

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-1**  
**February 11, 2025**  
**Police and Fire Headquarters**  
**2151 Salzedo Street, 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, Alberto Parjus**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Parking Director, Monica Beltran**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**

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Agenda Item F-1 [1:15 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing City Staff to implement a resident parking rate pilot program and to collect relevant data during the pilot program in order to determine the long-term feasibility of a resident parking rate. (Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: Moving unto item F-1.

City Attorney Suarez: I'll read it again. F-1 is a Resolution of the City Commission directing City Staff to implement a resident parking rate pilot program and to collect relevant data during the pilot program in order to determine the long-term feasibility of a resident parking rate.

Commissioner Castro: This is my item, and I think we've been speaking about this during other Commission meetings, but before I even continue, I want to give a really, really big thank you to Paula, Diana, Monica Beltran, and everybody that really made this pilot program possible. To give a little detail. This is going to be a pilot program that's going to start April 1<sup>st</sup> till, I think July 6<sup>th</sup> or July 5<sup>th</sup>, around there, July 6<sup>th</sup>; and the reason we are doing this is so that the residents could

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take advantage of the July 4<sup>th</sup> festivities. Its going to be three months and a week probably, a little bit some days, and its going to give you a 25 percent discount on parking. You are going to have to register. I directed staff to come back March 11<sup>th</sup> with the registration process so that we can go ahead and circulate. I'm also going to ask Martha Pantin or the Communications Department to please go ahead and help me advertise this or market it, maybe build a campaign. If I can ask my colleagues to go ahead and do the same after this item is voted for. The fiscal impact of this item is, we can't determine it right now, that's why it's a pilot program. We are going to evaluate the pros, the cons, to see if this is really feasible for the city, and how many residents to register. Monica, you want to give a little more detail.

Parking Director Beltran: Monica Beltran, Parking and Mobility Services Director. So, as you said Commissioner, its very difficult to ascertain what the impact of such a program is. However, I do have experience with these types of programs and anywhere between 10 and 15 percent of our transactions should be related to residents that register. So, by doing this and allowing the residents to register, its going to help us tremendously to get information and better evaluate what the impact would be. It also allows us for those residents that register, to create a database that we can always get information to them, get feedback, etc. So, in the three-month period, and this is a great time, because April would be like a peak period, July would be, it starts reining down as the summer comes in. So, it gives us a good balance for evaluation. It could be a great program; we'd have to evaluate it. The program would only be available through the app, the Pay-by-phone app, and the way it would work is, that you register your tag and when you pay-by-phone you enter your tag and the correct rate for the resident would kick in.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you so much Monica. I also want to thank Alberto, City Manager and also Joe, you guys were exceptional, Celeste as well, you guys made yourself available for my crazy meetings at any time, and I really, really appreciate that, and I know that the residents will really appreciate this effort as well.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to – I think Miami Beach has similar, doesn't it.

Parking Director Beltran: Miami Beach does, City of Miami does as well, a few cities do.

Commissioner Menendez: I remember for as long as I've been on the Commission, drawing our residents to our downtown has been a challenge. Hopefully, this is a very successful program, and we do draw our residents to our downtown to really enjoy what we offer. So, I think it's a great idea.

Commissioner Fernandez: And this is something I had talked to Kevin Kinney about in the old days and Kevin always didn't really want to move forward with a project like this, but I'm glad that you have. I think our business community has been calling for an opportunity to bring residents

to downtown. I recently met with the Chamber and part of the discussion was, we need to make sure our residents are coming to our businesses in downtown. I think this is an opportunity, because I do hear from residents about their concerns with parking, having to pay for parking, the cost of Uber, so I think this provides a new opportunity. They can park downtown; they can take the Freebie to different locations that they'll be visiting. If they are going to Miracle Theater and then going to a restaurant. There are many ways to get around. So, I commend you for working on this and getting this pilot program. As far as Miami Beach, just to use the example, since you have the background, how successful was the program.

Parking Director Beltran: So, approximately 11 percent of residents took advantage of the program. That's the same percentage for City of Miami. It's a little higher in other cities, but its very, very, very appreciated by the residents.

Commissioner Castro: This is a perfect opportunity to give back to our residents.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I have a couple of questions. In the Miami Beach study that you did, did it also include the parking garages?

Parking Director Beltran: It did. Actually, everywhere in the city.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

Parking Director Beltran: Actually, you can pay there also at meters.

Vice Mayor Anderson: My pre-agenda meeting, I understand that this is not feasible right now to do this, to include the parking garages and one of my concerns is, the value of the data that we are going to receive is going to be compromised because of that. Is there any way that we can have a dual process to where you can have a discount card or something for parking in a garage if you are a resident, because we have only so many surface parking spaces and they are in high demand, so its like giving somebody something that they can't really take advantage of.

