

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
September 22, 2020
Virtual Meeting
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-2 [9:50 a.m.]

A presentation and update by staff regarding the donation of a stormwater filtration system by SCR Mechanical. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: G-2, presentation and update by staff regarding the donation of a stormwater filtration system by SCR Mechanical.

Vice Mayor Lago: Good morning sir.

Public Works Director Diaz: My name is Hermes Diaz, I'm the Public Works Director and I'm here to present the donation by SCR Mechanical for a smart...skimmer, a pilot program that we are putting together at the Riviera Alpha pipe.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, I wanted to give you a little bit of background before we commence the presentation, and I wanted to thank staff for their efforts, because we've been working on this for probably...

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Public Works Director Diaz: A month, a month and-a-half maybe, I don't remember, but thereabouts.

Vice Mayor Lago: A month and-a-half, two months; and your team has worked diligently to see this new technology and what it could potentially bring to the table. So, I had the pleasure of meeting an engineer by the name of _____, which is very involved in the city. Her husband actually owns Pascals, but her interest is really in environmental stewardship and civil engineering and really water quality. So, one day she was talking to me about different technologies. Remember this goes back a little further when we were talking about the actual, the ability to clean water that comes from stormwater runoff; and that's still in the works and still potentially a possibility and we have a presentation, I don't know if I sent a memo to all the members of the Commission, but maybe you can share with them the multi-stage box system, filtration system that she included in the presentation. But then we wanted to do something and try to find something that could potentially help our existing conditions now that wasn't as costly, and they were willing to donate it, so it was a great thing. In one of our areas of most concern is our waterway that is adjacent to Coral Gables Senior High, located on the Riviera. _____ went back and forth with staff and you are going to go over the presentation and they gave us this exceptional donation, which is going to make a significant impact on the waterway and clean up a lot of the different issues, but she decided to donate, this item is around \$3,500, so it's a significant donation on her part, and it's something that hopefully it bears fruit and we can use it in different areas of the city to really contain a lot of the things that we are seeing now that are coming to light, especially in the bay that are affecting our water quality. So, Hermes, thank you.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, what you see in that picture it's the previous condition of that alpha. That Alpha has the equivalent size of approximately 60 inches. It actually connects the basing that includes...and the entire area is well over 300 acres, in addition to the state road, LeJeune Road, which we didn't estimate how much area that covers. So, it's more in excess of 300 acres and that is by far our biggest Alpha pipe. So, it's the one that would potentially have the biggest impact. Years ago, we installed a...barrier precisely so that we could prevent trash from getting into the waterway and we have a pontoon boat which we routinely pick up garbage and stuff like that. It's kind of hit or miss, but you...and it flushes out, so if it doesn't rain there will be nothing for a while, if it rains, so sometimes it needs to be cleaned more often than others, but that's what we had prior to.

Vice Mayor Lago: And if you get a chance, if you have grandkids, you have kids, and they want to see something really interesting, I take my girls there all the time, especially when we are in the area picking up garbage or not. You can see Manatees that come right to that out-fall and they are always there. I haven't gone one time and not seen them, and it's pretty interesting. It's a good opportunity to really enjoy nature.

Public Works Director Diaz: Manatees actually appreciate fresh water...

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

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Public Works Director Diaz: And because the water we are getting probably has less salinity than – in Miami we had the same thing, they’ll go to an Alpha pipe...

Vice Mayor Lago: But its interesting to see, they are always there.

Public Works Director Diaz:...families too sometimes.

Vice Mayor Lago: They are always there, have families.

Public Works Director Diaz: That picture that you see is slightly different from the one that was sent around in the past. So, what they gave us was a donation for – you see those wide tubes, so that is the march sponge, march sponge skimmers, its actually manufactured by a company called Ebi...Industries. So, we installed it originally on September 11th and as the Vice Mayor mentioned, it was donated by SCR Mechanical. What we notice though that when we installed it originally, it wasn’t doing a very good job of holding the solids behind, so we actually went ahead and put the curtain back, and in fact, the curtain that was there when we pulled it out, it wasn’t in the best of shape. So, they actually went ahead and donated the new curtain that you see there as well. So that condition that you see right now was install, I think, Friday and that specific march, but what it targets is hydrocarbons. So overtime, the sponge will collect the oil that discharges into the waterway, it will probably have to be replaced probably every year, six months, it depends on the amount of volume that goes through there, and in the meantime they offered to test, they take samples from the sponge, they get the volume of how much hydro carbon is being removed. We are also talking to FIU to see if we can take some samples before and after, just to see whether it really makes a big difference as part of the waterway to itself, as something we are talking. So, the idea, over the next six months to have a good idea of how effective this is and look at it from a perspective of operational and cost. This actually happens to be a more accessible Alpha. Most Alphas are actually on easements behind private properties, so they are not that easy to get to, those are also a lot smaller, as well, so this is a great pilot. Eventually as we move forward and we start talking about citywide...improvements, I think some of the larger investments will have to be made. There are little things out there, which you mentioned, we just have to be very careful with those things, because we have certain areas that flood and some of the stuff, this doesn’t have any impact upstream of the discharge connection, but some of the stuff can potentially exacerbate flooding somewhere upstream. So, we need to make sure that when we look at things that are more, I guess, intrusive is probably an appropriate word for that, that we don’t create an adverse condition somewhere, it could be behind the Alpha. But eventually, those are things that we’re probably going to have to be tackling, but it’s a good start.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, in closing, thank you for presenting this. I brought this forward, not only to thank Ms. Angel for her significant donation to the city, but I wanted to make sure that we study this, because as water quality becomes a focal point in South Florida, I mean we are talking about this Earth is covered by over 70 percent of water. So, as we talk about the direct collation between water quality and property values. You are seeing it happen now – they are talking about the bay, you know, we really need to take a strong stand on ensuring, and the three items I put on today’s Commission, really deal with water quality. They deal with issues of Biscayne Bay; they deal with

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issues of ensuring that what we have here today is there in the future for our children. So, I wanted to thank your staff, our City Manager, ACM, for really working with SCR Mechanical and let's use this opportunity, this gift, to see how we can apply this technology to other areas in the city, to increase our water quality. Look at their Smart Sponge technology, which is used, very interestingly, Peter, Mr. Manager, if we could find the video, not now, I'm saying the video and send it to my colleagues, I want to show them the multiple step cleaning process that they use in areas where oils, where they've done dredging, not dredging, but drilling, excuse me, and the water has become contaminated and then they run this water through, take all the contaminants out and the water comes out crystal clear on the other side. Again, that's a significant investment that, I'm not saying this...but this same company does that and really focuses on cleaning those types of polluted situations, as a result of maybe tanker opening up and splitting open in the middle of the ocean, like you've seen like the Exxon Valdes type scenario, but those situations can be applied to cleaning our waterways, which this is something that we should really focus on.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Vice Mayor, thank you very much. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Hermes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you – very interesting.

Vice Mayor Lago: And if anyone else has any ideas on this, anybody has any contacts that deal with cleaning water, bring them forward, because this is a great opportunity here, especially look at this generous donation from SCR.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Hermes.