

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
November 9, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias

Public Speaker(s)

Miguel Diaz de la Portilla

Maria de la Guardia

Anthony Paul

Sue Kawalerski

Karelia Carbonell

Barbara Perez

Agenda Item F-4 [11:34 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission granting approval of a Planned Area Development (PAD) pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-206, "General Procedures for Planned Area Development" for a proposed multi-family project referred to as "Gables Village" on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 22, Block 28, "Coral Gables Biltmore Section" (504, 516, 522, 530, and 536 Malaga; 503, 511, 515, 535, 529, 525, and 521 Santander; and 3109

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Segovia), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date.

Lobbyist: Miguel Diaz de la Portilla

Lobbyist: Mario Garcia-Serra

Lobbyist: Maria de la Guardia

Lobbyist: Jenny Ducret

Mayor Lago: Moving on to time certain 11 o'clock, F-4.

City Attorney Ramos: F-4 is an ordinance of the City Commission granting approval of a Planned Area Development pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-206, "General Procedures for Planned Area Development" for a proposed multi-family project referred to as "Gables Village" on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 22, Block 28, "Coral Gables Biltmore Section," Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. This is a public hearing item. We also need to swear the public in, Mr. Clerk, including Mr. Trias.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Trias, please raise your right hand. Actually, anyone else going to testify on this item today? Do you 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. May I have the PowerPoint, please? Mayor, Commissioners, this is a PAD, a PAD that is one block -- one full block of a residential area that has -- in the frontage on Segovia, duplexes, and then MF3, which is mostly rowhouses and small apartment buildings. And that whole block is zoned, and the land use is being followed, no changes are being made. The only request at this point is a PAD. I would anticipate a future request for a replat at some point in the future. But at this point, the request is a PAD because the project is 2.6 acres, so it does qualify under the provisions of the PAD. Gables Village, the architect will explain the design in some detail. But generally speaking, what we're talking about is two du -- I'm sorry,

duplexes on the front on Segovia, and then a variety of attached units and small apartment buildings. There was some discussion about a historic building earlier in the Commission that went through the process, and the Historic Preservation Officer explained how that was decided. There was also some discussion about the public benefits. As you can see, all of the sidewalks and all of the public areas are being redone. And in fact, all of the parking that right now is mostly on the right-of-way is being placed inside the project. So, there are multiple things that the applicant will explain. The project qualifies under the requirements of the PAD. The review timeline that goes back to the neighborhood meeting in September, Board of Architects also in September, and then Planning and Zoning in October. Letters were sent to property owners within a thousand feet, as required by Code. And then there were many multiple public notifications: three times in the form of letters, two times in postings on the property, and then also on the website and the newspaper advertisement for Planning and Zoning. Now, sometimes some citizens have said that I advocate for projects; I don't. The Code requires me -- it says shall require to have a recommendation, so I'm giving you a recommendation because I don't have a choice; I have to give it to you. So, the project is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, and staff recommends approval. And if you have any questions, I'll be around to answer, but I think the applicant has an extensive presentation.

Miguel Díaz de la Portilla: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. Manager, Madam City Attorney, members of the staff. I'm Miguel Díaz de la Portilla. I'm an attorney at Gunster, 600 Brickell Avenue, Suite 3500, Miami, Florida. I know I don't look like Mario Garcia-Serra, but I'm his partner. I'm pinch hitting for him. I'm joined this morning by co-counsel, Lauren Kahn, as well as our architect, Maria de la Guardia, and Kegan Marshall, who you may have seen there operating the electronic equipment. Just very briefly, I'd like to go over the location of the project and the current conditions, and then I'll turn it over to our architect to go over the details of the project. And we'll be mindful of your time because we know you have a lot of other things to do as well. And as we hook up there, let me just tell you where the project is located while they work on the technology. We're in the Biltmore area. The property is between Malaga on the north and Santander on the south, Hernando on the east, and Segovia on the west. It's a full block -- as your