Parking Director Beltran: So its all about technology and our technology in the older garages, except for Minorca, you can use it here, because we have pay-by-phone, and having given up on the fact that the technology is older in the garages and therefore it would require such modifications to hardware and software that you may as well get new technology in there, right. So, that will come with time, but ideally, yes, you would offer this in the garages, particularly here where we are blessed with the fact that Miracle Mile is lined with garages on either side.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Parking Director Beltran: Its ideal, but for right now, we only have it at Minorca.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes. Very few people know about the Minorca Garage, so maybe that just might be an opportunity to bring them in and get the pay-by-phone operational here now, because its not operational. Do we have a date for when it will be operational in the Minorca Garage?

Parking Director Beltran: It already is.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. So, would the gates be operating?

Parking Director Beltran: We don't have gates. Its gateless right now, but if we were to enforce or when we enforce, the tag would be registered with pay-by-phone and we also have meters, stations.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Have you determined the date when you are going to start charging in the Minorca Garage for parking?

Parking Director Beltran: There is an issue in that, two issues, but one of them is, we need to register the tags, we need to settle the dust with all the employees that will be parking here, because they won't be paying, right, because we don't have gates, I have no way of entering tags to say this tag comes in, this tag doesn't, but likewise, I can't enforce in the garage until I have tag numbers. So, we are collecting the information from the different departments, that's one; and then the other is of course, the fact that there are many disabled placards, so as a sense today, it is not a very practical system, but we are working on it. We'll find a solution.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I know when the Biltmore Hotel parking lot was an item that we were discussing and certain groups were going to be excluded from being charged, including city employees, I believe there was already a database set up back then and that was about a couple of years ago. So, can we have this done by April 1<sup>st</sup>, so that we can begin to charge in Minorca Garage.

Parking Director Beltran: We can. Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. Can it launch the same time as this program?

Parking Director Beltran: We can. Yes. All I'm going to do is we'll make some decisions as to if in fact we would give free parking to everybody at the Minorca to all the employees, at Minorca I'll work with HR to download the information.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: So, when this program does – I have a feeling, it's going to be very successful. So, when this program does go permanent and we collect all the data necessary, I think the next step would be to evaluate or establish or phase out updating all our technology in our parking garages, because at the end of the day, what we really want is to have our residents and our business community go into the garages.

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Parking Director Beltran: Here's another idea, because we are offering it here, you know how we always talk about east/west mobility, we are down the street from the trolley. So, some residents may take advantage of it, park here, and use the trolley or the Freebie to move around the area.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Can you put that in the notice, so they know that the trolley is available, because some people don't realize there's a stop right down the end of the block.

Parking Director Beltran: Correct. So, this could be like a park and ride.

Mayor Lago: So, I don't have any issue with the legislation. My only question is, if we have already examples, both in Miami Beach and Miami in regards to 11 percent of individuals taking advantage of similar legislation, similar savings, why don't we apply that, I know we are doing a pilot, but why don't we just apply that and you can give us a number of, let's say, what it would be if it was 10, 11, 12, 13 percent. What would be the cost on the city in regard to a reduction in actual monies that would come in from parking revenue. I don't know if you have that off the top of your head.

Parking Director Beltran: I do not. Because remember, that the only garage that would work is here.

Mayor Lago: I understand.

Parking Director Beltran: So, you have to exclude.

Mayor Lago: It would be good to just be able to – if other cities are doing similar things to push certain inventory that is kind of slow and incentivize people to use that inventory. I just thought maybe it could be an opportunity to actually have a number before we vote on this.

Commissioner Castro: There's different demographics and the discount that the other cities are giving, I think one of them is like 50 percent, is it.

Parking Director Beltran: The percentages are different, yes.

Commissioner Castro: Its significantly more. The discount is significantly more; 25 percent is, I think a very, very healthy balance for the city and for the residents, but I think that maybe coming up with numbers from other cities could give a distorted view of what reality is and that's the exact way, that's the exact reason why we are doing a pilot program, to have accurate data that then we can make a real decision with.

Mayor Lago: What was the number for Miami Beach, the discount.

Parking Director Beltran: In Miami Beach there's no percentage, it's a straight fee. I don't recommend it. It's a straight fee, \$1 everywhere per hour.

Mayor Lago: And in the City of Miami, do you know what it was?

Parking Director Beltran: City of Miami is – it used to be 50 percent, now its instead of \$1.50 per hour, its \$1.40.

Mayor Lago: I'm just trying to better understand why the number came in at 11 percent, both of them, that's what I'm trying to understand. Understanding the numbers of why both populations took advantage of it to 11 percent. Why didn't one population take it over for 20, 25 percent. I thought it would be more of an incentive for people to use it.

