

NOT REVIEWED BY CITY STAFF

**City of Coral Gables
Tri-Board Workshop – North Ponce de Leon District
Wednesday, January 22, 2003, 6:00 p.m.
Community Meeting Room, Room B20
2801 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, Florida**

Board Members Present:

Planning & Zoning Board

Jorge Hernandez
Manny Kadre
Randy Liebler, Vice Chair
Cristina Moreno
Felix Pardo, Chair
F. Michael Steffens

Historic Preservation Board

Michael Beeman
Lisa Bennett
Gay Bondurant, Vice Chair
John Fullerton
Shirley Maroon
Joyce Meyers
Dr. Edmund Parnes, Chair
Kendell Turner

Economic Development Board

Jose Calvo, Chair
Richard DeWitt
Gus Fonte
Dr. Al Smith

City Commission Members Present:

Maria Anderson
Ralph Cabrera, Jr.

Staff Members Present:

Maria Jimenez, Assistant City Manager
Yolanda Aguilar, City Clerk
Eric Riel, Jr.: Planning Director
Catherine Swanson, Development Director
Dona Lubin, Historical Resources Director
Margaret R. Pass, Building and Zoning Director
Dennis Smith, Assistant Building and Zoning Director
Walter Carlson, Assistant Planning Director
Frances Collado, Planning Department Administrative Assistant
Scott Bolyard, Planning Department Intern

Recording Secretary:

Nancy C. Morgan, Coral Gables Secretarial Services, Inc.

Meeting chair Felix Pardo called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. and asked all meeting participants to introduce themselves for the benefit of the audience.

Mr. Pardo then recognized Commissioner Maria Anderson who welcomed board members, City staff and residents. She explained that the topic of this meeting was the North Ponce de Leon District (NPD), stating that the area was primed for its next stage of development as a continuation of the work begun in early 2002 during the Charrette. Ms. Anderson said that this workshop and the

results from it would drive the project forward. At the conclusion of her introductory remarks, she introduced Planning Director Eric Riel, Jr..

Before beginning a Powerpoint presentation, Mr. Riel explained that staff had initiated a work-in-progress, three-dimensional computer model of the area to demonstrate development potential and display existing conditions and building configurations. The computer model, prepared by Scott Bolyard, would be shown at the conclusion of the Powerpoint.

Content of Mr. Riel’s Powerpoint presentation:

Mr. Riel stated that the purpose of the meeting was to solicit input on issues from each board’s perspective; to educate City staff and each board on issues as they relate to economic development, historic preservation and planning and zoning issues; and to solicit input from the public. He clarified that the NPD study area is bounded on the north by S.W. 8th Street, the south by Navarre Avenue, the east by Douglas Road and the west by LeJeune Road.

The district has been the subject of three previous studies: 1994 – Findings and Recommendations of the Douglas Apartment District Task Force; 1998 – Draft North Ponce District Zoning Review; 2002 – Coral Gables Charrette Report.

The Douglas Apartment District Task Force identified problems and opportunities in the area. Planning and redevelopment objectives included Ponce de Leon Boulevard, neighborhoods, traffic, parking, security, social and community services, incentive and enhancement programs, public investments and improvements, public and private financing and cooperative marketing and management.

The mission of this study was to support residential property owners, residents, commercial (Ponce de Leon Boulevard) property owners and Coral Gables taxpayers. The mission also included generating sustainable economic and physical redevelopment that was implementable over a brief period of time.

Summary at the time of the study (1994): serious deteriorating condition; high crime rates; non-existent owner occupancy; numerous code violations; understandable lack of motivation on the part of individual owners to make significant investments; failed retail commercial spine at its center; area includes historic urban landscape; historic Mediterranean character; Ponce de Leon is one of the City’s most important streets; support of the plan requires broad and committed support from the private sector.

