

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items E-5, E-6, E-7, E-8, E-9 and E-10 are related
April 16, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
City Planner, Jennifer Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Javier Fernandez
Maria Cristina Longo
Ed Santamaria
Saralane Conde
Helen Montero
Jennifer Davis
Francis Fournier
Enrique Bernal
Ron Sheffield
David Fournier
Rosie Borroto
Karelia Carbonell
Maru Sosa
W. Allen Morris

City Commission Meeting
April 16, 2024

Agenda Items E-5, E-6, E-7, E-8, E-9 and E-10 are related - Ordinances of the City Commission amending the Future Land Use Map of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan, making district boundary changes, and approving the vacation of a public alleyway for a Mixed-Use project referred to as "Ponce Park Residences" on the property legally described as Lots 8 through 21, less the West ½ of Lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section, together with that portion of the 20-foot platted alley lying east of Lots 11 and 19 of Block 29.

Agenda Items E-5, E-6, E-7, E-8, E-9 and E-10 are related [Time Certain 6:00 p.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending the Future Land Use Map of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process,” Section 14-213, “Comprehensive Plan Text and Map Amendments,” and Small Scale amendment procedures (ss. 163.3187, Florida Statutes), from “Commercial Low-Rise Intensity” to “Commercial High-Rise Intensity” for Lots 8 through 21, less the West ½ of lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section, together with that portion of the 20-foot platted alley lying east of Lots 11 and 19, of said Block 29, (3000 Ponce de Leon Blvd, 216 & 224 Catalonia, 203 University Dr, and 225 Malaga), Coral Gables, Florida; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (LEGAL DESCRIPTION ON FILE) (LPA review) (12 13 2023 PZB recommended denial, Vote: 3-3)

Lobbyist: Javier Fernandez

An Ordinance of the City Commission making zoning district boundary changes pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process,” Section 14-212, “Zoning Code Text and Map Amendments,” for Lots 8 through 21, less the West ½ of lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section from Mixed-Use 1 (MX1) District to Mixed-Use 3 (MX3) District (3000 Ponce de Leon Blvd, 216 & 224 Catalonia, 203 University Dr, and 225 Malaga); providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (LEGAL DESCRIPTION ON FILE) (12 13 2013 PZB no recommendation, Vote: 3-3)

Lobbyist: Javier Fernandez

An Ordinance of the City Commission approving the vacation of a public alleyway pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process,” Section 14-211, “Abandonment and Vacations” and City Code Chapter 62, Article 8, “Vacation, Abandonment and Closure of Streets, Easements and Alleys by Private Owners and the City; Application Process,” providing for the vacation of the twenty (20) foot wide alley which is approximately one hundred and fifty-five (155) feet in length lying between Lots 12 thru 18 and Lots 11 and 19 in Block 29, Crafts Section (3000 Ponce de Leon Blvd, 216 & 224 Catalonia, 203 University Dr, and 225 Malaga), Coral Gables, Florida; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and

providing for an effective date. (LEGAL DESCRIPTION ON FILE) (12 13 2023 PZB recommended approval, Vote: 4-2)

Lobbyist: Javier Fernandez

A Resolution of the City Commission approving receipt of Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-204.6, "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 "Ponce Park Residences" on the property legally described as Lots 8 through 21, less the West ½ of lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section, together with that portion of the 20-foot platted alley lying east of Lots 11 and 19, of said Block 29; (3000 Ponce de Leon Blvd, 216 & 224 Catalonia, 203 University Dr, and 225 Malaga), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (LEGAL DESCRIPTION ON FILE) (12 13 2023 PZB recommended approval, Vote: 4-2)

(This Resolution is not for consideration at this time and will be included with the above related ordinances on Second Reading if approved on First Reading.)

Lobbyist: Javier Fernandez

A Resolution of the City Commission approving Mixed-Use Site Plan and Encroachment review pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process" Section 14-203, "Conditional Uses," for a proposed Mixed-Use project referred to as "Ponce Park Residences" on the property legally described as Lots 8 through 21, less the West ½ of lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section, together with that portion of the 20-foot platted alley lying east of Lots 11 and 19, of said Block 29; (3000 Ponce de Leon Blvd, 216 & 224 Catalonia, 203 University Dr, and 225 Malaga), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (LEGAL DESCRIPTION ON FILE) (12 13 2023 PZB recommended approval with conditions, Vote: 4-2)

(This Resolution is not for consideration at this time and will be included with the above related ordinances on Second Reading if approved on First Reading.)

Lobbyist: Javier Fernandez

A Resolution of the City Commission approving the Tentative Plat entitled “Ponce Park Residences” pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process,” Section 14-210, “Platting/Subdivision,” being a re-plat of 42,543 square feet (0.977 acres) into a single tract of land on the property legally described as Lots 8 through 21, less the West ½ of lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section, together with that portion of the 20-foot platted alley lying east of Lots 11 and 19, of said Block 29, together with a 1,318 square feet portion of University Drive that runs north of the Malaga Avenue right-of-way and west of the Ponce de Leon Boulevard right-of-way and dedication of 1,725 square feet; (3000 Ponce de Leon Blvd, 216 & 224 Catalonia, 203 University Dr, and 225 Malaga), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. (LEGAL DESCRIPTION ON FILE) (12 13 2023 PZB recommended approval, Vote: 4-2)

(This Resolution is not for consideration at this time and will be included with the above related ordinances on Second Reading if approved on First Reading.)

Lobbyist: Javier Fernandez

Mayor Lago: Thank you. And I apologize, we took a few extra minutes. As we move on to Item E-5, first off, I'd like to thank everyone for being here. It's great to see so many people engage in the process, and it's beautiful to see so many residents and so many business owners who have an interest in this project, whether it be on one side or the other. So, Mr. Clerk, we're going to be -- we're going to be starting off with item E-5. Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suárez: (INAUDIBLE) to you, if there's approval on first reading on those three ordinances, the resolutions will come back on second reading for your consideration at that time. I'll read them all into the record. The three ordinances, I'll read into the record. E-5 is an ordinance of the City Commission amending the future land use map of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process,” Section 14-213, “Comprehensive Plan Text and Map Amendments,” and Small-Scale Amendment Procedures from “Commercial Low-Rise Intensity” to “Commercial High-Rise Intensity” for Lots 8 through 21, less the West 1/2 of Lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section, together with that portion of the 20-foot platted alley lying east of Lots 11 and 19 of said Block 29, Coral Gables, Florida, providing for a repealer provisions, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. E-6 is an ordinance of the City Commission making zoning district boundary changes pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, “Process,” Section 14-212, “Zoning Code Text and Map Amendments,” for Lots 8 through 21,

less the West 1/2 of Lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section for Mixed-Use 1 District to Mixed-Use 3 District, providing for repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. E-7 is an ordinance of the City Commission approving the vacation of a public alleyway pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-211, "Abandonment and Vacations" and City Code Chapter 62, Article 8, "Vacation, Abandonment and Closure of Streets, Easements and Alleys by Private Owners and the City; Application Process," providing for the vacation of the 20-foot wide alley which is approximately 155 feet in length lying between Lots 12 through 18 and Lots 11 through 19 in Block 29, Crafts Section, Coral Gables, Florida; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. Mayor, anyone who's wishing to speak on these items should be sworn in by the City Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Those who will be appearing on this item today, please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

City Attorney Suárez: So the applicant.

Mayor Lago: Good evening, sir.

