





To: Cityclerk@coralgables.com

Statement by The Villagers, the oldest historic preservation organization in Miami-Dade County  
Please accept this letter regarding 110 Phoenetia Ave., Coral Gables "Crystal Project".

This 1 ½ acre property is an historic, charming greenspace that has been part of the surrounding residential community for 74 years. 110 Phoenetia, built as St. James Lutheran Church in 1951, and was designed by noted architect Robert Fitch Smith. The former church is located across the street from the historically designated Coral Gables Woman's Club and tells a story of a peaceful, mid-century life in the City of Coral Gables.

The property is zoned Special Use, with Existing Use as Office one-story and the Land use is zoned Religious Institutional and is included in the "North Ponce Neighborhood Conservation District Overlay".

The North Ponce Neighborhood Conservation District Overlay, (NPNCDO) includes the greenway connection between Ponce de Leon Blvd and Douglas Entrance, the historic northern gateway to the City of Coral Gables.

The NPNCDO designation was created in 2016 by the city with the enthusiastic support of the residents to find a balance between the old and new in the North Ponce neighborhood. The Commission at the time had the foresight to create laws to protect this historic northern corner against over over-development.

The zoning overlay area protects the residential character of the neighborhood. According to the City's zoning code: "the purpose of the North Ponce Neighborhood Conservation District is to preserve and enhance the garden apartment character of the North Ponce residential neighborhood properties."

The owner of this property purchased the land with full knowledge that it was part of the North Ponce Neighborhood Conservation District. Current zoning does not permit an 8-story, 177-unit development. As proposed, the building would require the approval of many zoning variances such as setbacks, FAR, height and open space.

Allowing this project would be ignoring the guardrails in place to save historic areas in Coral Gables and forever change the integrity of a historic neighborhood.

Respectfully submitted,

Gina Guilford, President  
The Villagers, Inc.

Genevieve Orr  
829 Navarre Ave  
Coral Gables, FL 33134  
Genorr.realestate@gmail.com  
December 3, 2025

Special Master Review Board  
City of Coral Gables

**Re: Opposition to Proposed Project at :**

The Garden of Our Lord- 110 Phoenetia Ave, Coral Gables 33134

Dear Members of the Special Master Review Board,  
I am writing as a longtime Coral Gables resident who has worked as a registered architect for decades. My professional background informs my understanding of context-sensitive design, massing, and architectural compatibility, and it is for these reasons that I must express my strong opposition to the proposed project at this site.

**1. Failure to Meet Required Setbacks**

The property is required to provide a setback on the adjoining street as well as a 25-foot setback along the main entrance . The current proposal does not meet these standards. Setbacks exist to preserve the rhythm, character, and scale of our neighborhoods, and the deviation presented here disrupts the established architectural fabric.

**2. Incompatibility with Section 5-103 of the City Code**

Section 5-103 defines architectural context as the relationship of height, scale, massing, separation between buildings, and architectural style within a defined area. These terms, compatibility and context, appear repeatedly throughout our code and reflect the importance of these standards.

This proposal does not meet those requirements:

- \* The height and massing overpower the surrounding buildings.
- \* The separation between structures is insufficient and does not provide appropriate transitions.
- \* The claimed Mediterranean style does not demonstrate the authenticity, proportionality, or architectural character required to complement the historic Woman's Club next door.

The Woman's Club is a cherished architectural landmark that establishes the tone for the entire block. Any new development must respect its scale and character rather than dominate it. The proposed project disregards this essential relationship.

### **3. Inadequate Public Green Space Under the PAD Request**

The applicant seeks flexibility under the Planned Area Development (PAD) designation, which must be granted only in exchange for meaningful public benefit. The green space being offered is, in reality, an occasional green space. It is located deep within the property and shared with the school, which means public access will be limited and inconsistent with the intent of the PAD standards.

### **4. Disregard for a 200-Year-Old Heritage Specimen Oak**

There is also deep concern relating to the disregard shown for the 200-year-old Heritage Specimen Oak located on the site. Coral Gables has been recognized as a Tree City USA for more than 40 years, and our mature tree canopy is central to our identity. This tree is an irreplaceable asset.

A thoughtful and context-driven design would treat this Heritage Oak as a central organizing feature, reshaping the site plan to preserve and celebrate it. To push such a significant natural landmark aside contradicts both our values and our long-established design principles.

### **Conclusion**

As architects, we are trained to evaluate site restrictions carefully and to incorporate unique existing features into a design. There are always solutions when the design team takes the time to explore them. Respecting context, preserving heritage elements, and working within constraints are not obstacles to good architecture. They are the foundation of good architecture.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully request that the Special Master Review Board deny this application in its current form. It does not meet the architectural, contextual, or environmental requirements set forth in our city code and does not serve the best interests of our community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Genevieve Orr  
Coral Gables Resident  
Registered Architect (ret.)

**Dacosta, Susan**

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**From:** GORDON SOKOLOFF <gordons360@aol.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 3, 2025 4:44 PM  
**To:** City Clerk  
**Subject:** Dear City Clerk, Would you kindly forward these to the Special board in charge of the "Garden of our Lord "proceedings for Thursday. Thank you!

**CAUTION: External Sender. Please do not click on links or open attachments from senders you do not trust.**

To whom it may concern,

I am speaking out once again in favor of 'enforcing the codes' and NOT allowing the proposed project at the Garden of Our Lord site take place.

This project is incompatible with the area, for one. This building will stick out like a sore thumb and not blend at all with the character of the neighborhood.

As one who has fought over-developments over the course of many years in Coral Gables, I once again petition this Board to consider a compromise; one that would leave the garden itself intact, along with the precious plants, trees, and iconic wall emblems that make this place sacred to the neighborhood. The green-space that has been proposed with this project is a small, interior courtyard which is an insult to the neighborhood in general. The "garden" itself yields historical significance that the City of Coral Gables, of all places, should deem valuable to the neighborhood and the community as a whole.

I ask that your Board request the developer to return to the drawing board, work with the neighbors, and provide a project that preserves the Garden and is more compatible with the neighborhood overall.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Gordon Sokoloff 305-788-0828



1415 SALZEDO

# Green Acres

THE SIGNATURE GARDEN APARTMENTS OF THE NORTH PONCE DISTRICT

BY BRUCE FITZGERALD AND KARELIA MARTINEZ CARBONELL  
PHOTOS BY VICKI CERDA

Coral Gables emerged when the Merrick family's 1,200-acre citrus plantation was reimagined as a master-planned Garden City inspired by "City Beautiful" movements in northern communities like Tuxedo Park (New York), Forest Hills (New York), and Shaker Heights (Ohio). The City's 1925 incorporation, along with George Merrick's visionary approach to place-making, became the impetus for a hugely successful marketing campaign proclaiming Coral Gables "The Miami Riviera in The Heart of The American Tropics." Suddenly, Coral Gables was not only tropical – it was topical. We were hot news.

But from the beginning, Coral Gables

was also "The City Different," made so by strict adherence to one of the Garden City's core mandates: create a clear separation of districts according to their purpose. As such, the city as early as 1921 laid out distinct residential, business, industrial, and recreational sections. Significantly, according to the city's 2018 Designation of The Coral Gables Historic City Plan, "homes built for modest incomes were built alongside grand palazzos, and a section of the city was devoted to multi-family housing, producing a truly democratic environment."

This democratization of Coral Gables was noticeably apparent in the city's "Douglas Section," located in the northeast

**"CORAL GABLES DESERVES CONSIDERATION AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S PREEMINENT GARDEN VILLAGES."**

ROBERT A.M. STERN, ARCHITECT AND AUTHOR

portion of the Master Plan and roughly bounded by Alhambra Circle, Southwest 8th Street, and Douglas and Le Jeune Roads. It was, as described in the Designation of The Coral Gables Historic City Plan, "dedicated to multi-family residences targeted at

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION



middle-income families.” Here, tree-lined streets and both public and private green spaces established the city’s design aesthetic as much as its celebrated Mediterranean Revival building style. This was place-making of both architectural and horticultural consequence. As the *Chicago Tribune* described Coral Gables in 1926, “Each home is delightfully placed among enchanting gardens in a city that is a brilliant garden in itself” – one designed, it should be noted, by Florida’s first registered landscape architect, Frank M. Button.

