

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Section 15

Ramon Trias

*Lake Worth Beach City Manager
Candidate Report*

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Resume

RAMON TRIAS
7151 SW 103 Ct. Cir.
Miami, FL 33173
Ramontrias@aol.com

POSITION

City Manager, City of Lake Worth Beach

QUALIFICATIONS

- Principal author of 1992 Redevelopment Plan for Downtown Lake Worth, which resulted in reconstruction of Lake and Lucerne Avenues
- 23 years of public sector experience in Public Administration in Florida
- 7 years of private experience in Planning, Architecture and Preservation as principal of own firm
- Since 1990, staffed and organized 85 Urban Design Charrettes, in 16 states and internationally
- 10 years as part-time adjunct professor of History, Theory and Design of Architecture
- 20 years of civic service, including chairman of Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, vice chairman of St. Lucie County Planning Board and trustee of Florida Trust for Historic Preservation
- Member of the American Institute of Certified Planners; founding member of the Congress for the New Urbanism, signer of the CNU charter and CNU-A accredited; registered architect, Florida, AR94425 and NCARB 67353; LEED-AP Accredited Professional
- PhD in Public Affairs, (Policy and Administration)

EXPERIENCE

TOWN PLANNING AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

2012 - Present **Assistant Director of Development Services for Planning and Zoning**
Director of Planning and Zoning
Coral Gables, Florida

Reorganized planning and zoning functions of City as a single division. Improved review times and customer service. Coordinated and chaired Development Review Committee and established high standards and effective processes for project review. Enhanced

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aesthetic review process for Board of Architects. Developed reference materials on Mediterranean Architecture and Best Practices for Architecture. Prepared planning plans and amendments to zoning code for key areas. Provided design advice for capital projects, including Miracle Mile, Giralda Avenue and Public Safety building. Promoted transparency and public information with web tools. Reorganized and updated the Coral Gables Zoning Code. Advised City Commission, Planning Board, Board of Architects and Board of Adjustment on development issues.

- 2005 - 2012 **Founder and Principal**, Trias and Associates: Town Planning, Architecture, Preservation
Fort Pierce, Florida
- Organized and staffed charrettes and workshops for public clients, including the City of Vero Beach, Gretna, Sarasota, Fort Pierce Redevelopment Agency, Fort Pierce Farms Water Control District, and others, and prepared master plans for redevelopment and capital investment projects.
Prepared development plans for new town of Indrio Groves (1000 acres), and new villages of Laurel Gardens (500 acres), Grand Reserve (130 acres) and Sunset Lakes (135 acres).
Organized and staffed grass-roots project "Visions of Fort Pierce."
Architect for historic preservation projects.
Continuing services consultant or sub-consultant to FDOT District 4, St. Lucie County MPO, St. Lucie County, City of Fort Pierce CRA, University of Florida, Florida International University. Expert witness on planning issues for Palm Beach County Attorney.
- 1999 - 2005 **Director of Development**
Fort Pierce, Florida
- 1995 - 1999 **Director of Planning**
Fort Pierce, Florida
- Reorganized and staffed planning and zoning activities, and supervised building and code enforcement divisions. Developed city-wide plan, through public participation efforts, including charrettes and workshops. Guided design and construction of waterfront plaza, major road corridors, library, police substation, visitor center and Riverwalk. Worked with FDOT, County and School Board to improve the design of projects, such as Magnet School for the Arts and Smithsonian Aquarium.
Established Historic Preservation program, Art in Public Places program and educational efforts, including exhibits and publications.
Advised City Commission, Planning Board, Board of Adjustment, Historic Preservation Board and Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) on development issues.
- 1991 - 1995 **Urban Design Coordinator, Regional Planner**
Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, Stuart, Florida
- Established technical assistance program for urban design and city planning.
Organized and staffed 20 charrettes, in West Palm Beach, Lake Worth, Boca Raton, South Martin County, Boynton Beach, Lake Park and other towns.
Assisted municipalities in the implementation of master plans and form-based codes.
Principal author of *Strategic Regional Policy Plan*, "Vision for the Future".

Since 1990 **Urban Design Consultant**

Organized charrettes for road designs, downtown and greenfield development and educational workshops. Major projects included: Austin, Texas; Parlier and Lindsay, Central Valley, California; San Francisco bay area towns, California; Salem, Oregon; Oyster Bay and Huntington, Long Island, New York; Traverse City, Niles, Hartland, and Grand Rapids, Michigan; Charlotte, North Carolina; Gainesville and Orlando, Florida; San Salvador, El Salvador; Calgary, Canada.

ARCHITECTURE

- 1989 - 1990 **Architectural Designer**
Ron Dorris and Associates, Homestead, Florida
Prepared construction documents for residential and commercial projects.
- 1989 **Drafter**
Rodriguez and Quiroga, Coral Gables, Florida
Prepared archival drawings for the Historic American Building Survey.
- 1988 **Architectural Designer**
Jorge Hernandez, Architect
Prepared schematic designs and construction documents for residences.
- 1987 **Architectural Designer**
School of Architecture, University of Miami
Prepared plans for library renovation.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH

- 2010 - 2011 **Researcher and Adjunct Professor, Planning and Architecture**
Lehman Center for Transportation Research, and school of Architecture, Florida International University, Miami, Florida
- 2008 - 2012 **Instructor, Continuing Education**
Fort Pierce Academy of Town Design, Fort Pierce, Florida
Taught short courses on Town Planning and Historic Preservation.
- 2007 **Visiting Assistant Professor, Architecture**
University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida
Taught Town Planning studio. Assisted with Master Plan for School of Medicine.
- 2001 - 2008 **Adjunct Professor, Architecture**
Indian River State College, Fort Pierce, Florida
Founded Architecture Program. Taught courses on History, Theory and Design.
- 1989 - present **Speaker, on Urban Design, Architecture and Planning**
Institute of Traffic Engineers; National and Florida American Planning Association;

National League of Cities; Florida Redevelopment Association; FDOT seminars; University of Virginia; Congress for the New Urbanism; Florida Trust for Historic Preservation; Green Building seminar, Palm Beach; Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce; FIU Business School; University of Miami Schools of Law and Architecture.

CIVIC SERVICE

- 2015 – 2016 **Mayor’s Advisory Group on Historic Preservation, Miami-Dade County, Florida**
Member
- 2010 – 2015 **Seven50, Southeast Florida Prosperity Plan**
Executive Committee Member
- 2009 – 2012 **Smart Growth Committee, St. Lucie County, Florida**
Chairman
- 2008 - 2012 **Board of Historic Preservation, City of Fort Pierce, Florida**
Vice-Chairman
- 2007 - 2012 **Fort Pierce Academy of Town Design, 501 – c3 organization.**
Founder and President, prepared educational exhibits and publications on architecture and town design. Received research grants to study Transfer of Development Rights and rural development issues.
- 2005 - 2015 **Florida Trust for Historic Preservation**
Trustee
- 2004 - 2012 **Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, Stuart, Florida**
Board Member, Treasurer, Vice Chairman, Chairman.
- 1999 - 2007 **Planning and Zoning Commission, St. Lucie County, Florida**
Board Member, Vice Chairman
Provided leadership on growth management issues.
- 1998 - 2008 **Manatee Education and Observation Center, Fort Pierce, Florida**
Board member provided direction for environmental education programs.

PUBLICATIONS

- 2015 **Seven50 Plan and Regional Governance in Southeast Florida, Current Urban Studies Journal**
Principal author of peer reviewed paper.
- 2006 - 2007 **Indian River Magazine**
Author, general interest articles on architecture.
- 2001 - 2005 **Fort Pierce Tribune, daily newspaper**
Author, multiple articles on architecture, town planning and cultural issues.

- 2001 **Fort Pierce, a Town in Florida**, book
Principal author, historic development of oldest town in Florida's Treasure Coast.
- 1999 **Street Design Guidelines for Healthy Neighborhoods**, book
Coauthor with Dan Burden, manual for street design. Recognized as definitive guide on pedestrian design issues.
- 1998 **Building Plans and Urban Design Principles for Cities, Towns and Villages in South Florida**, book and plan guide
Contributing author, prepared chapter on building types and city redevelopment.

EDUCATION

DEGREES

- 2014 - 2019 **Ph. D. in Public Affairs, Public Policy and Administration** Department
Florida International University, Miami, Florida
Dissertation, *Democracy and Bureaucracy of Smart Place: Coral Gables, FL and the Role of Aspirational Content in Local Governance*
Phi Alpha Alpha
- 1990 - 1991 **Master of Architecture, Suburb and Town Design Program**
University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida
Studied under Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk
Outstanding student award
- 1984 - 1989 **Bachelor of Architecture**
Bachelor of Arts
University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida
Magna Cum Laude, General University Honors, Dean's List, President's List

SEMINARS

- 2017 **Florida International University, Miami, Florida**
Six Sigma Green Belt
- 2012- 2014 **National Management Incident System (NIMS)**, Miami-Dade County, Florida
FEMA Training
- 1996 - 2005 **Indian River Community College, Fort Pierce, Florida**
Management seminars
- 1994 **Harvard Graduate School of Design, Boston, Massachusetts**
Institute of Affordable Housing
- 1987 **Rice University**
Architecture program in Amsterdam, Paris and Barcelona

Candidate Introduction

Ramon Trias

EDUCATION

Ph. D. in Public Affairs (Public Administration and Policy), Florida International University
Master of Architecture, University of Miami
Bachelor of Architecture, University of Miami
Bachelor of Arts (Spanish), University of Miami
Registered Architect, Florida

EXPERIENCE

Planning and Zoning, Coral Gables, Florida	2012-Present
President, Trias and Associates, Town Planning, Architecture, Preservation Development, Fort Pierce, Florida	2005-2012
Planning Coordinator, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council	1995-2005
	1991-1995

BACKGROUND

The population of Coral Gables is approximately 50,000. The city has 846 employees. I directly supervise up to 12 individuals. The total budget is \$254,000,000 and the general fund is \$177,000,000.

The three most important issues facing Coral Gables are:

- Quality of large-scale development
- Effective communication with residents
- Public projects, new and maintenance (street design, public buildings)

GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE

In 1992 I led a redevelopment plan for Downtown Lake Worth, when I worked at the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council. It was my first project after graduate school, and I had the opportunity to apply theory to a community that was motivated to improve quality of life.

As a result, Lake and Lucerne Avenues were reconstructed with wider sidewalks and city staff expanded and implemented many ideas discussed with the community.

I have always been impressed with the city's historic urban fabric and appropriate development scale. This job presents an opportunity to enhance quality of life, one project at a time.

My management style is to provide direction and encourage professionals to use judgment and strive for quality. I do not micromanage, but I take full responsibility for outcomes.

Ramon Trias

The staff would say that I add value to their work by providing constant input and policy direction.

The elected officials would say that I provide the information and advice they need to enhance the quality of life in the community.

My strengths are professionalism, expertise in planning and development, experience in the private and public sectors.

In terms of weaknesses, I have not followed a conventional career path for the position of city manager.

The metrics I use to measure performance are customer service responsiveness, quality of development projects, feedback from Commission.

My greatest achievement is the construction of the waterfront Plaza in Downtown Fort Pierce. A public parking lot was transformed into the most iconic, beautiful, and functional public space in St. Lucie County, with modest local resources and great public support and pride.

One of my regrets is related to several towns I designed in private practice prior to the great recession of 2007. They were not implemented. I learned to respect the relentless effect of finances and economic conditions, even when they are completely beyond our control.

Yes, I have let employees go. Two cases were clear violations of regulations. It was the best decision for the city and, in the long term, for the employees.

The challenges facing the next City Manager for Lake Worth Beach are establishing an expectation of excellence and quality, based on the policy direction of the Commission.

In my first six months I will listen with the intent of understanding and facilitating the goals of the Commission and the aspirations of the community.

The media has always been a valued partner towards informing the community and building support for an enhanced quality of life. Nothing in my background would embarrass an employer.

Social media adds value and immediacy to an overall communication strategy. My view is that communication is a profession. I would seek the assistance of professional staff.

None of the activists in the communities that I worked will contact the city with “the dirt” on me.

In my leisure time I like to read and visit buildings and towns of great artistic merit.

Ramon Trias

SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE YOURSELF

Professional
Honest
Patient
Experienced
Visionary
Practical

REASON FOR WANTING TO LEAVE CURRENT JOB

The past decade in Coral Gables has been an outstanding experience. Nevertheless, I am ready to apply many lessons learned.

CURRENT/MOST RECENT OR RELEVANT SALARY

\$138,000 base salary plus car allowance and other benefits.

CB&A Background Checks

**Background Check Summary for
RAMON TRIAS**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Miami-Dade County, FL	No Records Found
St. Lucie County, FL	No Records Found
State	
Florida	No Records Found

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Miami-Dade County, FL	Results Pending
St. Lucie County, FL	Results Pending
Federal	
Florida	No Records Found

Motor Vehicle

Florida	No Records Found
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Credit

Excellent

Personal Bankruptcy

No Records Found

Sex Offender Registry

Not Listed

Education

Confirmed

Employment

Confirmed expect for:
Coral Gables (2012 – Present)

Social Media

Nothing of Concern Found

**Background Check Summary for
RAMON TRIAS**

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

**Background Check Summary for
RAMON TRIAS
Personal Disclosure**

Name of Applicant: RAMON TRIAS

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?
Yes No
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?
Yes No
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?
Yes No
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
6. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated?
Yes No
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?
Yes No
8. Please list all your social media accounts (Facebook / Instagram / LinkedIn / Twitter, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one. LINKEDIN - RAMON TRIAS
9. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?
Yes No
10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.

Attested to: Ramon Trias
Signature of Applicant

Please email this form via PDF DOCUMENT to Lynelle@cb-asso.com or via fax to (561) 621-5965 **no later than 5:00 PM PST 07/30/2021.**

(Note: Please be sure to sign the form with your actual signature if you are sending Fax or PDF Document)

Property of Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Reference Notes

Reference Notes
Ramon Trias

Arceli Redila – Principal Planner, City of Coral Gables, FL 305-460-5212

Ms. Redila has reported to Mr. Trias since around 2017. Mr. Trias provides clear direction to the team and is very enjoyable to work with. He is good at his job.

Land use and zoning are difficult issues, and the public generally only attends community workshops when they are very angry. Mr. Trias does very well in these situations. When citizens are being difficult, he responds by thanking them for the question, or commenting that they bring up a good point. He is really good with the public and stake holders.

Mr. Trias is not a micromanager, he is more involved with the coordination. He makes good decisions both when hiring personnel and in general. He maintains an organization at a high performance level. He keeps employees informed on a daily basis.

