

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
March 8, 2011
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

City Manager, Patrick Salerno
Interim City Attorney, Lourdes Alfonsin
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

F-2 [Start: 10:15:06 a.m.]

Discussion regarding the City’s Streetscape Master Plan
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.

Mayor Slesnick: F-2 Mr. Cabrera.

Commissioner Cabrera: Thank you. At the last Commission meeting, we were talking about a building that was over by the Fred B. Hartnett Park or Ponce Circle Park as it’s also known, and I got off on a tangent about parking, on-street parking and streetscape, and I’ve done this numerous times. I think in the last 18 to 24 months, I’ve talked about the systematic removal of on-street parking by our City time and time again; and it sort of falls on deaf ears, and today’s conversation may also fall on deaf ears, but I believe that I’m going to try really hard to give you a conceptual illustration of what happens when we embark upon the streetscape master plan throughout our City. Now keep in mind that what I’m going to talk to you about is based upon information that I gathered. I met with stakeholders, I met with people that actually were part of the process, so obviously whatever I say here can be questioned, and I welcome any and all questions that people may have and concerns they may have regarding this issue and my facts. I

did not have an opportunity to present you with a package because I wanted to abide by the City Charter and I wasn't able to make it on Thursday, but I do have documentation that I can provide the Commission at a later time that confirms the comments that I'm going to make, and so having said all that, prefacing all that let me go right to it. What I want to share with all of you is an example of a streetscape plan that's about to take effect, it's now in the final stages of the permitting process, and I ask you to think about the zero block of Giralda Avenue between Douglas Road and Merrick Way. If you all think about that and specifically the northern side of it; the northern side has the Hyatt Hotel and a building that's contiguous to the Hyatt Hotel that houses a number of companies, small, middle and large firms, that's the eastern side of it. The western side of that block houses an office building that is also contiguous to that entire complex. In fact my office happens to be in that building, and I know Mr. Kerdyk and Mr. Withers are part of a Board that also houses a bank there. So, I think everybody on this Commission is familiar with what I'm talking about. For the sake of this discussion, I would say that we all agree that, that block specifically the northern side of the block is a fairly industrial section. It has – I'll take you from the west to the east – it has a loading area for 95 Merrick Way, followed by a service bay for the Hyatt Hotel, followed by two ingress and egress ramps, one for the Hyatt parking and the second for the 95 Merrick Way parking, and it also is a place for a lot of workers from the Hyatt congregate during their breaks, and some of the work gets done back there also. For example, for the last four weeks the Hyatt Hotel has been working on cleaning their air vents, so there is a lot of industrial activity back there. Nonetheless, there is also a great deal of landscaping, there are actually planters that go along the way, a very high wall that has some plant material as well as trees. Now let me bring you to the comments about parking. Today on that northern boundary there are 12 on-street parking spaces, which are usually utilized during the day, not at night, but throughout the day they are utilized; and I'll tell you who utilizes them, the people that go to the restaurant on the south side of the road. There is a Lebanese, a Middle Eastern restaurant there, the people that visit the insurance agency next to the restaurant, the people that go to the beauty salon next to the agency, and now there is a photography studio that recently opened, it's a brand new business, and then what's left on the south side, southwest side is an empty retail space, that's miscellaneous retail. Before that it was used for selling purposes of the 55 Merrick Way Complex. So the people that go there are the one's that's doing photo shoots, they are having lunch or dinner at the restaurant, getting their hair done, and/or purchasing insurance, and I went to visit all of them; I went by to see all of the owners of those businesses and none of them knew about this under-taking of streetscape, and I explained to them what I'm going to explain to you now. I said, you currently have 12 on-street parking spaces on that northern boundary, if the project gets processed as I think it's being processed, here's what's going to happen; the two corners, the east and the west corners are going to be extended, that makes a lot of sense and I mean that sincerely, it makes a lot of sense because it's going to make it safer for pedestrians that want to cross the street, specifically on the eastern border of the north side of Giralda; on the west side it's going to make a cleaner corner because