Today known simply as the North Ponce area, the former Douglas Section has evolved into a mixed-use neighborhood with many of its original greenspaces and garden apartments still extant. As renowned

architect, educator, and author Robert A.M. Stern has observed about the city: “Coral Gables deserves consideration as one of the world’s preeminent garden villages.” That small-town quality can still be found in the North Ponce area, which continues to provide a welcome respite from encroaching urbanization.

Recently, a Historic District Designation Study of the North Ponce area has been green-lighted by Coral Gables city officials. This study could formally recognize the area for its contribution to our built environment, instead of its present diminution into 10-story “luxury” apartment complexes that are erasing the character of the area. Modest in scale and surrounded by lawns bordered by lush tropical vegetation, our Garden

Apartments represent a 20th-century lifestyle ideal that still resonates. “How fair is a garden,” Disraeli famously proclaimed, “amid the trials and passions of existence.” It’s not unrealistic to imagine that George Merrick was listening. ■

*Karelia Martinez Carbonell is the president of the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables.*

TOP LEFT: 223 MENORES  
TOP RIGHT: 230 PHOENETIA  
BOTTOM LEFT: 902 SALZEDO  
BOTTOM RIGHT: 1314 SALZEDO

# A Gables garden worthy of preserving; One of only three biblical gardens where tropical fish used to abound and lotus blooms everlastingly

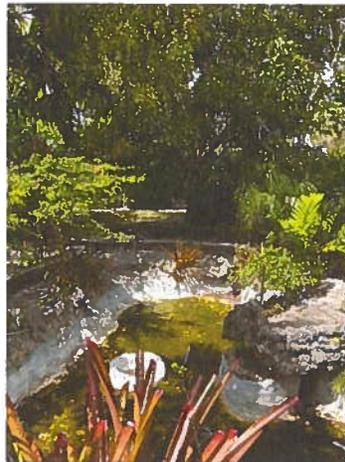
**T**he Garden of Our Lord is worthy of historic designation status. The Garden is a treasure in Coral Gables. It has great significance culturally, historically, aesthetically, ecologically, and architecturally. Yet above all, the Garden is part of a "green corridor" which runs from East Ponce until the Douglas Entrance. It is lined with specimen trees covered with Spanish Moss. The Garden is an essential part of the neighborhood.

## WORTHY OF PRESERVING

I commend Ms. Bonnie Bolton for her relentless and selfless advocacy on behalf of the preservation of the Garden of Our Lord and I agree with Miami Herald journalist Ms. Bea Hines when she observes, "some things are worthy of preserving." And this Gables garden is worthy. It is no ordinary piece of land. It holds as much emotional aura as it does historical flora. Entering the walled enclave, one feels the spirit. And yes, as developer Mr. Pino states in Hines' Miami Herald piece, it should "be handled with the utmost respect." A garden sitting on consecrated ground should not only be respected but revered.

Founded in 1951 by parishioners as a biblical garden, seeds brought back from the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem germinated into plants that included date palms and clumps of bulrushes. Plantings also included hyssop and cypress, cassia, red sandalwood, apple, camphor and cedar of Lebanon, the oleander, mulberry, fig, myrtle, the balm tree and the spikenard shrub used for special anointing. Walking among the trees and shrubs native to the Holy Land, one is transported to an otherworldly experience hard to explain. An Eden in the midst of our garden city as George Merrick would have imagined it. It is a memorial garden, and also a cemetery--a final resting place for some families. A sacred ground.

Seventy plus years ago, the Garden of Our Lord was one of only three biblical gardens in the United States, created as a sanctuary for prayer and meditation. Grieving families carved out a garden as a place of spiritual comfort. It is fitting it should stand in perpetuity not fall to indifference or a multi-story condo. The understanding is that the parcel where the garden sits still remains designated as Religious/Institutional land until a zoning change is approved. Some things are worthy of a miraculous intervention.



Coral rock grotto in present condition. "Here tropical fish used to abound and lotus blooms everlastingly." [Photo credit: JMaranos]



"Statue Still Standing" in present condition "overlooking the naturally rustic Children's Pool of coral rock, toward which all paths of the Garden eventually lead." [Photo credit: JMaranos]

## FROM THE ARCHIVES. ARTICLE FROM 1956.

### New Garden Grows Far West of Eden

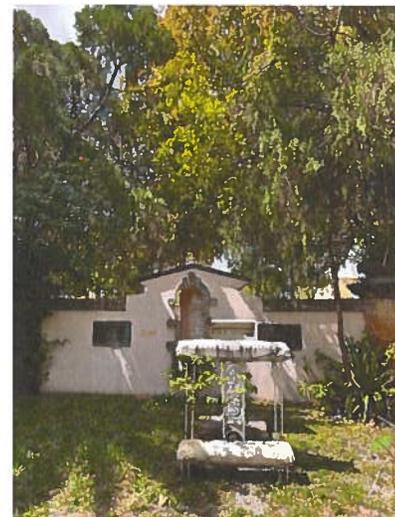
**Coral Gables Church has garden planted with flowers, trees and bushes mentioned in the scriptures.**

*By Harriet Blackwell Miami Sunday News, Florida Living, p12G, December 23, 1956.*

"And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there he put the man he had formed" Ever since Genesis, gardens have been an important link between God And Man.

One of the most unusual gardens is a the Garden Of Our Lord, 110 Phoenetia Avenue, Coral Gables. It covers a quarter of a city block next to St James Lutheran Church. The garden, planned around trees and shrubs native to the Holy Land, found a congenial climate in South Florida, with weather similar to that of Jerusalem.

There are no guides. Yet visitors to the garden are not



Outdoor Chapel in present condition [Photo credit: JMaranos]



Historical artifact. 1950s postcard depicting hand-carved statue of Christ. This beautiful statue of white Carrera marble was commissioned by Col. W.E. Hackett, chairman of the Garden committee. The 7 ½ foot statue was dedicated in 1953 [Photo credit: Vintage postcard circa 1950s]



Historical artifact. 1950s postcard depicting the unique outdoor chapel. "It is most impressive to rise from the kneeling bench and find, upon turning, the arm of Christ upraised in benediction." [Photo credit: Vintage postcard circa 1950s]

confused, for all the specimens bear identification plates, complete with Biblical references, relating each tree to the Word, and telling the part it played as the scroll of religious history unfolded.

Seeing these trees growing instead of merely an illustration in the Book adds reality and immediacy to the Bible. A tremendous date palm is reminiscent of Palm Sunday, and John's words echo along through the ages: "They took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet Him."

A little girl runs through the paths and pauses before a clump of bulrushes, and her eyes grow large with wonder. "Mother" she says, "was Moses really hidden in plants like these?"

Hyssop recalls the Passover when bunches of it were dipped in the blood of the sacrificial animal and applied to the lintel and the two side posts of the homes of the Israelites, insuring protection for them as God passed through the land to smite the Egyptians.

Towering over lesser trees a cypress brings the tabernacle to mind, as does the cassia, the red sandalwood, the apple, the camphor and the cedar of Lebanon.

The fruit of a pomegranate is associated with decoration of the pillars of the temple, while the almond brings to mind the rod of Aaron, blossoming in the tabernacle and the golden candelabra, made "like unto almonds with knops and flowers" that were placed upon the altar.

The oleander is here too and the mulberry and the "willows of the brook". So are the fig, the myrtle and the mastic, or balm tree. Jeremiah spoke of the balm of Gilead, the balm being a healing property in the resinous sap of the tree. Further along the path is the spikenard, the same kind of shrub which yielded a

rare ointment with which Mary anointed the feet of Christ.

