

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Virtual Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
July 14, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

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

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
Interim Director Historic Preservation and Cultural Affairs, Kara Kautz
Arts and Cultural Affairs Specialist, Catherine Cathers
Assistant Director Landscape Services, Brook Dannemiller
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Carlos Beckman
Michele Oka Doner

Agenda Item H-2

A Resolution approving the concept for a work of public art by Michele Oka Doner in conjunction with The Plaza Coral Gables development project at 2901 Ponce De Leon Boulevard in fulfillment of the Art in Public Places requirement for public art in private development (unanimously recommended by the Arts Advisory Panel approval/denial vote: 7 to 0, and the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 7 to 0).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let's go to Item H-2, public art by Michele Oka Doner. A beautiful piece. H-2.
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City Manager Iglesias: Go, ahead, I am sorry.

City Attorney Ramos: Sorry, Peter. H-2 is a Resolution approving the concept for a work of public art by Michele Oka Doner in conjunction with The Plaza Coral Gables development project at 2901 Ponce De Leon Boulevard in fulfillment of the Art in Public Places requirement for public art in private development.

City Manager Iglesias: And, I'll have Kara Kautz do the presenting on this item.

Ms. Kautz: Hello, Good Afternoon, we are excited to show you guys the art that was selected, part of the art that was selected for the Plaza, and I am going to turn it over to Catherine Cathers the City's Arts and Cultural Specialist to walk you through it.

Art and Cultural Specialist Cathers: Good Afternoon Mayor and Commissioners. Agave Plaza Trustee with the Plaza Development at 2901 Ponce de Leon Blvd. is coming again before the Commission with a petition waiver request of the Art in Public Places fee requirement by acquiring and installing artwork within the project as specified in the Zoning Code Article III, Division 21. The Agave team met artist Michele Oka Doner at her studio in New York and then again and invited her to propose an outdoor piece for one of the green spaces on the plaza. Ms. Oka Doner proposed a monumental ritual ring and bronze table circling a large specimen oak tree, the image you will see in a moment. Michele Oka Doner is an internationally acclaimed artist whose career spans for decades. Her artistic mediums encompass sculpture, public art, functional objects and more. Her work is filled with a life-long study and appreciation of the natural world which she has incorporated into this proposal. She is well known for creating numerous public art installations throughout the United States including "Radiant Site" at New York's Herald Square Subway; "Flight" at Washington Regan International Airport and "A walk on the beach" at Miami International Airport, of which I am sure all of you are familiar with and features 9,000 unique bronze sculptures inlaid over a mile and a quarter long concourse of terrazzo with Mother of the Pearls. It is one of the largest public artworks in the world. Oka Doner other public artwork projects can be found in federal courthouses, public libraries, hospitals, universities, other transportation centers and public parks. Ms. Oka Doner is represented by Marlborough Gallery in New York, in addition to major solar exhibitions at Marlborough. Her artwork can be found in the collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Whitney Museum of

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American Art and the Art Institute of Chicago, among many, many others which you have in her, in your materials. Mr. Carlos Beckman with the plaza project will review the concept proposal for the public to see and we can answer any additional questions. The cost of the proposed art piece and installation is estimated to be \$698,000.00, which is less than the required one percent of the project's total Art in Public Places fee. The developers expressed intent to submit additional proposed artworks. This is in addition to the Tony Craig piece that has already been approved by the Commission, along with the restoration of the historical building onsite to make-up the difference in cost. If there is any difference left over, it will be deposited into the Art Acquisition Fund. The Arts Advisory Panel and the Cultural Development Board both voted unanimously to recommend the artwork at their respective meetings on June 24th and July 7th. The developers are required to provide for the perpetual maintenance of the artwork which will be the sole responsibility of the developer in accordance with the restrictive covenant which will be entered into at the City of Coral Gables following the guidelines that we have in place. And now, I would like to turn it over to Carlos Beckman who will run through a brief PowerPoint and show you the project.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Mr. Beckman: Yes, Good Afternoon Mayor and Commissioners and staff. Thank you very much for having us here on what we hope is the last step of this process for this artwork that we have been working on with Michele for three years. The... there is a PowerPoint, if it could be shared with the team, perfect. That briefly gives you a description of the piece, of Michele Oka Doner's piece here. It is in the middle of the open to the public, open air plaza, part of the plaza development. The... it really sits in between the historic arts building that we currently use our office for the development and later will be used for something else, and one of the two main paseos on two levels connecting the commercial areas, the north parcel with the south of the hotel etcetera, etcetera. I believe we had Michele before, so I will try to be brief because she can definitely you know, speak better about her vision for the piece. But I don't know if she got disconnected, so I will carry on, again being brief. The inspiration comes from smaller current benches and seating arrangements she has done, like the one you see...

