

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items E-3 and E-4 are related
January 23, 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 Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

City Planner, Jennifer Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Mario Garcia-Serra

William Fisher

Maria Cruz

Agenda Items E-3 and E-4 are related [2:20 p.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission approving a Planned Area Development (PAD) pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-206, "General Procedures for Planned Area Development" for a proposed Publix grocery store and liquor store on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 48, Block 8, Coral Gables Crafts Section (2551 Le Jeune Rd), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and an effective date. (11 08 23 PZB recommended approval with conditions, Vote: 5-1)

City Commission Meeting

January 23, 2024

Agenda Items E-3 and E-4 are related - Ordinance of the City Commission approving a Planned Area Development pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, Section 14-206, for a proposed Publix grocery store and liquor store on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 48, Block 8, Coral Gables Crafts Section (2551 Le Jeune Rd), Coral Gables, Florida.

Lobbyist: Mario Garcia-Serra

A Resolution of the City Commission approving Conditional Use Review of a Site Plan pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process" Section 14-203, "Conditional Uses," for a proposed Publix grocery store and liquor store on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 48, Block 8, Coral Gables Crafts Section (2551 Le Jeune Rd), Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and an effective date. (11 08 23 PZB recommended approval with conditions, Vote: 5-1)

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

Lobbyist: Mario Garcia-Serra

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item E-3 and E-4.

City Attorney Suárez: Mayor, E-3 is an ordinance of the City Commission approving a Planned Area Development pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process," Section 14-206, "General Procedures for Planned Area Development" for a proposed Publix grocery store and liquor store on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 48 Block 8, Coral Gables Crafts Section, Coral Gables, Florida; including required conditions; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and an effective date. E-4 is just on for information. It will not be considered today, but it's a resolution of the City Commission approving Conditional Use Review of a site plan pursuant to Zoning Code Article 14, "Process" Section 14-203, "Conditional Uses," for a proposed Publix grocery store and liquor store on the property legally described as Lots 1 through 48, Block 8, Coral Gables Crafts Section, Coral Gables, Florida; including conditions; repealer provision, severability clause, and an effective date. This is a quasi-judicial item, so any individual who will be testifying today should be sworn in by the City Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Those who will be speaking on this item, please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm 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.

Mario Garcia-Serra: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. My name is Mario Garcia-Serra, with offices at 600 Brickell Avenue, here today representing Publix Supermarkets, Inc., the owner of the site located at 2551 South Le Jeune Road. I'm joined today by Mr. Hank Porcher, Publix's selected fee developer for this new store, as well as Mr. Bill Fisher, our project architect. If we could have the presentation up on the screen, please. I'll continue with the presentation while we're putting up the visuals. Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, the time has arrived for a new state-of-the-art Publix at this location. The existing Publix store has been in operation since 1962, and it has served the community well, but Publix feels strongly that the community deserves a better store and shopping experience and has made that commitment in a major way. This new store will be Publix's flagship location, its greatest store both aesthetically and functionally. It is important to note that Publix has approached this project with a mindset of a community grocer and not the mindset of a developer. The property is an entire city block located in the Central Business District and zoned MX3. This is the most intense zoning in the City of Coral Gables, and Publix has been courted by many developers over the years to joint venture and build a high-rise tower, but Publix has rejected those attempts and is focused on what it's doing and what it does best in providing a high-quality grocery store. On a property where up to 190 feet in height and 16 stories is allowed, Publix is only proposing three stories and 36 feet. Where there could be 400,000 square feet of floor area, 66,000 square feet is proposed. What will be happening is a great new supermarket with a sit-down café to serve both nearby residents and office workers, a liquor store to meet that need, and public recreational and open areas, which you have never before seen as part of a grocery store, including a public park on the east end of the property. Indeed, in a further demonstration of Publix's commitment to maximizing the community benefit from this project, what we will, I suspect, be discussing mostly today is not how big of a building we are proposing, but how big of a park we will be proposing and building. Mr. Mayor, you have repeatedly challenged this project, as well as others, to increase the size of public parks, and we are prepared to nearly double the size of that park over what was previously proposed. This will be more than a grocery store. It will be a community magnet where the residents and workers of this city will be able to do much more than just shop for groceries. With that said, I think we're in the process of getting the presentation up on the screen. I'll ask the architect, Bill Fisher, to come up here and introduce himself, maybe give some background as to how you guys approached this project, how many City reviews there's been, and so forth, and then we'll get the presentation up on the screen.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon, sir.

William Fisher: I'm William Fisher, Fisher & Associates Architects, 2315 Belleair Road, Clearwater, Florida. I represent Publix Supermarkets. I'm not real good at hand puppets, so I'm going to stall a little bit. I know of 12 years on this site, recently, five years, and I think we were here -- we've been working this specific project for the last two years -- a year and a half, two years. It's incredibly important to renovate this store. 1962 -- it's been renovated since, but it is not Publix's most prideful store, and it should be. They have gone through and have met with the different DRCs, Architect Review Boards, Planning and Zoning, and each time has gone through

and adapted to the requests of the City. The site is -- Le Jeune Road is to the west, which is to the right. Andalusia Avenue is to the north. Salzedo...

Mayor Lago: Salzedo.

Mr. Fisher: Salzedo is to the east and Valencia to the south. The main entrance to the Publix store is located at the top center of the building along Andalusia, and that is also where the elevator banks are and stairs that go vertical to the floors above. Located to the west of -- the west edge of the site is a pedestrian plaza. So, that would be along --

Mayor Lago: Le Jeune?