Planning Director said -- 2.6 acres total. There are currently 52 residential units on the property, a combination of duplex units and apartments. What we are asking for is an approval of a PAD with 48 residential units, so lower density than what is currently there. There are currently 85 parking spaces all over place, disorganized parking on the street, the swale areas. Mr. Mayor, you could have used for your presentation of some of the common areas, because they're nothing more -- there's no swale; there's dirt. Their parking is chaotic; helter-skelter is the phrase that comes to mind. And so, what we are proposing is 92 parking spaces where there're 85 now. These 92 spaces are internalized to the property: 16 parking spaces on the street, organized parking spaces on the street. In addition to that -- and our architect will go over that -- you're seeing the pictures of what it looks like now. That's on a good day. I drove there last night as well. It's about five blocks from where I've lived for 20 years in the City of Coral Gables. And it was a lot more chaotic than that on the street. But again, 16 parking spaces. This is in addition to the 92 internal spaces. Five drop-off areas, again, to allow for Uber and service, and in addition to that, handicapped vans, and the like. What we are proposing has tremendous architectural amenities and street amenities. The architect will go through it, but these are some of the projects that this team, this architect, and this developer has done in the City of Coral Gables, all a perfect and beautiful example of architecture and amenities and pedestrian amenities. Three projects that you're going to see here, pictures of, these are prior projects. You have Beatrice Row, you have Althea Row, and you have Biltmore Row. Those are three of the projects that this group, MG Developer -- by the way, they're also here. The principals are right in the front row, Mr. Ariel (phonetic) Gutierrez and Alirio Torrealba, who are here with us as well. And I think that's Ms. Ducret as well, Jenny Ducret, who I didn't see come in earlier. But you will see tremendous pedestrian amenities. All the utilitarian function of these buildings are internalized to internal roads taking them off the street, eliminating conflict with pedestrians, making for interesting vistas, a nice visual experience for those of us who enjoy walking in the neighborhoods, which is one of the greatest things about Coral Gables. So, now I'll turn it over to our architect who will quickly go through the project. I'm here to answer any questions you have and deal with any rebuttal should it be necessary. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Senator.

City Attorney Ramos: Just confirming, you've both been sworn in?

Maria de la Guardia: Yes.

City Attorney Ramos: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. De la Guardia: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Good morning, Commissioners. Thank you for hearing us. My name is Maria de la Guardia, and I live across -- I'm principals of de la Guardia Victoria Architects & Urbanists, here at 224 Valencia Avenue. I'm here with Kegan Marshall, our trusted architectural director. And I live across the street from Salvadore Park. So, my grandkids are truly enjoying the new park. I collaborated on the design with Trelles Cabarrocas Architects and with Fabre & Company on the design of the project. Gables Village stems from the conviction that the fundamental unit of design and architecture is not the individual building, but the city as a whole, and to the idea of civic art and town building for the well-being of an individual and community alike. A critical objective of the project is to develop a city block in such a way that it is at once responsive to the existing context and yet arrives at an urban design that is civic in nature and proposes a prototype for development in this district of the City of Coral Gables. Expressed through a sequence of meaningful garden spaces defined by residences, the civic dimension of the project reads as a harmonious and balanced relationship between house and garden and city and landscape. The garden courts -- courtyards, the pedestrian villa, the muse-like driveways are the essential organizing feature of the project, and as such, are interconnected as a pedestrian sequence of open spaces. These spaces extend beyond the property lines and engage the public right of way. Santander Avenue and Malaga Avenue are physically and visually joined by the sequence of courtyard and garden court. The consequent perspective view is framed by a two-story archway below a gable that recalls Phineas Paist's lovely arch at the Douglas Entrance and lends the project its namesake, Gables Village. Although interior common open spaces have

