

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-10
October 22, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, 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, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Police Chief, Ed Hudak
Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Public Speaker(s)

Daniel Milay
Roberta Nuway
Zully Pardo

Agenda Item F-10 [4:35 p.m.]

Discussion regarding the crosswalk at intersection of Ponce de Leon Boulevard and Stanford Drive (Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: F-10.

Commissioner Castro: Discussion regarding the crosswalk at intersection of Ponce de Leon Boulevard and Stanford Drive. During public comment I had a resident that spoke upon this item. I did include some pictures that she sent me. As it is, thank you to Hermes and Melissa and the City Manager. They were very quick to respond to this request. Her complaints were about the painting of this intersection that's already been – what stage are we on, because I know that this goes through different phases.

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Chief Hudak: What you're looking at here and you can tell by the floor that this has all been redone. They had a large construction site the entire length of Ponce. This particular picture we're looking at, if you notice the waffle-like look to the road itself. So, this has all been put up so it's been graded, and it will get done and reput down again. So, this was a temporary fix as they were resurfacing all of Ponce de Leon Boulevard and major parts of these intersections, which made it difficult for us to enforce on some of the stop bars during this particular time.

Commissioner Castro: So, we're in the phase right now that we're waiting 30 days.

Public Works Director Diaz: The pavement has been resurfaced and we put a temporary strapping on it, so its going to be at least 30 days before we put the final pavement, but the crosswalk is already well delineated and the final will be the thermal plastic, which we usually do. We still have some areas that we need to finalize the pavement, usually you do that in one shot, but the crosswalk right now its delineated and its just pending the thermal plastic, the final layer.

Mayor Lago: This is really simple. I drive this street every morning at 5 in the morning from my home to the gym next to Merrick Park. This has been an ongoing issue; you and I have talked about it for six months in regard to the work that was being done there with the sanitary sewer line that was being connected there. So now they're at the final stages.

Public Works Director Diaz: It doesn't look like that anymore. It's been repaved already.

Mayor Lago: I was just there this morning. I drove by this morning. Its completely done. It looks really nice. You still have some road plates that needs to be addressed, some road plates that needs to be addressed, but this is just the standard issue.

Public Works Director Diaz: Its two miles worth of sewer that we.

Mayor Lago: So now, moving on from that. What we have here right now is uncurable, okay, we can tell the residents that we are going to cure this and the only way you can cure this is by one way. Having a police officer in this intersection, sitting in a chair, or in a squad car pulling people over, because people are so desperate to cross all these intersections on Ponce because of the constant traffic, especially if you go there around 5 or 6 o'clock, again, near my house that everybody is desperate, so they get into the box. They block the box, they get into the crosswalk, and there is no resolution. By the way, just in case, I don't know when this photo was taken, but it was a Code Enforcement violation right there. You have a sign. I'll make sure I take care of that. I'll send it to Amos tomorrow morning, like I do every morning. So, that right there is a Code Enforcement violation and hopefully somebody would take it off the corner. So, this issue here is, and I'm going to tell you the truth, unfixable, because of what we've done here in the city and how people are in this community in regard to their driving habits. Chief.

Chief Hudak: Since January 1st to date, we've written 50 citations at this intersection with 57 traffic stops, and 44 designated details just on Stanford and Ponce. From Ponce de Leon to Red Road, from Red Road to Grand Avenue on Ponce, since January 1st, we've written 519 citations on Ponce de Leon Boulevard, another 192 traffic stops and traffic details where people were designated in this area for the last ten months for 181 times. Ponce is an ongoing issue, whether it be speeding or these intersections. The issue that we have from the Police Department is the next complaint that I get when we are stopping them, as we are blocking traffic by writing the citations, because of the curbing and the areas underneath the Metrorail, there is no safe area to have that vehicle pull over where we can issue the citation, so we do that as quickly as possible and I believe the next construction part that we are going to have down there is now, is the Underline is starting to come through this area, which if you all know, I have said this is why we are bringing in the mounted patrol to get a little bit more we can tie the horse up to a tree and the officer could actually write citations on foot. So, it is an ongoing issue. Some of the vehicles that are seen out there and I've talked with the City Attorney, there is a requirement from a covenant, I believe with the University of Miami that they have to have two officers at Merrick and Ponce. I'm not quite sure that's been in place for ten years. I don't know what that does other than allow egress and ingress, so those people are not necessarily writing tickets, and then you also have the other pedestrian side when the Metrorail is running well and there is an additional stop for the crosswalk there as well when they are coming over. We have and if you remember, probably another 20 years ago, when we put the pedestrian bridge over and everything else was now fenced along Red Road, I'm sorry, around U.S.-1 to Red Road, to stop pedestrians crossing across U.S.-1 from a number of fatalities. So, some are using that bridge, some are coming to those intersections which is also impeding the Stanford and Ponce intersection, because they are not yielding for the pedestrian lights. So, there is a myriad of issues at Stanford and Ponce; Granada and Ponce, I know we have talked ad nauseum over the years about redoing that. I think since we've resurfaced that, it will be a little bit more clearly delineated. We do know the times of days that they are there, but we have done a significant, in my opinion, effort to address these issues. It still happens. When they are getting across the box, there are arrows there, so there are traffic arrows there, the synchronization of these lights also has to coincide with the synchronizations on U.S.-1.