Recommendations of the study: create a redevelopment district; create and implement a plan; seek grants, private and public sector financial support; issue bonds financed by tax increment financing and transfer of development rights; make public improvements; establish a loan program; make direct investment into the community, such as social, service, recreational, beautification and economic development; create an overlay district with modifications to Mediterranean Ordinance, Historic District regulations and the Cottage Ordinance.

The North Ponce District Zoning Review Draft Document (1998) established an objective to stimulate redevelopment of the area. The study examined specifics such as green areas, empty

parcels, green space and edges, landscape corridors, specific building details, i.e., setbacks and FAR, and street frontages. The study never underwent public hearing review.

During **Pre-Charrette (latter part of 2001)** meetings, NPD issues identified to be addressed during the Charrette included land uses, zoning, urban character, transportation and traffic, parking, architecture, streetscape and infrastructure.

Pre-Charrette overview determined the following: the Coral Gables Apartment District was considered relatively affordable; the commercial corridor was attracting new retail, restaurants and entertainment; allowed: commercial high-rise development up to 16 stories permitted along the Ponce corridor; allowed: apartment development up to 50 units per acre and a height up to 8 stories (97 feet). Development trends identified: high-rise, mixed-use development along Ponce de Leon Boulevard; multi-family residential development adjoining the commercial corridor.

Existing housing is virtually all multi-family and most housing stock is 50 years old; development trends could result in the demolition of multi-family complexes to make way for larger scale buildings; Ponce de Leon Boulevard, the City's primary north-south commercial corridor, could benefit from streetscape improvements; small historic districts may help preserve the half-century old structures, and provide affordable/moderate rents to residents; long term goals are to ensure the commercial and residential developments are complementary to each other; the future trolley service linking the CBD, the Village of Merrick Park and Metro Rail will circulate through the North Ponce District; existing apartment buildings have little or no off street parking; parking for businesses spills over into residential streets; there is a need to preserve historic buildings, and tax incentives are available; development rights need to be balanced with the need to preserve the low to mid-rise character of the area; maintain and enhance street tree program.

Charrette Recommendations/Design:

Develop a master streetscape plan for all downtown and North Ponce streets to enhance the City as a Garden City, with an emphasis on pedestrian comfort as follows: maximize sidewalk width; add shade trees to increase the tree canopy; minimize vehicular land widths; maximize on-street parking; preserve commercial/retail visibility; access and accentuate mid-block crossings; design aesthetically pleasing lighting; select plant material types to relate to street scale; and promote increased urban open space in safe, accessible areas. Encourage the use of innovative design and planting techniques, including structural soil, to ensure survivability of plant material.

Develop four generic approaches based on the variety of existing rights of way and conditions as follows: activate trolley planned for north-south route from S.W. 8th Street to Merrick Park and Metro Rail; add east-west service on Miracle Mile and Biltmore Way up to Venetian Pool and the Biltmore Hotel; consider a long-term plan for fixed rail to substitute for rubber tire trolleys and study additional routes throughout the City in addition to routes previously mentioned; develop the eastern edge of Philips Park with liner residential buildings to conceal the parking garage now visible across the park and to add eyes on the park; use development proceeds to purchase land for small parks in the North Ponce area; reinforce five identifiable communities in North Ponce, per prior study, with a streetscape that establishes identity and a special green space for each community.

Additional design recommendations: create a central square for all of North Ponce at the intersection of Ponce de Leon Boulevard and East Ponce Boulevard with arcaded buildings or similar edge defining attributes surrounding the new square; redesign Ponce de Leon corridor to include increased sidewalk widths; sidewalk landscaping; limitation of vehicular driveway curb cuts; and traffic calming, including a landscaped median; provide landscaped traffic calming elements for Galiano and Salzedo Streets.

Charrette Recommendations/Management:

Position downtown and North Ponce retail to be complementary to, rather than competing with, the tenant mix of Merrick Park; create remote parking respectful of surrounding residential uses at the north terminus of the trolley system (the south terminus is already served at Metro Rail); introduce a residential parking permit system for the North Ponce residential neighborhood.

