

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-1, E-2, E-4 and E-5 are related
September 8, 2020
Virtual Meeting
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, Attorney for Applicant
Robert Behar, Architect

Agenda Item E-1, E-2, E-4 and E-5 are related [9:12 a.m.]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And now public hearings, E-1 and E-2 and then 4 and 5 later on, but we shall take according to our City Attorney's instructions, E-1 and E-2 together. Miriam.

City Attorney Ramos: Yes Mayor. I'll read E-1 and 2, E-4 and 5 are on for your information, but you won't have to vote on them until next meeting, so I won't bore everyone with reading them in. We can consolidate the public hearing for E-1 and 2, and we do need to swear anyone in that testifies in this hearing, Mr. Clerk, if you can keep that in mind. So with that E-1 is an ordinance of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida granting approval of a Planned Area Development (PAD) pursuant to Zoning Code Article 3, "Development Review" Division 5, "Planned Area Development (PAD)" for a proposed mixed-use project referred to as "Merrick 250" on the property legally described as lots 1 through 11, inclusive, less the south 7.5 feet thereof, and lots 32 through 42, inclusive, less the south 7.5 feet thereof, Block 3, "Coral Gables Industrial Section," together with that portion of the 30 foot platted alley lying north of the north line of the south 7.5 feet of said lot 11, projected westerly and south of the north line of said block 3 (250 Bird Road) Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. And E-2 is an ordinance of the City Commission of Coral Gables, Florida approving receipt of Transfer of Development Rights

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(TDRs) pursuant to Zoning Code Article 3, “Development Review,” Division 10, “Transfer of Development Rights,” Section 3-1006, “Review and approval of use of TDRs on receiver sites,” for the receipt and use of TDRs for a mixed-use project referred to as “Merrick 250” on the property legally described as lots 1 through 11, inclusive, less the south 7.5 feet thereof, and lots 32 through 42, inclusive, less the south 7.5 feet thereof, Block 3, “Coral Gables Industrial Section,” together with that portion of the 30 foot platted alley lying north of the north line of the south 7.5 feet of said lot 11 projected westerly and south of the north line of said block 3 (250 Bird Road) Coral Gables, Florida, including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. I’d also like to state Mayor that the applicant in this case has provided the city with a hold harmless and indemnification agreement relating to any mistakes, errors or otherwise that could occur due to the virtual nature of this meeting. Mr. Trias.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. City Manager, presentation.

City Manager Iglesias: Assistant Director Ramon Trias will present these two items.

City Clerk Urquia: Good morning Ramon, before you get started, if you could please raise your right hand. Do you swear that the testimony you will provide today would be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Assistant Director Trias: I do.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you sir.

Assistant Director Trias: Thank you. May I have the PowerPoint please? Is there an issue with the PowerPoint?

City Clerk Urquia: Give us one second Ramon.

Assistant Director Trias: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Is that the one?

Assistant Director Trias: Yes – I’m sorry, no, that’s not the one. That’s the applicant’s PowerPoint. So that’s not my PowerPoint.

City Clerk Urquia: So, Ramon, I don’t have yours then.

Assistant Director Trias: Okay. No problem. Then I’ll just make a brief presentation. As the City Attorney explained, there are four items today; there is a TDR and Planned Area Development, both of them are ordinances. There is also a conditional use for mixed-use site plan and tentative plat, which are resolutions and are there for your information. The project that is half a block. You may remember that in May you approved a project that’s called Belmont ALF, which was the other half of this block; and what we are dealing with today is the area that’s bound by Bird Road,