Aside from flora mentioned in the Bible, plants long associated with the Christian story in song and legend crept in: the Passion flower represents the "vine" which twines through biblical history; the dogwood is supposed to have furnished wood for Calvary's cross; the Judas tree is that upon which the betrayer hanged his self in his despair, while for years the poinsettia has been a symbol of Christmas.

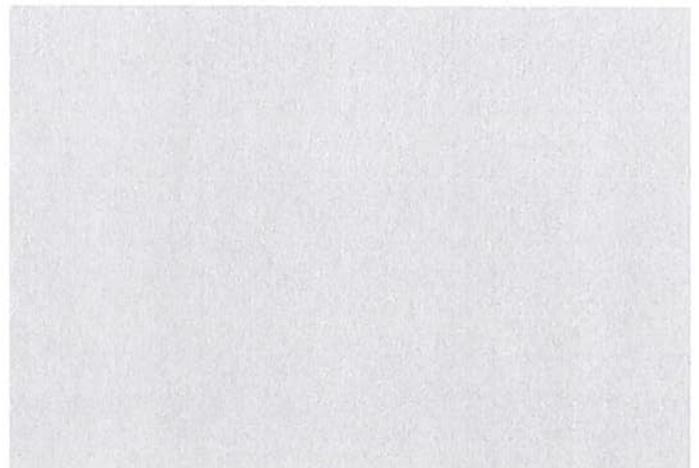
The church of St James has taken over full care of this lovely garden. It is kept open from nine in the morning until nine at night and all who are interested may enter at will. The registry bears names from every part of the world.

#### Points:

- Secluded grotto in the Garden of Our Lord, 110 Phoenicia Avenue Coral Gables. All the plants in this garden (open daily to the public) are mentioned in or bear some reference to Holy Writ.
- Visitors to the garden have no trouble identifying flora as each tree and plant bears a plate giving name and biblical reference.
- The olive branch is an ancient symbol of peace, frequently mentioned in the Bible. This olive tree has grown tall in our South Florida climate that is very similar to weather in Jerusalem.

*The Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables is a 501c3 non-profit founded in 1991. The Association promotes the understanding of the importance of historic resources and their preservation. For more information and/or to support the mission of HPACG, please visit [www.historiccoralgables.org](http://www.historiccoralgables.org).*

**BY** Karella Martinez Carbonell, President Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables



**Dacosta, Susan**

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**From:** Daniel Quintana <daniel@gardengardenstudio.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 3, 2025 11:20 PM  
**To:** City Clerk  
**Subject:** URGENT REQUEST TO DENY PROJECT AT 110 PHOENETIA AVENUE

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**Daniel Quintana**  
**614 Santander Ave 33134**  
daniel@gardengardenstudio.com

12/03/2025

**To the City of Coral Gables:**  
**Mayor, City Commission, City Manager, and Planning & Zoning Department**

**Re: FORMAL OBJECTION BY A PROFESSIONAL ARCHITECT AND FORMER NEIGHBOR: URGENT REQUEST TO DENY PROJECT AT 110 PHOENETIA AVENUE**

I am writing to you not only as a concerned Coral Gables resident, but as a professional architect and a former neighbor of the subject property. My unique perspective, combining professional expertise with direct personal experience of the site's context, compels me to submit this formal objection and urgent request that the City immediately deny the proposed development project for 110 Phoenetia Avenue. This project represents an existential threat to irreplaceable historic and environmental assets and constitutes a flagrant, wholesale violation of the City's own codes, design principles, and stated preservation goals.

#### **I. Destruction of Irreplaceable Historic & Environmental Treasures**

The property at 110 Phoenetia Avenue is not a standard development site. It is a sacred, multi-layered landmark:

- **The Garden of Our Lord:** A nationally significant site as one of America's first biblical gardens, a military memorial, and a cemetery. Designed by acclaimed architect Robert Fitch Smith to complement the adjacent Historic Woman's Club, it contains flora with direct lineage to Gethsemane.
- **The Two-Hundred-Year-Old Tree:** A living monument. Unanimous expert testimony from Vizcaya, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Montgomery Botanical Center, the Gifford Arboretum, Tropical Audubon Society, and independent arborists states authoritatively that this ancient tree will die if moved. This imminent destruction has already spurred a lawsuit.
- **City-Identified Priority for Acquisition:** This site was explicitly identified in the Coral Gables Visioning Workshop as a critical priority for City purchase to serve as needed park space in our most densely populated area. Approving its destruction contradicts this publicly-vetted vision.

#### **II. Direct Violations of Specific City Codes and Overlays – A Professional Assessment**

**As an architect, I must emphasize that this project is technically incompatible with the legal and planning frameworks governing our neighborhood:**

- North Ponce Conservation District Overlay (NPCO):** Enacted to “preserve and enhance the garden apartment character.” This project’s proposed density, massing, and typology overtly contradict this initiative.
- Pending Historic Designation:** The neighborhood is under study for historic designation. Approving this project preemptively undermines this preservation effort and the lush, canopied character it aims to protect.
- Section 5-103 (Context & Compatibility):** The Code defines context by “height, scale, massing, separation between buildings and style.” Having lived nearby, I can attest that the project is grotesquely out of context with the surrounding 1920s single-family homes, the historic bed and breakfast, and the low-scale apartment buildings. Its bulk and design are alien to this intimate residential setting.

### **III. Specific Building Code and Procedural Violations**

- Inappropriate Bonus Allocation:** The project received a Mediterranean Bonus under outdated, lax standards. Under the City’s current, revised standards, it would not qualify. Approval based on a loophole violates the Code’s intent.
- Inadequate Setbacks & Infrastructure:** The project ignores Code requirements for setbacks and imposes a massive scale on a residential street lacking the supporting infrastructure.
- Fraudulent "Public Benefit" (PAD Requirement):** The offered Planned Area Development (PAD) “green space” is an insufficient interior courtyard, functioning primarily as a private school playground. Public access is relegated to limited hours. This is a cynical, non-compliant attempt to meet a requirement for meaningful public space.

### **CONCLUSION & DEMAND**

**The proposed project at 110 Phoenetia Avenue is a deeply flawed plan that disregards sacred history, destroys a living ecosystem, and violates multiple layers of City code. It is an act of vandalism disguised as development.**

**I therefore demand that the City of Coral Gables:**

- 1. Deny all permits and approvals for this project in its current form.**
- 2. Uphold the NPCO and Context/Compatibility standards by requiring a design that respects the neighborhood’s scale and character.**
- 3. Honor the Visioning Workshop recommendation by seriously pursuing all avenues to acquire this property as public parkland, preserving The Garden of Our Lord and the Two-Hundred-Year-Old Tree in perpetuity.**

**As an architect who understands both design and regulation, and as a former neighbor who knows the soul of this street, I tell you this project is wrong for Coral Gables. Uphold your laws. Protect your heritage.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Daniel Quintana**

**Coral Gables Resident, Former Neighbor on Phoenicia Avenue, and Professional Architect**

**Daniel Quintana**

**Art Direction for Design & Architecture**

**[gardengardenstudio.com](http://gardengardenstudio.com)**

03 December 2025

Dear Ms. Bolton

Thank you for letting me know that a letter of reference I wrote June 20, 2008 for David Bryan has suddenly reappeared 17 years later in a filing regarding The Garden of Our Lord.

This letter to you is my attempt to convey to the appropriate parties that I have not given permission for that letter to be included in this submission.

I am surprised to see that a 17-year-old letter of reference would be pulled from the past and brought to the present. I believe I should have been consulted as to whether this letter could be used in anything beyond its original purpose 17 years ago.

I can only assume this letter is being resuscitated at this point is because I have submitted a letter explaining why I believe The Garden of Our Lord merits preservation. I feel the use of the 2008 letter of reference in this instance to be outside the bounds of principled behavior, and I would ask that this letter be removed.