Charrette Recommendations/Policy:

Consolidate dense development and redevelopment of downtown to enhance the public realm and its transit friendliness and walkability; work with the County to assume jurisdiction of all streets in downtown and North Ponce; preserve the historic apartment buildings in North Ponce and develop a methodology for implementation thereof; preserve North Ponce as the City's neighborhood for affordable rental housing; revise the zoning code to promote infill building in North Ponce that is compatible with historic types, with parking behind habitable space fronting sidewalks to ensure eyes on the street; revise the zoning code to allow bed and breakfast uses with smaller unit sizes and parking on the street with permits.

At the conclusion of this presentation, Mr. Riel reiterated the purpose of the meeting as one to educate City staff from the standpoint of each representative board and to solicit input from members of the public. At this time, he introduced Scott Bolyard, who presented the three-dimensional computer model of the NPD. The model depicted three differing scenarios of the District: 1) existing buildings in the area; 2) buildout without Mediterranean; 3) buildout with Mediterranean. He reiterated that the model was in early developmental stages.

Summarized comments during a review of 1) existing buildings follow:

Mr. Riel: If someone purchases an entire block, that mass, depending on the design, would be more bulky, but not necessarily higher. Mr. Hernandez said this appeared agreeable because the model showed a six-story height with a two-story footprint. To include the needed stairs and elevator on a taller building, a wider footprint would be necessary, and the buildings would be more monolithic. Mr. Fullerton added that six stories could not be built without providing parking and related amenities. Mr. Riel stated that the area was developed during a time when the City had no parking requirements. In response to Mr. Pardo's query about historical buildings, Mr. Riel replied that this model was only designed to demonstrate height.

Summarized comments during a review of 3) buildout with Mediterranean:

- This computer model is an extrapolation on the existing building footprint.
- Commercial buildings require 200 feet of frontage and 20,000 square feet of site area to build eight stories with Mediterranean. Multi-family projects need 100 feet of frontage and 20,000 square feet of site area to build eight stories with Mediterranean.

- Parking is dependent on use and number of rooms (residential). Commercial parking requirements are one space to 350 square feet; residential requirements are 1.6 spaces per unit.
- Alley vacations in the area are not relevant because there are no alleys.

Meeting Chair Felix Pardo then called attention to the information provided all Board members prior to the meeting, including the Douglas Apartment District Task Force (DADTF) study, a zoning review prepared by Correa, Valle & Valle and the relevant recommendations that resulted from the 2002 Charrette.

Regarding the DADTF study, Mr. Pardo observed that the amount of information organized and assembled in a short period of time was remarkable. He said there is an impression of overbuilding and over development, and the direction, or lack thereof, of construction that is occurring now or will in the future based on many projects that have been constructed in the CBD area.

Mr. Pardo commented that this area is unique to the rest of Coral Gables. Many buildings have a scale and historical significance different than other City areas, as this is first considered a commercial area and an apartment district area. He compared the area to South Beach, minus the style, without the impediments of not having adequate through traffic. Another similarity to South Beach is the high amount of absentee ownership. He suggested that it may be appropriate to offer incentives to propel development of the area, and described the DADTF study as relevant to the district today as it was ten years ago.

Ms. Lubin addressed the historical elements of the district, stating that a report produced in 2000 identified 400 properties in the district built prior to 1950. From that report, a map was developed depicting buildings constructed between 1910 and 1950. The 400 identified historic properties each has a Florida Master Site File form, and the Historical Resources Department has extensive research materials about the properties.

Mr. Hernandez observed that the existence of the Florida Master Site forms could provide the foundation for designating the area an official District. Ms. Lubin stated that the next level of research needed is to review microfilm to learn what alterations have occurred to these properties. Typically, Ms. Lubin explained, when owners learn their properties can be designated, they want to take that step. If the properties are also income producing, there are federal tax benefits available. In addition, if an area cannot be designated a district because it lacks contributing properties, there is the concept of conservation district that could apply. In the case of a conservation district, zoning incentives may apply.

