

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
April 28, 2015
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason

Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.

Commissioner Pat Keon

Commissioner Vince Lago

Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark

City Attorney, Craig E. Leen

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-3 [12:42:25 p.m.]

Update on North Gables Planning Study

Mayor Cason: Let's move to F-3. Do you have to leave?- OK. F-3 which is an update on the North Gables Planning Study – Commissioner Keon.

Commissioner Keon: I asked again at the last meeting we talked about with development, the need for we as a City to be out in front of development and not have development happen in these areas that are so ripe for redevelopment, parcels at a time by developers, that we need to ensure that we have in place the zoning and the rules and the regulations to guide that development, especially we know now we want to decide and look at if we really want to create a very urban neighborhood, residential community in the north part of the Gables, and then what aspects of those areas will have commercial development and how do we develop commercially in support of an urban residential community. So Cathy, the Manager was also working on that, I just wanted an update from her on that.

Commissioner Quesada: Can I just frame the issue a little bit more for those watching at home and the audience that they'll have an update on this. The area north of Alhambra, the area south of Eighth Street in between LeJeune and 37th Avenue, when you look at that square of the City there really is a "miss-mash" – there is a very small number of single family homes, which I believe actually are City of Miami, not even Coral Gables; and we have a "miss-mash" of old multi-use buildings, a lot that are not really consistent with the aesthetic look and feel of the rest of our City, whether they are commercial or the residential aspects of it. One of the conversations that we had on this dais a few months ago, maybe 6-8 months ago now, we've been discussing it for a while, when you look at the French Village, when you look at some of the gray areas of the residential neighborhoods and the gray areas of the commercial neighborhoods, this area of our City doesn't feel like either of that. So really the conversation was what can we do to move forward to be consistent with the Charrette from 2003 and the analysis that we did in 1996 to bring it to where past Commissions and staff and this current Commission think that, that area of the City should be from an aesthetic perspective, as well as a youth perspective?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Thank you Commissioners. When you say north of Alhambra, it's going to be helpful for us to understand, are you talking about Alhambra north/south, north and south Alhambra, north, or are you talking about...

Commissioner Keon: The north side of Alhambra – from the north side of Alhambra to Eighth Street.

Commissioner Quesada: But again, we never defined the specific geographic location, all of our discussions have been generally that area.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: It becomes germane because there are some projects on the south side of Alhambra that we had said based on feedback from the Commission that we are not moving forward with any development applications to Planning and Zoning Board that are not as-of-right in that area, meaning if they need a land use change, a zoning change, if they need some type of exceptions to the Code, we are going to put that on hold until the plan is developed; and so is it the north side of Alhambra?- or is it the north and south side of Alhambra?

Commissioner Quesada: The north side of Alhambra.

Commissioner Keon: The north side of Alhambra because the south side of Alhambra is part of the CBD and has been developed as part of the CBD, and I know that there is a section of the CBD, I think it goes to Navarre, but there is a parcel there that the zoning, the underlying zoning for that parcel is not zoned the same as the CBD.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So with that clarification I'm going to ask Ramon Trias to come up and he is going to explain how we are going to approach the North Gables Study, defined by the north side of Alhambra up to Eighth Street from LeJeune Road to Douglas Road which is our general study area.

Commissioner Quesada: If I could just jump in for one second. I think we discussed this at the last meeting that we discussed this item was having Chuck Bohl involved or Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, the University of Miami.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: You'll see what staff's recommendation is and then we'll go from there.

Commissioner Keon: OK. We can sort of combine – you can give us that study too, but I'd like us to also consider looking at the area bounded by U.S.-1 and Sunset, because the same thing is happening there. The zoning that is in place there is what encouraged strip malls because in the 50's that was how they were developing it, and we have to decide that, that's not what we want to see happen. We need to also look at that area because it again is ripe for development. There are a number of parcels now along U.S.-1, adjacent to the Riviera Neighborhood Homeowners Association that has sold recently.

Commissioner Quesada: So you are saying we should better define what we really want there, so as to prevent any types of projects coming in or being proposed that we are against.

Commissioner Keon: That's the other part of our City that is also ripe for redevelopment, so it should be the North Gables and then there is that.

Commissioner Quesada: And we should be proactive and controlling what we want their rather than be...

Commissioner Keon: We need to be out ahead of what is happening there.

Mayor Cason: You want to talk to both of those at the same time?

Mr. Trias: Yes – Mayor...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Actually, if it's alright Mayor, if we can first discuss the North Gables Planning Study that approach and then we will move to the discussion on the U.S.-1 and Sunset corridor, because they are actually two different projects, maybe the same approach, but they are two different projects.

Mr. Trias: Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, my recommendation is to have a two-step process for the North Ponce area. One, following up with the Vice Mayor's comments or perhaps Chuck Bohl or somebody like that, be the facilitator of a public discussion in a more academic setting, so we can gather some information from the public; and then have an RFP and select a consultant to be able to have the appropriate amendments to the Code that are needed. In the past, the past efforts of the City I believe didn't go far enough in terms of coming up with the right amendments, so we certainly have to go that...

