

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item J-2
December 5, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
Assistant City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item J-2 [0:00:00 p.m.]

A discussion regarding the future vision for Little Gables with a presentation on zoning and aesthetic treatment, including the trailer park.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright, and now we have the time certain, 11 o'clock, a discussion regarding the future vision for Little Gables with a presentation on zoning and aesthetic treatment, including the trailer park. Yes, sir.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Mayor, as a result of the Commission discussion, we put together a PowerPoint to give some general ideas about Little Gables. And also, we have our consultant, Mr. Iler, here to answer any questions, and of course, Craig Coller, our attorney, in case you have any concerns. I always like to show the history. And, one of the things that we found some time ago was this map from 1914, which is an important date because it's before Merrick. So, what it shows is all the natural systems, all of the type of development that was going on there before anything took place. And, we took the opportunity to colorize it a little bit, so it would be more clear. And in green what we see is wetlands, which is generally known as the Everglades. And, then in the slightly darker color, some mangroves that affect, as you can see, the southern areas of the city and so on. So, that gives you an idea of the way that this area was. And in yellow -- in yellow here, we have highlighted Little Gables. And as you can see, one of the interesting things about this, which I always thought makes sense, was that I believe that Merrick had incorporated some of the natural systems into the design. And, what we did is we overlaid the actual layout of the city and that became clear. It is true. If you look through the Biltmore and through the University of Miami, those areas that are larger and more green and so on, they used to be wetlands. That's the natural systems that were incorporated. And, if you go back like that and go forward, you can see how it is. And, you also can see that in Little Gables it's really missing in terms of the overall (INAUDIBLE). It does make a lot of sense that it's part of the city. If you actually look in detail at that map, you can see that Little Gables, which is highlighted in the red, touches the Coral Gables plantation, if you read the text of the map. And if you look at Coral Way, you can see the oak trees already there. So, from the very beginning, from the very beginning, this whole area was meant to be, I think, incorporated into the overall vision. Now, Merrick, in his first -- or one of the early plats, as you can see, platted most of the area in the Coral Gables plantation, nothing towards 8th Street -- and the Little Gables is highlighted in red right there, just touching the corner of his work. But, one of the good news about all of this is that one of the great things about South Florida is that very early on -- because it's a fairly, fairly young place -- it was platted very competently and very -- by professional engineers and so on, so all the streets, all the blocks, everything lines up. Now, we take it for granted here. We think that that's normal. I've worked in other places in my time, and I can

assure you that that is not normal. In most places, you don't have such a well-organized layout for the city from the very beginning, so we're very lucky from that point of view. Merrick did an exceptional job, but the areas within the City of Miami were also very competently done. Now, you can see that in the structure today. We have, you know, blocks that are very compatible with the blocks of Coral Gables. They're about the same size. The streets line up. Everything from an urban point of view is all very, very good. And in terms of the fabric, very few vacant parcels, only a couple of them that are very visible, but the rest of it is fairly well developed. Again, I emphasize in other places in Florida, that would not be the case. You have a lot of vacant properties, a lot of blighted areas and so on. That really is not what's going on here, so we are very, very fortunate from that point of view. Now, the County has always had a very simplistic look at the land use, and this is the actual map that they have. And, what it really means is that there are a lot of things going on, and when we have had discussions about grandfathering and site specifics and so on, I always heard -- or what I interpreted was that we were talking about the single family mostly. And it's mostly single family, as you can see, but there are many other things. There are many other things. Eighth Street is commercial, as you know. There's a trailer park. There's also multifamily. There's a lot of MF-2, similar in many ways to some of the things that you have worked on, on North Ponce. Some of those very same ideas could apply. So, there's a tapestry of things going on that I think in general is very compatible with everything that we have in the northern area of the city, except for 8th Street and except for the trailer park. I think those two are really a little different. So, what happens is that the single-family area is the bulk, but not everything that we have in this area. And our consultant, Mr. Iler, has prepared a comparison of the zoning requirements of the County and the City in different areas. As you can see, the zoning in the county is very complicated. I think it's overly complicated for the results on the ground in terms of the existing conditions. But, looking at it in a general sense, the City zoning requirement is very beneficial when compared to the County zoning requirements. So, I don't see any issues in the sense that, oh, if you, for example, were to annex and rezone to some of the standards of the City, you would lose property rights, but our consultant can explain that in more detail. Now, there's a lot of historic houses, very similar to the area. The streets are very nice. There's a lot of trees, et cetera. There's some code

