

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
December 16, 2008
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II
Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.
Commissioner Maria Anderson
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.
Commissioner Wayne “Chip” Withers

City Staff

Interim City Manager, Maria Alberro Jimenez
City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
City Clerk Staff, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Dr. Jack Briggie, Coral Gables Business Owner (Dentist)

F-1 [Start: 10:11:14 a.m.]

Discussion regarding developing a vision for streetscape, landscape and on-street parking.
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.

Mayor Slesnick: We have a time certain item, its F-1, Commissioner Cabrera’s item.

Commissioner Cabrera: Thank you Mr. Mayor. I wanted to follow up regarding a discussion we had up here on several occasions, and it has everything to do with the streetscape, landscape Master Plan, as well as the effects that it creates on on-street parking. I tell you why I’m bringing it back because I think it was Commissioner Withers who said the last time we discussed this item we should be developing some sort of a vision; was that pretty much how you phrased it?

Commissioner Withers: Yeah.

Commissioner Cabrera: Like a plan of action; and I believe more than ever we need to be doing that, but I’ve taken the liberty to invite two stakeholders who actually experienced the effects of development on on-street parking, and these are two merchants; actually one is a dentist, and the other one is a restaurant owner in different parts of the City, one is on Almeria, the other one is on Giralda, but they have both experienced on a first-hand basis what occurs when we have a commercial or a residential development in the midst of our Downtown area; and we go ahead and implement the Streetscape/Landscape Master Plan, and then the adverse effects that it creates on parking. Unfortunately one of the folks that I invited was not able to make it this morning, but I do have another one, the dentist, Dr. Jack Briggie; and Dr. Briggie are you still with us, I can’t see you through these beautiful ornaments. Would you join us up here?

Dr. Briggie: Absolutely.

Commissioner Cabrera: I think most of you know Dr. Briggie. He has served on numerous City Boards, he is a long time Coral Gables resident, very well liked dentist, and Dr. Briggie I appreciate you taking the time from your busy practice to be with us this morning, and I know you and I talked about this issue on a couple of occasions. So I'd like to, with the Commission's permission, I'd like to turn it over to you and have you give us the lay of the land if you will.

Dr. Briggie: Appreciate it. Thank you Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. I'm here today, my name is Dr. Joe Briggie, I live at 1430 Sienna Avenue, and my office is 368 Sevilla Avenue. My property abuts the official City National Bank/Bacardi/Burger King project. I am on the Board of Adjustment, I was on the Board of Adjustment back in 2005 when the project came through the pipeline, so I'm familiar with the variances that we granted; and I specifically asked many questions about parking. I'm speaking today just as a simple one story business owner in the business area of Coral Gables. My position is that what is happening now with the newer developments, they certainly are providing parking garages for their particular facility; and in the process of doing that of course we are going to lose some on-street parking spaces for entrance and egress. I understand that in my area between LeJeune Road and about half way up the block, which would be equivalent to where the Bill Ussery Motors building starts; on the two sides of Sevilla, north and south side of Sevilla, the south side of Almeria and the north side of Palermo we had approximately twenty-two (22) on-street parking spaces prior to the development, this was when City National Bank was there and there, was a vacant lot across the street. With the plans coming through the pipeline, and coming to the Board of Adjustment, in fact coming in front of this Commission for your final OK, the plans that came through the on-street parking went down from 22 slots to 16 slots. Well that's OK, you have to be able to get in and out of your buildings, I have no problem with that; but apparently in the summer of 2006, when the Commission OK'd some more streetscape issues, and I didn't realize that this could happen retroactively, but according to Mr. Delgado, you can for this project, because this project started January 1, 2006; with the quote, street bump-outs, which is the popular item for putting a tree in a street. We went from 22 slots to 16 slots to now 9, is what is basically projected on those three streets. Well that's a killer for a small business owner because we don't have off-street parking, and I know in the mid '60's when parking regulations started coming into Coral Gables, single story small buildings didn't have to require parking. In the '80's, I know it was revised a little bit, but my understanding is even if they had an FAR of less than one point four five (1.45), you still didn't have to require parking. Well that was on the assumption that we had an abundance of street parking, and we did back then, but this is 2008 soon to be 2009, and that's not the case. As a matter of fact, the biggest complaints that I have from my patients in the City of Coral Gables is traffic and lack of parking; well welcome to the world of traffic in Miami, that's not going to change, it's a mess. But I do have a problem with us reducing parking at the expense of placing these bump-outs on these streets. I'm not against greening of Coral Gables; I'm the first one to stand up to the plate, but I don't see that putting bump-outs along these streets, in the middle of the streets is helpful to the businesses, and the second aspect of that is you guys are losing a lot of revenue, because if you eliminate the parking meters you are eliminating a lot of revenue, and I know that's the number two revenue producer for the City of Coral Gables after taxes, but I'm just a little business owner, but I don't think the small businesses in the City realize that the area

