

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-8
July 9, 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)

Mario Garcia-Serra, Attorney for Applicant
Maria de la Guardia, Architect
Jose Mata
Karelia Carbonell
Enrique Bernal

Agenda Item E-8 [3:24 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving Conditional Use Review of a Site Plan pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process” Section 14-203, “Conditional Uses,” for a proposed townhouse development referred to as “The George” on the property legally described as Lots 29 through 41, Block 10, Coral Gables Biltmore Section (717, 729, 737 and 741 Valencia Avenue), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. Lobbyist: Mario Garcia-Serra

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item E-8, which is time certain.

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City Attorney Suarez: E-8 is a Resolution of the City Commission approving Conditional Use Review of a Site Plan pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process” Section 14-203, “Conditional Uses,” for a proposed townhouse development referred to as “The George” on the property legally described as Lots 29 through 41, Block 10, Coral Gables Biltmore Section (717, 729, 737 and 741 Valencia Avenue), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. This is a quasi-judicial item, so Mr. Clerk, please swear in all individuals who will be testifying in this matter or Madam Deputy Clerk, please swear in all everyone who will be testifying.

Deputy City Clerk Davis: If you are going to testify, please stand, raise your right hand please, do you swear that information given would be the truth and nothing but the truth.

Mayor Lago: Sir how are you.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Everything good, thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor and members of the City Commission, my name is Mario Garcia-Serra, with offices at 600 Brickell Avenue. Here today representing The George LLC, the applicant and owner of the assemblage of property located at 711 to 741 Valencia Avenue, which is on the north side of Valencia Avenue between Cardena Street and Anderson Road. I’m accompanied today by Jenny ____, Ariel Gutierrez, Jose Mata and Jorge Cepero from MG Developer, as well as Maria de la Guardia and Keon Marshall our project architects. The George LLC is a subsidiary of MG Developer, which is one of the city’s most successful and award-winning developers. In the vicinity of this site, MG has built four other projects – Biltmore Parc, Althea Row, Beatriz Row, and Biltmore Row. All of these projects have been well received and recognized for their architecture and sensitive scale. The project being presented today is The George, which is named after city founder George Merrick, who is literally looking down upon us today from behind you. The George continues in the tradition of the other projects, in that it is a relatively low scale project of 13 three-story townhomes, which incorporate the best of Coral Gables architecture. In a demonstration of how this developer thinks differently, and really has helped to build a neighborhood. Even though this property has one of the more intense zoning designations, which is MF4, the project comes nowhere close to maximizing that development potential. Where 13 stories is permitted on this site, this project is proposing three stories; 50 condo units are permitted, but we are only proposing 13 townhome units; a 2.0 FAR is possible and this project is at an FAR of 1.5. We have 26 parking spaces is the minimum required, my client is providing double that minimum requirement and providing 52 parking spaces for the residents. Through the good work of my client and others, this area of the city has evolved in a very positive way and The George is the next step in that evolution. The project complies with the code 100 percent, and we are only requesting site plan approval here today. I will now hand it over to Maria, so that she can walk you through the project.

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Mayor Lago: How are you, Maria. Good to see you.

Ms. de la Guardia: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor and Commissioners. Thank you for having us. Maybe we scroll through the, should we go through the images that were supposed to come up.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Maybe you can just show the other images of the other projects in the neighborhood. I think that would be sufficient. Here we have the other projects in the neighborhood. Very well received by neighbors. I even hear people adjusting their usual walking routine so they can walk in front of these buildings. And there's where the property is located within the neighborhood with the other buildings indicated. You can go ahead now.

Ms. de la Guardia: In the tradition of its namesake, George Merrick, The George emerges as a landmark development on Valencia Avenue, exemplifying luxury townhouse living while deeply respecting the architectural ethos of Coral Gables. This ensemble of 13 fee-simple luxury townhouses meticulously planned by MG is an homage to the architecture of historic Coral Gables. The George is designed philosophy and execution reflects a conscientious approach to urban development, prioritizing spacious, luxurious living environments within a harmonious community setting. Coral Gables is a city celebrated for its desire for high architectural standards, inspired by its beautiful historic architecture. In keeping with these standards, The George admirably showcases a preference for quality and community integration over maximizing development potential. The decision to construct only 13 fee-simple townhouses on a site zoned MF4 is a testament to MG Developers commitment to enhancing the residential quality and aesthetic value of Biltmore Square. The Coral Gables Zoning Code, as Mario mentioned, the Coral Gables Zoning Code for MF4 District allows 50 units, yet 13 are being proposed. It allows for 2.0 FAR, yet 1.5 is being proposed. It allows for 150 feet maximum height, yet 42 feet, six is being proposed. It allows for a net floor area of 73,000 square feet, yet 55,000 is being proposed. Finally, although 26 parking spaces are required, the project proposes to double the parking requirement to 52 parking spaces. With a proposed lower floor area ratio, and a modest building height, The George is poised to blend seamlessly into the existing urban landscape, further enriching the neighborhood's architectural diversity. Drawing inspiration from iconic structures such as the Coral Gables City Hall by Phineas Paste and James Knox Taylor's historic Old Federal Building, The George seeks to imbue its design with a sense of historical continuity and architectural elegance. These influences manifest in the project's façade, weaving the two-story order with the rusticated base. The façade is grand, yet the base presents a relatable scale to the pedestrian. This architecture approach not only pays homage to the city's heritage but also promotes a pedestrian-friendly streetscape that enriches the community's public realm. The design process for The George involves the thoughtful study of classic townhouse design to strike a balance between the individual character and the collective harmony. This research informed the façade layout and composition drawing queues from cohesive architectural expressions in the Upper East Side in