enforcement issues that are -- you know, that have to be dealt with generally, but in context, I don't think it's anything radically different than what we have in the rest of the city. Now, as I said, the multifamily area is significant, as Le Jeune and so on and the area a couple of blocks -- et cetera. But you have dealt with that recently, so you have plenty of experience on how to enhance those areas. And basically, again, nothing that would be out of place within the -- let's say, the North Ponce area, even some historic buildings that you find. The trailer park is certainly different and certainly unique. And, the City Manager can explain in more detail some of the ideas that she's leading to come up with a better plan for that area, perhaps. And, one of the things that I learned was that it was platted in 1931 as three tracts. And as you can see, they were competent enough and very smart, because they kept the same streets in order that in the future that the scale would be comparable, so it's very well done. Now, in 1931, if you think about 1929 and what happened in 1929, I would like to -- for the big picture, think about this building is 1929, perhaps. In 1931, we're doing trailer parks, and that is I think the result of the big trends in the economy and so on. But, it's being done with the same block structure of the rest of the city so, in the future, which is now, it wouldn't be very, very difficult to rethink that whole area. So, that's one of the good things that is going on. As you can see, the streets are there. There's a lot of -- a lot of the basics of the infrastructure are actually quite good. So, having gone through all of that, I think one of the other recommendations is to try to see if we can do some kind of overlay for 8th Street. I think 8th Street is one of those areas of the city that has not been dealt with pretty much since Merrick was around. I think there's a good chance that we can do something meaningful and something that would really improve the aesthetics. I'd like to say that the precedent for 8th Street is Douglas Entrance. That was the beginning vision of Merrick. So, somehow, we have a chance to maybe recapture some of that. And, even in terms of density and even in terms of the kind of mix of uses and so on, that was the original idea and we have that opportunity. So, maybe that's one of the good things that could happen. But, in terms of general recommendations, in our opinion, the Coral Gables designations are pretty good in terms of the development that they allow, as compared to the County. So, I don't think we're going to have big issues with that. That gives you a sense of the single-family and multifamily, the commercial, and then the trailer, which would have to be a little bit different. In my view,

most of the issues that are of concern, such as, let's say fences or different types of -- maybe some setback issues in the single-family areas can be addressed with the existing nonconforming regulations that we have in the Code. It wouldn't be unusual. We do that all the time with many of the areas in the north neighborhoods of the city. Sometimes the setbacks are not longer -- the ones that we have in the books, so we deal with each property one at a time. And, I think that process works very well. So, in terms of site specifics, you know, we may not need that much in the sense that a lot of the current language in the Zoning Code allows us to deal with unique situations. The multifamily parcels, we may want to think about some of the same ideas that we looked at North Ponce. And, then I think that a site-specific plan, probably a PAD because it is more than one acre, so the current code would allow for that to take place, may encourage some improvement in that trailer park. So, I think that the current code that we have in the city already allows us to do many, many of those things. And finally, if we had an overlay for 8th Street, I think that would finalize the improvements. The potential issues that I -- that we've seen, fences, some car canopies, some wood frame construction, some roofing materials, but generally, I would say that the houses are actually in fairly good shape. I didn't really notice too many big issues, except maybe some things that appear to have been done without permits, such as changing some single-family to multifamily uses and some -- nothing unusual in terms of what Miami or the greater area would be, but it would be unusual in the City of Coral Gables.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And I'm just going to interject. We have made it very clear to the Little Gables residents that if you were an illegal unit, if you were not properly permitted, you are not going to be grandfathered in in Coral Gables. And, we're going to stay very strong, because that's a life safety issue.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's been very clear...