Mr. Calvo suggested that appropriate property owners be informed that their properties are historic and to let them know the benefits of the properties. There followed a discussion about additions and alterations to historical structures. Ms. Lubin said there is potential to do the equivalent of what the Cottage Ordinance did for the small homes on the residential side of the North Ponce area that were being demolished. The City created the Cottage Ordinance which didn't designate the properties historic, but gave them zoning incentives to provide benefit to maintaining the structure rather than demolishing it. Ms. Lubin suggested that similar incentives could be developed for structures that are not able to be designated historic so they can still maintain their character.

Summary of continuing general discussion:

- Research would have to be conducted to determine the actual number of properties that would qualify for historic designation. Research would take substantial time, but letters could be sent to owners of all properties over 50 years old.
- On February 11, 2003, the City Commission will vote on passing an amendment to the ordinance to require property owners seeking permission to demolish property in the City to first be reviewed by the Historical Resources Department to determine if the property has historic significance.
- University of Miami resources may be available to help with historic research.

Ms. Swanson stated that the study produced ten years ago identified problems with the area that still exist today or have worsened. One of the five objectives of the Economic Development Board is to identify the entire North Ponce district as a revitalization goal for the City so it doesn't further deteriorate and begins to invigorate. Whether code issues or defining resident parking permits, the solutions were identified many years ago. She called attention to page 22 of the DADTF study.

Continuation of discussion:

- A striking comment in the DADTF study is that "status quo means continuing deterioration." The dichotomy is that people are assembling to construct large buildings and old properties are in disrepair and creating an eyesore.
- Not considered in the DADTF study is the use of TDR to change from square footage to specific units to go into a receiver area in the City. For example, instead of demolishing smaller buildings, give them the ability to sell the TDR in specific units which could be designated to go into a receiver area, such as in the industrial section near the Village of Merrick Park, and creating an incentive to provide senior housing in those areas, tremendously needed in the City.
- Protect for rehabilitation some of the poorly maintained but historic existing apartments in the apartment district.
- The trolley system will reduce some of the congestion in the area.
- Obstacles to developing senior housing: to avoid buildings 16 stories in height, allow for setbacks of greater than 100 feet if height is limited; the 25% retail requirement for mixed use developments makes no sense and needs to be reduced to a percentage of the first floor square footage.
- The advantage to the developer of the mixed use ordinance is that the density of apartments is computed differently. Without the mixed use and the commercial development within the building, FAR is used to determine the number of units and there is a cap to units per acre that applies. Because excessive FAR may exist, the developer may have to build larger units to use the entire FAR, but the market won't absorb such units. Mixed use allows a developer to use the entire FAR without regard to units per acre, but then the 25% retail rule applies. This is impractical in the North Ponce area, which is currently a vehicle area versus a pedestrian area.
- Most retail vendors cannot exist on neighborhood shoppers.
- If the ground level of buildings is 90% commercial and retail won't work, offices will occupy the ground level and the area will be devoid of people at night. Restaurants and shops will cause daytime and evening activity.