been created within the block, the city streets are never neglected as all residences with street fronts have their main pedestrian entrance oriented towards them. The character of the four different streets -- Segovia Street, Malaga Avenue, Hernando Street and Santander Avenue -- is addressed by appropriate housing types and corresponding building heights. I want to go around the block and look at the different views. And so, here we -- on Segovia, we have the duplexes with a maximum height of 30 feet fronting Segovia, which obviously is composed of duplexes. And so, if we go to the next street, okay, on Malaga Avenue, we have the townhouses, which have a maximum height of 35 feet. And they're providing the transition to the single-family residence across the street. Repeatedly, we have seen in the City where the townhouse is used as a transition between higher density and single-family, and it's very successful in doing that. We see -- sort of at the end of the garden court, we see the gable and the archway. We see -- and so, if we go over to Hernando Street, we have four lofts with a maximum height of 35 feet, and they are fronting MF3 across the street. And to the side, it's fronting single family, thus the maximum height of 35 feet. Okay, let's go to the next. And so, here we have Santander Avenue, which faces MF3, and it has a maximum height of 45 feet. And we see how -- and we see at the end of the courtyard, we see again the other side of the gable, with the archway connecting the two spaces and sort of the cerulean motif at the top of the gable, which comes to us from a similar cerulean type of window in George Merrick's own house. I want to bring -- I want to ask you to focus on the base of the flats, where we're going to have these four little piazzas along Santander Avenue. And so, Gables Village proposes four public places at the base of the flats on Santander Avenue. These four place-making spaces take inspiration from the glorietas of the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929 in Seville. The 48 glorietas representing the different provinces offered seating to the tired visitor, fountains to cool the temperature, small libraries for sharing books on the respective -- I'm sorry, for sharing books on the respective provinces. Gables Village offers four architects' renditions of the glorietas to the neighborhood and residents as an artful place to meet friends, swap books at the free street libraries, rest while walking the dog, or simply a pause for a moment of contemplation. Each of these places could illustrate the history of Coral Gables or take on a literary theme inspired by a Coral Gables poem. They would also serve as a setting for the Art in Public Place component of Gables Village. As a PAD designation, the site plan is able to provide a 37

percent ratio of landscape open space, exceeding the current minimum requirement for 20 percent. The PAD makes it possible to not only front the residences on the public street and civic spaces, but more importantly, it allows for the automobile to be segregated to the rear of the building. These interior drives allow for more neighborhood-friendly resolution of the automobile. Even though 92 parking spaces are provided, not a single garage door faces the public sidewalk or street. Parking along the public right-of-way is further systematized by proposing 16 on-street parking spaces organized between the mature street trees to replace the existing random and unplanned parking on the parkway. The project proposes 48 multi -- 48-unit, multi-family development consisting of a variety of housing types, such as duplex, flats, lofts, and townhouses at an accessible price point. The intention is to incorporate universal design and wellness principles to allow aging in place and produce a healthy cross-section of age groups in the resident population. The range of unit types and sizes -- from two-bedroom flats to four-bedroom townhouses -- will allow for residents from different socioeconomic groups and family sizes, a progressive concept that Merrick promoted. As Coral Gables nears its centennial celebration, the principles of City Beautiful and garden city movements are just as relevant today as when George Merrick first conceived the city in the garden. His civic art legacy in the form of shaded tree-lined streets, plazas, parks, fountains, and the celebration of the public realm as welcoming and beautiful, forms the conceptual basis of Gables Village, where the natural and built environment is celebrated for the benefit of its residents and neighbors alike. That concludes our presentation.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mr. Díaz de la Portilla: And just briefly, by way of summary, we have a positive staff recommendation, as you can see, a unanimous Planning and Zoning Board vote, cleared by the Board of Architects as well, and we have the support of the Coral Gables Neighborhood Association as well, Mr. Mayor. Thank you. We're here to answer any questions that you or your colleagues may have.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. You want to have --? Is there any public comment?

Vice Mayor Mena: There is.

City Clerk Urquia: There is.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Let's roll with the public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Alright. So, the first speaker is...

Mayor Lago: How many speakers do we have?

City Clerk Urquia: Two.

Mayor Lago: Two, okay.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Anthony Paul.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Paul, thank you for being here. The floor is yours.

Anthony Paul: Good morning. My name is Anthony Paul. I live a couple of hundred feet away from Block 28, and I just have a few questions I'd like to ask the applicant or the government, and that has to do with the minimum width of the swale and of the setback of these buildings. That's one. And the other is, how many off-street parking is there going to be per unit, so it could be -- I can do the...

Mayor Lago: Okay, would you like --? You want us to bring up staff? Mr. Manager.

Vice Mayor Mena: Mr. Trias, you want to...?

Mayor Lago: Can we have our staff come up and just answer this gentleman's questions?

City Manager Iglesias: Director Trias will...

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: Will respond. And we also have the architect.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: If the question is about the setbacks, maybe the applicant can go through the site plan and explain the specific setbacks. I mean, conceptually, the swales are becoming parking, so that's new, well-defined parking spaces all throughout the four sides of the building. But maybe the applicant can explain the setbacks a little further.

Ms. De la Guardia: At the duplex -- which basically on Segovia, we have 25-foot setback to the duplex and 15-foot setback to the side of the duplex, which is what's required. So, what is proposed is what's required for duplex. For the MF3, which is the rest of the project, we have 10-foot setbacks required and 10-foot setbacks proposed.

