

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

--MEMORANDUM--



The City Beautiful

TO: Honorable Mayor and Commissioners

FROM: Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

DATE: May 4, 2021

SUBJECT: Development Transparency & Zoning Code Amendments.

During this past election cycle, residents clearly expressed frustration with the lack of transparency and notice regarding development projects, zoning changes and plans altered or approved without notice to the public. In addition, residents have expressed that the current zoning code fails to require and promote the walkability, tree canopy and quality of design that makes Coral Gables special. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that our Commission should amend ordinances that:

- 1) Allow “as of right” commercial and mixed-use projects without review by the Planning and Zoning Board and without notice to residents, business owners and property owners located within 1,500 feet of a proposed project. Notice and comments from all stakeholders should be required because it invariably results in better projects.
- 2) Ordinances¹ that permit the City Attorney or City Manager to alter or amend site plans to:
 - a. change the type of use or business,
 - b. increase density or intensity,
 - c. decrease set-backs or step-backs,
 - d. decrease parking requirements,
 - e. decrease bicycle parking requirements,
 - f. decrease ground level green space,
 - g. permit or inherently require the removal and destruction of healthy trees over 12 feet tall, or
 - h. negatively impact the value of surrounding properties, businesses, or the overall quality of life.

¹ See Zoning Code Sections 14-107.1 and 14-107.2 and City Attorney Opinion 2017-11, which were used to modify the Gables Pointe Plaza Planned Area Development without the vote of the Commission, notice to the public or residents living within 1,000 feet of the project.

Approval by the Commission, after proper notice to all impacted residents and stakeholders, should be required for site plans altered or amended pursuant to such ordinances.

In addition, to increase transparency, a city-wide project “dashboard” of all commercial and mixed-use projects or proposed site plans that Development Services receives must be added to the City’s website. At a minimum, the dashboard should include a map of the city, with a photograph of the proposed project, which if clicked-upon provides clear drawings of a project from all sides, a photograph of the current appearance of the location, and a clear description in plain language of all zoning or site plan changes needed for the project to proceed.

Further, residents have clearly stated that the Mediterranean Ordinance has failed to promote the type of development that is in keeping with George Merrick’s vision and the residents’ views of what features are required to receive bonuses. For instance, tall buildings with high intensity and density and inadequate set backs and step backs have been inappropriately allowed close to historic structures and single family homes. The Mediterranean Ordinance is one of the tools that have been used to substantially decrease set-backs and set backs and increase height, density and intensity. Therefore, it is clear that the Mediterranean Ordinance must be amended to preserve the quality of architecture, character and livability of Coral Gables.

In the interim, the Level 1 Mediterranean bonus should be immediately suspended in order to avoid the approval of a flood of projects during the amendment process. During the amendment process for the Mediterranean Ordinance, residents must be provided a series of workshops that thoroughly explains the current bonus ordinances. Residents should then be requested to share their ideas regarding how the Mediterranean Ordinance should be changed, what features the residents wish to have encouraged, and the types of bonuses that should be awarded at each level.

On another but similar note, developers who have desired to increase set-backs in the commercial district have been informed that they must seek a variance to do so. Impediments for developers to increase set-backs should be encouraged, not discouraged. Therefore, the requirement to seek a variance to increase set-backs should be eliminated. Green space and open space shaded with tree canopy should be promoted, and shaded, safe and walkable pedestrian corridors must be required and promoted.