Boston's Back Bay and the unified elegance of the collective whole at the Circus in Bath, England. The individual distinction and the architectural continuity coalesce to form a vibrant urban tapestry. The George introduces a collection of three-story townhouses, each with balconies and terraces and four, 4-bedroom configurations. The inclusion of an elevated second floor principal living space reflects a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Piano Nobile concept, enhancing resident privacy while fostering engagement with the outdoor environment. The individual 4-car garages are accessible only from the alley, thus not disrupting the streetscape. The design philosophy extends to the careful selection of the materials and architectural details, where each element was chosen to evoke the Mediterranean heritage of Coral Gables. The building has a first-floor cast-stone rusticated base with mahogany windows and doors and arches that march down Valencia. The second floor is punctuated by three 9-foot-tall French doors opening to a balcony with finely designed geometric metal railings. The second and third floor are finished in stucco and precast architectural accents. The three-story building is capped with a precast cornice that has been proportioned to the building height. The flat clay tile roof represents the balance of the materials on the façade. Moreover, The George's contribution to the streetscape of Valencia Avenue through thoughtful urban planning and street planning underscores its commitment to community enhancement. The proposed 6-foot sidewalk and 12-foot parkway improvements accompany by the strategic placement of street trees, parking and lighting are designed to foster a welcoming and vibrant pedestrian experience, in line with the character of adjacent townhouses by the same team. So, urbanistically The George is charged with the responsibility of transition from multi-family high density down to single-family, and so, although we could build 150 feet and 13 stories, which is what Villa Valencia is, so we could build Villa Valencia here. The zoning is very similar, and the square foot size of the lot is very similar, but we are proposing 42 feet and 13 units instead of 50. So, as this project comes before the Commission, it does so with a commitment of the design and development team renowned for its contribution to award-winning projects within the community. The George presents not just a continuation of this legacy, but also in not maximizing development an opportunity to contribute a new chapter to the architectural narrative of Coral Gables, with a design that respects its past while embracing the needs of modern living. The George stands as a beacon of thoughtful community-oriented development ready to enrich the Biltmore Square for generations to come.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you Maria. I have perhaps a few more comments just to address. In general, the project's been very well received by the neighborhood and city staff and the city boards. Parking and trees are the two issues that have been discussed, but I think it would probably be most helpful if we had public comment first so that we can just respond to any other issue that's potentially raised at the same time.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon. Thank you for being here with us.

Planning Official Garcia: Of course. Good afternoon, Jennifer Garcia, Planning Official. So, we are here for our conditional use site plan review. So, the location, as you know, is just south of Biltmore Way on Valencia, between Cardena and Anderson Road. And this is nestled in the area where there are a lot of townhouses that have recently been built behind the David Williams Hotel. So, the land use right now is multi-family high density, and the zoning is multi-family 4 or MF4. So, the site is 36,000 and some change of square footage and that is why it's required to come before you for a site plan approval. The whole FAR is 1.51; 13 units are being proposed at a height of 43 feet 6 inches, and open spaces beyond the requirement at 26.4 percent building space. This is the site plan. It's very simple. The vehicle access is from the rear, from the alley side on the north side. The south side facing Valencia is all pedestrian entryway and they are proposing 8 parking spaces with additional trees. This is the rendering of what it looks like. So, DRC reviewed this in December of last year, they got Board of Architects approval in April of this year, Planning and Zoning last month, recommended approval and here we are before you for site plan approval. They'll come back maybe in the next few months with the final plat that goes with this. So, there were letters to owners and properties four times, with two neighborhood meetings and the requirement, Planning and Zoning Board and also for this meeting for today. The property was posted three times; the website was posted four times; two archives in the newspaper and two emails were sent out for Planning and Zoning Board and for this meeting today. The application does comply with the findings of fact which you'll find in the staff report of your packet. The standards of approval are satisfied subject to the conditions of approval. Those are laid out starting on page 2 of the resolution in your packet. But just to summarize, they are to relocate six mature live oak trees that are on the site, in coordination with Public Works, additional loss of on-street parking beyond ten spaces. Additional trees would be planted on Valencia, Biltmore Court, Cardena, and in the future maybe Biltmore Way with the canopy mitigation payments, required to pay. Construction dust to be minimized on the site. There are some concerns of a family just north of them, so that's going to be a condition for this project. That's it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Castro: I have a question. Regarding the trees, you said there were six live oaks.

Planning Official Garcia: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: And then...

Planning Official Garcia: That are in good condition.

Commissioner Castro: I was hearing that there were a lot of trees, like a lot.

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Planning Official Garcia: I think there's 91, they are listed on the tree survey. A lot of those are Palm trees. I think they have their arborist here or maybe Maria can give the details about that one.

