

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-7
January 11, 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 Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Parking Director, Kevin Kinney

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Development Services Director, Suramy Cabrera

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-7 [4:27 p.m.]

Discussion regarding enforcement of Downtown clean-up and Code Enforcement.

(Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Alright, Item G-7. This is an item that I'm putting on the agenda, discussion regarding enforcement of downtown cleanup and code enforcement. Commissioner Anderson and myself on this item. I just wanted to commend staff. I have some pictures that I wanted to showcase. We had a walk-through in the downtown with Dina and her team, Suramy's team -- my

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office attended -- and we walked the downtown to really identify -- and we spent about two hours walking the downtown, walking all the way from Miracle Mile all the way to Sevilla where Bachour is, back to Ponce, and we looped back really analyzing the current state of the landscaping, analyzing the current state of the sidewalks, signage that's missing, sidewalks that are cracked. We really noticed that there's some landscaping that is in horrible condition, not only for the City, but also for buildings, and landscaping that to me, I don't understand why there's a development agreement, why people are not being held accountable. Case in point, in the corner of Alhambra and Ponce, the glass cube building -- I mean, the landscaping is nonexistent. It's all just dead; the same thing with the Colonnade. The Colonnade on the corner of Ponce and Miracle Mile. It doesn't have any landscaping. That's part of the development agreement. They have to be held accountable. Code Enforcement needs to do it. I mean, we hold ourselves accountable. And also, the issue of all the landscaping down Ponce. It's beautiful Green Island ficus. But when you open up the Green Island ficus, it's so overgrown that it's basically the trunks and all the garbage that's in there because people throw things in there. All that has to be replaced. It's probably been 15, 20 years since all that landscaping has been replaced. And to me, it's not that it's not beautiful, it's just full of garbage. And we need to maintain that. We need to keep that up. And I think that we can do much better than that. So I want to not only hold ourselves accountable, but I also want to acknowledge -- and I don't see the pictures coming up. Maybe we're having some difficulty. I also wanted to acknowledge individuals like Mercedes-Benz, Kerdyk -- Bill Kerdyk, the Vice Mayor. He has his team out there. Look, this is from our walk-through on Alhambra. These are examples of issues, all the stickers. Look at all the alleyways. There you have Hermes, and his team is there also. We're looking at stickers. We're looking at overgrown vegetation throughout the downtown. They're taking pictures of me, making fun of me here because I have a problem with stickers. The vegetation. Okay, here's an example. Could you stop at this picture? I used Bachour as an example. Bachour and the Public Safety Building really paint a picture of what I want our downtown to look. If you look at the quality of the landscaping, the mulching, if you look at the sidewalks, if you look at how they're constantly being cleaned, how they're constantly being monitored -- for example, Bachour has somebody that goes out there in the mornings and in the afternoon. And there is no other place that I'm aware of -- restaurant -

- that has more foot traffic than Bachour does, especially on a Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. It's a madhouse. But it's impeccable, the landscaping, because they're methodical. They're thoughtful and they understand that there's a direct correlation between the aesthetic appeal of the outdoor and this area. Here, I give some examples of signage that has been sitting out there for I don't know who long -- how long. Next picture. Looking at a palm tree that's dead, that's been dead for about three years in front of the Aragon parking garage. They cut it down, the stump is there; never been replaced. And this is Bill Kerdyk's -- Bill Kerdyk. He took it seriously. January 1st, we commenced ticketing. Look at the difference in his sidewalk. This is a picture that he sent me with pride on January 1st. He goes, "I am taking this seriously in front of my properties." Bill Kerdyk setting an example. Look how beautiful those sidewalks are. And all it took was to just spend a little bit of time -- and I know it takes resources, but this is important to the future of the City. And I want to really focus in on the current situation of that sidewalk. How do you think his sidewalk compares to the neighboring sidewalks? Look how beautiful that is. So, what I'm asking is for -- just like I complimented, and I congratulated Code Enforcement for their efforts, I'm asking -- now that we've passed this legislation, now that we're holding people accountable, let's not just talk about it. Let's be about it. Let's start with City properties. Let's start making sure -- because we have the first quarter. We're supposed to do this on a quarterly basis. I want to see sidewalks clean. I want to see landscaping that's missing, I want to see it replaced. For example, Bank of America has no landscaping in front of -- it's just an empty ditch, has an empty sign in front of their property where there used to be a sign, but it's gone. Remove that sign. Obviously, we don't need a sign anymore. And those are a litany of things that I think are critically important. And if we're really going to push forward on the beautification of downtown, we've got to follow suit with Code Enforcement, really pushing on cleaning the sidewalks and replanting of the landscaping. We have to follow through on development agreements.

