

# Memorandum

MIAMI-DADE  
COUNTY

**Date:** March 20, 2007

Agenda Item No. 13(B)(1)

**To:** Honorable Chairman Bruno A. Barreiro  
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

**From:** George M. Burgess  
County Manager  
Murray A. Greenberg  
County Attorney

**Subject:** Report on the impact of the proposed 300 Grove Bay Residence development on Vizcaya Museum and Gardens

At the February 6, 2007, meeting of the Board of County Commissioners, the Board directed the County Attorney, in consultation with other appropriate departments, to assess the impacts of the proposed 300 Grove Bay Residences project (Project) on Vizcaya Museum and Gardens (Vizcaya), located at 3251 S. Miami Avenue.

#### Description of Vizcaya Museum and Garden:

Vizcaya, owned and operated by Miami-Dade County, was entered into the National Register of Historic Places on December 11, 1978, for the historic significance of the main house and the gardens. Additionally, due to the national significance of this property and its surroundings in the history of the United States, Vizcaya was the first building in Miami-Dade County to receive the coveted distinction of being a National Historic Landmark on April 19, 1994. The only other building in Miami-Dade County that shares this distinction is the Biltmore Hotel and Country Club Building, which was designated on June 19, 1996.

When industrialist James Deering (1859-1925) decided to build a winter home in Miami, he purchased a large tract of land from Mrs. William Brickell in 1912. After additional subsequent purchases of shoreline, hammock and pineland, he asked Paul Chalfin (1874-1959), a young New York painter and designer, to advise him on his plans for a house. Chalfin, who was not a trained architect, enlisted the assistance of Architect Francis Burrall Hoffman, Jr. (1884-1980), also from New York. Hoffman started drawing the plans for the house in 1913 and traveled to Italy with Deering to observe designs of Italian villas. By this time, Deering had decided that he wanted his winter home to be designed in Italian Mediterranean type architecture. The final component of this remarkable team of patron and designers was young landscape architect Diego Suarez (1888-1974) from Bogota, Columbia. Suarez was educated in Italy as an architect and later became interested in garden design, working near Florence in restoring historic gardens.

Vizcaya is an outstanding example of Italian Renaissance Revival architecture. In addition to the main house overlooking Biscayne Bay, a formal garden and fountains, the original 180-acre complex included a farm, livestock, and a variety of other service facilities covering both sides of South Miami Avenue. The main building is a U-shaped two-and-one-half story structure wrapping around a central courtyard with the open-ended side of the U creating the entrance loggia. Architectural elements executed in native coral rock include open loggia and arcades and an interior courtyard with a peripheral gallery. The roof is red barrel tile and the basic construction of the building is reinforced concrete.

While the main house is clearly oriented towards the east overlooking Biscayne Bay, the site plan emphasizes the formal garden on the south side of the main house. Suarez oriented the main garden away from the emerging downtown to the north side of the property, and arranged the garden in a fan shaped plan with a central north-south axis. That axis begins at the main house and terminates at a garden house perched atop a raised hill at the south end of the axis. The design of the main garden was inspired by Suarez's extensive knowledge of Italian gardens. The design of the garden creates a perfect setting for the house by integrating a number of architectural elements, such as terraces, balustrades, sculpture, and decorative urns, as well as fountains, pools, and cascades within several themed gardens. An important characteristic is the deliberate juxtaposition of the formality of these carefully manicured gardens with the surrounding natural hammock and Biscayne Bay. The hammock serves as a backdrop to the formal main garden. This juxtaposition insulates Vizcaya from any visual intrusion of the surrounding urban areas and was designed to visually transport a visitor to another time and place. This sensory perception of being transported to a different time and place is crucial to the historic conception and visitor experience of Vizcaya.

In 1952, Deering's heirs generously conveyed the main house and the formal gardens to Miami-Dade County. Deering's heirs also donated the estate's substantial furnishings and art to the County on condition that Vizcaya be used as a public museum in perpetuity. In 1955, the County exercised the option to purchase the village on the north side of South Miami Avenue. Today, Vizcaya provides a tranquil escape from the hustle and bustle of the city that grew around it and is a major destination for art lovers, tourists, photographers and filmmakers. Revenue generated from these sources supports the maintenance and operation of the museum and gardens.