Ms. de la Guardia: I think about 70 of them are Palm trees, the other 20, some are in poor condition, some are dead. What is of significance is really the oak specimen trees. The others either have a bad taper or are not important or are not good candidates for relocation. Really, it's the six oaks is what is of significance.

Commissioner Castro: So, from 90-something, only six oaks.

Ms. de la Guardia: Yes.

Planning Official Garcia: Again, the 91 is including Palm trees.

Ms. de la Guardia: Yes. There are more than 70 Palm trees.

Mayor Lago: So, I've walked the site on two different occasions.

Ms. de la Guardia: So, there's a ton of Alexandra Palms, Christmas Palms. There is a lot of...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Rufus.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Ms. de la Guardia: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, if you count every one of those.

Mayor Lago: If I may one second. What I recommend is that my colleagues walk the site. I've walked it on two occasions and it's abundantly clear when you get on the site. What's overwhelming is the amount of Palm trees on the site, not only that, but the poor quality of some of the oak trees that are there that need to be removed, but the specimen trees are spectacular, they are gems. There are gems that, in my opinion, should be relocated. I know it's going to be very expensive, but MG has been one of our greatest partners in regard to relocation. I know that our friends at Trammell Crow did a very good job also relocating some trees. So those trees are worth relocating. Obviously, the Palm trees have no redeemable value, at the end of the day, unless the city wants to use them for something. I don't see any. The cost to relocate them is more than the actual tree, the value of the tree. But there are those six oaks that are just spectacular.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll put it on the record. I've walked the site multiple times within walking distance of the property. There are actually eight oaks that are specimen oaks; six of which are candidates for moving, either because you've got to take sufficient root-ball with the tree and if you have two oaks ten feet apart and two oaks seven feet apart, one of which was hack-racked by

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FPL. Decisions need to be made to sacrifice one to save the other. And then there are two small oaks, one of which is not a good candidate because it has inclusion and overlap and not a good candidate for removal, unless you like some odd-looking tree that has kind of like a heart shape in it, and there's one gumbo-limbo.

Mayor Lago: There is a pretty massive one in the back also. You saw that one in the back by the asphalt.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes. That's the one that's seven feet apart from another tree.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There are two oaks together. If the second one was in good shape, if we were capable of moving these out to the street, if there wasn't a 20-inch water-force main out front moving them out like the mahogany was moved on the other site which is call Althea Row, I think.

Ms. de la Guardia: The one from Althea to the right-of-way in front of the Biltmore Row.

Vice Mayor Anderson: On Anderson Road.

Ms. de la Guardia: On Anderson.

Vice Mayor Anderson: They literally drug this thing out. They had a root prune for a year.

Ms. de la Guardia: That was an easy one.

Vice Mayor Anderson: What?

Ms. de la Guardia: That was an easy one because we...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Created a trench.

Ms. de la Guardia: Exactly.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And these could have been easier to0, but for the fact we had a 20-inch water-force main in the path.

Ms. de la Guardia: We've studied many sites in the vicinity trying to find a receiving site for these trees. The beauty of the trees is that they are so large, but that's what makes them so difficult is that they are so large, and so, in order to move these great tree canopies and great root balls. Many of these tree canopies are about 60 feet, the root balls are about 30 feet and the right-of-way, if there is nothing in the way is 60-foot right-of-way, and so, we actually have an expert. I think they are top in the field, they are called Environmental Design out of Texas, coming down to visit, and they are the ones that really understand the logistics and everything that needs to happen in order

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to move the trees. So, we've discarded maybe three or four potential sites, because they just weren't good receiving sites. So the one that really has the space and the amplitude is the golf course, and so, Environment Design is coming from Texas and they are going to study the trees, they are going to study the canopy, they are going to study the root ball, study the route, what is in the way, what can be moved, what can't be moved; and parallel to this, we are having conversations with FPL, because there are some important transmission lines that would need to come down, so we are having conversations and we'll know more within the next few weeks exactly what can be done and what cannot be done. Right now, we have a bunch of questions which we're trying to get answered in order to make sort of the final proposal and the final determination.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I've tried to help brainstorm ways to get the trees into a good location. I looked at Cardena. I looked at the width of the street, the limitations there, based upon restricted root ball space not being in an appropriate location for trees of this size. Perhaps some of the smaller trees can go in there. I've relied upon Deena to make a decision on where the smaller trees go. Whether they go on a golf course or anyone of our number of parks. The two smaller trees can go anywhere in the city because they are small enough. Logistics involved moving the trees, you have to have no powerlines in the way, but we really don't know the size of the canopy right now, because to say that its 60 inches assumes its round. It could be oblong, and it could be turned in a way to get to the street, assuming you have the width. What portion of it can be trimmed. What can't be trimmed because it's too large of a branch and while some of the trees that we have along the street, we meaning the city has along the street, can be tied back because they are still young and flexible enough, we still have to maneuver around powerlines. I asked some questions about FPL, can they reverse the flow and feed the buildings through another direction. Don't have an answer to that yet. I do know that FPL sometimes can feed an area from another direction, because they've done it in my neighborhood. Much to my chagrin when we used to be on the same line as City Hall and get brought up after a storm like this. Now, I have to wait a much longer period of time for my power to be restored. I've looked at the conditions of approval and Mayor, I know you've been through this road many times before on projects. We had something similar on Villa Valencia. There were two conditions of approval on that, that didn't come to fruition. One was they were supposed to install a bike lane, or a median separator and we required shade trees, and they brought in palm trees. It's a constant, seems battle to make sure that these conditions are complied with. So, I'm reading the conditions here about the off-site improvements, which is on page 3 and paragraph (b) and as well as paragraph (c). I'm going to ask you, based upon your experience, if you have some recommendations for us on how to make sure that these matters get taken care of.