Commissioner Fernandez: That's what I was about to say. I was there last week; two lights trying to make a left turn, and I was the first car. I was never able to make a left turn because of all the cars that were coming southwest to northeast. They were just taking that right turn and then they were blocking the right turn lane, because they are making the line at the left turn lane. The lights are not synchronized at all.

Chief Hudak: Right.

Commissioner Fernandez: I just gave up. I just kept driving on Ponce.

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Mayor Lago: To that point, to that point, there is disinformation on that. So, to that point, there is a new contract in Miami-Dade County, was taken away from the previous firm that had it for ten years, and now the entity that has it is called Horse Power Electric, and they will be now working over the next decade to ensure that they can revamp all the lights and finalize all that synchronization of the lights throughout Miami-Dade County. Another area that we will never be able to correct, and I know your team is out there constantly working on it. They're at the gas station is on the corner of LeJeune and Ponce, blocking the box. You have multiple different ins and outs; you have U.S.-1 on two different fronts; you have LeJeune, you have Ponce. Its like literally five areas of traffic converging in one area, and there is limited time to cross that intersection, so everybody blocks the box, everybody blocks the crosswalks. So, I hope it gets better with the Underline, but I'm going to be candid with you, I don't think there is much solution. Look at the amount of tickets that you've given. Look at the amount of effort that we've invested in there, and at the end of the day, its happening every day, because you have all these individuals from UM, you have all these individuals that are working on U.S.-1, schools, Ponce. Its just a convergence of traffic that, again its just more than what the streets were designed for 15-20 years ago.

Chief Hudak: It is. And Commissioner, the big issue that we have as far as cut-through traffic is, Blue Road is a feeder. Blue Road feeds into Granada, I'm sorry, feeds into Riviera, which then Riviera is the only way you can get on the highway, because Ponce backs up to Grand. So that's the constant trying to beat over there. A few years ago, at least while I've been Chief, I know we put a diverter in there to try and slow that down to the neighborhood. It was one of the first traffic cushions we put in. So, we do continually address it. The biggest challenge we have, and I've been copied on a lot of these emails from the young woman that spoke today is that, how we stop them. The speeding is much more easily enforced because we have more lanes, when they are in that box to continue to block the box, it makes it even worse, and then the transit pickups to and from the University of Miami Metrorail station. So we are, I think the motor unit and the officers have done a great job under the direction of Major Baublitz to kind of focus on this. So, this has been on our radar for some time. I think the markings once they are kind of set in stone again, as the director said, we'll be able to kind of write those. Most of those blocking the box intersection were like 46 percent of those citations that were issued at Ponce for blocking the box.

Commissioner Castro: Can we have any communication with UM to see if they can start having one of their officers there in that intersection.

Chief Hudak: The University of Miami officers have been working with us. They actually ask us for additional help on San Amaro. San Amaro has been a big problem pedestrian-wise. I think the University added a lot of crosswalks there. So, they have been helping us on different times. The Sergeant will supplement one officer for staff, as staffing permits, so we've been able to use them

as well, along with the UMPD has their own Shield 12 measuring devices. Their shift people put them out as well. They do a pretty good job of assisting us, both with traffic accidents and handling those parameter roads in and around the University.

Commissioner Castro: I'm just going to throw out an idea here. You know that sometimes when there's construction it says fines are doubled when you speed or whatever the case is in different parts of the city.

Chief Hudak: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: So, what about if we have like a, "Don't Block Box" or "Don't Block Crosswalk" because of high fines, like something, a visual that if you are on the other side of the light, you're like, I'm not going to cross over.