Mr. Fisher: Yeah, the -- in addition, there's a liquor store and a Publix café. I've done over 900 stores. I've never seen a store with four entries. You asked for four entries, we have four entries. The liquor store is self-contained by law. The café has two entries, one's on Le Jeune and one's to the bottom, but it also opens up into the store. So, if you get your serving, you can go there and eat it, you can continue to shop, you can come in, come out for lunchtime, dinner, whatever it would be. The façade along Andalusia is a full storefront, allowing you to see in and out of the store. So, again, a feature that just doesn't happen very often and -- but Publix has heard your request, trying to activate the street, and there's an arcade along that section, so that is there as well. Midblock, you can see what looks like a loading area. Just to the left of that is a right-in, right-out access, vehicular access to the decks above. So, Andalusia is a one-way street, so you would turn in to the right to go in and then right to go out in that area. Just adjacent to that, to the right, is a self-contained loading area, which has all the compactors, loading docks, and services self-contained behind doors. So, we did this store, we call it Flagler. We did the Flagler store where the trucks drive in, drive out. Same concept, doors go up, doors go down. Along Salzedo, the entire length of the road is -- fronts a grassy park. To the inside of that, to the left of that, we have 4,800 square feet of retail, restaurant, and outdoor seating area in that area. In the center, there's also access to the parking garage above, so those retailers would have access to parking. The second level is the second floor -- second slide is the second floor, showing vehicular movements. The elevators and stairs are on the top center of the drawing. The third image is of the roof, showing again the vehicular movement, but also showing a majority of the parking space covered with trellises. The next slide depicts the view along Andalusia and Le Jeune. The main entry to Publix is on the far left. The entry to the liquor store is somewhat in the center of the rendering, and one of the entries to the café is on the far right. In the foreground, you've got the outdoor seating. On the other side, there's another view of the plaza from the southwest depicting the two cafés -- café entries, you see where the two Publix signs are, and then the outdoor seating as well. This vantage point depicts the retail shops, restaurants, and outdoor seating at Salzedo as they open up onto the grassy park to the east area. This is the same park from the southeast corner, so this is looking somewhat north. This rendering depicts the main Publix entry along the north elevation with access to Publix elevators and the stair lobbies. This view is of the arcade connecting the outside pedestrian plaza along Le Jeune to the main Publix entry. And this

rendering is outside the dining area at the east adjacent to the grassy park area. And then a close-up view outside the dining area adjacent to the café, the south café, so this would be on the south but west side of the project. An aerial view from the west along Le Jeune depicting the overall view of the project and the plaza in the foreground. And then the next aerial view is from the east depicting the restaurants, outdoor seating, and generous landscaping on that side of the project.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you very much, Bill. Maybe if you could stay up here so that we discuss the other option with the enlarged park. Mayor and Commissioners, as you can see, great improvement over the existing conditions in that store. This is a store that will last, you know, 75 years serving this community, much like the existing store did, but even better. But we have something that might even improve it even more, which it's up to your discretion to discuss.

Mayor Lago: So, before we move into that...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Sure.

Mayor Lago: I'd like for both of us to share with my colleagues on the Commission, after five years of working on this project, why this project is potentially one of the most transformational projects to hit the City. When you and I started having a conversation about this project, we probably had, what, about a dozen meetings with developers, even to the extent that at one point, I even had a meeting with you on Zoom when I was in a wedding in North Carolina to discuss opportunities of how can we reshape this piece of property in our downtown. This is, like I said, probably the most important development that will happen in our city's history. One of the things that, to me, since I became Mayor and the Commission has supported, has been bringing at a minimum five pieces of open space to the downtown. We completed one where we were able to negotiate with Armando Codina and Manny Cadre for the 11,000 square foot site adjacent to Mercedes. This is the second site and there's another client of yours that's forthcoming with a beautiful site that hopefully we were able to negotiate into a deal. But let's talk about this site, why this is important. When this site came to me five years ago, it was at the developer's request, it was from lot line to lot line. And there was a lot of conversation about how can we make the project even better. These type of properties come around once in a lifetime. I want to commend you, Mario, and I want to commend the developer and the architect who are here and the Manager. I know it was not easy. We had a lot of conversations, but what you're about to see right now is what in my opinion is going to transform the quality of life in our downtown. I have made a request from the developer to expand the park, and we have one opportunity here to make this right. The developer has said that they're amicable to doing this, and we're potentially going to get a 20,000 square foot park in downtown that's going to go -- run the length of the street on Andalusia from one side to the other. This is a monumental opportunity for the City. And I just want to say thank you for listening, for understanding that Publix is a true community partner. And not only are they developing this piece of land, they're also offering to deed it to the City, so the City would own this piece of property, just like we were able to do with the lot with Armando

Codina and Manny Cadre. So, this is, again, an immensely important piece of property to the City of Coral Gables that will drop a park of 20,000 square feet, to be exact 19,000 --

Mr. Garcia-Serra: 19,650, I believe, is the approximate number right now.

Mayor Lago: Right in the middle of our downtown within a walking distance of Miracle Mile. Will you show them the...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Sure.

Mayor Lago: The property?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Sure. We were always very conscious or really became conscious, let's say -- this is a full city block in the Central Business District. So, this is a pretty significant property for the City of Coral Gables and it's not just your standard, you know, grocery store site. So, with that in mind, we designed what we think is a very good project, but trying to meet the challenge of how better we can transform Central Business District, we're about to show you now on the screen, an enlarged park on that east side which would be 20 -- almost 20,000 square feet, 19,600, potentially can be increased a little bit more. And Bill has some updated renderings to show also. If the host could potentially let us share our screen, we'd be able to show it.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, they're asking to share the screen.

City Clerk Urquia: You...

Mayor Lago: It is?

City Clerk Urquia: You're cohost, you're able to share your screen.

