

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-8
March 23, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli

Vice Mayor Vince Lago

Commissioner Pat Keon

Commissioner Michael Mena

Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Public Speaker(s)

David Shoppe

John Lucas

Agenda Item F-8 [12:30 p.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida approving Site Plan Amendment pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process" Section 14-203, "Conditional Uses," for a previously approved Country Club by Ordinance No. 2016-34, located within a Special Use (S) District, for the property commonly referred to as the "Riviera Country Club" and legally described as portions of Tracts 1 and 5, Riviera Country Club, a portion of Miami-Biltmore Golf Course of Riviera Section Part 4 and Lots 10-14, Block 112, Country Club Section Part 5 (1155 Blue Road), Coral Gables, Florida; all other conditions of approval contained in

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Agenda Item F-8 - Ordinance of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida approving Site Plan Amendment pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process" Section 14-203, "Conditional Uses," for a previously approved Country Club by Ordinance No. 2016-34, located within a Special Use District, for the property commonly referred to as the "Riviera Country Club."

Ordinance 2016-34 shall remain in effect; providing for an effective date. (Legal description on file at the City)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright, F-8, which I interrupted.

City Attorney Ramos: Yes, and I already read that one.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, you read it.

City Attorney Ramos: Sorry. I've already read that into the record. We need to swear in anyone who's going to speak. This is regarding the Riviera Country Club, and this is a public hearing item.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Mayor...

Vice Mayor Lago: Good afternoon.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I don't have any further information.

City Clerk Urquia: Ramon.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Please raise your right hand. So, do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I do. I don't have any further information. However, I do think that the applicant is ready to explain some landscape ideas that may enhance the public spaces, so if they're on the...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Zoom.

City Clerk Urquia: They are on Zoom, yes, sir.

David Shoppe: Yes, good afternoon.

City Clerk Urquia: Good afternoon, sir. Before you proceed, would you mind raising your right hand?

Mr. Shoppe: Yes, and I'm expecting counsel on as well, John Lucas, in a minute.

City Clerk Urquia: Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Mr. Shoppe: I do.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Mr. Shoppe: So, if we can give Mr. Lucas a minute, he'll be joining us any second.

John Lucas: I'm here. Thank you.

Mr. Shoppe: Great. Good afternoon, John.

Mr. Lucas: Good afternoon, David.

Mr. Shoppe: So, I think they're ready for us, John. Ramon was just on a few minutes ago and indicated that we had not provided any addition information and that we're prepared to discuss this case at this hearing.

Mr. Lucas: Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, members of the Commission, thank you for the privilege to appear again. By way of history, this matter came before the Commission for site plan amendment approval, which was declined. However, upon motion and an expression of interest by Commissioner Mena to gather additional information, the Commission finally entertained a motion to defer, which it unanimously agreed was deferred until today. Since that time, Mr. Shoppe has been in contact with the City staff and have spoken about other betterments that could have been or can be incorporated within this project, which would include enhancement to the oak trees, as well as what is referred to as understory that would line the right-of-way there at Blue Road, all of which would be in consideration of retreating from what had been initially proposed as being pavers within the existing right-of-away, and instead, utilizing what is commonly used as uniform traffic control devices, as we have throughout the City, the thermoplastic crosswalks across Blue Road, from north to south. If the Clerk will allow me an opportunity to share my screen, I'd like to share with you the recent communication that we received from Miami-Dade County, given the fact that Blue Road is in fact a County road. May I have access, please?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir. You have access.

Mr. Lucas: Okay. Let me pull up that email. Yesterday, March 22, David Shoppe -- who is also in attendance today and is kind of our project manager and go-to person for all of the troubleshooting that we encountered on this project -- reached out to Miami-Dade County, which confirmed to us as follows -- and for the record, I would repeat -- Good afternoon, David -- or quote rather. "I asked our Highway Division staff and they confirmed that pavers are not allowed on County roads. You can use colored concrete or stamped asphalt with a covenant." That being said, the issue of pavers appears to be one and that we're going to encounter difficulty with, with the County. We would offer that in support of our prior representations to the City, and that this

