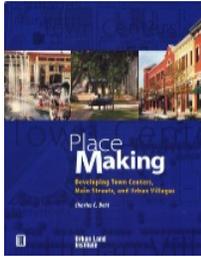


8/6/15 DRAFT



Charles C. Bohl and Associates – Place Making for 21st Century Communities

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8/6/15

Mr. Ramon Trias
Planning & Zoning Director
City of Coral Gables
405 Biltmore Way
Coral Gables, FL 33134

Re: Community Workshop for the US1 Corridor of Coral Gables

Dear Ramon:

Attached is a draft executive summary for the US1 Corridor Workshop that we facilitated for the City of Coral Gables on July 17-18, 2015. The full report will be submitted by August 19th.

Feel free to circulate this for discussion and feedback. You can also call me directly (mobile 305-528-5109) to discuss.

Thank you,

Charles Bohl, President
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**US1 CORRIDOR WORKSHOP
DRAFT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

City of Coral Gables, Florida
July 17-18, 2015

The US1 Corridor Workshop for the City of Coral Gables was held on July 17-18, 2015, at the Holiday Inn, 1305 South Dixie Highway, Coral Gables, Florida, 33146.

Turnout for the events were strong, with 96 participants signing in on the July 17th sign-in sheets for the Friday evening kickoff session and 52 signing in on the July 18th sheets for the Saturday morning walking tours and workshop. The total number of participants was somewhat higher for each day based on the number of seats occupied as some people arrived late or did not sign in, and planning staff estimated there were closer to 120 people in attendance for the Friday evening kickoff.

The Kickoff Event included the following presentations:

- Building Healthy Neighborhoods by Professor Joanna Lombard, University of Miami School of Architecture
- The Underline by Meg Daly, founder of Friends of the Underline
- Quality Urbanism: Complete and Connected Communities by Jason King, Dover Kohl and Partners
- Dr. Charles Bohl, Study Area Context and Workshop Overview

The presentations were organized to inform the audience and provide a catalyst for their ideas, discussion and participation in the workshop. Public participation activities began immediately following the opening presentation with a discussion of questions submitted by the audience via text messaging and microphones. A total of 40 questions were posed and discussed by the presenters. Technical questions regarding existing zoning, transportation plans and public works were addressed by planning and public works staff, and Commissioners Lago and Kern also spoke on the purpose and scope of the workshop and the importance of the public participation and input on the future of the corridors in the study area.

The Saturday morning workshop commenced with two separate walking tours with groups of participants and facilitators. One tour walked both sides of the US 1 Corridor observing existing conditions along the corridor, behind the commercial frontage to observe the current transition to the multi-family properties and single-family residential homes in the Riviera neighborhood, and the conditions on the University of Miami side of the corridor as well as the area below the Metrorail where the Underline is being planned. A second group took the Metrorail south and walked portions of Sunset Road, Red Road, and walking back to the Holiday Inn through the Riviera Section of Coral Gables.

In addition to the planned walking tours and activities, the facilitators responded to the interest of a group of participants for a discussion focused on the current proposal for redevelopment of the Holiday Inn site. This group discussion was convened by facilitators with multiple representatives of the Riviera Neighborhood Association, the owner/developer of the Holiday Inn and members of his team, and city planning staff during the morning walking tours.

The variety of participatory methods used for gathering public input included:

- The audience question and answer session at the kickoff presentation;
- Response cards that asked participants to characterize both the existing conditions and their vision for the future in one-word or short phrases.
- Survey forms with a series of short and open-ended questions
- A visual preference survey
- Written and verbal summaries of group table discussions

The public input from these sources was extensive and will be summarized in the final report.

Topics of discussion included the existing conditions and ideas for future change in the study area including:

- The pedestrian quality, safety and experience along the corridors
- The pedestrian connectivity from the neighborhoods to the businesses along the corridors and across the corridors to and from the University of Miami and Metrorail stations.
- The character of development and comparisons to other places and corridors in South Florida and other cities
- The amount and speed of traffic along the commercial corridors, concerns with cut-through traffic in the neighborhoods, and the potential impact of ingress and egress for commercial uses on residential streets
- Parking for future development and concern with parking for commercial uses spilling over into residential areas
- The height of buildings along the corridor and transitions from the commercial corridors to the neighborhoods
- The types of shops, restaurants and other uses along the corridors
- The quality of the streetscapes along the corridors, on streets connecting to the commercial corridors (many of which lack sidewalks), and on streets running parallel to the corridors at the rear of commercial buildings that are currently used as alleyways
- The potential for the Underline to be transformed into a high quality public realm for pedestrians and cyclists and the types of active and passive uses that could be accommodated
- The potential for the University of Miami frontage along Ponce de Leon to create a "main street" environment that would include a mix of academic and

commercial uses that would serve both the University community and Coral Gables residents and visitors