Their department is in a studio and Mr. Trias leads the staff every day in exchanging ideas to resolve issues. He manages the budget well. He is very responsive. He responds well in challenging circumstances because he has a mellow personality.

While Mr. Trias has been involved in controversy related to planning and zoning, he has not personally been involved in anything controversial.

Ms. Redila would definitely hire Mr. Trias. She believes he would be a good city manager. He has done well as a top-level manager for Coral Gables.

Words or phrases used to describe Ramon Trias:

- Great manager,
- Organized,
- Good with time management, and
- Knowledgeable.

Strengths: Knowing how to dance around the issues and facilitate a good conversation between stake holders. He achieves end results others are in awe of and did not consider possible.

Weaknesses: Strengths can be weaknesses. Though he is not a micromanager, he tries to manage and coordinate everything. Also, he is good at providing direction and feedback to the senior staff but could be more demanding of the admins.

Reference Notes
Ramon Trias

Dennis Beach – Former City Manager, Fort Pierce, FL 772-971-5767

Mr. Beach has known Mr. Trias since the mid 1990s and they worked together for ten years. Mr. Trias reported to Mr. Beach.

Mr. Trias is a genius, and quite a capable individual. Some of the better employees in the department were hired by Mr. Trias. He makes good decisions generally. He is definitely a change agent, and he is innovative as well.

In Fort Pierce Mr. Trias was very active in the community. He led the effort to involve the community in the decision-making process. He was excellent with the public. He led a series of planning workshops that resulted in the direction that the community has followed since.

Mr. Trias kept Mr. Beach informed. Mr. Trias was a leader who rallied the staff around the vision of the elected body. He was very capable of handling the budget for his operation. He completed tasks on time. He created more stress than he received because he is a very demanding individual who expects the best from both colleagues and the people he works with in the public.

As an architect and planner Mr. Trias sometimes was at odds with other professional architects and planners because he was certain that he was correct and wanted to do it his way. Nothing in his conduct or behavior would concern a reasonable person. He left Fort Pierce to start his own consulting business.

Mr. Beach would absolutely hire Mr. Trias. Mr. Beach cannot say whether Mr. Trias would be a good City Manager because it requires a different skillset, attitude, and flexibility. However, if he approaches the position the way he approached his role in Fort Pierce, he will do just fine. He was really good at his job and really made a great difference in the community. He may be able to accomplish more as a manager because he will have more authority.

Words or phrases used to describe Ramon Trias:

- Very determined,
- Tenacious,
- Intelligent, and
- Leader.

Strengths: Training and education have prepared him well for what he does, very focused, determined, gets the job done.

Weaknesses: Like others who are extremely capable, he does not communicate as well as he could and can be assertive at times. Some may see this as a weakness and others a strength.

Reference Notes
Ramon Trias

Venny Torre – Builder / Developer, Coral Gables, FL 305-442-9494

Mr. Torre has known Mr. Trias since around 2014. Mr. Torre is a builder and a developer in the community, and they have interacted in this regard. In addition, Mr. Torre has served in many roles in the city. He is president of the business permit district, and he has served on the park preservation board, the planning and zoning board, and more.

Mr. Torre values his interactions with Mr. Trias and rates him high in terms of job performance. While people may be frustrated and complain that they do not get what they want, Mr. Trias is right on point in his decisions. He is good about keeping others informed.

The staff in Mr. Trias' department are top notch, they are very highly regarded in the community. He is often out in the community, and he does a good job with residents. He gives presentations and explains projects. When he becomes frustrated with another's lack of understanding, he keeps his cool and has always been respectful to them.

The code is subject to interpretation. For example, zoning interpretations on how to park a car in a specific zoning type vary. Mr. Trias works through the fine print to determine how it all can work. He is amenable to working with individuals to arrive at solutions. He is not robotic, and he does not see matters in black and white.

Mr. Trias has not been involved in any matters of large consequence, though he has worked in controversial situations because of his role in the city. However, nothing occurred that put him in the spotlight in a negative way.

Mr. Torre does not know of anything related to Mr. Trias that is concerning. Those who complain about Mr. Trias say that his ideas are too old fashioned or rigid.

Mr. Torre would hire Mr. Trias. While Mr. Torre is not sure whether Mr. Trias would be a good city manager, that role takes a different skillset, he is not saying no to the idea. Mr. Trias is a good person.

Words or phrases used to describe Ramon Trias:

- Thoughtful,
- Helpful,
- Visionary,
- Flexible,
- Professional, and
- Straight up person.

Reference Notes
Ramon Trias

Strengths: Good vision for what the city should be and what is needed to move the vision forward, very scholarly and makes decisions on his knowledge of architecture and planning rather than being swayed by the politics.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Miriam Ramos – City Attorney, City of Coral Gables, FL 305-460-5084 305-733-0216

Ms. Ramos has worked with Mr. Trias since March of 2015. Mr. Trias is extremely knowledgeable and is always improving his skillset. He attained a higher degree in architecture or planning.

Mr. Trias makes good decisions. He is innovative, a change agent, and he maintains an organization at a high performance level. He always keeps others informed.

Often out in the public Mr. Trias was very visible in the community. He worked with the public generally well but could be a little impatient at times. He is responsive and his responses are timely. In stressful situations he can come across a little strong, but he always finds a way to collaborate and resolve the issue.

One project Mr. Trias led was the update of the entire zoning code which had not been revamped since 2007 so it was a significant undertaking. The process lasted over a few years, and he was at the helm.

Everything in zoning is controversial but nothing embarrassing or controversial comes to mind in relation to Mr. Trias specifically. His conduct would not embarrass an employer.

Ms. Ramos would hire Mr. Trias. She only knows him as a Planning Director and has not evaluated him on other attributes needed for a City Manager role.

Words or phrases used to describe Ramon Trias:

- Committed,
- Responsible,
- Responsive,
- Knowledgeable,
- Intelligent, and
- Confident.

Strengths: Work knowledge, knows the code, applies processes and procedures.

Weaknesses: He can be a little impatient.

Reference Notes
Ramon Trias

Marshall Bellin – Architect, Coral Gables, FL 305-447-1927

Mr. Bellin is an architect in the community and he has worked with Mr. Trias in this capacity. They met in 2012 when Mr. Bellin was hired.

Because his allegiance is to the community Mr. Trias makes good decisions with respect to his work. He is very involved with the community. Mr. Bellin has enjoyed their interactions. Mr. Trias answers questions and they talk about the issues at hand.

Coral Gables has a very complicated zoning code and sometimes issues come up that are not easy to decipher. Mr. Trias' guidance in these situations is good. He is always very responsive and he is timely in his responses.

Decisions made with respect to zoning can be controversial and Mr. Trias has been involved in the conversations, but he has not personally been involved in any controversy. Mr. Bellin is not aware of anything concerning about Mr. Trias' behavior, nor does he know anyone who has a negative opinion of Mr. Trias.

Mr. Bellin would hire Mr. Trias, though he is not sure what the responsibilities of a city manager are. Mr. Trias does his job well and is a good candidate.

Words or phrases used to describe Ramon Trias:

- Presents well,
- Conscientious,
- Easy to work with, and
- Great communication.

Strengths: Planning.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Prepared by: Lynelle Klein
Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Internet Research

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
March 2, 2021

Coral Gables commission forges deal on contentious Miracle Mile rezoning. Will it fly?

Author: Andres Viglucci

Coral Gables officials looking for a key to unlocking redevelopment on ailing Miracle Mile without obliterating its small-scale charm say they may have found it: A consensus measure that would cap new construction at four stories.

That's taller than most existing buildings on the Mile, but two stories shorter than current rules permit. At the same time, city commissioners and planners appear to have settled on an outright ban on parking within the footprint of any new buildings on the retail street. Together, they say, the contemplated new rules will protect the Mile's pedestrian-first ambience while promoting mixed-use development at the right scale to revitalize one of South Florida's signature streets, long plagued by vacant shops and a lack of foot traffic.

That fresh compromise, forged during a two-hour public city commission workshop last week, may resolve a sometimes heated, months-long debate over the fate of the Mile that was sparked by a broader update of the Gables' stringent zoning code. The commission is scheduled to take a first vote on the Miracle Mile measure March 9. A second and final vote would follow on March 23.

Commission members were at pains to point out that the consensus reached will lower height caps on the Mile compared to what's allowed now. "We are lowering the height on Miracle Mile — that's h, e, i, g, h, t," Gables Mayor Raul Valdes-Faui said during the Wednesday workshop, adding later: "Whatever we get, it's going to be an improvement over what we have today."

Commissioners approved the broader, mostly technical zoning update on Feb. 8 by a 4-1 vote, with vice mayor Vince Lago dissenting. But they agreed at the time to put off a final vote on proposed tweaks to rules governing Miracle Mile, by far the most contentious piece of the zoning rewrite, to consider alternatives. The Miracle Mile measure has become a bone of contention in a crowded city election with few other issues to fire up voters.

Candidates for two open commission seats have dominated public hearings and community meetings on the question, accusing incumbents of ramming through the rezoning proposed by city planners while ignoring public consternation over an intense development boom in the city.

The original Miracle Mile proposal developed by city planning director **Ramon Trias** and consultant Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a noted architect and University of Miami professor, sought to tweak existing zoning on the street to spur small-scale redevelopment.

The key, they concluded, is to allow owners of the often obsolete, one- and two-story buildings on small lots that dominate the street to redevelop while providing required parking somewhere

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Ramon Trias***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

else nearby. The small lots can't accommodate the required parking, effectively encouraging any owners wanting to redevelop to aggregate property and build big with on-site parking garages — something city officials want to prevent.

To avoid litigation from property owners over potential downzoning claims, that original plan kept height limits at currently allowed levels of 70 feet, or six stories, while requiring new buildings to step back at four stories to preserve the street's intimate feel. Nothing has been built at that height on the street, however, in part because of the difficulty in accommodating on-site parking on shallow lots.

The proposal raised the hackles of residents and preservationists who feared it could lead to a uniform, 70-foot-high "concrete canyon" along the Mile — a concern some commission members, including Lago, seconded. The debate boiled down to precisely how tall any new construction on the Mile should be, a question that's anything but straightforward because it depends on complex technical and legal variables.

All five commissioners agreed on allowing developers on the Mile the option of so-called "remote parking" within a 1,000-foot radius of their property. Ample parking is available near the Mile in both public and private garages, and the supply will be enough to meet demand for about a decade even as redevelopment occurs, city administrators assured commissioners.

Lago and Commissioner Patricia Keon, both vying for the retiring Valdes-Fauli's seat, each released an alternative proposal, as did Commissioner Michael Mena. At this week's workshop, Coral Gables' five elected officials weighed four proposals, including a slightly tweaked plan from city planners, before settling on the four-story compromise substantially along the lines of Mena's alternative. This time, only a handful of people turned up on Zoom to oppose the Mile changes.

The proposals were designed to avoid directly downzoning the Mile, something Gables City Attorney Miriam Soler Ramos warned could open up the municipality to property-rights lawsuits. To keep a lid on heights, all proposals banned the use of additional "air rights" on the Mile. Those development rights can be purchased by developers from owners of historically designated properties to add stories to projects in the downtown Gables over what basic zoning allows, but their use must be approved by the commission. Because the approval is discretionary, Soler Ramos said barring them doesn't constitute a property "taking."

Lago, however, proposed also prohibiting the use on the Mile of the city's so-called Mediterranean bonus, a measure that allows developers who adopt the Gables' trademark architectural style to add stories to downtown projects. That ban would effectively reduce development capacity and limit heights to four stories on the street. Lago also proposed still allowing developers to build a garage if they chose to, providing them flexibility to skirt property-rights concerns. But Lago's plan ran into concerns from other commissioners that it would still encourage developers to aggregate property and build street-killing garages and access ramps fronting the Mile.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Keon proposed no hard-and-fast height cap, saying small lot sizes effectively would keep most new building heights under six stories, since development capacity is dependent on the property footprint. Avoiding a hard cap also preserves creative flexibility for architects by not constricting a building's shape, she argued. Keon persuaded fellow commissioners to embrace city planner's proposal for ground-floor stories of up to 15 feet to satisfy requirements from high-end retailers.

Mena proposed a strict four-story cap, or about 50 feet, with a step-back at the fourth floor. That means building owners could have terrace restaurants or other uses on the fourth floor, promoting activity on the street, he said. Mena also proposed requiring remote parking for new buildings on the Mile instead of making it optional, an idea other commissioners appeared to embrace along with the four-story height limit.

Trias, the planning director, said the proposal will work if the city also eliminates building setbacks on the Mile. The ability to build to the property line means redevelopment or expansion projects could still use the full capacity allowed under current rules while hewing to a 50-foot cap, avoiding any takings issue, **Trias** said. Again, commissioners agreed.

Commissioners noted that there is ample precedent on the Mile for 50-foot heights — such as the large building at 55 Miracle Mile that houses the new Gramercy restaurant, among other businesses. The building, which occupies multiple lots, was the last significant construction on the street, made possible because required parking is in a garage in a companion condo high-rise at its rear.

At roughly that same 50-foot height, Mena said, the cap in his proposal respects property rights and the Mile's modest scale while encouraging new development that enhances and modernizes the street. "I appreciate the fundamental concern about the Mile, that it not be developed into something that is out of scale with what residents expect Miracle Mile to be," Mena said in an interview before the workshop. "But we have to be cognizant of the property rights of those owners. We can't just come in and say, 'Hey, you can only do two stories now.' "

But Mena said he wanted to avert the possibility of parking decks on the street by any means possible. "I think that would be a travesty on the Mile," he said. "No one wants to see development on that scale. What I'm trying to do is foreclose this possibility."

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
November 29, 2020

coral gables - 'Miracle Mile is sick': Coral Gables looks to redevelopment - to save iconic street - Coral Gables wants to lift parking requirements for new construction to spur redevelopment on Miracle Mile, which is beset by vacancies and lack of foot traffic.

Author: Andres Viglucci

Looking to rejuvenate an ailing Miracle Mile, Coral Gables commissioners say they're ready to embrace a zoning tweak that could carry big repercussions for one of South Florida's most iconic streets: significantly easing rules that require on-site parking in new construction on the strip. The measure, a small piece of a wide-ranging update of the Gables' famously strict zoning code, could pave the way for extensive redevelopment of the Mile, the city's premier shopping street.

The proposed new rule would make it far easier for developers to provide "remote" parking for tenants and customers - that is, make a deal for them to park elsewhere in downtown Coral Gables. Studies show that parking across the business district is both plentiful and severely underused.

Backers say that simple expedient would unlock the potential for new retail, office and even residential development along the Mile by essentially lifting requirements for on-site parking within the envelope of new construction. Those requirements, they say, now make redevelopment along the Mile and its narrow, shallow lots physically and economically unfeasible.

