

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
March 10, 2009
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 Works Director, Alberto Delgado

Public Speaker(s)

F-2 [Start: 10:46:07]

Discussion pertaining to service issues related to our residential area north of S.W. Eighth Street
Commissioner Maria Anderson

Mayor Slesnick: F-2.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes, thank you. The discussion I'm bringing forward today is the discussion pertaining to service issues relating to our residential area north of Southwest Eighth Street. Here's what I'm finding guys, and as you know we get to do, every four years we get to do happy trails through our neighborhoods; and it's really good to actually do that, because what you come across are some issues that have not been resolved that should be resolved. When I was walking through the area, I met with people whom I had already met many years back, and who had very big concerns over two main issues, and Bill before I say it I'm not trying to take over your trolley, but they were very, very disturbed that the trolley is still not going up there even though it was promised, and I tried to pawn it off on you, Trolley Manager Kerdyk, but you know what, its all our responsibility anyway. So I was talking with out City Manager, and if you all...I think we should really consider trying that out.

Commissioner Cabrera: How much does it cost?

Commissioner Anderson: I mean, we have, we have, I know that she offered, we have some monies available.

Interim City Manager Jimenez: In July of 2008 we received a State grant for about a hundred thousand dollars for that extension.

Commissioner Cabrera: But you know what, that money could go to offset the cost that we have to use from reserves.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: But I think it's only specifically for the extension, we haven't received the money; I think it is sitting in FDOT.

Interim City Manager Jimenez: That's correct.

Commissioner Cabrera: I don't want to take from Ms. Anderson's.

Commissioner Anderson: If I could finish, I might be able to finish before we get side tracked. Let me just discuss specifics. So we'll come back to the specifics of the trolley, but they are very upset, and there is an aging community there as well as young families that would love to come to the Mile, and they say what's wrong with taking the trolley three more blocks down and actually making a safer turn down the other way. The other issue, I was standing on an interior street in that neighborhood and the cars careening through there, and careening through Ponce coming in through Douglas, there is nothing like that in any other part of our City as velocity that are coming through except in that northern part.

Commissioner Cabrera: Are they going east bound or west bound?

Commissioner Anderson: They are going any-bound.

Commissioner Withers: Off of Douglas?

Commissioner Anderson: They are going everywhere; I was in an interior....I was going, Boabadilla is one, you are talking the north Ponce circuit, you are talking side streets bordering Douglas, you are talking all of the streets, I went on all of them, and there are some serious issues that people have, I mean, they do come careening off of that. I was told that the Traffic Advisory Board had looked at this area and had proposed that something be done, which was really commendable. Then, the County came forward, and I think issued some negative or put something like pavers or something like that, and maybe Mr. Delgado at the appropriate moment will clarify. The reality is bottom line, that area of the City and there are some parts of the City that don't get the attention; we have other areas where traffic calming has blossomed and sprouted, these people really need it, and I think we should beat the bushes to get something done for them because they are...let me tell you there is antagonism in that. I do have people who are willing to listen and willing to wait to hear what we are going to do today. I hope that we can move positively forward on both of those issues. Now, there are other areas of the City, I'll discuss at discussion time, because they are more minor, not minor in terms of importance to them, but smaller scope, but I'd like to see what we can do to address and maybe we can do some discussion now.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Are they happy with the park we put up there and the equipment?

Commissioner Anderson: They didn't mention the park; their biggest concern and when they turn in, like I said on Boabadilla, which is a more interior street; they were turning in and just speeding through.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, one of the reasons that occurs is because that is a street that is not twenty-two (22) feet wide, it's actually much wider than that, and that causes the traffic to even drive at faster speeds. So there are traffic calming devices that we can suggest, but I'd like to just take a shot at responding because I very much appreciate you bringing this to our attention, I appreciate the fact that you are out there talking to these residents. Number one, I've had discussions with several of these residents, in fact I've agreed to meet with a couple that stood me up and decided that they were too busy that day, because they are teachers and they couldn't come by and visit with me; but I then corresponded with them and here's the reality, is the trolley system a circulator or is it a transit system?- and we need to come to some sort of decision if that's what we want to make it, because if it's a transit system so we can meet the needs of the residents in the North Gables, and we need to meet the needs of the residents in Black Gables, because they came to us on the day that the trolley was approved back in Gables High in 2002 and told us that they had needs, and the University of Miami has shown us that they have certain needs as well. But the bottom line is that we took a project that's a circulator, meant to circulate within our Downtown area, and now we are expanding it into a massive transit system, if that's what we want to do then that's the direction we need to go. If we need to meet the needs of these folks in the North Gables by all means lets do it; and if the funding is available let's do it, but to the best of my knowledge we continue to fund the trolley at the tune of seventy-five thousand dollars a year from our General Reserves.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Let me just answer the question...