Mayor Lago: What I've done before in the past, for example, when we approved the Thesis, we made sure that we stated on the record there had to be a traffic study done X amount of years in the future and that traffic study had to be brought and reviewed by the city. We've also required,

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obviously, when we provided approvals, we stated if you are moving forward you had to deliver on traffic calming before you were able to get your TCO, whatever traffic calming that is. If it's replacing a light or its adding actual infrastructure our sidewalks, lighting. What are the things here and just dovetailing off of what the Vice Mayor is saying is, we can put a covenant of some sort, or we can put some sort of, Madam City Attorney, what did we use in the past.

City Attorney Suarez: We always require a covenant. There is always a covenant.

Mayor Lago: I misspoke. I apologize. Not a reverter, but we've used before in the past.

City Attorney Suarez: Like a bond.

Mayor Lago: A bond. Thank you. Not like a P and P bond, but maybe something similar to that where I want to see these trees saved, and I think there's an opportunity to do that. I think there's a huge value here for the city, for the community as-a-whole. Your design is one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen.

Ms. de la Guardia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Its exceptional. The value that this property is going to bring to the city, the cache. You could develop three times what you're developing here, maybe four times, I apologize. You said 50-plus, right.

Ms. de la Guardia: 50 units.

Mayor Lago: We're getting 13.

Ms. de la Guardia: 13.

Mayor Lago: Plus the square footage and everything, but I really want to see those trees be put in a position, whether its and Vice Mayor, I defer to you on that front, because whether it's a city park or it's a right-of-way or its somewhere and I know its complex and I know it's difficult, and I know the developer is going to spend a lot of money to do this. I know. I know it's painful, but we only get one opportunity to do this right, and you don't come across this opportunity that often.

Ms. de la Guardia: The challenge – because we've been thinking about this for many, many months and talking, the challenge is the size, and if we start to hack at the tree and hack at the tree and hack at the tree to reduce it, then we're really affecting its chances of surviving. We're bringing in the top expert.

Mayor Lago: May I say something to you. I' sorry to interrupt, I apologize. I'm going to give you an example and I give the Vice Mayor a lot of credit on this front. When Trammell Crow was in the process of developing their site and getting their site plan approved, they had some beautiful

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massive oak trees on that property. The canopies were huge and two of them were moved to a park that we designated adjacent, like literally on the corner of the property. It's going to be a little beautiful pocket park. There's going to be an exceptionally talented artist that's going to have a sculpture there. It's going to be something really nice in that area. You're going to have multiple little parks when you talk about Codina and Manny Cadre along Mercedes, there's another park there's going to be there, when you talk about Publix. That little area which is like five or six blocks. It's going to have for sure three, maybe even more little parks, 20,000 square feet, 6,000 square feet, and I think the Mercedes Benz lot is about 10,000 square feet. When you look at those two trees that were moved, they were gigantic. Some of the biggest trees I've ever seen moved. It was expensive. One died after a few months, but the other one has survived. I think the value in that one tree surviving in the middle of our downtown having a specimen tree like that is something that you just can't buy. You can't buy that. I put that on the record not to say that – I want to see if can find some sort of option. If we can find some sort of cooperation, collaboration. I'm in favor of this project. This is a beautiful project. When you talk about quality. What MG has done here with your design and the entire team, for me that's not even in debate. What I really want to find is a way that we can work together and really save these trees, the ones that are appropriate.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to dovetail with you on a couple of things. Before I do that though, I just want to again commend you on the design. This project exemplifies why Mediterranean design is important. It's timeless. It's warm. It's welcoming. It's beautiful and people just love, again to walk by these projects. I appreciate all the time and effort you all have taken to meet with me again in love of the trees to try to save the trees. I know we don't have enough information right now. As far as the one tree that was lost, those were two trees that were paired together, and we had an unusual soil condition. We have marl we had no rock, because typically when these are being moved in our area, now we have that beautiful oolite or coral rock, as people like to call it, and they break the rock like this, they ball-strap the rock to the tree, it's like a potted plant. Obviously, you have to have someone very talented with a crane to lift these trees and move them slowly to their destination or put them what they call, lowboy trailer to move it where it needs to go, and I recognize all the difficulty in all this. But MG has stood up and time and time again made efforts to save the trees even in instances where they were not required to save the trees. Gables Villages is one of the examples. I went to the site. I spoke to the owners; they saved the sausage tree. It's going to go to the Trammell Crow's site too, replace what I knew was a tree that was doubtful to survive just based upon the dry, straw-looking nature of the roots on the tree that I never thought was going to make it to begin with. The one that we have back in the alley in this site, looks better than the one that was pulled out of the ground and lifted before. I wish we had more information on the trees at this point. Is there any way that we can carve out this piece on the covenant and still move forward and come back with it with more information?