Commissioner Anderson: I put this on as well. And you know, the pressure cleaning there to show the stark contrast we have between one piece of property and another. And I don't know if

there's a way we can facili -- you know, encourage, I should say, businesses to -- in a block -- do their entire block, one shot.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

Commissioner Anderson: The other thing I think we need to discuss is the special issues that are presented with the pavers. Depending on who's pressure cleaning them, we lose the sand, how often they need to be done, the type of materials that are on Giralda versus the ones that are on the Mile, you know, do present some issues when you're dealing with gum because one is tougher than the other. And City Manager, I spoke to you a little bit about that, that perhaps we should examine that more as to delegating a particular vendor to handle that, whether there has to be a cost contribution from the members of the community, the BID, towards that. I think we need to control how that's cleaned and re-sanded on a periodic basis, whether it be twice a year or more often.

City Manager Iglesias: We take care of the Mile on a monthly basis, and we also remove gum and so forth. Pavers, whether there are the pavers that we have or interlocking pavers, you cannot use pressure clean -- you can't use pressure on any paver because you will take out the...

Commissioner Anderson: The sand.

City Manager Iglesias: (INAUDIBLE) sand.

Commissioner Anderson: Right.

City Manager Iglesias: So those are a little bit different. However, these pavers are a little easier to actually take care of because gum can come out a little easier than a concrete paver, which is very porous and very difficult to take out. So, I will let our Parking Director who's handling that.

Parking Director Kinney: The Manager was covering it very well. But specifically with the gum, we have bought a system that block by block does remove the gum.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Parking Director Kinney: For the property owners of restaurants, businesses along the paver portions of the Mile and Giralda, we've actually given them specific instructions of how they're supposed to do their part. But the Manager is correct, at least once a quarter on the plaza, and more frequently on the Mile, we are out there doing the heavy cleaning. But where they have outdoor seating, when they have trash in front of their location, they have a list of things we ask them to do. And as long as they cover the things they're supposed to do -- and the easiest thing to think about is what we've instructed is to use a mild soap, bucket of water, and a deck brush. That's the best way for them to manage spills and things on the pavers. And then we'll come in on a regular basis and do the heavy work.

Commissioner Anderson: Yeah. I was just looking at the matrix and it doesn't specify how -- you know, exactly how they're supposed to deal with it. And I've had tenants before in buildings and one person's interpretation of cleaning is far different than the other one's interpretation of cleaning so...

City Manager Iglesias: What we need, Commissioner, would be the brush type, not the pressure cleaning, and that's what we have actually specified. However, the problem is where you're actually using the right-of-way as dining, and I think you have the responsibility to keep that clean. You're using it as part of your -- you are the tenant of that area. And I do think that there's more use, and that needs to be the responsibility of that tenant.

Commissioner Anderson: I don't disagree with you. I just think we need better communication and a consistent cleaning formula for all those businesses that are restaurants there, get together and have it dealt with, with a single professional so we have a consistent type of cleaning going

on, so we don't have lines of demarcation. One person uses bleach, the other one doesn't use bleach. You know, take something that's beautiful and make it ugly.

City Manager Iglesias: We recommend using Dawn actually because it's very -- it works very well -- it's used in construction -- and a brush type -- instead of a pressure type -- so you have a brush type machine is what we have -- what we have asked the property owners and the tenants to use. But we can certainly contact the BID and the Chamber to see if they want to get -- maybe use maybe a couple of contractors that will make that easier.

Commissioner Anderson: Yeah, yeah, that's what I was going to ask you to do. Let's have a meeting with the BID and get some clarification here, okay?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Well, so just adding on that. So I just want to give you a heads up. My plan is on March 1st, I want to walk the same walk that we did with you and about 10 other staff members from the City. I want to walk Miracle Mile again and I want to see an improvement, not only from landscaping. I know landscaping is going to take some time. I know we're working on the landscaping, on revamping the landscaping. But Luminaire should be held accountable for the massive sidewalk damage that's in front. Someone's got to take care -- I know there may be -- ran fiber optics there, but you just can't stay like that. You can't just take asphalt and put it over a sidewalk. You've got to...

Public Works Director Diaz: I believe that location had an open permit if it's the same one that we're thinking about.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, but there's...

Public Works Director Diaz: So, we will definitely double check (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: But there has to be some finalization of that.

Public Works Director Diaz: 100 percent.

Mayor Lago: It can't just be that you pour asphalt on a sidewalk and then you have, you know, contrary kind of traction on the side -- as people are walking.

Public Works Director Diaz: It makes sense.