Mr. Paul: (INAUDIBLE), could you --? Do you have this written out somewhere or --? It's going to take me a little while to write this and waste everybody's time.

Vice Mayor Mena: They can give you a plan that will show you -- basically, it's a rendering that will show you what the setbacks are, if that's easier for you.

Mr. Paul: Where do I get...

Mayor Lago: Would you mind maybe...?

Mr. Paul: A copy of this, all this stuff?

Mayor Lago: We could have our staff sit down with you if you'd like...

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: To explain it.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, if I may suggest that Mr. Trias can meet with the gentleman and explain everything he needs to know.

Mayor Lago: Would you like that? Would you like for our staff to sit down with you...?

Vice Mayor Mena: To go over...

Mayor Lago: Maybe after this item is heard and to go over the setbacks and to make sure you have all the necessary information you're requesting?

Mr. Paul: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Your other question was the issue of parking, correct? I want to make sure we address it on the record.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: The table in the cover memo of the Commission has both the setbacks and the parking data so it's...

Mr. Paul: I don't think I ever got a copy of that.

Mayor Lago: Well, we'll give you a copy of that.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I'll give you a copy of that, sure.

Mayor Lago: So, you can have it for your record, and I'll...

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Trias, can you please explain to the resident what's -- concerning parking and the setbacks, please?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yeah, so what happens is that if you look at the table, it's 10-foot setbacks for MF3, 25 setbacks for MF1. It's all right here clearly explained.

Vice Mayor Mena: But let's...

City Manager Iglesias: If you could explain...

Vice Mayor Mena: But guys, let's -- he's -- I'm presuming you're not necessarily familiar with MF3, MF4, I don't know if you are or not.

Mr. Paul: It's alright.

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm assuming you're not familiar with all of these zoning acronyms that...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: No, of course.

Vice Mayor Mena: Mr. Trias is utilizing. So, what I would propose is if he can sit with you...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Sure.

Vice Mayor Mena: And he can tell you on this street because it's this type of building, here's the setback. On that street -- and he can give you a rendering, answer any questions you'd like. And just to give you some peace of mind and so you understand how this process works, the item is before us on first reading today. It will be back on second reading presumably at our December meeting should it pass. And so, you will have an opportunity once you have the benefit of those answers and that information to address any concerns you may have at the future meeting.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, and I'm happy (INAUDIBLE)...

City Manager Iglesias: If I...

Mayor Lago: Let me just say one thing really quickly. I'm happy that the Vice Mayor mentioned that because what I'd like for you to do is sit down with Mr. Trias after we've heard this item, go over all your concerns, and then you can come back if you have any other further concerns on second reading. That's the great part of the process. You get two bites of the apple here to have a discussion or bring up...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Your concerns or bring up your ideas if you can see that this project can be made better in any way or fashion, okay?

City Manager Iglesias: And that's what I meant, Mayor, for Mr. Trias to sit privately...

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

City Manager Iglesias: And go over the project with the resident. So, if you could do that privately, Mr. Trias, I would appreciate it.

Commissioner Menendez: And I'd like to know if the...

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Absolutely.

Commissioner Menendez: Architectural team also can participate as well. And one thing I think would be helpful is to do a -- explain the comparison between current setback and the setback based on your design. That way I think it's a lot easier to say currently there's 10, there'll be 10 -- you know, that helps anyone.

Unidentified Speaker: Good question.

Ms. De la Guardia: Just to put it very simply, right now, there's 52 units on the block, and almost all of those units are parking on the street. So, you have basically the cars for 52 units that are on the street. There's a few that you can pull into the apartment -- into the parcel, but basically, everybody's on the street. We're proposing 48 units, and all those units are going to be parked inside our building where you can't even see the car. And in addition to the 92 parking spaces that we have within our project that you can't see from the street, we have 16 additional parking spaces around the perimeter of the block where the street trees allow. So, working with the layout of the street trees and trying to keep a certain distance from the root system of the street trees, we're going to sort of carve 16 parking spaces versus what's happening now, where all those 48 units are just parking...

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Ms. De la Guardia: I'm sorry, all those 52 units, they're just parking right over the root system and actually, you know, damaging the root system for all those mature mahoganies and black olives. So, I think that from a parking standpoint, what you will see after the project is done is that we've cleaned up the street and we have added 16 additional parking spaces that do not go towards our

parking requirement, but rather would work for guests or visitors or even the apartment building across the street.