Javier Fernandez: Good evening, Mayor and Commissioners. For the record, Javier Fernandez with law offices at 121 -- sorry, excuse me, 201 Alhambra Circle, Suite 1205. Having the honor this evening of representing RC Acquisitions, KP Ponce LLC, and J&J Design before you, and presenting as well the re-envisioned Park Ponce Residences with a principal address of 3000 Ponce de Leon Boulevard. Briefly introduce our team, joined this evening by June and Allen Morris, Spencer Morris, Derek Cardenas, and Scott Flatley, the EMCO team, John Cunningham, our design architect, Andres Arcila of Naturalfiction Architecture, and my associate, Alex Cimo. And I know it's been a long day and you still have many things to do, so I will try to be as brief as I can. But I do have a number of people to thank before I begin my presentation. And with your permission, Mr. Mayor, I will do that. First, sir, thank you for you -- to you for allowing us this time certain at 6 p.m. There are a great number of people who wanted to have a chance to express their opinion for or against the project. And this was the most convenient time and we appreciate all of you accommodating that request and for making yourselves available to us over the last 21 months to help us recalibrate this project. I'd also like to thank the members of your staff and the administration for their time and cooperation in this process over the last 21 months. We appreciate your professionalism and your patience as we've gone on this journey. And lastly, and most importantly, I'd like to thank the many members of the public with whom we've engaged in conversations since we were last before you in July of 2022. And I'm most especially grateful to Maria Cristina Longo, Rosie Borroto and David Fournier, who are here this evening, for their

engagement and contributions. It's their help, their counsel, their ways to inform, to nudge, and more than a few occasions reprimand us for what we were failing to do that has allowed us to kind of get to this point today. And so we are grateful to them, whatever the outcome. If I could have the presentation, please. You all are very familiar with the site. It's located in, I would say, a gateway parcel at the intersection of University and Ponce. It is a parcel that the Morris family, their affiliates began assembling in 2011 and completed in 2018. One of the items before you is the closure of an alley that bisects the parcel north to south. It's 20 feet in width and about 1,318 square feet in total size. This is the context for the parcel. Again, on the north is Catalonia Avenue, on the south are Malaga and University, and to the east is Ponce. Let me actually back up, excuse me. In terms of buildings that are adjacent to the site, on our north is the Zubi building, which is approximately six stories. On the east is the Plaza, which in part exceeds over 200 feet in height. And to the west is 250 Catalonia, which is seven stories in height. This gives you kind of the full composite of where the site is situated and its surrounding context. This briefly provides a timeline of where we started and where we have ended up over the course of the last 21 months. The last time we were here before you, there was a lot of feedback, and I think we were in a markedly different place than we were then. And during those conversations, we heard from residents many things, and I'm going to highlight two people in particular. From Jennifer Davis, we heard the developer has ignored the residents' suggestions in regards to design, scale, density, and height. And from David Fournier, who hopefully you'll hear from today, he shared the following. We want something, we want something on this corner. Don't think we don't want anything. We want something beautiful, and we want something that is Coral Gables. From all of you, we heard without any dissension that the project in its prior form was not acceptable in terms of its height and intensity. From Vice Mayor Anderson, I'll quote, we don't want a reinterpretation or contemporary view of Mediterranean design. This is the same slippery slope that led us to the Zubi building. That's not what residents want. They want true Mediterranean. And we also heard from you that what we had to do was something that was compatible to the current context and the 149 feet at the time, with the possibility of 190 feet for any future project was simply unacceptable. Commissioner Menendez, you encouraged us, admonished us probably to go back and speak to residents and try to find a balance. And if the project that we brought forward today mirrored what we did the last time, we probably would find ourselves with having the same lack of success. And Mr. Mayor, in closing, you were very clear in your opposition to the prior scale of the project and advised us that in your conversations with residents, that there was some flexibility in terms of additional height, but we had to come back with something that provided a real public benefit, something of real value to the community, akin to what we've seen in some other projects in downtown Coral Gables. And Commissioner Castro and Fernandez, from our conversations, I know that you shared those same sentiments. The message has been clear, and hopefully we'll see in our presentation is a response that meets the mark that you set for all of us. So, following that hearing in July of 2022, my clients took a moment to assess what was said, what was shared, and hit the reset button, threw away the old design, and returned to a partner in John Cunningham with whom they'd had tremendous success. John is probably one of the best neoclassical architects of his time. And we had a successful collaboration with him before with the development of 121 Alhambra Tower, which your staff often references as one of the best examples of Med architecture

in the city. And we reset the process with direct community engagement. We stayed below the radar for nine months, a lot of quiet conversations, hand in hand with the community as was shared with us, redesigned the project. Their comments, their hand really guided John's pen throughout this engagement. And so we hope you'll see, and we think you'll see today, is something that just not represents our best aspirations for the site, but the community's aspirations as well. Through today, we've traveled on this journey. There is a timeline, very quickly. The next slide summarizes the results that we've achieved along the way. We do have a recommendation of denial of the comp plan amendment, a no recommendation on the rezoning, and the only other negative recommendation was with respect to the alley closure from the Historic Preservation Board. That is where we stand today and where we are in terms of the consideration of this project. In terms of comparing -- quickly comparing the old with the new, we started at 179 feet and 16 stories. The last version you all saw was 12 stories and 149 feet, 80 apartment condominium units in that case. The current proposal is nine stories at 115 feet, eight inches to the eve of the top of the residential story, 57 luxury condominium units with an average size in excess of 2,600 square feet. Before you are six requests, I have a seventh there. That's an error. It's really tied to the site plan. We are discussing items one, two, and five this evening. We hope to have the chance to discuss the balance with you at a future commission hearing. Very quickly, this is the current zoning pattern that we are operating from. We have a low rise intensity commercial and mixed use MX1 for the site today. We've been asking for high rise intensity and an MX3 designation, which would render us roughly consistent with everything in the immediate area. And I'd like to emphasize that we concur as I start the presentation with all the staff's recommendations and our only modification with respect to the site plan resolution is with respect to one condition regarding public realm improvements, where we want to go beyond what was suggested by staff. The site plan very quickly, again, is anchored with retail on the ground floor. One of the reasons we're able to -- we want to ask for the alley vacations because we have organized all the back of house internal to the building on the west side of the site, loading on the south, parking access on the north with the balance of the back of house adjacent to those two sections. Retail very prominently on the front of the street, both facing Ponce and on University. And at the center are the lobby cores that will provide pedestrian access to the upper floors of the building. This is a quick floor plan for the mezz level, which includes some amenities for the residents, additional retail, and additional back of house on the second level. This gives you a sense of the range and types of units. We've got units, principally two, three, and four bedroom units. As you get into the upper floors, the purple units are multi-story units that John very adeptly incorporated into the design of the building to help break up the monotony of the façade, which is one of the comments that we got in the prior iteration of the design. At the upper levels, we have a resident exclusive amenity set, which consists of four pools, two plunge pools, a kiddie pool, a resident pool, a covered bar area, and then an outdoor seating and barbecue area. This is not a space that will be activated commercially. It's strictly for the benefit of the 57 unit owners and their guests. So I know that on occasion, you get concerns about roof activations and noise because they're commercial operations. You will not have that issue with this project. This gives you a quick cross section of the building. And I incorporated it because I wanted to highlight that the atrium design of the building allows for light to penetrate from the roof to the ground, which is going to be something

that really sets our paseo apart from some of the paseos you were discussing earlier today during your Commission meeting. Here is the quick view of the articulation of the design of the paseo. This is not a dead space. We understand that one of the public benefits attendant to the alley was this pedestrian connectivity. It is the one aspect that we want to retain and replace, but we wanted to enhance it significantly. So the dimension of the alley -- not the alley, of the paseo is larger than the footprint of the alley and is a space that is animated by retail on both sides. The lobby -- the lobby areas on the east and west at the center of the alley, it has access points and points of interest and muses that will draw people's attention and keep you engaged. And as you'll see with the site plan, we're not just trying to engage your visual senses. There are -- there's an acoustic engagement through the use of water and other sensory engagements with the use of natural flora that is uniquely an opportunity for this site given that light is able to penetrate to the ground floor because of the building's design. A quick overview of the landscaping, you'll see that we are paying very, very close attention to our -- the public realm here. Vice Mayor Anderson, you mentioned in the last discussion that you want us to retain the slip lane, but one of the enhancements you thought would be appropriate was the removal of the on-street parking. We've accomplished that with this design, so we are keeping the vehicular functionality and connectivity and enhancing the public realm and pedestrian safety by elevating the grade of that slip lane so that it's at the same level of the sidewalk. Again, this is going to be a point of connection from the neighborhood to the Central Business District, and we wanted to create a very safe and accessible pedestrian environment, and we hope this design accomplishes that to your satisfaction. Quickly, I'll run you through the architecture of the building. These are some renderings. This is a southern perspective looking north. Again, it gives you a sense of the context relative to the other built environment. Same perspective at night. So you can see how the building, again, incorporates light but is not overbearing in terms of its impact on the surrounding area. Again, this is a context looking north to east, again, with a relationship between it and the plaza. You know, John did a fantastic job in creating movement of the façade and paying homage to the Biltmore Hotel by incorporating the tower feature at the top of the of the plaza. If you look at the building in its prior, you'll see that the center tower is really reflective of the center tower of the Biltmore Hotel. And so I think he's done the best to incorporate some of the traditional reference points that you see in architecture elsewhere, the best architecture in Coral Gables elsewhere. Here's a perspective to the south at the corner of the building, looking south and west, this is the corner that expresses itself most directly onto Ponce. And you'll see at the ground floor, there is a circular room. We hope that will be an interesting space for private seatings, for a restaurant that we hope will, you know, anchor that portion of the ground floor. And you see very -- there at the bottom, right-hand corner also, the porte-cochère, which is the subject of one of our requests for the site plan to allow that encroachment into the right-of-way so we can provide some covered protection for people arriving, the patrons of the businesses, even residents arriving using the valet off-street there with a covered overhang. Again, here is the northern elevation of the building looking south, gives you a good sense of the architecture of that street. I would note again, the porte-cochère at the center of the block. And if you look at the right hand of the screen, the access to the subterranean parking, which is another element of the building that we thought was very important to elevate the quality of the design, as well as the pedestrian experience in terms of the