Vice Mayor Keon: Yeah.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Every time we've met with them.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: And again, that's the only big issue that I anticipate in the single family. The rest of it is fairly doable. This was for your benefit. If you have any questions, we have all our consultants here to address the issues.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I think that -- Madam City Manager, you want to address the trailer park issue?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Of course. Now, the City Attorney has also done some research to give you options. We are, at this point, pursuing the positive development discussions with the property owner. We met yesterday. We have retained Dover Kohl, where we are the client, but he is the customer, so that we can vision a project -- a redevelopment project clearly removing the trailer park and replacing with it some really quality redevelopment that works for the neighborhood, that works for the developer and also works for the City of Coral Gables. He has shared with us what his individual concerns are. We are incorporating those concerns in the plan, in addition to having Dover Kohl available to him at the City's expense, because that property redevelopment is so important. We also have Leonard Roberts from the Economic Development helping with evaluations from the economic return -- the immediate economic return based on current market. The City Attorney has allowed, in addition to the excellent legal counsel that we have from a zoning standpoint with Craig Collier, we've also brought in a city real estate attorney to help us on the redevelopment specifically of the project. That's Vivian de la Cuevas. And so, we've assembled a team and that team all agrees that the goal is the redevelopment of the trailer park in a way that is very positive for the neighbors, as well as the developer, and ultimately, for the City of Coral Gables. And, we've been very strong in our severe desire to have that redeveloped, and we've communicated that with the property owner. Property owner happens to be a Gables resident.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And, he was very positive about it.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Very positive. He is welcoming the conversation. In fact, he is -- when are we going to get this done? When are we going to get this done? So much, so that if we're able to reach agreement as to what that new zoning should be in advance of annexation that we -- it would be our recommendation that we coapply with him to the County to get that in motion.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: He lives in Hammock Lakes, no?

Vice Mayor Keon: He lives where?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Oaks. Hammock Oaks?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Hammock Oaks.

City Attorney Ramos: And so, in the packet, you'll see a memorandum from our office that I prepared with the assistance of Craig Coller, who's here if you have any specific questions, and it tracks exactly what the City Manager just spoke about, the idea of having a business deal with the redevelopment of the property, using our settlement agreement function in the Bert Harris section of our Code, which is a very good vehicle for establishing timelines and also, God forbid, penalties, if things were not done as they should be done. It, at the very end, is responsive to what you requested of our office at the last meeting, which was to propose an ordinance should we want to make essentially trailer parks illegal upon annexation. It is our view and the view of the City Manager's office that that is really the last and not most favorable option. But you know, to the extent that you asked for it, we have drafted two potential ordinances that could be used, if that's the route that the Commission chose to take.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Discussion.

Vice Mayor Keon: Yeah. I had asked for this to come back, so I'm glad to see it. I know that there was some discussion about working with the County and if the -- you know, I'm going to assume that the gentleman who owns this property is very sincere in moving forward with the plan to rezone this area. So, we would need to work with the County to move people that are living there now...

City Attorney Ramos: Yeah, so there's...

Vice Mayor Keon: At some...

City Attorney Ramos: A state statute that says that when you rezone a property, you must find adequate places for those individuals to live. We're certainly willing to work with the County, but Ms. De Las Cuevas-Diaz, which is the real estate attorney on this, actually had a transaction not so long ago involving a trailer park where that component was there too, so we have some expertise in-house as to how to do that -- how to best do that.

Vice Mayor Keon: How difficult was it to relocate was it to relocate those -- the people?