Mr. Fisher: So, it's the same orientation, the Publix is in the same place. The ramp to the parking above is in the same place. The service area is in the same place. The difference between this layout and the one I previously presented is we no longer have the 4,800 square feet of retail and restaurant space with outdoor seating. The park went from the -- we call it the grassy park because we have to distinguish between that and the plaza. So, the grassy park was, or would have been, 64 feet 3 inches wide. This is 92 feet 6 inches wide. So, it's significant -- it's not a little bit larger, it's significantly larger. To do that, we pretty much had to remove that element, because you can't lease too small of a space, and if it's not viable, it's just not worth doing. So, what you see from the gray box to the right is the new grassy park, wider park in this option. The other -- the previous option is what we've been approved by the different boards and subcommittees, but this is what has been discussed. To do that, you'll notice on the bottom how much more significant this grassy park is.

Mayor Lago: If I may, if I may. To me, this is what this Commission will be remembered for. This piece of property is literally within a block, half a block from Miracle Mile. We've always talked about, since I've been here, about the opportunities of acquiring a piece of property in the downtown and making it into a park literally adjacent to Miracle Mile. While we have one right now that we use, we don't own that piece of property. That property is owned by a very generous family here who allows us to use that property right off Miracle Mile. This is the type of opportunity here after five years of working on it and through the help of Mario, the Manager, and the developer and the architect, where we could have something special that we can use that is transformational. You add this with the other piece of property that we got down the block, which is about 10,000 square feet on the corner next to Mercedes, and then potentially with your other client that's coming through the process now, which I think the property's around 15,000 square feet, it's another corner. You could have three significant parks in the downtown that are, again, the envy of every other municipality, and by the way, that we as a city would own. They don't own it. It can never be developed, and it's only -- it's another asset in the City's coffers that just, again, continues to increase the City's cachet and quality of life.

Mr. Fisher: So, to function north to south, we've got the park, we've got the edge at the street, but then we've got a pedestrian connection against the building that's covered with trellises and there's also benches in that area and it's made to basically soften that and then enhance the park itself.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, if I...?

Mayor Lago: Of course, please.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I also noticed on the west side, the Le Jeune side, there's some space there that we can make a wonderful space for pedestrians to go from north to south and from...

Mr. Fisher: Right. Le Jeune is very important to our project in that it is the outdoor café to our indoor café, and it's also a north-south connection, so not only at the curb edge, but also inward. We have a landscape.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I saw you were doing that. I just want -- when you work with our landscaping team, I noticed some of the stuff was up in planters. I'd rather see it more permeable for pedestrians to be able to walk in and out and not have to...

Mr. Fisher: So, if you look...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Feel like they're on one side of a wall versus on the other side of the wall...

Mr. Fisher: Right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Smashed up against the traffic.

Mr. Fisher: If you look at this site plan on the far left, you see the gray for the street, Le Jeune, and then you see a tan area, which is, I'll call it, that's your sidewalk. Some of it's ours, but it's your sidewalk. Then you see a landscape buffer, a white area, that's landscape, and then you see another enhanced textured walkway. So, that whole area is really going to be energized. And then also we wrap it around the corner so Valencia gets that same energy from that. So, yes, there's two sides to the project. The functional side that I'm working with is the Le Jeune side. The other side, the benefit to the City is the park side. And, you know, we're trying to deal with all the plates at the same time.

Mayor Lago: You know, something that I would just love to consider, and I mention this because the Vice Mayor was so instrumental in saving two massive trees, more than two, but a bunch of trees in the project that you represented, which we got a little park there also.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Correct.

Mayor Lago: A little 6,000 square foot park, it's going to be nice, a few blocks away from here. There's going to be a bunch of little parks in that area. This is a perfect place to potentially transplant a tree that, for example, let's say that a resident, due to the new state statute, for one reason or another wants to cut down a tree on their property, if we can save that tree, figure out a cost and maybe transplant a beautiful tree if it can be transplanted. But this is why this piece of property is just such an opportunity for us. And imagine if we, instead of cutting down that beautiful oak tree that was cut down in front of the Biltmore, we could have brought it here and planted it here. If it survives, it survives. We at least make the effort to bring it here.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I did look at the arborist report on it.

Mayor Lago: I know you did. I know you did.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And I know it couldn't have been saved, but we've had a number of conversations. And one was some of the existing trees on there, on the site. I'm going to ask our landscape director to evaluate, for instance, the health of the gumbo limbos. I understand you don't want them on your site, but we have other parks and places that we could utilize them in. But I also want to talk to you about transportation from a number of aspects. This is a very heavily walked area across Le Jeune Road. We have a bus -- couple of bus pickups. We had talked about putting in the audible press buttons for individuals that are sight impaired, especially on the intersection of Valencia -- no, is it...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Crossing Le Jeune.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Andalusia, also on Valencia, you know, that's an issue there, the do not block the box. It has been sorely needed marking on the intersection of Valencia and Le Jeune for decades. That's needed. I know FDOT at one time reached out and was amenable to doing it. So, perhaps this project would be the impetus for actually finally getting that done so we don't block this traffic when the light changes at the intersection of Valencia and Le Jeune. The other thing that we have that's interesting here on this site on Valencia is in many of the areas is three lanes, but it actually functions as two lanes. It makes sense for it to be three lanes where you're making the right-hand turn, but the full length, no one feels comfortable going next to the parked cars because the doors are going to open and the lanes are narrow. So, we talked about restructuring Valencia in those mid-block sections to be a two-lane functioning area so that we're not having these cars constantly overlapping each other over these lanes. Then comes the bike lanes. Okay, because we had, I see it's in...

Mr. Fisher: There's two green -- they're identified in -- and I'm not sure if green was the right color, I didn't pick up on that, but...

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, no, no, green's fine.