The parking proposal appears to enjoy broad support among elected officials, city administrators and business leaders, who say the Mile is in desperate need of modernization. They contend the street has been hobbled by property owners' inability to replace or expand the one-story storefronts - in many cases tiny and obsolete - that were built after World War II and still dominate the Mile.

Despite a recent \$25 million streetscape makeover that widened sidewalks and beautified the street, the Mile is plagued by vacant storefronts, a longstanding issue that has only been worsened by prolonged street reconstruction and the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent count by the Miami Herald found 37 empty shopfronts along the half-mile-long street. "Miracle Mile is sick," Coral Gables Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli said at a recent commission debate over the new zoning rules. "Miracle Mile is in deep trouble. And unless we do something to stimulate it, it is going to go down."

But exactly how much new development should be encouraged on the Mile as parking requirements are eased, and at what scale, has become a sharp bone of contention among commissioners as the city undergoes a sustained wave of new construction in and around its increasingly dense downtown.

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Though all five Coral Gables commissioners say they support the remote-parking measure, a debate between two mayoral contenders, commissioners Vince Lago and Patricia Keon, over related limits to new development on the street became so heated that board members unanimously agreed to break out the Miracle Mile plan from the broader, largely uncontroversial zoning rewrite. With Valdes-Fauli opting for political retirement, Lago and Keon are seeking the mayor's seat in elections next year.

Expanded remote parking would offer property owners and developers on the Mile far greater flexibility to build up to a height of 70 feet, or about six stories - the current cap, established by a previous zoning rule that would remain in place. Keon says she's satisfied that the height cap and requirements for buildings to "step back" at 45 feet will be sufficient to preserve the street's pedestrian-first feel and intimate scale. But Lago wants to restrict the size of new buildings further, saying he fears the result otherwise could be a "monolithic" new six-story scale along the entire Mile, a prospect other critics have likened to a concrete canyon. He argues developers should be willing to accept further limits on size in exchange for the right to forgo building costly parking decks.

The commissioners will hash out the remote parking measure and some possible tightening of restrictions on new Miracle Mile development at a special virtual workshop Nov. 30, before a final vote on the full zoning rewrite that's scheduled for Dec. 8.

Developers with holdings on Miracle Mile, including the street's largest property owner, Terranova Corp., have been quietly watching the debate. The group's plan for a boutique hotel on the prominent corner of Miracle Mile and Ponce de Leon Boulevard stalled in 2019 amid issues with provision of off-site parking and some public and political blowback over its proposed seven-story height.

Terranova Chairman Stephen Bittel said he supports the remote-parking measure, developed as part of the broader zoning update by city planners and its consultants, the Miami firm of Duany Plater-Zyberk. "Miracle Mile, as a result of COVID-19 and changed retail patterns, is at a low point of the last 20 years," Bittel said in a brief interview. "City staff and their consultant Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a renowned urbanism expert, have come up with an enlightened plan for the future." "The definition of insanity is to do the same thing again and again and expect different results," Bittel added, alluding to critics who oppose changes on the street.

To bring desperately needed attention to the Mile and generate some activity, Bittel and the city teamed up in October to temporarily turn over a half-dozen vacant storefronts for use as working studios and galleries for artists. The artists will remain at least through the end of the year, depending on when shops are leased.

The studios are open to the public. Artists say the experience of working with other artists has been good. But business has been light, though some curious pedestrians do drop in. "It's been slow, but people are happy that this is going on," said ceramicist Laura Mármol. The debate over the Mile's future could be consequential beyond Coral Gables' borders. The city's busy

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downtown is a major regional office hub but has found itself increasingly in a losing competition, at least pre-COVID-19, for retail and dining customers with newly vital entertainment districts in Wynwood and nearby Coconut Grove, among others.

And how the city, famed for its careful planning, handles the parking question could provide new impetus to efforts by some planners and activists in the Gables and elsewhere in Miami-Dade County. Some have called for easing of what they describe as onerous on-site parking requirements that block needed new development on small lots and foster over-scaled construction and lot aggregations, inflating housing and other costs.

Miracle Mile property owners holding at least 200 feet of frontage can already apply for remote parking. But most have single lots of small holdings and don't qualify, one reason nothing new has been built on the street in 15 years. New construction under current rules would require aggregating lots and building big with parking decks and ramps - something the city wants to discourage.

The new rule would make remote parking available to those small property owners, who could then build to three or four stories, Plater-Zyberk said. The hope is those upstairs floors, where retail won't work, will be offices or apartments, boosting foot traffic to help sustain the shops and restaurants at street level, she said. The measure would encourage development of a modest, pedestrian- and neighborhood-friendly scale that's economically sustainable and largely missing in the city, she added. "It will be kind of an urban street that's developed incrementally. Hopefully it would be an interesting, varied streetscape, rather than one long building," Plater-Zyberk said. "The city has lots of big, tall buildings, and some little, small buildings, and nothing in between. We're hoping to bring in that missing middle."

Anthony De Yurre, a partner at Bilzin Sumberg who represents some Coral Gables developers, said some limits could work if carefully calibrated, but he said the remote-parking measure is essential if Miracle Mile is to thrive. "It depends on what you think the vision of Miracle Mile should be," said De Yurre, who has no clients with property or a project on the Mile, but represents developers bidding on a stalled city project to redevelop obsolete public parking garages next to it. "It comes down to a pedestrian scale. That to me is what the debate is about. They're really going to get granular with it on Monday. They know it's going to have a tremendous impact on the Mile. I think you will see a new Miracle Mile in the next 10 years."

At the November workshop, commissioners will also consider a second zoning change that would expand the city's downtown. The broad zoning update doesn't affect single-family or residential-only neighborhoods, but this proposal would be an exception. It would rezone an anomalous, two-and-a-half block island of single-family homes and duplexes that's surrounded by larger-scale residential and commercial development.

That change comes at the request of a majority of property owners in the section, who signed a petition asking for it to be upzoned for commercial or mixed use so they can sell out. Originally part of a plan by city founder George Merrick for a crafts section that was never realized, the

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small neighborhood is today plagued by cut-through traffic and increasing density around it, including the massive Plaza Coral Gables under construction two blocks to the east.

The city plan is to classify the area under a new category under the zoning rewrite that's designed to foster more of the "missing-middle" development Plater-Zyberk describes - in this case, low-scale development mixing residential, retail and office uses.

But Commissioner Michael Mena called for a recalibration of the proposed upzoning, citing concerns over the impact on the abutting, historic San Sebastian Apartments, rising four stories at their highest point. Mena doesn't want any new development to overwhelm the building or residential areas across LeJeune Road. "This is unique because it's a three-block area in our downtown. I view it as a blank canvas," Mena said. "So rather than just come out and upzone and see what comes along, I want to be a little more thoughtful."

City commissioners have few quibbles with the larger zoning rewrite. Plater-Zyberk and Gables Planning Director **Ramon Trias** said it mostly streamlines and reorganizes the code, making it easier to navigate and understand. It also introduces defined zoning categories that mix commercial and residential uses to the code for the first time. Although numerous large mixed-use projects have been built, approval for each one has until now involved a laborious process of negotiation. Adding a set of tailored rules should result in a simpler review process and better buildings, Plater-Zyberk said. But Miracle Mile has been a sticking point. Lago and Keon both agree on the need for remote parking and more residential development downtown.. But they differ, at times acerbically, on the particulars.

Keon suggests Lago's concerns are overblown. Most property owners with small holdings would be unable to build to the maximum of 70 feet, or about six stories, she noted. "You would have to have a certain footprint to do that. Not everything will go to that height. You could have some buildings at three or four stories. You would still have a varied roofline," Keon said in an interview. "I think what's important is the scale and the viability of the Mile. You can leave it at two stories, and if all the stores are empty, that's not a pretty picture."

But Lago wants to further restrict development capacity to ensure that not every property is built out to the maximum 70 feet. That could be done by barring from the Mile measures that provide additional building capacity to downtown Gables developers - a "bonus" for hewing to Mediterranean style, and the purchase of unused "air rights" from designated historic properties. "You need to ensure that out-of-scale projects are not built on Miracle Mile, that you're not allowing developers to build every square foot of the envelope," Lago said in an interview. "The idea that additional height will solve the problems of Miracle Mile is wrong. Let's protect one street, and that's Miracle Mile."

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<https://www.vice.com/en/article/xwnykg/luxury-housing-is-threatening-to-wipe-out-miamis-trailer-parks>

Luxury Housing Is Threatening to Wipe Out Miami’s Trailer Parks

By Alexandra Martinez

When Miguel Castro moved into his Little Gables trailer home, his backdoor neighbor gifted him a potted schefflera tree. It was a welcome gift, but Castro quickly saw a more practical use for the umbrella tree—he would plant it as a barrier to discourage trespassers. Today, Castro’s rectangular lot is a tropical oasis from the encroaching concrete on Miami’s southwest Eighth Street. But the verdant refuge could soon be demolished. For the past three years, the wealthy city of Coral Gables has been pushing to annex a 205-acre, unincorporated area of Miami-Dade County that includes the Little Gables trailer park and its 225 residents. It’s a move that would subject them to higher taxes and most likely, displacement—recently re-elected Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli has openly said the trailer park would have to “disappear”, adding that the new development would be built for young couples. The mayor’s words mirror a national trend of trailer park owners selling their long-time investment to new investors who drive up the rent and eventually wipe the trailer park off the map, adding to a nationwide housing crisis where only 37 affordable homes exist for every 100 low-income renters. And there’s plenty of incentive for local politicians in charge: During the recent election in Coral Gables, Mayor Valdes-Fauli received \$29,500 in March alone from developers, real estate firms, contractors and construction companies.

The Little Gables trailer park opened in 1931 when the Great Depression plunged the economy into scarcity. Since then, Miami’s population has grown from 143,000 to 2.7 million, and the average rent for a one bedroom apartment has reached \$1,700, with only more growth expected. At \$500 a month for the lot rental, tenants said the trailer park offers a reprieve. For residents with fixed incomes, disabilities, or who have recently immigrated to this country, there is often no other option—applications for public housing in Miami are closed and people are still being called off a 2008 waitlist intended to alleviate Miami-Dade’s affordable housing crisis. The annexation would weigh heavily on the residents of Little Gables. Many tenants have spent their whole lives here, and have cultivated a community in those decades. They have families, doctors and jobs nearby, and relocation would upend all of it. Their trailers, which most spent at least \$4,500 to purchase decades ago, would be too expensive to take with them, and would have to be demolished. And for those who are in critical health conditions, the physical strain of moving would put them in an even more precarious situation.

Filiberto Llerena, 81, said he doesn’t want to leave. He has owned his trailer for over 30 years. His days are spent taking care of his ailing wife, Julia Edith Llerena, 82, who is confined to her bed after open-heart surgery, a fractured hip, and a stroke three years ago landed her in a fragile condition. “I’m going to wait until they find me somewhere to live if they have to demolish this,” Llerena said. On a typical day, the residents at Little Gables Mobile Home Park sit on patio chairs in front of their homes, sip café, and check in with their neighbors. Castro’s spot, particularly, is a hub of community. Patchouli incense and Marc Anthony on the radio waft

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through the air. Inside, his pets create a symphony: parakeets chirp against their cage's metal bars, ping ponging with the rooster's crowing. The humble space feels like a slice of his native Cuba. "Every morning the neighbors drink coffee with me, sometimes we smoke a cigarette here. If I barbecue, I go give them some, we have a sense of feeling, of connection," said Castro. But that sense of peace is limited—Castro is also president of the homeowners association, formed in response to the sudden onslaught of penalties for code violations.

In 2014, the County Regulatory and Economic Resources building department, a local agency that oversees housing, started running random sweeps on the property owned by Burleigh Kaplan of Gables Trailer Park INC and found over 70 code violations in Little Gables, mostly illegal additions to their homes that the tenants rented out for extra income. In an attempt to get the tenants off the land, the agency slapped them with substantial fines and forced them to take down the additions, but the property was finally up to code.

A year later, when tenants heard that the property owners were interested in selling, they sought out the help of the nonprofit organization, Legal Services of Miami. As owners of the trailers, but renters of the land, they attempted to use their right of first refusal to purchase the park. An angel investor was willing to provide a mortgage, but it wasn't enough. The property was sold to Jay Suarez of Titan Development Partners LLC, a real estate and property management company. "After I cleared up the violations, everyone is suddenly interested in the park, I got an offer for \$8 million," said Suarez, who insisted he wanted to keep the trailer park as it is. "The bottom line is, I turned that down. That's not my interest."

If the annexation passes, the trailer park would still be subject to Coral Gables' notoriously strict code enforcement, which includes painting your home a palette of muted colors approved by the Board of Architects, and not parking a pick-up truck in your driveway. The affluent city's higher property taxes would amount to an increase of \$1.21 per thousand in taxable value or \$500 to \$1,000 annually for homeowners, in addition to \$405 more for solid waste removal. Suarez, who already raised the rent \$40 in October, admitted that the increases would have to come out of rent spikes for the tenants. Regardless of development plans, annexation would mean stricter regulations and an increase in rent. Relocation would be inevitable.

Coral Gables is not waiting for him to get on board. In November 2017, the City of Coral Gables sent out official consent petition forms to see how many residents in the Little Gables neighborhood, which houses roughly 5,400 people, of which the trailer park houses only 225, were actually in favor of the annexation. Out of 1,607 registered votes, they received 400 in support of the annexation. But according to the residents' lawyer, Nejla Calvo, no one at the trailer park received the notice.

Once they had the minimum requirement to submit the application at a city commission meeting on December 2017, the city retained a planning consulting firm to be available to redevelop the park. And City Commissioner Patricia Keon proposed that the commission pass an ordinance to make trailer parks illegal upon annexation. Other officials advised the Commission to find

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adequate places for mobile homeowners to relocate, such as Orlando, for example, four hours north of Miami.

This wouldn't be the first time that government officials in Miami-Dade make a deal with developers to wipe their property clean of trailers. In 2016, Chinese company Wealthy Delight agreed to a deal with the Village of El Portal, a community slightly north of Little Haiti, to buy the Little Farm trailer park on the condition that they demolish the park. Two hundred and forty residents were displaced, some were sent to Orlando, while others remained homeless.

The Director of Planning and Zoning, **Ramon Trias** says nothing has been decided and plans are still in a very preliminary, conceptual level. "I think we can have some, let's say row houses, small apartments, some way to keep the streets where they are but enhance the landscaping," **Trias** said. "The idea is not to displace people, but to provide better ways to develop the land. But, is there a willingness to do it?"

