

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
January 22, 2019
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Jennifer Fine
Karelia Carbonell

Agenda Item H-2 [0:00:00 p.m.]

An update on LaSalle Cleaners Building located on 2341 S. Le Jeune Rd, Coral Gables, FL 33134.

(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Vince Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: An update on LaSalle Cleaners Building located at 2341 South Le Jeune Rd. Commissioner Lago -- Vice Mayor Lago, I'm sorry. Apologize.

Vice Mayor Lago: No, no, please.

City Commission Meeting

January 22, 2019

Agenda Item H-2 - Update on LaSalle Cleaners Building located on 2341 S. Le Jeune Rd, Coral Gables FL 33134.

Commissioner Keon: We had a meeting.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah. We had a meeting in regards to this issue, Mr. City Attorney -- Mr. City Manager.

Commissioner Keon: City Manager.

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah.

Commissioner Keon: We met last week.

Vice Mayor Lago: You want to give a little bit of an update on this in reference to LaSalle Cleaners and where we stand?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes. We met with the owner and the...

Commissioner Keon: Attorney.

City Manager Iglesias: The -- and the attorney and our City Attorney and Commissioner Keon. And, what they wish -- the cost of that property is something that we truly cannot afford now, because of all the infrastructure that we're doing. The cost would be about \$5 million with probably 2 or \$3 million of restoration.

Vice Mayor Lago: And remediation.

City Manager Iglesias: Correct. And we haven't talked about remediation.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

City Manager Iglesias: Because that's a site that was a gas station and later...

Vice Mayor Lago: A cleaners.

City Manager Iglesias: A dry cleaners, so you probably have oil and dry-cleaning fluids in that soil. So, they have not done any kind of environmental investigation and truly it's something that, at this time, I don't believe that we can afford.

Vice Mayor Lago: I just wanted to put it on the record, because I want it to be very clear because I received several emails and I know that my colleagues have also. And number one, this is a lot of money we're talking about. And there's nothing more that I would love to see than that building restored, but you know, to be honest with you, right now there's nothing that we could do with it. So, I just don't want to keep going back and forth and back and forth on this issue when, again, the owner's asking for a certain amount of money and they're not willing to move off that number. Currently, we have way too many obligations on our plate that we need to deal with.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And a lot of construction projects...

Vice Mayor Lago: And a lot of construction projects and...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Including the public safety building, Fire Station 2.

Vice Mayor Lago: By the way, and these remediations, you can't just say I'm going to put a number on it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: These remediation, you know, tasks or endeavors could be one, two, three million dollars, depending on the magnitude of cleanup that's required. So...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Vice Mayor Lago: I would love to see it restored, but it doesn't look like right now it's even a possibility.

City Manager Iglesias: The property's about 12,000 square feet...

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor, and we really don't know what we're getting ourselves into at this time. There's been no phase II done, no phase II environmental...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

City Manager Iglesias: Testing done, so at this time, we really truly cannot afford it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, H...

Commissioner Keon: Dona Spain -- can I ask -- I mean, Dona Spain met with us also when we met with the owners of the property. And they were waiting to speak with the City, because they were directed to have a meeting with the City on the property or whatever. And, it was made very clear to them that the City is not going to purchase that property and has no intention of purchasing that property. They also discussed, you know, what can be built there, because of the zoning of that property because of the size of the parcel. It is limited to four stories, so there's nothing that considerably can be built there. And after a lot of discussion with Dona, they have a demolition permit. They are waiting to not move forward with the demolition, because they

believe that possibly the best use of that property could be for someone who chooses to purchase it and restore it as it is because of the cost to remediate that land and the limitations placed on that site just by the size of that lot and the zoning. So, they are holding off. They are going back -- they were waiting on marketing that program until they had that discussion with the City. Now that they have and they know exactly where they stand and they know exactly what the zoning is, they know exactly what is allowed on that site and they know the concerns and the conditions of the site. They are going back to market that site. So, they will market it and you know, hopefully, maybe someone will purchase it and restore it or they may not. But it is in their hands. It is their property and they will make that decision.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: The site is under 20,000 square feet and we made it very clear...

Commissioner Keon: its 12,000 -- it's like 12,000 square feet.

City Manager Iglesias: its 12,000 and change.

Commissioner Keon: So, it's very limited.

City Manager Iglesias: We made it very clear that we were not, unfortunately, interested at this time.