Mayor Lago: So March 1st, I would like to walk with our team, and I would like to see what Mr. Kerdyk did, what Bill Ussery is doing, what the City of Coral Gables is doing. I would like to see the same amount of pride from everybody in our downtown. I would like -- and that is going to require our Code Enforcement to go and visit those businesses and say you have the next two months. Clean your -- and you got to do it. Don't wait two months because you're going to do it again in the following quarter. And this is where my next issue is. I have gotten emails and I know that -- I don't know if we're still in need of hiring people in Code Enforcement. But if we need to hire people in Code Enforcement -- by the way, I want to commend the gentleman who works on reviewing the excess green matter because he is bringing a windfall of money into the City of Coral Gables every single month.

Public Works Director Diaz: Michael Gatu (phonetic).

Mayor Lago: Michael Gatu is doing a wonderful job and he needs to be commended for his efforts.

Public Works Director Diaz: I will bring it along.

Mayor Lago: And -- what?

Public Works Director Diaz: I will pass it along.

Mayor Lago: Pass it along.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to mention it in the Commission along with my colleagues.

Public Works Director Diaz: He's doing a great job.

Mayor Lago: He's doing a great job, but what we need to do is we need to hire an outside firm to assist us. Because we're doing a great job with the cardboard, and that's going to pay dividends in the future because we're going to divert it from the garbage. And we're not going to make money on it, but we we're actually going to save money because it's going to be diverting it from the garbage stream, which costs us money. But I want to make sure that just like we're doing with the residential, that the downtown is abiding by the guidelines that we've set forth. If you need manpower and if you need to bring in an outside entity to help with code enforcement, to notify businesses, to ensure that they're complying, please tell me now, Mr. Manager, so I can help you. I don't want this to be an issue about resources, okay?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I appreciate you.

Public Works Director Diaz: And for that March meeting, you just want to make sure we involved Code Enforcement as well.

Mayor Lago: Yeah. That's where we failed last time.

Public Works Director Diaz: I know.

Mayor Lago: That was my fault. I'll take the blame. It was my fault so -- but I'll remember to invite Suramy -- Ms. Cabrera and your team and Code Enforcement and Public Works and anybody else who would like to come -- the Manager's office -- you're more than welcome. And at the end, I'll treat everybody to coffee. Okay.

Public Works Director Diaz: Many of us could use the walk so...

Mayor Lago: Maybe we'll get -- but it was a good walk -- right? -- for about two hours.

Public Works Director Diaz: It was absolutely. It was a great walk.

Mayor Lago: It was a great walk. And I think we're bringing -- now that I said coffee, Commissioner Menendez will show up. Alright, enough with that. Commissioner Anderson, do you have anything else on that point or no? I don't want to just...

Commissioner Anderson: The only other request that I had is from the BID. And City Manager, I'm going to ask you to address it, is there's a request for additional trash and recycling bins along the downtown streets.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: That is again a request from the BID. So, can you cover that with them as well? The BID has requested additional trash and recycling bins along the downtown streets.

City Manager Iglesias: We have that on...

Commissioner Anderson: Which is something we've discussed.

City Manager Iglesias: GIS. We'll ask the Public Works Director to take a look at that and see where we can add those, Commissioner.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, a quick question. As the BID representative, who are you dealing with at the BID that's making these requests because they're not bringing it to my attention and I'm going to the meetings and stuff like that.

Commissioner Anderson: I met with Reinhardt, Zeke Gilford.

Mayor Lago: Perfect, okay. I just want to make sure, so I know. I'll go speak to Aura. And I just -- I want to -- you know, I want to see if she -- whatever else she needs.

Commissioner Anderson: And then she just sent me a message. She wasn't able to come here today because she's currently contact -- not feeling well.

City Manager Iglesias: On...

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: On the Mile, we do have block by block with just continuously cleaning and continually removing.

Commissioner Anderson: Right, right.

Mayor Lago: And make sure that they're cleaning the actual -- if you can -- the actual garbage can because people put gum and stuff like that.

Parking Director Kinney: Yes. Every time they collect the garbage, they wipe the can down. We are getting to the point where our little stickers need to be replaced, but I have to find out where we get those. But -- so the cans generally look good. There are on the Mile -- eight times four -- 32 -- 16 garbage and 16 recycling cans on the Mile. So, it would be nice -- if Aura's asking for additional garbage cans, maybe to have an idea of what blocks she's talking about. Because on the Mile, if the bag is half full, block by block is not doing their job.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Ms. Cabrera, may I ask you a quick question, if you don't mind. Who do we have working analyzing -- case in point -- the Palace? The Palace has a development agreement with the City. The City owns that property, 99-year lease. Who is ensuring that the dead trees in front of the Palace, the broken light, the hedges, and all that kind of stuff is --? Do we have somebody analyzing, you know, the development agreements now so that we could start pushing forward, for example, the issue that we're having with the Colonnade, and the issue that we're having with the building on the corner of Alhambra and Ponce, the glass cube, where all the landscaping is dead, where the actual Chamber is located. Who do we have doing that? Who's working on that?