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Salzedo, and Aroura Street. Now the land use and the zoning do not change, they are already in place. The TDR is relatively a small request. They are asking for 4,904 square feet of additional development rights, which raises the FAR from 3.5 to 3.58, so it's a small request. Request number two is the PAD, which allows for a better design and some opportunities to create high quality open space, in particular, I would point out the southern edge, which is the area that meets the prior project approved. The applicant did a very thorough job trying to combine both projects and they will explain in some detail. And the PAD also requires a minimum of 20 percent open space, and they are providing 21 percent, but in this case, it's very precisely designed, and again, the applicant will explain it with the drawings, etc. Finally, I would say is that the last request is a plat in order to replat the property into two parcels; the northern parcel is the one that matches the commercial zoning and the southern parcel is the one that would match the current industrial zoning. So that cleans up the platting of the area. The review timeline – the project went to DRC in August, then to the Board of Architects in October. The neighborhood meeting took place also in October and Planning and Zoning reviewed it in August and recommended approval. Letters to property owners were sent within the 1,000 feet and there were two times that we sent letters to properties, three times the property was posted for DRC, Board of Architects, and Planning and Zoning, four times that the property was posted on the website and one newspaper advertisement for Planning and Zoning. Staff recommends approval and I believe the applicant has a presentation.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Good morning Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, Mario Garcia-Serra, I'm here on behalf of the two co-applicants on the project, Baptist Health of South Florida, which is the property owner and Alta Developers LLC, which is the developer, represented today by Juan Carlos Frita, who is with us today on the virtual meeting, I'm also accompanied by our project architects Robert Behar and Eddy Vera of Behar Font, our traffic consultant Juan Espinosa, and my colleague from Gunster Law Lauren Connor. If we could please start up the applicant's presentation.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Behar you have been given the capability to share your screen. I'm not sure if you are going to be doing that.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you very much Billy. Ramon did an excellent job of providing you with background information on the site with the basics being that it is a 1.4-acre site consisting of the north half of Block 3 of the industrial section, and that it is located within the city's mixed-use district. Go to the next slide – that shows the property and where its positioned, just to the south is the Belmont Village project, which was approved back in May of this year, to the east the Collection Office Building and car dealership, and into the west several mixed-use projects which have been approved within the last 15-year timeframe, One Village Place, The Henry and Merrick Manor; and into the south is of course is Shops of Merrick Park. I want to talk a little bit more about the vision plan and existing context of this area, and if you can, go to the next slide please. The transformation of this area from the semi-industrial almost forgotten area, which it was previously, to the vibrant mixed-use area, which is developing today, is one of the city's great planning success stories. If you can please, the next slide. Well within the memory of all of us here in this meeting, this area of the city previously looked like this, characterized by the City's Public Works yard there on the southern part of this image, which is now the Village of Merrick Park and to the north it was a series of, sort of semi-industrial buildings some used for warehouses, really it

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was almost a forgotten corner of the city. Not one which was really reflective of what the City Beautiful is all about, must less was it one that was generating any sort of tax revenue or great benefit to other areas of the city. The development of the Shops of Merrick Park at the site that used to be the City's Public Works yard was the big first step and taking this area in a new direction and one that's more fitting with the rest of the city. An equally big step was the city's commitment starting in the late 1990's that the area around the Shops of Merrick Park was also to be transformed into a mixed-use village, with more people living, working, shopping and entertaining in this area of the city. Twenty years later, we now really see the results and benefits of that planning effort. Next slide please. Here we see Merrick Manor, The Henry and One Village Place, are all projects which were built pursuant to the mixed-use regulations. Belmont Village which was approved earlier this year and is starting the permitting process and the Collection Dealership Office Building are also shown in this image, as well as the proposed project, 250 Merrick, which as you can see fits in very well with the rest of the building in regard to scale, architectural look and use. It is indeed the one missing piece to complete the mixed-use sort of vision and plan for this area of the city is this one site that we are talking about on the north half of Block 3 of the industrial section. Merrick 250 would be a 12-story, 120 foot mixed-use building with 215 rental apartment units and 33,000 square feet of commercial and retail space, with much of that office space coming from the existing 250 Bird Road Office Building, located in the northwest corner of the site, which is going to be preserved and renovated and incorporated into the project and provide for a very significant office component, for the project, as well as significant office component for this part of the mixed-use district. This slide does a very good job of demonstrating how 250 Merrick will fit into the rest of the area. Its height and massing are essentially the same as the other buildings in the area. Next slide please. Another significant feature of this project and one that we touched upon previously when reviewing the Belmont Village project is that both projects are combining their cross block passages to create one unified open-air paseo, which at its narrowest will be almost 37 feet in width and at its widest will be almost 50 feet in width, and will both be open and covered portions so that on a good weather day you are walking through the open portion and on a bad weather day, you'll be walking through the arcade. This landscape almost parklike passageway will be truly unique for new developments in the city and I think an example for other projects to follow in the future. With that said, I'll hand over the presentation now to Robert Behar who will be presenting the architectural plans and renderings.

City Clerk Urquia: Good morning Mr. Behar, before you testify today please raise your right hand. We cannot see you, I need you to please stop sharing the screen for a second.

