



March 24, 2014

VIA HAND DELIVERY

Mr. Ramon Trias
Planning & Zoning Director
City of Coral Gables
427 Biltmore Way, 2nd Floor
Coral Gables, Florida 33134

**Re: Columbus Center / Phase II / MXD Site Plan and PAD Application /
Statement of Use**

Dear Mr. Trias:

On behalf of USRE Holdings, LLC and Gables Residential (collectively, the "Applicant"), I respectfully submit this statement of use in connection with the enclosed application for Mixed Use District (MXD) Site Plan and Planned Area Development (PAD) approval (the "Application").

The Columbus Center is a 14-story mixed used building located at 1 Alhambra Plaza which was constructed "as of right" in 1990 after City Commission approval of the partial vacation of the alley which previously bisected the block. It was the first mid-rise building in the area and it provided an alternative access to the remaining public alley way as well as a public plaza on the West side of the building. Today, it is bordered by buildings of similar height and scale to the north, south, and west. While large buildings have risen across the streets surrounding Columbus Center, an approximately 0.744 acre parcel abutting Columbus Center to the northwest has remained vacant.

The Applicant proposes to fill in the vacant parcel to the northwest by completing "Phase II" of the Columbus Center (the "Project"). Phase II will consist of an 18-story mixed use building, including 200 luxury residences, 3,400 SF of retail space, 2,600 SF of office space, and 387 parking spaces. To ensure that Phase II is fully unified with the existing Columbus Center, and to allow flexibility in the provision of mixed uses, open space, and communal amenities, all without sacrificing the strong emphasis on aesthetics and architecture that the City's regulations demand, the Applicant is seeking the following approvals:

- a Mixed Use District (MXD) Site Plan approval;

- a Planned Area Development (PAD) Designation approval; and
- an amendment to Ordinance No. 2854 which vacated part of the alley which previously bisected the site and provided for an alternative alley access easement.

Specifically, the requested MXD Site Plan approval will allow Phase II of the Project to incorporate residential and retail uses alongside the existing office uses of Phase I of the Columbus Center. The PAD Designation will allow the Applicant to transfer approximately 147,915 square feet of floor area from the Phase I site to the Phase II site, will provide relief from certain setback requirements and will permit part of the new Phase II building to encroach on the Phase I site as indicated in the enclosed plans. This will grant the Applicant the necessary flexibility to provide shared open spaces and amenities between both Phases of Columbus Center even as the overall floor area permitted to be developed on the Property is unchanged. The proposed Phase II building will require a slight reconfiguration and reduction in height of the alternative alley access easement which was required for Ordinance No. 2854. A direct application will be made to the City Commission requesting this modification.

Benefits to the City

The Project will adhere to the City's Mediterranean architectural design standards and will advance George Merrick's vision of a residential community anchored by a dynamic commercial center. By providing a mix of complementary uses, the Project will minimize reliance on cars within the area thus helping to reduce traffic congestion. Furthermore, the Project will include an enhanced street level public realm including the installation of an arcade and pedestrian access routes on all sides of the Project as well as a greatly improved public plaza. These public realm improvements will help form a very pedestrian friendly transition between Downtown Coral Gables and the residential communities to the north and east of the Project.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code Criteria

The Project will be consistent with the following Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the Comprehensive Plan:

Goal FLU-1. Protect, strengthen, and enhance the City of Coral Gables as a vibrant community ensuring that its neighborhoods, business opportunities, shopping, employment centers, cultural activities, historic value, desirable housing, open spaces, and natural resources make the City a very desirable place to work, live, and play.

Objective FLU-1.1. Preserve Coral Gables as a "placemaker" where the balance of existing and future uses is maintained to achieve a high quality living environment by encouraging compatible land uses, restoring and protecting the natural environment, and providing facilities and services which meet or exceed the minimum Level of Service (LOS) standards and meet the social and economic needs of the community through the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use

Classifications and Map (see FLU-1: Future Land Use Map).

Policy FLU-1.1.5. The general intent of the Mixed-Use land use classification is to promote a multi-faceted pedestrian friendly environment comprised of an assortment of uses, including: Residential, Retail/Commercial, Office, Industrial, and Public Open Spaces.

