

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-9**  
**November 14, 2023**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson**

**Commissioner Melissa Castro**

**Commissioner Ariel Fernandez**

**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Assistant Director for Mobility, Matt Anderson**

**Public Speaker(s)**

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Agenda Item F-9

Discussion regarding recycling plastic film  
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-9, discussion regarding recycling plastic film. I had the pleasure of meeting with a resident during my office hours. Her name is Sherry. She brought an idea up to me, which is something that coincides with a habit that we have at my house, where we recycle plastic bags and, for example, dry-cleaning film, the film that basically protects your shirts and dresses and that kind of stuff. So that usually just gets thrown away. You can't throw it into the recycling bin. What I've been doing for years is, I have a separate basket and I collect it all and then I take it back to Publix and I recycle it at Publix. I probably do it once a month. It stays in my car for a few days, and I take it to Publix, but that's not really feasible for the entire city. She exposed me to a company called Next-Trex and look at all the cool things that you can recycle which right now we can't put into our recycling bins. These are all different types of plastic wraps and bags.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: You can have something at the Youth Center too.

Mayor Lago: Yes. So, what I was thinking about was, taking a parking space, taking a parking space at the Youth Center, very easy, one parking space, it doesn't have to be the one closest to the entrance. It could be one the furthest away, and putting one of these containers and when you fill it up, if there is not cost, they take it from you and then they have a challenge and the challenge, other cities are doing this. They take all the stuff, all kinds of items that we cannot even recycle now, bubble wrap, zip locks, cereal liners.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Ceral box liners, I've seen...

Mayor Lago: Produce bags, store bags, ice bags, newspaper sleeves, and what they do is, they give you a bench made of these materials, and they are pretty nice benches, and we can take those benches and we can dedicate them to somebody. For example, I would buy the first one. You can do like a raffle, or we can do \$1,500, \$2,000 for the bench, and the bench can have someone's name on it and we can install it in a park, or we can install it in City Hall, we can install it somewhere that's appropriate. I thought I had a picture of the bench, but I didn't. She also showed me something about cigarette butt recycling, but I thought that was a little too aggressive. I think this is more feasible. So, I would like for my colleagues to entertain this as a possibility and potentially installing one of these receptacles in the Youth Center or somewhere else that has a lot of opportunity for traffic, maybe here in City Hall we could put one, whatever you like. I think it's a pretty large container and then they come, and they pick it up and they recycle these products, and they provide us with a bench which we can use for something that again will benefit the city and install it somewhere nice.

Commissioner Fernandez: What does it look like?

Mayor Lago: I don't have a picture of it, but it's nice though. It's something very well done. Again, we can use it as a tool in the city to reward the Employee of the Year or we can use it for a fundraising opportunity with businesses, they could have their name put on it, something like that and it can be something that again, we're benefiting by actually recycling all these products which are now going into the landfill. We can divert all these products and we can also benefit by building one of these beautiful benches.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think it's a great idea. We could also have smaller ones around like we have for the batteries to take it from there and then put them into the larger container, if it's going to take up that much space. The point is education and to make it easy for people. The Adult Activity Center, you can have a receptacle there and just go fill the bigger one up, even on a weekly basis empty it out. All great stuff.

Mayor Lago: So, what I wanted to do is, before I proceed. I've already had conversations with a resident and a company, I'd like to present it at the next Commission meeting for your approval and consideration and I'll have more ideas, more proof on how the actual benches look, what is the size of the container, how often do they pick it up. So, we can start telling our residents that this is the location where you can go and drop off all these products and recycle all these products, instead of, here you go. Thank you, Gabby.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Marlin Ebbert showed this to me at one point.

Mayor Lago: They look great. They are weather resistant, and they are made from the actual products that you're recycling, and as you can tell, you can put a little plaque on it, you can dedicate it to somebody and it's something very tasteful.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And our kids would be teaching the parents, they'll go, dad, dad, you have to recycle that.