Mr. Behar: Can you see me now?

City Clerk Urquia: No sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: There. We can see you now.

City Clerk Urquia: Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you will offer today will be the truth and nothing but the truth.

Mr. Behar: I do.
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City Clerk Urquia: Thank you sir.

Mr. Behar: Good morning Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, good to see you in this way. Hope everybody is safe and looking forward for the new future to be able to present in person to you again. As Mario mentioned, this is truly a mixed-use project. This project consists of three major components, a residential component of approximately 215 residential units, retail component and the renovation of an existing building with approximately 30,000 square feet of office component. As you can see here, want to make sure that we took careful consideration in providing a pedestrian realm around the whole site that would be something unique and very useful. We have incorporated a habitat and residential uses on all four sides of the building. As you can see on Bird Road is 100 percent residential and office component use, so when you experience Bird Road, you see something very attractive on Bird. We put our service and loading area fronting on a road, fronting the Collection to minimize that service area, and we have internalized it to make sure that the whole exterior of the building is activated. As Mario mentioned, we have closely worked with the Belmont project to create a mid-block paseo to something that's going to be very unique. We are consisting of open to the sky in addition to a covered pedestrian pathway. I think this would be one of those really well-designed space that will become very useful. As already mentioned, all our services are internalized so its keeping away, and furthermore the existing building we have created an L-shaped paseo that wraps around the existing building to be able to visualize here, the paseo wraps around the whole entire building. I think that at the end, we are going to get a really nice pedestrian realm experience. Go to the next slide please. On the typical level of parking, we have lined Bird Road with residential units, liner units, so from Bird Road the whole façade will be, you will see that on the renderings will be habitable, that goes up level 2 through 4. On level 5 is where we start our residential floor and the units. And on this floor, you will see, as we've gone through the presentation, what we have done is, in order to relieve our impact on Bird Road, we have created a U-shape tower, building. Keep in mind that because we are fronting a residential zone to the north, we have a 100-foot setback requirement that, for this particular site is a little bit of a hardship unlike any other site to the south where you could go vertically up to 120. Here we have to maintain 100-foot setback from the residential zoning. In here also, go back a second please, on here one of the comments from the Planning and Zoning, we incorporate it. We put in a dog park, a little dog area on the deck for a resident to be able to utilize that. As I mentioned before, the building is designed in a U-shape to minimize the impact of that long façade on Bird Road. You will see that when I come to the rendering. This is a view of Bird Road looking west, this is the ground floor with the commercial space. Second and third floor is where we line up with residential unit, so the whole eyes on this street on Bird Road is really this here, and not a parking garage facing Bird Road. This is also the street that is on Aurora that is across from the Collection, you see the Collection Building on the left, so we tried to minimize the service impact area as much as possible. Next slide please. This is Bird Road, a view from Bird Road and on the left side is the residential building with commercial on the ground floor, on the right hand side is, believe it or not, is the transformation of the existing office building that was, when it was designed it was designed to be more enclosed to the inside, not to the outside. What we've done is, we are going to take out the existing screen of the building and the ground floor, which sadly enough, it was designed as a solid wall, we are going to open it up to be able to activate that street. As you can see there also, the paseo that is going to run through our building to create a very nice pedestrian

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space. This is that view looking east of the existing office building, and you can see the whole transformation of how that has come to play from an enclosed building to a very open building for office that's the ideal, and what we've done is we kept it to be compatible with the rest of the project. This is one of the views of the paseo that we are working, as I mentioned, with Belmont, where to the right of this image, you see is open to the sky and just to the left is the cover area paseo that we are providing. In addition to that, we are incorporating habitable spaces, such as our fitness area facing the paseo so that's always activated. Another view of the paseo. As you can see, we are working with them to incorporate the landscaping so it becomes a mid-block park, if you want to call it, but I think its looking really, really nice, and that whole landscape in that would be very pleasant. This is looking back from Aurora back, so all the streets are being lined with habitable commercial space. A bird's eye view of the paseo, and you can see, as Mario mentioned, like 37 feet across. This is a shot of the area and you can see, as Mario mentioned, and I think you can see here, by doing the U-shape tower building, we minimize the impact on Bird Road, so its not one solid piece, its broken out. You can see in the backdrop the other buildings and it demonstrates how compatible this building is with the rest of the area. Here is another shot demonstrating our buildings. And that's the end of our presentation. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Behar. Mr. City Manager? Ramon? – or Mario, you want to say something? Hello, somebody speak.

