

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-8
May 21, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Planning Official, Jennifer Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item F-8

Discussion regarding potential legislation to require mailed notice prior to Board of Architects review of Mediterranean Bonus applications. (Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto F-8. I think we skipped that one.

Commissioner Castro: Is Jennifer here? She's right there.

Mayor Lago: I didn't see her. I was going to see if you wanted to go to F-10, that's all I was going to say.

Planning Official Garcia: Good evening. As you know, we don't send out mail notices for Board of Architects meetings, right. So, in discussions with the Commissioner, we are thinking about maybe requiring it for whenever an application is requesting a Mediterranean Bonus, since the

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board is actually granting additional height, additional FAR, and at times additional density. And so, we brought before you to discuss and see any thoughts or comments.

Mayor Lago: So, the BOA grant additional height or just dealing with just design.

Planning Official Garcia: As far as the Med Bonus, yes.

Mayor Lago: But that gets ratified on the Commission floor.

Planning Official Garcia: No. The board is actually the one granting that bonus.

Mayor Lago: Based on the design that they believe that they are meeting, whether its Med 1 or Med 2.

Planning Official Garcia: Exactly.

Commissioner Castro: So, when something is by right, I think it would be appropriate that we did provide notice to the neighbors.

Vice Mayor Anderson: In February, Commissioner Menendez and I sponsored a notice requirement. I have a copy and I can have it sent to you all again. Its Ordinance No. 2024-06, and this was about the time that we had gotten the first introduction, if you want to call it the Mediterranean Design Bonus and I had mentioned that the Board of Architects wanted some kind of notice to go out. So, this hits it at an even earlier point in time. And the additional language provided, an additional public information meeting shall be required prior to the Board of Architects preliminary review for proposed buildings and structures on building sites of 20,000 square feet or more. The other additional language in here says, the notice shall provide the website and QR Code for residents to sign up for all future required notices to the property. This was in response to the Board of Architects request, as we discussed, to have individuals informed of these projects at a very, very early stage. You have the neighborhood meetings that happen before the conceptual design, and we can get folks information from that point forward. We have projects like Allen Morris' project that would serve as a very good example of that. Before it ever reached the Board of Architects and they had the very first informational meeting, people could just sign up to get the rest of the notices. They could stay on board for that instead of having to rely upon an envelope that goes in the mailbox and maybe your husband doesn't give you, I've had that problem for a project down the street from me, and that way I can have the emails coming to my in-box as opposed to any other way. We will have the Mediterranean Design Bonus coming or I should say Mediterranean Design Code, it's not necessarily tied to bonuses per say, coming back to us, I hope sometime this summer. Planning and Zoning is working on it right now. This is something perhaps you can mention to Planning and Zoning and get them to weigh in at the same time to discussing the various levels and design improvements that we had placed into that proposed code. I'd like to hear their recommendation and bring to them this one as well, because there's a point where we've already covered it. We are beating the dead horse even more. So, this

is 2024-06, we just passed it in February, and I think it provides some pretty early and robust notice for the exact same purpose.

Commissioner Castro: Is it happening?

Planning Official Garcia: Yes. That legislation is for additional meeting to happen before it goes to Board of Architects, but only if it's required to have a neighborhood meeting. I think the intent of this is to capture both the Coral Gables by right and not by right requiring Commission approval projects.

Commissioner Castro: There's two parts to this one to the one I was proposing. This is just a discussion. I will be bringing it back next Commission meeting; would it give us enough time?

City Attorney Suarez: I think you wanted it to go to Planning and Zoning first, right.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

City Attorney Suarez: Is this one on, Jennifer, forgive me, is this on in June?

Planning Official Garcia: Right – and next we'll discuss it with the Board of Architects as well to get their input.

City Attorney Suarez: But will this go June to Planning and Zoning or it will have to go in July to Planning and Zoning?

Planning Official Garcia; Probably July.

City Attorney Suarez: July.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Is the Planning and Zoning Board going to be covering the Mediterranean design issue at the same time?

Planning Official Garcia: In June.

Vice Mayor Anderson: In June.

Planning Official Garcia: But we can try and have a discussion with them at that time.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think it bears being mentioned to them so that they can consider it in conjunction with the language that they are looking at right now and remind that this is in place for the projects 20,000 square feet and larger and have them weigh in on whether the 10,000 and below should also require that type of notice as well.

Planning Official Garcia: Well, any Med Bonus request.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: Or Med design because we require Med design in some areas without a bonus.

Planning Official Garcia: Correct. Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, my suggestion that these be paired together.

Commissioner Castro: This really came about the complaint I got from a resident in a condo that a nine-story building was going up, you know the story, Jennifer.

Planning Official Garcia: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: And it was by right, but then they applied for Med Bonus, so there were no notifications to any of the neighbors and this is a building that's almost nine floors. So, I think it's pretty significant that if a building of nine floors is going 60 feet from you, you should get notified even though if it's by right. So, under the 20,000...

Commissioner Fernandez: Just a question because you're talking about mail notice. Are you looking to also apply the door hangers to this?

Commissioner Castro: We haven't spoken about that.

Commissioner Fernandez: Because if you're going to send it to Planning and Zoning and BOA for consideration, if you are considering having that, have them consider both at the same time.

Commissioner Castro: I mean if this is something that the Commission would have some appetite for, I'd be more than open to it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I mean I have an appetite.

