitely. I mean, we  
4 have been working with them. We tried to  
5 make a revision your City architect  
6 mentioned. Unfortunately, it created much  
7 more complications for us, trying to get  
8 that additional pedestrian environment.  
9 We still believe that's a great change  
10 that can be made to the project.

11 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Are you asking  
12 them to walk you through --

13 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: No. I think  
14 ground floor plan with just simple  
15 color --

16 MR. CORDOVES: Mr. Chair, I'll be  
17 happy to walk it through again.

18 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: You did all  
19 that already.

20 MR. CORDOVES: And actually tell you  
21 what we are proposing. Can we go to the  
22 ground floor, please?

23 So, today, this particular site,  
24 there's no green space at all. At all.

25 MS. LONG: It has no what?

1 MR. CORDOVES: No green space for  
2 public access. Not at all.

3 What we are proposing is a pedestrian  
4 realm, as per the required code, with  
5 additional sidewalk that we have today.

6 In addition to that, we stepped the  
7 building back in several areas: Here,  
8 here, here, and here (indicating), in  
9 order to expand that pedestrian realm as  
10 well.

11 In addition to that, we created  
12 (inaudible) in the corridor, which would  
13 allow the public to come in on weekends  
14 when it's not in use for the school.

15 And, lastly, we're creating a Paseo  
16 that we don't have today, with access to  
17 beautiful almost 6,000 square feet to the  
18 courtyard. None of those things are  
19 existing today. We are providing it on  
20 this project.

21 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Thank you.

22 You understand, Ladies and Gentlemen?  
23 Did you understand clearly what he said?

24 MS. LONGO: Mr. Alvarez,  
25 unfortunately that's not enough. The

1 green spaces that they are showing --  
2 again, I'm going to try to make you  
3 visualize. Take a Ponce De Leon building,  
4 on an avenue that is East Ponce, Phoenetia  
5 Avenue and Galiano. This building, in  
6 scale, it's completely out of proportion,  
7 and the green area that is required  
8 proportionally is not there.

9 Additionally, to have a tunnel that  
10 is supposed to be a Paseo is not very  
11 friendly. This is not a friendly -- it's  
12 not friendly for the neighbors, no matter  
13 how you try to kill the cat -- skin the  
14 cat. It's not.

15 MS. BOLTON: And it's a fraudulent  
16 benefit. The pad is an occasional green  
17 space. It's something that can be used  
18 from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday  
19 through Friday, and only on Saturdays and  
20 Sundays, so it's a fraudulent benefit.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I just have  
22 one quick question. I'm wondering how  
23 would we know it's there, if it's inside?

24 THE COURT REPORTER: Mr. Ceballos,  
25 I'm not sure who's speaking from the

1 audience at this point.

2 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: The public  
3 portion of this meeting is over. We're  
4 now in the final where we're basically  
5 asking questions of either party.

6 So do you have any further comments?

7 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: No. I have  
8 no further questions.

9 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Do you?

10 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: I'm good.  
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: So what is your  
13 pleasure? Is there a motion?

14 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Let's make a  
15 motion. We have -- you're ready to make a  
16 motion now? You?

17 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: I'm ready -- I'm  
18 ready to vote.

19 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Yes. That's  
20 what I said.

21 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: I'm the Chair. I  
22 should not be making a motion ideally.

23 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: You call  
24 the --

25 MR. CEBALLOS: I'm sorry?

1           SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: You follow  
2 the protocol.

3           MR. CEBALLOS: Somebody can make the  
4 motion whether to approve, deny, uphold,  
5 overturn.

6           CHAIRMAN BERMELO: If no one is  
7 willing to make a motion, I'll make a  
8 motion. I'd rather not make a motion,  
9 because I'm the Chair.

10          MR. CEBALLOS: I mean --

11          SPECIAL MASTER FONT: I can make a  
12 motion, if Mitch doesn't want to.

13          CHAIRMAN BERMELO: I'll second the  
14 motion.

15          SPECIAL MASTER FONT: I make a motion  
16 that we uphold the approval of the Board  
17 of Architects.

18          CHAIRMAN BERMELO: There's a motion  
19 to approve the Board of Architects'  
20 approval, that we uphold that decision  
21 that is currently being appealed.

