

Date: April 16, 2014

To: Honorable Chairwoman Rebeca Sosa
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From: Carlos A. Gimenez
Mayor 

Subject: Update to Conceptual Study Relating to Possible Development of a Cuban Exile
History Museum at Parcel B or Other Potential Locations

The following report has been prepared in response to Resolution R-922-13, sponsored by Commissioner Audrey M. Edmonson, directing the Administration to: 1) update the 2008 Conceptual Study analyzing the development of a Cuban Exile History Museum at County-owned Parcel B of the FEC property (Parcel B), and 2) expand such study to include other potential sites for the Cuban Exile History Museum in the surrounding area.

2008 Conceptual Study

The 2008 Conceptual Study was originally prepared in response to Resolution R-1000-07, which specifically directed to complete a conceptual study for the development of a Bay of Pigs Museum and Library at Parcel B after consultation with Basketball Properties, Limited (BPL) and to determine whether the development of a Bay of Pigs Museum and Library at Parcel B may materially impact the operation of the American Airlines Arena, among other things. Parcel B site is located east of the American Airlines Arena on approximately 2.76 acre vacant parcel (Folio Number: 01-3231-055-0020).

The 2008 Conceptual Study contemplated the following features:

- A five story building approximately 82 feet high;
- Below ground, ground level and above-ground parking to accommodate approximately 1,000 automobiles;
- Three levels of enclosed space with approximately 110,000 square feet to accommodate exhibition, office, theater, storage, library, and other museum space;
- Proposed lot coverage of 88.6 percent or 106,785 square feet of the 120,225 square feet available on Parcel B; and
- The prior design also contemplated reserving adequate space for construction of the Baywalk between the then proposed Bay of Pigs Museum and Library and the intercoastal waterway.

Update to 2008 Conceptual Study

It is important to note that after the 2008 Conceptual Study was released, the concept of the Bay of Pigs Museum and Library project broadened in its scope, and is now referred to as the Cuban Exile History Museum. A preliminary design of the Cuban Exile History Museum was prepared by Chisholm Architects utilizing the County-owned Parcel B location as the basis of the design. Staff reviewed the preliminary design and met with the architect, Mr. Robert Chisholm, as well as representatives of the Cuban Exile History Museum to better understand their vision for the site, its surroundings, and the proposed facility itself. The representatives of the Cuban Exile History Museum understand that the current lot size of the Parcel B is 120,225 square feet (2.76 acres). The group stated that numerous factors were considered in developing their design, including consideration of the bike path/Baywalk along the edge of Parcel B, and anticipated parking needs for the Heat Group, and its affiliate (BPL).

The preliminary design contemplated a three-story building of approximately 65 to 75 feet in height and inclusive of the following features:

- The first floor would be the Public Plaza Level, inclusive of a restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating, visitor's center, gift shop and restroom area, and an open air public plaza area. This area would be accessible to the public at no cost.
- The second floor would be dedicated to exhibition space.
- The third floor would include a 300-seat theater, research library, and staff support area.
- Ground level parking would accommodate approximately 291 vehicles. The parking would be at the existing grade of the site, and the building and adjacent open air public plaza would be built above the parking, and flush with the existing street and sidewalk, adjacent to the American Airlines Arena.

Additionally, several of the other site features and issues necessary to be considered as part of the proposed design are as follows:

- According to the architect, the newly proposed conceptual design for the Cuban Exile History Museum could partially obstruct the viewpoint of the intercoastal waterway and PortMiami from the roadway and the promenade area of the American Airlines Arena where Bongos Cuban Café (Café) is located. Patrons to the Café, or persons standing on the roadway above the current level of Parcel B would, based upon the current design, be prevented from having a clear unobstructed view of Biscayne Bay, which could detract from the attraction of the Café, particularly the outdoor seating/event area. Essentially, the proposed location and height of the Cuban Exile History Museum would place the three-story building, approximately 65 to 75 feet high, above the roadway, and across the roadway from the Café.
- The ground level parking for the proposed Cuban Exile History Museum would be expected to accommodate large tractor-trailer trucks; however, the required turning radius to gain entry into, and exit out of, the ground level parking facility will need to be carefully taken into consideration during the design phase of the project. This is necessary to ensure that large vehicles can properly maneuver underneath the building, particularly with the required parking and loading area needs of the Cuban Exile History Museum.