Mr. Fisher: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think you have it on the wrong side of the road, if my eyes are seeing correctly here, because Andalusia is solely a, you know, west to east road. And we have a future plan, you know, the parking lots across the street and so forth. We really needed it to be on the south side, closest to Publix, as opposed to the north side of the street. And we've gone back and forth on this, and I was talking to our Assistant City Manager, who is very familiar with the County and their buses and ones that have doors open on the left so that you can have pedestrians safely get off on the opposite side of the street as opposed to always being on the right-hand side of the road. So, on Andalusia we need to resolve the bike lane issue. On Salzedo, we need to make sure that we're solid with the County and everybody's regulations for the bike lanes, whether it's going to be a two-way on that side, because I've gone over that street a bit with our Public Works Department, where the crown of the road was, and it looks like we're in half a favor going on the west side of the street to have a two-way as opposed to splitting it up, and be able to put a left-hand turn lane on Salzedo and Valencia to be able to allow folks to be turning into Valencia to be able to get to -- to get to Publix. There's a lot of people going on Salzedo who don't want to be stuck behind people wanting to make that left-hand turn onto Valencia to head west. Let's see if there's anything else I left out of here that were in the planning stages. Light poles. I notice we have light poles in here. So, since we were talking about light poles earlier, I just want to note for staff to kind of look at the light poles in here and see if we're being consistent about our designs. Okay, I've completed my comments. I mean, I love the project. I love the park. This is so exciting to be able to actually deliver on something like this. It's been -- what, you've been working on this for, what, 10 years, I think?

Mr. Fisher: And I'm not that old, either.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think it's been 10 years.

Mr. Fisher: I was 28 when I started that 10 years ago, so it just came about so.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, to be able to finally move on this...

Mr. Fisher: I think there's different -- now, there's been different attempts. They all look differently and they were -- and many of them were more dense. More of them were developer-driven, and it's to the point where, and I'm speaking out of turn, this is where I get in trouble, but Publix has made the decisions they need to build this store. And there's certain things that they have to do to run a store, and they just are. They have back of house, we've enclosed back of house. They have parking requirements. We've put parking above the store. We've opened the store up to glazing, which doesn't happen in my world. We've -- we've -- the liquor store, the cafés, the embellishments, this is very far from a prototypical store. Well, internally we call these unique. This is really unique. And it's a special store. So, I hope that...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh, one more...

Mr. Fisher: You are in favor of it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: One more, one more special thing I know that we covered in earlier conversations, and that is the pickup and drop off for, you know, folks that use Freebee.

Mr. Fisher: Right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We're going to have that up the ramp and in a safe area as opposed to down on the street.

Mr. Fisher: Yes. Yeah, there's -- you're talking about where they'll deliver the groceries to the car? Is that --?

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, no, I'm talking about, you know, we have these little free ride services that come in, the electric carts.

Mr. Fisher: You mean, about ceiling heights?

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, no, it's not ceiling heights. It's basically a place where people can load and unload.

Mr. Fisher: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And have people pick them up and drop them off but have it up the ramp as opposed to having someone who has a mobility impairment have to go downstairs.

Mr. Fisher: Like street level? No, upstairs, on the second floor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Upstairs, under cover.

Mr. Fisher: At the second floor, at the main door before you get in the elevator, there's that area, yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, so we accommodated that as well. So, thank you very much for all your efforts.

Mayor Lago: Anything else?

Commissioner Fernandez: I've seen some of the different versions that went through Board of Architects and I'm happy to see what's coming here today. And I appreciate all the efforts that have gone into making this what is going to be the staple Publix store in Coral Gables. I agree, I think a larger park in that area makes sense. It'll help activate that last block of Miracle Mile that's always been struggling because it can bring people out there. As far as the bike lane, I actually like the bike lane on the north side because there is no ramp on that side, whereas the ramps for the garage will be on the south side of the street. So, personally, I think it might make more sense the way it is drawn just because you won't have any interaction with the trucks coming in or the cars coming in and out of the garage versus just having a straight shot.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, let me share with you, the devil's in the details. Where do you go from there? Where does it come across Biltmore Way? How do you lead it through that triangle park that we have in front of the City Hall? That's why it's on the south side.

Commissioner Fernandez: And the question is what happens next with the garage across from Chocolate Fashion, which is on that side? So, if we are trying to connect there, it might be best to have it on the north side so it's easier to connect. I'm just concerned with safety of cars entering and exiting, whereas the garage that we have on the other side, the ramp is on the east side of the garage.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I sat down with Dover Kohl, and I've gone over this a zillion times with them. There's no way to traverse this Y that we have going on out here on Biltmore Way, between Andalusia, and coming in front of this City Hall without running it on the south side of the street. So, you hug that side and you continue on through. You're going to have the same driveway cutout problems on the opposite side of the street as you will with Publix. But like we do on every single intersection approaching a driveway or an intersection itself, you have that

dashed line situation going on to warn bicyclists. This is not where you'd be riding, you know, 15 to 20 miles an hour. You'd be riding at maybe five...

Commissioner Fernandez: Right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Miles per hour. But to try to traverse this V-cut that we got going out in front of City Hall, there is not a good way to do that at all. So, that's why it hugs the south side of Andalusia.

Commissioner Fernandez: The good thing is there's time to change that, correct? What we're approving today does not include the...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: There's two readings.

Commissioner Fernandez: Bike (INAUDIBLE), does it?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Well, there's two readings that have to take place because this is proposed.

Commissioner Fernandez: Got it.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: And it's in a planned area development, so it's an ordinance. So, this is first reading along with the resolution which is on for informational purposes approving the site plan, which will come back at second reading.