City Attorney Ramos: My understanding from her is that it's doable, because it also does not have to necessarily be -- if people are willing to move elsewhere, Orlando or wherever, it's possible, as long as they agree.

Vice Mayor Keon: If someone is not willing to move, what do you do?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, Commissioner, we had a -- Vice Mayor, we had a very good conversation with -- of the population in the trailer park, there are some seniors that it's really his hope that the seniors would be able to continue to live either in -- where they are today or be moved into the new development until their end of life.

Vice Mayor Keon: Okay.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And so, that's a -- we're -- our consultants are -- Dover Kohl is incorporating that as a part of it. They're 90 to 95 -- we believe they're 90 -- he thought they were 95 -- units. We believe that the universe of people that are really considerations as a part of it is probably 50. And, then how do you incorporate on a, what, two-and-a-half-acre site, very exciting to include mixes of income, mixes of uses in the redevelopment, keeping the vision and the character of not only Little Gables, but also the North Gables vision. So, we're working on that. We are not -- there are many tools available. Some of those tools, we probably would not want to discuss publicly, but we have discussed with him and we are -- in the long-term vision of that property, I think we are very much on the same page.

Vice Mayor Keon: Okay. I mean, I'm not concerned and I would hope that we wouldn't litigate this. I mean, I think that the first step in anything is that you negotiate. And it's -- you know, we don't ever have to litigate because if we can't negotiate, we can pull that application at any time. So, litigating it shouldn't even -- I don't really believe should even be part of the discussion.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, believe me. He was very, very positive and they were meeting with Dover Kohl. I went in to say hello and stayed for two minutes, but...

Vice Mayor Keon: Yeah.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It was a very, very positive meeting.

Vice Mayor Keon: Good. So...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Keon: I mean, I think that's why it can be...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Keon: A negotiation and we don't need to have legislation come forward that...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Right.

Vice Mayor Keon: Contemplates litigation...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No. We have that as a last resort.

Vice Mayor Keon: Because, you know, our last resort is that we just pull the application and we don't annex. I mean, so...

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Keon: Rather than we...

Commissioner Lago: That's always an option.

Vice Mayor Keon: Litigate. I mean, that's -- at the very end, if, you know, you don't get there, you don't get there. But, I do think it is -- I really do think that we should move forward. There are -- I had spoken with Ramon about, you know, some of the potential Code issues. And I -- you know, I do think that where we can apply our code, we should apply our code, because I think it's that code that is what has -- is what supports the aesthetic of this city and what keeps that aesthetic is our code. And, even though our Code has been challenged many times, we have always been very successful in...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We've always prevailed, yeah.

Vice Mayor Keon: Defending and supporting our code. So, I do think that we should -- I think that the properties there should be subject to our Code, you know, under a number -- in most circumstances. When you -- I'm asking Ramon. When you talk about existing nonconforming that you would allow those as nonconforming, but it would be nonconforming, but permitted properly.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Right, right. And, under the rules that we have in the Zoning Code right now, we're able to deal with anything that has been permitted in the past and is legal as a nonconforming legal building. And, what happens is that -- what I mean by that is that I don't think we need to come up with new regulations...

Vice Mayor Keon: I don't either.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Because the current Code allows us to deal with it.

City Attorney Ramos: Ramon, can you address what happens in a demolition and rebuild or redevelopment -- or remodel that is significant?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah. You would have to follow the new zoning regulations. If we adopt the same regulations that we have in the City, they won't be very different. They'll be very similar for single-family, for example. But, we do have some things in the City that, for example, we don't allow wood frame construction or chain link fences, et cetera. If the Commission wants to have some site-specific regulations that are limited to those issues, we could come up with that, too. But I -- I mean, my recommendation is not to do it. My recommendation is to deal with the issues as nonconforming...

Vice Mayor Keon: Right. I would prefer not to have site specifics.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Keon: I'd like -- if a property is purchased that the residents demolished, then the new residence...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: (INAUDIBLE).