bordered by LeJeune Road, Douglas, Eighth Street, and University Drive, according to Mr. Delgado that this whole section over a period of many, many years, 15-20 years, has plans for these bump-outs to be put in the streets. For every three parallel spots, if you have a bump-out you lose one, you lose thirty-three percent (33%) of the street parking in that area, that is a big issue. People leave downtown Miami, the big businesses came to Coral Gables, because easy to get to, easy access, easy parking; they left downtown Miami because of traffic and parking; we're losing our customers, our patients, our clients because of the same issues; this is a great City; I am born and raised here, and I'm going to live my life here, but its being very difficult for us to conduct business when patients or clients cannot find a place to park. As I say, I'm against the bump-outs being placed on these streets at the expense of losing a parking place.

Commissioner Cabrera: Dr. Briggie I appreciate you coming here this morning, and I wanted you here as well as Mr. Kenny Lugo because you are living the experience, I mean, you and I discuss this because of an e-mail you originally sent me; and I worked along side staff to try to curb some of the construction streetscape/landscape program, but the reality is you are being adversely affected, other merchants or business owners are being adversely affected, and I think that we have a serious responsibility to develop a vision as to how we want to proceed with these kinds of projects. Now, understanding that probably development will not continue to grow at the pace, that it has grown in the last seven or eight years, but notwithstanding I think that we owe it to you and we owe it to others like you to develop the right business model; and that's one of the reasons I had also asked staff to begin to look at this; and by the way, Mr. Lugo who couldn't be here with us this morning, he owns Geodino Salads across the street from my building where I work, and by the way, sorry for...you are on Sevilla not Almeria...

Dr. Briggie: Yes.

Commissioner Cabrera: I apologize for that.

Dr. Briggie: That's alright, in the neighborhood.

Commissioner Cabrera: Mr. Lugo already has his streetscape/landscape product in front of him, and I actually ran into him the other day because he was cleaning out the bump-out, he was pulling weeds, and I was joking with him, and I said Kenny, you are going to get in trouble with the City of Coral Gables for going into a public right-of-way and damaging the plant material; and he sort of laughed, but he said you know, I do this every several weeks, that's not to say that we are not doing a good job ourselves to keep up these large ash trays, as I like to refer to them, but the bottom line is we've got merchants out there that are also trying to keep them up, and these are folks that already have experience, you are just beginning to experience them. So I have taken the liberty to ask staff to consider coming back to the City Commission within the next ninety to one hundred and eighty days with a review of both on-street parking and the effects of streetscape/landscape on on-street parking; and I believe that we have the right amount of talent internally to come back to us without going to an outside consultant, and giving us some feedback as to how we can proceed to create some sort of a compromise going forward. So that was really the purpose of this exercise this morning. Madam City Manager any comments about this?

Interim City Manager Jimenez: No, we'll be glad to come back to the Commission with that vision that kind of achieves the objective of keeping as much parking as we can on-street while providing some greenery, and some landscaping. We'll have our Parking Director, our Public Works Director and our Public Service Director involved in that process.