is not a bait and switch, as was suggested previously. It was something that was proffered or proposed at the early stages of the project in terms of design by the architect at the time. As I mentioned to you previously, Riviera Country Club is not in the business of building roads or otherwise maintaining roadways, and certainly, did not want to volunteer to maintain Blue Road at this location. We do, of course, want to implement the crosswalks, which we're required to do and are prepared to do. Commissioner Fors had mentioned at the last meeting that he want to hear a little bit more about the burden associated with it. It's not a financial burden that we're concerned with at this juncture, as far as the pavers. They do not add anything in terms of enhancing the pedestrian experience, which was the observation that staff made in its report to the Planning and Zoning Board. It does nothing in terms of better defining an area within which the pedestrians will traverse Blue Road from the north and the south. The pavers that were intended would have been a large swath that would have essentially connected the driveway to the north versus the parking area to the south on Blue Road. And we feel that, from a burdensome standpoint, it would really be a financial burden, but we're not arguing that as an excuse. It adds nothing to Blue Road. We believe that the traveling public that traverses Blue Road with -- excuse me for that -- that traverses Blue Road is going to be much more attuned to what they see on every other right-of-way, and that is the uniform traffic control device, which is the thermoplastic crosswalks that we intended and do intend to install. I think we can entertain further improvements in terms of the understory and enhancement to the oak trees, as we've mentioned. I know that Commissioner Mena expressed interest in receiving additional information concerning this project. We did not have an opportunity to connect in advance of today's meeting but stand ready to continue with that discussion. We feel that the development as a whole is an enhancement to the neighborhood. We want to create a very safe condition, not only for the members at Riviera Country Club, but also for our neighbors, and anybody else who travels Blue Road as they do. Thank you again for the time to revisit this issue with you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you very much. Any other testimony?

Vice Mayor Lago: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright. Questions from the Commission?

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes, I have a -- just a few. Mr. Trias, in reference to what we're discussing today, what is staff's recommendation?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Staff recommendation was in the memo, and the only thing that we recommended denial was the request to remove the pavers. There were some aspects of the request that I think were beneficial, such as the oak trees and et cetera.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: The discussion the Commission has had was whether or not there could be some additional enhancements in the public areas.

Vice Mayor Lago: So...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: There's been some back and forth on that. I've seen some emails on that, but I don't have an actual submittal committing to...

Vice Mayor Lago: So, the recommendations of the oak trees and the undergrounding are all beneficial. I think it's great. Staff recommends that the pavers stay, correct? That's what the recommendation...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: We have not changed the recommendation because we don't have any alternative solution at this point.

Vice Mayor Lago: And maybe this is a question for our Public Works director. Was this design approved by the County when they approved the new clubhouse, the outside improvements?

Public Works Director Diaz: We were never given the opportunity to...

City Clerk Urquia: Hermes.

Public Works Director Diaz: Work -- yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Sorry, really quick. Please raise your right hand.

Public Works Director Diaz: Oh, yeah.

City Clerk Urquia: Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Public Works Director Diaz: I swear.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, the County didn't review this at all, zero?

Public Works Director Diaz: So, my understanding of the process was that when the developer went to the County with the pavers, the County with some objections. We were not brought into the conversation at that point. This is a little thing that the County very often objects to, that through -- some things can be worked out, some things cannot.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Public Works Director Diaz: We were never given the opportunity. So, when they came back to us with a County-approved set of drawings, the pavers were gone, and that's when we raised the alarm. What a minute, this is not what the Commission approved.

Vice Mayor Lago: But we didn't get a chance to advocate...

Public Works Director Diaz: We never had a chance to advocate for the pavers with the County. Whether that was -- whether the County would have dig in their heels or not, at the point, we don't know.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah. I mean, it's...

Public Works Director Diaz: But that was really kind of like the process. It just came to us as a surprise. You know, (INAUDIBLE) what the County will approve and...

Vice Mayor Lago: I'd like to see if I can show some pictures. I took some pictures personally. This is -- right here, I want to stop on this picture. These pavers go all the way up to Le Jeune, which is by far a street that is a lot more traveled than the Blue Road. Continue. This is all Coral Gables, by the way. These are pavers that we've installed in neighborhoods throughout. That seemed to me that were installed maybe what -- stop -- what, a year ago, two years ago, would you say?

Public Works Director Diaz: Something around those lines.

Vice Mayor Lago: There's no problems with the pavers. There's no maintenance issues. There's nothing. Everything is working perfectly, drainage.

Public Works Director Diaz: So far, yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: I mean, so far, two years.

Public Works Director Diaz: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: It's going well. I mean, look how nice that looks. You know, the neighborhood is very happy with it. And again, I'm not a traffic calming expert. But again, here's another photo of Le Jeune, a nice walking path on Le Jeune. I mean, that gets a lot of traffic. You know exactly where that is. My question to you is this: do pavers also offer a reduction in speed? Do they offer anything in that capacity?

