

CITY OF CORAL GABLES WATERWAY ADVISORY BOARD

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2021 - 5:30 P.M.

In-Person Meeting – Commission Chambers

- MEETING MINUTES -

MEMBERS	District	F	M	A	M	J	S	O	N	D	J	APPOINTED BY:
		20	20	20	20	20	20	20		20	21	
Lissette Stancioff	1	P	P	*	*	*	P	P	*	P	P	Raul Valdes-Fauli
Carla Isaias	3	P	P	*	*	*	P	P	*	P	E	Jorge L. Fors
Juan A. Galan Jr	3	P	P	*	*	*	P	P	*	P	P	Patricia Keon
Manny Chamizo	2	P	P	*	*	*	P	P	*	A	P	Vince Lago
Mario Lamar	4	P	E	*	*	*	P	P	*	P	P	Michael Mena
Douglas Yoder	CR	P	P	*	*	*	P	P	*	P	A	Peter Iglesias
Bertram Goldsmith	7	E	E	*	*	*	P	P	*	P	P	Commission-As-A-Whole
John Swain	2	P	P	*	*	*	P	P	*	P	P	Commission-As-A-Whole
Andria Codina Miyares	6	P	E	*	*	*	P	A	*	A	P	Board-As-A-Whole

**P – Present**  
**E – Excused Absence**  
**A – Absent**  
**(-) – No Appointment**  
  
**(\*) – No Meeting**

**STAFF:**

Jorge Acevedo, Utilities Division Director/Board Secretary  
Pilar Wiese, Recording Secretary  
Maj. Jennie Hoff, Specialized Enforcement Division  
Ray Toledo, Marine Patrol  
Chris Challenger, Marine Patrol

**GUESTS:**

Dr. Tiffany Troxler, FIU

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order at 5:52 p.m. The roll was taken, and a quorum was present.

**PRESENTATIONS / DISCUSSIONS:**

- Dr. Tiffany Troxler from FIU was invited for a presentation on the FIU Water Quality Assessment project. She said that the project is a collaboration among Florida International University, University of Miami, University of Massachusetts, NOAA, and Miami Waterkeeper.

She said that the City of Coral Gables has always taken a proactive approach to using science and data to inform decision-makers and uses every opportunity possible to interact and engage with residents regarding issues of concern and interest, regarding sea level rise and water quality issues.

Two of the primary nutrients -Phosphorus and Phytoplankton- the Florida Department Treatment of Environmental Protection, guided by the Environmental Protection Agency, has set nutrient criteria to protect the character, biology, ecology, and ecosystem of Biscayne Bay. Water quality data from DERM have shown that these two indicators have exceeded every year for at least the last 15 years.

Water quality specific recommendations for watershed approach to achieving deep reduction in pollutant loads for restoration of seagrass meadows to historic coverage:

Conduct an immediate assessment of land-based hotspots based on existing known impairments.

Undertake and secure funding for new pilot and research focused on reducing pollutant loads, and

Pass a county-wide fertilizer ordinance.

Goal for assessment of water quality and habitat conditions in the Coral Gables waterway:

1. Design and implement a water quality monitoring program to understand nutrient loading impacts on water quality in the Coral Gables waterway and tributary canals, including stormwater outfalls.
2. Characterize the nutrient loads into and from watershed.
3. Undertake field data collection at select critical junctures of the waterway system for tidal stage and velocity measurements to inform model development.
4. Develop education and outreach materials and contribute to policy development.
5. Report on data synthesis and project management.

- Discussion - Board members' rotation of roles

Mr. Galan said he asked for the item to be added to the agenda for discussion as it seemed that the Board is not doing something right regarding governance of the Ordinance as the chairperson and vice chair should be selected for one-year terms, maybe name two successive terms. Board has not ever named a vice chair. He thinks members need to adopt some agreement as to how to govern board members. He is not in favor of a one-year term as that is not enough for any person to serve as a chair. He would be more in favor of two-year term. It should be rotation so that every board member has an opportunity to serve in either a chair or vice chair position. It has been over almost four years and the board has not done any rotation.

- Discussion - Access launch area on Ponce de Leon and Rivera Dr. near US1

Mr. Goldsmith said that he had visited the area. It is a disaster and very unsafe. The county should fix it or close it off completely until they can fix it. Somebody is going to sue somebody over that; not Coral Gables because it is a county property.

Mr. Chamizo intervened saying that the area is a little launching area that was used originally by the police department to launch the smaller boats. It is not really a marina which is what is being used for right now. It is just a small little rocky area. Board members have been in favor of opening access to the waterways to boaters, kayakers, but not motorized vehicles coming down the pike. He has pictures of 20 ft. boats being launched from that area. He said that he has gotten a lot of heat last time because he did not want the area to be opened unless it is safe. He said that there are two other places where you can launch.

Officer Toledo said that it was not a ramp used for the police department. It was mostly Public Works that would use it for their maintenance vessels. It is county property and police have nothing to do with it. As far as enforcement, he will check on that but to his knowledge, police can not enforce anything under that bridge.