Ms. Doner: Hello, Carlos.

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Mr. Beckman: You're there?

Ms. Doner: Yes. I thought I was muted, I am here.

Mr. Beckman: Oh, please carry on, I will not do such a good job, please carry on and then I will just wrap-up with a couple of comments.

Ms. Doner: Oh, alright. Well, first of all, hello. It's nice to be back in Miami, in Coral Gables even virtually. As many of you or most of you know, I am a native daughter and I was so trilled when Carlos found me. I know the development he is working on, I knew the properties and I even have a wonderful book of poetry from 1920 that George Merrick wrote in my Florida library which I am digging out right now, and ... to try to reinstall here in New York. So, I don't know how many of you knew your founding father was a poet.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very much so.

Ms. Doner: But, I... sorry, what?

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very much so, yes.

Ms. Doner: Very much. That's wonderful, the name of the book I have let's see. This is, I don't... You could see I have my Florida library printout here because I haven't instilled, I am making a special area for it, that's why it's taking so long. But it is, let's see, George... Oh, "Songs of the Wind on a Southern Shore in other parts of Florida." It is really quite beautiful. It's interesting in those days developers were "visionaries and poets" and I think with Carlos, its full circle because we have had a wonderful dialogue over the course of a few years, and when he first showed me the plan, I suggested more shade trees and we... he actually listened and changed the landscaping a bit, so, I have been following your meeting today, and I am fascinated by all of the care and attention you are giving to what's planted, where it's planted, even how its planted, I find it very thrilling. Coming from Miami Beach where I was born and raised, we did not have that, we were not a City of trees we were a City of beach... beaches, so we do have to cross the McArthur or the Venetian Causeway to find some shade in parts of Miami. So when we spoke, we managed to cover quite a bit of ground, but what came out was this was a place that had a public space that was sort of missing in Coral Gables and I know right

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across the street you will be joined and you will have a more useful site for people to gather. So, speaking of trees, and shade and gathering, I have made this bench first for the University of Michigan and then they wanted a second and a third. We have done a whole plaza, but each one different. Those were between natural history buildings and they had science benches. This is one when I cast the bench at grounds for sculpture, at Johnson Antilea in New Jersey, Stewart Johnson who just passed away, the sculptor and the generator behind the foundry liked it so much he said “can I have one too”, so I cast one for his sculpture park and they have that in an enclosure. Though your plaza has a natural enclosure and a specimen tree will come, I am looking for ... this is a 10-foot in diameter bench, and for the first time I am creating a 17-footer, and really it’s a magical ring. It will, the tree will provide the shade and recently Carlos even suggested we make lanterns, so that in the evening it will have this kind of allure of fireflies. This is the natural patina that green grows in Florida. It’s really quite beautiful. It’s all the copper coming out in the bronze and it looks more and more beautiful. Speaking of maintenance, as it ages, it just needs a little bit of wax every year just like a car that you drive, you know anything that’s outdoors. Oh here, it looks wonderful, and so it evolved in conversation from the bench, and the tree, and the shade to what about people having a table to put their lunch, to lunchtime in a bag or their handbag down, and so we worked out this table that is across from the bench. It looks pretty beautiful and I am very pleased. I have never mastered something of this scale that has to be so perfectly round, but the foundry is excited, and I am excited, and recently I have been casting a lot in China for some large scale projects, and I am thrilled that this can be cast right here in Philadelphia so... and sent to Miami on a flat bed trucks. So, it works on every level. The site, you know, which is the first circle really and then, you know, the idea coming, and then the cosmic level which is how to make it and get it to Florida. Do you have any questions at this moment?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I don’t have a question. This is the Mayor, I don’t have a question, but I congratulate and thank the Beckmann Family and company for everything they do and their expression of good taste in hiring you, or in acquiring your work and making it available to us for our art in public places. I am very, very pleased and not only do I congratulate the Beckmanns, but I congratulate myself and ourselves for having them as our community residents in Coral Gables. I thank you very, very much for this. Are there any comments from the City Commission?