Vice Mayor Keon: Has to be rebuilt under our Zoning Code.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And so...

Vice Mayor Keon: If it's more than 50 percent, it has to be built under...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Right.

Vice Mayor Keon: Our...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Keon: Zoning Code.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Absolutely.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And so, what was very interesting as a part of this is, if it's vacant land, if it's demolished, if it's more than 50 percent, the idea of folding it into the City Code. But, when Ramon looked at the City Code and he saw that...

Vice Mayor Keon: (INAUDIBLE).

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: In many instances, Coral Gables is more relaxed than Miami-Dade County.

Vice Mayor Keon: Right.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Amount of setback required, amount of...

Vice Mayor Keon: Right.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Backyard setback required...

Vice Mayor Keon: Right.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And so, the County was more strict...

Vice Mayor Keon: Right.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Than Coral Gables in that Zoning Code, in many instances.

Vice Mayor Keon: That's why -- I think when we have gotten a number of letters from residents, you know, not supporting this annexation because they feel that, you know, it just -- it doesn't look like the Gables. It doesn't have the aesthetic of the Gables. It doesn't feel like the Gables. I think that that in the instances where it doesn't, it has really been that there has been no code enforcement in the area, because the County Code is very similar to our Code; I mean, as far as setbacks and canopies and all of these other things. So, a lot that has been done there has been done there that's not permitted. And if it wasn't permitted, we will ask them to remove

it. I mean, I know that you will give them a period of time where you'll have to work with Code Enforcement how you will go about doing that. But you know, those issues are issues that we can deal with under our Code. And you know, I have lived in the City since 1973 -- or 74. We bought our first house in December of '73, so I've lived here a very, very long time and have seen the transition of neighborhoods in this city. And, not every neighborhood in the city looks as good as it looks today. It's -- as people have bought homes, they have, you know -- they've redone them, they've refurbished them, they've rebuilt. And you know, it's wonderful...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Especially in North Gables...

Vice Mayor Keon: Especially...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: With older folks...

Vice Mayor Keon: In the North Gables.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And young -- yeah.

Vice Mayor Keon: Where there were older homes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Keon: They were more affordable for younger people coming in, and so, they redid those homes. I think that in many instances, the same thing will happen in this area. In addition to it, there are some very, very nice homes that exist in that area. I mean, this is not a whole area that is, you know, not good. There's -- the vast majority of this neighborhood is a very nice neighborhood that looks very much like the rest of the northern part of our city. There are some -- and I think it is really due to the code enforcement -- and we all know that it is code

enforcement that has kept this city as good as it is. So, once we apply that and the code enforcement, you know, I don't...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very good.

Vice Mayor Keon: Have a problem with it. And, I think that the issue with the trailer park is one that we can now well manage. And at any point, if we don't come to a negotiated agreement, we can pull that application at any point along the way. So, I'm glad for the clarification on these issues. You know, I just -- I wanted to make sure that as the ballot goes out to the voters in Little Gables, that they clearly understand, you know, what the expectation is when they vote on annexation. And, I really still believe that that support that was there was there, because they want the code enforced and...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Vice Mayor Keon: We'll do well. So, I -- again, I don't have a problem with it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Any other comments?

Commissioner Lago: No. That's fine with me.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Let's go on to the next one, which is a discuss...

Vice Mayor Keon: So, when will this come back for a second -- we voted on this...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No -- yeah, we voted on it first...

City Attorney Ramos: The ordinance is passed.

Vice Mayor Keon: Done. It's done.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

City Attorney Ramos: The application's being...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It's been passed.

City Attorney Ramos: Completed by Mr. Iler...

Vice Mayor Keon: Okay.

City Attorney Ramos: And Mr. Coller, and will be submitted to the County.

Vice Mayor Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And our discussions with the trailer park, we'll keep you posted.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: But, they're moving quickly and favorably.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.