- The Mediterranean Ordinance Committee discussed a more realistic percentage as related to a floor plate and shared parking uses to apply on a sliding scale depending on the mixes of uses on properties.
- Suggestion to create an incentive for people not to assemble properties in order to retain property sizes as they are and avoid properties that consume one half to an entire block.
- If a developer chooses to build a low density building, low density regulations will apply.
- Costs of land in Coral Gables are so high that developers will build as high as possible to maximize the mass, increase the number of units and make the project more economically viable.
- Smaller, historic buildings will act as a buffer or block between the larger buildings.
- Examine zoning issues.
- Ensuring preservation of the area while being careful about not removing the property rights of people, of downzoning. Incentives must be provided.
- South Beach's success should be examined. The scale of the buildings and access to restaurants, parks, bars and entertainment areas attract people.
- Develop the Ponce corridor properly, i.e., back 100-200 feet, and devise incentives to encourage people to build what the City wants.
- Encourage re-development of some of the residential buildings and areas.
- If more than 50% of the assessed value of the building is spent in the renovation of the building, the entire building must be brought up to code.
- Resident parking permit program cited as a plus. Decals, signs and enforcement important.
- Residential areas and parking begins one to two blocks off Ponce de Leon Boulevard.
- Biggest problem as the area develops will be parking. Find a way to provide more parking on existing streets by either reconfiguring the streets or changing circulation patterns.
- Create systems of parking garages to service neighborhoods so people living in each block would have access to a parking garage within their own block that would prevent massing created when parking is constructed under buildings. This would create some pedestrian traffic but would provide people who prefer not to park on the street with a parking garage. People could pay for garage use or a special taxing district could be established.
- Parking garage spaces cost \$21,000 per space; parking garages can be a problem of scale.

Public Input Summary:

- Ken Musiak, 540 San Esteban: Mr. Musiak expressed concern for quality of life issues from a resident's standpoint; only seeing concerns about development, developers' rights, how big things can be. He has concerns about traffic congestion, striving for optimal density, quality of life. Examine how Miami Beach has resolved some of these problems. Re-examine the Mediterranean Ordinance. Keep residents' concerns in mind.
- Joe Fadel, 1 Alhambra Circle: Mr. Fadel stated that the changes being discussed have already begun. Plans have been submitted on preliminary basis to the City, or are already in progress through the Building and Zoning Department. He cited several specific projects in various stages of progress throughout the area beginning just north of Miracle Mile. He urged the combined boards to view these current activities as important in terms of developing incentives for the residential areas. He expressed distaste for tall buildings in residential areas, describing the effect as being surrounded by concrete.

Tri-Board comments:

- Keep residential low-rise areas and figure out the right incentives to establish good zoning.
- Recommendation that staff conduct preliminary ordinance work for small residential buildings with a package of incentives. Package the ordinance similar to the cottage ordinance.
- The 10-year old PADTF study is the foundation for establishing legislation to make this a reality.
- Will the people who are building the mixed-use buildings who don't want to put retail or commercial on the second floor give up a floor to eliminate that requirement?
- If a current cost of \$21,000 per parking space is prohibitive, it will still be unaffordable 10 years from now. Some builders may be willing to build extra parking spots for the neighborhood or other buildings to use. The cheapest parking lot that can be built today is approximately \$14,000 per parking space. Either the City needs to find land to build buildings for parking or the City needs to get out of the parking business. If the right types of buildings are built and the right types of incentives are developed, large buildings will pay for smaller ones.
- Staff is talented and should devise a plan or proposed ordinance that can be examined in draft form by the combined boards and the Commission. The only way to accomplish any progress is to start.
- South Beach is a parking and traffic nightmare, and the buildings are rampant with code violations. It is important to establish what we are going to do before we begin doing anything.
- One significant problem is that elderly residents have no appropriate accommodations within the City. They become empty nesters who can no longer enjoy the City they have spent the past 40 years living in.
- Staff comment (Dennis Smith): The problem along Ponce de Leon Boulevard is that the high-rise corridor is on lots or platted at 100 foot depth. The other issue on Ponce is the setbacks because now when a setback is applied to those properties, parking becomes very inefficient. Developers/contractors/builders say that the 100 foot depth doesn't allow for the building of an efficient parking garage that maximizes the number of parking spaces; perhaps the depth needs to go back 150 to 200 feet to help determine the most efficient type of parking floor along Ponce. FAR is the bottom line. Parking doesn't count in FAR. The less efficient the parking is, the higher the structure will go, so something must be done to make those parking plates more efficient. During the Charrette, mechanical parking was discussed as one solution. Lift parking spaces for residential units. This increases the efficiency and reduces the bulk of the parking facilities in a building.
- The Comprehensive Land Use Plan would have to be amended in order to take some of these steps.
- The North Gables area is very long and narrow, so if parking is provided along Ponce, walking a block to either the east or west of Ponce to an efficient lower parking structure, the problem could be alleviated without the City getting into the business of land acquisition and construction.
- Strike a balance: on one hand, create an efficient parking plate, about 120 feet deep, and the intrusion of a larger mass into the residential neighborhoods. Ponce could easily support eight story buildings on the property line, and if the ability for people to create