Commissioner Withers: I think the vision is a little broader than that Maria, and I don't know Dr. Briggie, you know, in your industry how many offices like yours are small free standing buildings in downtown areas, or how many are in medical centers that are attached to hospitals, or attached to medical complexes where there is racked parking; I would say that most of your industry is not any longer in smaller free stand alone buildings.

Dr. Briggie: I know a lot of times they have not taken the wise choice of buying a building perhaps, maybe they don't have the opportunity; but yes, physicians are more tied to the hospitals, but even with that and I understand that's another issue, but if you especially in this City of ours know some of our population is a little more elderly, and if you ask any of the more older individuals, they hate parking garages...

Commissioner Withers: Absolutely.

Dr. Briggie:...they are "creped-out" by them, and I understand security is an issue that's well taken care of, but its convenience.

Commissioner Withers: But my point is do we as a City want to discourage your type of business and profession in our Downtown and make it difficult for you to operate, how you operate, and turn your space into professional offices or whatever?- that might have less walk-in traffic possibly, or do we want to enhance and help you maintain what you have?- that's what I mean by the vision, I mean, do we want to attract businesses that need on-street parking?- or do we not want to attract businesses?- and we can do that very easily by taking away the on-street parking, or enhancing on-street parking; that's the vision, that's the exercise that I was talking about, was what kind of business mix do we want to see?- what are the parking requirements?- and then we legislate moving forward in that direction.

Commissioner Cabrera: But you know, in the case that you brought up, and that's a very interesting case that you brought up in his practice, one of the things that he may not necessarily want to discuss is dentists, doctors, medical professionals more than ever have a difficult time finding office space in large buildings, and that's because they don't want you there, because they think that you have such a large patient base; the equipment that you must maintain; the pick-up that you must maintain; but if you look at his immediate area, and I was listening to what you were saying, you look at his immediate area you have a dry cleaners, you have a frame shop, you have an antique store, you have architects offices, you have an insurance agency, you have a lunch diner, so those are other businesses that benefit from that on-street parking.

Commissioner Withers: Absolutely, and that's exactly my point; if that's the kind of business community we want to develop, then we better look at developing their needs in the way that they need to have it met.

Commissioner Anderson: The small business village concept.

Commissioner Withers: If that's what we want, and that's what I mean by our vision.

Commissioner Anderson: And I think as part of our discussion we might want to include our Planning Director and Department, because I think sometimes, and I don't if it will solve your problem Dr. Briggie, but it might for other people, is maybe negotiate in the development process with some of the developers who we can negotiate parking spaces in their garages to provide it, or to provide some payment in lieu of that to help us develop smaller nodal garages in the City. I encourage that as part of our thinking process.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Let me just say this is very analogous to what's going on in Miracle Mile; we are talking about taking parking there, bumping out the sidewalks there and forcing people to park into the parking garages; and I think that gets back to, are we creating a pedestrian-friendly location and thus landscaping?- or are we going to drive people into these parking lots?- and in your particular case, you are outside the Central Business District; the Central Business District as you know bifurcates on Almeria Avenue, and maybe look at the Central Business District one way and maybe look at the other locations in the City of Coral Gables in a different way, and with the thought that the Central Business District is where you will most of your density and that's where you do have the right to build more FAR in that Central Business District, so when you get outside it maybe we need to look at exactly how we can devise a plan outside the Central Business District differs tremendously.

Commissioner Cabrera: And you know what the problem is, I don't know how the rest of you feel about this, but I sit here as Dr. Briggie pointed out, and I was one of the members of the Commission that approved the Burger King project, and now it's the Bacardi project, and we even talked a little bit about parking, and I remember parking was an issue, but here's what happens, then we approve it, then it goes through the permit process, and then construction begins, and before you know it, its completed and then you look at the project and you say to yourself, well, gee if I would have known that we were going to eliminate twelve parking spaces or thirteen parking spaces, whatever the number is, I would have made a different decision.