Commissioner Menendez: Are those designated?

Mr. Paul: They'll be on the swale?

Commissioner Menendez: Those are designated.

Ms. De la Guardia: What's that?

Mr. Paul: The 16 will be on the swale?

Ms. De la Guardia: They will be on the swale where we can safely nestle them between the existing street trees.

Mr. Paul: What street will they be on, the 16?

Ms. De la Guardia: Okay, they're going to be on Malaga, they're going to be on Hernando, and they're going to be on Santander.

Mr. Paul: Sixteen on each street, you mean?

Ms. De la Guardia: No, total.

Mr. Paul: Four?

Ms. De la Guardia: Well, let me see. Let me just see.

Mr. Paul: A total of 16.

Ms. De la Guardia: Total of 16 divided into those three streets.

Mr. Paul: Okay, yeah.

Ms. De la Guardia: And no on-street parking on Segovia. So, it'll be along the other three streets.

Mr. Paul: On Segovia...

Ms. De la Guardia: Segovia, there will be no on-street parking.

Mr. Paul: Yeah. Okay, well, I'll forward to talking to your people. Thank you.

Ms. De la Guardia: Yeah. I think that...

Mr. Paul: One more, one more.

Ms. De la Guardia: If -- I think that this project what it did get right was the handling of the automobile. I think it's its greatest success is the way it's pulled -- it's just sucked up all the automobiles from the street, housed them internally, and create -- in an effort to create a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood and environment.

Mr. Paul: Sounds good. One more question: were there any variances or anything, or is it completely in sync with the requirements?

Mr. Díaz de la Portilla: If I may, no variances. No variances were requested.

Mr. Paul: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Unidentified Speaker: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay, the next speaker is Ms. Sue Kawalerski.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Kawalerski, the floor is yours. Thank you for being here. It's not good afternoon; it's good morning for one more minute, so thank you.

Sue Kawalerski: Okay. I think it's good morning now. Oh, now it's good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Ms. Kawalerski: My name is Sue Kawalerski. I live at 6830 Gratian Street in Coral Gables. It is my birthday today, but I chose to be at this meeting today because there are a couple of agenda items -- including this -- I wish to address. I'm representing the Coral Gables Neighbors Association. And as Senator Díaz de la Portilla indicated earlier, the Coral Gables Neighbors Association supports this project. We applaud architect Maria de la Guardia for her fantastic ability to combine the Mediterranean architecture and the various housing styles here. And particularly, we applaud the fact that the cars will be hidden and internalized from the neighborhood. We believe this project will enhance and improve the neighborhood, and therefore, are in favor of it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Next, Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: The next speaker is Ms. Karelia Carbonell.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Carbonell, good afternoon. The floor is yours. Thank you for joining us again.

Karelia Carbonell: Yes. Hi, everyone again. I -- as -- on behalf of the Historic Preservation Association, I would like to read our letter in the record, and so I am going to read right now. It says, "On behalf of the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables, please accept this letter in opposition to the Gables Village Development as currently proposed. The community is currently seeking historic designation of 503 Santander Avenue for its historic cultural and architectural significance as an intact example of a garden apartment building in the Monterey style. The Historic Preservation Board has not yet reviewed 503 Santander Avenue for historic significance. The Gables Village proposal seeks to demolish an entire city block of garden apartments, including 503 Santander Avenue. Founder George Merrick included affordable housing and garden apartments as part of the tenets of this city as based on the garden city and City Beautiful movement. Different architectural styles, such as the Monterey, were constructed to complement the fabric of the rich historic built environment in the City. The proposal seeks to demolish an established piece of this fabric. As such, the Gables Village proposal does not satisfy Section 5-201 of the Coral Gables Mediterranean style design standards as it does not continue to support George Merrick's vision consistent with the established historic building fabric of the City. Therefore, the proposal should not be awarded, the Mediterranean bonus or -- the Mediterranean bonus. We also ask that the current -- to deny the current application for the PAD. We find that a study is needed as to how significant the Monterey building located at 503 Santander Avenue could be preserved as a separate site or incorporated into the development. The Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables promotes the understanding and importance of historic resources and their preservation. Respectfully, Karelia Martinez Carbonell, President of the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables." My question is this village seems more like a private enclave than a public residential area. And what is the estimated value of these homes? And definitely, we are losing all our affordable housing, as Mr. Merrick -- that is -- that was one of his tenets. He wanted a city that was democratically developed, and we are losing that in Coral Gables.

