

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
September 25, 2018
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

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

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-2 [11:22:12 a.m.]

A discussion to clearly define “open space” as “green space” within the property line for new developments (Sponsored by Commissioner Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: H-2 – open space, green space.

Commissioner Lago: Our Director of Planning, Mr. Trias, would you mind coming up here please. Thank you sir. Let’s talk about this. What’s going on? Where are we?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: As you know, we have a consultant working with us to update the code. We’ve had meetings all throughout the summer with a series of committees and also we had a workshop with the Planning and Zoning. There are three or four issues that are critical and that is one of them. As soon as we can bring you some amendments, we certainly will, we could make it even more a priority if you wanted.

Commissioner Lago: Because this went to Planning and Zoning on three separate occasions, correct?- two? This went to Planning and Zoning on two separate occasions or three?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Two – well actually one. One Planning and Zoning meeting and then it would come here.

Commissioner Lago: And, then there were some concerns about how this would affect...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes, but that was prior to us engaging or you engaging the consultant. That was the prior discussion that set the priorities and now we actually have a consultant working on this.

Commissioner Lago: When do we expect the rewrite / clean-up of the Zoning Code to be completed?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I'm expecting two steps. I'm expecting a rearrangement that should happen relatively soon before the end of the year; and then I do expect some code changes, some language changes that focus on open space, MF2, mixed use, the kinds of 5 or 6 issues that you have identified, to happen starting in January and through the year.

Commissioner Keon: I just wanted to ask about. I know we asked at looking at Biltmore Way in its entirety as an entrance to the City.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Will you do that in the rewrite also or is that a separate item?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: The issue with the Biltmore Way has to do with the site specifics mostly in terms of the Zoning Code, but it also has to do with public space and this public space which we'd have to coordinate with Public Works. That is not a Zoning Code amendment, but the site specific it is and so we are looking at that.

Commissioner Keon: So the site specifics we will do it.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes we are dealing with that.

Commissioner Lago: If I may Ramon. I'd like to see if you can sit down with my colleagues and get their opinion in regards to this, if they may have a difference of opinion in regards to this green space / open space ordinance. What I'd like to see if we, as a Commission, can really define how we can make this a priority and how we can actually deliver on this, because there are some issues and some restrictions, obviously the height of buildings that are going to play into this. Again, this is going to be a policy decision. Do you want to have more open space and green space at the lower level and that includes mezzanines and staircases and corridors in

reference to open space. Obviously, I think we've talked that is something that we all want. But when you see that for example, a property that has a nine story limit, 90 feet or has 120 feet, are we as a Commission willing to allow the developer to have a little bit of flexibility to say, OK, you can go one-story, an additional one-story so that you can push the massing a little higher, but open up maybe the ground floor for actual green space, or do you want to continue to allow certain properties that just go zero lot line and just go from one piece of property to the other, from one setback to the other. Again, there is really no open space and there is no green space and I want to be flexible to the developer, because I understand that they are trying to do something, but at the end of the day they are limited because of the footprint of the property.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: You've identified the complexities of the code as they exist right now and I think that was needed, as you said it's the policy, the policy direction. What should be the most important priority? I think we can have that discussion with the City Manager wants to do it individually with each of the Commissioners.

City Manager Iglesias: I don't think we've had any project as of late that has used open space at the upper levels.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: No, no.

City Manager Iglesias: Space such as that. All open space now has been concentrated on the ground floor.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Staff review follows your direction, so we do, we are able to redesign or improve the projects based on those comments. Now changing the code, so that we don't have unintended consequences or other issues is not an easy task. That is why we have this consultant helping us. In the meantime, I think that you suggested of meeting individually with the Commissioners could be a very good one.

Commissioner Lago: I want their input.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: And, I want them to understand when you are talking about open space, what is defined in the code right now as open space for a mezzanine, a corridor, a stairwell, that all constitutes open space. So when a developer tells you, yes I have 30 percent open space, but that's not real open space, that's not real green space and that's a concern.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Something else and I don't think that one foot above street level or two feet above street level, even if it's open, will constitute in my opinion open space, because there is a

psychological barrier and nobody goes up one floor or two feet in order to use that open space. Look at the building on Alhambra Circle and Galiano, it's not used.

Commissioner Lago: That plaza, that plaza.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: There is not anybody in that plaza, nobody.

Commissioner Keon: Somebody is going to look at the grass that's in there; somebody's going to look at the artificial turf that's in that plaza please.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes, that's a very good point. We may be able to have the consultant meet with you individually also to get your input. I think this is very important, unfortunately it's very complex.

Commissioner Lago: And I would hate to see Liz Plater Zybert, correct?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: That she finish her job and what we have requested her to do and then it comes before the Commission and this gets brought up and this is not highlighted in the rewrite. I know that staff has done, your staff has done an exceptional job and the fact that a lot of the projects that have come before us have little parks and have a lot more open space on the first floor. They are understand the Commission's interest in really beautifying these neighborhoods and limiting the amount of concrete on the first floor. Now I don't want this to be concrete jungle. This has to be an exceptional green, lush, project that they bring before us where people can enjoy the open space. So, I just wanted to make sure we brought that up, highlight it with...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I will discuss it with the City Manager and see what the best approach is. I think that everybody here understands how complicated this is in terms of the zoning code and thank you for giving us the time to help you. But, I think it's very clear what you need to do and we just need to figure out the best way to do it.

City Manager Iglesias: I think Commissioner, the direction is clear.

Commissioner Lago: OK. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

[End: 11:29:27 a.m.]