For now, it's a waiting game. The application for annexation was submitted in February 2018. By December 2018, it passed in the County Planning Advisory Board. It will ultimately come down to a vote by the roughly 5,400 Little Gables residents of which the trailer park houses only a fraction of that.

At the end of the day, Castro's partner washes dishes inside their recently renovated trailer. The couple stripped the walls of mold and redid the kitchen, totaling a near \$4,000 investment. Now, Castro's only hope is that he can keep his labor of love. "I would have to cry and declare a state of misery because where would we go?" says Castro. "That would be like a hurricane coming and destroying everything."

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Miami Herald, The (FL)
February 18, 2019

A high-rise building boom put Coral Gables on steroids. Will it remain the City Beautiful?

Author: Andres Viglucci

Just five years short of a century ago, developer George Merrick conjured up a Mediterranean fantasyland on his family's holdings of scrub pine and avocado groves just outside the backwater city of Miami. He called it Coral Gables, and it was good.

The city beautiful that Merrick romantically baptized "Miami Riviera" would have it all: Charming Spanish-style homes and gracious Italian villas masterfully laid out amid gardens, lush boulevards and golf courses; imposing formal entrances; a university and a thriving business district. In promotional brochures, its crown jewel, the Biltmore Hotel and its 300-foot tower, rose out of the humid mist like a mirage in Washington Irving's "Tales of the Alhambra".

Merrick's vision, and the master plan and strict controls he drew up to realize it, have endured through boom and bust, firmly establishing Coral Gables as one of the most desirable, stable and envied communities in Florida. Now it's gone on steroids.

Enthusiastic backers of a new wave of high-rise, mixed-use development, including city leaders, say it's re-invigorating the city, enhancing Merrick's vision and turning its once-stodgy downtown into a lively urban neighborhood. But some residents fear that what's made the Gables special could be obliterated in a rush to build big. No visitor to the Gables can miss its redrawn face. The city's downtown and commercial corridors of South Dixie Highway and LeJeune Road bristle with construction cranes erecting Mediterranean-inspired buildings of a scale and density Merrick could not have foreseen.

A dozen large-scale projects recently inaugurated, nearing completion or just now under construction are delivering around 2,000 condos and apartments, hundreds of hotel rooms and hundreds of thousands of square feet of retail, restaurants and offices to the Gables in the span of a few years. It's a surge likely not rivaled since Merrick began building his city in earnest in 1924.

The biggest by far, Agave Ponce group's massive, \$600 million The Plaza Coral Gables, will spread across seven acres and three city blocks on Ponce de Leon Boulevard, just south of the recently revamped Miracle Mile. The project, the largest in Coral Gables history, will encompass 242 hotel rooms, 164 apartments and lofts, 160,000 square feet of retail, 445,000 square feet of office space and 2,000 parking spaces.

And that's after city planners and commissioners scaled back an initial plan during three years of stringent review — and after the developers trimmed it again, redesigning and renaming the former Mediterranean Village project, in response to changing market conditions following

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approval in 2015. Agave finally began construction on the first of two phases last year, with completion expected in May 2020.

The tweaks include less retail space and more office, reflecting a downturn in the fortunes of brick-and-mortar retail and unflagging demand for workspace in downtown Coral Gables. Agave also scaled down a hotel tower that would have exceeded the usually strictly observed height cap of 190 feet for usable space in the city, not including spires and cupolas. A development wave is redrawing the face of Coral Gables. Backers of a new wave of high-rise, mixed-use development in Coral Gables say it's re-invigorating the city, but some residents fear that what's made the Gables special is at risk of being obliterated in a rush to build big.

The Agave project's shifted footprint now places the bulk of construction around a one-acre plaza with a historic building — the turreted, three-story studio of Merrick's noted city designers, architect Phineas Paist and artist Denman Fink — at its center. The new plaza opens up to Ponce Circle Park. Agave executive Gregory Schwartz boasts the project, designed by the international firm CallisonRTKL, is so consequential it will shift the center of downtown south. "It's going to open right up to the park, shift the center of gravity towards the park, and create the new social, civic center for the city," Schwartz said. "The plaza embodies the spirit of the project."

An architectural rendering shows how The Plaza Coral Gables mixed-use project on Ponce de Leon Boulevard will look when completed. The project's first phase is now under construction. An architectural rendering show how the completed The Plaza Coral Gables mixed-use project on Ponce de Leon Boulevard will look when completed. The project's first phase is now under construction.

A few blocks west, a new mid-rise Aloft hotel introduces a sense of walkable urbanism to the traffic-choked gash of LeJeune Road, with arcades along the ground floor, a garage that's concealed within the building and a street-facing restaurant and outdoor cafe. The change in scale and approach that it represents is abundantly clear. The Aloft building comes right up to the sidewalk and goes straight up to create an arcaded street wall, an approach that planners say creates a welcoming, sheltered space for pedestrians. The hotel's suburban-style neighbors, by contrast, are set back, often behind a parking lot and a fringe of scraggly greenery — an approach that planners say is less inviting.

Abutting the downtown's western border on Douglas Road is the curving hulk of Gables Columbus Center, a newly opened 200-unit apartment building designed by Behar, Font & Partners that backs directly up to the quaint, stucco three-story La Palma Hotel from 1924. One of the earliest surviving commercial buildings downtown, and protected as a historic landmark, it's now hemmed in by towers.

Farther south, in the former industrial district south of Bird Road that's gradually been converted into a mid-rise residential neighborhood since the 2002 launch of the Shops at Merrick Park, the latest addition is about to open. Crews are putting the finishing touches on Astor Companies' Merrick Manor, a 227-unit, 10-story condo, also designed by Behar, Font, that fills nearly an

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entire block and overlooks LeJeune Road and Coral Gables High. Its value at sell-out is estimated at \$160 million.

Just north of Miracle Mile, a nearly finished deluxe 33-unit condo building, Giralda Place, stretches nearly the full length of a block on Giralda Avenue, with a new art gallery on one corner. A gym and Bread Cycle, a health-conscious Mediterranean restaurant, are among other planned sidewalk amenities. The building, which varies in height but is 90 feet high at its tallest point, replaced a strip of nondescript, low-scale modern storefronts.

The \$65 million project, with a clean, updated Mediterranean design by architect John Fullerton, also encompasses a renovated bank building on the corner of Ponce de Leon Boulevard that houses 700 WeWork shared-office desks. WeWork joins competitor Pipeline, which opened a shared workspace floor in the downtown Gables in 2015. That's a fresh wrinkle for the formerly buttoned-down Gables workplace aesthetic that Giralda Place developer Christopher "Cristo" Brown says portends the broader sea change in store for the neighborhood. "In the next six months, it's going to be a very different feel here, a more energetic one," Brown said. "You're going to see more and younger people out and about. There's going to be buzz and you're going to see people coming in from other areas who would not have made the drive before. People want walkability and all the Gables has to offer."

That a city of 50,000 should be in line to absorb so much new development is the result not just of its lasting desirability, but the redevelopment tsunami overtaking much of neighboring Miami. A seemingly insatiable, pent-up demand for urban, walkable places across the region has dovetailed with a determination by Gables leaders to turn the city's downtown — long a regional business center where sidewalk cafes were banned and streets quiet after office hours — into a denser, full-service, live-in urban hub.

The thinking is straightforward: Build dense to bring in enough residents and workers to support a variety of shops, amenities and activities in close proximity, and people will happily walk more and drive less. Planners say that creates an appealing alternative to sprawling auto-dependent development of the kind that has dominated South Florida for decades, fostering desirable growth while keeping a lid on traffic congestion. There's another big benefit for the city. Downtown properties already account for as much as 40 percent of the city's tax base, said Gables Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli. That allows the city to boast of one of the lowest property-tax rates of any city offering full fire and police services in Miami-Dade County, he said.

While he could not provide a precise figure for how much new development will add to the city's bottom line, Valdes-Fauli said it's substantial and will help preserve those low rates while producing "a very livable Coral Gables." "We have measured development, rational development," Valdes-Fauli said. "I see it as a continuation of what Coral Gables is and has been. We don't want a Brickell."

Umbrella Sky in Coral Gables More than 720 bright umbrellas will sway gently over the newly transformed Giralda Plaza through September 17, 2018, the pedestrian promenade located at the

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100 block of Giralda Avenue. There's a way to go to reach the critical mass that will fill the new buildings and generate the level of street life and retail revival the city wants, said Bill Kerdyk Jr., a former Gables commissioner and CEO of Kerdyk Real Estate. But it's starting to work. Many of those now renting and buying downtown are empty-nesters who don't want to deal with car commutes to work, dine out or see a film or a play, said Kerydk, who represents the new Gables Columbus Center apartment tower.

"That was once a foreign concept, having people living downtown," said Kerdyk. In the mid-1990s, when developer Armando Codina built the first apartment building in the business district on the old bus station site, that project, too, faced considerable skepticism. "Now you come down on a Wednesday night, and it's hard to find a place to park, and there is a buzz about being downtown. "I think having people living downtown will reinvigorate the retail. It comes back to quality of life. That's what the city of Coral Gables offers."

To many residents, though, the increased mass and density is jarring. So is a longstanding city code requirement that requires buildings and entryways that come right to the edge of the sidewalk, something which planners say creates a true walkable city environment and fosters pedestrian activity. All that some critics see, though, is concrete, increasing traffic and a loss of the modest neighborhood scale that once characterized the Gables' urban districts. "These big buildings are consuming the streetscape," said Ellen Ugucione, a longtime resident and former historic preservation chief for the Gables and neighboring Miami. "I think it overwhelms. The downtown district in the 1920s was small-scale buildings. We have to evolve. But that evolution needs to take into account what buildings existed before and pay homage by stepping back. "We need to be more astute and ask, 'What is the essence of Coral Gables?' "

Ugucione stressed that the city has so far managed to protect its residential areas from intrusive or inappropriate development. But longtime Gables resident Sue Kawalerski watches the march of the cranes down South Dixie Highway and, like many of her neighbors, is afraid. Very afraid.

Like many in the Gables, they fear that what they describe as a developer-friendly city commission will turn Coral Gables into a facsimile of Miami's high-density, high-rise Brickell district, and downtown and U.S. 1 into concrete canyons. "They have absolutely no regard for what residents want," Kawalerski said.

To be sure, Coral Gables has seen waves of large-scale development before. The real estate bust of the late 1920s brought Merrick's dream to a close with much of his city yet unbuilt. Things didn't pick up until after World War II, when Miracle Mile was built and Modernism was the style of choice. By the time Mediterranean architecture came back into vogue in the 1980s, many original downtown Gables buildings had been replaced with a new run of taller, modern office buildings.

Some more-recent Med-style buildings have come under fire for mediocre architecture and ungainly proportions unbecoming of Merrick's handiwork, but city planners say they have cracked down and sharpened the quality of design. Most of the new buildings eschew pastels and

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pasted-on detailing for whites and a pared-down, contemporary version of Mediterranean design that may be more appealing and sophisticated. But what's also different about them, critics say, is their sheer bulk and in-your-face presence.

The two most attention-drawing and controversial of the new projects loom on South Dixie. The mixed-use complexes by NP International, now under construction, represent an obvious shift in scale for the corridor, now dominated by mostly low-scale, suburban-style strip malls.

Hugging the sidewalk between the elevated Metrorail tracks and the traffic-choked highway, the 504-unit Gables Station extends all the way from LeJeune Road to the intersection of Ponce de Leon and South Dixie, requiring no fewer than five cranes for construction. The apartment complex is designed to capitalize on adjacent transit and the planned Underline, the 10-mile bike and running trail connecting to downtown Miami. A public plaza lined with shops and food will connect to the Underline through a colonnade.

Farther south, on the site of a former Holiday Inn across from the University of Miami, NPI's Paseo de la Riviera will include a 10-story, 252-room hotel, 224 apartments in a 13-story tower, and retail around a plaza. An imposing arch leads out to Jaycee Park and the residential neighborhood behind it.

Both NPI projects, designed by Coral Gables architect Jorge Hernandez and architectural giant Gensler, required changes in zoning to accommodate greater density and height, prompting complaints that the city was not hewing to its code. The height of the Paseo tower matches that of a 1971 office tower next door that's now owned by the University of Miami. The UM tower, though, is slimmer and set back behind parking because its footprint is suburban.

City planners and elected officials see both projects as a new, transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly model to replace the strip-mall mode of development along that stretch, extending the Gables brand of Mediterranean architecture to the nondescript, auto-dominated corridor. But Kawalerski, president of the Riviera Neighborhood Association, sees high-density development and its impact, like increased traffic and blocked skies, starting to encroach on the garden-like tranquility of her single-family neighborhood. The association bitterly fought the Paseo project, which won commission approval by a 4-1 vote.. "It's right on top of U.S. 1, and it's a big block of cement," she said. "How could you allow that to happen?"

Commissioner Vince Lago, considered a voice for moderation in development on the body, favored the Paseo project after it was scaled back, but voted against Gables Station because he thought it was too big for the location and would generate too much traffic at what's already a choke point. He said the city needs to be "prudent" and some projects need to be scaled back. But he also noted that most are built to what the city code allows, giving commissioners little ability to alter them.

Still, he defended the city's overall strategy, noting that it's already bearing fruit downtown. "It's very welcoming," Lago said. "You see a lot of families and young professionals enjoying

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downtown, which is what we envisioned." Lago said the city has also been astute in developing transportation alternatives in tandem with the more intensive redevelopment. Those include a growing bus-trolley circulator network, an experiment with shared electric scooters that appears to be succeeding, and establishment and expansion of the on-demand Freebee electric golf-cart system in the city.

The current Gables boom has been simmering for at least five years, when City Hall was flooded with development proposals at the height of the real-estate expansion that's now in retreat. But projects were slowed in part by drawn-out, painstaking review by city planners and, in the case of Paseo, unsuccessful litigation by unhappy residents. The Agave project, for instance, could not win approval until it was shrunk and the developers agreed to donating millions of dollars worth of public amenities, including incorporating a stop for the city's expanding system of free bus trolleys as well as paying for new vehicles for the service.

Another major project, a long-contemplated proposal for redevelopment of two obsolete city parking garages on Andalusia Avenue, has been under negotiation while undergoing substantial revisions and downsizing for two years. The Allen Morris Company and Related Group were selected in a competition by the city with a plan that would combine public parking with retail, residential and office space. The Coral Gables commission will consider the plan in March, though critics concerned about overdevelopment are pushing for the city to finance and build new garages on its own, at a cost of around \$40 million, without the developers. "We've been trying to find the right balance," said Anthony De Yurre, an attorney for the developers, describing the city review. "We have made a significant number of concessions. They have been very collaborative with us. You can't do anything that's not world-class in Coral Gables."