So, I do ask, what are the ranges for these properties? And again, it looks like it's a private enclave and please explain this. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Mena: What is --? Ms. Carbonell, sorry. I'm not understanding the distinction you're trying to make between a private enclave -- and I'm not sure what the other term you used was -- a public what? I'm sorry. This is a private property.

Mayor Lago: Well, and I think it's interesting because it's also -- if I may interject, Vice Mayor -- George Merrick built similar types of developments throughout the City...

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mayor Lago: The Chinese Village, you know, German. There's different feels to these themed projects throughout Coral Gables. And I also find it very interesting -- and I'm not well versed in historic preservation even though I'm a fan -- I also am under the impression that George Merrick left undeveloped certain villages that he had proposed but he wasn't able to get to before his untimely death. So, I'm also a little bit confused and I echo the sentiments of the Vice Mayor.

Ms. Carbonell: Well, I just -- I saw the -- it seems like it's sort of -- when I say private it's that it's -- right now that all that area has the public streets, and I didn't -- I saw that it was pretty enclosed. So, that's just my observation. I'm not saying that's what it is, but that is my observation. But going back to what are these residences going to be priced at -- because again, we're losing our affordable housing.

Mayor Lago: So...

Ms. Carbonell: And one of the tenets of Merrick's plan was to incorporate those types of income levels. So, what is the range?

Mayor Lago: So, if I may interject one second before I bring up the developer. First off, it's a great question, when you talk about, you know, people's ability to remain in the City. Even though I opposed it, the Commission before this Commission voted in favor of doubling the density in North Gables in an effort to be able to incentivize developers to, you know, increase stock so that we could have a lot of the individuals that live in our community stay in our community; the elderly, single families, young professionals, people who wanted to come into our City. But there's an interesting situation that we also have to always remember and never forget, and that is that people have property rights in this community. They have property rights. And a lot of our families left places like Cuba because your property rights were taken away from you. If you told me that this individual was coming before us asking for significant above the normal request for development rights -- as a matter of fact, he's reducing the amount of units. He's internalizing the parking, which in my opinion, I think is a more beautiful aesthetically pleasing product at the end of the day. Again, I'm not the architect. I leave that up to professionals like the architect who's done, I think, an exemplary job here, but this is Mediterranean, right? This is what we're looking for. This is what we're fighting for, right? So, why not celebrate something that's done...?

Ms. Carbonell: Well, may...

Mayor Lago: Go ahead. Yes, the floor is yours.

Ms. Carbonell: May I quote from the local historic designation where it says it is also wholeheartedly incorporated that the garden city...

Vice Mayor Mena: Ms. Carbonell, we're having a really hard time hearing you. I'm not sure if you're able to get closer to the microphone.

Ms. Carbonell: Can you hear me now?

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, it's just a bit muffled.

Ms. Carbonell: Can you hear me?

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, it's better.

Ms. Carbonell: Okay, sorry. I am quoting from the historic preserva -- one of the historic preservation reports from the City. And it -- quote, it says it also wholeheartedly incorporates the garden city precepts of comprehensive planning with defined areas for different uses -- residential, commercial, trade -- offering housing for different income levels without sacrificing quality. And homes were built for modest incomes, were built alongside grand palazzos, and a section of the City was devoted to multifamily housing, producing a truly democratic development. Now, I don't see that here. Again, there's certain -- there's different issues. Yes, it looks like a beautiful community. It looks like a beautiful village, and that's not in question. The question is -- and we do question it every time there's development -- is that we are losing our affordable housing, and there should be that consideration. And also, there are some historical implications. As per 503 Santander, I know there was a conversation earlier about that particular housing unit or property. And so, we just want Historic Preservation Association to be on the record that these are what -- how -- you know, what our opposition is, so thank you. But I do want to know what's these homes -- I mean, they seem like they would be over a million dollars, and we are losing...

Vice Mayor Mena: I think that's a safe bet.

Ms. Carbonell: The multifamily.

Mayor Lago: That's a safe bet. And I -- you know, you've seen a significant upswing in Coral Gables and South Florida in regards to pricing over the last four or five years. So, I can have the developer's attorney step forward and provide that information if you'd like it.