Dr. Briggie: Absolutely. I have the original stuff that came before the Board of Adjustment. As a matter of fact, I put you all heads up on that meeting and that was in December '05.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Briggie: And that is an issue. I was upset because as far as I was concerned they were going to change the plans because Codina and now Flagler Development went to great extent to meet with the commercial folks and the residential folks to try to mediate some of the issues; and I'm a big stickler on parking because it directly affects my business, and they were very amenable to try to work things out; and then when the facts as the project went out and things changed, I felt betrayed, because this is not what came down the pipeline that I thought I agreed with, which is what you are addressing right now, the changes. I understand certain things have to change because you don't know what you are hitting once your project starts, but you know parking is a major issue.

Commissioner Cabrera: But you know, Dr. Briggie, I can name two other sites, the building that Mr. Morris is now going to build that was recently demolished, it wasn't until the very last minute that this Commission was approving plans that I noticed that we had eliminated seventeen (17) on-street parking spaces immediately in front of the building, I mean, they were gone; it was a beautiful sketch because they make it very pretty.

Dr. Briggie: Absolutely.

Commissioner Cabrera: The same thing goes for the street that is just north of Coral Gables Elementary, there is a new development there; and if you look at that street from the east to the west all you see is a row of about eight or nine bump-outs, and that's an elimination of about, I don't know, twelve-fifteen-sixteen parking spaces, and I just don't know if we are developing the right vision to carry us forward, or if we need to start thinking about what Chip said and start developing a whole new concept, or if we need to start thinking about building a series of smaller parking garages, or redeveloping existing parking garages because eventually we are just going to lose the on-street parking capabilities.

Dr. Briggie: And then you are going to lose businesses I think, you are going to lose businesses.

Commissioner Cabrera: I agree. I agree.

Commissioner Withers: One last question, when you look at some of these buildings that put retail on the first level, is that conducive to your type of operation?

Dr. Briggie: Yes, again with these buildings that are mixed use, retail and so forth, they still have parking requirements internally, usually either a parking garage or so forth, so we are hopeful that, that helps.

Commissioner Withers: So it's a transition period that we are going through, getting from possibly where we are to getting there if we wanted to get there with mixed use retail.

Dr. Briggie: I'm guessing yes, I'm guessing, but again I still go back to on-street parking is a major, major issue.

Commissioner Withers: Oh absolutely.

Dr. Briggie: And we don't need to be driving business out of Coral Gables.

Commissioner Withers: How much of your business is walk-in business from people working downtown, and how much...?

Dr. Briggie: I have quite a few, I have quite a few that work in the area, that walk down, but we also have long time people that live outside of the Gables, that still come into the Gables because we've been in the practice. My father and uncle worked in 1948, third and fourth dentists here in Coral Gables; so we still have a lot of those long time folks, and to be quite frank, they are a little

bit disgusted. Now during the project itself, the building, we had some help and actually the Flagler Golf Group allowed our patients to park in their parking garage for a very short period of time, but that's over with, the honeymoon is over, so they are back to trying to find one hundred percent street parking, but we do have a certain amount of walk-in and the trolley helps that too, by the way.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well done.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Cabrera: And you know what we are going to do as we develop this analysis, audit, study, whatever it is, we are going to end up calling it, we sure like to have you...

Dr. Briggie: I'll be more than happy to look at it, absolutely.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well you know, I really believe Madam City Manager, that we should somehow, somehow incorporate folks like Dr. Briggie and Mr. Lugo and others that are real stakeholders in this.

Commissioner Anderson: That should be a planning session that may be a one or two day planning session.

Commissioner Cabrera: You know, I would love it as you develop this that you have a planning session or workshop with affected merchants and property owners and stakeholders to get their views on this, because I know you have gone to great length, and I know you brought your file...

Dr. Briggie: I've got everything.

Commissioner Cabrera:...you've got your plans, and I appreciate the fact that you are keeping it global, but I know you know a lot about this issue, and I just appreciate the fact that you reached out to me, and I'm sorry it took this long to put you on the agenda.

Dr. Briggie: I'm happy to be here.

Commissioner Cabrera: We are going to stay vigilant on this process and again thank you.

Dr. Briggie: Terrific. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

[End: 10:31:58 a.m.]