City Attorney Suarez: So currently, what the conditions say, which I think is very important what the condition currently reads. It says, the applicant shall coordinate with Public Works on the relocation of the six mature oak trees and be responsible for canopy mitigation payments for any loss of tree canopy. All collected tree canopy mitigation funds shall be allocated toward providing new shade trees on Valencia, Biltmore Court, Cardena and Biltmore Way. So that's all it says right now.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I know. I know. Here's my concern. Villa Valencia was developed by one developer. It was sold to another one. We were no longer dealing with the same individual again. The conditions of approval were up to Public Works, and they were forgotten. So that's my concern and that's why I ask that question.

City Attorney Suarez: Understood. Understood.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, with regard to the trees, can we piecemeal this somehow?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Mr. Mayor, if I can maybe make a suggestion, because I think everyone's heart is in the same place. Whether it's applicant, developer, or city, the idea is to try to save these trees and put them to good use and relocate them in an appropriate location. What we don't know is what it's going to take and where can they go, you know, what route, and so forth, and what else has to happen. And alternatively, the idea is already in the condition also of potentially improving streetscape around the neighborhood. We really don't know, some of this information we don't get until we actually demolish the buildings and see what the root ball is and how can we address and so forth. So, I would suggest perhaps that that part of the condition be that we come back here with a plan specifically on tree relocation and streetscape to be approved by the City Commission at a point in time that we have all this information.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Which I think you are going to have maybe the individuals are going to be down here before our next Commission meeting, I think.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: We hope to have the tree location company down here within the next week. We could come back if you want on August 27th at least with an update. I don't think we're going to have a plan, a complete plan in place, but at least.

Mayor Lago: Let me not push. Let's not push. Let's wait till September, you get everything in order, you get your ducks in a row, work with staff. Take your time to do it right. Again, like I said before, we have one shot at this. We can get this done right, take the time. For example, if they say the root ball needs to be four months in the position or six months or whatever it has to be, three months or two months, let's be very careful, let's be thoughtful. The city will make accommodations as we can to make sure that we do everything in our power to try to save those trees. Let's figure out a way. We'll work with neighbors. Let me give you an example. If we

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relocate them, if it's possible to say something like a city park, or a city, an area that has like a piece of green space or maybe the golf course or something like that. We want to make sure the Commission will make sure that we work with whatever you need to do to get the residents' approvals to make sure that we facilitate FPL, that we see how we can work together on this front. The last thing I want to do is deliver a tree that ends up dying on us because we hacked into it, to try to force it into an area that we had to prune it so much that we couldn't get it anywhere else. I'm for sure going to get 20 calls. I'm going to get 20 calls and text messages from residents saying, hey, bring it to our neighborhood, we'll take it, and it's on the other side of the City of Coral Gables. We have to be realistic too, have to be realistic.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: And on our side, we wouldn't want to enter into commitments unless we know we can fulfill them.

Mayor Lago: But the good thing is you're in the middle of downtown, it's right there. There are opportunities, if we can just find the right place.

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't want to hit the tree issue, but that has been my concern over this project. I've been on site a couple of times. My concern in this area, and I'll tell you, what MG has done has been changed the entire look of the area, and addressed the main concern that residents have had for years which is height, and I think you've built a very high-end product and created a district within the City of Coral Gables which has become a very desirable place to live. My two concerns are, obviously, we're taking trees away from this area, which already has a depleted tree canopy, and it's not just these six trees, it's the 91 trees. Even though they are palm trees they do provide some sort of shade to the area, and I'm not sure what is being done in front of the building on the street, but the removal of parking spaces is also a concern that I have. This is an area, and I spoke to the Manager and staff about potentially doing a parking study in this area going forward before we continue to approve the removal of parking spaces and I know the Manager and his team were working on other things for our flooding in garages, because that has been one of the larger kinds of impact for parking, but I don't want small trees put out there in front of the building. I want to make sure that you have a large tree with a large tree canopy when you are placing these out in front of the building to provide shade to folks who are walking on these sidewalks. I don't want these little twigs that you see that 20 years down the road they'll have a couple of branches. I want to make sure that when they are put in, we can already start feeling the shade in this area. I agree with the Mayor, the Vice Mayor and Commissioner Castro, saving these six trees is a priority for this Commission. I know in the past, and Mayor, you may remember there was a project that moved a tree up here to Merrick Park in front of City Hall at one point, and I think two trees were moved, only one survived. There may be space for one of the larger trees out here in front of City Hall at Merrick Park. So that may be a place, it's not too far for them to have to move and there is a fairly large area on the southwest corner of that park where you may be able to put one of the

larger trees, and then you don't have to move very far. There shouldn't be a lot of obstacles in the way.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Obstacles usually are powerlines.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, the first thing I did before I went out to the site is, I drove the potential routes and the width of the trees, which we don't have the actual width. You need a measurement at the drip line, also need an assessment from the arborist as to how much they can be trimmed back to make the route. If you go down the block on Segovia to the Gables Village site, you'll see that the sausage trees have been trimmed or these sausage trees were trimmed in a fashion that it can make it underneath major powerlines. You are not going to have that flexibility with these trees. The sausage tree is a fruit tree and it's a very easy thing to move. These are much older, well the sausage tree is pretty old, but it's not that type of tree that you can take that type of cut on a big thick branch. Plus, the habit of oaks is to grow wide, usually wider than they are tall. And that's good for hurricane resistance, but we will need this assessment done in order to really make an intelligent decision.