22                 Is there a second?

23          SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Yes. I  
24 follow the approval, and second it.

25          CHAIRMAN BERMELO: So the motion has

1           been seconded. Discussion on the motion?  
2           Is there any?

3                   SPECIAL MASTER FONT: No. I just  
4           wanted to confirm that we are basically  
5           approving the architecture itself.  
6           Nothing to do with the uses, with the  
7           zoning, the density, with any of that.  
8           It's just the architecture that we see  
9           before us.

10                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Just in terms of  
11           comments, and I'm going to peel back a  
12           little to at least some of the references  
13           that were made by architect Robert  
14           Chisholm.

15                   And anybody that goes to the Board of  
16           Architects knows how excruciating --

17                   SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: No.

18                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: -- and sometimes  
19           agonizing it can certainly be, and how  
20           detailed, because the members of that  
21           Board, like I'm sure people that are here  
22           speaking, with all their best of  
23           intentions, they're trying to abide by  
24           Article 5, Zoning Code, and they do that  
25           to the best of their abilities. And the

1           lady and gentlemen that are Members of the  
2           Board, they're excellent architects.

3                   And I did not know the history.  
4           That's why I asked a number of questions  
5           of the City architect, but these five  
6           reviews, which maybe to me at one point  
7           would have been concerning that something  
8           had to be reviewed so many times, but on  
9           the other side, the fact that it was  
10          reviewed so many times, you know, it's  
11          like proofing a document, you know, a  
12          legal document, the fact that we had five  
13          bites at the apple, each time taking a  
14          lamina of improving and come back in a  
15          collaborative effort. If this had been  
16          approved overnight, with no discussion,  
17          I'd be having a different thought process,  
18          but the fact that it took over almost  
19          18 months and five meetings of the full  
20          board, it wasn't like there were only  
21          three members, but the full board --

22                   MR. RIESCO: Every time.

23                   CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: And we have full  
24          City staff approval, which is also  
25          challenging, I don't see how we can do

1 anything here today but uphold the Board  
2 of Architects' approval.

3 Having said that, all the bites of  
4 the apple, with its residents, because  
5 this journey is not over and I think their  
6 issues are related really in a different  
7 forum. They're just using this one, but  
8 it's really more in a different forum than  
9 the one here today.

10 So I want to thank all the rest of  
11 you for coming and taking the time, you  
12 know, and eloquent and we heard your  
13 comments. They did not go unheard. You  
14 are not invisible to us. And we also  
15 heard all the comments in the process.

16 So I am in support of my two  
17 colleagues in voting to uphold the Board  
18 of Architects in their decision to approve  
19 this project.

20 MR. NAVARRO: Thank you.

21 MR. CEBALLOS: I guess we'll do a  
22 roll call just for the purposes of the  
23 record.

24 Mr. Alvarez?

25 SPECIAL MASTER ALVAREZ: Yes.

1 MR. CEBALLOS: Mr. Bermello?

2 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Yes.

3 MR. CEBALLOS: Mr. Font?

4 SPECIAL MASTER FONT: Yes.

5 MR. CEBALLOS: I'm going to go ahead  
6 and print out the procedural order. I  
7 have to get it from next door. They're  
8 going to bring it over to me. You can  
9 just sign it, and we'll provide a copy to  
10 the appellant and the applicant so that  
11 everybody has a copy.

12 MR. NAVARRO: Thank you all for your  
13 time today.

14 CHAIRMAN BERMELLO: Thank you all.

15 (Thereupon, at 4:45 p.m., the hearing  
16 was concluded).

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

STATE OF FLORIDA)  
COUNTY OF MIAMI-DADE)

I, Lorena Ramos, National Registered Professional Reporter, do hereby certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically report the hearing of the Special Masters, on the 13th day of January 2026; and that the foregoing transcript, pages 1 through 145, is a true record of my stenographic notes.

DATED this 02/03/2026 in the City of Miami, Miami-Dade County, Florida.

*Lorena Ramos*

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LORENA RAMOS, COURT REPORTER  
Registered Professional Reporter