Mr. Behar: I think Mario is muted.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Okay. I'm now unmuted. Thank you very much Mr. Mayor. Thank you, Robert, for that presentation. Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, this project has been very well received by city staff, by the neighborhood, we've received nothing but positive feedback in general, one exception, there was one person who mailed in some objections to the Planning and Zoning Board meeting that we responded to those objections there. Other than that, DRC, Board of Architects, Planning and Zoning Board, everybody has had either positive recommendations of approval or comments, in all cases is unanimous. So, we would ask that you follow those recommendations and vote to approve these two items on First Reading so that we can then proceed to Second Reading and final approval. I'll reserve time for any potential objections that might be received, so we have an opportunity to rebut them, but other than that, I would hand the meeting back over to you Mr. Mayor and Commissioners.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you, Mario. Mr. City Manager, Ramon, any other comments or questions? – and if not, we'll pass comments or questions by City Commission.

City Manager Iglesias: No Mr. Mayor. Staff recommends approval for the project.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Mr. Fors, you have any comments?

Commissioner Fors: Not at this time.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Ms. Keon?

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Commissioner Keon: Yes. I wanted to know whether the sidewalk was along Bird Road.

Mr. Behar: On the new portion of the project, the new building, its 15 feet. On the existing building, I think currently it's a 5-foot sidewalk there. What we've done is, obviously, the building remains, but we've opened up the ground floor as much as possible, but on the new portion of the building, its 15 feet.

Commissioner Keon: But you only have five feet because of the existing building?

Mr. Behar: Correct.

Commissioner Keon: That's there.

Mr. Behar: Yes. Commissioner, the sidewalk is five feet, but our ground floor is set back an additional three feet, I believe. So technically, you have from the back of curve to where the building is, I think it's a minimum of 8 feet.

Commissioner Keon: For the front of the building?

Mr. Behar: Yes. Where the...is, we have a minimum of eight feet at that point.

Commissioner Keon: Okay. Alright. Its not a lot you can do when you have an existing building. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Behar: You're welcome.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Vice Mayor Lago.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Mayor. I just wanted to hear from Mario, he said there was one comment in reference to a resident that had a concern. Were those concerns addressed or is it similar to what was just mentioned right now, maybe the sidewalk and existing building, what was the exact issue that we were dealing with?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Mr. Vice Mayor, the objections that were raised by that one objector were very hard to address, let's say by any sort of site plan revision. What his objections were more than anything else was, Oh, I think the buildings in this area are too big, basically is what his objection was. And the way we responded to it is, pointing out that everything that we are proposing here is consistent with the mixed-use regulations. In other words, we are not asking for any more height, we are not asking for any more sort of FAR or anything like that. The FAR that we are requesting, there is a small increase in TDR's, but its minimal. And he was suggesting a maximum height in this area, three stories or 45 feet. Its just not something that's realistic with what exist today, nor is it part of what the city's plan has been for this area now over 20 years and we are just now being realized. Now its an area where the city can have within certain limits some height and some density, so to really have this sort of mixed-use the city always wanted in this area.

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Vice Mayor Lago: With your response, you answered my second question, which I wanted to make sure we memorialize the fact that this building is being proposed within the confines of the code, I think that's important to always mention. One of the things I also wanted to mention and give credit where credit is due, I think Robert, his team has done a great job, the design of the project is beautiful. I also really enjoy the fact that its set back significantly, obviously because of the existing building on Bird Road. Another thing I want to mention, like I always mention, I know you always hear this Mario is, really memorialize the fact, for example on page R1.3, you showed shade trees, some pretty nice significant shade trees that are up to the third floor, third story. I want to make sure that this is not just used on the design and shown to the Commission. I want to make sure that when its planted that it actually is something that's realized, and I think it's important, especially for this area as it continues to grow. You are going to have a lot of people moving into this area, which is great. You have Merrick Park, you have a lot of great amenities, but let's make sure that we include that on Salzedo and Aurora, by the way, those where you can really see it, the actual trees that I'm talking about. The other issue too, maybe I failed to notice, if it was included in your drawing was the issue of crosswalks and offering individuals the ability, especially the disabled community who end up living in this building or walking in this area. I want to make sure that the developer has always, Mario always does a great job in ensuring that the trees are first class and the crosswalks are provided, that we provide everything that we need as per the standards of the county and the City of Coral Gables to ensure that that gets taken care of. But besides that, and I think it's a great project. I think the design is exceptional and I think its going to go well for the area. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you Vice Mayor and I truly enjoy your emphasis on trees, green, that is very much a part of Coral Gables and I thank you for your concern in that area, because that is one of the very important things that makes us what we are. So, thank you very, very much. Commissioner Mena, you have comments?

