

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-2
February 27, 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

Interim City Manager, Alberto Parjus

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Laura Russo

Agenda Item E-2 [1:30 p.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending St. Philip’s School site plan approved under Ordinance No. 3576 to replace an existing building with a new pre-K building located at 1109 Andalusia Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida; all other conditions of approval contained in Ordinance No. 3576 shall remain in effect; providing for severability clause, repealer provision, codification, and providing for an effective date(11 03 23 PZB recommended approval with conditions, Vote 7-0)
Lobbyist: Laura Russo

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item E-2. Just want to catch this one before we go to lunch.

City Attorney Suarez: E-2 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending St. Philip’s School site plan approved under Ordinance No. 3576 to replace an existing building with a new pre-K building located at 1109 Andalusia Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida; all other conditions of approval contained in Ordinance No. 3576 shall remain in effect; providing for severability clause, repealer provision, codification, and providing for an effective date. This is a quasi-judicial item, so anyone who’s wishing to speak today should be sworn in by the Clerk.

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City Clerk Urquia: Those who will be appearing before this item, please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm the testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth.

All: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Ms. Russo: I was about to say good morning, but actually good afternoon. Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, I'm here this afternoon representing St. Philip's Episcopal School and Church. You may recall that we were here a few weeks ago with a request to do a modification to our site plan to demolish an existing building and replace it with a building of almost equal size, the only difference being that a current awning connection was going to be enclosed for the safety of the children. The new structure is to replace the Pre-K – 3 and Pre-K – 4 classrooms. As you know, one of the conditions in between first and second reading was that we meet with the neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Toyos, and I want to let you know that we did meet with Mr. and Mrs. Toyos. We had a very successful meeting. We have come to an agreement on the swale and that is that we will each landscape our own side of the swale. So, St. Philips will landscape the west side of Cordova in front of their house, and the Toyos will landscape theirs. We've agreed that we will match whatever landscaping the Toyos want. And during that meeting, we also discussed that we may have future disagreements. If the school should ever decide to expand and we've agreed that we will disagree, but that we will keep them posted on any plans. We let them know that there were no short-term or long-term plans for that, but that to be honest, if something were to happen where the house next-door became available, we might be able to buy it, we might not, but that we would let him know and that any process would involve them, and we would always keep them posted. We also agreed that when there are special events, and I just let them know of a funeral that is upcoming tomorrow, that there will be extra traffic circulating in the area. And so, the Toyos and Mrs. Norma Perez, who is head of school, have exchanged cell phone numbers, so they now have direct access to be able to deal directly with the school should there be an incident. So, we look forward to working with them on their landscaping and we respectfully ask you to approve it on second reading with a condition modified as we and the Toyos have agreed to.

Planning Official Garcia: Jennifer Garcia, Planning Official. So, just to clarify. The ordinance in your packet today, does not reflect this change, because that change was too late after we had uploaded the draft ordinance, so we will make that amendment that the school will enter the swale on the west side and the owners will prepare on their property on the east side.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Are there any questions for staff or for the applicant? Are there any public comments?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir, Mr. Waldo and JC Toyos.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon, thank you for being here again. Good to see you.

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Mr. Toyos: It was going to be good morning, but...

[Laughter]

Mayor Lago: We thought it was going to be a good morning. I apologize.

Mr. Toyos: I thought we had communication issues.

[Laughter]

Vice Mayor Anderson: It happens.

Commissioner Menendez: It will be a good morning soon.

Mayor Lago: Sorry, we have to lighten it a little bit.

Mr. Toyos: We met with St. Philips School administrators and with Laura and we reached an agreement that we would, obviously incorporate into the ordinance and I think we're both on the same side. And like she said, we agreed, and we disagreed, but all left happy, so. How do you call it, as my wife tells me every once in a while, in Spanish, _____. We all know where we stand.

Ms. Russo: But we've agreed to be respectful in our disagreement and that we will meet with each other many times before that having nothing to do with that, but should the time come when that comes, we understand their position and we will try to persuade them with whatever position that may be, but not in the foreseeable future and hopefully after my retirement.

Mr. Toyos: We will try to make it after her retirement.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Thank you for finding a solution.

Mr. Toyos: So basically, we did agree on the both sides, the landscaping and they are going to match us and where everyone is paying for the other side, and we're good with that, and we are all moving along beyond that. Now, we did tell them, you know, and we've spoken with the neighbors, some of our neighbors and we are on the same page on this, that any future attempt to rezone any single-family home to institutional zoning or any further expansion of the current campos footprint will be opposed by us and the neighbors that we have spoken to. We are in support of the vision that George Merrick had for this area, especially on Coral Way within the single-family district and that's what we are going to stay true to in that area, and they know that, we know that we're good with that.

Mayor Lago: Any comments, anything else.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think it's a beautiful example of what happens if you take the time to sit down and meet. You guys were at each other's throats practically the last time, and you came to

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resolution, and it just takes a little effort, a little time. That's the beauty of mediation. It's a lot less painful when you can sit down out of the arena, so to speak, and have an off the record conversation. So, I'm glad you all worked that out and I hope that more issues in our city will be able to be worked out that way. Thank you.

Mr. Toyos: Little miscommunication, but we're beyond that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Always is.

Commissioner Fernandez: I just wanted to thank both sides for having the conversation and for forging a path forward of communication and dialog, which I think is going to be beneficial to both. Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to add that the fact that the room wasn't full of people must have been a good sign that you all came to an agreement, appreciate it greatly. It's a good sign, right. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Can I have a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Second.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Ms. Russo: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much Ms. Russo. Thank you for being here.