- The potential to create a more pedestrian- and transit-oriented development pattern along the commercial corridors with a reduced dependence on automobiles

There was consensus on the need for change and improvements to the corridors throughout the study area, most of which were viewed as outdated, disconnected and out of character with Coral Gables.

Some of the strongest topics of agreement concerned the dissatisfaction with the existing conditions and development along the corridors, particularly along US1, which was described as “ugly,” “dangerous,” “scary,” “sprawl,” “car-centric,” “uninviting,” and “nondescript.” The words used to describe the future vision for the corridors emphasized a “boulevard” character, “mixed-use,” “pedestrian-friendly,” “lively,” with a “Coral Gables character/identity.”

Participants including the Riviera Neighborhood Association, expressed support for development that will help bring about positive changes to the corridors and help realize the qualities expressed in their vision statements, and support mixed-use development that will bring new restaurants, shops and services to the area. Participants had mixed opinions on the appropriate height and intensity of development for different corridors, particularly for the US1 corridor and the transition between commercial development on US1 and the multi-family and single-family areas of the Riviera neighborhood bordering the corridor. Riviera Neighborhood Association participants, in particular, have concerns about the height of new development along the US1 corridor and the potential impact it could have on traffic and parking.

The results of the visual preference survey and table discussions and presentations will provide additional insights from participants on their preferences for different types, character and intensity of development, however the issues of height and transitions will require further study. The low-density, “suburban sprawl” development that has occurred along the corridor was strongly rejected by the participants, and any existing regulations that promote this pattern for future development will clearly need to be replaced by zoning and regulations consistent with a more compact, walkable and transit-oriented mixed-use vision in character with Coral Gables. At the other end of the scale, the lone tall building (in the range of 140-feet tall) along the US1 corridor, UM’s “Gables One” tower, is unfortunately a poorly designed building – both at the street level and in its facades and massing – and was used as an example of what participants do *not* want in terms of design, character and intensity.

In referencing existing zoning within the study area and other parts of the City of Coral Gables, the city’s high-rise zoning that allows up to 18 stories and 190 feet, is clearly viewed as too high, and participants from the Riviera Neighborhood were not

comfortable with the 140-foot height of the Holiday Inn redevelopment proposal. At the other end of the scale, existing zoning categories for low-rise buildings are inconsistent with Merrick's original vision of framing the city's widest, busiest thoroughfares with taller, more architecturally significant buildings. The existing low-density, suburban strip zoning locks in the characteristics that were so strongly critiqued by the workshop participants, works against pedestrian- and transit-oriented outcomes, and makes more compact, walkable development economically unviable.

The variety of workshop discussions and public input send a clear message that there is either a need for new zoning categories or an overlay district to regulate infill and redevelopment along the corridors consistent with the compact, pedestrian- and transit-oriented vision and Coral Gables character and quality that participants envisioned. The city has previously adopted an overlay district approach to regulate development of the city's industrial section, and the unique conditions of the workshop study area involving the city's busiest corridor, strongest transit facilities, connection with the University of Miami campus, and the need for sensitive transitions from commercial to residential areas recommends a similar approach.

The City should carry out a planning and urban design study to create a transit-oriented development (TOD) overlay for the study area. The study should include an illustrated analysis and alternatives for public review and input including building types and frontages along the commercial corridors and the transitions of the height and intensity of buildings as one moves from the corridors towards the multi-family and single-family areas of adjacent neighborhoods. These can be modeled and illustrated with visual impact and shadow studies in relation to the adjacent neighborhoods. Given the broad support for a mix of uses, the study should focus primarily on the form – height, intensity, transitions, frontages and architectural elements – of buildings, the connectivity and character of streets and streetscapes, and the management of parking and ingress/egress for commercial uses in relation to adjacent residential areas.