Commissioner Mena: No. I think it's a great project. I just wanted to get a sense from either Mr. Garcia-Serra or Mr. Behar. As the building sort of, as it relates to the building that Baptist is doing to the south, I guess there, how does it sort of compare in terms of height and also the setbacks on Aurora and Salzedo? In other words, if somebody is walking down on either of those streets, is it sort of, I don't want to say matches, but are the setbacks sort of similar so that it's a uniform experience as one walks through that block.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Commissioner Mena on height they are very close. Robert will give us the exact numbers, but I believe there maybe a foot difference in height between the two. And then with regards to step backs, they are very similar also, as far as how they address.... and Salzedo, but Robert, go ahead if you like and provide some further detail, maybe we can put some of the plans back on the screen.

Commissioner Mena: And if you know, Mr. Behar, why there are also, I think you said the loading and unloading, I think you said was on Aurora for this building. Do you know if that's the same for that other building to the south? Because you have this unique situation with two buildings going up at the same time, sort of back-to-back, I just sort of want to understand how the interplay is between the two.

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Mr. Behar: Commissioner, the height of the building, as Mario mentioned, we are one-foot difference. Belmont is 119 and couple of inches, we are at 120, so the height is the same, the setbacks and the step-backs are the same. We have internalized our loading to minimize the impact on the street. Theirs is a little bit different. I don't have a drawing on third loading, but on Aurora fronting the Collection, which is I think a good thing, because then Salzedo becomes 100 percent pedestrian.

Commissioner Mena: Right.

Mr. Behar: But I know that their service, they try to do a good job to try to minimize the impact on the loading area. But they are both, all of them are on Aurora.

Commissioner Mena: And you are saying that the setbacks at the ground level which is really what I'm referring to on both Aurora and Salzedo are the same for both buildings?

Mr. Behar: Yes. I would say that they are almost identical.

Commissioner Mena: Okay. Great. I don't have anything further Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. Good comments. I have very brief comments. I like the project very much and I am glad that you presented a picture of what this area used to be in the 90's, all of the 90's, and then in mid-90's we started developing Merrick Park and I think I was one of the promoters of Merrick Park. I remember there was a lake in the middle of the equipment yard which had little ducks and the ducks glowed at night. It was so contaminated with so many God knows what, that the ducks glowed and if anybody had eaten one of those ducks, they would have become bionic. We had a referendum at that time about the redevelopment of this area and it was 70 percent, almost 70 percent favorable for the redevelopment, which gratified me to no end, and we redeveloped the area to what it is today, which is not only mechanics and whatever. Nothing wrong with mechanics, but we have ALF's, we have great buildings, we have the Collection, we have consulates, etc., and that is a wonderful development. And I congratulate the developers, Mr. Behar, Mario, you have wonderful clients, and congratulations everybody, because this is a great project. Now, I'd like to know if there are any members of the public on the Zoom platform that would like to comment on this project?

City Clerk Urquia: No one has requested to speak Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Are there any members of the public on the telephone that wish to speak on this?

City Clerk Urquia: No sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Have you received, Mr. City Clerk, any e-mail or message comments from members of the public on this item?

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City Clerk Urquia: I have not.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Then let's proceed. We need a motion on each item, E-1, Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Ramos: Sorry, I was muted. Yes, you do need two motions sir. E-1 and E-2, if you'd like to call on E-1.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, E-1.

Vice Mayor Lago: So moved.

Commissioner Keon: Second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll Mr. Urquia?

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes

Commissioner Mena: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And now E-2 please. I need a motion.

Vice Mayor Lago: So moved.

Commissioner Keon: Second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll Mr. Urquia?

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes

Commissioner Mena: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much everybody. I think this is going to be a great project for Coral Gables and that zone which was really an embarrassment for our city has now become a great, great, great development for our future. Thank you very, very much.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you Mr. Mayor and Commissioners. We'll be back on Second Reading. Thank you very much.

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Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.