Mayor Lago: Mario, but if I may, if I may, because I want to address the idea that there's more time. I've been on every single phone call in regards to this issue and just so my colleagues are aware, your clients are in a hurry. Your clients are in a hurry. They made that very, very clear to me. They want to get this project started. So, we need to address the issues that need to be addressed. If it's lighting, if it's the bike path, if it's the park, whatever that may be, I want to get it addressed and bring this back as quickly as possible because it's a show of gratitude to these individuals who have always been willing to meet our demands. And the last demand was, I mean, I'm going to be very clear with everybody here, was we want the development rights and we don't want to give up the park. We negotiated to give up the park and in perpetuity for the City, the Manager and I, with you. So, let's try to get -- let's give a little so we can get a lot in my opinion because there's a statement that was made by the gentleman up there, which to me is very important, which is that this is a very unique, unique project that Publix has never done. And I give you my word, on behalf of the Commission, if I may, that this community is not going to let you down. Publix has always been a partner, always been a partner, whether in philanthropy, you guys are a staple, one of the last few privately owned companies that are of this magnitude, of this size, and Coral Gables does it right, Publix does it right, and we're a good partner. That's why you have -- you're going to probably go on, I think, four or five stores in City Beautiful if things keep moving in the direction they're moving. So, I want to give to them, we should give to them,

just try to expedite as much as possible, so let's iron out whatever details are needed between first and second reading. I don't want it to lag too long.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Understood. And it took a lot of effort to get here.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yeah, I know. The other question I had for you, I don't know if you can pull up the diagram again, probably not because of the IT issues, but on the larger park version, I saw that the wall of the Publix would have benches along the wall.

Mayor Lago: We addressed that.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm not talking about the benches.

Mayor Lago: What are you talking about? Tell me.

Commissioner Fernandez: Listen, the question is what's going up on those walls? It looks like it's just a bare white wall. You can go to the next -- I think it's the next screen. Behind where the benches are.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's not moving.

Mayor Lago: They're going to put trellises with actual hanging (INAUDIBLE).

Mr. Fisher: We were -- it's the wall and then we articulated with a sloped roof up above and then -- leave it there. You can see the...

Commissioner Fernandez: Right.

Mr. Fisher: Well, yeah, that (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Fernandez: So, right there...

Mr. Fisher: That (INAUDIBLE) sticks out 11 feet, so it's not a -- it's not stuck on the wall.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay, if you go to the next one, I think you can see it a little bit better. Yes, so you see, it's kind of a lot of white space.

Mr. Fisher: We were also asked not to put an arcade across there to provide cover for those sleeping at night. So, we minimized it with an open structure, but we wanted to bring it out to give shade and comfort to the people traversing from one side.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right.

Mayor Lago: So, like I told my colleague...

Mr. Fisher: So, yes...

Mayor Lago: These are things that we addressed already because we worked these through with the Manager to make sure that we weren't having issues with homeless people sleeping there. We brought in the articulation of the trellises, of the trees, we talked about -- we met with the City architect. The City architect made a multitude of recommendations for that wall because we knew that there would be an issue when you took away the two businesses that were there, one the liquor store and one the restaurant, that you were going to have just a drab wall and that was going to be an issue. So, we brought in the City architect to find ways to mask exactly what you're saying. The reason why you see it this way is because there was supposed to be a walkway there, but we reviewed it, we studied it, it was an opportunity to potentially have a problem. And that's why you see what you have there.

Mr. Fisher: So, it's an evolution. We've looked at several different schemes but...

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay, so...

Mr. Fisher: This is a good depiction of what it is.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I appreciate it. None of what he said has anything to do with what I'm trying to bring up. My concern is I would like to see something there that's not just a white wall. Maybe it's a place where you can put some sort of murals along those four, I guess, eight little openings or something that won't just make it a white wall. It would make it a little more attractive to go out to the park.

Mr. Fisher: We have -- so we can come back in a second, but we have used tile in this project as mosaic up in the upper freezes and the towers and all.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

Mr. Fisher: So, there's already that vocabulary here.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

Mr. Fisher: So, it would be...

Commissioner Fernandez: I just want to make it a little softer than what it is. That's the only thing that kind of stands out. And it might just be in the depiction because it does have a lot of sunlight shining off of it.

Mr. Fisher: Right.

Commissioner Fernandez: But that's the only thing that I see. Other than that, I mean, I think it looks like a great project.

City Manager Iglesias: And Commissioner...

Mayor Lago: And if you look...

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, if I may?

Mayor Lago: When you look at this and you say it's not, it is. Sometimes less is more. If you add too much embellishment on the wall, you take away from what I think is the actual design of the project, and obviously, the green space. What you can do there if you want to add some -- I'm not a big fan of murals. I don't think that we should be Wynwood or the Design District or anything like that. I think we should keep it clean, keep it as clean as possible, and a lot of people are shaking their head because they agree that Coral Gables has a certain standard. So, I don't want to -- I'm not a big fan of murals and spray painting and that kind of stuff. If that's what you want, I mean, that's fine, but I'm not in favor of that. What I would -- I don't even -- I just don't want to see any relief. Now, I'd like to see, like we talked about, which is having some nice area where people can sit, they can relax, but it doesn't become an area where it could be problematic. There's very limited things that we could do with a two-story façade, it just becomes difficult. If you throw too much accoutrements on it, it looks cheap. If you throw too much of fake coquina on it, it doesn't look good, right?

Mr. Fisher: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: I mean, you're the architect. So, there's -- our hands are tied. So, when you have the bougainvilleas and you have the wooden trellises, it kind of breaks the wall. It breaks the wall and it doesn't look cheap like it would look in my opinion if you had -- I'm at the point, I'm going to be honest with you, I'm not a fan anymore of the murals that you see in the City, in the City on downtown. They've gotten tired, in my opinion, and I don't think that we should have our whole downtown covered with those murals. I think it just -- it doesn't bode well for our -- for what we are pushing out there.