Commissioner Fors: And before we get into the value of the homes, regarding the concept of this seeming like a private enclave, correct me if I'm wrong, but right now, as the block is laid out, if you're in the middle of Santander and you want to get to Malaga, you have to walk around the entire block, right? There's no pedestrian cut-through through the middle of the block. Whereas the way this is laid out now, this Gables Village proposal, pedestrians can actually cut through the village on to the other side. So, I think this is actually -- what's proposed here is actually exponentially more public than what sits there today, which makes...

Unidentified Speaker: Great point.

Commissioner Fors: It makes it very difficult to understand the perception that this is creating some kind of private enclave.

Vice Mayor Mena: In addition to the fact that the public right-of-way, which is currently a public parking lot essentially and is really unsightly, and obviously, poorly maintained from a landscape perspective because nothing is going to grow when you have cars parked on it 24 hours a day. So, the parking plan, which takes cars off of that public right-of-way and into the private property, frees up additional public space. There will still -- obviously at times going to be cars that park and they can do so. But the volume of cars that are parked in the public right-of-way is going to decrease exponentially, so I think that's an important point to make as well when you talk about the interplay between the public land -- to the actual public land, which is the right-of-way, and the private property.

Commissioner Anderson: Yeah. This property is within walking distance of my home, blocks, a very short walk. And walking that sidewalk is difficult because not only is it -- because it's filled with cars, they're hanging over the sidewalk.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Commissioner Anderson: Repositioning the cars the way they are in this plan will make it more accessible. And yes, Commissioner Fors, you're correct. You cannot traverse that block at this time. There's no way to cut through halfway through the block. So, those are my two observations that I can give you from my...

Vice Mayor Mena: This is...

Commissioner Anderson: Nearby observation.

Vice Mayor Mena: Listen, from -- sorry, I don't want to jump in. You may have comments. I don't know if you wanted to discuss something else first.

Mayor Lago: No, no. I'm good.

Vice Mayor Mena: This -- I'll be honest, from my perspective, this is one of the highest quality, nicest projects I've seen presented in the City since I've been here, frankly rivalled only by few, and some of them are other projects by this developer. I think it just checks all the boxes. Aesthetically, it's beautiful. It has I think just a very nice aesthetic that's consistent with what we want to see in the City. It's thoughtful in the parking, you know, the art component, and I forget what the term of art was for those outward-facing sculptural elements.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah. And it's not a surprise then that my second point is the neighborhood association, which throughout my time on this -- I'm not sure I can think of a single time that I've received a letter from them saying that they support the project being proposed by the developer on a project of this magnitude. And so, I think the proof is in the pudding there in that, you know, you've done the things that I think the community wants to see. And so, you know, kudos to everybody involved from Mr. Torrealba, all the way down to all the professionals that he's working

with on this project. But I just think it's a great example, and it's really going to improve -- it's going to be night and day from what you see there today to what you see now. I think we've seen that in the other developments you've had and sort of similar change, and I'm frankly looking forward to seeing it here. I think it's a great project, and I commend everybody involved for it.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Menendez: I just...

Mayor Lago: Any last comments?

Commissioner Menendez: I echo the sentiments of my colleagues. From a planning perspective, it's absolutely spectacular. In addition to the parking in the swale, sometimes I drive through there. Obviously, I live in that area of the Youth Center, and sometimes the cars are protruding into the street, so you're driving, and you encounter the rear end of cars, which is a danger for everyone. And it's funny, we get used to the idea that we get accustomed to a particular look in an area, and sometimes we fail to realize that there is actually a better way to design a block, an area. And this particular team has done a spectacular job from day one, and you've done everything the right way. And I agree, the design is beautiful, and it actually takes an area that perhaps is a little bit right now -- especially with the parking -- a little bit out of control, and you bring some...

Mayor Lago: Uniformity.

Commissioner Menendez: Uniformity, some additional beauty, but it's uniform. And I think it benefits everyone in that area, so kudos to the team. I think it's a phenomenal design.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Menendez: And project.