Thank you for making me aware of its existence after all this time. I am disappointed in the parties submitting the letter to see it used in such a way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanna Lombard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joanna Lombard, AIA, ACSA Distinguished Professor

School of Architecture, University of Miami, 1223 Dickinson Drive, Coral Gables, FL 33146

To the Special Masters:

Please reject the plans for the Garden of our Lord  
and the 200 year old tree.

Thankyou,  
Tora Teitelbaum  
1614 Salzedo St. Apt 3  
Coral Gables, FL 33134

12/2/2025

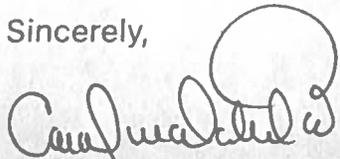
To Commissioners Willie Bermello, Mitch Alvarez, Jorge Hernandez, Mayor Lago, and all Members of the Commission,

I am writing to express concern about the proposed development at 110 Phoenetia Avenue. As currently designed, the project does not meet the City's setback requirements and its overall massing is incompatible with the surrounding neighborhood. The scale simply overwhelms the nearby historic homes and small residential buildings.

Equally troubling is the threat to the Garden of Our Lord and the 200-year-old tree. Experts have stated clearly that relocation would be fatal to this irreplaceable tree, and the loss of the garden would be a significant blow to the character of North Ponce.

*I respectfully urge you to deny this proposal and uphold the City's established code and preservation standards.*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carolina Padula", with a large, circular flourish above the name.

Carolina Padula

20 Calabria Ave #504

Coral Gables FL 33134

**Dacosta, Susan**

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**From:** Vicki Cerda <vicki.cerda@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 4, 2025 8:32 AM  
**To:** City Clerk  
**Subject:** Input for Special Master Review Board on Dec 8th re 110 Phoenetia: Deny current non conforming plans & save the Garden of Our Lord & our Heritage trees

**CAUTION: External Sender. Please do not click on links or open attachments from senders you do not trust.**

**Dear Special Master Review Board,**

**As a Coral Gables resident of close to 40 years, I am writing to you to voice my opposition to the building plans under consideration for 110 Phoenetia Avenue which are totally out of sync and scale with this N Ponce residential neighborhood. The proposed project, scheduled to be built on the site where The Garden of our Lord, St. James Lutheran Church and Crystal Academy now stand, does not conform to the present zoning code. They seriously ignore our City's code and the need that any buildings emphasize context and compatibility with the existing structures that surround it -- these plans DO NOT. There is also the matter of The Garden of Our Lord and the 200 hundred year old tree that needs to be saved, not moved.**

**Neighbors and concerned residents have spoken out loud & clear in opposition to the plan many, many times. The area was designed as a low-scale garden apartment district.**

**Please listen. I/We oppose the project as presented and request that the Special Master Review Board will preserve our cultural and architectural heritage.**

**Maria Cerda**

**1216 Asturia Ave, CG 33134**

TO: SPECIAL MASTERS

FROM: RAYMOND DUBBINS

1439 CERTOSA AVE.

CORAL GABLES 33146

RE: 110 PHOENECIA

"GARDEN OF OUR LORDS"

PLEASE REJECT THE PLAN

AS IT VIOLATES THE CODE.

THE GARDEN AND THE TREE

NEED TO BE PROTECTED

AND PRESERVED

SIGNED: 

12/4/25

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**George Hernandez, Mitch Alvarez , Willie Bermello , Mayor Vince Lago and City Commissioners**

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I strongly urge the Special Masters to deny approval of the plans for the project proposed for The Garden of our Lord and The Two Hundred Year Old Tree because they violate the most fundamental principles of our City Code and the qualities which have defined our City. I have lived in this neighborhood for over twenty years and in recent years I have purchased a condominium. I chose this neighborhood because of its dense tree canopy, most of the streets are lined with old growth trees that provide shade and respite from the heat even on the hottest summer days. I was drawn to its Garden Apartment character, its Historic homes and the lack of traffic that make it a very pedestrian friendly area of our City. If the Special Masters were to approve this project it would ruin this neighborhood and amount to a dereliction of their duty to uphold our Building Code. The design of this project is incompatible with this neighborhood. It is completely out of context for this residential and Historic area. The plans call for the removal of old growth trees on the swale of Antilla Avenue and East Ponce. This is egregious because the swale is publicly owned property. It will create a lot of traffic on streets that are narrow and it will limit its pedestrian friendly atmosphere. The project is incompatible with the numerous Historic structures in this area, most importantly The Woman's Club. The projects massing, scale and design are not appropriate in our City. Please do not be guilty of dereliction of your duty. Your only choice is to deny these plans!

*Cecilia Bravo*  
Cecilia A. Bravo  
120 Salamancade  
Apt 3A  
C. Gables Fl. 33134

To the special Masters:

The plans for the Garden of our Lord and the Two Hundred Year old Tree must be denied. This city has prided itself on its stringent standards of Architectural Design. The standards by which this project has been designed are substandard. The plans fail to follow our Code in a myriad of ways. First and foremost they are a subpar Mediterranean design, their facades are much too generic, their setbacks are inadequate, their massing, scale and height are out of context for this City and this neighborhood in particular. Our Building code requires compatibility with existing structures which these plans do not provide.. Please respect the principles of good architecture and deny these plans!!!

MARIO NEIRA

911 E Ponce de Leon Blvd  
Coral Gables, FL 33134

We live here for 20 years.  
I have raised my family here  
Save the Neighborhood!

To SPECIAL MASTERS

PLEASE DENY PERMIT TO CONSTRUCT  
DEVELOPMENT ON VENETIA AVE / ANTILLA AVE.  
IN ORDER TO SAVE THE GARDEN OF OUR  
LORD'S 200 YEAR OLD TREES.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. H. H.', written in a cursive style.

2008 GRANADA BLVD

## To the Special Masters and Elected Officials

I request of the Special Masters that they reject the plans for the project at the Garden of our Lord. The Garden with trees and bushes from Gethsemane and the Ancient tree are unique elements in this city and my neighborhood, which only enhance the City and add to its value. The project calls for the destruction of The Garden and moving the Ancient tree, which will surely result in its death.

I recently purchased an expensive, new construction apartment in a low rise building two blocks from the Garden. I am appalled at the possibility that a project that violates our code in such an obvious manner might be built anywhere in the City, no less in my neighborhood. The project's enormous footprint of over 220,000 square feet is out of proportion for this neighborhood in particular. Context and Compatibility are mentioned repeatedly in our Building Code, which is why this project must not proceed. Stretching from sidewalk to sidewalk with virtually no setback on three sides is an outrageous violation of our standards. The setback at the main entrance also fails to follow city regulations and must not be allowed. The scale of this project is an incongruous incursion into a neighborhood with many single family homes and low rise garden apartments. The faux Mediterranean design is so unimaginative that I fear it will depreciate the value of property. Please deny these plans and save The Tree, The Garden and our neighborhood. Coral Gables demands and deserves better architecture than this. These plans must be denied.



Sergio Hernade  
220 Salamanca

**To Mayor Lago, Commissioners, Jorge Hernandez, Willie Bermello, and Mitch Alvarez,**

I am writing with great concern regarding the proposed plans for 110 Phoenetia Avenue. The property—anchored by the Garden of Our Lord and the irreplaceable two-hundred-year-old tree—is a site whose cultural, architectural, and environmental significance cannot be overstated. The Garden, designed by Robert Fitch Smith to complement the adjacent Historic Woman's Club, is not merely a landscaped parcel but a rare assemblage of memorial, biblical, and heritage features, including plantings whose lineage traces back to Gethsemane. Its presence is inseparable from the neighborhood's identity and from the vision articulated in prior City workshops, which specifically emphasized the need to preserve and potentially acquire this land as a critical green refuge for the most densely populated portion of Coral Gables.