architecture's relationship to the street. We've also taken great pains to design a back of house screening that is not only functional, but artistic. And John has done a magnificent job of blending that functionality and artistry. This is the -- right now an underdeveloped public space that was part of our initial public benefits suite. As part of our \$2 million in streetscape enhancements, it was our proposal to enhance that public space and maintain it in perpetuity. This is a space that will, like our street trees, will be anchored by mature, Kapok, Banyan, and other trees, oak trees, and we think this is -- will help be the first pocket park that connects to a broader series of parks that you all have worked very hard to develop in the CBD, including hopefully a revitalized Ponce Circle Park. This gives you a sense of what we're hoping to achieve in terms of the architecture of the paseo. You'll see again at the center of that illustration, a glass covering that provides for natural light penetration and the ability to grow flora in that space. Again, something that you see in many paseos in Europe, but too few of them here in the United States. And this gives you a good perspective on how we hope to activate that area at the entrance of the paseo, where the retail to your right would basically be a full service sit-down restaurant, and the areas to your left would likely be a bakery and/or café that would be an amenity both to the building, but also to the neighborhood. Again, here's a perspective of the same space in the evening. Now again, our first public benefit was to improve the space. This basically summarizes the substance of that contribution. It's about 22,700 square feet, so just under a half-acre, but a \$2 million total investment. And again, a contribution to maintain that space in perpetuity. The right-of-way encroachment I discussed for the porte-cochère, I just wanted to kind of give you a sense of that illustration and its effect and the kind of materials and the commitment to, you know, materiality. Natural stones at the base and podium of the building, European plaster finishes on the upper portions. Again, we are hoping to raise the material quality and design quality of buildings across Coral Gables through the execution of this project. Lastly, we had also heard quite a bit of concern about what happens if you don't move forward, if your project somehow fails, right? That was a point we heard over and over again from residents and a concern that was expressed by members of the status. So we've proffered our two restrictive covenants, one that will accompany the future land use amendment and the zoning. Future land use amendment, in addition to limiting the height of the building at 115.8, also will require a forfeits vote to modify it. Again, so a super majority to make any future changes, and that would require also the applicant to go through the typical public hearing process. Now, again, all of this that we've discussed so far was in part with the exception of the proffered covenant, part of the package is sort of public benefits. But we were cognizant of the challenge that all of you laid before us, in particular, Commissioner Lago, your comments -- Mayor Lago, excuse me, your comments about doing something extraordinary in exchange for the benefit of height that we were going to get when you gave us direction in 2022. And so what we endeavored to do was try to see what can we do to enhance the community in the most impactful way possible. And there's been quite some discussion for a long time about Ponce Circle Park and executing improvements to that park. And we became aware of the fact that there was a substantial funding gap between what the City had estimated the cost to be, which were about \$8.9 million, and what they had budget -- we have budgeted currently. And we're also aware that you have many other pressing needs in terms of for funding to advance other park improvements across the city. So we thought the most appropriate and meaningful public benefit

we could offer was to take on the responsibility of executing the improvements to the space and committing to either fund or raise the balance of the funding necessary to meet the budgeted target. And beyond that, and executing the improvements, also take on the risk of any cost overruns. And so what you have in front of you beyond the restrictive covenant, which I gave you an example of, is language that would modify the public realm condition that's part of the site plan resolution that would memorialize that obligation and set the conditions. It would require a number of other agreements, which we're happy to work on with your staff to make it a binding contract, but certainly as part of the development order, those conditions would be incorporated and our commitment would be memorialized in writing.

Mayor Lago: So if I may, Mr. Fernandez, I'd like to talk a little bit about that.

Mr. Fernandez: Please.

Mayor Lago: So, very briefly, since the inception of this project, I've been a no vote on multiple occasions. I want to commend you and I want to commend Allen and his lovely wife for -- and his son who's here, I just can't see him, for really stepping up in regards to this project. Today we're talking about development. Yesterday we were talking about a donation to the museum. It's one thing or another, the Morris family's involved in this city on multiple different fronts. And a month ago we were talk -- we were at their lovely home raising money for the Coral Gables Senior High School. So it's not just about development. It's about a shared vision for the City. I want to also thank you for going above and beyond. I think you're an exceptional attorney. I think your demeanor has really made this project take a really good turn. And I also want to commend the residents for willing to listen and willing to come to the table. I was a no vote until we had discussions on the issue of Ponce Circle Park. To me, I think public spaces are the key and the future to our city, as you can see by the ones that we've delivered recently to the downtown. Two months ago was Publix, before that was adjacent to Merrick Park, before that was Armando Codina's site. So we're talking about multiple different sites that in the downtown that are going to be transformational. So I had a conversation with the attorney, Javi and Mr. Morris, and we discussed about the possibilities of engaging and finding a solution for Ponce Circle Park. This is a major step forward and I want to commend you and I want to commend Mr. Morris and his son and his wife for stepping forward and really taking the baton. Let me tell you why this is a big deal, not only because financially it's a big step forward in regards to public space donation. It's a big step forward because it takes the liability away from the City. I'm in the business of construction, cost overruns and government significantly higher when we're building versus when you build. So I think the cost, the dollar will stretch even further. Ponce Circle Park has been a dream of this commission and prior commissions for a long time, but for one reason or another, we were always stalled. So I want to say thank you for listening to my request, to the Commission's request on this front and delivering. This is the reason why I'm going to vote in favor of this project.

Mr. Fernandez: We thank you for that vote of confidence. And again, I was going to close with just this thought. I know that there's been a lot of consternation for a very long time about this project. I know that often you'll be accused of with a yes vote of voting in favor of a developer. I would tell you that in this particular case, I think the vote represents a lot more than that. And I think because of the engagement, because of the dialogue, what you're going to hear, I hope, from the folks here, is that a vote, yes, is not just a vote for us, my client, but it's a vote for what the residents want. And so with that, Mayor, Commissioners, if I just ask respectfully to reserve some time for rebuttal. If you have any questions, I'm happy to take them now, or after staff's presentation and public comment.

Mayor Lago: What I'd like to see as a request by the City Attorney is to have staff and that we can hear. I just wanted to make sure, since you brought that slide up there, I think it was important, I think many people were caught off guard in regards to that additional scope.

Commissioner Menendez: I just had a quick question because a resident asked, and I want to confirm on the record, the slip lane from Ponce University, it remains?

Mr. Fernandez: It's going nowhere. It's going nowhere, we're going to improve it. The only thing, as I mentioned, was we are in the design, will not retain the parking, which, you know, it's diagonal parking, a little bit treacherous in some ways.

Commissioner Menendez: Which actually draws people to drive the wrong way into the slip lane.