Policy FLU-1.7.1. Encourage effective and proper high quality development of the Central Business District, which offers potential for local employment in proximity to protected residential neighborhoods.

Policy FLU-1.9.1. Encourage balanced mixed use development in the central business district and adjoining commercial areas to promote pedestrian activity and provide for specific commitments to design excellence and long term economic and cultural vitality.

Policy FLU-1.9.2. Encourage the detailed planning of downtown, which is defined as the central business district, to establish sound economic, aesthetic, and land use principles for effective utilization of both public and private resources.

Goal DES-1. Maintain the City as a livable city, attractive in its setting and dynamic in its urban character.

Objective DES-1.1. Preserve and promote high quality, creative design and site planning that is compatible with the City's architectural heritage, surrounding development, public spaces and open spaces.

Policy DES-1.1.1. Promote and support George Merrick's vision consistent with the established historic and cultural fabric of the City.

Policy DES-1.2.1. Continue the award of development bonuses and/or other incentives to promote Coral Gables Mediterranean design character providing for but not limited to the following: creative use of architecture to promote public realm improvements and pedestrian amenities; provide a visual linkage between contemporary architecture and the existing and new architectural fabric; encourage landmark opportunities; and creation of public open spaces.

Policy DES-1.1.2. Provide for rigorous design guidelines, standards, and review processes via the City's Zoning Code that ensure high quality design of buildings and spaces.

Policy MOB-1.1.1. Promote mixed use development to provide housing and commercial services near employment centers, thereby reducing the need to drive.

Policy MOB-1.1.2. Encourage land use decisions that encourage infill, redevelopment and reuse of vacant or underutilized parcels that support walking, bicycling and public transit use.

Policy MOB-1.1.3. Locate higher density development along transit corridors and near multimodal stations.

Policy MOB-2.8.2. The City in its development of the downtown and central business district shall promote the installation of landscaping within the rights-of-way and private properties since the urban fabric will be transformed into a significant urban center as buildout continues pursuant to the establishes Comprehensive Plan and Map.

Policy HOU-1.5.2. Encourage residential mixed use as a means of increasing housing supply within the Downtown/Central Business District/Mixed Use Development Overlay Area, thereby promoting increase in commercial and retail activity, increased use of transit, reduction of auto dependency, in association with minimizing visual and physical impacts of nearby lower density areas.

Through the incorporation of responsible planning techniques like mixed land uses, pedestrian-friendly design, increased density, protected open space, and urban revitalization, the Application supports the City's goal of economic growth through sustainable development that increases its residents' quality of life.

Compliance with Conditional Use Standards and Criteria

We respectfully submit that this request for mixed use Site Plan approval satisfies the review criteria of Section 3-408 of the Zoning Code as follows:

- A. The proposed conditional use is consistent with and furthers the goals, policies and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and furthers the purposes of these regulations and other City ordinances and actions designed to implement the Plan.**

As stated above, the development is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and will promote the realization of the goals, objectives, and policies thereof.

- B. The available use to which the property may be put is appropriate to the property that is subject to the proposed conditional use and compatible with existing and planned uses in the area.**

As the site is located within the Central Business District (CBD), the proposed mixed residential and commercial use is appropriate and compatible with the adjacent pedestrian-friendly, downtown commercial district.

- C. The proposed conditional use does not conflict with the needs and character of the neighborhood and the City.**

On the contrary, the proposed development is both compatible and complimentary of the historical and cultural fabric of the City.

- D. The proposed conditional use will not adversely or unreasonably affect the use of other property in the area.**

The Project will benefit nearby properties by enhancing property values, provide housing to new customers for local businesses, and encourage pedestrian activity with its street level retail options for residents.

- E. The proposed use is compatible with the nature, condition, and development of adjacent uses, buildings and structures and will not adversely affect the adjacent uses, buildings or structures.**

As discussed herein, the Project has positive synergy with adjacent uses, buildings, and structures and will not have an adverse impact upon them.

- F. The parcel proposed for development is adequate in size and shape to accommodate all development features.**

The unified design provides continuity with its adjacent neighboring sites, complimenting the skyline at the entrance to the downtown CBD district while also providing architectural design elements focused to the pedestrian scale.