The plans submitted for redevelopment, however, wholly disregard this context. The proposed massing of the structure, the disregard for required setbacks, and its incompatibility with the surrounding scale and architectural rhythm constitute an undeniable and substantive violation of our City code. Section 5-103 outlines with exceptional clarity the principles of architectural context—massing, scale, height, separation between buildings, and compatibility—yet the current design contradicts each of these mandates. Within steps of this site stand three Historic 1920s homes, the only historic bed-and-breakfast in the City, and modest-scale residential structures on Antilla Avenue. Introducing a structure whose volumetric proportions so drastically overshadow its neighbors is not only aesthetically discordant but fundamentally illegal under the requirements set forth in the NPCO and related development regulations. Therefore, the plans must be denied.

Further, the proposal's attempt to qualify as a Planned Area Development (PAD) is unfounded. Although PAD requires meaningful public green space, the project offers only a small interior courtyard whose primary function is to serve a private school, with limited and inconsistent public accessibility. This does not meet the criteria established by the Code, nor does it satisfy the intent of community benefit. Environmentally, the removal of specimen trees and the relocation of the ancient tree—which arborists from Vizcaya, Fairchild, Montgomery, the Gifford Arboretum, and others have warned will result in its death—would be an irreversible loss and may expose the City to significant legal, ethical, and ecological consequences.

For these reasons, grounded firmly in municipal law, historical responsibility, and environmental stewardship, I respectfully urge you to deny the proposed plans in their entirety. The City has long prided itself on disciplined design principles, preservation values, and community integrity. Upholding those standards in this instance is the only just and lawful course.

**Respectfully,**

Omar Packard  
911 e Ponce De Leon Blvd #902  
Coral Gables, FL 33134

To Special Masters

Please reject  
the plan.

Mania P Cañ

Willie Bermello, Mitch Alvarez, George Hernandez, Mayor and Commissioners,  
110 Phoenetia Avenue

Please save our neighborhood. Prevent this project from being built as it is currently designed. It will be a blemish on the distinct architecture which exists in this area. The project's design fails to abide by our Code's requirement for public green space! It offers a tiny space that the public will not be able to access throughout the day because it must be shared with the school. It should not receive the Planned Area Development (PAD). Save our Quality of Life! Require Good Architecture!!! Demand that the project follow our Building requirements!! Deny these plans!



1201 Epsi - Parc de  
Leon Coral Gables  
#MANITA R Farm  
DE @ ESI 13

**Mitch Alvarez, George Hernandez, Willie Bermello , Mayor Lago, Vice Mayor Anderson, and Commissioners.**

I respectfully request that these plans be denied. I have lived in various locations in this neighborhood for ~~over thirty~~ years, I currently reside on Phoenetia Avenue. I have made this neighborhood my home. I am now fearful that the neighborhood which has meant so much to me will be irrevocably changed by a poorly conceived design that threatens the harmony of architecture which has defined this densely canopied area of our City. The developer has sought exceptions to our Building Code that should not be given to them. This project should have been designed solely upon what is allowed as -of -right. However, these plans ask for exemptions from our Code which are extreme. For example, as -of -right setbacks are 25 feet at the main entrance and 15 feet on the abutting streets. The developer has proposed a setback of 10 feet at the main entrance, less than 10 inches on two abutting streets and zero setback on a third street. The project's facades are too generic and discordant with the context of this residential neighborhood. The project also removes specimen trees with Spanish moss which line the swale on Antilla Avenue and East Ponce. The swale, the public's right of way, does not belong to the property owner and yet they have the audacity to seek to remove what is essential not in their purview. These plans must be denied because they seek extraordinary exemptions from our city code that will have a ruinous impact upon the context of this neighborhood and in particular Phoenetia Avenue which has several Historic structures.

*CKJ 42 Phoenetia Ave Apt 5*

To the Special Master,

I have lived in  
the Garden for 42 years.

The beauty of our land is  
one of our precious resources

Please deny the plans  
eradicating the garden.

James R. [Signature]

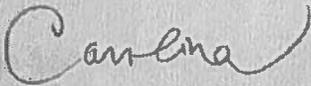
To Commissioners Willie Bermello, Mitch Alvarez, Jorge Hernandez, Mayor Lago, and all Members of the Commission,

I am writing to express concern about the proposed development at 110 Phoenetia Avenue. As currently designed, the project does not meet the City's setback requirements and its overall massing is incompatible with the surrounding neighborhood. The scale simply overwhelms the nearby historic homes and small residential buildings.

Equally troubling is the threat to the Garden of Our Lord and the 200-year-old tree. Experts have stated clearly that relocation would be fatal to this irreplaceable tree, and the loss of the garden would be a significant blow to the character of North Ponce.

I respectfully urge you to deny this proposal and uphold the City's established code and preservation standards.

Sincerely,



Carolina Rodrigues Salgado

20 Calabria ave #306

Coral Gables FL 33134

12/2/2025

TO MAYOR LAGO , CITY COMMISSIONERS, AND THE SPECIAL MASTERS,

As a resident of this area, I urgently appeal to your sensibilities and respect for the values which have guided the City since its inception to deny these plans for The Garden Of Our Lord. The plans are ridiculous in their scope. The scale, height and massing will be a disaster. The project should never have been approved in the first place. You must deny them !!!



JAMES SOLOMON 888.200.6245

Please reject the proposed plans for this project.  
They violate our building code.

Jasmin Gutierrez  
40 Sidonia Ave #1

**George Hernandez, Mitch Alvarez , Willie Bermello , Mayor Vince Lago and City Commissioners**

Please deny the plans for the Garden of our Lord and The Two Hundred Year Old Tree!! This project is a prime example of the type of project that should not be built in our City. The style of this building, though given the Med bonus, is not Mediterranean. The only reason it has the bonus is because it received it when the requirements were very loose. Our City is nationally and internationally recognized as being defined by Mediterranean architecture.

Please reject the plans to demolish this wonderful Place in our beautiful City.

Rafael Mir

127 Phoenicia Ave Apt 1 Coral Gables, Fl 33134

To: The Special Master

These plans must be rejected  
they do not follow our City Codes.  
I have lived here for more than  
20 years - it is very disappointing to  
see what is happening here.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sandra L Wisham  
411 Anastasia Ave  
C.G., FL 33134

TO WILLIE BERMELLO, GEORGE HERNANDEZ, MITCH ALVAREZ AND MAYOR LAGO AND CITY COMMISSIONERS,

I live on Phoenetia Avenue and I am worried about the project proposed for The Garden Of Our Lord. This project should not be built on this street which is graced by the biblical garden, The Women's Club, the Historic Douglas home and three Historic family homes that date from the 1920's. This neighborhood with all of its history should be preserved. The design of this project is not right for my street. The scale of this project , its fake Med. Design, its tremendous square footage and its lack of harmony with the street must not be permitted. Please do not approve these plans which will overshadow and drown out this special street.

Blanca Y. González

2 Phoenetia Ave Coral Gables FL 33134

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**Mitch Alvarez, George Hernandez, Willie Bermello, and Elected Officials,**

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To serve as Special Masters it is essential that you require developers to follow our City Code! Your decision on this project will shape this neighborhood!! Please reject this project because it will destroy this residential neighborhood's identity. The project is completely out of context . It fails to preserve the Garden of our Lord, which has trees and bushes which came from the Garden of Gethsemane!! It also will remove specimen trees from the swale that are covered in Spanish moss. And it will move an Ancient tree that will die if it is moved! This is a densely canopied area of our City.

Context is a very important part of our City Building Code. The project does not take the context of this area into consideration. It is not compatible with this area. The scale of this project is outrageously out of proportion to the surrounding structures most notably Historic single family homes and The Nationally recognized Woman's Club. It will irreparably destroy this neighborhood's character. As Special Masters it is your responsibility to reject these plans which are not appropriate for this neighborhood! Please do not allow this project to proceed! Reject the plans!!