Development Services Director Cabrera: Each Code Enforcement officer is responsible in their area so that when they see this, there's a link that we've shared with everybody that Public Works put all the covenants in there, all the maintenance covenants, so when they see something, they're supposed to go in there, see if it's the property owner that's responsible for it, and then they give warnings or citations. If you want to know on a specific property where we stand, I could do -- you know, check with Code Enforcement.

Mayor Lago: This is what I would love to do. I would love to schedule a meeting in the next two weeks with yourself and anybody in Code Enforcement, and I would like to be shown what they're doing. And I would like to see why doesn't the Colonnade comply. Why do they --? Why does the City of Coral Gables have to go out and put mulch on the corner of Ponce and Miracle Mile

when they just won't comply, when it's part of their development agreement? They own probably one of the most important properties in the City of Coral Gables, on Main and Main. Why won't they comply? Is it just they don't care, or they don't want to? The entire Christmas month, the most important month of the year, celebrating Hanukkah, New Year's, Christmas, you know, it's a great time in our city, not one decoration, not one piece of landscaping. While other people in the community are having such a good time, they're enjoying it, they're beautifying the City, you know, it's incredible. And I -- and by the way, it's not only me. I go to the restaurant probably three times a week to have coffee at the Colonnade. And even people inside have told me, "This is a mess out here. No one picks this up." And I have to tell them, "Listen, this is not the City," from my understanding. I could be wrong. But my understanding is that those -- there's a development agreement where they're required to maintain that; they're not maintaining it. Just like the glass cube on the corner of Alhambra and Ponce, all the landscaping is dead. What I would like to understand is if we're short on staff -- we're short on staff because March 1st, I will walk it with staff, and I'd like to understand what are we doing. Are we hitting them with a fine? Are we notifying them? I want to understand that if you don't mind. And if you need more staff, tell me. Tell me if anything (INAUDIBLE).

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, now that we have it on GIS, we can link quickly to that development agreement. And I think that we certainly try it with -- at first to get compliance, and then, of course, we cite.

Mayor Lago: But I want to make sure that we're notifying them.

Development Services Director Cabrera: I'm going to give you -- I will look into it specifically on those properties, and in general, speak with Code Enforcement. I do know that they've been really, really busy with...

Mayor Lago: I know.

Development Services Director Cabrera: The cardboard so...

Mayor Lago: That's an understatement.

Development Services Director Cabrera: Maybe they're not following up on some of these other ones, but I will look into it. And we are putting out to hire two more part-time Code officers.

Mayor Lago: There you go. So maybe the answer is -- you know, I know that they're super busy, and they're doing a great job, like I said, because you can see it in the cardboard. It's paying dividends, and it's going to make us money. It's going to save us money more likely. But maybe we need to bring in a private firm so that we can catch up, notify all these businesses, put them on notice, and then once the cardboard issue settles down, we can go on our daily business. But I just -- I'd love to meet with you in the next two weeks to go over that at your convenience.

Development Services Director Cabrera: I'll have Jean Marie reach out to (INAUDIBLE)...

Mayor Lago: Chelsea, thank you, or to Santiago.

Development Services Director Cabrera: Wow.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Anderson: It's late. It's a long day.

Mayor Lago: (INAUDIBLE). We're almost done.

Commissioner Anderson: I have...

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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Commissioner Anderson: One other little piece to add to that. When they have to replace the landscaping like at the Palace, some of the original choices that were put in there were not good, so make sure it goes back to, you know, our landscaping department to say what can go in there that would survive better. So, like the foxtail palms are not a good choice, just really not, a lot of maintenance required for those...

Development Services Director Cabrera: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: To make them look pretty.

Development Services Director Cabrera: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: It's our right-of-way, so I do believe that we have a right to do that. And we'll take a look at that, Commissioner.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. Manager.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: However, Mayor...

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Cabrera.

City Manager Iglesias: The fact that we have that on GIS now, you will see progress in that area.

Mayor Lago: I know we will. But I'm just saying if we need to bring in a private sector company temporarily -- not full -- just temporarily to catch us up because there's a lot of -- listen, Ms. Cabrera and her team have a lot on their plate right now.

Commissioner Anderson: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Because we've pushed a lot of...

City Manager Iglesias: We are bringing...

Mayor Lago: Legislation forward.

City Manager Iglesias: Two part-time Code Enforcement officers for the weekend so we don't have to use the people -- the Code Enforcement officers during the week on the weekend so...

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: So we are -- we're working towards that to make sure that we have the right staffing, not too much, not too little.

Mayor Lago: Okay.