- G. The nature of the proposed development is not detrimental to the health, safety and general welfare of the community.**

The Project will feature the highest quality design and construction and the Applicant is sensitive to the various dimensions of development that affect the civic environment, including traffic, the landscape, streetscape, and community concerns.

- H. The design of the proposed driveways, circulation patterns and parking is well defined to promote vehicular and pedestrian circulation.**

The driveways and pathways provide safe, efficient circulation for vehicles and pedestrians while creating positive aesthetic qualities. Off-street parking requirements are met for all uses in the Project.

- I. The proposed conditional use satisfies the concurrency standards of Article 3, Division 13 and will not adversely burden public facilities, including the traffic-carrying capacities of streets, in an unreasonable or disproportionate manner.**

The proposed Project complies with the City's concurrency standards as is indicated by the Concurrency Impact Statement provided as part of this submittal.

Compliance with Required Findings for a PAD

We respectfully submit that this request for PAD approval satisfies the findings required by Section 3-503 of the Code as follows:

A. In what respects the proposed plan is or is not consistent with the stated purpose and intent of the PAD regulations.

The Project exemplifies the Code's intent of developing economies of scale achieved through the creative planning of experienced design professionals. The development team has utilized the Code's permissive provisions to unify the Columbus Center site in a harmonious, efficient plan that embraces the City's architectural heritage and further enhances the downtown business district.

B. The extent to which the proposed plan departs from the zoning and subdivision regulations otherwise applicable to the subject property, including but not limited to density, size, area, bulk and use, and the reasons why such departures are or are not deemed to be in the public interest.

In order to better integrate the development across the Project site, the Project employs innovative PAD provisions regarding relaxed setback controls and the sharing of floor area among uses. This design flexibility enables the Applicant to provide better amenities and infrastructure improvements without an overreliance upon these flexible provisions, the result of which would undermine important regulatory criteria. The result is a balanced use of bulk, height, open space, and dwelling units over the entire property.

C. The extent to which the proposed plan meets the requirements and standards of the PAD regulations.

The Project adheres faithfully to the Code's prescriptive standards, but the use of a PAD permits simultaneous control at the design stage, thus ensuring that the individual elements of the PAD work together to enhance the whole. Adherence to these requirements has guaranteed that the multiple land uses are seamlessly integrated and make efficient use of the open land.

D. The physical design of the proposed PAD and the manner in which said design does or does not make adequate provision for public services, provide adequate control over vehicular traffic, provide for and protect designated common open areas, and further the amenities of light and air, recreation and visual enjoyment.

The Applicant's design observes the Code's objectives concerning architectural, landscape, and streetscape elements so that the entire Project maintains a cohesive sense of place. Pedestrian connectivity is encouraged by the shaded arcades and welcoming landscaping, while the public plaza provides circulation and visually pleasing open space.

E. The compatibility of the proposed PAD with the adjacent properties and neighborhood as well as the current neighborhood context including current uses.

The Project's unified architectural style and size are aesthetically pleasant and compatible with adjacent properties. The improved design of the Columbus Center integrates recreational, living, working, and commercial facilities wholly within the PAD. Its mixture of uses adds to a diversified neighborhood concept, with pedestrian-filled pathways that enhance the character of the neighborhood.

F. The desirability of the proposed PAD to physical development of the entire community.

Rather than conventional regulations which contain uniform standards, the PAD promotes variety in the physical development pattern of the City and offers a more desirable living environment. The development incentives provided to the Applicant offer a significant return for the City in terms of attractive new property, valuable tax revenues, increased economic activity, and opportunities for residents.

G. The conformity of the proposed PAD with the goals and objectives and Future Land Use Maps of the City of Coral Gables Comprehensive Plan.

As detailed in the previous section, the Columbus Center PAD is consistent with the goals and values of the City's growth management plan. The Project's integrated development fulfills the Comprehensive Plan by advancing intelligent growth and sustainability, while furthering the downtown district's reputation for high quality urban design.

Thank you for your consideration of the Application. Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss the foregoing.

Sincerely,



Mario J. Garcia-Serra

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Joseph Wilber

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