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Commissioner Keon: It's just beautiful, beautiful.

Ms. Doner: Well, that's so sweet. I am very moved, Mayor, and you used to have in the 40s a Poinciana Festival. Does anybody remember the poetry immediately? But, does anybody remember, had any sense the City had this... to honor the blooming of the flamboyant trees in June?

Commissioner Keon: We had it last year.

Ms. Doner: Oh, how fantastic.

Commissioner Keon: We did, and it was cancelled this year because of COVID, otherwise, it was planned, and it usually takes place at the Merrick House.

Ms. Doner: Oh, how fabulous.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, on Coral Way. So, it was beautiful. Yes.

Ms. Doner: It's nice that it's brought back...

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: There is a...

Ms. Doner: ... so years ago at a flea market, I found a small publication of the Poinciana poems which I will bring with me the next time I come to see Carlos in Coral Gables when I come back. But I am going to...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: There is a Spanish Nobel prize winner poet, Juan Ramon Perez who has a very beautiful poem called "Poinciana Trees". He lived in Coral Gables for two to three years after leaving Spain because of the civil war over there.

Ms. Doner: And, tell me his name again?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: J-u-a-n R-a-m-o-n and then J-i-m-e-n-e-z, he won the Nobel prize for Literature in the 50s, I think.

Ms. Doner: Okay. I am going to look it up and see what I find. I will definitely get the little book, or whatever, you know the poetry chart it is was published in. So, we had a poetry laureate in Florida, and I think that's come back also, which is very lovely because maybe around this ring in the evening you could have a poetry reading. This is a community place and we will see many, many people, because

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people it seems will sit in, they will sit out, (laugh) they will put children on their lap and really function beautifully in that way.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Beautiful, then the whole City Commission can go sit around your beautiful ring with Poinciana leaf hats on.

Ms. Doner: Yes. Oh, here are the rough sketches, so to speak for the lanterns. On one side there is a, you see the texture. On the left you see, this is a bundle of roots, you know, I pulled from the earth and the top would have to be closed in order to be put on the branch of the tree, and we haven't worked out all the design details, but that is the idea, the notion behind the lantern. So, in the 1940s there was Vivian Larimore Yesler...Laurette and she was good friends with Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, there were so many people that gathered. So, you could really provide that energy again and I will leave you with her wonderful poem called "Superlative". "The poinciana's bloom is brief, well so are ecstasy and grief. Superlatives like flame and song, are not meant to last very long."

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very beautiful. Do I hear a motion from the Commission?

Vice Mayor Lago: So moved.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Second.

Commissioner Mena: Second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll, Mr. City Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Fors.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Enthusiastically, yes. Thank you, very much. It was a pleasure.

Ms. Doner: Thank you.

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Mr. Beckman: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mayor for your kind words and to the Commission, and by the way, we have several poincianas planned for the plaza along with two jacarandas. So, we want to have blooming festivals in the spring and early summer. So, glad to hear that everybody is into that, not only us, so...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Be careful with the jacaranda.

Mr. Beckman: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: There is a type of jacaranda that doesn't flower well here, and there is another type that does flower very well.

Mr. Beckman: Yes, yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And, if you have a car, don't park it under a poinciana tree.

[Laughter]

Assistant Director Dannemiller: I agree with you on that, Mayor. My only comment was the roots... a raised planter, you are putting a royal poinciana in there, there might not be enough soil. So please consider the roots to soil volume in your design. Maybe, you push it down to the wall to be flushed or you do structural soil or...[Inaudible]...depending on the species you select, and jacaranda do pretty well here, like the Mayor said.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Brook.

Mr. Beckman: Thank you, Mayor.