Mayor Lago: So, before we take a vote on this, I just want to echo the sentiments of all my colleagues on the Commission. I think this is an exemplary designed building, product. I have had the pleasure of being in this business to see the level of finish that is being provided by the developer, by the architect, and they're not skimping any corners. And like the Vice Mayor said, the proof is in the pudding. What's that pudding? The pudding is the square foot prices and the quality of the families that are moving into these homes. It's an exceptionally done product. This is nothing new. We have this type of product throughout the City of Coral Gables. George Merrick implemented this vision. So, when you take a real walk through the developer's other projects, you're seeing the thoughtfulness and the consideration for a lot of our heritage. So, I welcome this type of product in the City. I think it's something that's very beneficial for a lot of families. There's a lot of opportunities for all different types of stock in the City. Like I mentioned before, you have people like my parents who owned a big house for many, many years. They're empty nesters. Three kids have started their own families. Now, what are they going to probably be looking for? To be honest with you, they'll probably be looking at this product, you know. It makes sense. It's walking distance from Coral Gables Hospital where my dad practices medicine, and it's an opportunity to continue to enjoy our beautiful downtown, which is continuing to grow. And this type of product, I think, will serve many different communities. It has an opportunity due to their product makeup. So, you know, with that being said, I will entertain a motion unless there's something else the Clerk wants to say.

City Clerk Urquia: No, there's one more public speaker.

Mayor Lago: What's that? Go ahead.

City Clerk Urquia: Barbara Perez.

Mayor Lago: Can we close the public hearing?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Perez, the floor is yours.

City Clerk Urquia: She's not unmuting.

Barbara Perez: Hi, good afternoon. Hold on a second. Good afternoon. I apologize, miscommunication on my part. This is not the item I want to speak on.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Ms. Perez: So...

Vice Mayor Mena: No problem.

Mayor Lago: Perfect, we'll put you on hold. Thank you, Ms. Perez.

Vice Mayor Mena: And listen, one last point about the notion that you're going to have less units, high quality finishes, public artwork, parking inside all of that, and then have it be low-income housing is just divorced from reality. You can't have your cake and eat it too. There's a time and place for every type of product. This particular product is obviously not aimed at that demographic, and that's okay. But...

Mayor Lago: It's a different demographic. I said there's different products for different...

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mayor Lago: Different strokes for different folks.

Vice Mayor Mena: But it does really everything else you could ask for from a project. And I think there -- you know, the Mayor referenced -- but we've taken other measures in the City to incentivize certain development in certain areas that will enable potentially smaller, you know, lower price point units near Merrick Park and the Village of Merrick Park.

Mayor Lago: Gables.

Vice Mayor Mena: North Gables. There are certain areas in the City that we've made efforts to try to incentivize that because there is room for that in the City. But I certainly have no issue with a high-end luxury quality product like this one, which I have no doubt will be very expensive units and should be, frankly, because of the quality of the product. So, yeah, I think...

Mayor Lago: With that being said, I just want to put one item on the record, and that is to -- like I always say, let's make sure that what's being portrayed on the drawings -- never had an issue with this developer -- to make sure that the trees are the trees that are being portrayed. You know, again, obviously, the existing species, protect them, but if we're going to plant trees, let's do what's right. Let's not put some toothpicks up there that take 30 years to grow. Let's spend the money and put some nice, nice trees, you know, that have a good caliper, that have some good coverage. Don't make me come back when the project is done and then you see this beautiful building, and then you have just a tiny little, you know, little bush. I mean, it's -- we're talking about community here and we're leaving a legacy. This developer does not do that, but I'm saying I will reiterate it over and over again because when developers come to this community, I want to make sure that they leave something behind and what they should be leaving behind is pride and what our standards are.

Commissioner Anderson: I will...

Vice Mayor Mena: This is a project we're going to point to...

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Alright, and I'll...

Vice Mayor Mena: I really believe that as a great example of so many things, so...

Commissioner Anderson: I'll be watching it closely. And I know that they expressed also willingness to take the two koombooloombas (phonetic) that are on the property and make them available to the City.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

Commissioner Anderson: Where we can place them...

Mayor Lago: Look forward to it.

Commissioner Anderson: And to replace a tree on Hernando that's been missing...

Mayor Lago: This developer...

Commissioner Anderson: For over 10 years.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, this developer has never said no.

Commissioner Anderson: Right.

Mayor Lago: Has never said no on philanthropy, on engagement, on quality, so they have a reputation to uphold in this community, and I don't doubt that they will do that.

Commissioner Anderson: Alright.

Mayor Lago: With that, I'll entertain a motion.

Vice Mayor Mena: I'll move it.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)