

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-10
March 10, 2026
Public Safety Building, CMR
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Jorge Arrizurieta

Agenda Item F-10 [Start: 2:40 p.m.]

Discussion regarding assessment for commercial property owners for beautification
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Item F-10, discussion regarding assessment for commercial property owners for beautification. I'm the sponsor. So, I've invited our uh our President from the Chamber who's going to sign in really quick, so that he can speak and I want to show you a quick, I want to show you a quick slideshow presentation that I got to give credit where credit is due, where Lora and Nicole did an amazing job. I'll tell you when to click. So, I want to show you this because we talked about beautification in regard to the New Times and you know it's funny when we were talking about the New Times before our beautification, does everybody here remember the FP Joran clock that I donated personally. Well, there was a piece of rust on that remember and I was held, my feet were held to the fire on that, and I had to go and pay a company to come in remove the clock, send it back, fix the rust and I did it. So, if I can be held to, if I can be held accountable and I'm not making money on donating something to the city, why shouldn't the New Times be held

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accountable also. Just thought about that a few moments ago and it cost me a lot of money. All right. So, it's about accountability in our downtown and making sure we provide what's right for the city. Look how amazing the work done by staff and I've brought this up to the DCM, ACM and City Manager. Look at the entrance features on Eighth Street and Ponce, look at the landscaping by Deena, look how beautiful. Those entrance features have never looked better in the 13 years that I've been here, never. That's an attention to detail that I have to, I mean this is what I'm showing you. This is what we could do in our downtown, but it takes time, it takes effort, and it takes money and this is what our business community wants because when it was done, I got a bunch of phone calls. Oh my God, Vince, it's amazing, all the businesses, were like, this looks so good, look how great it looks. Go to the next slide please. Let me give you some examples of areas that are well maintained. Look at the landscaping; it's not too tall, look at the mulch, you know you see the hydrant is painted, sidewalks are clean. Next slide. Some areas where we see neglect just down the block; exposed irrigation; no ground cover; sparsely planted plants not thriving, what Commissioner Fernandez mentioned; inconsistent plant materials; missing plant materials; dirty sidewalks. By the way, all that landscaping is the responsibility of the buildings of the property owners. It is not the responsibility of the city. We are responsible for the median. Next one, more examples. No ground material; brown mulch; peat rock; river rock; red mulch. Next. By the way, the sidewalks, look at missing trees; garbage; trees not planted; you know there's no there's no trees there where there should be trees. Next one. These are unhealthy, these uh shrubs haven't been changed in 20 or 30 years, that's more towards North Gables as you can see. They have not changed, and then they need to be refreshed. They're almost as tall as the meters, as you can see. Next one. You have sidewalks that are broken, that are patched up with asphalt, concrete, and that are dirty. Next one. Here you have two interesting conditions that we studied, which are a hazard because I see people trip on them all the time. These are pavement materials, sidewalk material installed as part of a development agreement which needs to be reviewed. This is the bank on Ponce and Miracle Mile, and this is a site on Ponce also, as you can see. So, you have you have the streetscape on Miracle Mile, which you can see at the ends, then you have these tiles and then you have concrete. You have three different surfaces within 40 feet of each other that should be uniform. We need to review those development agreements. Thank God that doesn't happen in most places, but that's something that needs to be reviewed and find out who's responsible for that, who's responsible for that maintenance and how can we fix it and make it more uniform. Next. Block by Block Maintenance – these are areas that do not have Block by Block Maintenance that the weeds, the trash, overgrowth, you have block storm drains, uneven pavers, leaning signs, need to be addressed. Next. Here you have parking meters that have been like this for some time now that they haven't been removed. It's time to remove them, they're unsightly. If you already took the parking meter off, let's take the metal poles out. Next one. The alley conditions. Some are well maintained, look at the left how well maintained that is; look at the right; you look closely there's food, there's garbage all over the floor, there's potholes. Next one. I think we're done. All right. So, the reason why I wanted to show this was because the city needs to partner with the property