Commissioner Menendez: I've been waiting an hour to say this. We're missing the forest for the trees.

[Laughter]

Commissioner Menendez: The project is phenomenal. You have four parking units, four parking spaces per unit, which I think the average is two, that should address a lot of the parking issues. We all agree the trees, not only the body as-a-whole, but the community wants to preserve. Mr. Garcia-Serra proposed a solution. I think we made it very clear how important the trees are and accommodating the needs of the community. So, I suggest we just agree on a solution, a path forward and let's get to it. I think Mario sounded reasonable to me.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right – to come back. I would appreciate it if you'd come back.

City Attorney Suarez: On timing on that, should it be prior to the issuance of the building permit or an earlier date. When is the timing on bringing back a tree relocation plan?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: It's a complicated issue, the more time the better.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, the demo permits, I know that you've gotten at least two of the three done and I assisted with the expediting on the Trammell Crow site so we could get the assessments done on the trees, get the root pruning done as early as possible, assuming that that site was definitely going to be. So, you still have what, one more demo permit to finish up – one. Okay. So,

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you can get that part moving forward. Is there anything else pending that would slow you down that you would need done at this Commission meeting as opposed to in the future?

Speaker: [Inaudible – off mic]

City Attorney Suarez: Can we repeat that for the record. Have him come up and speak into the microphone.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right. We're trying to keep a record. No one can hear you from the second row.

Mr. Mata: My name is Jose Mata; I live at 363 Aragon Avenue. Good afternoon, everybody. So, we submitted three out of the four demolition permits and we're hoping to submit the last permit within a week, and as well as the fencing permit, which will be resubmitted now.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And on the demo, I just wanted to thank you all for working with the neighborhood folks that caught all the cats that were living underneath the buildings and sealing off the building so that we have no cats that would be subject to demolition.

Mr. Mata: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do we have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, we do have a member of the public requesting to speak, however they were not sworn in, and they are appearing via phone, so I don't know if we can swear them in.

City Attorney Suarez: So, it would not be considered testimony. It would be public comment, but it's not testimony that you all should consider as competent substantial evidence.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Clerk Urquia: Its Karelia Carbonell.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Carbonell.

Ms. Carbonell: Hi, good morning again, sorry, good afternoon. Hi, this is Karelia and I'm speaking personally, but as you all know, I'm also an advocate of historic preservation so I wear many hats. I love the project I have to say. I mean there's nothing that I don't like about it, but I think when are we going to start really analyzing the detriment of demolition and new construction. I mean the city, it's a sustainable city, we talk about it all the time, but we're losing 90-plus trees. We are demolishing pretty much a neighborhood, just like we lost. Recently we lost another neighborhood to new construction, and I'd like to read something that I did send to you all, but I'd like to read it

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so that other people can listen, if they are listening. It really is time to stop dismissing and start considering the seriousness of the environmental catastrophic effects of demolition and new construction. This is a real issue and it's not theory and I'm not an environmentalist, you know, person that continues to think that the sky's going to fall but this is serious. Just recently, the Global Alliance for Building and Construction shared that the annual data on carbon emissions from building construction and operation, it is high. We talk about cars, but this is even higher. Please preserve what is already built. The building sector is the biggest source of carbon emissions causing global warming. Worldwide the construction and operations of buildings is responsible for 37 percent of all human generated carbon emissions, more than the amount contributed by sectors such as transportation or any other industry. Please again, the project is beautiful, there is nothing I can say negatively about it, but I think we have to think about the bigger issues here and I continue to hear that trees are being discarded, demolition continues to happen, construction continues to happen without any discussion about the environmental effects. And I would really ask for that to happen. As we move forward, please, that should be an item that should always be considered. Thank you.

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

City Clerk Urquia: Enrique Bernal.

Mayor Lago: Dr. Bernal, thank you for being here with us.

Dr. Bernal: Good afternoon, Mayor and Commissioners. Enrique Bernal, I live at 73 Valencia Avenue.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mic please. Thank you. We'd love to hear your voice.

Dr. Bernal: Thank you. Thank you. Enrique Bernal, 73 Valencia Avenue, Biltmore Parc Condominium. Our building literally matches in size the proposed project, we're facing it, so we're the most affected in a sense by this project, and I'm here to really urge you to approve this project. After six years of having been involved in the zoning of this area, being a tree-lover that have consistently spoken for maintaining our tree canopy. I was the President of the Board of Directors of the association for several years. I personally have had four meetings with all of the owners of the property, and we have appeared at the neighborhood meetings up to 12 of us to support this project. We have faced the situation where we rezoned 190 feet, finally with the help of the Mayor and members of other Commissioners, turned that around. One thing the city has given a permit or seriously considered a permit to make 160 apartment rental units in this project. We are so happy to see this beautiful development in front of us and we have suffered for all the trees. My place from my bedroom, my terrace and everything else, I see all these 91 trees and we suffer for the loss of the trees, but the same time we realize that this is probably the best that we can ever get

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and it's so consistent with this elegant architecture that MG have developed what they originally considered to be the Biltmore Square and they are bringing it to reality and doing a great quality job and they have kept all their commitments to protection for the canopy in the six years that I've been involved with them. They are doing it in the Gables Village, so for myself and I believe I'm representing all the owners of our property, I will say, please approve this project, subject to all the conditions that you are proposing. By the way, in the corner of De Soto and the fountain, the city just removed a huge oak tree from there. Something was wrong with it, but they just cut it in the last six months, so there's an ideal place that is within a few blocks.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're talking about the area where there were powerlines going through.