Commissioner Mena: Yeah. I would just -- look, I think from the beginning when we discussed this, you know, however many months ago now, I think, for the most part, we were clear that it's unlikely that we were going to be in a position to buy the property, but you know, free market can sort of come into play here and maybe there's somebody who can come along and do something...

Commissioner Keon: Right, so...

Commissioner Mena: Like what you suggested. And, I would just add I'm willing to engage in some sort dialogue about what can be done from a zoning perspective if there's a proposal that retains the historic structure and implements some other...

Commissioner Keon: Okay.

Commissioner Mena: Sort of project. I don't know what that looks like...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Commissioner Mena: Today. There's no proposal.

Commissioner Keon: But I think that it is not historic. It wasn't designated historic, because of the modifications they have done to it. But, the Historic Preservation Officer has said that if someone comes forward that would desire to return it to its original -- to include those aspects of that building that would restore it back to what would make it a -- or could qualify it as a historic building, that we certainly can have that conversation. So, they were asked, if, you know, there is someone that has an interest in purchasing it and has an interest in the restoration, that they will meet with Historic Preservation and any benefit or anything that could come to it as a historic site would -- could be granted to that site that would encourage that kind of development. So, I think, you know, we've done everything. If you want to ask Dona, she can certainly reiterate that for you...

Commissioner Mena: No, I...

Commissioner Keon: Because I think that's much what was -- that was what was said. That's now. They understand that, so I mean, I think a lot of the problem was is they did not clearly

understand were the expectation -- what the relationship with the City was. And I think now they do. So, hopefully, it'll...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I agree with that.

Commissioner Keon: It'll move forward.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And, I just wanted to add that when it went to the Historic Preservation Board and they did not designate it, they encouraged the owner then to take it back to what it was so that they could designate it...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: In the future. So, I mean, I think that's an option available to them and hopefully that'll happen.

Commissioner Keon: Right. Or if...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Anyone who...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Or...

Commissioner Keon: Purchases it...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Or you know...

Commissioner Keon: Does it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You wanted to say something?

Jennifer Fine: Good morning. Jennifer Fine here. Mario couldn't make it this morning. I'm here on his behalf and the owner's behalf. We just wanted to say on the record that we did happen to meet with the City last week and that the owner is doing its own land use and zoning due diligence to assess the entitlements on the property. So, we're not entirely necessarily in agreement with the City's assessment from that meeting of what can be built on the site, but we just haven't done all of our research yet, so we'll come back once that's ready.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Commissioner Mena: But again, I want to just make...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright, let's go on.

Commissioner Mena: I want to make my opinion clear and I understand everything you said for you and your client, which is, if there's a party out there, your client or somebody else, who has some sort of proposal that would require us to look at the zoning and somehow make an accommodation that would enable you to keep...

Commissioner Keon: Historic.

Commissioner Mena: A...

Vice Mayor Lago: Structure.

Commissioner Mena: A modified and appropriately historic structure intact, I would be willing to engage in that dialogue. I can't speak for my colleagues.

Commissioner Keon: I think that...

Commissioner Mena: I think that's an important...

Vice Mayor Lago: I think we all would.

Commissioner Mena: Point to make.

Commissioner Keon: I think we all would.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah. Alright. Thank you.

Ms. Fine: Understood. Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: And we will be happy...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Karelia, you want to...

City Manager Iglesias: Assist them.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Say something brief?

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, come here.

Vice Mayor Lago: Please.

Commissioner Mena: No, that's all right.

Karelia Carbonell: I really appreciate what the City has been doing. I -- on behalf of HPACG, I know it's been several months and I know you've all been very consistent in the discussion. But, one thing I do want to just put out there is I understand as far as there are certain resources and the -- you know, it is high as far as what the party's asking, but please don't close the door. I mean, there are other options other than purchasing the property. There could be -- and I'm hoping that the owner's open to it -- but think that Coral Gables is known for its historic buildings, not its new development. And so, I hear that there's a lot of developments going on, but if the focus could stay on the historic. I understand it wasn't designated, but I think that was a faux pas way back and maybe it can be corrected. Hopefully, it can be corrected and every day that the building's there is really a plus for the City. You know, other than that, hopefully, it won't become a parking lot if it does go to that point. If you stand right at LaSalle and see City Hall, you can even feel the history, as you know that George Merrick was visioning the City from there. So, just keep that in mind, please, as you, you know, move forward. And again, hopefully, it's not a closed door. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Karelia.

Commissioner Mena: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: Let me say we will certainly assist in whatever the owner wishes to propose there.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Let's go on. Thank you.