City officials say smart planning, adherence to the 190-foot height cap, rigorous review of new designs by planners and the Gables board of architects, and close attention to what happens at street level together ensure new development hews to Merrick's plan while fostering greater urban density where it's called for. The city's long-established Mediterranean bonus rules grant developers greater density than allowed by the basic zoning code if they adhere to Mediterranean design precepts like arcades and courtyards. "In my opinion, we are fulfilling the original vision," said Coral Gables planning director **Ramon Trias**, who hung framed, blown-up architectural drawings of city landmarks such as the Biltmore throughout his department to show applicants the high bar they must clear to win approval. "This is very rare in American cities, that something was that well thought-out and has been carried out for a century. "Merrick had a very clear vision. The people who crafted it were very professional. We have the history, the tradition, and people who really care. What other city gets to this level of quality?"

All mixed-use buildings in the city require commission approval, even after they have been closely vetted — and usually significantly modified — by planners and review boards. All get a public and sometimes contentious airing, especially when developers seek variances. Those few that are approved, **Trias** argues, usually improve a building because a zoning code can't anticipate all circumstances. "I've never worked with a commission that gets so involved in design," **Trias** said. "Sometimes there is conflict, but that's a very good thing. Always, the

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projects get better. It's that kind of passion that makes Coral Gables Coral Gables." The type of design quality the city demands can add 25 percent to the cost of development, **Trias** said, but he contends it pays off both for developers and residents.

Veteran developer Armando Codina agrees wholeheartedly. Codina, who built some large commercial buildings on LeJeune road in the Gables in previous booms in addition to the first downtown apartment building, says the city has the approach and the downtown scale about right — though he, too, disagrees with the rules requiring no building setback from the sidewalk. "I happen to like the scale of Coral Gables, and I like how careful they are," he said.

Codina went an extra mile or two in conceiving and building his newest project, built on a former parking lot just north of Alhambra Circle. The newly inaugurated 2020 Salzedo consists of a five-story office building with a stately rotunda, an expansive public courtyard that will hold tables for a new bakery and restaurant by star Lebanese-Puerto Rican pastry chef Antonio Bachour, opening Friday, as well as a 213-unit apartment tower. Codina said he personally "went after" Bachour, who will teach other chefs in a glassed-in kitchen once a month.

The building, where Codina moved his headquarters, is clearly a labor of love. So is the masonry front of the rotunda, which also bears the Codina name discreetly etched in the concrete. He commissioned well-known Miami artist Naomi Fisher to design elegant black terrazzo floors in the lobby and elevator landings of the building. Each features a different design with native palm fronds and plants. Fisher also designed metal gates that open to the courtyard. The office building balconies, meanwhile, have Cuban-tile floors. His architects at Nichols Brosch Wurst Wolfe took special care to get details and proportions right, so that the building echoes the skillful and evocative Mediterranean design that Merrick's architects were so good at. "I care," Codina said. "We view this as our second home."

The city has been carefully laying the groundwork for the downtown transformation since the 1990s, when it acquired the Miracle Theatre movie house and renovated it for use as a live drama venue by Actors' Playhouse. Since then, it created an arthouse cinema on the ground floor of a new parking garage across from the storied Books & Books shop. It converted and expanded the original fire and police station, an Art Deco landmark by Paist in coral rock, into the Coral Gables Museum.

After years of debate and planning, the city also embarked on a thorough makeover of downtown's main street, Miracle Mile, dramatically expanding sidewalks and restoring entry plazas and fountains.

Since opening last year, along with a companion conversion of the Giralda Avenue restaurant row into a pedestrian plaza, the \$20 million project has been credited with luring new dining spots and shops and boosting street life and foot traffic. Drawn-out construction, however, also claimed some longtime merchants and restaurateurs who did not survive. "Those two years really crushed a lot of existing tenants," Kerdyk said. "It's only now coming back."

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The shake-out may not be done. Last week, Tarpon Bend restaurant, a 15-year-old mainstay on the mile, closed abruptly. The owner blamed higher taxes and maintenance costs passed on to the business by the landlord. But Tarpon Bend also faced increasing competition from new bars and restaurants catering to the young professional crowd he relied on.

Some skeptics are concerned that the Gables has not yet refreshed its stale image sufficiently to attract the necessary big numbers of those young people, many of whom see Mediterranean architecture as their parents' speed and might instead prefer to patronize a resurrecting Coconut Grove or Midtown Miami. But some seem willing to gamble on it. The former Scientology building on Giralda, the city's original post office, is now being renovated and expanded by a developer to house several restaurants and a rooftop lounge, for instance. The building sat on the market for two years until the Giralda makeover was approved, said Kerdyk, who handled the sale. "It's going to take Giralda a little time to retool with some more restaurants, but it's going to be a really nice scene," Kerdyk said.

The combination of public foresight, the emphasis on culture and the encouragement of mixed-use development downtown is attracting new developers to the Gables who might not have considered it previously, said Rishi Kapoor, founder of Location Ventures. Kapoor is now seeking to raise the ante exponentially on downtown Gables condo living. He's won city approval for Villa Valencia, a lavishly amenitized, 13-story condo on the edge of downtown where the top penthouse will be priced at \$10.5 million. Kapoor expects a sellout will yield \$111 million. The average size of the 39 units is an expansive 3,000 square feet, he said, and the building is designed for affluent, downsizing Gables couples who don't want to give up the space of a house — and want to spend less time in a car while enjoying an urban lifestyle.

The retooled, upscaled downtown Gables fits the bill perfectly, and he expects other developers to follow suit at that very high end, he said. "Coral Gables has gone through this beautiful rejuvenation," he said. "Look at Miracle Mile and Giralda. It's unrecognizable from 10 years ago. Now people are seeing it as a hub for an elegant lifestyle. We think the Gables market is hungry for it." Yet it's that feeling of not recognizing the Gables anymore that gives many residents an uneasy feeling.

Despite its famed zeal for architecture and preservation, the city has at times failed to guard its legacy in the face of development pressure, said Karelia Carbonell, president of the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables. Last year Carbonell led a drive to save the last standing building from Merrick's original business district, the LaSalle cleaners building. The city had a deal with the owners to demolish it and replace it with a parking lot but backed off under public pressure. But the city decided earlier this year not to purchase the building because the owners were asking too much, leaving its fate in limbo. "It would be a sad day in Coral Gables if that building came down," Carbonell said.

Carbonell is now tilting at an even more unlikely windmill. She is urging the city to reconsider its decision to tear down its existing fire and police station, a 1970s example of severe, sculptural Brutalist architecture that many in the city deride as "The Thing."

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The city approved a deal to swap the station property with Codina. He owned a lot catty-corner from his 2020 Salzedo where the city is now building a \$34 million, 190,000-square-foot new public-safety building, designed by international architectural and engineering firm AECOM in a modernized version of Mediterranean style. Codina said he has not decided what would replace the old station. But Carbonell, who organized a panel of noted architects last month to highlight the historic value of the Brutalist style, said the station represents a modern phase of the city's evolution that's as much worth preserving as the LaSalle.

Meanwhile, she said, the newest buildings are not only much larger than what they replace, but often architecturally bland, without the sense of grace, creativity or proportion of the Mediterranean style that inspired Merrick. It's instead "faux Med," as she put it. "The developers get credit for having a little fountain out front, so they just plunk it down. We start losing that authenticity," Carbonell said. "Coral Gables is not the sleepy town it used to be. It's lost that pleasurable feeling. It's very dense. Parking is an issue. Getting around has become complicated. Miracle Mile has changed. You feel it as you go about your day. I know we can't just live in the past. But it has not been well curated."

Architect Jose Gelabert-Navia, who helped write the original city ordinance providing the zoning bonus for Mediterranean architecture, says it's often been misused. The rules were meant to encourage architectural variety by allowing modern design that incorporates Mediterranean features such as arcades, colonnades, plazas and balconies, he said. But, he told a full house during a lecture at the Coral Gables Museum last month on the design of cities through the centuries, the city has mostly succeeded in its quest to build on Merrick's "unique" vision. "The plan is there, and for the most part it survives," Gelabert-Navia said. "I think the city is getting better and better."

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami New Times
February 14, 2019

Coral Gables: If You Must Use Fake Grass, Hide It

Author: Brittany Shammas

When Miami city officials decided to tear out grass along Brickell Avenue and replace it with artificial turf last fall, residents were not pleased. A days-long protest ensued, complete with "Save me! I will die soon" signs on trees the protesters said would be smothered by the fake sod.

Now, commissioners in notoriously code-happy Coral Gables are making sure that kind of turf war never happens in the City Beautiful. This week, they voted to require permits for artificial grass and to largely limit it to backyards or floors above ground level. The new rules apply to both residential and commercial buildings throughout the city.

The idea is about limiting the spread of turf — and keeping it out of sight. "It doesn't look great in the context of Coral Gables, which is about authenticity; it's about landscape," planning and zoning director **Ramon Trias** said in January. "If all of a sudden everything is artificial turf, then pretty soon we lose some of the most important qualities of the city."

Miami's fake grass debacle started in October when contractors suddenly glued artificial turf on the swale along Brickell Avenue between SE 15th and 25th Roads. Residents complained trees wouldn't get the water and nutrients they need and that dog poop wouldn't disintegrate. They said the city was being "plastified." Filmmaker Billy Corben called it "beautification fraud."

Mayor Francis Suarez initially defended the change, saying the swale looked "dramatically better." But eventually, he surrendered and ordered the removal of the fake grass.

In Coral Gables, permits for fake grass may be issued for children's playgrounds, recreational ball fields, rooftop gardens, or open joints in pavements. For residential areas, even backyard artificial turf comes with the requirement that it be hidden by a "buffer," such as a fence or wall. Other locations will be allowed only if landscape options are limited by the lot conditions.

The new rules, which passed on second reading Tuesday, went into effect immediately.

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Sun Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, FL)
September 19, 2018

Live-work-play growth spurt for Coral Gables

Author: Lisa J. Huriash

Coral Gables is in the midst of a growth spurt of mixed-use residential projects. Apartments, hotels, restaurants and more are being planned that will make "the city more active," said **Ramon Trias**, the city's Planning and Zoning director. One is at the doorstep of the Metrorail, within walking distance of shops and restaurants. Another will be outfitted with generators, thinking ahead to hurricane season. Many of the mixed-use projects are in "areas that in the past used to be mostly commercial," he said. "It's high-quality growth." Among the projects, according to the city or developers, are:

Giralda Place, a nine-story, mixed-use project of 33 condos on top of retail space. It's adjacent to a nine-story tower of Class A office space.

Closings will begin this month on the condos at 255-275 Giralda Ave. Building amenities include 24-hour concierge service and electric vehicle charging stations. Prices start from the \$900,000s. Units range from one to three bedrooms and have custom Italian cabinetry by Snaidero.

The Plaza Coral Gables, a 16-story project that is under construction. The 7-acre project will have 150 rental apartments, a 220-room hotel, 161,000 square feet of retail space and restaurants, and 465,000 square feet of office space.

Gables Station, a 499-unit rental apartment project that is under construction. The building, on Federal Highway from Ponce de Leon Boulevard to Le Jeune/Grand Avenue, will rise 14 stories tall and include commercial and office space. It will be 30 feet from a Metrorail station.

Paseo de la Riviera, an 11-story project that is under construction. It will feature a 249-room hotel, 211 apartments, retail space, and a large public open space in the form of a classically designed "paseo" (which is the Spanish word both for a leisurely walk and a walkway).

Merrick Manor, a 10-story building at 301 Altara Ave. that is expected to be completed by year's end. The project, by the Astor Cos., will have 227 condominiums, ranging from one- to four-bedroom units. Prices will range from \$374,900 to \$2.5 million. The project will also include 19,000 square feet of ground-floor retail and restaurants.

It is next to Merrick Park, which is an upscale shopping mall. "This area needs good condominium housing," said developer Henry Torres, of the Astor Cos. Among the perks: emergency generators for the amenities floor, which includes the fitness center area.

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Stuart News, The (FL)
June 20, 2018

Mediocre won't do for Fort Pierce's crown jewel - For plant site, patience better than so-so plans

Author: Anthony Westbury

I don't think it sends the message to the development world, ... that we can't make up our mind. I think it says just the opposite: We have a very special place here and we insist on only the best. Fort Pierce Community Redevelopment Agency board members made the first move Monday evening by giving the go-ahead for a new round of bids to develop the former H.D. King power plant site in downtown.

As I've written before, this is – or should be – the city's crown jewel. It's the last major undeveloped parcel that overlooks the Indian River Lagoon. It could be a visually stunning centerpiece for the city. Unfortunately, two recent proposals for the site were not, as Mayor Linda Hudson noted Monday, very "exciting." "I was struck by the lack of (public) enthusiasm for either proposal," Hudson said. "I'd hoped for a lot of excitement." We all did, but we didn't get it in the plans submitted.

CRA members voted unanimously Monday to re-do the city's request for proposals for the King site in the hope the city will receive better ideas next time. The timeline for a new RFP process is a little daunting. It'll take about 18 months all told, but several community members spoke in favor of getting the process right this time rather than settling for second-best, or worse. "We're not a third-rate community," resident Holly Theuns argued from the podium. "We deserve and can get better as a city. We're obliged to get the best (proposal) we can. Let's have community forums and make the third time the charm."

A former city commissioner, Eddie Becht, agreed. "We can do better," he said during public comment. "This is a unique centerpiece for Fort Pierce: It's on the water, it's right next door to the city marina where you've just invested \$20 million. "Why the rush (to approve inferior plans)? Three years ago we couldn't get a hotel; I believe if you put out another RFQ you'll get better proposals." Becht, a lawyer who specializes in real estate, said the market for commercial real estate in Fort Pierce is "hot" right now, and that we should take advantage of that trend.

City Manager Nick Mimms outlined an 18-month timeline for a fresh RFP process. One of the first tangible steps, Mimms said, will be a community planning forum slated for July or August. That is the community's chance to be heard (again), to tell city staff and prospective developers what we want to see on the King site.

As Commissioner Tom Perona noted, "we need a clearer message. We should have three or four absolutes we have to have in place." I'd go one step further. We need more than a list of major components for the site; we need a vision, a picture of how it all could look. I recall then-

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Commissioner Becht speaking from the dais in 2005 about shortcomings in the city planning department.

While then-Planning Director **Ramon Trias** had transformed downtown with some truly imaginative architecture and streetscape additions, other "nuts and bolts" planning regulations and an update to the city's comprehensive plan had gone neglected. "I need a planner," Becht said. "I've got a world-class urban designer, but I need a planner."