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owners, there has to be accountability. I passed a piece of legislation, and I know that when you pass a piece of legislation you hope that it works. The intent is for something positive to come out of it, but when I passed the legislation that was to force building owners to pressure clean their front sidewalks, the issue that they told me was, Vince, I'm spending, you know, two three hundred dollars to bring have somebody come in here and pressure clean my sidewalk, but then my neighbor doesn't pressure clean their sidewalk for six months. So, it's clean, dirty, clean, dirty, clean, dirty. It doesn't make sense. So why not and if the President of the Chamber could join us, why not put ourselves in a position where we have a uniform, a uniform attack on our downtown and we address issues like landscaping, and we address issues like cleanliness, where I already spoke about this in the Chamber when we do an assessment that has to be reviewed by all the business owners and we say, instead of instead of having to comply with twice a year pressure cleaning your sidewalks, we will do it for you in a uniform approach and we will also address the cleanliness of the sidewalks, and excuse me the cleanliness in the alleys and then we'll also take an opportunity to start noticing where do we have deficiencies; is a curb broken; is a bus bench broken; is a sign crooked; is it faded; and we write all these things down and we give them to the DCM and the ACM and the City Manager at the end of the week. I have a report like that that I have with the Manager's office that deals with everything that I submit during the week, and then that gets sent then to Public Works, it's sent to Parking, it gets sent to Code Enforcement and we have a system where we are fixing these issues and maintaining our streets. The way that we're doing it right now is not working, it's not, because Commissioner Fernandez brings up, hey there's a sidewalk issue, there's an area that hasn't been cleaned from the post office. As the DCM will tell you, I have probably asked them to go and visit the post office 20 times, I've sent pictures, you know and like that there are many other situations here in the city. So I'm thinking about getting buy-in from the Chamber, there's no bid, we're getting buy-in from the business community and say, we want to do something that there's a fee for the Central Business District outside of Miracle Mile/Giralda, because we already have cleaning for those areas, and we want to elevate the quality of our downtown and I also want to with the leadership of Deena and her team, I want to have us address the landscaping one time, and then once we address the landscaping one time we say, this is your maintenance, this is how you need to maintain this, these are the trees that you can plant there, this is the brush that you can plant, and every five years or 10 years you have to relandscape that area and if it falls out of compliance. For example, there's a car accident and destroys all the landscaping, we work with them to address it, but they have to maintain it, and they have to maintain it because if you look at it right now certain areas look incredible and certain areas don't even look like, don't even resemble Coral Gables. We gave you some examples there. So, Mr. President will you please join us. I would love to hear your guidance, your input, you know what are you thinking, what can we do to be better, how can we collaborate.

Mr. Arrizurieta: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, Jorge Arrizurieta, I'm President and CEO of the Coral Gables Chamber, 201 Alhambra Circle, suite 100. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Madam Vice

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Mayor, Commissioner Fernandez, Commissioner Lara, Commissioner Castro. I'm here obviously representing the Chamber. I've got some prepared comments just to make sure we don't miss any important point and then we'll open it up to whatever question you might have additionally. I'd like to commend the Mayor and this Commission for initiating the discussion regarding a commercial property owner assessment focused on beautification, maintenance, and accessibility of our downtown area. A coordinated effort to improve front sidewalks, rear alleys, and overall streetscape maintenance is an important step toward ensuring that our downtown maintains the level of excellence expected in the City Beautiful. When some properties are pristine and others are not, the result can become a patchwork that diminishes a cohesive look and feel of our commercial district. A well-structured assessment program could help create uniform standards for cleanliness, beautification, and accessibility particularly by ensuring that rear alleys are maintained, cleared and fully accessible as service corridors. These alleys are essential for delivery, sanitation, and overall operation, operational efficiency in a thriving downtown environment. I understand that the initiative does not include Miracle Mile or Giralda, I would respectfully note that the alleys behind, some of the alleys behind Miracle Mile require attention and ongoing maintenance. These corridors play a critical operational role, as you know, for many of our small businesses in the area. Improving them would be not only functional but would improve aesthetics. Mr. Mayor, at a recent, a most recent board meeting you made a very clear presentation on this topic matter, which was followed by a very supportive and collaborative discussion with several of our board members, some of which are business owners, merchants, and property owners throughout our downtown corridor. I'm here to thank you for your steadfast leadership by taking the initiative to handle this important issue and I'm also here this afternoon to reiterate our members support to you, the Vice Mayor and the Commission's full support. The Chamber will continue to work collaboratively with the city, property owners, and merchants to ensure the high standards that make Coral Gables not only a City Beautiful but also one of Florida's premier business communities. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. One of the points that I'm happy you clarified was, for example, Miracle Mile/Giralda that would be the fronts, would be the sidewalks, but the alleys would have to be cleaned under this process, because there's no way that professionally they can live up to the standards that I think we need. One of the points, before we take it away even further, I want to just mention some points that I forgot to mention that I was thinking about, and I had some notes here. Currently, business owners need to get a permit to pressure clean, to pressure wash, which in my opinion is incredibly burdensome, but it's still a requirement because you want to make sure people do the right thing, that they're not destroying, you know the asset, whether it's a sidewalk, alley you know they pressure clean a pipe, you know who knows what happened, they don't know what they're doing. So, we would take that away from them. They wouldn't have to hire a pressure cleaning company, they wouldn't have to come and get a permit, you know economy of scales will allow better pricing and consistency across all properties. The scope of