our street cleaner can't get into that little corner there, so by extending it out its going to make for a cleaner corner and also a safer corner for pedestrians. So right there we are losing two parking spaces, but in addition to all that we are building six bump-outs, so let me tell you what happens. When you build six bump-outs and you extend the corners and you have 12 on-street parking spaces you now reduce the number of parking spaces by 8 and you are now left with 4, and that's the impact I've been trying to share with you that continually happens throughout our downtown area. Now let me add to the problem. You've got a new urgent care facility diagnostic center that Baptist has opened which is a marvel and I'm very happy to have it in our City, but they've acquired three loading and unloading spaces that are on-street. Our Parking Director whom I ran into one day and that's how I found out about the \$3,000 of parking space figure, apparently worked with them and now it's only two spaces that are being used for loading and unloading. So it seems like we are getting one back, but as you move to the west on the south side of Giralda, a bank's taken two more of those spaces for ten minute parking, so you are minimizing the impact of that, and don't get me started because I've done a lot of work on this, but you wouldn't believe how much we modified the streetscape even after we, the City Commission, approved the streetscape design for 55 Merrick Way, when we weren't able to install the roundabout, we made modifications to it that this Commission never approved; and I count at least the loss of about ten to possibly fifteen parking spaces. I could be off on that because I don't have a measuring device. So what do I hope to do this morning by giving you this conceptual illustration of the loss of on-street parking?- I hope to inform and educate you and get you to realize the kinds of things that happen in spite of the fact that's a dramatic example, but more importantly I ask you to support me and requesting from the professional administration to go back and to look at ways to maintain the streetscape master plan without compromising two-thirds of on-street parking spaces along Giralda. That's really what this exercise is all about; and as I said before this is in the final stages of the permitting process. If any of you walk out there, you'll see that it has already been painted, so the sidewalk's been painted, the street's been painted to reflect the changes that maybe occurring shortly, and so I thought that now would be the best time or the last time that we could potentially save some of that parking from going away. Any of you have any questions or comments?

Commissioner Withers: Are you more concerned about or maybe you are concerned about both, the loss of parking for the merchants that's one issue?

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, the loss of parking for those that would go to those merchants, yes. Not for the merchants themselves.

Commissioner Withers: I know, I know.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes.

Commissioner Withers: And also the fact that it's a revenue loss for us?

Commissioner Cabrera: Well the revenue loss we can debate back and forth. I think when I told you the \$3,000 figure, I think it's an average figure for the downtown area, I think your response had to do with the ad valorem tax, I don't know what the quantifying variable is to off-set the other, we could sit here and debate it, but I really don't know. I'm looking more at the following, I'm looking more at let's keep the integrity and concept of the streetscape alive because apparently that's what we all supported, whenever we did, but let's not lose sight of the fact that we are reducing parking at an exponential rate, and the exponential rate comes from going from 12 to 4; and again, Chip, I'm not making any of this up.

Commissioner Withers: I know. I know the street you are talking about exactly, and you left one thing out. The Hyatt Hotel next to it is the office building and they do have a loading zone as you move toward Douglas.

Commissioner Cabrera: You're right, you're absolutely right, next to the ingress and egress ramps, there is one more loading zone right there, you're right.

Commissioner Withers: There's one more. It's like the back; it's almost like an alley on that street.

Commissioner Cabrera: Listen, I have the plan here, I have the plan in front of me. I shrunk it to an eight and-a-half by eleven proportion, but I highlighted the bump-outs and if I may, I'll pass it first to my right and then pass it down so you all can see what I just illustrated for you conceptually.

Commissioner Withers: Well, I think philosophically the discussion this Commission has to have is, do we want to push people into parking garages by eliminating on-street parking?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: It's actually the same debate you're going to have on Miracle Mile too.

Commissioner Withers: That's a discussion you guys are going....

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: That's exactly the situation, that's the discussion because the parking garage is right there; there is a parking garage right there so the question is exactly what you say.

Commissioner Cabrera: Bill there are three parking garages right there, there are three of them.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: There is a lot across the street on...

Commissioner Cabrera: Are we talking about Giralda?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes, Giralda.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK, there's....

Commissioner Withers: There is one in the building...

Commissioner Cabrera: There are two parking garages in the Hyatt complex, we'll call it that, and there is a parking garage at 55 Merrick Way.

Commissioner Withers: But there is no signage that says public parking on either of those parking garages.

Commissioner Cabrera: All three of them have no signage that reflect that, and incidentally one of the three is a private parking garage, the other two allow outside folks to park, and the rates are exorbitant, I mean, they are just sky high. I'm sorry; I should have brought you the numbers so you could see how expensive it is to park in these places.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: But we have our parking lot right there too, right around the corner there.

Commissioner Withers: By Fritz and Franz.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes.