It wasn't long before **Trias** left the city. He's now planning director for the city of Coral Gables. We have a planner now, the competent Rebecca Grohall, and no disrespect to her abilities, but Fort Pierce needs an urban designer again, even temporarily. We need someone who can articulate the community's vision for the King site, put it on paper to inspire developers who want to buy the land and fulfill the city's dreams.

The visionary could be a consultant, it could be a team. In the past, designers from the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council re-imagined Harbortown Marina as a Mediterranean fishing village. They illustrated ideas for the wastewater treatment site on South Beach. Maybe we should ask them back?

Having a do-over on the King site can be a very good thing for Fort Pierce. I don't think it sends the message to the development world, as a couple of commissioners feared, that we can't make up our mind. I think it says just the opposite: We have a very special place here and we insist on only the best. We've been given another chance to get the King site right. Let's utilize all the talent we can muster to make it a crown jewel that truly dazzles.

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
January 27, 2017

What sort of college dorm can \$155 million buy? UM students will find out.

Author: Andres Viglucci and Lance Dixon

The University of Miami plans to spend around \$155 million on a major new dormitory complex on Lake Osceola, further cementing the institution's transition from a college with a majority of commuting students to a school increasingly centered around a traditional on-campus undergraduate experience. Construction of the elaborate 1,100-bed dorm would also carry side benefits for residents of surrounding Coral Gables by markedly easing auto traffic into and out of campus, long a sore point in the City Beautiful, UM and city officials say.

The dorm plan, which is now under review by the city but is expected to be greenlighted, is also designed to reduce automobile use on campus. It would convert a nearly nine-acre expanse at the center of the UM campus that's now occupied mostly by parking lots, a roadway and lawns into an activity-filled, pedestrian-friendly hub for student life, planners say. At ground and mezzanine level, the plan, which encompasses 23 interconnected buildings, includes retail space, a "launch pad" for student businesses, a 200-seat auditorium and a flexible "curated warehouse" that could accommodate special programs such as exhibits or dramatic productions.

The plan, designed by Miami-based architectural giant Arquitectonica, would in addition advance the greening of the UM campus by creating an expansive lawn and a tropical garden on the lakefront. The dorms, raised on thin columns and arranged in the shape of a lasso, would be set amid green-bedecked courtyards, plazas and outdoor spaces. Green roofs — that is, roofs literally covered by cooling green grass — would top the dorms. "As the institution continues to attract brighter and more talented students, the living space in this new facility is being designed to meet the needs and expectations of the next generation of University of Miami students," said Jim Smart, director of UM housing, in a statement. "By adding programming space to the lower levels, the village will serve as a gathering space for the greater UM community."

After a meeting at the city's Development Review Committee on Friday, UM representatives and Gables officials said they were happy with progress on the dorm blueprint, first envisioned under a campus master plan approved by the city in 2010. That broad plan gave UM significant flexibility in building inside the campus in exchange for strict controls by the city along the campus borders. The dorm complex would be approved by the Gables' planning director and does not require a city commission vote. "I think the University of Miami is doing an outstanding job with the functional aspects of the project and the design aspects of the project," said Gables planning director **Ramon Trias**. "It's going to completely transform the area around Lake Osceola, and the buildings will contribute to the overall aesthetic of the campus."

The dorm complex, which also requires approval by UM trustees, would open in fall 2019, the university said. It's only the latest in an ambitious series of expansion and improvement projects launched under now-retired UM President Donna Shalala, who raised more than \$3 billion in

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donations during her 14-year tenure at the university. The unveiling of the dorm plan comes just as UM completed the new Lennar Foundation Medical Center to provide consumer health services by its doctors on the campus edge on Ponce de Leon Boulevard. The medical center will hold its grand opening on Sunday.

The dorm project better positions UM, which has a reputation for older, cramped dorms that lack the snazzy amenities today's undergraduates expect, to compete for students who rate schools in part on dorm quality. The last big new dorm project built on campus was the University Village apartments on Red Road in 2006. Since then, developers have built apartment complexes near UM in part to lure students. UM also plans to soon begin renovating its older housing facilities. "As the University of Miami continues to rise as a top-tier research institution, so too do students' expectations for a comfortable, secure and supportive living and learning environment," said Patricia Whitely, UM's vice president for student affairs, in a statement released by the university.

The new complex would substantially boost the campus residential capacity. Only 4,000 of its 10,500 undergraduates now live on campus, UM says. Freshmen, with the exception of those whose parents live nearby, must live on campus and are not allowed to have cars on campus. But UM said it wants more of its undergraduates sleeping on campus, in part "to foster a stronger sense of on-campus community," according to an explanatory letter in its permit application.

The new dorms would have scads of amenities, from the auditorium and innovation spaces to study lounges, a bike room and outdoor recreation decks, as well as a distinctive look. In keeping with UM's design ethos — the main campus, developed mostly after World War II, was the first U.S. college built entirely with Modern architecture — the dorm complex is contemporary in style, updating the climate-friendly Miami Modern aesthetic.

The dorms would have slanted roofs, ranging in height from 50 to 70 feet, and three different facade designs — one in wood, another in metal, and a third in concrete and stucco. Planning documents promise lots of natural light and interconnecting, shady breezeways and airy colonnades at ground level. The project would entail the loss of parking, some of which would be replaced with the addition of parking lifts at UM's Pavia Parking Garage, as well as the closure of a roadway, eliminating some vehicular traffic in favor of a pedestrianized "car-free zone" connected with the surrounding campus by a network of new walkways, the application says.

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Ramon Trias**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
May 16, 2016

New plans proposed for Coral Gables' North Ponce area at community meeting

Author: Lance Dixon

As more change, modernization and development come to Coral Gables, city staff is working to find a balance between the old and new in the North Ponce neighborhood. The city is considering the creation of two zoning overlay areas that would both encourage commercial development on Ponce de Leon Boulevard and preserve the residential character of the neighborhoods around the road. Gables staff welcomed about 25 residents to the St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church for a community planning meeting May 5 to present them with the proposed zoning changes and receive their feedback. Similar meetings held last summer partly shaped the latest plans for the area. The North Ponce neighborhood is bounded by Alhambra Circle, Southwest Eighth Street, Douglas and LeJeune roads. "We would really like to see this remain a residential community of a scale that is very livable and walkable," Commissioner Patricia Keon said.

Staff's proposal is for a conservation district in the two neighborhoods off of Ponce, on the east and west sides. The city would then create a North Ponce mixed-use overlay for the land along Ponce and in the city's business district. The conservation district would encourage the development of small businesses like bed and breakfasts and home offices. Buildings in the area would be capped at 20,000 square feet and three stories high. The district also includes proposals like matching every car parking space with a bicycle parking space and providing a bicycle rack for each new building.

Meanwhile the mixed-use district along Ponce would encourage larger buildings with a minimum of 20,000 square feet and mandatory step-backs from both the main street and the residential district. In addition to the potential zoning changes, the city hopes to do additional studies and create pedestrian and bicycle mobility plans for the area while also exploring the creation of residential permit parking. Staff is also considering the addition of new park spaces in the area and the use of vacant lots to develop community civic spaces or build larger apartments along Ponce.

Residents at the meeting seemed encouraged by the idea of protecting the residential areas, but some expressed concern about large development on Ponce. "Once you have everything going up you can't tell one developer no if you did it for the other one," Mayra Diaz said.

Staff said that the plan is a work in progress and finding a balance between new commercial growth and conserving the residential feel of North Ponce will be their challenge. "I do think when we get done, this area is going to be very similar to what it is now," planning director **Ramon Trias** said. Staff will take the residents' feedback and present an updated plan to the City Commission at a future meeting.

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Miami Hurricane
April 13, 2016

City Commission of Coral Gables hosts public hearing for Gifford Arboretum

By David Ufberg

After nearly two hours of discussion Tuesday morning, the City Commission of Coral Gables approved the University of Miami's request to alter the plans of the internal road to be built through the northern part of campus so that it does not run through the Gifford Arboretum. The City Hall hosted a public hearing on Tuesday regarding the construction of the road through the arboretum areas. The decision is not yet finalized and is subject to change before final approval. In the current plan, the proposed road would connect the two parking lots adjacent to the arboretum, connecting the northeast side of campus to the northwest by road. UM's request for the road, however, entails the pavement being laid around the arboretum as opposed to through it, preserving it in its entirety. The proposal for the road first arose in 2007 due to a large amount of complaints from nearby residents about traffic and was subsequently postponed.

City of Coral Gables Planning Director **Ramon Trias** spoke to the commission about UM's proposed redesign of the construction project, which would include not building through the arboretum. "The [primary] condition is the improvements around Campo Sano ... The ones that enhance the aesthetics around the campus," **Trias** said. "The University has committed to fund \$1 million in public projects for the neighborhood [should its request for the internal road be fulfilled]."

One of the potential resolutions includes UM's funding of \$1 million worth of public works projects to benefit the neighborhood. Another would see an expansion of the arboretum.

Maria Cruz, a representative of the residents around UM who are concerned about student traffic in their neighborhood, questioned why it took so long for "the neighbors" to get what they want and deserve. "[In 2007], we felt that we needed the internal road to alleviate the traffic in our area. We fought it and fought; we finally got the city to give us an agreement that it would be built," Cruz said. "Somehow, the university found ways to postpone, extend ... to not have to complete it. And this is where we are today. It should have been completed years ago ... It's very hard to walk on San Amaro and look at cars parked there, where you felt that the area should be open."

Stephen Pearson, the director of the arboretum, explained how crucial the area is to the community. "We have programs throughout the school year; every single one of these programs are free and open to the public," he said. "We fought very hard to reciprocate to the community and to educate the community."

Commissioner Vince Lago agreed with Pearson that the garden is a mainstay of the community; he lives on San Amaro Drive and sees the arboretum every day. On Wednesday night, Pearson and approximately 50 people gathered in the arboretum to observe Arbor Day as part of Earth

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Week and to celebrate the Coral Gables campus's designation as a Tree Campus USA by the Arbor Day Foundation. The designation honors universities that effectively manage trees and engage students in doing so. The jazz ensemble from the Frost School of Music, the Zack Zebley Trio, performed at the event. At the event, Pearson, who has been director for four years, said he knows many residents who are in favor of expanding the arboretum rather than constricting it.

The video of the public hearing at the commission meeting will be available on the City of Coral Gables website on Thursday or Friday.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Miami Herald, The (FL)
July 5, 2015

Redevelopment wave to hit Coral Gables

Author: Andres Viglucci

Until now, Coral Gables - unflashy, uncool, a Mediterranean-themed bastion of affluent suburban stolidity - seemed a bulwark against the wave of redevelopment that's swept through neighboring Miami and Miami Beach, turning derelict areas from South Beach to Brickell and Midtown into dense urban enclaves a-glimmer with the young and hip.

Not that anyone in the City Beautiful was complaining. And not that there wasn't the occasional big new residential and commercial project downtown, or some hot restaurants opening amid the bridal shops, to enliven the worn sidewalks of Miracle Mile, its once-sleepy main street. But wander a couple of blocks off the Mile, especially after office hours, and the Gables still seems more City Quiescent than City Beautiful. That may be about to change.

An avalanche of high-density projects, some with towers pushing up against the limits of the city's famously stringent zoning rules, could reshape the landscape of central Coral Gables, filling in its downtown and surrounding neighborhoods with new hotels, hundreds of condo and apartment units, and an array of office, restaurant and retail space that measures out in the hundreds of thousands of square feet.

The roster of projects, many approved and some already under construction, has stirred impassioned debate among Gables residents and elected officials. Some fear the surge imperils the city's proud tradition of meticulous planning and tightly controlled development - a regime well known for regulating construction down to the color you may paint your house. Others say it will bring welcome growth and rejuvenation while hewing to city father George Merrick's picturesque vision of a subtropical Mediterranean Eden, thanks to those strict rules and a series of planning and quality-of-life initiatives by the city that include a total makeover of Miracle Mile. One thing's for sure: This is not your grandfather's Coral Gables.

Earlier this month, after three years of intensive review and revision, Gables commissioners approved the biggest single development in the city's 90-year history - the Mediterranean Village at Ponce Circle, comprising more than one million square feet of hotel, condos and shopping layered into 6.7 acres of long-vacant land three blocks south of the Mile on Ponce de Leon Boulevard.

In embracing the project blueprint, which contains nearly as much retail space as exists along the entire Mile, commissioners broke with longstanding Coral Gables practice: They allowed a significant markup in density even after trimming the project's size. And, by a narrow 3-2 vote, they approved a controversial restaurant above the hotel tower's 19th floor, up to now the strict cap for habitable space in the city. Only the cupola above the city's fabled Biltmore Hotel will top the tip of the Mediterranean Village's 297-foot-high spire, and just by a couple of feet.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Ramon Trias***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

That's hardly the end of it. Some 16 projects of substantial size are in the city development pipeline. They range from an outpost of the budget-friendly, youth-oriented Aloft Hotel chain now under construction on busy Le Jeune Road to a proposed 16-story residential tower, 33 Alhambra, that would occupy most of a city block behind Coral Gables Elementary School, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Gables Mayor Jim Cason acknowledges that's quite a bit for a city of 50,000 that he says had seen just 13 major new developments since 1999. But he's not sure all the contemplated projects will actually get built or go as big as proposed. Speculators and inexperienced developers often give up when they run into the first critical design review from the city, he said. "There's lots of people who say they want to build in Coral Gables," Cason said. "People say the tall buildings are coming. Well, maybe, maybe not."

It's not just tall buildings, though. Developers have filed applications for more than half a dozen infill residential projects, mostly rowhouses and small apartment buildings, that would replace modest and sometimes rundown duplexes and apartments dotting neighborhoods west of downtown. The wave extends to the old industrial section surrounding the upscale, 13-year-old Village of Merrick Park shopping mall, an area south of downtown that's being gradually transformed into a high-density mixed-use district. Ugo Colombo, owner of The Collection auto dealership on Bird Road, purchased the adjoining block and, with developer Shoma, recently won approval for the Collection Residences, a 10-story building with 270 luxury condos and 40,000 square feet of ground-floor retail. That's just one of six large projects approved or proposed for the district.

Developers are even looking to build tall on South Dixie Highway, the strip-mall-dominated corridor that bisects Coral Gables. A contentious proposal to replace the old Holiday Inn across from the University of Miami with two towers, a 15-story residential building and a 13-story hotel, has divided residents of the single-family neighborhood behind it. The project would feature shops and restaurants on the ground floor and a pedestrian passage connecting to the adjoining neighborhood. City officials insist they're equal to the challenge.