Commission Cabrera: Which question?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: The question with regard to the circulator or is it a transit system, and should we extend it up to Flagler?- I guess Flagler would be the turn around point. We received this grant in July of last year; we have not brought it forward to the City Commission because the appetite, we didn't think the appetite was to match the grant, which is necessary to get this grant in place. Am I correct Mr. Delgado?- we have an eighty-five thousand dollar grant sitting out there at DOT for the extension, but we have not brought it forward, and the thought process was exactly what you said, is it a circulator or a transit mode; and we just want direction from the Commission before we ever move this thing forward. So it's out there, we can move it forward, we are not pushing it, but...

Commissioner Cabrera: I think Ms. Anderson deserves a response from us so that we can give some sort of direction.

Commissioner Anderson: Here's what my biggest problem is, it's not about the details, it's about the promises that were made, alright. I would like for that if that were to happen, if they could do that, I mean, I'd like for all those routes to happen that you mentioned. The reality is there are some that are more natural routes because they extend like natural routes which are right beyond

three blocks and then turn. Now whether the policy decision of this body is to go ahead and discuss it or not, I think, the fundamental problem that I find is that they were promised something and...

Commissioner Cabrera: By whom?

Commissioner Anderson: By our administration maybe by us, I don't know.

Commissioner Cabrera: I never promised anyone.

Commissioner Anderson: But they petitioned, they sent petitions in for this trolley many years back and I passed it along; I got some and I think we all got some. I'm not trying to upset like...we have to make a policy decision we can do so.

Commissioner Withers: I'm in favor of extending the trolley, but I think what we should do is, we should look, I'm sure we are getting the money because it connects with some Dade County bus route, so I don't know how often that bus route runs, but let's say that bus route runs every thirty minutes. Maybe we send every fourth trolley up there, not every trolley up there.

Commissioner Anderson: You know, that's a decision that's beyond mine to make.

Commissioner Cabrera: The major bus routes for Douglas and LeJeune, and they come every ten to fifteen minutes at a cost of a dollar-fifty. So the bottom line is the trolley will be helpful because it comes every five to seven minutes, at no cost.

Commissioner Withers: No, what I'm talking about; I'm sure there is probably a trolley, not a trolley, a connector bus on Flagler or something like that Dade County is interested in us connecting to.

Commissioner Anderson: And they lost a route, I think, on 37th, right?

Commissioner Withers: I'm assuming that's the reason they are giving us eighty-five thousand bucks.

Mr. Delgado: There was a study that paid by MPO, and David Plummer conducted the study to look at the route at Flagler Street and the extension of the trolley. There is a route, Route 11, which is the busiest route in the entire Dade County, that's Flagler Street; sometimes they have the accordion bus, you know, the attachment, because the amount of people going to Flagler is incredible. That route runs at the peak of the hour eight minutes, and ten to twelve minutes the rest of the day to fifteen minutes. So that route runs very, very frequently, and the study determined that if we were to extend the trolley to that area we would capture more than three hundred passengers.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK, but we are going to capture three hundred passengers...

Mr. Delgado: Specifically for Coral Gables residents.

Commissioner Cabrera: Residents or....no, no, this is another mass transit connector; this is another, I'm sorry, I don't concur.

Mr. Delgado: That's what they said, three hundred people will be boarding the trolley in that area, OK, let's qualify that; three hundred people will be boarding the trolley....

Commissioner Withers: Flagler and Douglas.

