

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-3
November 9, 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 Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant Director for Solid Waste, Paula Rodriguez

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-3 [11:48 a.m.]

Discussion regarding green matter in trash pits. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item G-3. Discussion regarding green matter in trash pits. This is simple. Again, I'll preface the conversation with we are not discussing removing trash pits. As the county cost gets more and more expensive, we will, I don't have a crystal ball, but we will be receiving, Paula, you come up here and talk a little bit more about it, we will be receiving for sure a pass-through in regard to more county fees in the upcoming year, if this continues to happen. Its inevitable. It is what it is. Especially, as I expect the county to have significant shortfalls because the federal government will not be giving multi-hundred-million-dollar check to the county this year, that I foresee. You have a lot of reoccurring revenues which needs to be taken care of. So, what I foresee is, an opportunity to find solutions on how to take our trash pits and make them to divert some of that trash and potentially recycle it one way or another, and we are looking at one company in particular that the county is already entering into a letter of agreement with, a letter of intent, and this company is already being used in Tallahassee, in that county.

City Manager Iglesias: Leon County, Mayor.

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Mayor Lago: Leon County, excuse me, and they are doing a pilot program over there. Very interesting and we've been having discussions, I know that you are looking into it. That's not for today. Besides saving money, I think its also an issue of beautification. So, I wanted to show you three photos that Paula and I were busy in the neighborhood. So, this is the first photo. This is what we encountered. This right here is completely allowed by the code, that can be there for seven days, correct?

Solid Waste Director Rodriguez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: So, you can have a black bag or ten back bags in your trash pit and that is completely allowed by the code. What I would like to see is, potentially the next photo, is for your pit to be solely for green matter. By the way, that's the same pit. All I did was remove the plastic bag and I let the leaves, by the way, they weren't leaves, they were actually garbage that people used to hide and throw it away, but I'm going to tell you they were leaves, just put the leaves back onto the trash pit. And if potentially, we were able to find a company, like the one that we're kind of discussing right now, I would like to see something like this in the future. This is the third photo. You would have your trash pit, which you could have seven days a week for green matter and adjacent to that when it's the day of the pickup, the night before you can put your trash that you want to get rid of adjacent to your trash, or right next to it. Why do I want to do that? – because I want to try to limit, number one, the horrific look of all these garbage bags throughout the city in our trash pits, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; and number two, if we do engage with the company that is already working on with the county and Leon County, they require for the trash pit garbage to be only green matter and what they do is, they take that green matter and they divert it and they basically make into a matter...

City Manager Iglesias: Ash.

Mayor Lago: An ash which can be used in sidewalks. This was brought to me by a previous Senator, who was representing them as a client, and its very interesting, very interesting model, which if you look at the presentation which was sent to me by e-mail, so it's a public record, forwarded to the staff, the numbers are between 80 to 85 percent savings because they recycle the green matter. That green matter, correct me if I'm wrong Paula, this is your specialty and the Manager, you guys know this a lot better than we do, green matter goes to the county, to the dump, correct?

Solid Waste Director Rodriguez: We actually take it to our resource recovery facility, so it's used for recover.

Mayor Lago: Yes, but we have to pay for that.

Solid Waste Director Rodriguez: Yes, we pay approximately \$43, about \$44.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, garbage goes to the county by the Bond Issue and green matter and garbage goes to Waste Management.

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Mayor Lago: But we have to pay.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, we do.

Mayor Lago: So, the whole point is to divert that forty-something dollar expense per ton and imagine our city has so much lushness that it would be a lot of money if we can divert it and we have the facility on 72nd and Coral Way, where we have multiple acres that are not being used currently.

City Manager Iglesias: 1.6 acres.

Mayor Lago: 1.6 acres – So if we could have this, by the way, its no cost to the city. It would literally reduce our garbage. So, I'm looking for options to be more sustainable and I'm looking for options to save the city money. The garbage fees are going to continue, so this is the first year in a long time that the Commission said no, we are not going to pass the \$300,000 uptick in garbage that the county is passing onto us, we are going to absorb it, but we can't continue to do that. We have to be honest with ourselves. We cannot. So, we've got to find solutions. If we are not going to get rid of trash pits, I said we're not going to, we ask people do not listen to blogs, do not listen to hearsay, rumors, we are not asking for that. We are just asking to beautify the city and we are asking to do something like I showed you in those pictures, which I think will not only save us money, it's a sustainable thing to do, but its also, imagine six days and-a-half of just no garbage bags located on your street. I think that's a huge step forward, along with the cardboard that we did, because its already saving us almost, diverting 300,000 pounds of cardboard. I think it was 320,000 pounds.

City Manager Iglesias: 320,000, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: 320,000 pounds in the presentation you put together, Paula. That's my intent and I'm doing it in the Sunshine, I'm having a conversation with my colleagues, to make sure that we do the right thing, save money, sustainable and we divert, we save the city, we essentially beautify the city.

Commissioner Anderson: I think this is a step in the right direction, because it will help bring down the cost for the residents, environmentally speaking as well. The amount of money it takes to open up a new dumping site is tremendous, and we are really running out of places to dump, so its getting trucked further and further away from burning the fuel, to haul this stuff and the lack of space to do it. There are articles out there where they show the South Dade landfill was only meant to be a temporary thing after Hurricane Andrew, and it's impacting our ability to restore water flows to the Bay. So, there's many different reasons why finding a more sustainable way to deal with our yard waste is a good thing.