Mr. Fernandez: Correct, so that is the one modification. The slip lane, its functionality will remain. Yes, sir.

Commissioner Menendez: Perfect, thank you.

Commissioner Castro: I do have one ask. I do have one ask, and it's for the alley. The Historic Preservation has been very vocal about it, but I think -- I think -- I personally think there'll be a compromise if there was an easement for pedestrian walking. It's never gated. It's always open access to the public. And that's it. I don't know if that's possible.

Mr. Fernandez: I will -- my client has affirmed that they're willing to work on an easement condition for that space as well. Certainly providing pedestrian connectivity and access for that connection is something that was our intention from the start. And by design, the only gated sections of the paseo are gated sections that provide access to private spaces. So the paseo is intended to remain open 24 hours a day.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, and I never saw an indication that it was going to be gated. I think what's happened over time here is that the usefulness of alleys has been converted into the, you know, back of house of the building. And instead of having dumpsters that people see out there,

you now have it enclosed, you have it refrigerated, you removed an eyesore basically from the City. And other than the fact that this was always a parking lot to begin with and never even looked like an alley. But I have to commend you and Allen and the team for doing a job of the quality that is mirrors essentially the draft of the Med Design Ordinance that's going to come before the Planning and Zoning Board I think hopefully in the next meeting and eventually get here. Those revisions were to achieve the quality that you see here today. Some architects need the guidance, this architect didn't, and I applaud that, the effort, the hours, the time that you've spent in the past 21 months, meeting with these residents, listening to the residents, that's the most important piece here. As I always told you, Allen, listen to the residents, and then you'll get a product that they're willing to support, and it really embraces the City on a very key piece of property that is like an entrance gate for Ponce Circle Park and the whole area. And to have that park functional and to have that park safe is critical. And I know you're committed to it. And I know you're going to make it a very beautiful project. One last thing about the slip lane is it does change level and I think that does help slow down the traffic. And I know that pedestrian safety is top of mind for everyone here in this room.

Commissioner Castro: The Ponce Park for us is going to be like our Central Park, right? So, maybe as a special request, I know that they were considering the landscape architect to be Raymond.

Mr. Fernandez: So based on your direction, we'll go in whatever direction you want. I mean, the City did spend resources developing a conceptual plan. To the extent you would like us to revisit that, we're happy to do that, if that is your preference. If not, we can work, you know, based off that conceptual plan and move to schematic design and construction documents and advance the improvements. We do understand that the roadway improvements surrounding the park are already permitted. So that's something that, you know, hopefully we can get started on sooner. But our intention is to work with all of you and work with the community on coming up with whatever final design ideas you would like for the park and then execute those.

Commissioner Castro: In my opinion, there's too much concrete, there's too much variety of trees, there's not uniformity in that plan. We need consistency in trees that flows the elegance to that park. And I think with this landscape architect, we will be able to accomplish that.

Mr. Fernandez: Commissioner Castro, if that's the direction, you know, it's certainly, it's been our ambition. We thought we got one of the best with John and Andres, and we can work with Andres on the plan as well, or, you know, seek proposals from other, you know, acclaimed landscape architects to really do something spectacular at Ponce Circle Park.

Commissioner Castro: And would this be contingent to the CO?

Mr. Fernandez: So we have proffered a condition and there's a number of thresholds. Certainly what we have put in writing is that there is some risk for us in that this is a public process. It's not

just us executing our personal vision. And so we want to make sure that we are -- our development schedule is not driving necessarily the public schedule so that we can get to some consensus around what we should do. So what we have there is if we want to proceed with our building permit or getting a CO, we would provide a building permit, a minimum deposit of \$2 million as a cash bond with the City. So that you know you've got the resources, at least part of the resources to execute that vision if we went belly up or walked away from the project. Or if we are about to procure a CO with the language that we've proffered and are working on with your staff would basically require us to provide a corporate completion guarantee and deliver the improvements within a certain number of months following your approval of the design. So that's how we've structured it. Again, we're open to comments. We're trying to build in safeguards. We understand that you need guarantees and certainties and between now and hopefully the next hearing, we can work with your staff to get the language to place where you're comfortable.

Commissioner Castro: Now we've already waited long enough with the funds that we had from Agave and it still hasn't gotten accomplished. So I would see the concerns that most residents would have, oh, well, this park's not going to get done anymore. So I think we need to be careful with the language that is implemented into that contract.

Mr. Fernandez: Yeah.

Commissioner Castro: And make sure that...

Mr. Fernandez: We see -- I speak for my client when I say that they think that the execution of that project inures to all of our collective benefit. In fact, we think it'd be a significant benefit to us to be advancing that work so we can -- as we're going to be selling condos probably to the highest price points in Coral Gables, having that amenity and being able to sell and share that vision with prospective buyers would be particularly valuable to us as well.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to dovetail what you're saying. As far as the design of the park, there's been a number of comments that have been shared by residents about some of the contents, the spacing, vendor space, a band shell. So I would urge that you go back through the same process that you did for the building and listen to the community at large because that is going to be one of the stellar -- you know, most important, stellar parks of our city. So rather than rush to get it done, and we're going to get it done, I'd rather make sure that we do it right.

Mr. Fernandez: And I think that's the lesson I certainly learned from this process. You know, we didn't come up for air publicly for about nine months, and we, you know, counseled my client, let's take our time, because we appreciate the fact that this is probably going to be our last opportunity to earn your support. And so we want to make sure with this park, we, I think, take the same approach, which is let's get to consensus. If you all have individuals you want to appoint an advisory committee of some sort that we can work with formally, we are happy to do that. But

it is our intent to work in a, you know, in a consultative and collaborative process with neighbors. Yes, sir.

Commissioner Menendez: With regards to Ponce Circle Park, the only conversation I had with the administration, which was a concern, but I think now we're going to revisit it in a good way, was the latest design made it very -- almost impossible to have a moon over Coral Gables, that type of event to get something onto the park and back out. So I want to make sure we can continue to activate it with community events, beautiful community events that bring everybody together. So I just want to make sure we keep that in mind. If it's going to be our Central Park, we should have it activated so that everybody can enjoy it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Fernandez: With that, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fernandez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Great work. Jennifer, how are you? Thank you for being here. I know it's a late night.

City Planner Garcia: Good evening, Jennifer Garcia, Planning Official. Can I have the PowerPoint, please? So I'll be talking about the six requests, even though today you're only going to vote for the first three, once I have that PowerPoint up. Thank you. So the six requests are the comp plan change to the map, zoning code map change, vacation of the alley, and then TDRs, mixed-use site plan, and tentative plat. So location we're very familiar with, it's on University and Ponce de Leon. It's that half of that block right there. And this is a view of looking northwest. You can see the two parcels separated there by the 3,000-square-foot public alley. You can see the building that's abutting them, which is a legal nonconforming at 91 feet, and the Zubi building, the office building to the north. And the plaza in this aerial or this photograph is not yet developed yet. So again, six requests, you'll just be taking a vote on the first three, but I'll go through all of these requests. So the first request is a change of land use from low-rise to high-rise. This is not increasing the amount of square footage or FAR, the FAR will remain the same. They're not increasing the amount of density, the density also remains the same, it's only increasing the amount of height that they could build. And the zoning code map change to MX1 to MX3, same thing. It's not changing the density. It's not changing the FAR. It's only changing the height. And the third request is the vacation of the alley, which is about a little over 3,000 square feet. And the receipt of TDRs, they'll be purchasing -- sorry, they have special super TDRs and they'll be requesting to receive about 23,000 square feet. And then the mixed-use site plan, this is a site plan showing the slip lane is drawn there. There's a paseo that's running more or less where the current public alley is. There's a loggia on the front, mostly retail on the ground floor, fronting all three