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the work that I'm looking at are pressure clean sidewalks and alleys, relandscape sidewalk planters with low maintenance plants, supervised to report deficiencies so efforts are comprehensive, look for exposed electrical wires, leaning signs, block catch basins, for example. Public spaces will be maintained to the highest standard will, improve property value, and it benefits all involved, applies to all commercial properties except like, I said before Miracle Mile and Giralda, the alleys are included. So when you talk about ensuring that now especially, where we're going to be potentially depending on our commercial spaces for their tax dollars more and more, as a result of what's coming out of Tallahassee potentially in the residential communities, we need to make sure these property values stay strong, we need to make sure that we're putting our best foot forward and welcoming everyone, that there's no garbage in the front of the alleys, that the sidewalks are clean, that if it's a New Times or if it's something that's rusted that that can be taken care of, because it just starts it's a trickle-down effect. You allow one property like the President was saying, to just fall into disrepair or not do something appropriate and the neighbors are going to say listen, why am I spending all this money and cleaning my sidewalk if they're not getting fined. So, and again, this across the board builds uniformity, it builds beauty, in my opinion, and I think it's something that it will take time to put together. You know what I would want is for staff through the Manager's office to put together a plan, working with the Chamber and to say look, this is what we're looking at, this is what it's going to cost, this is going to take months and months to put together and this is what we're looking at get, do a Town Hall, get some public comment on it but if we don't take these necessary steps and we depend on people to do it themselves, I think we're going to fall very short to what the City Beautiful standard is.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, Mr. Mayor, you and I have been talking about this for probably about 15 years. I remember how many conversations we have around your dining room table about this issue in particular and how we could get the businesses to participate. At one point I know you considered doing something like this, but we didn't have the buy-in from the business community so I'm glad Mr. President, that you're here and we do have the buy-in from the Chamber and the businesses, because at the end of the day, it's to their benefit as well. I think if we can continue to beautify our Central Business District in our commercial zones it's only going to attract more people to Coral Gables and it's going to be success for all of our businesses and our partnerships. I think we are expanding it outside of just the CBD, correct, because the businesses on S.W. 8th Street are a big issue, those that are on Sunset, the limited area that we have there as well, they haven't been taken care of for years. So I think this provides them also at least those that are currently working on this and doing the beautification themselves, it's going to reduce their cost, because at the end of the day when you have a larger project, I remember a family member of mine used to pressure clean their sidewalk when they started doing it as a community it was about a 25