Commissioner Quesada: Let me ask you a question. The 2003 Charrette, the reason I'm bringing up their names Chuck Bohl and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, they were the ones who did that Charrette in 2003, were they not?

Mr. Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm not holding you to it, but I think I've seen them both.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: It was a very significant project jointly done by the City and the University of Miami, and they were two key contributors to it.

Commissioner Quesada: I know they were the – what's the proper term?- on the Agave project they were the peer advisory group, they worked on the Charrette. The reason I always bring up their names, they seem to know our land use and zoning and aesthetic better than anyone else out there, but whatever the process is.

Mr. Trias: My recommendation is that the peer review process works really well and that we should continue in that frame of mind. The other issue with the 2002 Charrette is that it included the North Ponce area, it has significant and very good recommendations, so there is a lot of very good material that we can revisit there, so that's a very good process.

Commissioner Keon: It was never implemented though?

Commissioner Quesada: Correct.

Mr. Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: OK. So this time we are going to go all the way.

Mr. Trias: That is why I am recommending as a second phase to have an RFP, and that RFP is being reviewed right now by staff, I believe the Assistant City Manager got the last version this morning, so we are working on that, hopefully soon we'll be ready. That might be a very good way to get the public involved and then implementable fully professional prepared amendment to the Code. As far as the other discussion that I had with Commissioner Keon was, that from my perspective the City of Coral Gables has only a few very well defined areas that require planning, the other two are Sunset certainly and U.S.-1, so the same process or something similar could be applied, and it's a very narrow focus...very clearly understood in terms of the context, so I think it's very doable.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you. I think with the development of the Underline, which I really do believe will come to fruition, we are going to create a great linear park there along the highway, which is going to encourage other developments where there are some commercial strips there, where there is a Starbucks and a Taco Rico – you know where that Taco Rico and what else is in that...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Our new trolley maintenance facility.

Commissioner Keon: It's on Riviera there; I don't know what the name of that center is.

Commissioner Quesada: Is someone anticipating developing that?

Commissioner Keon: I think they will.

Commissioner Quesada: Yes. I think you raise a great point of looking at it now, again, so we could be proactive in controlling and putting what we want there, rather than responding to variances and other things as we normally seek them out.

Commissioner Keon: You know that the land values have gone up, people want to go higher. How do we step things down, so that we don't negatively affect the residential areas around them?- so let's do it...tell them this is it.

Mr. Trias: Site specific.

Commissioner Keon: Tell them this is it.

Mr. Trias: U.S.-1 – have a vision of the 1940's of strip development as their preferred type of development, so that clearly is outdated, so we should revise that.

Commissioner Keon: We should revise that.

Commissioner Slesnick: Are we talking from like Granada west to Sunset or west to Red Road, Granada west to Red Road?

Mr. Trias: That's up to you whatever your preference will be, but that's more or less what I'm thinking.

Commissioner Quesada: I think really where we started there is have staff take a look and you guys guide us.

Commissioner Keon: Right – and actually both sides of U.S.-1 where they develop open properties because of that.

Mr. Trias: That's what I would recommend.

Mayor Cason: So when would you envision coming back to us with your ideas about the delineation of the areas?

Mr. Trias: As soon as we finalize discussion with the City Manager, I think we'll be ready.

Mayor Cason: OK.

Commissioner Keon: OK. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm sorry, you mentioned the Underline, digressing a little bit, but sort of still on topic. We are big supporters of the Underline, we have been, we allocated \$50,000 to get them going. I really think it's a transformative project from a transportation perspective moving forward. One of the items that we've discussed in the past is having showers on the first floor of office buildings for new buildings, so that people can ride bikes get to work sweaty, take a shower and change and actually have a professional work day and not smell like you just rode a bike for a few miles to get to work; and one of the big aspects of that is that connector and I really think we are seeing a big movement, a lot of different municipalities, a lot of different types of projects on transit related housing and I think the Underline is a big portion of that. I think we have 2.6 miles of the Underline will be directly in front of the City of Coral Gables, which behind the City of Miami will have the biggest impact. Moving forward, I don't know, and this is a question for our City Manager. Madam City Manager, does it make sense for us,

what I envision is we really want any property owner embracing the Underline, because the more money that they have the more resources that they have for the Underline, the better product we are going to get, and in turn it's going to be obviously it's a great amenity for our City. Moving forward for our transportation perspective, public art perspective, some of the ideas that they have it's not only for walking and riding bikes, but at the same time its parks, so I imagine we are going to have another 2.6 mile park right off of U.S.-1 protected, so we want to make sure that they have the right resources specifically from Coral Gables. Is there a way we can either, whether its incentivizing property owners so that they can contribute more money to the Underline?- specifically those funds have to be allocated for the portions that affect Coral Gables. I don't want us to be – I don't want our private citizens who are our residents, or our City contribute money to the Underline and that money going toward a portion to fund the City of Miami. I want it impacting directly us. I want the nicest piece of the Underline to be in front of Coral Gables and people say, Oh we are going to go to Coral Gables because the Underline is the best there. It will reduce traffic; we've had the experience with the trolley, we know we are going to have that experience reducing traffic and obviously beautifying the City. So I just want you to think about it. I'm not asking for an answer now, how we can allocate more funds there without coming out of our pocket to move that project along?