Commissioner Fernandez: The only request should be to find a good location for it. I think the parking lot at the Youth Center is a little overused as it is. If we can find a spot that may be more visible too.

Commissioner Menendez: Fred offered his parking spot. He told me, right Fred.

Commissioner Fernandez: But this is something I had talked to Matt about, prior to this recycling event to see if we could have public here at this last recycling event. It didn't work out, but if we do have a partner that can be out here so that we can recycle these goods as well, I think it would be great.

Mr. Anderson: So what we have been doing is, obviously first and foremost from sustainability we want to encourage reusable bags as much, but we know people still have to use plastic, and obviously we've been encouraging residents to take and drop off at Publix, Target, a lot of your retail stores that do distribute plastic, do have bins where you can drop them off at. This is something certainly we can look at. And Mayor to your point, the one thing I don't want to cause confusion about is people putting them in the single stream recycling. You all have seen on the tours from Waste Management that is a big problem when they get caught in there, but this is certainly something we can look at and a potential location, obviously working with Parks. The reverse vending machine that we have in the Youth Center right now, actually that grant is scheduled to end this week. So, we're probably going to be taking that machine out, so there may be an opportunity to...

Mayor Lago: What I want to try to do is, I want to just have a location where somebody literally can just hop out of their car and dump it, like I do at Publix. And I agree with you, but if you look at what I recycle every month or every two months, ten percent of just plastic bags. The only plastic

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bags that I ever get are for milk, for almond milk, and wet things like that, and I try not to get paper, as much or reusable bags, which we have, but there is no recycling for you have a dress shirt, it comes with a film.

Mr. Anderson: Correct.

Mayor Lago: You buy water bottles, which we try not to, but you still buy water bottles for one reason or another.

Mr. Anderson: Its hard to avoid it 100 percent.

Mayor Lago: There's plastic everywhere. Over 50 percent of oil is used not for gasoline, but for plastics, over 50 percent. Plastic is everywhere. And it was very interesting when you see, and it was brought to my attention the amount of items that we could recycle. All you have to do is drop it off and it's great, because you are diverting it from the waste stream.

Mr. Anderson: Correct.

Mayor Lago: And a lot of people are making a mistake, even though we have a very competent, educated group of individuals here in our community, they are excited about recycling. So, people dump things in there that wreak havoc on the actual machinery, and then they get, you can't recycle this, this is too difficult. I literally have a basket in my garage. Whatever I can throw in there that makes sense is on that list, bread, this, that, throw it in there and it gets taken care of.

Mr. Anderson: And I believe Publix, the program that they have set up, I believe they do make benches. It's a very specialized recycling process to be able to do that. Yes, it's certainly something we can explore.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Publix only takes number 2 and number 4 plastic. This is a much broader list.

Mr. Anderson: Correct. Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, if we could take a look at the parking on, for instance, where we put the Christmas Tree, you know, one of the spots for the plastic, if it's really going to need that much space.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. I have to look at the size of the container and see.

Mayor Lago: Before I did all that research and I will bring it to the next Commission, I just wanted to see if there was an appetite for it.

Mr. Anderson: I just like the idea – and this is why we’ve done it with other locations is, putting it somewhere indoors, so it’s protected. It’s also in a secure location. Again, it all depends on what the size of that.

Mayor Lago: I realize that the easier you make it for people...

Mr. Anderson: Oh yes, 100 percent.

Mayor Lago: The more engaged they become.

Mr. Anderson: Easy and convenient.

Mayor Lago: That’s why I said, I don’t want that parking space all the way in the front. I use the Youth Center just as an example. It could be City Hall; it could be another parking area. Take one space and I imagine the machine is pretty significant in size. They’ll probably come pick it up maybe once a quarter and you literally just put it all as far away and people drive by, and they do like what I do every month. And I think it’s a very beneficial thing and it continues to build upon what the city is known for.