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to 30 percent discount when they were doing it all together versus doing it individually, because they got a package rate. So, I think this is a great idea. It's going to help continue to beautify our city. You tie this in with the projects that we're bringing into Giralda, and with the work that's being done on Miracle Mile we're attracting our businesses and people to our Central Business District. I think this is going to be a huge success for the city.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So, you talk about economy of scales, and I promise you know what I'm asking my colleagues, I know they're very busy, just go to North Gables, go to 8th Street and beyond and look at the landscaping. For example, look at the landscaping that's there that the residents aren't even aware that you know, the landscapers come, they just do a very simple, quick you know, the hedge is there, they're running to the next job, everybody's trying to you know be as efficient as possible, but when you look at it the hedges are getting taller and taller and taller and taller. We just removed one on Bird Road and Granada that had been there that you couldn't even see over the hedge and you're making a right on Bird Road, thanks to the DCM and the team, they removed it I think Deena took care of that also. It was in the line of sight when a car was trying to make a right turn, and you know it wasn't the landscaper's fault; they were doing their job but you're not measuring how much taller that hedge is getting every single year. So, to me, you know the economy of scales like the Commissioner said is going to be, is going to really help the cleanliness. When you talk about what can we do to put our best foot forward, okay. So, crime is down, we have our own police downtown, we're cleaning everything, we're re-landscaping everything, we're doing the medians all the way to 8th Street, we have transportation, we're having great culture events, you know we have really upgraded through Belkys and her team, you know, the Christmas ornaments. By the way, I brought it up at the Chamber and I said, what did everybody think about it. Everybody loved the Christmas ornaments this year. You know we've been very successful in bringing people to the downtown, but it doesn't matter if it's not clean. If the sidewalks are dirty, if the alley stink, and by the way, there's going to be people that are going to be put on notice and they're going to be unhappy when they're put on notice and they say hey, you got to fix X, Y, and Z, you can't dump or you can't put, for example, the container where you put hot oil you know visible, you got to move it and that's the point. While they're cleaning the alley they're looking and they're making sure, okay this is not correct, this is not to code you send them a notice, you got a month to cure before you get a fine, you got a month to take care of this issue, correct this pipe, you have a leaky pipe, whatever that may be. Again, it's not only about beautification, it's also about being stewards of the environment you cannot continue to do certain things here and get away with it. We have our drinking water - you know you can't throw water. I see all the time you know this happens. Mr. Manager, where you see businesses throwing water into the catch basins. You can't do that, you can't, that's not allowed, not allowed. So, this is an opportunity to really get a grip on things and do things the right way and call ourselves the City Beautiful and really live up to that standard.

Commissioner Fernandez: And Mr. Mayor, I think one of the conversations we had in the past was people will never blame the business, they'll always say look at how bad Coral Gables looks. It falls on us as a city to make sure that we are looking the best we can.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to give you another example, okay. I didn't know this and I'm not afraid to admit it, the Manager brought it to my attention. I always thought that the City of Coral Gables was responsible for the median and the landscaping on the sidewalks. He told me, no it's not. We're responsible for the median. The landscaping is the responsibility of the business owner. Some of the landscaping hasn't been trimmed it's not trimmed, excuse me, has not been changed in 25, 30 years, and by the way, when we lift it up and Deena will tell you she's here, when you remove that landscaping the amount of garbage that attracts rats, you know, it's full of garbage, full of garbage. The perfect example was Morton's. We removed that there was one that was full of mints because people would walk out and they would eat them, and they would throw the paper in there. I mean had hundreds of mint wrappers in there. Yeah, it's not the business's fault, they don't know, you know, they don't know what's going on here, but at the end of the day when you remove that now you see it's a lot more aesthetically pleasing and you have brand new fresh landscaping. So, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor. One of my concerns when we did the pressure cleaning was that we're going to have a hodgepodge look, which...

Mayor Lago: You're right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Makes it look dirtier because you have one clean, one not so clean, and one dirty. So, this is fantastic and my conversation i had with the Chamber President is that we need to you know attack all storefronts, all the way up and down Ponce, you know. Our delineation where the CBD is really doesn't end, you know where Navarro is and where Almeria is, because it continues on down along all the storefronts, along Ponce, 8th Street, Sunset and I had the opportunity to have a conversation with an individual visiting us from Miami Beach and the comment they had was, the city can do better, and yes we can. This is similar to an item that I brought before the PACE YGRENE committee about doing a co-op for a septic to sewer conversion. The mobilization costs alone for whatever it is that you're doing, whether it's pressure cleaning, or plumbing, solar panels, etc., that is a major cost and anytime you can do economies of scale we're going to save everybody some money and it's going to be a much better job I think in the end when we can have some oversight on it. And the alleys, you know I've reported them many times, I know you have Mayor. There are frequent flyer text credits that you have earned through DCM, for the number of items that you have reported and yes, sometimes I've gone by these alleys when walking or biking and I just about knock you off your feet, because it smells so bad because these alleys are not being taken care of. So, thank you. Do you need action from us?

Mayor Lago: Yes. I wanted to hear from Mr. President; do you have anything else you'd like to add?

Mr. Arrizurieta: Sir, thank you for your leadership and your support.