Mr. Delgado: Along Ponce de Leon up to that point. Where are those people going to go?- most likely people that live in the Gables will go to catch that route to Flagler, or people that are coming to the Gables in that route, that they will be coming to the Gables because either they reside in the Gables, or they work in the Gables, will be taking that route. So that's the three hundred passengers or people are going to...that was verified by the University of Miami also in the study that was conducted.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Refresh my memory, how much of an expense was this to do to run this route?

Mr. Delgado: According to the analysis that was done, we would require an additional trolley to put in circulation, to be able to keep our current frequency.

Commissioner Cabrera: How many do we have now?- seven?

Mr. Delgado: Right now we have six working all the time; we have seven to eight trolleys right now available; six are running all the time.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK, so we have eight trolleys.

Mr. Delgado: Yeah, we have eight trolleys.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK, this would be an additional trolley.

Mr. Delgado: Yeah, that we need to put into circulation.

Commissioner Cabrera: At a cost of?

Mr. Delgado: The cost of operating that was a hundred thousand dollars a year. We have a grant from DOT of ninety-two thousand five hundred, that's what we have right now that we need to match.

Commissioner Anderson: Is another grant or the same grant?...I understand.

Mr. Delgado: No, the same, ninety-two thousand five hundred, that's the same number...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: But we need to match that.

Mr. Delgado:...and we need to match that to use in operations.

Interim City Manager Jimenez: They also at the same time provided us capital cost for additional trolleys...

Mayor Slesnick: But wait, Commissioners Withers has a good point that he's mentioned up here; couldn't we take the money that we are now paying to subsidize the trolley and use that as a match?

Mr. Delgado: Yes, the operations...

Commissioner Withers: We are already doing it.

Mr. Delgado: This is the money from operations; that money can come from the operations....absolutely, and the five hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars that we have sitting there have to be matched with capital money if that's to buy an additional three to four trolleys.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: See that's the other issue, we forgot; we have five hundred and twenty-five thousand sitting there, if we come up with another five hundred twenty-five, we get another three or four trolleys, where do we get five twenty-five?

Commissioner Withers: Not replaceable trolleys.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well the bottom line is, and I don't want Mrs. Anderson to think we are not supportive, but once we do this, we will get other requests from other neighborhoods and we will go from having a circulator to another bus system.

Commissioner Anderson: Let me clarify; let me clarify my point in bringing this forward. My problem with the whole thing, I think it's a natural extension, and you are right, it could open up another area, I understand that, but they were promised and that's my biggest thing; people were talking, and another thing was the process, or was it the architecture. For me in this particular thing, they felt that they brought petitions forward, and they've been waiting three-four years and they haven't heard nothing. So, whatever comes, you know, the Commission decides it. So I bring it forward only to show that there have been some inequities in the system as far as what they feel that they were had, and there were some discrepancies in what they believe. I do think it's a nice addition to the route, and whatever the policy of this Commission body decides to be, I think that that would be the first natural addition to it, but we will decide as a group.

Commissioner Cabrera: I agree, I agree.

Mayor Slesnick: Let me also remind everyone that after we heard from the area just south of Coral Gables, and we heard the problems of trying to extend the route across U.S.-1, and so forth; we went to the County, I personally went to the County, and they reconfigured the entire Coconut Grove connector to ensure that it covered our area and took people to the trolley station and Metro Rail. So Carlos Gimenez office was incredibly cooperative, and so that area of the

Gables is not being overlooked, but now they get on the connector is reconfigured, so they wouldn't have to ride through the entire Coconut Grove to cross the highway, they can now get on and get over to the connector.

Commissioner Anderson: OK, so they can actually get to the Metro; great.

Mayor Slesnick: Yes. There is a connector that runs to our South Gables, that area in south Gables, the McFarlane-Homestead area, and then takes them across the street to the connector to the Metro Rail and the trolley.

Commissioner Cabrera: And again, I don't want to be combative, but who here promised that we would have this route extension?

Commissioner Anderson: They brought a petition, I carried it forward, I don't know if you all got petitions, I'm sure...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yeah, I did.

Commissioner Anderson: But I responded, I corresponded with them, and what I'll do is I'll give you a copy of my correspondence.