Mr. Bernal: No. No. If you're coming...

Vice Mayor Anderson: De Soto and what?

Mr. Bernal: De Soto – you come out from Valencia, you hit the fountain, you do like 75 degrees and right there on that corner of De Soto and Granada, they removed a huge tree.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes. Yes. It died.

Mr. Bernal: That's an ideal site. It's huge.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, I know. Unfortunately, we all don't live forever and if we're struck by lightning or termites.

Mr. Bernal: Right. Right. I don't think there are any powerlines.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You have to have the route, you know, we can look at these options.

Mr. Bernal: We'll be glad to go and look for sites with you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You live very close to that site, so you can start walking it.

Mr. Bernal: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We can walk together.

Mr. Bernal: Yes. Let's do it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to take a stab at suggested language here.

Mr. Bernal: Yes. Sure.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Paragraph (c) page 2, on site trees.

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Mayor Lago: Thank you doctor.

City Attorney Suarez: To be clear, that's section 2 of the resolution, subsection 3(c).

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes. I don't have the full piece of paper up here. I'm using electronic, so thank you City Attorney. On site trees – Applicant shall seek Commission approval on relocation of eight trees, once six specimen trees and two non-specimen trees. In addition, applicant shall be responsible for canopy mitigation payments for any loss of tree canopy, and the rest of the paragraph remains the same. All collected tree canopy mitigation funds shall be allocated toward providing new shade trees on Valencia, Biltmore Court, Cardena, and Biltmore Way.

City Attorney Suarez: So, may I suggest that we leave in the sentence that the applicant coordinates with Public Works on that, and then comes back, that the relocation plan requires City Commission approval. In other words, they can coordinate with staff, but the plan would require City Commission approval.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Fine. Would require City Commission approval and there are eight oaks, six of them are specimen, two additional trees, and I've walked the site and I've gone through with our Landscape Director are eligible being relocated. They are small enough and they can move to any city park, whether it be Salvadore Park or any other park that we need some shade trees in. I know even in a children's play area, there's a bench without shade over on the west end, the Gumbo-limbo could go there, the oak could go there, whatever Public Works deems to be appropriate.

Ms. de la Guardia: The Gumbo is in the count that you just mentioned or is it eight and the Gumbo.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We have eight specimen oaks on the site, okay, six of them are movable, you know, candidates for moving; one is very damaged because it's underneath the powerlines, the other one is too close to the one tree to be moved, because its within a ten-foot distance. There's not enough root ball space and they are too large to move off-site together.

City Attorney Suarez: So those are seven and eight. That would be numbers seven and eight.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's seven and eight, and then there's two smaller trees; one is a narrow, tall Gumbo-limbo can be laid flat and taken to another site and the same is true with the other oak tree. It's small, it's a baby, it can be taken to one of our city parks somewhere again, the appropriate location will be determined by Public Works.

Ms. de la Guardia: It's come up in several neighborhood meetings the issue of the on-street parking. The existing conditions are, there are basically four sort of garden apartment buildings with 22 units, I'm sorry, 17 units, 22 bedrooms, so that would generate a requirement of 21 parking spaces. Currently, the site has 12 parking spaces on-site, so whatever wasn't accommodated on-

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site would have flowed out onto the street. So, of the 22, 12 were accommodated on-site; 10 would have flowed out to the street. Right now, there are 14 spaces on the street; 10 of which were taken up by the residents of the apartments. None of our parking, none of The George's parking is overflowing. So basically, even though we are reducing the parking count on the street, we're also greatly reducing the need for parking on the street, because of that 14 – 10 were being occupied by the overflow, leaving only 4. We're providing 7 parking spaces for all to use.

Commissioner Fernandez: Again, my concern is, reduction of inventory of on-street parking. I understand the impacts that the building is going to have are going to be within the property, not on the street, and my comment was more in general of going forward. As a city we need to figure out what our inventory is and what our need is and what our need is going to be with the new development projects that are being proposed in the area, because there are a couple, some of them are already under construction have limited parking, just to ensure that we're not removing parking spaces that we are going to be needing in the near or far future.

Mayor Lago: So, Mario, if I may, we have a long agenda today. Two issues that are at hand, right. Number one is the trees, which the Vice Mayor has laid out. We can check that off. We're good.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: I would say so. I think the consensus is, we come back with a plan regarding tree relocation and if necessary, tree mitigation also.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. But we're really shooting for tree relocation.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Understood.

Mayor Lago: That's number one. Number two, the Commissioner's comments about parking. How are we addressing that?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: The impact of the project itself, like we were discussing, it reduces on-street parking from 14 spaces that are available right now to 8 or 7, depending on exactly what design we use with the bump-outs. So, there is some reduction of parking on this block, but the fact that we're providing 52 parking spaces, four parking spaces per unit, I think it addresses what the direct impact of this project is.