They've put the brakes to the Holiday Inn project while they study its impact and develop a broader vision for the Dixie corridor - one of two such planning efforts now underway. "We're not going to allow anything to get out of hand," Cason said. "We want to preserve Merrick's vision. There's always people who want to build more than we want. But we're never going to be Brickell. We don't allow buildings that tall." But the stream of plans has strained the resources of the city's small planning department and raised concern among some residents over the ability and willingness of administrators and elected officials to protect Coral Gables' historic scale, look and feel. Many also worry about the impact on traffic, which already becomes congested at peak times.

Downtown Coral Gables, a regional corporate and employment center that attracts tens of thousands of commuters, is certainly no stranger to height or density. Most developers working there today already take advantage of zoning bonuses that allow them to build bigger if they

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Ramon Trias**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

adopt the city's trademark Mediterranean look. But, like the approved Mediterranean Village, many of the proposed new developments result from big lot assemblages and may require rezonings, variances or special large-area plans that strike some as more go-go Miami than conservative Coral Gables. Critics say it would be unwise for the city to stray from the plan Merrick developed in the 1920s. The city founder adopted the tenets of the late-19th Century City Beautiful movement, which sought to bring elegance to gritty American cities by erecting grand civic buildings in a garden-like setting of squares, fountains, boulevards and plazas - a template Gables leaders have mostly preserved and enhanced in the decades since. "The people who want to come in and get exemptions ought to be building according to our code," resident Jim Hartnett told city commissioners as they debated the Mediterranean Village plan. "Sooner or later, it will not be Coral Gables, the City Beautiful, but Coral Gables, the city of concrete."

Recently installed Gables commissioner Jeanett Slesnick, who ran on a slow-growth platform, contends the city had become too lenient in granting what she called "spot zoning" to developers seeking to supersize projects. "It's why I ran for office," said Slesnick, whose husband, Don Slesnick, preceded Cason as mayor. "I got angry that this was happening in my town. I want people to take a second look at what they're doing. You have to have some change. But you need quality change, change that reflects the community."

The development pressure on the Gables, developers and city officials say, results from spillover from Miami's real-estate boom and a pent-up appetite among Millennials and empty-nesters for urban-style living in the suburbs. The central Gables, with its urban grid layout, a burgeoning dining and cultural scene, stable governance and a well-to-do population, but also antiquated, non-historic commercial buildings on small lots, is a natural draw for redevelopment, they say.

To be sure, nothing in the Gables development pipeline approaches the scale of the newest megablock skyscrapers in Miami. But dense Miami-style development has been creeping up to the Gables border at both Bird Road and Coral Way, where the municipal dividing line runs along or close to Douglas Road. "The whole market is hyperactive," said veteran developer Armando Codina, who has built several mixed-use buildings in the Gables in past years and has started construction on his newest, a 16-story residential building with a companion four-story office building, on an acre and a half at 2020 Salzedo Street. "What's happening inside the Gables is simply that the market is overheated."

Codina, who stressed that he has never asked for a variance from the Gables' height cap, said he believes the city's code for downtown has it about right, encouraging an urbane and consistent scale of development. "I think we have the right scale," he said of his new buildings, which will be separated by a broad, public interior courtyard for dining and lingering. "It's a very human scale. It's a Coral Gables scale. I like their code. I like their controls. I know someone's not going to come and build something crappy next to me."

City commissioners and planners have been at pains to stress that the Mediterranean Village, which supplants a never-completed Spanish Village development, presented unique circumstances because of its size, and set no legal precedents for other developers. They note the

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

city stood its ground when the Mediterranean Village developer, Agave Ponce, an offshoot of the Mexican family that controls the Cuervo brand of tequila, initially filed plans that many thought too big and mall-like. Planners and elected officials got Agave to scrub more than 100,000 square feet from the project, including an entire residential tower, a gym and a cinema, which the city said would have cast a shadow over a single-family neighborhood to the east and overwhelmed an important historic building that's to be incorporated into the village. Agave also reshaped the village to put pedestrian-friendly street-level retail and a pedestrian-only "paseo" entrance on Ponce de Leon Boulevard.

The result, the city says, is an urbanistically cohesive, well-designed set of buildings and public plazas and streets that will bring fresh commercial and pedestrian life to what's been a dead zone for too long. "That took three years and the developer was not happy, but that's what it takes," said **Ramon Trias**, the city planning director. "Every step of the way, it got better."

City planners have also scrambled to get ahead of the development wave, embarking on rapid studies of two broad areas of the city where development pressure is building - the South Dixie corridor and North Ponce, the mostly low-scale residential neighborhood that extends north from Alhambra Circle downtown to Southwest Eighth Street along Ponce de Leon Boulevard.

In North Ponce - a hodge-podge of historic apartment houses and nondescript buildings edging up to more-recently built residential towers on Ponce - the goal is to develop rules for congenial new development that preserves and enhances its urban-village texture and economic diversity, city planners and consultants say. No fewer than nine projects have been proposed for the North Ponce area, one of the few relatively affordable neighborhoods in the Gables. "We will set the parameters as to what we accept and what we want up there," Cason said. "We don't want spot zoning."

On South Dixie, where Merrick's zoning was changed in the 1940s to accommodate auto-oriented strip development, the idea is to set the table for a gradual transformation of what's now a funnel for cars into a more walkable, Gables-like boulevard - perhaps by returning to Merrick's original conception, which Gables planning director **Trias** says called for tall buildings. On the west side, the city is actively supporting plans for the Underline, a contemplated bikeway and linear park that would replace the bare-bones path beneath the elevated Metrorail line.

At the same time, the city will soon break ground on a long-contemplated, \$20 million streetscape makeover of Miracle Mile and neighboring Giralda Avenue, the popular but faded block-long restaurant row, that's designed to beautify and make both much more welcoming for pedestrians. Now in the last stages of planning and design, the project will expand the width of sidewalks along the Mile to 23 feet, from the current 15 1/2 feet, to accommodate pedestrians, outdoor cafes and a dense thicket of shade trees, all by slightly narrowing auto travel lanes and supplanting angled street parking with parallel parking, a controversial idea that will eliminate numerous spots. The restaurant row, meanwhile, would be rebuilt in a curbless European design so it can better accommodate events like the popular Giralda Under the Stars, a seasonal monthly event in which restaurants set up tables in the street. Retractable bollards would make it easy to

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Ramon Trias**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

close the street for such special events. The draft plans for both streets, by noted New York firm Cooper, Robertson & Partners, feature artsy design elements - pavers tinted to resemble clouds and blue sky on the Mile and, on Giralda, a street design consisting of concentric circles that resemble ripples in a puddle, and above it, suspended LED lights shaped like raindrops. Thick copses of trees at either end of Giralda will create romantic, formal entranceways. A related city project would replace the two big obsolete parking garages on Valencia Avenue, just behind Miracle Mile, that create a dead zone for pedestrians. The city is looking for developers to build a total of about 500 parking spaces within architecturally fitting, sidewalk-friendly building envelopes, and with some mix of uses, possibly including condos or apartments. Merchants and property owners on the Mile say the streetscape improvements are long overdue, pointing to its stained, uneven sidewalks, cracked paving tiles, patches of bare dirt in open tree pits and the non-functional historic fountains at either end of the street.

They say the Mile needs to regain its luster if downtown Coral Gables is to hold its place in the increasingly competitive urban ecology of Miami-Dade, where new and resurgent neighborhoods like Midtown Miami, Wynwood, the Design District and even adjacent South Miami's downtown are drawing away well-to-do shoppers, diners and residents by amping up the pedestrian, dining and shopping ambience. "Miracle Mile is the absolute face of the city," said Stephen Bittell, chairman of Terranova Corp., a real estate firm heavily involved in the revitalization of Lincoln Road Mall in Miami Beach that now owns multiple buildings on the Mile. "It just needs to reclaim its glory and kind of go back to the future. To do that you gotta bring people to the street. That turns on everything else there."

Bringing people to the street, in fact, aptly sums up the city's development strategy and its response to the traffic issue. Mixing condos and apartments with offices, shopping and dining, attracts young professionals to boost commerce and helps keep a lid on auto traffic, officials say. "They can live near where they work and walk and bike," Cason said. The city is also installing new bike lanes routes and expanding its popular trolley-bus system. Under the Mediterranean Village approval, Agave will put up \$37 million towards neighborhood and street improvements and for expansion of trolley service. The developer will spend \$1.3 million to buy four new trolleys and \$626,000 annually for 25 years towards operations. The city also required Agave to incorporate significant bike-parking facilities and showers for bike commuters.

Such meticulously planned projects, supporters say, distinguish development in the Gables. The Mediterranean Village faced little resistance in the end because neighbors and Miracle Mile merchants and property owners, initially wary of its impact on homes and businesses, were won over by its benefits, noted Agave's land-use lawyer. Marcio Garcia-Serra. "At one point people were very resistant to change, but that's changed. They see that development done the right way can lead to benefits for their daily lives, such as a more walkable city," he said.

Cason said he intends to ensure that review of forthcoming projects will be exacting. "We want to preserve the great things in Coral Gables, and that means controlling what goes on downtown and in the residential neighborhoods," he said, before adding with a laugh: "No purple houses."

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Indian River Press Journal/Sebastian Sun/50 Plus Lifestyles/Florida Fairways (FL)
February 2, 2006

Vero panel to interview firms for zoning codes

Author: KEONA GARDNER

VERO BEACH -- Almost a year after the City Council approved a plan to help manage the future growth, city officials will interview firms to help direct the process. Starting on Friday and continuing on Wednesday, four firms from as close as Fort Pierce to as far as Jacksonville will vie for a chance to help write the city's future zoning codes.

The selection committee's suggestion will be given to the City Council for approval. The committee is composed of Deborah Daige and Keith Pelan, members of the Vision Implementation Team; Planning Manager Nancy Carter; Finance Director Stephen Maillet and Monte Falls, Public Works and Engineering director. The winning firm would be charged with rewriting the city's zoning code to mirror the Vision Plan and creating master plans for several of the city's commercial districts.

Pelan said Tuesday consultants are needed because the implementation process is a time-consuming task for city staff and the 21-member implementation team to undertake. "I don't have the expertise and the time and neither do they (the team) have the time," Pelan said.

The Fort Pierce-based **Trias** and Associates will be the first firm to interview. The firm's principal is former Fort Pierce Planning Director **Ramon Trias**, who facilitated September's community forum on design changes to the Twin Pairs. So far, the city has paid **Trias** \$15,000 for the forum.

If selected, **Trias** will work with local architect Michael Wangen, who is a city Planning and Zoning Board member, to rewrite city code. By working with **Trias**, Wangen -- who could not be reached for comment -- may create a conflict of interest because board members are prohibited from having any contact with any party that may go before the board on an issue.

Assistant City Attorney Wayne Coment said Tuesday he hasn't researched the issue fully, but the conflict could be avoided if Wangen recuses himself from voting on the zoning changes proposed by **Trias's** firm. What: Interviewing firms to help implement the Vision Plan.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Sun Sentinel
January 16, 2005

DOWNTOWN FORT PIERCE SET FOR BUILDING BOOM

Author: Brandy Swartz

Recent building plan approvals might signify the beginning of a boom for downtown Fort Pierce. Cheryl Asklof's eyes light up when she talks about the condominiums that will be built behind her shop, Bangz, a hair salon in the historic P.P. Cobb building. "I cannot wait to see condos right there and over there," Asklof said as she pointed toward lots where future projects are in various site plan stages. She has owned the business for six years and said she chose the location because she believed in the downtown area. Four downtown projects are in different stages of development, including Marina Square, the city's JC Penney parking garage, the Renaissance and now One Marina Place -- the most recent to have its preliminary site plan approved -- and will allow people to live downtown. One Marina Place is a five-story project featuring 41 condominiums and retail space on a 1.2-acre lot. The lot is located in an area that allows the city to control development.

City commissioners approved plans on Jan. 3 for more units per acre and a taller building than other downtown structures, although they asked that the height be brought down from 84 feet to 75. The building is being developed by Location Development of Boynton Beach. "It's a long time coming," Commissioner Christine Coke said, adding the city's enthusiasm needs to be peppered with caution. Coke criticized the city at a commission meeting Monday night, saying its plans to have shops at the street level of the JC Penney parking garage would put private retailers at a disadvantage. "A lot of people have said that the retail will be competing with downtown shops," Coke said. "I don't think it's fair of the city to compete with local citizens" who own businesses downtown or are trying to rent out retail space.

The garage would be southwest of Marina Square on Indian River Drive and add about 300 public parking spaces downtown. There would be three stories of office space and one story of retail business use, according to **Ramon Trias**, city director of development. **Trias** said he hopes to begin building the parking garage at the same time as Marina Square.

Marina Square is a 2.5-acre site across from the city marina that would house a five-story building featuring hotel rooms and condominiums, office space, retail space, a 3,600-square-foot conference center and public and private parking. The cost is an estimated \$50 million and the project might take more than a year to complete, according to the developer, Catalfumo Construction of Palm Beach County.

The Renaissance is still in the early planning stages but architect Philip Steele of Steele Design Associates, Inc. said he has a finished schematic for the lot, just over one acre. His plans are for 56 condominium units, four stories of offices on the Indian River Drive side and commercial space on the Melody Lane side, "on top of and around" a two-story parking garage. The developer is Boca Ven Land of Vero Beach.

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Stuart News, The (FL)
November 6, 2000

Piecing together the future, students design hypothetical

Author: Carla Roccapriore

FORT PIERCE -- High wind, strong rain and safety alerts don't accompany all Hurricanes paying visits to Fort Pierce. Fifty-four Hurricanes swarmed the area this year, arriving from Coral Gables with a professor and guided by a local alumnus.

University of Miami students toured Fort Pierce in September, learning about its architecture and revitalization efforts from **Ramon Trias**, the city's director of development, who also traveled to the campus to speak to Dr. Joanna Lombard's students. As a result, future buildings in northwest Fort Pierce may someday be built thanks to the two-month-long efforts and creativity of several second-year UM architecture students. They built models from balsa wood and designed drawings of proposed structures for sites within three blocks of the Sgt. Willie B. Ellis Police Substation on Avenue D, **Trias** said.

An array of their work was put on display at the substation this weekend -- outlining imminent possibilities for northwest Fort Pierce. "The university has ways to test things better than the commercial market," Lombard said. "Students try to do research, legwork and test ideas. Then the professionals take over." Such concepts are common in many industries, she said.

Trias, who earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees in architecture at UM, led students through the city, taking them to older, historic buildings, such as the Seven Gables House and St. Anastasia School. He also took them down Avenue D, discussing possible plans -- the root of their recently completed class projects. "This is real exceptional work -- the question is whether we can learn from it and get the whole area [Avenue D] moving," **Trias** said. "They were being fairly realistic. Fort Pierce was a good laboratory for them."