Impacts to American Airlines Arena

The Heat Group expressed overall support for the Cuban Exile History Museum, but did share concerns regarding significant potential operational impacts associated with the Cuban Exile History Museum being built on Parcel B. Some of their concerns are as follows:

- The footprint of the American Airlines Arena is already too small for its existing operations, particularly as compared to arenas in other comparable markets, which are typically surrounded by acres of surface parking, providing function as both event staging areas and event parking. The fact that the American Airlines Arena sits on a small parcel of land, and is bordered by a major thoroughfare on one side and train tracks and another thoroughfare on a portion of another side, present geographical challenges that are only currently mitigated by the presence and availability of the County's Parcel B property for event staging and parking purposes.
- Tied to this challenge, the Heat Group expressed that the magnitude of live entertainment productions in general, continues to grow, and the amount of equipment transported expands commensurately with such productions. The provided example is a typical "A level" marquee show, such as Beyoncé consisting of upwards of 40 18-wheelers, and 15 or more buses containing staging, sound, lighting, and other equipment. For this type of event, all of this equipment must be moved into American Airlines Arena quickly, and equally important, quickly removed and loaded back into the trucks and buses so that the production crews can be on their way to their next venue.

- Facilitating immediate ingress and egress at the American Airlines Arena, which is critical to its ability to attract and retain quality entertainment for the residents of Miami-Dade County, is a concern to the Heat Group. From their perspective, the continued use and availability of the Parcel B property is an essential component for their continued operational viability.
- As it relates to alternative staging areas, the Heat Group indicated “as a result of the ongoing development of the downtown corridor, which the construction of the American Airlines Arena was intended to spur, there are no viable alternative areas for staging.”
- The Parcel B property also enables the American Airlines Arena to accommodate Ringling Circus’ needs as it relates to humanely housing circus animals during their annual performances.
- A further concern of the Heat Group is obstructing a portion of the view of Biscayne Bay from the area near and around Bongos Cuban Café.
- The Heat Group supports a proposed use of Parcel B by the City of Miami and Downtown Development Authority as a Baywalk as that is complementary to its operation.

Evaluation of Parcel B

In conducting our analysis of the preliminary design of the Cuban Exile History Museum based upon the foregoing information, County staff believes that the proposed Cuban Exile History Museum could be built on Parcel B under the existing zoning, so long as the appropriate variances and/or waivers are secured from the City of Miami, subject to the Biscayne Bay Shoreline Development Review Committee, as well as other appropriate County and City approvals, and so long as such museum is in keeping with the County’s prior expressed desire to utilize Parcel B for public open space purposes. However, solutions to the American Airlines Arena staging concerns would need to be addressed as part of any Parcel B development.

Evaluation of Other Surround Properties

There are a limited number of County-owned properties in the surrounding downtown Miami area that could accommodate a facility such as the proposed Cuban Exile History Museum. County staff examined the possibility of the Cuban Exile Museum being located in the same building as the History Miami Museum, located at 101 West Flagler Street. However, consultation with staff of the County’s Department of Cultural Affairs found that History Miami already was pursuing additional space for its own programs and operations at its current site, given the growth of its collections and activities and the limitations of its current building. It would not be feasible to include another museum into the History Miami facility due to space limitation.

County staff also evaluated the County-owned building located at 140 Flagler Street, and determined that the structure and location of the building would not be conducive for the Cuban Exile History Museum.

During the meeting with the representatives of the Cuban Exile History Museum, it was made clear that they have given a considerable amount of time and attention to the possibility of having the Cuban Exile Museum History built and operated in the City of Miami’s new Museum Park and in a location that was previously slated for a building. They also mentioned having positive conversations with the City of Miami about locating the Cuban Exile History Museum in Museum Park.

There may be other privately owned properties that may be available to the Cuban Exile Museum. County staff has not explored these options due to the cost associated with such an evaluation.

Conclusion

County staff’s role in conducting this analysis of the preliminary design of the Cuban Exile History Museum at the Parcel B location was to provide an evaluation of the proposed design relative to the

property available. This included pointing out general planning, zoning, and permitting hurdles that may need to be addressed by a developer selected to complete this project; identifying possible concerns of neighboring operations that may be impacted; reviewing existing contractual restrictions/variances that exist on the Parcel B property or with other neighboring parties; and providing feedback on other possible viable locations for the Cuban Exile History Museum.

Should you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact Leland Salomon, Assistant Director, Internal Services Department, at (305) 375-4421.

c: Robert A. Cuevas, Jr., County Attorney
Office of the Mayor Senior Staff
Lester Sola, Director, Internal Services Department
Leland Salomon, Assistant Director, Internal Services Department
Charles Anderson, Commission Auditor