City Manager Iglesias: We've been looking at this, as the Mayor said, they have a pilot program in Leon County and what they do is, they take green matter and mineralize it into a form that can be used, let's say in concrete for ash and things like this. What we have to look at right now is the potential cost savings which might get more and more as we go, because we would have to have

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additional equipment to make sure that we segregate green matter from what is not green matter. So, we currently have a crane and two trucks that actually work in tandem, so when one truck goes to dump, the other truck is being filled. We would potentially have to look at maybe a third truck so that we have green matter in two trucks and the other, and the waste or the trash, let's say not garbage, but trash in that third truck. So, I think as we move forward, we really have to take a look at this because this is very interesting. The fact that we can create an ash that can be used in construction, can be used in cement, let's say in concrete to reduce the cement ratio in concrete, thereby – the making of cement is where the problem is, as far as concrete, its not in the asphalt plan. So, we are looking at this from a pilot program perspective, Mayor. We are looking at some cost involved in seeing what the additional cost of that additional truck is, versus our savings, but as trash pickup gets more and more expensive, we are currently paying \$47 a ton, we are paying almost \$70 a ton for garbage at the county site. So, we are going to continue to monitor this and see how that Leon County pilot program works, Mayor, and hopefully if that works out, we do have the 1.6 acres at 72nd Avenue that we would have to clean. There are environmental issues in that site, but that's a tremendous piece of property, its IU-3, it's a tremendous piece of property that we could use and so, we are going to continue to monitor that, monitor what's going on in that pilot program and bring it to the City Commission as soon as we get some, a little more information on it, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, I wanted to thank Senator Oscar Brennan who brought it to my attention, and the purpose of this discussion, at the end of the day was just to give you a little bit more information of what I presented to staff, and to have you buy-in to this idea and to ask staff to engage with this company; Paula, start doing research through the Manager, conducting research to understand, okay, what are we looking at. If we have X amount of green matter that we have to process and that we are paying for, we have the numbers, we know how much we are paying for it. What if we divert that and we use this system and it saves us, they say 85 percent. I want to be conservative, let's say 75 percent, 70 percent of what we're having to pay at \$47 a ton. Again, that's money, that's real money, that's significant money, and by the way, its also environmentally the right thing to do. We can use it for – they take the ask, again, it's a construction boom, there's a lot of opportunities – we're building sidewalks, we can't build the sidewalks fast enough. This is something that I ask the Commission, I don't know if you need a resolution. Do you think you need more time. Can I put this on the agenda in January, is January, okay?

City Manager Iglesias: I think January would be good, Mayor, it gives us a little bit of time to look at that pilot program, see how its functioning. I know DERM is also looking at that pilot program.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Its already happening in Leon, they are already doing it in Leon.

City Manager Iglesias: They are actually doing it and DERM is actually looking at that to see how that works, so it gives us a little bit more time to really evaluate and see how that pilot program is doing, and we could also talk to the DERM folks and see how their evaluations are doing. It's very interesting, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, the key there too is, like what Commissioner Anderson said, we also are limiting your travel times, you are wasting less fuel, wasting less fuel having to take it to
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the dump sites. So, there's a lot of things that are going to go into this discussion. So, Mr. Clerk, with the support of my colleagues on the Commission, can we put this on the agenda for January to have Paula and her team with the Manager, present the conversations. I want to give you enough time to really look over this, and take those pretty pictures, because when you segregate the waste like that, that's the way you start, by the residents helping you, green matter, trash, and then you have your cardboard and recycling. I think its not that difficult and plus, if you can pass the savings onto the residents, then they are like listen, this makes sense, this is a good idea.

City Attorney Ramos: And Mayor, when we're ready we'll just need to amend the ordinance to prohibit non-green matter from...

Mayor Lago: Yes, I want to see the numbers. I want to see the numbers and by the way, I'm willing to do it now for the purposes of just beautification alone. How do my colleagues feel about the issue of not allowing garbage bags and just collect the leaves, collect the green matter and put it on the pile. Do you feel comfortable with that, or do you want to think about it more, do you want to talk to colleagues about it, our constituency? I'm fine with that.

Vice Mayor Mena: I feel very comfortable with it.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: If they are put out the night before and not sitting out there seven days a week.

Mayor Lago: But no black bags, no black bags, no clear bags, no white bags at all, its allowed by the code now until the night before. You treat it like trash, and if you want to remove – if you want to take away the green matter which are the leaves that are in the bags, just dump it on the pile. You beautify the neighborhoods. Its something that I think is very beneficial, in my opinion, aesthetically.

Vice Mayor Mena: Let's see what they come back with.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes. I'd like to speak to the constituency some more about that, because its not just leaves in the bag, there might be, you know.

Vice Mayor Mena: But I will say, you touched on something earlier, which is the key, if we are going to have a real discussion on this item, you need to pass through the cost from the county, because people need to pay the actual cost associated with this if they are going to engage in a real discussion about cost-savings. If you're subsidizing it over and over and over and over again, then you're not really having a discussion about the cost.

Mayor Lago: Exactly.

Vice Mayor Mena: And that is one of the things that, to me, came to light from the Sunshine meeting, which is, and by the way, to their credit, I think a lot of the residents who were here said,
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they're okay with that. They value the service and that they were willing to pay more for it if they have to, because there are pass-through costs. So, I think that's something you mentioned earlier, I just wanted to mention that I agree with wholeheartedly.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to recap for those that are watching. We are not taking away your trash pits. We're not. Please loop this and just send it out to social media. But we are looking, and we are finding real-world solutions to control cost to keep our city beautiful and to make, and to find ways that the responsibilities and the burden of our residents is lessened by working together. So, kudos to my colleagues. I think Fire Rescue agrees, you can hear the sirens in the background, they are celebrating, but we are not taking away your trash pits, but we are working hard to find solutions for our community.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So, we have it on the agenda for January. Is there anything else.

Solid Waste Director Rodriguez: Thank you. No. As the Manager said, we've already been discussing with the company and following their premise, so we'll be ready.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Solid Waste Director Rodriguez: Thank you.