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Miami commissioners approve Miami 21 zoning code

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On its second try, the Miami City Commission approved the ambitious and controversial Miami 21 zoning code by a 4-1 vote after a day-long hearing Friday, charting a new, pedestrian-focused course for future development in a town famously built around the car.

Setting aside concerns that the new code "is not ready for prime time," as one resident put it, a commission majority endorsed Mayor Manny Diaz's strategy for reshaping development. The new code embraces sidewalks and generates pedestrian traffic by mixing shops and homes along the city's principle corridors, an urban template more like that of Manhattan, Chicago and San Francisco than the strip mall model of the Sun Belt.

The code still must be confirmed in a second commission hearing not yet scheduled.

The vote, in a packed commission chamber at Miami City Hall, came a month after the commission deadlocked on the plan 2-2 with Commissioner Angel Gonzalez out because of illness. Gonzalez voted yes on Friday.

Commissioner Tomas Regalado cast the only no vote.

Commission Chairman Joe Sanchez, who cast a surprise no vote last time because of concerns over strict height limits that Commissioner Marc Sarnoff had insisted on along Biscayne Boulevard, switched to yes. Sarnoff agreed to drop the height issue until the second vote, but said he was voting yes "very reluctantly."

Sanchez urged Sarnoff and supporters of the height limits to compromise by the second vote.

"Our decision should not be based on the next election, it should be based on the next generation," Sanchez said, urging a yes vote from his colleagues.

Before the vote, more than 50 people spoke during four hours of public testimony.

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