Alfredo D. Jimenez  
44 Antilla Ave. Apt 9

Save the tree!

12-8-25

Special Master,

Please reject the  
plans to remove the  
tree at the property  
next to the Womens Club

  
Douglas  
Carl O'Neil

## The Special Masters And City Officials

I vociferously request that the plans proposed for the Garden of our Lord be rejected! My family and I have owned property in this neighborhood for over 40 years. As Special Masters, you are obligated to enforce the Design Review Standards in Article 5 and Division 6 of our Zoning Code. Those standards include height, scale, massing and style and the requirement that projects are compatible with surrounding structures. Our code explains that, "...compatibility refers to the sensitivity of development proposals in maintaining the character of existing development." Our Code demands harmony with existing structures. This proposal fails to provide the harmony or compatibility which our Code requires. Its scale is out of sync with the neighborhood. Its massing is overwhelmingly inappropriate. And its style is not genuine Mediterranean. This project should not be built in this City because it fails to adhere to our Design Review Standards. Please reject the plans for this project because they are an affront to our identity as a City known for its exemplary design standards. Thank you.

DEBORAH ESCALONA  


42 phoenix Ave Apt #4  
Cord Sel 61, RL 3313 Y

~~THE~~ PLEASE DENY THE PLANS FOR THE PROJECT  
THEY VIOLATE OUR CITY CODE

Daniel Ramirez

40 SIDONIA AVE

TO : Willie Bermello, Mitch Alvarez, and George Hernandez, Mayor V. Lago and Commissioners,

RE: THE GARDEN OF OUR LORD

The proposed plans for The Garden Of Our Lord must not be approved. The Garden was designed by Robert Fitch Smith, one of the most influential and significant architects in South Florida's history. Many of his designs have been designated historic. The Garden has trees and bushes which came from Gethsemane as seeds. It is a war memorial, medical memorial, civic memorial and a memorial to religious martyrs. The memorials in the Garden are plaques with significant details that line the entire interior wall. Each individual plaque goes into tremendous detail. The Garden's biblical plants are identified by small markers which state the name, chapter and verse in the Bible where they are discussed. The biblical plants with their markers and the memorial plaques are very educational. The Garden use to have thousands of visitors and ceremonies throughout the years. The Garden has also been the final resting place of the ashes of many local residents. Renowned Harvard educated architects and Professors of Architecture at the University Of Miami, Joanna Lombard Hector and Rocco Ceo, authors of Historic South Florida Landscapes submitted the architectural criteria in an attempt to designate The Garden historic. To the great dismay of many it was denied designation. It is still considered historic by many in the neighborhood. Fitch Smith designed the wall surrounding the Garden to compliment the Woman's Club which is adjacent to it. Ceo and Hector describe the wall surrounding The Garden which is crowned by oolitic limestone as intentionally styled to match the Woman's Club's oolitic limestone. Ceo and Hector also noted the wall's resemblance to the one at Vizcaya Farm. The project proposed by the Chicago area developer, Fifield for the Garden is not compatible with the Woman's Club. It is a contradiction to it. The Building Code in Coral Gables discusses compatibility over a dozen times. The Code mentions context over 9 times. The project is neither compatible nor appropriate for this historic area with the Woman's Club, The Douglas Entrance, The Douglas Estate and historic single family homes. The plans have no appreciation for the important and unique context of the area. Please respect the historic soul of this neighborhood, request that the developer preserve The Garden and create a project which will enhance the beauty of the neighborhood. Show respect for the neighborhood and our City please deny this very inappropriate plan!!!!

*Manuel Mucino* live in neighborhood more than  
20 years 23 Phoenicia Ave in Dbl 3

Please reject the  
plans to the city  
clerk.

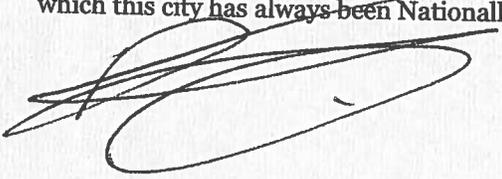
Rolando Gonzalez  
75 Antilla

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## The Special Masters And City Officials

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As Special Masters you have no alternative but to reject the plans for this project. This project proposes to demolish the Garden of our Lord, move the Two Hundred Year old Tree and irrevocably destroy the essence of this densely canopied residential neighborhood. These plans are an overtly obvious attempt to subvert our exceedingly high design standards. This City was established to display thoughtful and authentic Mediterranean Architecture. Though this project received the Mediterranean Bonus, which enabled it to receive two additional floors, it doesn't deserve it. The Mediterranean Bonus was created to encourage Authentic Mediterranean Architecture. This project is an outlandish insult to the principles which define Mediterranean Architecture. Please ask of the developer that they redesign the project and submit new plans which preserve The Garden, Keep the Two Hundred Year old Tree where it is and reflect the core principles which define True Mediterranean Architecture. These plans are not in keeping with the high standards for which this city has always been Nationally and Internationally recognized. Please reject these plans!!!



42 PHOENIXIA AVE A.P.T 1  
CORAL GABLE FL 33134

To the special masters:

Please reject the plans to demolish the Garden of Our Lord  
and moving the 200 year old tree. We have lived  
in Coral Gables for 43 years. Thank You

Carol & Jorge Crespo  
944 Catalonia Ave.

**To Commissioners Mitch Alvarez, Willie Bermello, Jorge Hernandez, Mayor Lago, and Members of the Commission,**

I am writing to express my profound concern regarding the redevelopment plans proposed for 110 Phoenetia Avenue. This is a site whose significance—historical, environmental, and communal—extends well beyond the boundaries of the parcel itself. The Garden of Our Lord, together with the irreplaceable two-hundred-year-old tree, constitute an ensemble of profound civic value. Designed by Robert Fitch Smith as part of a deliberate architectural relationship with the Historic Woman’s Club, the Garden represents one of the earliest biblical gardens in the country and contains plantings of documented lineage tracing to Gethsemane. Its preservation has been recognized repeatedly during City visioning processes, which identified this property as one of the few remaining opportunities for much-needed parkland in this densely populated area.

It is therefore extremely troubling that the proposed development disregards both the spirit and letter of our municipal regulations. The plans exhibit substantial violations with respect to required setbacks, and the overall massing of the structure is incompatible with the architectural scale and rhythm of the surrounding district. Section 5-103 of the City Code is unequivocal in defining contextual obligations—massing, height, scale, separation between structures, and architectural compatibility—and yet the current proposal conflicts with each of these principles. The neighborhood’s built environment, composed of historic single-family homes, the City’s only historic bed-and-breakfast, and modest residential buildings along Antilla Avenue, would be overwhelmed by a development whose proportions are neither respectful of nor responsive to its surroundings. Under these conditions, the City has no legal or procedural basis to approve the plans; they must be denied to remain consistent with established regulations.

Furthermore, the attempt to qualify the project under the PAD (Planned Area Development) designation is inappropriate and unsupported by the facts. PAD approval hinges on the provision of meaningful public benefit, particularly in the form of accessible open space. The proposal's small, interior courtyard—primarily intended for school use, with only limited hours available to the general public—does not meet that requirement in substance or in intent. Equally unacceptable is the proposed disturbance of specimen trees on the property and the attempted relocation of the ancient tree. Expert testimony from multiple respected institutions, including Fairchild and Vizcaya, has confirmed that relocation will result in the tree's death. The City cannot, and should not, sanction a plan that knowingly causes irreversible ecological damage.

Given these significant deficiencies—legal, architectural, environmental, and procedural—I urge the Commission to uphold the integrity of our zoning framework and deny the proposed development at 110 Phoenetia Avenue. Doing so honors not only our code but also the history, identity, and environmental heritage of the North Ponce community. I trust the Commission will act in accordance with its duty to protect the irreplaceable assets entrusted to its care.