Chief Hudak: If this body wanted to do a "Don't Block the Box" markings, so to speak, I believe that's something that we could entertain, which was pretty much if somebody's in there, I'm not saying no to the idea, I think the issue of the idea is then we would stop them on Ponce to write the ticket or whether it be Stanford which is the main entrance way at night for the University of Miami, so that could get backed up. To increase those fines would be something that we would have to do statutorily. That would actually go through Tallahassee to see if we could in fact do that. That's who decides who those citations, the radar if you will, on how much those cost goes through Tallahassee. College doesn't equate at a school zone, West Lab does, so that's actually handled as a school zone itself, but that's something that we could entertain.

Commissioner Castro: I think dealing with Tallahassee, we could explore that later, but maybe putting a sign, Don't Block the Box or Don't Block the Crosswalk could be something that prevents people from actually being there before they get the ticket.

Public Works Director Diaz: We asked the county; you see those usually on the...so we reached out to the county, and we asked them to see if they will entertain putting a sign there. It will have to fit within the weight because those...have a weight limit depending on when they were designed, but we did put that request for the county.

Commissioner Castro: And what happened.

Public Works Director Diaz: We just did it.

Commissioner Castro: You just did it.

Public Works Director Diaz: Yes, recently.

Commissioner Castro: Keep me updated please.

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Public Works Director Diaz: Will do.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, gentlemen.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, before moving forward, I have two members of the public requesting to speak on this item.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker is Daniel Milay.

Mr. Milay: Hi. My name is Daniel Milay. My wife spoke earlier, Laura Milay, my address is 1205 Mariposa Avenue in Coral Gables, and I want to speak to the crosswalks, obviously. My wife wasn't able to stay in line because she had to go in and get our daughter, and funny enough someone was blocking the crosswalk both directions while she was picking her up. Both going to school, she goes to West Lab and coming back. The police officer wasn't there for some reason right now. I have to tell you, I'm the one that does the drop off in the morning. Every single day someone is blocking that crosswalk and I'm only there for a 20-second window of the whole day. And I know you all discussed having more signs, initiatives like Don't Block the Box. Personally, I don't feel like that works at all, because no one read signs. No one is paying attention. They are looking at traffic, they are trying to get where they are going. Just yesterday, somebody cut in front of me as I was trying to cross because they were turning right, and I was trying to cross the crosswalk. They weren't even looking right to look at who's coming in, so they just turn right and go. The police officer wasn't able to do anything at the time because the person just turned and left. So yes, there are things that can be done. Its not just a shrug, oh, people drive bad. If we make Ponce not a thoroughfare where it's a bypass for trying to go around Dixie traffic or getting from point A to point B, doing things to slow it down, make it not worth taking it. I'm not talking about closing it off, but speed tables. We put speed tables at all the crosswalks, that way you have to slow down, you have to maintain the speed limit. It was just two days ago, I think I was coming from the UM train stop and the crosswalk there for students to cross, and someone just blew through it, like didn't even slow down. I'm surprised that no ones in the crosswalk at the time. So, I'm glad its addressed and everyone knows how bad Ponce and the crosswalks are. We are looking for more of a permanent solution. A cop there every day only works as long as you have them available, signs don't work, because no one reads them, or eventually it becomes background noise, like you just see it every day, like oh, I don't even see that anymore, its just there every day. And I also feel its not just for us, you all mentioned the Underline that's coming, the remodel with all the pickleball courts, its only going to get worse because more people are going to be using that section, so its only going to get worse, I'm afraid someone is going to get hurt. I'm afraid its me

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and my daughter personally, but I see other kids riding their bikes to school. I see students. I see just joggers out. Its not just us. It's the entire community and more people will be using this as more is done on the Underline. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you for joining us.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Roberta Nuway.

Mayor Lago: Roberta, good afternoon.

Ms. Nuway: Hi. I'm Roberta Nuway, 1236 South Alhambra Circle, and as you know, I'm always complaining about South Alhambra and U.S.-1, and South Alhambra and Ponce is just as bad. So, I agree with what the gentleman was just saying. I think we need to slow down Ponce and I think enforcement, as much as it inconveniences people, it would help to some degree. I have seen very little enforcement on Ponce and Alhambra. I can't speak to Ponce and Stanford. But Ponce and Alhambra in all the years I've driven there, I've walked there, I can count on one hand the number of times I have seen people pulled over. So, I think there are solutions. I just think we have to work harder at them, and now I'm going into the Gables, so I have to leave, and I'll probably be delayed by people blocking Ponce. So have a nice day everybody and thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Roberta.