Mayor Lago: Are you willing to make any concessions there, if not, what are we doing here?

Ms. de la Guardia: If we have to find more parking then there's less streetscapes. Right now, that side on Valencia...[Inaudible – off mic]...What we're trying to do is we study the spacing of the trees. What is the right spacing in order to create a canopy, and that's how we have arrived at this plan. The way we arrived at this plan is by setting sort of the combination parking space and tree spacing in order to create canopy, in order to create walkability. And so, we are reducing the on-street parking load right now in this project.

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Commissioner Fernandez: I'll make it simple.

Mayor Lago: Let me just add something. Give me one second. So, my next question is the same one that I always ask Mario, he knows what the next question is, because this goes back to the Vice Mayor's comments. How big are the trees that you are providing us? Please. I always say the same thing, nothing new, not here to hurt anybody's feelings. Let's not cut the ribbon on the property, everybody's moved in, everybody is super happy, and we have ten-foot trees.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Condition of approval requires 16.

Ms. de la Guardia: We're providing 20 to 22 and they are coming from north Florida. They are not available here.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Just to have perspective, the two that I put in on Palermo from my father's house, one was 25 feet, the other was 28 feet. It would give you an idea of that size of tree looks like if you can get them and they can be brought down and trucked in and so forth. I think it would look great on your property.

Mayor Lago: What type of trees are they?

Ms. de la Guardia: Right now, we're thinking about oaks, because oaks are what's happening across the street and in search of that pretty oak canopy.

Mayor Lago: The problem is it takes a long time to grow. You know Mahoganies grow a little faster, but they have seeds, obviously which bothers people.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, I've had my oaks grow four feet a year. So, I'm going to make a couple more comments on the parking issue. We have a building coming into the east, used to also burden the on-street parking. Its going to internalize the parking needs for that building in the building, so in a way we're having a net reduction on on-street parking demand because now we're parking cars inside of the buildings instead of what was happening there historically for years. I do appreciate Ms. Carbonell's comments about preserving buildings, but we're long past the valuation of historical nature of those buildings and I can't turn back time. I cannot historically designate something that's already been past the deadline on historic designation. And I've also read the comments about oak trees and whether or not they'll survive here in the future, and I embarked on some research, because what is the range for live oak trees what's the temperature the live oaks can withstand. What's the sweet spot temperatures that they do well in. And I'm happy to report to you that even in the City of El Paso where it's like a blast furnace when I was there, going from the courthouse to the restaurant to get across the street, has on its street, street plan for street trees and live oaks. So, if planned right, you put in Silver Cells, you provide adequate, the proper amount of irrigation and oaks love water, they can sit in water for six weeks,

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they should do well. But again, the devil is in the details and how they're planted and how they are irrigated.

Mayor Lago: In regard to parking, where are we?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: With regards to parking, I think it will stay the same. I mean there's a little bit of a debate between applicant and staff whether there should be seven or eight spaces reserved on-site. We're on the side of seven, they are on the side of eight. We really think seven makes sense because of the trees.

Mayor Lago: The tradeoff is parking, more parking, less trees.

Vice Mayor Anderson: One parking space versus – When I spoke to folks in certain areas, the tree canopy was the most important issue for them, especially since we have four cars, parking spaces per unit, covered parking, coming in through the alley, instead of having the vehicles out there on the street. I think that takes care of the needs of the units, as well as any people that need to provide service too.

Commissioner Fernandez: All I would say is, I would want the Parking Director to sign off on the necessary number of parking spaces based on her assessment. It is a fine line because we do want larger trees, and in order to get larger trees we need more space to plant them. We are losing a large amount of tree canopy on this property, and we have to move it to the swale area, and I do see that your building will be moving the parking on property, but again, its about the general area. I don't want to throw out – this building is fixing the problem, but others are not, and we're still going to have the impact. When we restriped, we lost parking spaces because the prior striping wasn't done adequately, so lost about 14 parking spaces, and it seems like year over year, new projects, MG's other projects have removed parking all over the swale. So, we have a large impact in parking in this area over the last few years and we haven't removed density from this area generally. So, that's my concern with the parking. With the trees, I'm in agreement with the Vice Mayor's plan on bringing that back to the Commission.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm three blocks basically away from the 700 Block of Valencia. I get to walk and look at the parking situation on practically a daily basis.

Commissioner Menendez: Just real brief. Normally, I'm for additional parking, but the fact that, like I said, you have four car spots per unit, which isn't the norm. You are going above and beyond. You shouldn't have to pay for the fact that others haven't done what you're doing. And the fact that your project, everyone here is in total agreement, it's an absolutely gorgeous project, something that will only enhance the area. To now start taking away tree canopy which enhances the beauty of that project, not only for the people that live there, but everyone around there, for an additional one or two spots is counterproductive to me. You have something that's amazing and

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we shouldn't be chipping away at it. We should find a way to, obviously find a balance, but not take away from what you're designing or creating.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I make a motion with the conditions previously enumerated for approval.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you very much. Hope you all have a good day.

Mayor Lago: Have a nice day.

Vice Mayor Anderson: For anybody interested in trees, the adopt a tree next event is July 20th. You can sign up to get your trees.