Parking Director Beltran: So, Miami does...

Mayor Lago: I think 11 percent of people using it is, I don't think its that much of an incentive.

Parking Director Beltran: Well, you know, think about Miami Beach. On Ocean Drive, for example, maybe they'll be parking, but in South Beach where parking was \$4 an hour, residents were paying \$1, so it's a 75 percent discount. Now, still when you speak to some of the residents, they just didn't register, but some did, and many do register, but that's the percentage of the use, that's the number of transactions.

Mayor Lago: 75 percent reduction in the fee, I would expect everybody to take advantage of that, especially people who work or people who visit South Beach a lot, it's a massive savings.

Parking Director Beltran: And they also have a very, very good trolley system as well, and it also has connections, so I think a lot of people make use of that. They also have a very healthy biking program, so I think people use alternatives. Furthermore, I believe that a lot of people carpool and so typically you don't go in different vehicles, but there is a city, for example that the usage is 16 percent, and that's because its by the beach. So, the residents, when they go to the beach, they use that 16 percent. If you think about it, you know you go to the beach every day because you are a resident, probably 16 percent of the time.

Mayor Lago: So, if you get a chance, as the Clerk for a public records request. We tried, I sponsored an item, I think probably 5, 6, 7 years ago, I can't remember when it was, to give anybody who is a resident free parking in the downtown during the holidays, and I think we ran the numbers and it was going to cost us a pretty significant amount of money, but maybe you can take a look at that and bring it back and tell us through the Manager's office and tell us what the cost would be associated, because you want to push people to come to the city, don't discount it, give it to them for free, especially residents.

Parking Director Beltran: So, that idea was floated before, so I've answered that question before and the idea is not to incentivize the use of vehicles, but rather if its free why would I take the trolley or a Freebie, right. So, it is an advantage, and it is a benefit, but free parking really

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incentivizes. So, I'm going to wear my sustainability hat. Free parking incentivizes people to use their vehicles and competes against visitor parking, and we do want people to come here and find parking, so it's a balance.

Commissioner Castro: The Mayor has a lot of valid concerns, but I think addressing some of them, I think it has to do with the marketing or campaign that the city put to be able to get the information out there, so that people do register. And the other one is, that our residents really are not coming to our downtown and they are not shopping locally, and this is part of that movement. So yes, data could be misleading, I would say or look different in other cities. I will go ahead and move this item.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think the numbers that we saw in the economic development presentation pretty much tells us the same story; 78 percent of the people who are coming to our downtown are not Coral Gables residents. You have 22 percent of the people who are coming to our downtown who are Coral Gables residents, and you start calculating the numbers and it may be the equivalent of 11 percent of our residents who are using our downtown. I think this will get us very valid data, not just for us regarding parking, but also for our business community to see how they can attract our residents, and that was part of the conversation I had with the Chamber. This is a group effort and attracting the residents to our downtown, has to be an effort that we have as a city, but also as a business community making sure that our residents know the businesses in our downtown, frequent the businesses in our downtown, and a lot of it also has to do with the makeup that we have. I remember when I was on the Property Advisory Board, they did a presentation and a study on what Miracle Mile should be, and we did not tick any of the boxes. We were basically deemed by their study to be unsuccessful, yet we are successful. Bridal shops they say are horrible for the economy, yet we flourish with our bridal shops. At the time, we had Subway on Miracle Mile, they said that was horrible, yet Subway was extremely successful on Miracle Mile. Ross on Miracle Mile, they said was a bad idea, yet it's been successful for years. So, I think its about attracting residents. I think this will attract residents. It will provide an incentive to come to our downtown. I would also like to see those other garages with different technology just to make sure that we are able to use those as well, but I commend you all for your efforts.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to add that it's a pilot program and hopefully this pilot program scores higher than the other pilots and quite honestly, if you are a business owner, you have a restaurant, you have a shop, anything that provides an uptick in traffic to your store, to your

restaurant, I think is going to be well-received, even if its 10 percent, 11 percent, that's big for a lot of these business owners. So, we are headed in the right direction.

Parking Director Beltran: I believe we are going to be successful, also because this is a very walkable city. So, you get towards the center and then you walk, its pleasant to walk.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes, exactly.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you, Monica.

Parking Director Beltran: Pleasure.

Mayor Lago: We have a motion.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have members of the public requesting to speak on the item, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I think this is such a wonderful idea, because I've heard from so many people how good Freebie is, but those of us who live outside the business area do not get the benefit. Now, we can come park, get on the Freebie, do whatever we want to do, and we are part of the community, and this is a wonderful idea, and I think the businesspeople will love it because some of us that normally do not come here will be coming because this makes it easier. Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)