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

Mayor Lago: Alright. Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I have some follow up questions for Public Works Director. Are we allowed to put in any type of speed tables, cushions on Ponce.

Public Works Director Diaz: No, I don't believe so. It's a collector and that intersection itself is humungous. I just don't see even if we were allowed to by the county agreement, which we are not, I just think from a geometrical perspective, I'm not sure how that would work.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Can we add speed detection signs.

Public Works Director Diaz: That – yes. Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Can we add cameras?

Public Works Director Diaz: That I will have to discuss with IT. We could do anything that we are willing to pay for, I guess. That's something we can work with Raimundo, if that's the desire of the Commission.

Commissioner Castro: But are they enforceable.

Public Works Director Diaz: I'm sorry.

Commissioner Castro: Would the cameras be enforceable?

Vice Mayor Anderson: They would have to be enforceable.

Public Works Director Diaz: I can't speak to that.

Commissioner Castro: That's a question for the City Attorney.

Public Works Director Diaz: Putting cameras.

Chief Hudak: At this time, the only time speed cameras are allowed to be used are in school zones. The statute does not allow us to do that, other than at a school zone.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Can we ticket, Do Not Block the Box.

Chief Hudak: You can't ticket for Do Not Block the Box, without checking on specifically is, I don't know if blocking the box. So, blocking the box is the traffic. I don't know if there is a citation for blocking the crosswalk.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There should be.

Chief Hudak: I don't know if that's a separate statute number.

City Attorney Suarez: It's a non-criminal traffic infraction. Its for blocking, for entering an intersection or a marked crosswalk, unless there is sufficient space.

Chief Hudak: Right. So, what's happening is, everybody is going to the other part of the stop bar, which is the thick white line at the edge of the intersection, and when they go across and they are backed up, their back ends are in the crosswalk off the beaten path of or outside of the, what we call the intersection, which is the large white lines. So, if they are blocking over that, they are blocking the intersection. We are writing the moving violations for blocking the box, if it stops the traffic. But once they are off that road, if there are no pedestrians present, they may not be writing notes.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, if I may.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, you may.

Mayor Lago: My advice is its getting late and we have a lot of items to take care of on the Commission. Through the Manager, maybe your office, along with Public Works can provide what legally is available at our disposal to address block the box, along with other issues that we're facing on Ponce, and what is allowed in regard to speed tables, which I'm pretty sure they are not. You already explained about the cameras, so it can be properly memorialized and can then be sent to the residents who have concerns in this area. Okay. Appreciate Chief. Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, before we move forward, we had one more speaker on this item, Zully Pardo.

Mayor Lago: Hi Zully, how are you. Good afternoon. Zully, Ms. Pardo?

Ms. Pardo: Yes sir, can you hear me?

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Ms. Pardo: Hi, good afternoon. Thank you for addressing this very important issue. I live at 49 – I'm Zully Pardo, I reside at 49 Campina Court. I live in the Coral Gables Flagler Street section and we, our main thoroughfare is Ponce de Leon and on the east side we have Douglas Road. We recently, as you I'm sure, including Chief Hudak, is aware that we recently had a major accident where there was a fatality. We have the same issue. Its not just through the south on Ponce. Its also north Ponce and I would really love to see some kind of addressing the issue in our neighborhood. Its very important. We had people just as the previous speakers were saying, we have folks speeding through our neighborhood. They take all our side streets, and they speed through to connect to Miami on the LeJeune side. So, I think its really important to address and I also would like for our neighborhood to be included in this endeavor. Thank you. I appreciate it and I hope to see some changes in our neighborhood as well.

Commissioner Castro: Hermes, through the Manager, could you go ahead and maybe do an analysis of what is it that's happening in that section.

Public Works Director Diaz: That's already in the books. We've actually been doing a study there for a while. The county asked for some additional information.

Mayor Lago: When did you start that study?

Public Works Director Diaz: Over a year ago. We actually provided the county what they asked. When we sent it over to them, they said, actually I need more data. So, we've got to collect more data, send it back to them. Its unfortunately, it's a lengthy process, but that's something we've been working on for quite a while.

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Mayor Lago: We made some site visits to the area.

Public Works Director Diaz: And the idea is that, from those results, we are looking at potential projects, kind of like similar to Ponce Phase 3, which is going to start relatively soon south of that location.

Commissioner Castro: When you get a chance, do you think you can send me an email of an update.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Commissioner Castro: So, I can go ahead and circle around that neighborhood.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.