streets. And then the vehicular exit and entrance is on the Catalonia on the northwest end and the loading is off of University. So it's a very well-wrapped project. And so the site plan, right now the existing lot area private property is 39,000, but with the vacation the total square foot should be 42,000 roughly for their building site. They're receiving TDRs. Project request is 23,455 TDRs. The total FAR would be 4.05, so not even the maximum they could have with TDRs. The building height would be 115 and 8 inches, and then a 20-foot pool cabana. And then they're requesting 57 residential units, so it's a very low-density building. Ground floor commercial, about 20,000 square feet. Total parking is 204 spaces. And open area, they're providing 14 percent, or about 5,000 on-site, plus the immediate right-of-way and park improvements. And obviously, not counting the Ponce Circle Park. And the last request is the tentative plat. So this is basically incorporating that vacated alley into the property, as well as changing the curve of the property. So the curve is getting a little fatter and shorter. The image on the left is showing the current plotting and proposed is on the right. So the darker green is what they are dedicating to the City, and then the bluish color on the south side is what they're vacating. So they've had an extensive review timeline. So they've been meeting with the community fall of last -- sorry, fall of 2022, spring of last year. They went to DRC in June of last year, Board of Architects in August and September, neighborhood meeting if it's required of them in October, the Planning and Zoning Board in December, and Historic Preservation Board in January and February of this year. And here we are for first reading. So the letters were sent to property owners and properties within 1,500 feet as required by the Zoning Code. And that was sent four times, the neighborhood meeting, PZB, as well as Historic Preservation Board, which is not accounted for in this graphic right now. And as well as the last Commission meeting and this Commission meeting. And the property is posted three times. The website was posted five times and once for newspaper advertisement. So staff determined that the application is consistent with the comp plan as it relates to mixed use buildings and the redevelopment of our downtown area. Staff recommends approval with conditions. Those conditions are outlined in your exhibit -- sorry, the mixed use resolution. But in summary, they would construct and complete the Ponce Circle Park. That's not in the draft resolution you have right now. This was brought to us last Thursday. So this is an update for just that. They have to revise the slip lane area to make it so that the County would approve it. Right now, the way it's designed with the curbless design, I understand the County would not approve that. So they have to revise that accordingly, revise the public plaza accordingly as it relates to the slip lane and then maintain access -- pedestrian access, circulation during construction on Ponce de Leon and then maintain and do any improvements, they have to maintain it on that public plaza that's abutting their property. That's all I have, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker this evening, Mr. Mayor, is Maria Cristina Longo.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Maria Cristina Longo: Good evening. I'm Maria Cristina Longo and I own a property at 240 San Sebastian, just a few blocks south of the Ponce Residences. First, let me start by saying that I have only spoken in favor of development projects two times since I moved to the City of Coral Gables more than 30 years ago. On the other hand, I have fought and taken a strong stand against many bad and poorly planned projects over the years in order to protect my quality of life, including this project, the Ponce Residences. The first project that I've ever spoken in favor for was the Village of Coral Gables by AMG Developer and designed by De La Guardia Victoria Architects. And the second one is today, I'm here to speak in favor of the new design for the Ponce Residences by architect John Cunningham from Zyscovich, who is a renowned traditional designer and who is the same architect who designed the Alhambra Towers. What is extraordinary for me today is that I'm speaking in favor of a project for which I was one of the leading opponents. I fought the original design of the Ponce Residences initial modern design wholeheartedly and with great passion because the original design style, concept, scale, height, density proposed were not appropriate for this iconic site and for the City. The residents won when the modern taller project was rejected by the Board of Architects. And as a result of us winning, the developer hired a traditionalist, a great traditionalist architect. And he also worked closely with the community, listening to our valuable insight to ultimately design a great and elegant building, a project which will elevate the Ponce corridor to a new level of quality never seen on Ponce before. It's a project of the similar caliber as the ones we find on New York's more prestigious streets. The new building by Allen Morris offers timeless and classical architecture. It offers a paseo open to the public, which is double the size of this existing bare alley. It will enhance the existing University Drive right away into a public park of about 21,590 square feet. And it will enhance the existing Ponce Circle with gardens designed by a world-class landscape architect because that's what I was promised. Okay, so the site for this project is extraordinary and iconic because it's a gateway from the residential single family to the city center. The South Ponce Corridor is our Fifth Avenue. We will never have another opportunity like this one presented here today. To this date -- one more minute, less than one more minute. To this day, our Ponce Corridor does not have one classic, timeless, and beautiful residential condominium building of the quality of the Ponce Residences. We don't have one. Coconut Grove has I don't know how many. Brickell has I don't know how many. We do not have a beautiful, timeless, luxurious condominium in the city center. This will be our first, and it's about time that we do. We all know, unfortunately, that the quality of design in the North Ponce, which is where I live, for the -- it has been -- the value of the land has been diluted there because the quality of the design is poor. Most important of all, what I want to share with you, which is a first one for me, is that the Ponce Residences will benefit the City by establishing a precedent for other developers to follow, both in quality of design and also in the way this developer and his team has actively engaged the community members. Allen Morris team has redefined the role of the community in Coral Gables, which has led to a more successful and impactful project. However, in order for this project to happen, in order for this project to

benefit the City in these grand ways, we need your approval today. And this will be all of our legacy. Theirs, the community, and yours. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Ed Santamaria.

Mayor Lago: Good evening, sir.

Ed Santamaria: Good evening. Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. Manager, Ed Santamaria, 47 San Sebastian Avenue. I'm here to speak in support of the Ponce Park Residences project. I first learned of this project in 2019, approximately five years ago. Yes, five years, while I was working at the Office of the City Manager. Since then, the project has seen a number of iterations, which up until now, have always faced strong neighborhood opposition, due mostly to the height and density, as well as the abandonment and vacation of public right of way. I commend the Allen Morris Company for listening to residents and conceptualizing a project that today enjoys strong support throughout the neighborhood of a community of which I'm a member. This is how the entitlement process is supposed to work. A failure to approve would run contrary to this intent. Thanks to the hard work of (INAUDIBLE) in collaboration with neighbors, you will be voting on a project that features all of these considerations. Widespread support of area residents, a high-quality building which is compatible with the area, two million dollars towards much-needed public realm improvements on University Drive, three million dollars towards Ponce Circle Park at a time when funding is needed to fully realize the improvements to this park. Also, a pledge to take on the completion of design and development for this unique public city park asset. And more importantly, a guarantee to cover all costs overruns encountered during the course of constructing the Ponce Circle Park improvements. In closing, there is no reason to not vote in favor. Why? A no vote is contrary to the intent of the entitlement process, which values residential input. The residents that should have the most say, the neighbors are in support. The Allen Morris Company is providing pledges and guarantees of at least \$5 million in total public realm improvements. These public realm improvements will enhance University Drive and complete Ponce Circle Park. This is an extremely important vote for the future of Ponce Circle Park, the area around it and the City in general. Should you deny, my neighbors and I will see the possibility of a lesser quality, less compatible project with greater density. Additionally, residents will be deprived of at least \$5 million in guaranteed public realm improvements. I ask you to recognize the voices of residents that have helped manifest what has unfolded as an exemplary entitlement process. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Saralane Conde.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Conde, good evening.

City Commission Meeting

April 16, 2024

Agenda Items E-5, E-6, E-7, E-8, E-9 and E-10 are related - Ordinances of the City Commission amending the Future Land Use Map of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan, making district boundary changes, and approving the vacation of a public alleyway for a Mixed-Use project referred to as "Ponce Park Residences" on the property legally described as Lots 8 through 21, less the West ½ of Lot 8, Block 29, Crafts Section, together with that portion of the 20-foot platted alley lying east of Lots 11 and 19 of Block 29.

Saralane Conde: Hi, I'm Sarah Conde. I'm from 228 Alesio. And I'd like to thank the Mayor and I'd like to thank the Commissioners for asking the developer to work with the neighbors. And I'd really like to thank the developer for coming up with such a gorgeous project that's really going to be an asset to our community. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Have a good evening.

City Clerk Urquia: Helen Montero.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Helen Montero: Good evening. I live at 220 Sarto Avenue. I just want to say keep it simple. I approve.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Jennifer Davis.