Commissioner Anderson: I gave it to administration and there had been talk floating in the ether, I can't remember exactly when it was that they were going...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I think when they saw the extension study that we did, they automatically thought that they were getting...

Commissioner Anderson: And they also had a petition, so they made a natural assumption and whatever it is their perception is that was something that we were going to do.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: From a policy decision, we have the ninety-two thousand five hundred dollars, we would have to match it, and the other thing you point out is that we have to buy another bus, and where do we get that money? Now I will tell you just to remind you, we have the five hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars sitting at DOT, and it's very tough to get money in these days and times; and then furthermore, we had that discussion down there at the MPO recently, where Carlos Gimenez injected and is trying to get the municipalities twenty percent, which would bring the City of Coral Gables about another four to five hundred thousand dollars, which would be for the trolleys, that would be an immediate match for that, if we get it; and I don't know where we stand on that process, but that's a possibility we wouldn't even take any money out of our pocket to buy it, otherwise we have an issue.

Commissioner Cabrera: Vice Mayor Trolley, listen, when do we make a decision as to what the trolley is; is it a circulator, or is it a mass transit system, or is it a transit connector?- I mean at some point in time...

Interim City Manager Jimenez: I think initially we all thought it was going to be a circulator, and it has naturally become bigger than that.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, it's interesting because if we thought that then why the heck did we do an east-west route?- why did we do an east-west route?

Commissioner Withers: Why the heck....we had one originally planned...

Commissioner Cabrera: No, we did it; we did an east-west route. We used to go all the way to the Biltmore Hotel and back.

Commissioner Withers: It was to pick up 600 Biltmore, 700 Biltmore; it was to pick up the condominiums on Biltmore.

Commissioner Cabrera: And it went all the way to the Biltmore Hotel, and it did a turn around, and then it went all the way to Douglas.

Commissioner Withers: The usage wasn't there for the condominiums, that's why we didn't do it.

Commissioner Cabrera: And the usage and we project the usage, I think what we need to do in order to meet the assumptions and the impression that this part of the community has, is look at the projected ridership.

Commissioner Withers: Ralph, it won't be there...

Commissioner Cabrera: I know that, I know that Chip.

Commissioner Withers: It would be three hundred people from seven to nine, and three hundred people from five to seven.

Commissioner Cabrera: But I think we need to do some sort of outreach and explain these facts, and then either move forward with it or quit giving people false impressions and expectations.

Commissioner Withers: Well that's what I'm saying; my feeling is if we did it we would run it regularly in the morning, regularly in the evening to meet Dade County's requirement, then run it every half hour or every hour during the day.

Commissioner Cabrera: At what cost? At what cost?

Commissioner Withers: From what I understand we're subsidizing the trolley by almost a hundred thousand dollars anyway...

Commissioner Cabrera: Right.

Commissioner Withers:...so we would be matching that and we would get the one hundred thousand from Dade County to cover this cost, that's the math unless it's backwards.

Commissioner Cabrera: Well, I got a problem.

Commissioner Anderson: I think this discussion probably brought back to be more to live another day, but I wanted to bring back that concern, that there are people feeling left out, and I think its worthy of a discussion maybe at the next Commission meeting, we can talk more in depth just about that particular issue and how it affects it, because I think its worth continuing the conversation, maybe not in the context of right now, because I don't think we are going to resolve it honestly.

Commissioner Withers: I think what would be more effective for those folks up there than the trolley would be the whole traffic and beautification issue; and I don't know if it was Alberto or if it was Dan or someone, but I remember taking someone up there and because the streets were so wide the idea was to almost put planters into the street that would basically narrow the street, you could put trees in there to beautify, it would serve as a traffic calming, kind of like what we did behind Christy's Restaurant, curb it and stuff like that.

Commissioner Anderson: And actually there have been calls for beautification; I have one of our residents, one of our favorite ladies Mrs. Kurhan, who lives...Alicia...she had asked for that, but the traffic situation is really fast.

