

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-5
March 29, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Landscape Director, Deena Bell-Llewellyn

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-5 [Start: 4:10 p.m.]

Discussion regarding tree canopy issues, specifically loss of tree canopy (2016 to 2020 percentage of gain and loss in County Commission Districts), standards for flowering and medium size trees, and use of small to medium shade trees in shallow planting areas. (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto G-5.

Commissioner Anderson: G-5. Deena Bell-Llewellyn is here, and I just wanted to go over a few things related to canopy, this is one of them. To highlight to you all that between 2016 and 2020, our city actually lost some canopy. It has not happened before, but I think there's a lot that we can do, and we are doing right now with developers moving trees to bring that forward. Second, on this list on G-5, the standards for flowering and medium-sized trees and to use small and medium shade trees in shallow planting areas. Deena, I'd like you to lead the discussion, since you're the most experienced person in the room right now on this. Thank you.

City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022

Landscaper Director Bell-Llewellyn: Good afternoon, Deena Bell-Llewellyn from Green Space Management in Public Works. Regarding tree canopy loss, I'm wondering if that might have been Hurricane Irma that contributed to canopy loss. That's the only thing I can think of that would have taken canopy out drastically between that period. We did remove 1,000 trees during Irma that fell, and Commission voted approval to plant 1,000 new trees which our department spearheaded after Irma, the year following Irma. So of course, the new trees planted are much smaller than mature trees that were lost, so that's probably what happened. Then standards for flowering and medium size trees. Are we talking specifically in swales and public right-of-ways?

Commissioner Anderson: Yes – swales and public right-of-ways. Our current standards, we had a discussion, are difficult to fulfill.

Landscaper Director Bell-Llewellyn: Right. Currently our code for street trees says, trees must go in at 16 feet overall height. The goal is to get larger species of trees to shade the road, canopy over the road and the sidewalks, and also to get at least 8 feet clearance from sidewalks for pedestrian safety. So sometimes using smaller trees and swales and bump-outs is problematic.

Commissioner Anderson: So, the other thing that we discussed is for flowering trees, it's difficult to get them at 16 feet.

Landscaper Director Bell-Llewellyn: Well, we are constantly sourcing large trees in nurseries. Sometimes the availability is low in nurseries for interesting and flowering trees. We might be able to find one or two species at a time of certain things. Its hard to buy them in bulk sometimes, but we are always searching them out.

Commissioner Anderson: So, my question to you is this. If we are able to find a flowering tree that doesn't quite meet the 16-foot height, and we plant it now, won't it reach 16 feet perhaps by the time you source it from the nursery.

Landscaper Director Bell-Llewellyn: Sure. And we do find locations in parks and our triangular green spaces for those and bump-outs and swales we stick to 16 feet height, that's the code for clearance above sidewalks for pedestrian safety. We're afraid that some of the species might be too low branching.

Commissioner Anderson: Right. Right.

Landscaper Director Bell-Llewellyn: And you can't.

Commissioner Anderson: What would you recommend for this Commission to do to try to facilitate you doing this job on flowering trees?

Landscaper Director Bell-Llewellyn: I don't know if there's anything the Commission – its written in the code the height, so maybe you can look at the landscape code for minimum tree heights as a start.

*City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022*

Commissioner Anderson: Okay. Minimum tree height for flowering trees, what would you suggest? You're the expert.

Landscape Director Bell-Llewellyn: Well, there are so many different species of flowering trees that will grow to different heights at maturity. So, it really depends upon – our tree code designates small, medium and large size trees based on the height that tree will grow at maturity, is basically how its determined.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay. You had more leeway.

Landscape Director Bell-Llewellyn: We have leeway.

Commissioner Anderson: What leeway would you like?

Landscape Director Bell-Llewellyn: We can examine straight tree planning on a case-by-case basis, depending on the growth rate of the tree. For very fast-growing trees maybe we can make an exception of installed height and allow shorter trees that we know will grow very quickly, that's an idea.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay. Can you send us some recommendations?

Landscape Director Bell-Llewellyn: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: Alright.

City Clerk Urquia: Before you move on, we do have a member of the public who requested to speak on this item.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

City Clerk Urquia: Its Ian Linder Sheldon.

Mayor Lago: The floor is yours.

Mr. Sheldon: No worries getting the name wrong, it's a long one. I just wanted to draw some attention to what was said about the amount of distance between a right-of-way. I know Mayor Lago brought up the planting areas around Books and Books. I think giving green space more wiggle room to put more trees in more places, we have a lot of really good native small flowering trees that get really big. I know the Bridal Vale was mentioned earlier, that actually gets, I think like 35 feet, they get pretty big. Not just having live Oaks and Mahoganies everywhere, and of course, no one likes Black Olive. More options more trees. That's all.

Mayor Lago: I think its great. Commissioner.

*City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022*