Unidentified Speaker: I approve. Helen Montero.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Jennifer Davis: Hi. Good evening. My name is Jennifer Davis. I'm from 133 San Sebastian Avenue. Just asking for your support of Ponce Park Residences and to vote yes on Items E-5 and E-6. I live within 500 feet of the proposed building and initially was against this project, but as a community we've spent four years working together and meeting with the developer. It's been a long road, but well worth it. The transformation of the building is really dramatic. It's simply beautiful and really would complement the neighborhood well. Really, the development should stand as a gold standard for future residential projects and is an example of how the developer worked in conjunction with the community to produce a better project. My initial objections were the height, density, and design. They've addressed all of that. In addition, we were happy that we will be keeping the slip lane that will assist with the traffic that's heading westbound to University. Also, the alleyway has been transformed into a pedestrian -- a pedestrian paseo. This is a usable commercial space that the community can enjoy. Also, we love the design. The Mediterranean style is extremely elegant. Also, it's reduced the density with larger units. Not to mention the team's commitment to Ponce Circle Park is really, really wonderful. The park in its current condition just doesn't really match the surrounding area and it's really in desperate need of refurbishment. So we'd agree on that. So for all these reasons, we just urge the City Commission to approve Ponce Park Residences and thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Francis Fournier.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Francis Fournier: Good evening, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners, and City Manager. My name is Francis Fournier and I live at 128 San Sebastian Avenue. And I come here to please ask you for the support for the Ponce Park Residences. As concerned residents that have gone through a transition from a very quiet to a very busy neighborhood, we did not support the first rendering of this project because of the density, the number of units and the height. Over the past few years, we provided feedback to the developer hoping to be heard and as this would dramatically impact our livelihood. They listened to our -- they listened to and addressed our concerns and not only redesigned the project, but converted it into a high-quality residential project, bringing down the height, putting the parking underground, and very important, contributing towards the budget to warrant the completion of a newly refurbished Ponce Circle Park, which we desperately need. This is the gateway to our business district, and it is extremely important to have an iconic architectural piece to frame this entrance that welcomes and engages our residential and business community. The pedestrian paseo further adds to the walkability of the city and provides outdoor patio space. The professional landscaping with nature trees will add to the outdoor usable space to make Coral Gables a more desirable and pedestrian-friendly city, attractive, again, to the residential and business community. For all those reasons, we ask the Commission to please approve the Ponce Park Residences and thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much for being here.

City Clerk Urquia: Teresita Carmona.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Teresita Carmona: Good evening. My name is Teresita Carmona. I live in 117 San Sebastian Avenue. I'm here to tell you about I approve this project. I think it's going to be very elegant and will be an asset to our neighborhood. And I would like to thank the developer and his team for listening to the neighbors and working with us. And he came back with a beautiful project. We're very happy. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Enrique Bernal.

Mayor Lago: Dr. Bernal, good evening. It's nice to have you.

Enrique Bernal: Good evening. Enrique Bernal, 718 Valencia Avenue. I'm here to support this project and really to celebrate what I consider to be the most, the best example of a community and a developer coming together to make our city more beautiful. And I hope that this will be a model for all of us. So again, congratulations to Mr. Morris. I was one of the ones that opposed this original proposal and worked with the neighbors, but it's a pleasure to see them step up and give us another building like the one at Alhambra. So please support it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Ryan Holtzman.

Mayor Lago: Good evening, sir.

Ryan Holtzman: Mayor, good evening. Commissioner, good evening. First and foremost, I'm a resident of Coral Gables, 444 Bargoello Avenue, born and raised, raising three kids in Coral Gables. And I just want to commend the Morris family and their team for creating such a beautiful project. And the park space is something that's tremendous. I mean, during COVID, we biked around all of Coral Gables. And post-COVID, we probably visited 80 percent of the parks. I believe there's 60 within the city. And transforming this area of Coral Gables into the vision that I see on the screen is incredible. And secondly, I represent owners of office buildings across the City of Miami and Coral Gables. In Miami, there's been over 1.5 million square feet of (INAUDIBLE) market tenants to Miami and 575,000 square feet of (INAUDIBLE) market tenants to Coral Gables. I believe that housing is a major issue right now. We're tip of the spear when it comes to, you know, questions of these tenants that come into the City. And this is a project that is exactly what our residents are looking for, and especially the (INAUDIBLE) market tenants that are coming here, bringing their businesses here, raising their families here. And so I just commend you guys and I hope you approve this project. It's fantastic, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Ron Sheffield.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you, Ron.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Sheffield, it's great to have you.

Ron Sheffield: Mayor, Commissioners, thank you. You know, as I'm sitting here tonight, I've sat through probably 40 years of these types of meetings in this very chamber. And it's exciting, and I want to commend you. It's exciting to see what's been done from the time I moved here in 1975. You know, when you think about the fact that where Neiman Marcus, you know, is open today, we had an equipment yard there with junk cars and, you know, repair shops. And then you get to the north end of Ponce, and it was pretty much barren land. And you see, you know, in those days,

you couldn't even have a restaurant table on the sidewalk. And, you know, these types of meetings have produced, you know, what we are enjoying today. And I thank you for that because I know it's not easy, and you guys have put through -- you know, put in a lot of work. And it's fun to see the neighbors all here, you know, putting their input into what's going on tonight. And, of course, I've known Allen and his family for, you know, 40 plus years and, you know, I know the quality of what they've done in other places. So, you know, we've all talked tonight about, you know, what a wonderful building this is going to be. Yeah, I do think this is a night that George Merrick would be really proud to be here because this is a dream that he had. And this building, as I'm sitting here looking at these renderings, you know, realizing that as you're driving north on Ponce in that area, this will be the entrance to the urban core of Coral Gables. And the quality of these units will bring more quality people to our community. I mean, we have so many quality people in this community, but you know, it hasn't been very many years that they've been able to live downtown. And I know in my business, people today, their common refrain is that they want to get closer to where they need to be. You know, they want to be able to walk to things. And of course, you've created that. You've created the trolley system. You can get to the Metrorail without using your car, living in Coral Gables. And I don't think a lot of people even still today realize that. So, again, I not only commend Allen and your family and what you all have done, the neighbors and the time that you've put in, because I know the time that that takes, but the people who will really be the real beneficiaries of this will be the people who will live in this building, because they're going to be the ones that enjoy it for a long time, and their families will continue to live there for many, many years. So thank you again. Obviously, I'm fully supportive of what's going on here tonight. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: David Fournier.

Mayor Lago: Good evening, sir.

David Fournier: Good evening, Mayor Lago, Commissioners, and Melissa. I think you know me. This is exactly what happened when a developer meet the resident. Wonderful product, wonderful building. Sorry, lost my point. The reason why we're here is to approve something that is beautiful and is something that also will revolutionize the landscape of Coral Gables. I think now we ask to set up the very high ceiling, and I think this is what was done. And there's three things. The height, so the height we went low to 115. The density, the density went to only 57, only 57 apartments and also safety, the fact that what they are doing with the slip lane will reduce the speed on the University and also it will help for us residents nearby to walk in safety because, you know, as of today, you cannot walk on the left side, you have to walk on the right side. So, I would like to have you to vote yes and thank you very much for your time. Have a good evening.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Carlos and Lisette Nunez. Rosie Borroto.

Mayor Lago: Good evening.

Rosie Borroto: Hi, Rosie Borroto, 110 San Sebastian. I was one of your biggest opponent. I think four years we've been fighting for this. I don't think I have missed any meetings, even when on vacation on Zoom. It was a nightmare that has become like a dream. I'm ecstatic with the end result. It's a beautiful building, very fitting of that corner. I couldn't imagine that it will be as beautiful as it is. I congratulate the Allen Morris team and thank you for listening to us. And today is up to you, our Commission, our Mayor, to leave us with a beautiful legacy. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Now, Mr. Mayor, we're going to Zoom next.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: We have one speaker on Zoom and it's Ms. Karelia Carbonell.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Carbonell, good evening.

City Attorney Suárez: Mr. Clerk, if she's going to be sworn in, she'll need to turn her video on.

City Clerk Urquia: She will not be sworn in, she's on the phone.

City Attorney Suárez: Okay, so then it won't be -- she can speak, but it won't be considered competent and substantial evidence.

Karelia Carbonell: Hi. Hello. Can you all hear me?

Mayor Lago: Hi, how are you?