Mr. Delgado: Still there are some issues, but as far as traffic, we have done three major things in that area; we did a complete traffic study of the entire area; we identified that the major problem that they have, there is a street called Fifth Street in the City of Miami; Fifth Street is a street that you use by people from Eighth Street and Flagler to cut through Boabadilla and go through Ponce de Leon and get to Douglas and everything. We identified that and the County did some adjustment making the street one way in one direction or something like that. So that was something that the County did after our study from our engineering in that area. In addition to that we put a median at Campina Court at the end...

Commissioner Anderson: I remember that very clearly.

Mr. Delgado:...looks like a run way, like a plane could land over there; we put a median in that particular area, and we did some traffic calming in the intersection of Campina Court and Ponce de Leon, two islands over there because people were shooting through there at high speed.

Commissioner Anderson: You should see Boabadilla.

Mr. Delgado: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: You should see the side streets, they are speedways. There is a gentleman whose car he parks on the street on his house, he has to put his rear view mirror to the side because he's lost it three or four times.

Mr. Delgado: On the side street we still have a plan that we have not implemented, we are putting bump-outs at the intersection of all of these streets that are north of Eighth Street up to Flagler.

Commissioner Cabrera: And how are we funding those?

Mr. Delgado: Those will be to the street improvement program...

Commissioner Cabrera: OK.

Mr. Delgado:...those are very expensive; we are funding it probably next year, and the idea is to create bump-outs at the intersection of Ponce de Leon and also Douglas, so that when the people get to that street, they kind of go to a funnel or tunnel effect and they will slow down, because right now we know that they are going through there. This project has been submitted to the County for approval, and the County has some concerns about the dimension in Douglas; Douglas is a County road and they have complete jurisdiction on that; and if that project is approved by the County we will be able to implement those on those streets; we are talking all of these streets like Alcantarra, Oviedo, all those streets north, all the way, they are like seven streets.

Commissioner Anderson: And what's the timeline, the potential timeline for that.

Mr. Delgado: On that one the County is the one holding it right now on some concerns that they have, it might be that we cannot do Douglas, because Douglas for them has certain parameters over there that they don't want to...[inaudible]...we may probably do Ponce de Leon.

Commissioner Anderson: I think just there should be some type of outreach to these folks, I mean, honestly there are other areas of our City that have gotten a lot, a lot of traffic circles that needed it, I'm not belittling anybody that has gotten one, whose wanted one, I think that's great, but this area is a speedway, and actually I was embarrassed because I walked through there and it looks really different from other parts of the City.

Mr. Delgado: We have met several times, one of them is a teacher, Mrs. Sardinias, and we have met with them a lot of times, so they know we know them by names...

Commissioner Anderson: Yeah, I'm sure they do.

Mr. Delgado:...and they know we are trying to get some of those things, if we cannot do the bump-outs then may be we'll do some kind of crosswalks.

Commissioner Cabrera: Mr. Delgado, is Mr. Talamas still a member of the Citywide Traffic Advisory Board?

Mr. Delgado: No, but he is still in touch, he lives in the area.

Commissioner Cabrera: The reason I ask you is Mr. Talamas lived on Boabadilla, or lives on Boabadilla, could you have a workshop between the neighborhood and the Traffic Advisory Board at the Coral Gables Women's Club, and bring them in and give them the options that are available to them, and discuss all of the options including the bump-outs...

Mr. Delgado: Sure and give them an update of everything, sure, absolutely...

Commissioner Anderson: That would build a lot of goodwill, but I want us also at that meeting to set realistic timelines and realistic expectations; if things can't be done or can be done we need to let them know, because then they can't come back later and say you promised, or you said this is going to be, you need to be very realistic as to what's going to happen and when; that meeting the sooner the better that it can happen, that's great; and then maybe Vice Mayor Kerdyk, I'm going to leave that issue with the trolley thing to you to address at a future Commission meeting. Its not my purview, its not my project, I would like to see some things happen with it, but its yours, and its yours to explain and for us to make a policy decision now. I was just hoping that we could just air out the concerns, and if we've done that, at least we've taken the first step.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Alright.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you very much.

Mayor Slesnick: Ms. Jimenez could you ask the Chief to maybe do some special traffic enforcement up there for a period of time in the next month or so, so that we could take a look at what we find up there, a special enforcement unit.

[End: 11:10:17 a.m.]