Mr. Trias: Vice Mayor, if I can update you. The Collection project coming up very soon has a component that includes funding for the Underline in close proximity to the project. We have been able to initiate a discussion, in fact in the last week we had two meetings with the County staff and the Underline to try to coordinate, so I would like to be able to do that more and certainly we will coordinate.

Mayor Cason: Tell Meg Daley to come sometime in May and tell us where she is.

Commissioner Quesada: I met with her several times on this and calling her nonstop, because I think it's such an important project for our City. What I've asked her to create is some sort of standards that cities can adopt. I know South Miami is on board, I know City of Miami is on board, all the municipalities are really jumping on board, but if there is some sort of standard that they recommend that we can implement, so that I've asked for that draft document, when I get it I'll distribute it to everyone.

Commissioner Lago: Let me tell you what's going on. The last meeting that we went to was at the School Board and I think you were with me?- did anybody else come?- or was I the only representative for the City that day? Commissioner Suarez was there and we spoke there, and basically what's going on right now is they are getting the funds to do pre-design, they are doing pre-construction. They are going to basically use the architect and they are going to come out with some schematic ideas in reference to what they are looking for in the Underline. Right now

there is really no concept that's nailed down, they are just taking ideas. The funding that's in place that we committed to was for pre-design and getting word out there, the buzz. In reference to the Collection residence, it was my understanding the City Manager, along with Ramon Trias were working on it. There was a portion of that project that was supposed to be allocated to Coral Gables Senior High School, that was scrapped and they moved in a different direction, and that direction was to fund the portion of the Underline. So we have more than enough time, there is ample time to really put our footprint or our thumbprint, whatever you want to call it, on the way this project is going to look in reference to the corridor that runs in front of the City of Coral Gables, because they haven't even started designing. What you are seeing right now is super preliminary, because they are going to have the funds allocated to actually do the construction.

Commissioner Keon: But they hired the design team.

Commissioner Quesada: They have the design team, they are an amazing design team, they are great, I know they can do a spectacular job, but I want to make sure that we have some control, I mean, again, it's our doorstep, it's the entrance to the City coming off of U.S.-1, hundreds of thousands of vehicles riding by every day. I want to make sure we have some sort of control, the final look and feel what we have in front of us, if we are going to be allocating money. I don't think we have that much time. There are a lot of different projects, a lot of different discussions or rumors that there are projects going up and I want to make sure we can capture everything we need to capture, so we can have a spectacular linear park in front of our City.

Commissioner Lago: Madam City Manager quick question. Has this project been funded by the County?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Has this project been funded by the County, the Underline?-no.

Commissioner Quesada: But you have other projects that are moving.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I appreciate both of your concerns and so the discussions with Collection residences is, give us a bond, so that we don't know what the improvements are for the Underline. We know that there are about \$10 million a mile, and so as we take in lieu of payments for, we don't know exactly what those improvements are, but they can be placeholder contributions, so that you accomplish what you need and you recognize that we are not ready yet, but at least we are identifying and pooling resources, so when they are ready we can make sure that that Coral Gables portion gets addressed promptly.

Commissioner Lago: What I think we need to do right now is and it encompasses what Commissioner Quesada, Vice Mayor Quesada is saying, and that is we need to make sure that while they are in the pre-design phase, which is what they are going through right now, they are identifying finishes, they are identifying trees, they are identifying electric light fixtures, is it going to be sustainable?- is it not going to be?- what can they put in this?- because there is a certain budget as you mentioned, \$10 million per mile, which may sound like a lot, but it's not, it's not when you are talking about the necessary infrastructure that needs to be brought in to be able to host the individuals that they want that are hopefully using the Underline. So there is time in the sense of that right now will be the appropriate time to start talking to them in an effort to when they do start designing this, I think will – they can talk to staff, I think they probably won't probably start fully designing this until a year from now, unless those funds have been allocated in the County. Right now I think the \$500,000 is mostly based toward pre-design, conceptual design, Ramon am I near there?- is that the numbers probably?

Mr. Trias: I think you are generally accurate with all that, but last week we did meet with Megan about this and we discussed some of the possibilities. I think we do have some very clear understanding that some things can be defined now; other things may be defined later, just like the City Manager said, as long as we have the ability to make those decisions later on. Right now we can make an appropriate contribution from each of the projects, and the project we have in mind is very close to the Underline geographically, and that discussion took place with Planning and Zoning, so I think it's a very reasonable....

Commissioner Quesada: Great. OK.

[End: 1:01:26 p.m.]