Ms. Carbonell: Hello, this is Karelia. I am going to speak on behalf of the Historic Preservation Association. I've heard all the wonderful comments from the neighbors, and but I would be remiss to not defend our historic public assets. And so, our letter has been submitted, so I know that it's part of the official legislative file, but I will read it. It's not a long letter. But I do want to be able to express and defend the position of the historic preservation community. On behalf of the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables, please accept this statement in opposition to Case File 23-6704 or 67010, requesting the vacating of a public alley. As per the Coral Gables Historic City Plan, alleys are one of several protected historic resources. While the item is coming

to the City Commission from the Planning and Zoning Board, the staff report does state that the Historic Preservation Board denied the vacation of the alley, not one, but each time it has been presented. In October 2021 and again in January 2024, the Historic Preservation Board upheld the historical significance of the City Plan and rejected the project's request to vacate the alley. Presently, the Zoning Code allows four stories. The proposed project is asking to double the height and this can only happen if the alley is vacated. This request will encroach on the historic City Plan unanimously passed by the City Commission in 2018, which protects, quote, "rights of way, parkways, roadways, alleys, open space, parks, swales, reservations, sidewalks, waterways." This is all on page two of the City Plan report. And it will adversely affect the historical, architectural, and aesthetic character of the historic area as per the Secretary of the Interior Standards and National Historic Preservation Act guidelines. A pedestrian paseo cannot replace a public alleyway, which has its own function and purpose. This opposition has nothing to do with the project. It's a beautiful project and I commend the developers and everyone that worked on it. But all that this has to do is with the preservation of our City assets. Why landmark a City Plan to then overwrite it? The Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables promotes the understanding and importance of historic resources and their preservation. We ask the City Commission to uphold the historical significance of the City Plan and reject Case File 23-6704 or 6710 due to its irreversible effect on the integrity of the Coral Gables Historic City Plan, officially recognized as a local landmark by the Historic Preservation Board in 2018, and it was accepted by a unanimous vote of the City Commission that same year as per Resolution 2217-240 and Ordinance 2018-13. So I respectfully -- this is our point of view. And again, thank you for listening.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Carbonell.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, one more speaker in person, Jackson "Rip" Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, good evening.

Jackson "Rip" Holmes: Greetings, you poor people going through all of these different things today. So this is a kind of a delicate subject matter. I do oppose your changing the zoning because I think that it's like it's -- it's -- what is it, a Trojan horse, opening Pandora's box, whatever. If this was a standalone project, I've talked now with some of the people who were opposed to it and I see they've had a change of heart and I'm not here to make enemies. But I urge you to vote no on this because how many copycats are we inviting in the door by changing the zoning? And I think that we have an opportunity to stop the urbanization of Coral Gables. And if you weren't changing the zoning, you know, if this was just like a variant situation, are you going to go with the local neighbors who say, yeah, let's do it? That would -- you know, who am I to oppose it? But opening Pandora's box, opening the door by changing the zoning, I oppose that. I urge you to vote against it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: I have no one else, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Perfect, let's close public comment if there is nobody else that would like to speak. Mr. Clerk?

Commissioner Menendez: We're good.

Mayor Lago: Is there anybody else? Someone from...?

City Clerk Urquia: I'm being told there's someone on Zoom but I haven't received the request to speak.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Well, let's move on then. I mean, I'm more than willing to wait but...

Unidentified Speaker: We can move on.

Mayor Lago: Okay. As we move forward we have a few items we have to vote on. Is there any further discussion from the res -- excuse me, I apologize, from the Commission in regards to...

Commissioner Fernandez: I do...

Mayor Lago: Go ahead.

Commissioner Fernandez: I do have some comments. I want to commend you for the work that you've done working with the community. I think that was the main request that came from the community time and time again when this project came before Planning and Zoning Board last time and when it came before the Commission. I think the request time and again was sit down with the residents and make sure it's a project that works in the community. And I think you've definitely changed the way that development should work in the City of Coral Gables. Development should not be, I want to build something, this is what I want to build and I'm going to build it. Development should be, how is this going to benefit the community? How is this going to benefit the neighbors? And what are we going to do to make sure that we're having a positive impact in the community? And I think you've done that. And as the Mayor said, I was a no vote until Ponce Circle Park was on the table because that park has been an eyesore for this neighborhood for many years. We're talking about a footprint that's larger than the footprint of the project that you're proposing. And neighbors have had to look at this park on a regular basis. Grasses -- there's no green grass. There's nothing that attracts you to that park. It's not a safe place to get to. And the conversations that I've had with staff over the last few weeks have been, we can't find anybody to do the work at a cost that we can afford as a city. We're basically blowing our entire budget on infrastructure around the park. So you taking this on and telling us you're going to take over this project and get it done is a huge relief for not only the residents in this area,

but us as a city. Because we're always trying to find ways to fund important projects for the city, whether it be sidewalks, whether it be pothole repairs, whether it's our tree canopy replacement, taking this project off of our books allows for us to find money for addressing other needs throughout the city. As far as height, residents are concerned with height in the city, and it's something that they have brought up for years. It's the reason that I'm on this dais. There was a concern that they brought up for many, many years. And I have to commend my three colleagues who were here before because when this project came up on its first iteration, they all voted no. And they said, this is not something we're going to approve. And great to move down from 16 stories to 9 stories, reducing the density. As far as the alleyway, that's one that I've kind of been concerned with since my days covering this in the past. And I think Commissioner Castro's recommendation for the easement and the alley, the footprint of that alley will still remain intact through that paseo that you're proposing. So there will still be access to that. And what I would say is, is there anything you can do with that alley that can pay homage to the City's vision? And that's something you don't have to give me an answer today, but maybe that's something that you can do -- whether it's something that you can do in the design in there or something going forward, just to embrace the historic map of our city. And I think that that's what the Historic Preservation Association has been pushing for many years. I think this is a place that we may be able to kind of honor George Merrick's vision for Coral Gables. I don't think that George Merrick's vision was to protect alleys in perpetuity. I think they were used during those times. They were something that was a necessity. Today that alley is not used. The City, I don't think, has used that alley in ages. But I think preserving resident access to that alley goes very far. As far as the slip lane, I actually had been talking and I talked to Mr. Fernandez about this and I spoke briefly to staff about the possibility of doing something a little bit different there. I've crossed at the slip lane many times, and as a pedestrian, it's a nightmare. Cars cannot see you. And I don't think that that's really going to change by preserving the slip lane as it is. But I always like to think outside the box. The project across the street, the Plaza, has an exit of its ramp from a parking garage within about 200 feet of that intersection. The Plaza is currently about 20 percent occupied and you already have traffic backing up at that intersection. What I would like to see done during first and second reading is possibly having a conversation with staff about maybe putting a traffic circle at that location so that traffic can free flow and it will be safer on the side of University. It would change the slip lane, but it would allow for traffic to continue to free flow not just north and south on Ponce, but also east-west where traffic is kind of bottlenecking right now at the Plaza. I think that was -- when the Plaza was kind of designed, everybody saw that as an opportunity for people to go in two directions, but having it there now, I think what we're seeing is traffic is already bottlenecking. Once you're at 100 percent, that's going to be a major traffic intersection. And if we have the opportunity to work on that now, I think this is a good opportunity to maybe contemplate whether a traffic circle can be placed at that location. I don't know if it can. That's something for the Public Works team to look into, but that's what I would like to see done there. Again, I think you've taken this project in a completely different direction. You've put in hard work. I know that the residents have as well. It's been a hard decision for me. It is not something that -- you know, I've lost sleep over this, but I think the residents have really made the case for you. The neighbors who were against this project, it is very difficult. And I think Mr. Santamaria

was the one who said it. We have a duty to those residents and to the residents in the area. And the concern that many of those residents have shared is what if this project doesn't go forward? What comes next? Unfortunately, we're fighting a battle with Tallahassee where the Live Local Act is continuing to expand and developers can come in and say, I'm going to build a 16-story building and administratively it has to be approved. We will lose the ability to decide what we want at this location. And if the residents in that area are saying this is the project that we want, this is the design that we're okay with, we're okay with the height of this building, I don't see how we can stand in front.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner?