#### Description of the Project:

The Project is a residential development on a land area of a little over 11 gross acres on the southwest corner of the Mercy Hospital property along the Bay. The proposed development includes 300 luxury residential units, which range in size from 3,200 to 4,000 square feet, in three towers placed over a deck structure that includes recreational and other amenities and approximately 642 parking spaces. The height at the roof canopies of the towers range from approximately 422 feet to 314 feet. The tower nearest to the Vizcaya is approximately 2,100 feet away and is 422 feet tall.

#### Impact Analysis:

- The County concurs with the City of Miami Planning staff recommendation that "the project is out of scale with the area, and the rezoning of the property should be consistent with the adjacent neighborhood, which is R-3 zoning." The proposed rezoning of this property allows unlimited height. The majority of the developments around the area are single family and low-rise development (including Vizcaya). The tallest building in the immediate vicinity is within the Mercy Hospital campus and is less than 170 feet in height.
- The listings of Vizcaya in the National Register of Historic Places and as a National Historic Landmark require that the attributes, features and characteristics that contributed to such designations be preserved and protected.
- Vizcaya is a Facility of Countywide Significance and the County Comprehensive Development Master Plan provides for protection of such facilities.
- Neither the City nor the developer recognized the impact of this Project on Vizcaya

- during the development of the plans.
- The Project does not appear to have any adverse physical impact, such as noise, shadows, dust, or traffic, on the Vizcaya property.
  - The Project will, however, have an impact on one of the most prominent attributes of Vizcaya, the view from the house and the garden. The visual impact of the proposed towers would impact the feeling of immersion that visitors currently experience.
  - Compromise of the view from the house and garden could diminish historic integrity.
  - A compromised view from the garden may also have a negative impact on Vizcaya's ability to generate revenue through special events, photography and film permits.

