

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items C-1 and C-2
January 28, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Mario Garcia-Serra
Ana Alvarez

Agenda Item C-1 [9:14:15 a.m.]

Mayor's Comments

C-1: Discussion on amending the Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code, to provide incentives for the inclusion of public parks in new developments in the North Ponce area.

C-2: A discussion regarding the progress on the Fink Studio.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mayor's Comments – Discussion on amending the Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code to provide incentives for the inclusion of public parks in new developments in the North Ponce area. Anybody to make a presentation?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Good morning Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, Mario Garcia-Serra with address at 600 Brickell Avenue. I'm a zoning attorney that has represented various projects in the North Ponce area. And what I wanted to talk to you about today is the possibility of incentivizing parks in the North Ponce area, public parks. There has been much discussion on this Commission about

City Commission Meeting
January 28, 2020

landscape open space in the North Ponce area, but the discussion has mostly been about private landscape open area, and components of the project that are not as significant as the public park space. What I think we are looking to do here or trying to do here through the Mayor's efforts is have incentives so that significant park space can be included as part of private development that are large enough, perhaps an acre minimum in size, and can provide landscape open space at sizes of around 5,000 square feet, which is where you want to start for neighborhood parks. I think these incentives don't necessarily need to be very complicated, could be perhaps a little bit more of an incentive in height, perhaps an additional story, a little bit more density. I do not think there needs to be any increase in the actual size of the building with the FAR, in order to achieve this. As been discussed before in workshops and in various different context by this Commission, perhaps making buildings skinnier and slightly taller would lead to more open space on the ground level which we could make in public parks, which I think your City staff recognizes are necessary for this area of the City, which is growing, which is redeveloping, and which is right now probably short of the amount that park space should have, in order to accommodate the needs of existing residents and future residents. That's the idea; and the idea, I think is to see if there is support for incentivizing public parks in the North Ponce area, to then be able to proceed with some sort of legislation, which of course I'd be more than happy to work with staff, as I've always done before to try to come with something that's agreeable to everyone involved.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: This has been the Vice Mayor's and all of us, really, efforts or desire to provide more parks in Coral Gables, especially in a high-density area, such as North Ponce and I applaud your presentation. Thank you, thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: May I ask a question. Are you talking about the infill area, the residential infill area, or just North Ponce?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: What I think is appropriate is in the residential infill area. In other words, that area that's not directly fronting on Ponce, but within the North Ponce area where you've seen already seen a few projects come through.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Mario.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: C-2 – discussion regarding the progress on the Fink Studio. Fink Studio – anybody here? There is somebody here.

Ms. Ana Alvarez: Good morning.

*City Commission Meeting
January 28, 2020*

Vice Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Ana Alvarez: My name is Ana Alvarez, I'm an architect, Martinez and Alvarez Architecture, working on the restoration and improvements for the Fink Studio. We have a PowerPoint presentation today, not sure if someone can help me bring it up, thank you. I'll give a quick overview of the work we've been doing on the Fink Studio over the last couple of months. For those who are not familiar with the building, it's a historic building located at 2506 Ponce de Leon. It was the architectural studio of one of the prominent architects in Coral Gables, George Fink, and its considered one of the best examples of early Mediterranean revival architecture from 1925. The work on this building started with an assessment and an evaluation that it included a whole team of conservators, architects, engineers, contractors. We were part of a larger team that includes the folks I mentioned, as well as members of the City, and we've been meeting with Historic and the City Manager's office. These are early pictures of the building and early drawings. The pre-design stage that we are in, includes documentation, discovery, surveying, conservation strategies and review of code, code requirements and also the tenant requirements. We've been documenting the building, studying all its features from overall to specific. If you have the opportunity to visit the building, there are some wonderful features that are nowhere else in Coral Gables – ceiling. We've been surveying the building. It's a unique site and that its locked, land-locked, so we only have the front which is on Ponce and the alley to work with in terms of egress. We've been drafting the original plan. On the left you'll see the original plan drawn by George Fink, and yes, it is hard to read, but we've been able to translate it and draft it. The large room that you see towards the back is the drafting room, and to the left you'll see the field notes from documenting all the dimensions. On the right we superimposed the original plan with the existing. On the left a tidier version of the drawing, on the right, one of the first plans drafted for the tenant improvement. The original drafting room is significant because it gives us the opportunity to have a large assembly space for the tenant. The tenant is CCE, Center for Cultural Espanol and they will have lectures and special events in this large room. I'll just quickly go through some of these slides so you can see some of the wonderful features of the building. So, this is an example of the exercise we go through. We document special elements in pictures and in dimensions, and then it gets drafted, like you see on the right. All of the building components have to be studied for practical evaluation and then also for conservation strategies. How do we waterproof what features can be restored in place, which features have to be replaced just because of their state of disrepair, and then what can be done to make the building, of course accessible, and resilient for the hurricane. This is a draft of the existing condition. That prior drawing was the ground floor, second floor – which one?