- turnoffs/dropoffs in front of their buildings is eliminated, then the buildings would not have to protrude as far back into the neighborhoods, but efficient parking would be available.
- 200 feet back would give a developer a lot of flexibility in terms of fronting the building, the parking with walk up apartments, beautiful brownstones that activates the street and pedestrian experience. People can park in front on the street and walk up to their apartments or park within their buildings. Setbacks could be situated in some areas, retail and/or commercial in some areas.
 - Concern was expressed about putting all parking on Ponce de Leon Boulevard and expecting the market to accept walking two blocks to their apartments.
 - The City may have to purchase some of these properties in strategic locations to provide parking either below ground or one to two levels above ground in the middle of a block that would go from street to street. The frontage along each street would be residential and the area behind it would be for parking and people from all directions in the middle of this residential district would have access within 100 yards of their entrance.
 - Regarding purchasers currently buying multiple contiguous properties along Ponce, Dennis Smith stated that along Ponce, there are four sites that have been assembled.
 - Purchasers have to come to Planning and Zoning to get parking for the Ponce frontage portion.
 - Two-story historic buildings would face the side of a parking garage across the street unless something is done.
 - If incentives are given to increase parking, then regulations need to be built in to prevent this from happening.
 - The sixteen stories, if allowed, must stay on Ponce de Leon Boulevard or they will destroy the neighborhoods. Establishing the correct incentives can keep the number of stories down.
 - The Historical Resources Department and the Historic Preservation Board was encouraged to move forward with generating an overlay of the entire area, and using such a report as a guideline.
 - The Development Department and Economic Development Board was encouraged to provide incentives to generate an optimum result; look at specific funding/taxing district or economic mechanism for specific uses in this area.
 - Make sure people who want to build something have the proper incentives to do what they want to do.
 - Be pro-active so developers know what to expect up front, rather than cause them to make numerous changes throughout the process.
 - If an overlay is developed, create incentives for independent senior housing as a category for a type of incentive program, i.e., trade off parking for independent senior facilities.
 - If you are going to market and attract people 55 years old and over, certain specific amenities must be provided.
 - Create a holistic package.

Additional Public Input:

- Bill DuPriest: Mr. DuPriest and his wife own a 3,800 square foot building. For the past 22 years, they have wanted to add a 3,000 square foot addition to the top of the roof, but

they would have to provide ten parking spaces to do that. He stated they would likely sell their property to someone to assemble properties for a high-rise.

Ms. Swanson pointed out that this property was an original Stutz Bearcat showroom. Mr. DuPriest said before being a showroom, the building was a barn for horses that pulled the City's streetcars.

Mr. DuPriest asked consideration of two points: 1) Consider adding green space, urging the City to consider eminent domain for any green space in the area because it will enhance the quality of life and make people want to live there; 2) There is a beautiful building on Ponce de Leon Boulevard that won a number of architectural awards, but has ingress and egress directly on Ponce. He called this an egregious affront to the public and an amendable, comfortable way of life. He urged that this not be allowed to happen in the future.

Mr. Pardo urged the Planning Department to expedite researching and determining what and how specific incentives could be implemented in light of the relevant study performed ten years ago. He asked that a bulleted, highlighted summary package be presented to the Planning and Zoning Board for discussion.

Mr. Pardo concluded by thanking City staff, all board members and members of the public for their participation. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Eric Riel, Jr.
Planning Director

Dona M. Lubin
Historical Resources Director

Catherine Swanson
Development Director