Mayor Lago: Oh, thank you for your support. Thank you for allowing me to speak to the board. I think it was about 30 minutes. It was a very productive meeting, and I wasn't going to move forward and bring it to the Commission until I spoke to the business community first and foremost. Do we, Madam City Attorney, should we take some action in regard to asking the Manager to put together a plan with his team.

City Attorney Suarez: So that would be appropriate. I think the manager already has the direction, but if you want to formalize it, we can do that. I think that we've heard enough about the details of the services that you'd like us to explore. I will work with the City Manager's office on making sure we follow the legal process of course to do this. I just don't know if the Manager has sufficient details about the proposed areas. I've heard all commercial areas except Miracle Mile/Giralda so that would be all commercial areas in the city.

Mayor Lago: Yes, and for example, you're not going to have the Colonnade paying as much as a small business that has minimal frontage, you know it's going to be broken down by obviously by linear feet and frontage.

City Attorney Suarez: So there'd be an apportionment methodology we'd have to study and it would be based on the special benefit that's conferred to upon individual properties, the service below will come for that special benefit and we'd have to use a consultant to come up with that methodology and we've done that before in other situations.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: I think we have established what we want to do. We want to live for commercial areas throughout our Central Business District beyond and through the Ponce corridor, 8th Street. We will uh establish criteria, for instance the Mile -- the pavers are different, but they do have alleys. So, we will establish criteria. When it's alleys only, streets only, landscaping and so forth, and we can bring that back, we have to establish the area, number of residents, costs involved and it's a great undertaking. I think it will benefit the city, and I think I understand what the Mayor, what you want and what the Commission wants concerning this and we will set up a protocol for getting everything done.

Mayor Lago: How many months do you think it'll take to put this together?

City Attorney Suarez: I think there'll be several steps in this process because once we have a proposed plan or the Manager has a proposed plan, of course, and we need to come back to

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Commission for the hearings established and imposed. So, I don't know how long it'll take the Manager to come up with a proposed plan but certainly there are other steps that we will have to take.

City Manager Iglesias: We would like, through the Mayor. We need to establish the district that we're going to do, we need to establish all the property owners and all the areas affected. We need to look at the different costs of each proposal, and we need to establish this is almost like an improvement district, but for the maintenance improvement district and so I can give you a better schedule at next Commission meeting. I'm sure it's going to take a few months, but it's such an undertaking. We would probably like a consultant to help us out to establish this because of all the work that we're currently doing, and so I can give you a status of this next Commission meeting.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Do we need a motion or we're fine with it coming back in the next Commission meeting. Mr. Clerk, we'll put this back on the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor. Just a quick question or just to recap. So, we're not looking; the proposal here isn't the discussion, it isn't about increasing or burdening businesses. They have an existing obligation, correct, to maintain this particular aspect of beautification, landscaping, sidewalks and things like that. We're looking to maybe, if done correctly, we may even reduce their expense because we're going to use the economy of scale,

Mayor Lago: Right.

Commissioner Lara: Exactly and it should drive the businesses economic engine because we're making the downtown more beautiful, more enjoyable for people to come to play and to spend.

Mayor Lago: Exactly.

Commissioner Lara: Okay. So, no brainer.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

City Manager Iglesias: What the Mayor is saying is correct. There are economies of scale of pressure cleaning three blocks in a row, of landscaping three blocks in a row, and that would be cheaper and easier to do and with that methodology than having each individual 25- or 50-foot-wide business do it on their own. It would also be more consistent, and we could get a better operation. So, it would be better, cheaper, and faster.

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Mayor Lago: And I'm almost certain also, you have turnover for businesses and none of those businesses really understand their requirement in regard to the landscaping because that is something that, you know, it's very again, you can tell by the maintenance.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor

Mayor Lago: Yeah. and of course, the bare minimum is being accomplished.

Commissioner Lara: And this is going to be also a relieving of a burden to the city to have to then do the enforcement side of things.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

Commissioner Lara: Alternatively, which is expensive, time-consuming, and will not further the cause, right. This really does it's a great, great idea. It just hits all the boxes the right way.

Mayor Lago: Well said. Well said. So, Mr. Clerk, we'll have this back at the next Commission meeting.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: With a plan of action from the Manager. Thank you.