Commissioner Fernandez: Again, my request is something simple, just to try to soften it. It might just be a change in the color so that it's not as bright, just something simple. (INAUDIBLE) the mute button.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor?

Mayor Lago: The mute button?

City Manager Iglesias: May I address that, Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Of course, of course.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you. Thank you, Mayor. We have already been in discussion to work with the City architect and the Board of Architects on that wall and also maybe a slight change, not on the building, but just on the landscaping and so forth on Le Jeune Road. So, we have already been in discussion concerning that so our board of architects can address just the wall and actually maybe some of the landscaping on Le Jeune Road and I believe we're in agreement with working with the Board of Architects on those two minor issues.

Commissioner Fernandez: And that may be the solution, just to move the benches a little forward and put some landscaping behind it. It could be something simple like that.

City Manager Iglesias: Understood.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Menendez: It's my turn. Hi. I love the design. I think it's beautiful. It's appropriate. It's like the Mayor said, it's going to transform that area. That Publix has a special place in my heart for two reasons. One when this project came to me in terms of agenda review and we met, Mario and the developer, I said, man, I've been going to that Publix my entire life. Then you said it was created -- it was built in 1962...

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Right.

Commissioner Menendez: Which was the year I was born. So, it was my entire life I've been going there. I've lived within three blocks of that place. And then I quizzed staff on agenda review, I go, do you know what was at that site in the 1940s and 1950s? They didn't know. That site's where the original Coral Gables Youth Center was located back in the day in the '40s and '50s. I'm all for the larger, I don't know what the -- you used the grassy knoll or something?

Mr. Fisher: No, no, grassy park.

Commissioner Menendez: Grassy park, okay, okay, okay.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: We are in politics, so I'm going to avoid that, just in case. That was '63.

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah, that was '63, I was born in '62. So, I'm totally supportive and I agree with all the comments. It's, you know, with that park area and what's coming on nearby,

that area is going to be walkable, enjoyable and a pride of the City. Mario, we've spoken and I appreciate some changes that you've done to the rooftop parking with the trellises. And we talked a little bit before you came in, if you could, between first and second reading, add some more green to that area, perhaps fixed planters. In terms of the entire concept, that's the only thing that I would like a little bit of additional work on, more green, simply because it's a lower building, which is well received in Coral Gables, but there are a lot of other buildings in the area. And I noticed years ago when I would go to an office building in Coral Gables, we have the most beautiful city, but we have the ugliest rooftops when you're looking from down -- up, down.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Good point.

Commissioner Menendez: So, this is an opportunity with a park and everything we're doing to perhaps lead the way on what we can do with rooftops and perhaps that be the trend. And you all, because you've been such great partners and neighbors, it's an opportunity. With regards to the bike lanes, north, south -- north or south, I'll -- at this moment, I have no opinion. But great presentation and I'm glad you're here to stay.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you, sir.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll second the request for greenery on the...

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Greenery on the...

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Want to hear some public comment?

City Attorney Suárez: Mayor, we also have staff's presentation if you want to hear from staff on their presentation.

Mayor Lago: That's fine. You're still here? You knew this was going to be an easy one.

City Planner Garcia: Jennifer Garcia, a Planning Official. If I could have the PowerPoint quick, and we'll go through it really quickly. So, they are requesting two requests. The first one is the PAD, the planned area development, and second one will be the conditional use for site plan review since they are past the threshold of the 20,000 square feet. And as you know, the PAD is an ordinance, so it has first and second reading. The conditional use is a resolution, which you'll consider at the second reading.

Unidentified Speaker: Hand puppets?

City Planner Garcia: I was going to run through the conditions. If you go to your cover memo, you can see the deviations from the Zoning Code that they are requesting, which is an allowed request to the PAD. So, the PAD provides the flexibility of our Zoning Code. Our Zoning Code, as you know, encourages use of mixed-use active ground floor uses, transparency. If I could pull up the -- hold on really quick. Transparency, doors and windows facing the streets, fronting of buildings, these are the kinds of things you want to see on the ground floor on a sidewalk. However, as you know, a big box store needs to have back-of-house, needs to have refrigeration and uses that aren't really positive towards sidewalk and active pedestrian space. So, they are requesting those deviations from the Zoning Code, and they're allowed to do that as a PAD in return for some public benefits. Pull up the PowerPoint yet? Those deviations are included on the second page of your cover memo. The paseo, for example, the paseo is kind of internally on the east -- I'm sorry, on the west side of the building. Pedestrian access and orientation, that's the shop doors and windows that are facing the street. They don't have that along the south side for obvious reasons, transparency associated with that. Curb cuts are wider than what we usually require for them to accommodate their large trucks. Pedestrian design features such as, you know, no-blank walls, that's also on the south side. The facing of the building, like I said, the vehicular areas are, you know, kind of wide because they need that space to be able to use their trucks getting out and the frontage. They're not meeting it quite on Valencia side, on the south side. So, in exchange of that, they are offering this park, a larger park. Staff has suggested that they also underground utility lines north and south up to the alley north and alley to the south. I think they had some issues with that. I think staff's now recommending what the Commission has to say as far as the two-way cycle track on the south side of Andalusia, also on the west side of Salzedo. From memory, I think that was it.

Commissioner Fernandez: There it is.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Now that you're finished.

Unidentified Speaker: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Did it also include the left-hand turn lane on Salzedo to be able to get on Valencia and dealing with the two versus three lanes, the traffic on Valencia?

City Planner Garcia: So, we did not get into that detail as far as the plan goes on the street, like a street playing. You're saying left turn lane from Valencia?

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, maybe between first and second we can sit down...