Design proposals from students included a produce market, community theater, bakery, row house, apartments, music store, homes, bed and breakfast, professional offices, health clinic, community development center and a seamstress shop. The model buildings were all mixed-use - - some commercial, others Florida cracker-style, **Trias** said.

Students were graded on the general appropriateness of their proposals and how closely their plan would fit and work, Lombard said. Students also learned how building structures in urban and suburban areas differ.

Redevelopment in a city such as Fort Pierce is about architecture, mainly public space and public buildings, **Trias** said. Lombard said her students were excited about assisting the city and impressed with the high quality and quantity of urban architecture. She said she'd be interested in returning to Fort Pierce with future students.

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The work of the UM students opened many eyes. Avenue D was a "nice place" 30 to 40 years ago, **Trias** said. But to regain its once-vibrant spirit, help from the private sector is necessary, he said. "What we're missing are people who actually want to do it," **Trias** said. "Part of what needs to happen are people in this business need to discover Avenue D as a place of quality and opportunity."

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Stuart News, The (FL)
September 3, 1999

PSL'S COOPER BLUNDERED WITH UNGRACIOUS REMARK

Dear Editor:

As a class member of Leadership XVII, I recently experienced the different municipal governments of St. Lucie County in action. Since this letter is coming from an individual, I cannot unequivocally say that the entire class agrees with me, but I would venture to say that at least 98 percent would concur with the following.

Kudos to Fort Pierce Mayor Eddie Enns, City Manager Dennis Beach and Director of Planning **Ramon Trias** for their professionalism, information and hospitality. They encouraged participation by the class and provided the overall picture of where Fort Pierce has been and is going. What teamwork and what a support system!

Much to my chagrin, I was incredibly taken aback by Port St. Lucie City Manager Don Cooper. I will cite only one of what I considered to be several blunders.

The most blatantly disturbing comment that I must address is when he said "my wife refuses to go to Fort Pierce for fear of being murdered."

During City Manager Cooper's presentation he provided numerous facts. He stated, "what Fort Pierce does affects Port St. Lucie and what Port St. Lucie does affects Fort Pierce." This is clearly evident to me, but I question how evident it is to Mr. Cooper and how it enhances the relationships between Port St. Lucie and Fort Pierce. I see it as a step back, not forward.

Good luck, Port St. Lucie.
Betsy Haddock
Fort Pierce

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Ramon Trias**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Stuart News, The (FL)
April 23, 1999

3 LOCAL HISTORICAL PROJECTS RECEIVE \$55,000 IN GRANTS

Author: Drew Dixon

"They're beginning to discover there's a lot of history in Fort Pierce." **Ramon Trias** Planning Director

City of Fort Pierce

Three historical projects - two sponsored by the city of Fort Pierce and one by St. Lucie County - have received more than \$55,000 in grants from the Florida Department of State Historic Preservation. The city received more than \$35,000 in matching grants; the county received \$20,000. **Ramon Trias**, director of planning for the city, applied for the grants and called the awards a coup for the area. "They're beginning to discover there's a lot of history in Fort Pierce," **Trias** said. "Historical people are starting to pay attention now."

Of the grant money earmarked for Fort Pierce, \$25,000 will go to the Seven Gables House, a cracker-style historic home that last year was moved next to the Manatee Observation and Education Center in downtown Fort Pierce and will serve as a historic museum showcasing local architecture and lifestyle. The restoration and preservation of Seven Gables House cost the city \$230,000, and the grant from the state will offset some of that cost, **Trias** said. The house is set to open to the public later this year. The city also received \$10,927 to be used for the Fort Pierce Architecture Education program, **Trias** said. The city's planning department has developed a coloring book designed for elementary students that features the architectural uniqueness in Fort Pierce.

A test sampling of the book was distributed to fourth-graders at F.K. Sweet Magnet Elementary School earlier this month, and **Trias** said it went over well with the youngsters. "It was way beyond my expectations," **Trias** said. "They were talking about architectural terms. They were ready to conduct a course." But the overall urban renewal of downtown is what is bringing the funding to the city, **Trias** said. A couple of years ago the State Department did help with some funding of Sunrise Theater restoration. "Now they realize there's a lot of historic buildings around it. The whole downtown is what makes Fort Pierce so interesting."

The St. Lucie County Archaeological Survey scored \$20,000 in grants for projects that would make Indiana Jones proud. "It will be (used for) a survey of prehistoric and archeological sites," said David Kelly, planning manager for the county. "We are aware of a number of archeological sites that are certainly pre-written history sites. They're prehistoric Native American sites."

Kelly said a consultant will be hired to survey the sites and search for new sites. And that, he said, could generate ecotourism and heritage tourism. Beside that, Kelly said, the county has a cultural obligation to identify historical Native American sites. "We have citizens of St. Lucie

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

County represented by these groups and I think it is important culturally." The county is kicking in \$32,000 from the general fund for the archeological research. A consultant will also be hired and the county plans to produce a video explaining the archeological significance of the area, Kelly said. The Florida Department of State distributed nearly \$1 million in grants as part of the historic preservation funding this year. In all, 58 historic projects in Florida received money.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Stuart News, The (FL)
June 5, 1998

GROUNDBREAKING SIGNALS START OF EFFORT TO REVIVE AVENUE D

Author: George Andreassi

To go along with the improvements, Fort Pierce officials have asked residents to cooperate with police on crime issues. "Needless to say, we could come in here and pave these streets with gold. That won't do any good if we can't remove the criminal element." Reginald Sessions

FORT PIERCE - Declaring a new beginning for a faded commercial corridor that has become synonymous with drugs and violence, city officials Thursday staged a ceremonial groundbreaking for a \$2 million rebuilding of Avenue D. "We're here today to remove that negative stigma on this particular corridor," said City Commissioner Reginald Sessions. "Needless to say, we could come in here and pave these streets with gold. That won't do any good if we can't remove the criminal element."

Sessions called for neighborhood residents to cooperate with police and refuse to tolerate the drug dealing and violent crime that have made Avenue D the most notorious street in the city. Avenue D has been the scene of many killings in recent years, including a fatal shooting Feb. 23. There also have been dozens of arrests this year on drug-dealing charges, according to police reports.

But city officials and neighborhood merchants hope the reconstruction of the road and the erection of a new fire station and police substation will provide the impetus for an economic revival of the once-thriving commercial strip. "Avenue D is everybody's problem," said Randolph Scott, president of the Lincoln Park Community Businessmen's and Women's Association and owner of Scotty's Deli, 1507 Avenue D. "We need to stop making Avenue D our excuse and start making it a solution."

Plans call for the reconstruction of Avenue D from U.S. 1 west to the city line at 33rd Street, said **Ramon Trias**, the city's director of planning. "It's going to be brand-new, a total reconstruction," he said. "The deferred maintenance of the last couple of decades is going to be completely taken care of."

The planning director said he could not find anyone who remembers the last time Avenue D was repaved. A roundabout is planned for 15th Street, similar to the traffic circle on Indian River Drive at Avenue A in downtown Fort Pierce, **Trias** said. He expressed support for a proposal by Scott to place a statue or monument in the center of the roundabout in honor of the black civic activists who contributed to the progress of the city's black residents.

Sidewalks also will be expanded to 10 feet wide and there will be brick crosswalks, **Trias** said. The street will be lined with cabbage palm trees and most of the overhead utility lines will be moved to other streets, he said. An important aspect of the redevelopment plan for Avenue D is

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

the construction of a \$500,000 police substation at the intersection with Means Court, which is known as "Slay Corner." Construction is scheduled to begin in the fall.

Plans for Avenue D were formulated during a community planning session in May 1996 when city planners and community residents met to discuss their vision for the future of the Lincoln Park neighborhood, **Trias** said. But not everyone on Avenue D is happy about the way the city is handling the reconstruction.

George Porter, the owner of G&T Tires, said he thinks the city's offer of \$1.50 a square foot is too low for the commercial property it wants to acquire along Avenue D to accommodate the widening of the sidewalks. "It's not all roses," he said. "They're low-balling everybody out here. I want fair market value. It's a good location." Porter said he plans to establish a service station and convenience store on his property at Avenue D and 15th Street. He said he is negotiating with two major oil companies.

Sessions said some of the city's older residents told him about a time before desegregation when Avenue D was the heart of the black community in Fort Pierce. But as black and white people began to mix more freely, many merchants moved their businesses to more lucrative sites and Avenue D began to suffer from crime, vice and urban blight, he said.

Scott called upon the former residents and merchants who had made Avenue D a thriving commercial strip to help restore it to its former glory. "I came back to put my roots back where I came from, which was Avenue D and I'm not ashamed of it," he said. "We need the people of the community that have moved away - that grew up here, that went to the juke bars here, that danced on this street ... to come back and help us uplift the community because we need it."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Ramon Trias**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Stuart News, The (FL)
April 29, 1996

Top planner remembers charrettes

Author: James L. Rosica

FORT PIERCE -- The meetings are over, the colored pencils put away, but **Ramon Trias** hasn't forgotten the importance of the city's recent community planning sessions. Residents and local business owners met last month with professional planners and designers for two separate planning series, one devoted to Orange and Delaware avenues, the other to Avenue D. **Trias**, the city's director of planning, pores over a large-scale map of the master plan developed for the Orange Avenue corridor and surrounding neighborhoods. "We want to keep the ideas alive," he said, pointing at the thin line that represents a two-lane Orange Avenue with on-street parking. Other groups, like the nonprofit Neighborhood Housing Services, have been getting residents together in brainstorming meetings.

The group's neighborhood coordinator said residents have formed work groups to check into the feasibility of rehabilitating the old St. Anastasia school or developing a neighborhood business incubator. They also sponsored the first few meetings that developed into the Avenue D Merchants' Association. "It was a wonderful process," said Linda Van Natta, referring to the planning sessions. "But we want to keep people excited" about the area's potential. But keeping up the excitement means seeing the work actually getting done. So **Trias** and other city officials met last week with representatives of the Department of Transportation about getting started on the proposed streetscape changes. The state oversees maintenance and construction on Delaware and Orange.

The DOT agreed to the changes but asked the city and county commissions for resolutions supporting them, according to City Manager Dennis Beach. Delaware Avenue between U.S. 1 and 13th Street should have two opposing lanes of traffic with on-street parking on either side, **Trias** said. Between 13th and 17th Streets, Delaware should have the same configuration with an added grass median.

Because of space limitations, bike lanes won't be built, he said. **Trias** earlier said the city wants to take over from the state the one-way section of Orange Avenue, in between Seventh Street and U.S. 1. It's possible the city could get the road within the year, state officials said. The transfer would need Transportation Secretary Ben Watts' approval. Even County Administrator Tom Kindred's interest has been piqued by last month's sessions, **Trias** said.

Kindred attended part of the meetings for the Avenue D corridor and told the audience about how his father would take him shopping on the strip when he was a young lad. Kindred was out of town and could not be reached for comment. But Philip Freeland, the county's community development administrator, said Kindred asked him to coordinate with the city on some of the road changes. Avenue D is a county road. "We certainly try to accommodate changes when it affects land within the city," he said.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Ramon Trias**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Stuart News, The (FL)
October 4, 1995

Racial issues surround city's reorganization plan

Author: Maryanne Murray

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Ramon Trias** is listed below.]

In a separate action, commissioners voted 4-1 to confirm **Ramon Trias**, a staff planner for the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, as the city's new Director of Planning -- a position Drummond said Smith should have been selected for. Smith's new job will pay \$55,000 a year, about \$5,000 more than her current salary.

Under the contract approved Tuesday, **Trias** will be paid \$57,500 a year. He will start work sometime in late November, Beach said. Last January, **Trias** led a community planning session known as a ``charrette" and helped craft a master plan for downtown redevelopment. ``He has spent a lot of time in our community," Commissioner Mary Ann Bryan said. ``He knows our problems -- /and/ our potential."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Stuart News, The (FL)
November 27, 1994

Creating a sense of place, White City historical

Author: Mark Schlueb

WHITE CITY -- Residents here want to make sure their memories don't become a thing of the past, and regional planners have taken the first steps toward helping them. The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council this week handed over its preliminary recommendations to the county for turning White City into an historical district.

County and regional planners met with residents in September. During two brain-storming sessions, homeowners told officials they want to preserve and build upon White City's turn-of-the-century ambience. "I've been to other areas of the United States where they've been able to preserve parts of their heritage," resident Patricia Ferrick said. "I think it's possible for White City, too."

Regional Planner **Ramon Trias** said a historical district for the 6 1/2-square-mile unincorporated area is feasible but will take some hard work. "It's a very difficult undertaking. It's much easier when you have a city that's built-out with historic buildings," he said. "White City doesn't have that -- it has a lot of gaps." The recommendations **Trias** made to the county would help fill in those holes.

The most ambitious suggestion in the proposal calls for the county to establish zoning restrictions that would limit new construction in White City to certain architectural styles. Hoping to promote construction of the Florida cracker-style buildings common to White City, the proposal would require new homes to have a porch at least 12 feet long running along the front facade. Driveways would be prohibited in the front yards of new homes; automobiles would gain access through a rear alley.

Commercial buildings lining the town center would have porches that run the length of the front. Billboards would be prohibited, as would many types of businesses, including car dealerships, packing houses, scrap yards and kennels.

Officials say most residents favor turning the area into a historical district, but if architectural standards are established some might complain that the county is trampling their property rights. "I think there may initially be some opposition, but all you have to do is drive down to Stuart to see how well these districts work," Commissioner Cliff Barnes said. Barnes brought the idea for the historical district to his fellow commissioners several months ago after talking with members of the White City Historical Commission.

The draft proposal also urges the county to redesign Midway Road into White City's Main Street. The area between Oleander and Palmetto avenues would be the district's town center, with shops, offices, wide sidewalks, landscaping and on-street parking. Redesigning roads is typically

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Ramon Trias

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

expensive, but Midway Road already is scheduled to be widened. ``The redesign of Midway isn't as radical as it might seem, it's just a matter of how you build it," Barnes said. Other suggestions in the proposal would be simpler to implement:

* Planners recommend placing signs, reading ``Welcome to the Historic Rural Town of White City," at key intersections.

* Bike paths should be built to connect residential neighborhoods with White City Elementary School and White City Park, the proposal says.

* White City Park, which is the site of frequent arrests for solicitation of prostitution, needs additional supervision to make it safer.

Trias said the proposal is still in its preliminary stages. He worked on a similar plan for Lake Worth, and it was about 1 1/2 years after the proposal was completed that any historic ordinances were adopted. County commissioners have scheduled a work session to study the historical district on Dec. 12. ``Right now it's just a matter of working out the technical details," **Trias** said. ``It's a fairly long process, but one day you look around and say, `We've got a nice place here.' "

Research Compiled by: Cara Slade
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