Public Works Director Diaz: It would be hard to quantify, but yes. Any time, especially when you have crosswalks and areas where you're going to get a little traffic, anything that creates a visual "this is different," people tend to pay more attention. There's also, to a certain extent, it's uncomfortable to drive through pavers, you know, depending on what kind of car you drive and your wheels, et cetera. So, there is a level of traffic calming to that. I don't know that it's something that we can actually quantify, at least I couldn't. Maybe it's somewhere, but to an extent, yes. But you know, absent a speed table or speed hump or something like that...

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Public Works Director Diaz: You know, traffic calming is a matter of degrees, right? You do certain things and it's incremental, so to speak. So, certainly, there will be a benefit of traffic calming by pavers. To what extent, I couldn't tell you.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, after these findings and hearing the both of you, I'm not ready to vote on this, and I'll tell you why. Because I would like to hear from the County. I would like to have our staff have a conversation with the County. And if the County says no on their own circumstances, then the vote is no. We can't have it. It is what it is, just like if they don't allow stop signs, just like they don't allow no left, no right turns, no closures of streets. It is what it is; we can't do it. In

very -- in few instances, I have been able to get a stop sign in some location where it's been appropriate, but we've had to advocate it -- advocate for it and fight for it. So, if the County says no and they don't give us any other options, then I completely understand. We got to move forward, and it is what it is. But I don't want to vote on this today and make a decision on this today and -- you know, in a hurry. Because everything you've told me, staff's advocating for it. We've done it on other areas of the City, especially that are just as high traffic as this, if not more. It has a -- I don't want to say it reduces speed because it doesn't, but there is...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Would you like to suggest that we defer this?

Vice Mayor Lago: I would like it because -- but I would like to defer with -- I would like to defer it to meet, number one, with the representatives for the country club. I'd like to have -- I'd like to find a solution. I don't want it just to be all or nothing. I'm more than willing to meet with the attorneys, and I'd like to sit down with them, and I'd like to have a conversation with the County, maybe the County Commissioner in the area, have a conversation with Yamilet, from Transportation. I've met with her; I've dealt with her before. She's very professional. I'd like to see a little bit more what our options are before I take a personal vote on this.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright. Is there a -- can we defer, Madam City Attorney?

City Attorney Ramos: Yes, you can defer to the next meeting, or you can just continue it indefinitely. It's up to you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Should we continue it until the next meeting?

Vice Mayor Lago: That's fine, whatever you'd like. I would like to defer it to the next meeting.

City Attorney Ramos: Okay, so that will be...

Vice Mayor Lago: And then that will give me...

City Attorney Ramos: The first meeting in May.

Vice Mayor Lago: That'll give me enough time to meet with the applicant. And I recommend -- staff, please, I would like to have staff with me, please.

Public Works Director Diaz: We'll be more than happy.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes, please, like always.

Public Works Director Diaz: Sure.

Vice Mayor Lago: Just, you know, please meet and we can have this discussion and we can show different examples of where this is happening in the City; I mean, Le Jeune. And we can sit down...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: With Yamilet in the County and have a conversation. If they say no, I don't have a problem with it. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Commissioner Fors, you wanted to say something?

Commissioner Fors: No. No, I'm fine with deferring.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, it'll be...

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Deferred -- or continued...

Mr. Shoppe: Can I...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: To the next meeting.

Mr. Shoppe: This is David Shoppe for the applicant. Can I just make a request as part of this...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Sorry, what?

Mr. Shoppe: Effort with the County? Can you all hear me?

City Clerk Urquia: That's the applicant speaking to you, sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Shoppe: Yes. So, one...

City Attorney Ramos: Did you swear him in, Billy?

Mr. Shoppe: Of the things that staff recommended through the...

City Clerk Urquia: We did.

Mr. Shoppe: Course of this...

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry, sir. Go ahead.

Mr. Shoppe: Can you hear me?

City Clerk Urquia: Go ahead.

Mr. Shoppe: Yes. One of the things that staff recommended in the course of this application was to keep the road with -- at the current 19 feet, which conflicts with the County's standards of what's now been approved at 22. This is a half-section standard road. So, if there will be conversations with the County, staff had indicated along the way that they would help us to get them to allow for that modification since it's not consistent with their standards. So, I would hope that during this effort that, you know, Vice Mayor Lago or some of the others could assist us with making sure that they work with us in that compliance with City requirements, or City's efforts to make that change.

Vice Mayor Lago: It would be my privilege -- our privilege to help you on that, please.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. We will continue with F-7.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.