Vice Mayor Lago: One back.

Ms. Alvarez: Oh sure, this one? This is how the building is now. The prior use was an office space, so it was sub-divided in a series of small offices. The head piece of the building which has the
City Commission Meeting
January 28, 2020

diagonal line contain some of those special interiors that we looked at earlier. This is the second floor; the roof plan; the elevations drawn with all, kind of like all the existing conditions including where the drainage happened. So, there is quite a range of tasks from like beautiful documentation to kind of the nuts and bolts of what's really there, so we can address major issues with drainage, how the electrical is going to be done, new plumbing, etc. These are some of the special elements in the building, the entrance, the eve. We worked with a team of conservators who were studying the original colors of the building. The upper right hand of the slide you'll see some of the original colors that were uncovered, so we are looking to how we can bring that back. Again, more of the special features. There was a Gargoyle on the building which had fallen and is now in storage in the archive's office in Historic Department. So, we are going to recreate that pre-cast Gargoyle. So, we are at the stage now where we are meeting with the tenant and looking at their program and how they want to use the space and we are combining that with the practical constraints of the building and also the code research. We went through several schemes and we reviewed number seven with Peter Iglesias and this is where we are at now. The building will have new bathrooms, office space, a ramp in the back to address accessibility. The assembly space, I talked about before, perhaps a video conference room, and again, a tidier version of that. We were setting the sections so that we can better accommodate the mechanical system. That's where we are at. Any questions?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Tell me about the timing.

Ms. Alvarez: So, we are working towards having a submittal for Board of Architects and Historic Department in 4 to 6 weeks, with the intention to finish the construction documents by late May or June.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, we are pre-qualifying a group of contractors so that we can expedite construction, so that's being done right now.

Vice Mayor Lago: That was going to be my next question just to try and obviously get this done as quickly as possible. Is it going to be a hard bid, or this is going to be a process based on qualifications?

City Manager Iglesias: The contractor has been selected on qualifications for restoration on this kind of work.

Vice Mayor Lago: I think on a project of this magnitude and this care, I think we need to be very careful to not select the cheapest contractor. We need to select the contractor, again that we think is going to be, who has the experience to go after this work.

City Manager Iglesias: That's why we are doing that pre-selection to make sure that at least four are actually qualified. We would certainly work with the most qualified and then we'll go on down the line, but since its historical and since it's a special building we have that ability.

Vice Mayor Lago: And one final point, I just want to commend you and your team to doing an exceptional job...

Ms. Alvarez: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago:...along with staff, great work. All this upfront work is going to safe us, not only time, but its going to save us significant money, as we start working on demolition and really encountering a lot of the situations that I imagine have been in place for decades. So, thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: We are dealing with a lot of things that are not normal in the building preservation and conservation and documentation of the existing building in such a way that this will all be referenced for any work in the future also.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me tell you my concern now. Government projects tend to linger and if people don't pay attention to them, they will linger. We bought this property five years ago, five years ago, and it is now that you are here, and you are telling us all these plans, that was five years ago. And I don't want for us another five years or three years or one year to go buy without our doing work in order to restore this invaluable piece of Coral Gables history and this property. In the middle of our City we have the creation of the City and I want it done. Thank you very much.

[End: 9:27:07 a.m.]