**Thank you for your careful consideration.**

Judith Packard

911 e Ponce De Leon Blvd APT 902

Coral Gables, FL 33134

TO WILLIE BERMELLO, MITCH ALVAREZ, GEORGE HERNANDEZ AND ELECTED OFFICIALS,

*-35 years*

I am a resident of this verdant neighborhood and I am asking The Special Masters to deny these plans because they are a contradiction to everything that this City values. The Garden of our Lord is one of the first three biblical gardens in America. Some of the trees and shrubs which grow there today came as seeds from THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE!! The Garden is a unique asset in this city which must be preserved. The Ancient tree on the playground is also a great asset. The plans for this project must be denied because they fail to take into account our Building Code. The setbacks that the developer is requesting are not AS-OF -RIGHT. They are an extremely significant deviation from what should be allowed. These setbacks will serve to hamper any transition from the street to the building. The projects massing and height will tower over the Historic Woman's Club in a manner that will forever obscure its sense of place along East Ponce, which is a green corridor of specimen trees, many of which are covered in moss!! Height is part of the BOA 's purview and the height of this project is too much for a neighborhood with single family homes!!! PLEASE DENY THESE PLANS AND PRESERVE THIS NEIGHBORHOOD'S QUALITY OF LIFE!!!

*Kathleen Terry*

*3223 Riviera Dr.*

*CORAL GABLES, FL 33134*

*305-951-7441*

TO : Willie Bermello, Mitch Alvarez, George Hernandez, Mayor Vincent Lago and Commissioners,  
RE: THE TWO HUNDRED YEAR OLD TREE AND THE GARDEN OF OUR LORD

The plans proposed for The Garden Of Our Lord and The Two Hundred Year Old Tree must not be approved!! There are a plethora of reasons why these plans should not be approved, they do not have proper setbacks, the facades are lacking, the size, scale, and the massing are inappropriate for this residential neighborhood. The design fails to exhibit the panache which has defined Coral Gables architecture and for which this City is famous. Most disturbingly the plans will demolish the Garden and move the Tree! Do not allow this project to go forward. Stop it ! Demand that the developer redesign the project and save the Garden!

Chianne Mejia

37 Phoenicia Ave.

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**George Hernandez, Mitch Alvarez, WILLIE BERMELLO, MAYOR Vince LAGO AND COMMISSIONERS**

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THE plans for the Garden of our Lord must be denied because they are an obvious violation of our City code! The plans fail to take into account that this is a residential neighborhood with many Historic single family homes. On Phoenetia Avenue, there are three Historic Single family homes and the Historic Casa Coral(The Douglas Estate for which Douglas Road was named.) The Nationally recognized Woman's Club is directly across the street from the project. On Antilla Ave, there is a single family home directly across the street from the proposed project and a Historic two story Apartment building. Further down on Antilla Avenue there are two Historic single family homes. This neighborhood with narrow streets will not be capable of handling the type of traffic that a project such as this will bring. There is no integration or connectivity with the abutting streets and structures.

Though the developer is requesting Planned Area Development they are not providing public green space. The developer is proposing a Space which will be difficult for the public to access because of its location in the center of the building and because it will be shared with a school which means that the amount of time that the public can use it will be very limited. The project fails to provide adequate public green space and it is totally out of scale for this area. Please do the right thing by our neighborhood! Reject this project until the developer can create a project which keeps the two hundred year old tree where it is, preserves the Garden of our Lord and abides by the City code!!! Thank You

*AUDRITZO MONTES*

*45 ANTILLA AVENUE #1-E*

*00004 CORAL, FL 33134*

*11 year resident*

*ma h. montes 10/3/05*

# Wells & Wells, P.A.

901 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Suite 200  
Coral Gables, Florida 33134  
Telephone: (305) 444-0016  
Facsimile: (305) 444-0019  
www.twellsllaw.com  
E-mail: tom@twellsllaw.com

December 4, 2025

## **Via Email and Hand Delivery**

Coral Gables Board of Architect Special Master Hearing  
c/o Billy Y. Urquia, City Clerk for the City of Coral Gables  
405 Biltmore Way  
Coral Gables, Florida 33134

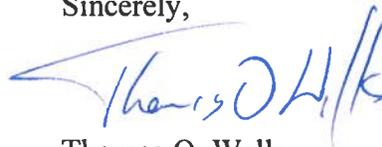
***Re: Opposition to the Proposed Development at 110 Phoenetia Avenue***

Dear Special Masters:

I have lived in Coral Gables for the past 33 years, and my law office has been located at 901 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Coral Gables, Florida 33134 for the past 8 years. I submitted the attached letter, dated August 6, 2025, in opposition to granting a variance to the Zoning Code of the City of Coral Gables with respect to the proposed 9-story, 177 residential units and 16 live-work units with 340 parking spaces seeking to be located at 110 Phoenetia Avenue, Coral Gables 33134 (the "Proposed Development"). The Proposed Development is incompatible with the existing garden-apartment residential architecture and urban design adjacent to and surrounding the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development is more compatible with other high-rise developments located directly on Ponce de Leon Blvd. – not located beside the Coral Gables Woman's Club and/or replacing The Garden of our Lord.

I have always lived in North Coral Gables west of Granada Blvd. I currently live on Coral Way and San Domingo Street near St. Theresa School and Church of the Little Flower. I do not want or expect to live next to a high-rise residential complex because it is incompatible with that residential area. Similarly, the Proposed Development is incompatible with the existing garden-apartment residential architecture and urban design represented by the Coral Gables Woman's Club and/or The Garden of our Lord. Our Zoning Code<sup>1</sup> prohibits the Proposed Development. Please enforce our Zoning Code and reject the Proposed Development for that area. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Thomas O. Wells

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<sup>1</sup> Section 1-103 of the City of Coral Gables Zoning Code incorporating Future Land Use Element Policy 1.3.2 protecting residential neighborhoods from intrusion by incompatible uses.

## Wells & Wells, P.A.

901 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Suite 200  
Coral Gables, Florida 33134  
Telephone: (305) 444-0016  
Facsimile: (305) 444-0019  
www.twellsllaw.com  
E-mail: tom@twellsllaw.com

August 6, 2025

### **Via Email and Hand Delivery**

Coral Gables Board of Architects  
c/o City of Coral Gables  
Development Services Department  
Planning Division  
427 Biltmore Way  
Coral Gables, Florida 33134

### ***Re: Opposition to the Proposed Development at 110 Phoenetia Avenue***

Dear Coral Gables Board of Architects:

I have lived in Coral Gables for the past 33 years, and my law office is located at 901 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, Coral Gables, Florida 33134. I will be impacted by additional cars and traffic brought into this area. In evaluating whether to approve the 9-story, 177 residential units and 16 live-work units with 340 parking spaces to be located at 110 Phoenetia Avenue, Coral Gables 33134 in Board of Architect Application 22-08-0326 (the "Proposed Development"), please consider its incompatibility with the current residential area and do not approve it.