Mr. Galan said he believes the fire department has some smaller rubber boats, used in the past to train their people with those boats in the waterway. He does not disagree with safety. He suggested that if they are going to allow anybody to use the paddleboard site, to put in the proper paddleboard top.

The parks department goes around this particular property that it has been used like a park, like a launching site for 30, 40, 50 years and there are people who believe that they should have a right to use it. He can not say to them that they

can not use it. His suggestion is to work with the parks department in the City and the County to improve the site and make it safe for people to launch there but making sure that nobody can put in a motorized vehicle.

Mr. Swain intervene saying that launch area has been used for at least 50 years because he used it when he was in high school and he does not think it is unsafe. It is a good slope. There has not been a problem until COVID-19 came around and suddenly, the boat ramps got close. People started to use it as a boat ramp, which is a problem. County has put up three big signs for no motorized vehicles. He had suggested that if the signs do not work, what the city or the county could do is to take one of those big concrete highway dividers and put it down right in front of the ramp and no one is going to use it as a boat ramp. He agrees with what Commissioner Keon said at the commission meeting when she suggested letting the county, the city, and The Underline work together and come up with a permanent solution. The Underline project is finishing Phase 1 now and this should be Phase 3 or 4. What we need to do is just a temporary fix for now and let the underline and county come up with a permanent solution down the road. He does not see any problems for the kayakers using it and if the signs do not work, put up one of those big concrete blocks.

Mr. Chamizo said that if you look at the grade on there where families go with children, carrying children with coolers and kayaks. The Blue Road open space is much safer and so is the Girl Scout. It is not like we do not have launching area. We want to make sure is safe and that no one gets hurt. We want to make sure that no trash is left behind and there is not a parking disaster underneath the underline and that people are accessing it correctly.

Mr. Swain interjected saying that there is not a launching area at Blue Road open space and what is being developed is a passive park and parking is not going to be there. He said that for him, the Girl Scout park is more dangerous than the one on The Underline. It is a sharp drop off, really cut between two hedges, kind of like this warrant area where the people have just created their own little boat ramp and it is not safe either. He would like to suggest that eventually down the road the board put a comprehensive plan with all the things to fix to make all the launch sites safer; one of them would be a proper launch site at Ruth Brian Owen Park, the Girl Scout Hut.

Mr. Galan said that we do not control the property, the county controls the property. There is a concern because of misuse that the property was used as a ramp for motorized vehicle. Maybe the county would allow the City to put in one of the big concrete barriers to block the access by trailers as a temporary solution. Over a period, the City can work with the county with the underline to come up

with a better overall solution for that park so the people that are using it can keep using it but in a safe manner, meanwhile we protect the canal and the residents around it from the motorized traffic use.

***A motion was made, “To recommend the City that a semi-permanent obstruction be placed so that no one can use that ramp with a trailer and any kind of motorized boat; and that the City work with the county, including the City’s Parks Department to see how we can improve that site, so it provides greater safety for those that use it.” The motion was seconded, voted upon and adopted unanimously.***

Maj. Hoff intervened saying that she had some information requested at last meeting and found a little history of why it was closed. She has also investigated the history of complains that motorized vehicles are still being launched on the area, but she has not seen many calls for that. She has asked to please call the police department instead of taking pictures so they can respond immediately and inform these people that they cannot go down that path.

- Discussion - Signage for jumping over the bridge.

Ms. Stancioff said that a neighbor on the Mahi Canal has raised an issue about the kids jumping over the bridge and the bridge at Cartagena Circle. None of those bridges have signs and that is a concern to some of the boaters as they are jumping too close to the boats going by.

***A motion was made, “to place signs for no diving on the bridge.” The motion was seconded, voted upon, and adopted unanimously.***

- Discussion – Enforcement of Y-Valve for blackwater discharge from boats

Mr. Galan has talked to the police about the Y-Valve. They do not have the right to enforce a rule and check people’s Y-Valve for dumping. From his experience very few people use the pump at the marina. People might be dumping into the waterway. Most boaters do not even know they have a Y-Valve. The Y-Valve in Florida most likely is set to overboard discharge, but even if it is a holding tank discharge, most people go to the Bahamas and in the Bahamas everybody is overboard. No many people come back, check, and put theirs in the holding tank. The pumping out is not being done out in the marina which means it is all going overboard. The enforcement in these waters is much less that you see in other states. It should be a requirement for all marinas in Coral Gables to have pump-out stations and for all marinas to report the use of pump-out stations. After you start with those requirements and measure them maybe for a year or two, a decision can be made if more enforcement is needed.

- Discussion – Police Safety and Enforcement on the waterways  
Mr. Galan wanted to bring up this item on public safety and enforcement of rules because somebody died and was not using a life preserver of any type. He said that there are a lot of paddle boarders, including children, and somehow enforcement of life jackets is needed. Maybe a sign that says life vest required to operate a vessel.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 7:15PM

NEXT MEETING:

Wednesday, February 3, 2021 at 5:30 p.m.