Commissioner Menendez: As a resident who's lived in the Crafts Section for 61, almost 62 years in the Crafts Section, I've seen the Crafts Section evolve and develop and grow. As Mr. Allen and his team knows very well, at that site, there was a Royal Castle for many, many, many years. Behind it was a full-service gas station. Behind that, going up University and Malaga, was a UtoteM, later Circle K. And George Merrick's vision for the Crafts Section, if you look at some of the original renderings, for Ponce Circle Park, he had an expo center, planned an expo center. People were going to work and live there. The San Sebastian Apartments was for the employees of the Coral Gables Corporation. That area was a transition to our downtown. It wasn't a sleepy town at Mayberry R.F.D. He had visions. He had a dream for that area. But unfortunately, the Great Depression, the hurricane, the World War II, and he passed away in 1942. His vision, his dream for that area was never fulfilled. I honestly believe you have caught on to that vision, and I think you are able to carry it out, and especially with Ponce Circle Park, I think we're moving much closer to what George Merrick always wanted for the Crafts Section. When I saw the image that -- one of the images looking towards Ponce Circle Park, remembering everything that was there in the past, and for a while, for many years, that area where the park was, it was almost a blighted area. As Commissioner Fernandez said, and especially for many years, it wasn't safe to walk at night from Christie's to Miracle Mile. You would jump in your car because it was barren. And little by little, we've brought life. We've invigorated the area. And to have folks to be able to move into such a beautiful facility and to live there and to enjoy what Coral Gables has to offer, I honestly believe after admonishing you, your team, in 2022, you are the 1969 Miracle Mets. You have come from nowhere to win, in my opinion, and you've won over the hearts of the neighbors. The one thing, you know, hopefully things move forward and the project moves forward in a wonderful way. Because I hope to have a peaceful breakfast, because it seems every time I have a breakfast in the area, I have to look up and David Fournier is sitting down at my table to further advocate for the project. And David, at least buy me my coffee, you know. Come on. Yeah, next time. Thank you. What was referenced a little while ago, this should be the standard, the new standard established between developers, private interests, our city government, and our community. This should be the way to go because the last time you were here, I described your project not as a baked Alaska, but a radioactive Alaska. And it's been transformed. And look at it, everyone's cooperated. Everyone's been involved from day one. And that's, in my opinion, that is the way, and that is the Coral Gables way. It's about community, and it's about engaging

our community. And I honestly believe you've succeeded at achieving that goal. So, congratulations on an outstanding job.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Commissioner Anderson?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Again, I'm going to commend you for establishing the gold standard on communication. One thing I always ask every developer when they're considering a project is, have you knocked on the doors of the people around the project? Have you personally spoken to them and heard their concerns? I don't think that was quite done the first time around, but you've done cartwheels to listen to many, many suggestions and ideas from very demanding residents on a high-quality level of architecture that is required. And I know because I've spoken to them personally about the details and the -- what they aspire to see like they see in Europe reappear here. But you've also taken care of one of the biggest concerns I had is that we didn't have Plaza 2.0 where a project is designed and approved at a satisfactory level and something happens because we can't control the future. And another project comes in, and the zoning that was approved for something that's only 115 feet comes back to us to haunt us at 190.5 feet. So we don't ever want to have that again. And you solved that problem. And Mr. Fernandez, you did a phenomenal job of assuring me that there was no chance without four votes to change that covenant for a Plaza 2.0 to ever occur again. So that was a major, major concern. And I believe pedestrian safety is something that you have taken to heart and you will improve not only in this project but to the Plaza, the Ponce Circle Park area, and over to the Plaza itself. All these improvements will be taken into account. As for the alley, I mean, having served on the Planning and Zoning Board, I know that we're allowed to go over the alleys with a 20-foot height. You have 20 feet here. You have given homage to the alley space and made it into something beautiful from something that, and I've driven this site, it was really a pretty rundown and not something you would want to show people that this is Coral Gables. By the way, when I was at the site and I'll ask staff to follow through with you, there are some street trees there that are oaks. Please follow through with staff and we'll determine, you know, if they can stay, if they can be relocated, and hopefully we preserve everything that can be saved. But I did go through the rest of the site and the rest of them are invasives. They're not worthy of being saved. So I'm very pleased. I hope everybody's listening out there that's developing in Coral Gables and follows your example and has this type of engagement. I hope also the residents are listening because the comments that Commissioner Fernandez made regarding not only the Live Local Act but in areas where we have RTZ zone, this commission will lose the ability to deliver the type of development that the residents would prefer if we hand the authority over to the state to determine. We cannot make that determination anymore, or for the county to determine. We can have a much nicer product if we work together, like you've worked together with the residents, and have something that's compatible with the neighborhood. So thank you.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro?

Commissioner Castro: From the first moment that I -- the first encounter I have with developers and they want to come meet with me, my first -- the first thing I say is, have you met with the residents? What do the residents want? And they ask me, well do you like it? It doesn't matter if I like it. I'm here to represent the residents. I can love it, that's not going to make a difference. It's what are the neighbors saying? And have you had community meetings with the residents? That's the most important thing to me. And I hope that Mr. Allen Morris is an example to follow for the rest of the developers that want to come up to the Commission and ask for something. Talk to the residents, communicate. That being said, I am bringing something forward and it's door hangers because I feel from the beginning with these community meetings, the more involvement we can have with the community, the better it's going to be -- the better it's going to be from the beginning of the project. It's going to be presented at next commission or the following. It's in Planning and Zoning right now. So thank you very much. This is exactly my vision of how development should be.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. With that being said, I'll entertain a motion starting on E-5...

Commissioner Menendez: Move it.

Mayor Lago: Unless there's any further comment.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, before we take the vote, I did have one member...

Mayor Lago: Oh, I apologize, yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Of the public who wants to speak.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me, there is one extra person that would like to speak.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, it's Maru Sosa and it's on Zoom.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Sosa, thank you for your patience. The floor is yours.

Maru Sosa: Good evening, Mayor, Vice Mayor and Commissioners. As a resident who was once called a radical neighbor who is against development, and someone who did canvass the area to go against the prior project that was presented to us, I can say that this is a project that I support. I don't know if these words mean anything now that you guys are going to take a vote, but I was waiting from before. I don't know what happened. I wanted to say that this developer truly

listened to the residents and completely changed the terrible project that was presented to us prior to this new project. Again, basically, I'm happy to support, and I feel that this project will establish a precedence of high quality and design respecting the beautiful City's roots and setting an example for other developers in our area. Thanks to the Allen Morris team for listening to us and thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much for being with us. We have a motion and a second on the floor on E-5.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item E-6.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Second.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item E-7.

Commissioner Menendez: Move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Second.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Items E-8, congratulations on first reading. Thank you very much for being here.

City Attorney Suárez: So Mayor, E-8 will be heard next time.

Mayor Lago: I know, that's what I'm saying. I was going to say E-8 -- just for the record, E-8, E-9, E-10, and E-11 will be heard next time.

W. Allen Morris: Mr. Mayor...

Mayor Lago: The floor is yours.

Mr. Morris: Madam Vice Mayor, members of the Commission, neighbors, we would just like to say this has been a long process. Thank you deeply for your consideration today and thank you for making -- voting to make this project a reality. This is going to be a beautiful addition to the City. Thanks.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Congratulations.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you.

Mr. Morris: And we know that it's a hard job that you have, and we are grateful for your serving our community the way you are. And you've taught this old dog new tricks. Then my new way of going about development is to start with the residents, is to be a part of the collaborating team in designing what we want to have in our neighborhoods because that's why we exist as a company, to inspire, impress, and improve. And that's what we want to continue to do in Coral Gables. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Morris, before you leave, you're the consummate professional. And you've always been, even in disagreement, you've been a gentleman. So I want to say thank you for everything you've done for the City. Besides the project, which is going to be a wonderful addition to the City, more importantly, thank you for you -- for what you have done, and your wife, along with Dorothy Thomson and your son. So thank you very much.

Mr. Morris: And thank you for your leadership, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: And you deserve this win today because you've done a lot of hard work, a lot of heavy lifting. So thank you very much.

Mr. Morris: Thank you all so much.

Applause.