

Coral Gables is changing its historic street lights, but shut residents out of the decision

BY MICHAEL MAXWELL

Unbeknownst to the Coral Gables Historic Preservation Board or the Landmark Preservation Board, the current streetlights are being replaced with new streetlights colored black and not the same style as those now or originally installed by city founder George Merrick. The city is replacing the existing silver streetlights installed during 1980s and 1990s.

So why the sudden change?

The existing streetlights were the result of a broad community effort led by the late Sarah Anderson, Sally Jude and Arva Parks and multiple city commissions. Historic photographs and records show the current streetlights closely matched those originally installed by Merrick. The effort to install the existing lights took many years of working with FPL to establish and install them as the city's standard streetlight fixture.

Streetlights are a highly visible component of the city's historic fabric. Such a major alteration to that fabric should have been brought to the Historic Preservation Board and Landmarks Preservation Board for review and input, at a minimum — and, preferably, to the entire community before this work began.

To sweep away the efforts and years of work to accomplish the current silver streetlights without input from the Historic Preservation Board and the public is not in keeping with the city's stated goals for the preservation and care of its historic resources.

FPL is fully capable of providing the correct streetlights.

If the current streetlights require maintenance or new lights, why replace them when repair or replacement in-kind is the correct and proper manner to preserve and protect the vital historic fabric of Coral Gables as advertised and stated in city policy?

Changing the streetlights needs to stop now. The city administration must obtain input from its boards and residents and do what is true and correct — and not allow FPL to unilaterally change history.

Michael Maxwell is vice chair of the Coral Gables Historic Preservation Board.