Section 1-103 of our Zoning Code provides that its purpose is to implement the Comprehensive Plan ("CP") including Future Land Use Element ("FLU") and Housing Vision Statement ("HOU") for the protection and promotion of the safety, health, comfort, morals, convenience, peace, prosperity, appearance and general welfare of the City and its inhabitants. Section 1-103 of our Zoning Code is specifically intended to (i) protect the distinctive historic and architectural character of the City, (ii) preserve the basic comprehensive plan and layout of the City by its forefathers, more specifically George Merrick and (iii) preserve residential properties to assure that future development will be in conformity with the foregoing distinctive character, with respect to type, intensity, design and appearance. Zoning Code Section 1-103 incorporates the following obligations and considerations as to new developments:

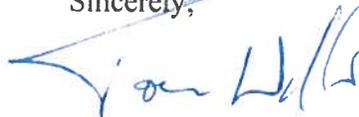
- ✓ *requiring a concurrency impact analysis for all development orders issued by the City (Policy FLU-1.1.7)*
- ✓ *promoting compatibility with the architecture and urban design character of surrounding areas (Policy FLU-1.1.11)*
- ✓ *protecting residential neighborhoods from intrusion by incompatible uses (Policy FLU-1.3.2)*
- ✓ *preserving the low intensity and high quality character of the residential neighborhoods (Objective FLU-1.11)*

- ✓ requiring the City to *enforce the Zoning Code to preserve and improve the character of neighborhoods* (Objective FLU-1.14)
- ✓ requiring the City to assist neighborhood groups with neighborhood plans to *minimize potential impacts between non-residential and residential land uses* with the intent of ensuring residential areas are protected from noise, light, traffic and vehicular access (Policy FLU-3.3.2)
- ✓ preserving residential properties to assure that *future development will be in conformity with the foregoing distinctive character* (HOU Vision Statement)
- ✓ *requiring aesthetic compatibility and visual harmony be considered as a bona fide criteria in reviewing requests for residential housing* (Policy HOU-1.2.3)
- ✓ *requiring new development to be compatible with adjacent established residential areas* (Policy HOU-1.2.6)
- ✓ requiring new housing be designed and located that ensures preservation of the unique character of the City's existing neighborhoods (Policy HOU-1.2.7)

Assuming the Proposed Development can comply with the Zoning Code, the elements of the FLU and the statements of the HOU, it should be approved. But I strongly oppose granting exceptions to the Proposed Development. Those exceptions prevent the uniform application of rules and code provisions to real estate development projects and create the appearance that certain well-connected developers receive special benefits from the City of Coral Gables.

As to the Proposed Development, I do not see how a 9-story, 193-unit facility with 340 parking spots is compatible with the look and feel of the existing garden-apartment residential area, the Coral Gables Woman's Club and/or The Garden of our Lord. Because it is not compatible, it should not be allowed to move forward.

Sincerely,



Thomas O. Wells



November 22, 2022

To: Mayor of Coral Gables, City Commissioners, Historic Preservation Board

I am writing to express my grave concern for the planned demolition of the Garden of Our Lord, located at 110 Phonetia Avenue, and the relocation of the very large Live Oak tree in the adjacent property. I strongly support conservation of the garden and preservation of the Live Oak in situ.

My area of expertise is in historic gardens and their associated resources such as large trees and historic architecture and structures. I've been in public horticulture for more than 20 years and am very well versed in their myriad benefits to the public and the cities they are located in. Particularly in overdeveloped locations such as South Florida, green space is a precious commodity, and green space with a strong story to tell about its location even more so. It is critical these spaces are preserved. Indeed, if Miami Dade County had not stepped in and purchased Vizcaya for a sum of \$1 million in 1952, it would have been razed and developed – and this world renowned treasure would have been lost. In Coral Gables, "The City Beautiful", which prides itself on its strong historic preservation ethic and gorgeous properties like the Biltmore and the Venetian Pool, why would a precious historic garden and ancient tree not be saved as well – especially on a green corridor?

A garden is as good as its trees – and the rare treasure sitting immediately next door could easily be preserved as a green space. This enormous Live Oak predates the City – it is easily 200 years old – and certainly is larger than any Live Oak that Vizcaya has in its untouched forests. This tree has endured several lifetimes' worth of hardships – hurricanes, development, drought – but it cannot endure relocation. This tree is far too large – its huge girth would break apart from the pressures put upon it and its root system spreads over the entire park it occupies. Relocation would spell certain death and be a waste of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Better to preserve it in place and let the residents of your fine city enjoy it and the garden it graces.

I ask that you very strongly consider my recommendation to preserve the Garden and the tree. I am available via phone and email if you'd like to discuss this further. Please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Best Regards,

Ian Simpkins  
Senior Director, Horticulture & Sustainability  
Vizcaya Museum and Gardens  
[ian.simpkins@vizcaya.org](mailto:ian.simpkins@vizcaya.org) / 305-860-8430

1:16 PM



**The Coral Gables  
Chamber Of  
Commerce added a ...**

**Dacosta, Susan**

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**From:** Jorge J. Zaldivar <jorgejzaldivar@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 4, 2025 2:08 PM  
**To:** Board of Architects  
**Cc:** City Clerk  
**Subject:** Save Trees & History — Don't Play Us

**CAUTION: External Sender. Please do not click on links or open attachments from senders you do not trust.**

**Dear Special Master Review Board,**

**Please consider the project "110 Phoenetia Avenue" in context with the area. The area was designed as a low-scale garden apartment district. The enclave was planned by city founder George Merrick as part of his "garden city" precept. The proposed project, scheduled to be built on the site where The Garden of our Lord, St. James Lutheran Church and Crystal Academy now stand, does not conform to the present zoning code. The historic green canopy and heritage trees surrounding the property will be displaced.**

**I/We oppose the project as presented and hope the Special Master Review Board will see the value of this petition.**

**Please preserve our cultural and architectural heritage.  
Thank you.**

**Respectfully,  
Jorge J. Zaldivar  
3143 NW FLAGLER TERR., 33125  
(786) 299-1934**

**December 2025**  
**To the Special Masters**  
Development Services Department  
City of Coral Gables

Dear Special Masters,

As an architect living in Coral Gables, I write to oppose the demolition of the Garden of Our Lord and the removal or relocation of its mature trees. My position is not anti-development; I fully support growth that is sustainable, resilient, and contextually grounded. Unfortunately, the proposal before you disregards the architectural, cultural, and urban value of this historic garden and does not meet the basic standards of compatibility required by our city.

The Garden of Our Lord was designed with intention and respect for its surroundings, particularly the Historic Coral Gables Woman's Club immediately adjacent to it. Together, they form a cohesive architectural dialogue, one that reflects the scale, rhythm, and openness characteristic of this residential neighborhood. From an urban design standpoint, the garden functions as a critical green relief in a corridor otherwise defined by small-scale historic homes and garden apartments. The proposed project breaks that dialogue. Its architecture, scale, massing, and overall volume are fundamentally incompatible with the character of Phoenetia Avenue and the surrounding streets. By overwhelming the Woman's Club and the nearby historic homes, the project disrupts the proportional balance and human-scale fabric that define North Ponce.

In addition, this is one of the most densely populated areas of Coral Gables, where mature canopy and open space are essential for walkability, shade, stormwater benefit, and neighborhood identity. Removing the garden erases a critical piece of ecological and cultural infrastructure, one that cannot be recreated once lost.

Thoughtful development should strengthen context, not contradict it. Any proposal for this site must honor the established character of the North Ponce Neighborhood Conservation District and align with the City's own visioning efforts identifying this garden and its ancient tree as assets worthy of preservation. Replacing a historically designed landscape and irreplaceable old-growth tree with a project whose scale, massing, and architectural language disregard their surroundings is inconsistent with both the spirit and the letter of our code.

**December 2025**  
**To the Special Masters**  
Development Services Department  
City of Coral Gables

I respectfully urge the City to deny the current plans and encourage a responsible path forward, one that preserves the irreplaceable value of the garden while allowing for development that honors context, history, and community resilience. Coral Gables deserves solutions that strengthen its legacy—not diminish it.

Respectfully,

**Nanette Martinez, M. Arch., Associate AIA**  
Architectural Designer, Resident of Phoenetia Avenue, Coral Gables

**Dacosta, Susan**

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**From:** PATRICA BLANCO <patblanco@aol.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 4, 2025 2:43 PM  
**To:** City Clerk  
**Subject:** Preserving our City Beautiful;

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I have lived in Coral Gables for 46 years. I love the city and especially our Mediterranean architecture. I recently heard that a developer bought the land across from the CG Women's Club and wants to build an 8 story condominium on this precious site. It would destroy the character of the neighborhood. Please don't let this happen.

Patricia Blanco  
long time resident