Commissioner Cabrera: You mean our parking garage.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes, our parking garage; and also we have that parking lot on the corner of Giralda and Galiano too.

Commissioner Cabrera: We do, we do, but I was talking about the street itself. The parking garage you are referring to is on Galiano, Giralda, and Aragon.

Commissioner Anderson: You know, I want to piggyback on what you said Chip, I think the key there is to figure out how philosophically we want to put these people in parking garages, we have to make sure they know they have parking garages with signage, which is something we struggled with a few years back, trying to get better signage, trying to make it more inviting for

people to go into the parking garages, and that's the philosophical thing between if these losses are occurring, then how do we get them into those parking garages?

Commissioner Cabrera: And Ms. Anderson whether we end up doing something about this, or staff comes back with a compromise that works for all, I mean, I hope that's the ultimate outcome of this exercise, but you are absolutely right, that's the real big picture discussion that we need to be thinking about. In the interim, you may not agree with me and that's perfectly OK, but I hope you understand that I took the time to research this so that I could present it to you in a light that had facts behind it and that's what I tried to share with you today; and as you pass that document back you will see that it is an official document as presented to the City there are copies of it. I happen to have the one before that to the other side of the project when we in fact, yes these have nice colors, when we in fact were not able to install the roundabout with Mrs. Merrick's statute because the Public Works Department of Miami-Dade County refused to approve, and I can share with you because I saw people taking notes that there were lots and lots of losses; and in fact let me just share this one with you, when this thing was approved by us, the Commission, with the roundabout. There were seven parking spaces on the southeast side of Giralda, today the actual number is five; on the west side there were four actual, today the number is three. So, again this is another example of how systematically we end up eliminating these. I'm going to say this one more time, this was not approved by us, it got done because the Public Works Department when they denied the roundabout left us with no other choices and to do some modifications and the professional staff made these modifications without Commission approval.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: You know the other important component of this overall pie is the valet parking, because that takes out parking right off the deck too. Now of course it adds to it from the standpoint that people drop off their car and they park it in a parking garage, so that's maybe a very good thing, but that is part of the overall discussion on what we are doing with parking on the street level. Of course all retailers would like somebody to pull up to their property, get out and walk into their building or into their establishment, there's no doubt about it. I see Mari there and she would probably concur with that. The fact is where is the City going as far as this parking goes?- and we just need to get on the same page and try to come up with solutions, because the situation is we can have a nicely landscaped downtown area with less parking, or we can try to come up with some type of arrangement that would try to save as much parking as possible and not have this nicely landscaped downtown area. We also want to create that nice environment for pedestrians to walk down the street in 10-15 years where they can walk under a tree and say, you know this is a good experience. So it's a trade-off in my opinion.

Commissioner Cabrera: It is, it is, but you know it's interesting on this street, it's not.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: This is not a great street.

Commissioner Cabrera: We are shoving it down the throat of the folks that have to build it; and Bill I'll tell you, this is not rocket science, this doesn't take ten more months to study to come back with a decision, we don't have to hire PriceWaterhouse to do this for us. This means reducing bump-outs from maybe five to three or from five to two, and maintaining the integrity of the streetscape master plan and having the trees that you are speaking about; and having the bump-outs with the rodents and the garbage and the cigarette butts and the maintenance issues that's OK, that's the goal here and that's what we are all doing conceptually, so be it; and if it's not trees then it's pretty Universal Disney World palm trees, whatever it is. The bottom line is that, please I really ask you, you don't have to agree with me on most things, this is one that if I didn't make my point today please tell me and I'll stop; I promise you I won't bring this issue up again.

Mayor Slesnick: Ralph you've raised this issue any number of times and I think what we are saying in return is basically the same thing I'd say and that is, sometime the time is right especially with the Miracle Mile discussion going on for us to again talk about our philosophy as to what we want. I mean, I think about the great cities that don't allow any parking downtown and people still flock to them. So there is a discussion to be had; do we want to encourage on-street parking to continue or do we want to discourage it and have what we might call beauty in its place, and I agree by the way although I've never said it, that as long as we are going to have beauty we have to keep it maintained. I go up and down as you know, we've done this before together, actually pick up garbage together, and I do that all the time, and I notify City Hall when I see the same conditions you see in the bump-outs and the flower beds. So if we are going to have these pretty spots we need to find an effective way to keep them clean and derodent, I haven't actually seen any live rats.