City Planner Garcia: Yeah, right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: For that.

City Planner Garcia: Let's see, we've kind of gone through the whole site plan. With DRC, November 2022, Board of Architects review, went to Board of Adjustment for the location of the liquor being too close to a religious use. They had a neighborhood meeting last June. Planning and Zoning reviewed it in November and here we are for first reading. They mailed out letters to 1,000 feet three times. The property has been posted twice, a website posting three times, and advertised once in the newspaper. The site determination is consistent with the comp plan to provide attractive uses for our downtown residential people who live downtown. The conditions of approval are before second reading is to revise the site plan to address those egress and ingress driveways, which I believe they've already done per Public Works. And also revise the park design and the right-of-way, the two-way cycle track, like I mentioned, on Andalusia and the west side of Salzedo, concrete sidewalks and a crosswalk on the south side of Valencia crossing Le Jeune. And again, the conditions of approval also continue for the conveyance of the community park, (INAUDIBLE) improvements along Andalusia, Salzedo, Valencia, like I said, underground utility lines between the two alleys north and south of the project, the crosswalk, like I said, and any signal adjustments.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Planner Garcia: That's it. Thanks.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir. Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon.

Maria Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, I love the proposal. I just signed up to talk. I wanted to make sure that I heard the staff recommendation because Planning and Zoning was not agreeing with them. And I just want to make sure that I got in. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Alright, is there anything else?

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, if I may, I want to take a personal point of privilege. So, I'm going to pass the gavel over. I'm going to make the motion.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Could we just...?

Mayor Lago: What?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Could we discuss some points first just to make sure everything's clear on the record?

Mayor Lago: Yeah, after I make the motion.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Okay.

Mayor Lago: I make the motion to approve the project with the 19,600 square foot park, to address the issue with the bike lanes in between first and second reading.

City Manager Iglesias: Excuse me, Mayor, 20,000 square foot park.

Mayor Lago: 20,000.

Vice Mayor Anderson: 20,000. You forgot 400.

Mayor Lago: 20,000. I forgot 400, I apologize. The 20,000 square foot park, to address the issue with the bike lanes, you know, defining exactly what is appropriate and please have a conversation with the Vice Mayor and our transportation advisory team to make sure that everything is, you know, as in the best use in regards to biking and pedestrian accessibility. To address the issue of the wall, which we've already been through 30 times, but a 31st time is appropriate. I agree. Have a discussion on what else we could do to potentially add more articulation or more design elements to that wall within the standards of the City of Coral Gables. Number four, the undergrounding of the power lines, something that you need to address with the City Manager between first and second reading, but I'm not going to allow it to become a sticking point right now. Figure it out. We've been at this for too long, okay? I don't know how many times -- I don't think we understand. Remember that we were going to cancel the project. We're going to leave the project the way it is. Remember how many times they told me that?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: More than once.

Mayor Lago: More than once. We're not moving forward, and we will go back, and we'll go back, and we'll go back, and please, please, let's do something. So, I want to get from first to second reading. What else am I missing?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: No, I think that...

Commissioner Menendez: Green rooftop.

Mayor Lago: Oh, yes, there you go.

Commissioner Menendez: Planters.

Mayor Lago: Sorry, Commissioner. Well, Commissioner Menendez's statement in regards to the roof, you have an opportunity here to, again, he's 100 percent correct. When you look at the roofs across our city, it was done intentionally. It was done intentionally. We don't have the nicest roofs. Okay, so you have an opportunity to do something nice here, which is going to be beautiful because you're going to have, obviously, cars parking on the roof, and you're going to have trellises and some sort of structures up there. Is there anything else that I'm missing?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Valencia traffic, we can restructure those lanes. So, instead of three lanes, it will be two lanes like it is on Andalusia. We have an opportunity here to put in a left-hand turn-only lane from on the northbound side on Salzedo to turn on to Valencia to make that a better traffic situation. Purview of staff with light poles.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mayor Lago: So, we have some -- and the walk buttons, the audible walk buttons on the corners of Valencia and Le Jeune and Andalusia and Le Jeune and address the FDOT requirements and have a do not block the box put in at that intersection that always gets blocked between the Aloft Hotel and Publix to where it dead stops traffic. So, right on Le Jeune, do not block the box. Maybe we can do it prettier than other locales do, but still we desperately need that.

Mayor Lago: We good?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think that is everything on my list, Chair.

Mayor Lago: Final point is deeding, obviously, the park to the City, which I appreciate. That was the final negotiation from me this past week. Thank you for the Manager, getting that done. And the final point is -- this has nothing to do with you. I imagine you'll be probably donating into the Arts in Public Places Fund, correct?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Please work with Catherine and the Commission. This is an opportunity to put a beautiful, world-class piece of art, maybe you donate it to the fund and we do something later where we install the artwork there, because it's a premier location and I think it's going to be something very well received. Just to make sure we clarify that and we leave that opportunity for the future.

Vice Mayor Anderson: One more thing, salvage the healthy trees. I think the gumbos are healthy enough to move.

Mayor Lago: Okay, salvage them, we can do something with that.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Yes, that's acceptable.

Mayor Lago: Alright, so that's -- what else?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Just one more. Now, let me ask for something.

Mayor Lago: What else?

Commissioner Menendez: I have a question. When construction starts, will their service of, you know, market, grocery, it stops during construction or are you going to do --?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Well, what's going to happen, this project doesn't start until the new Publix that's being built in South Dixie Highway at the former Riviera movie theater site...

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Ends. So, that has just recently started construction. Once that store is up and ready and running is when this one closes down and is...