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: For being as sustainable as possible.

Mr. Anderson: Try to get to zero waste as much as we can.

Mayor Lago: We’re trying, right, we’re trying.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, as far as taking a parking space, how large is this container?

Mayor Lago: I spoke without having the information. I thought of a parking space because I look at, for example, a waste container that you see in the alleys. They are probably something like that unless they actually have a compression system in there which actually compresses the plastic and pushes all the way. I don’t even know. I have to have further discussions. I just wanted to see if there was an appetite on the Commission for me to continue doing research on this and have a second conversation.

Mr. Anderson: And I believe with this program, NextTrex, and I think there’s also one other company, Altera Recycle, that has programs somewhat similar, I believe, they also have mail homes, like systems where people can sign up, like that sort of thing. I’m just saying. They do come in smaller sizes as far as pre labels and everything like that...

Mayor Lago: For example, we could have one here in City Hall. We don’t want to do Youth Center; we can have it here at City Hall. We can put it in a corner where maybe there are parking spaces that are just not efficient and we take that little corner and we set it up nice, well done, and we put

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it there and we see how successful we are. Then we tell people, listen, now we are offering this amenity for anybody in the community that wants to do this, this is an opportunity for you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Is it like this, almost like a trash can.

Mayor Lago: The one that I saw was a little bit bigger. I have to get the actual dimensions. I didn't really – I just think for example, I don't know how big that trash can is. I put together every two months a pretty significant bag full of it and I compress it and I compress it down. I want it to be something where you don't have to be constantly attending to it, and don't forget, our community again, is very interested in the environment. So that little container is like what they have in Publix. When I go, sometimes I struggle to push down what I bring because it's full.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I make my own bag. I just leave it on top, so its standing this tall. So, they just come pick it up.

Mr. Anderson: Mayor, to your point, you could just see the successes in the other programs we've launched and making it convenient, like the battery recycling, like the recycling drive-through.

Mayor Lago: When we started that recycling drive-through, how it exploded and what Solanch has done with the batteries is incredible.

Mr. Anderson: And again, to your point, make it easy and convenient for people to be able to participate, you're going to have high levels of participation because of that, and we've seen that success.

Mayor Lago: That was my thought process. You're right about the vending machine, but if you put it somewhere, again just literally get out of their car and dump it, it makes it easy. If the Commission is interested, I'll bring it back with more detail and I'll prep a memo that will send the information before the Commission.

Vice Mayor Anderson: With photos and dimensions.

Commissioner Menendez: The Youth Center would be a great place.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Plus, you can have more than one of these in different locations. That's not so big.

Mayor Lago: I just don't think that would work, because I'm telling you, you know Vice Mayor, you know better than I do. When people get into something like this lady, Sherry, who brought it to my attention, she's like, I promise you everybody is going to start doing this. When you tell people all you have to do is put a little bag there in your garage, just dump all the plastics and look at all the cool things that you can recycle, the kids get into it, and you realize it's big before you know it. You're like, what am I going to do with all this stuff. That's the position we're in.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: That's where you have the big one. How often are the garbage cans emptied at the Youth Center.

Mr. Anderson: I think staff takes care of those on a daily. Fred can chime in on that, but I believe it's frequently.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Frequently – yes. So, you just start putting them into the larger containers at that point but making it convenient for people to drop them off is the key.

Mr. Anderson: Well, what's interesting too is when we started the reverse vending machine, they weren't finding any plastic bottles anywhere on the Youth Center grounds anymore because all the kids were gathering them and putting them in the reverse vending machine. So that was just something we saw as a result.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's a wonderful thing.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, I know, exactly.

Vice Mayor Anderson: What does it cost us to continue that?

Mr. Anderson: The grant we received was for \$25,000. To continue the program, it would be \$25,000 on an annual basis.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Versus paying somebody to pick up all the bottles.

Mayor Lago: Alright. So, I'll prepare that.