Commissioner Cabrera: You should see what 55 Merrick Way is doing, they've got rat traps all over the place, you should see what the Hyatt is doing to mitigate the rodent population.

Mayor Slesnick: I hope it's not just the bump-outs that are doing that, there are other things that cause rodents.

Commissioner Cabrera: I know the garbage, but the animals have to go back some place.

Mayor Slesnick: But here's the thing, I was going to get to the point about this street; this street to me is probably one of the least focused, I don't have any focus on this street. I remember this street from the Oaks Club days.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, I do too.

Mayor Slesnick: And it's never been exactly the show street; the show street of Coral Gables nor that I know we want to make it that. So I would be more than happy to support asking staff to come back with a full presentation and/or rethinking of it to accommodate.

Commissioner Cabrera: That's all I'm asking for, that really is. I'm asking our Public Works professional, our Parking professional and our Public Service professionals to get together. They are all bright and in my opinion they are all best and I'd like to see them all come back as professionals with a plan of action that keeps the vitality of the streetscape alive, but does not compromise two-thirds of on-street parking. That's the goal here; there is no other goal other than that.

Mayor Slesnick: Does anybody have an objection to us asking?

Commissioner Withers: I think you should also put a revenue loss cost in there too.

Commissioner Cabrera: Sure. That would be great. It would be interesting to see, but I need to really...you know Chip, I'm going to be careful, I'm going to say yes, I'm intrigued by it, but I know what can be done around here to modify and change things. So they are going to have to show me, I may need to get PriceWaterhouse involved to show me that.

Commissioner Withers: Ralph, if its \$3,000 a space...

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes.

Commissioner Withers:...and 8 spaces that's \$25,000 a month...

Commissioner Cabrera: OK.

Commissioner Withers:...that's \$3,000 a year

Commissioner Cabrera: No, not a month, that \$3,000 is a year. If you ever thought it was a month...

Commissioner Withers: We'll get a [inaudible]...to see what...

Commissioner Cabrera: What I'll be interested in seeing – well that's an average. Listen, let me put this in perspective, OK, because I don't want to get anybody in trouble Chip. I ran into the

parking guy, I ran into Kevin Kinney, you know, and he was out there and he was pondering something and I stopped and we talked for a couple of minutes and we talked about Baptist, and I forget what else we talked about, and I said, hey, out of curiosity how much does one of these parking spaces generate in revenue per year, and I can't quote him directly, but I believe he said \$3,000 on the average in the downtown area, the core of the downtown area, and I just continued my walk and that was the extent of it. There was nothing more exchanged, there were no City secrets exchanged, I just went on my merry way.

Mayor Slesnick: Because at best it's a dollar for every hour....

Commissioner Cabrera: What about violations, what about violations.

Commissioner Withers: I spent about five hours the other night or six hours downtown Coral Gables going out to dinner, and go out of the parking garage and she said that's \$2.00. I said what?- she said \$2.00, you park for five or six hours at night that's \$2.00, that's the best deal in town.

Mayor Slesnick: And we still get complaints, but it is the best deal, but you're right.

Commissioner Cabrera: But it is they don't know where they are, they can't find them. So, I'm going to ask, can I formalize this by asking for a motion that I move that the staff be directed to review the zero block northern section of Giralda Avenue to determine if a compromise can be achieved of maintaining our streetscape, while at the same time reducing the loss of two-thirds of on-street parking spaces.

Mayor Slesnick: OK. It's been moved by Mr. Cabrera second by Mr. Kerdyk. The only thing I would ask Ralph, is that as we do that we also check in with Baptist, as you said yourself, they've put a lot of money into the street and I'd like to know what their expectations were.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, they actually do have a loading and unloading zone.

Mayor Slesnick: But I meant I didn't know what their expectations were about how the street was going to look after they've finished.

Commissioner Cabrera: That's true, that's true, and the merchants; and listen the merchants, there are people there that are struggling right now. So needless to say based upon this motion if it gets approved today, I would then assume that the project would stop until such time that staff comes back with a new recommendation. Would that be an appropriate assumption on my part?

Mayor Slesnick: I would think so. OK.

Commissioner Cabrera: Thank you, thank you all.

Mayor Slesnick: All those in favor please say aye.

All: Aye.

Mayor Slesnick: Opposed like sign.

Commissioner Cabrera: Thanks again.

Mayor Slesnick: Thank you.

[End: 10:39:00 a.m.]