Mayor Lago: So, Commissioner, can I add something to that? I'm happy you brought that up. And Mario, please add some color to the conversation. What Publix wanted to do first was build a structure all the way to Le Jeune and then knock down the existing building. That's what we had talked about for a long time. But Publix, we talked to them and said, listen, let's do something amazing. And this is where the park idea came about a year ago. Let's do something amazing and start working on this. So, they were planning on leaving the store open while they built a new store in one form or another. But that obviously, it goes against their model. It's a lot harder for them. They lose money. But it's another -- just another case where you can see that they've led by -- they've led.

Commissioner Menendez: And there's one thing -- I'm sorry, and I just mentioned to the Manager. We talked in passing, opportunity to make a difference in the community. And I'd like to just have further discussions with you and your team. Very close by, there's a school called Banyan Day School that thanks to Commissioner at that time, Cabrera, Ralph and Carlos Gimenez, we got a school speed zone there, but all the traffic off of the Le Jeune and Sevilla goes down that street and we're looking for some kind of electric, you know, crosswalk because they're little kids. And you've been such a great neighbor and this is a way to make a difference in the safety of the, you know, the people around that area. So, I'd like to have that conversation between first and second reading to see with the Manager is something we can do.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: And see what happens on the other issues also, too.

Commissioner Menendez: Sure, absolutely.

Mayor Lago: I love the idea. I'm very familiar. Both of my daughters went to that school. Amazing little treasure in our city. So, anything else?

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's a small world, so did mine.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, it's a great place. Anything else?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: So, on the point of the east elevation being further reviewed as far as aesthetics are concerned, as Commissioner Fernandez was remembering, we went through eight different meetings of the Board of Architects. So, it was a long arduous process. To the extent that we can keep that as an administrative review perhaps or something more limited, they can perhaps get feedback from the board members and so forth.

Mayor Lago: Could you do me a favor? Will you have a conversation with Commissioner Fernandez and the Manager and give him some of the information, the multiple meetings we had with the City architect to show how we exhausted every opportunity to make that façade as in line with Coral Gable standards, but to also break the white, just two -- you know, two floor structure that's there. And maybe after he's looked through everything that we've worked on with the City architect, maybe he has another idea that could potentially help us and we don't -- and I'm all favor -- I'm all in favor of the administrator review, just it has to go through (INAUDIBLE).

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, if I may say, I think it's a good idea to take it to the Board of Architects with a very limited scope just on the wall, just on the wall.

Commissioner Fernandez: But I think...

City Attorney Suárez: (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Fernandez: I think we're taking it completely out of proportion. What I would like to do is soften it. Landscaping might be able to solve that problem.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's what I was going to say.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I think it will -- it'll work better with the park. So, we don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right.

Commissioner Fernandez: Let's find something that works, maybe landscaping wise, to soften the look of that wall behind the benches. That's it.

Mayor Lago: You know what's...

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, your -- you took the words out of my mouth.

Mayor Lago: You know what's going to soften that -- you know what's going to soften that wall? It's very simple.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Trees.

Mayor Lago: It's a 20,000 square foot park that's going to be right there where people are going to be more in love with the park than they are going to with the wall.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Trees.

Mayor Lago: You know, let's...

Commissioner Fernandez: We don't need to diminish anybody else in the Commission to make ourselves look good.

Mayor Lago: I'm not diminishing you, Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: I second your motion though.

Mayor Lago: I'm not diminishing. Stop being so sensitive. I'm not diminishing your statement. I'm saying that people are going to be more in love with the park than they are -- they're going to forget about the magnitude of the wall. I worked on it -- I worked on that wall with...

Commissioner Fernandez: Here we go again.

Mayor Lago: Ernesto for...

Vice Mayor Anderson: The Great Wall.

Mayor Lago: A month.

Commissioner Castro: I think...

Commissioner Menendez: So we're...

Mayor Lago: Don't take things personally.

Commissioner Menendez: So, we're going to soften the discussion and there's a motion, I think, by the Mayor, and I'll be more than a second.

Commissioner Fernandez: I second it.

Mayor Lago: Yes, don't worry.

Commissioner Fernandez: I second it.

Mayor Lago: Hold on.

Vice Mayor Anderson: He beat you.

Mayor Lago: Hold on. The Vice Mayor, who seconded it?

Commissioner Fernandez: I did.

Mayor Lago: I think it was Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, Commissioner Fernandez did. I know you don't want me to second it.

Commissioner Menendez: Somebody play back the tape.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, we can all second it, huh?

Commissioner Castro: I think what they are worried about is going through another board review, right?

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I don't think we need to.

Commissioner Castro: If maybe we do something to avoid -- maybe administratively the City architect can approve.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm not going to put you through another Board of Architects.

Mr. Fisher: I just want one clarification on the burying of the power lines. We agreed to do that on our blocks. We just don't -- we want it to terminate on our blocks.

Mayor Lago: I understand. Let's work on that. I mean, we got that taken care of. Let's work on that with the Manager and we'll move forward on that issue. So, we have a motion and a second. We're working on -- Madam City Attorney, which item are we on? Because this is two.

City Attorney Suárez: I'm sorry, Mayor.

City Clerk Urquia: E-3.

Commissioner Fernandez: E-3.

Mayor Lago: E-3, want to make sure.

City Attorney Suárez: This is E-3.

Mayor Lago: Okay, go ahead.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Anybody else?

Unidentified Speaker: E-4.

Mayor Lago: I know, hold on.

City Attorney Suárez: No, the other item is not on for consideration today.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's not on for today.

City Attorney Suárez: It's just for information.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, don't worry, I got it, I got it.

City Attorney Suárez: So, it will come back on second reading.

Mr. Garcia-Serra: Thank you very much, Mayor and Commissioners. Looking forward to keeping this on track, and before you know it, we'll be at a groundbreaking, and then a ribbon cutting.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.