Commissioner Castro: For door hangers.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well.

Commissioner Fernandez: I have an appetite right now period.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I tried to do something like this two years ago and there were legal concerns expressed on the by right. So, we'll have to navigate this. Let it go to Planning and Zoning. Let's have staff weigh in on it. The Aloft Hotel is the prime example.

Mayor Lago: I was waiting for you to bring that up.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That I would bring up that should have had notice because if we would have had input, we could have done a better job. We wouldn't have a building smashed up against LeJeune Road with minimal amount of space to walk and we might not have a restaurant space facing where the exhaust fumes from trucks idling and actually get used. I'm all in favor of it, but instead of piecemeal, I'd like Planning and Zoning to consider this at the same time since it's the same issue.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Okay. Thank you very much Jennifer.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, a member of the public requesting to speak, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Maria Cruz, Mrs. Maria Cruz, by the way. Today is my husband's birthday. I think having gone to Board of Architects many times and listening to people, I think this is a wise move, because most of us when we get to Planning and Zoning, Board of Architects, we hear the as of right so many times that sometimes we really question whether it is a fact or not. I think we have made it clear. Vice Mayor has been very clear on what Mediterranean Bonus should be, and if you drive around the city you find many buildings that have granted Mediterranean Bonuses, they look nothing like they are supposed to. So, I think this is good and I thought your idea was very good. Since you're going to do it for some stuff, do it the same way, and that way there is no confusion. If you establish this is the way we're going to let the people know, using the door hangers, then everybody knows that they should expect the door hanger instead of doing it different ways then, did I get the letter, did I not get the letter, I thought it was going to be a door hanger. Well, yes...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Do both.

Mrs. Cruz: I agree.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mistakes happen.

Mrs. Cruz: That's fine, but I do think that the door hanger is a good idea. Okay.

Commissioner Castro: Are there any legal limitations to that?

City Attorney Suarez: Well, it's just an additional requirement that you are imposing, as always. The more you add requirements to certain requests or certain approval processes, there is obviously, there's a spectrum of potential risk.

Commissioner Castro: And the reason I'm asking is because when you're putting a door hanger on a property, a development that is by right, who is covering the cost for that? You get what I'm saying or no.

City Attorney Suarez: What's the question?

Commissioner Castro: For the properties that are built 20,000 feet and maybe they are already constructing by right, it doesn't have to go through the Commission, who would be providing a door hanger for that?

City Attorney Suarez: Currently, under the ordinance that was considered today, there wouldn't be a door hanger requirement for those.

Planning Official Garcia: Correct. We were discussing it. I think before we were discussing, staff would be kind of in charge of mailing the notices for the actual meeting, at that point they were going to have to add on, given more to the Med Bonus fee schedule to accommodate that extra fee.

City Attorney Suarez: But I think she is asking about door hangers. So, the ordinance that was considered on first reading today was door hangers for the public information meeting only, not for anything else. So, what you were discussing was mailed notice for Board of Architects.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. Yes. But Commissioner Fernandez mentioned, well, if we are already mailing notices, we should also consider door hangers for this one, is that a possibility, is that something we could mention to the Planning and Zoning Board?

Planning Official Garcia: Yes, they could discuss it.

City Attorney Suarez: Yes, of course. I just think their concern about having the door hangers remaining at the properties would probably be compounded the more you are doing it for different meetings and so forth.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Use the Aloft as an example.

Mayor Lago: How sustainable are these door hangers by the way, because we worry about the environment and printing and cost and stuff like that, but again, the developer is going to for it, so let them pay for it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Recycled paper.

Mayor Lago: How sustainable is it though, Jennifer, tell me.

Planning Official Garcia: Printing paper is not the most sustainable way to get out information.

Mayor Lago: Interesting.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, but the alternative is we end up with projects that are bad or could have been better.

Mayor Lago: Listen, I'm not denying that. I supported you on that issue, but I think there's a lot of other ways that we, I'm not saying I'm not supporting this, I'm supporting this, but there are a lot of ways that we could do things with technology.

Vice Mayor Anderson: But it doesn't necessarily work for everybody.

Commissioner Fernandez: Exactly. It hasn't and that's been the problem.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We can always add recycled paper requirement.

Mayor Lago: What I would love to do is, I would love to be able to kind of be able to monitor if there is an uptick in response, but then again, some projects garner more attention than others due to the size, due to the scope, due to the location. Some areas are more united.

Commissioner Fernandez: You know there could be a way to do it. We have a sign-in sheet in every single meeting. We could have a box, where did you hear about this meeting and we could put letter, email, and that will give us data on.

Mayor Lago: So, what I was saying was, if you could come back when you address the Commissioner's items with some ideas of how we could track and get an idea of what's working, what's working best. I know the best approach is obviously having multiple strategies. Like today when you're advertising something whether its on the website, whether its E-NEWS, whether its an email, whether it's a door hanger, whatever it is. I want to get an idea. I like data. I like to understand what's actually working towards somebody's personal fancy. What appeals to a certain demographic of individuals and then we can break it down.

Planning Official Garcia: I think that's exactly it.

Mayor Lago: And we can break that down and say, listen, there's an older demographic or a younger demographic or let's see how this works the best, because then we could potentially, not say remove something, but focus in a lot more on trying to drive interest, we just got to use that type of technology or that type of print media and see how it would work out.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you, Jennifer.