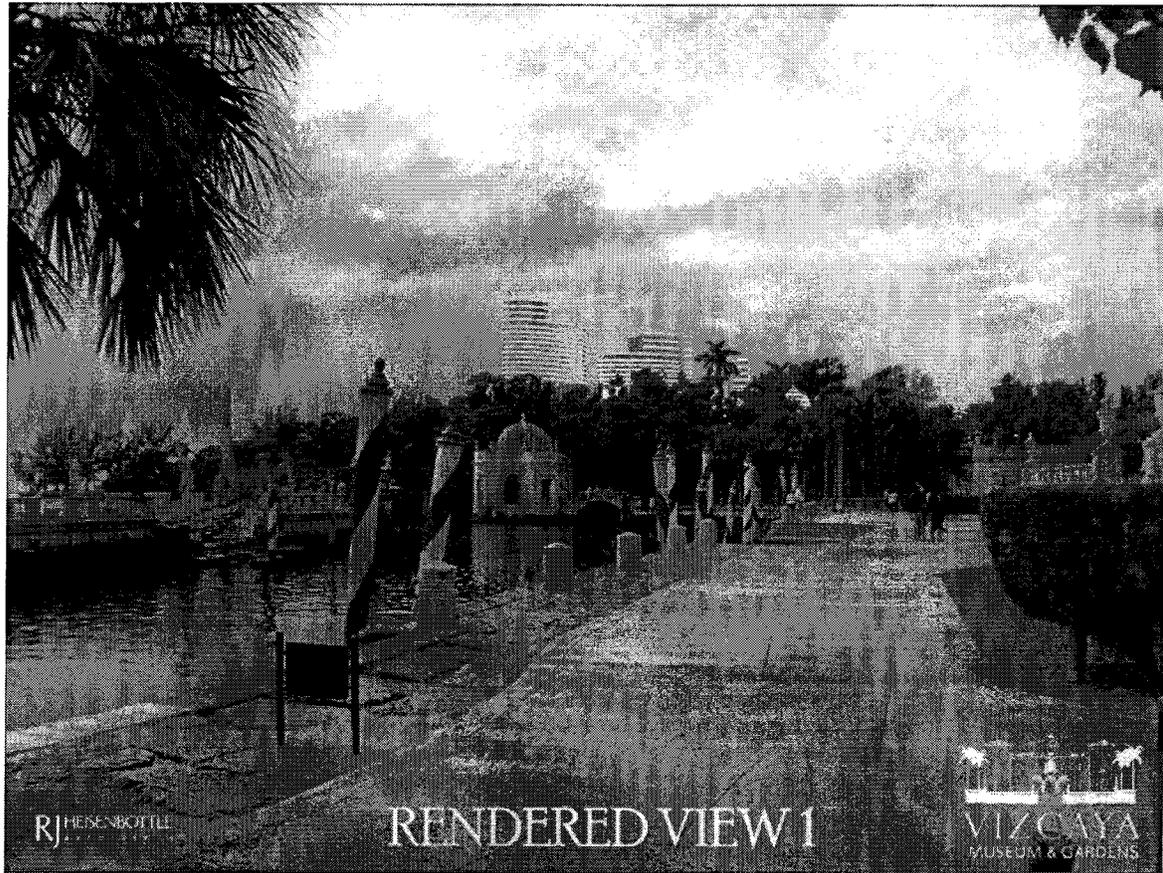


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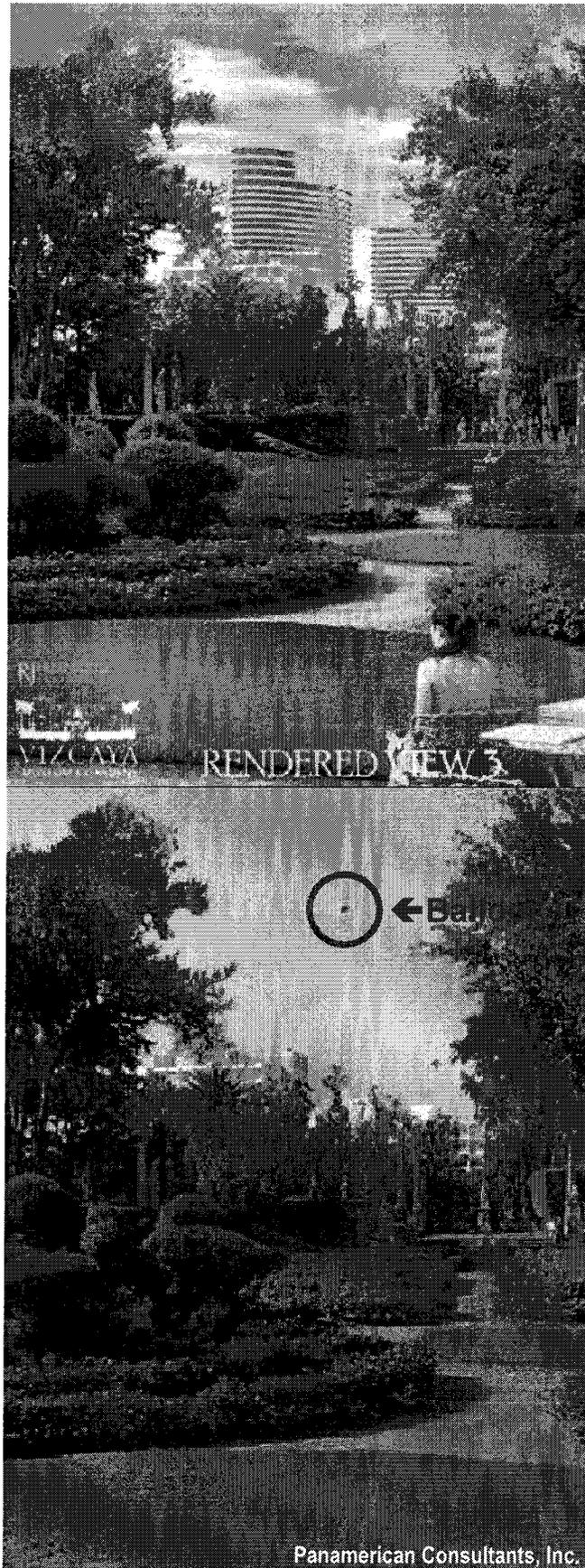
Assistant County Manager

Attachments:

- Appendix A: Renderings prepared by Richard Heisenbottle, Architect for the Vizcaya.  
Appendix B: Independent verification of the visual impact of the height of the towers.







Panamerican Consultants, Inc.

