

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
July 11, 2023
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, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-4 [3:19 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to explore options and the budget for the costs to replace the July 4th fireworks show with either a laser light show or a drone light show. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving forward, F-4.

City Attorney Suarez: F-4 is a Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to explore options and the budget for the costs to replace the July 4th fireworks show with either a laser light show or a drone light show. Assistant City Attorney Gus Ceballos can present what the resolution says.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Good afternoon Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor and Commissioners. This item is the Vice Mayor's, so I'm just here to answer any possible questions, but as presented right now, the resolution basically states that staff will explore the options and the costs related with possibly switching over from a standard firework display into some sort of a drone or possibly a laser show.

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Agenda Item F-4 – Resolution directing city staff to explore options and the budget
For the costs to replace the July 4th fireworks show with either laser or drone light show

[Date]

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Vice Mayor Anderson: I sent you all a memo to outline the various reasons why this is important for our community to move forward. Its not just about the pollution in the air and the carbon build up in the air. Its about our folks that are veterans with PTSD, its about our animals and the future, the impact upon them as well. I think that City of Coral Gables is an advanced city, and we should take steps to move in a direction of other cities that have done away with the annual fireworks show. The pollution in the air is not good for the humans and its not good for the environment, they are not good for our waterways as well. So, I'd like to move forward on this. Anybody else have any comment on it before we make a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: Did some research and I saw that the fireworks for the 4th of July go back to July 4th, 1777, John Adams, and started in Philadelphia and moved to Boston, and after the war of 1812, even more the fireworks were used in some of our most historic cities. I also did research that some cities are moving to laser, mostly the cities out west that are subject to wildfires, because they could set off brush fires. Also, the research I did showed instances – we're on a golf course and people are all over the golf course. The visibility of the fireworks because they go higher, you can see it from all around. My understanding is some of these lasers are lower. If you go to Epcot and they have the lasers in the middle, you have to be basically on the edge of the water to see it, but when the fireworks start, you can be anywhere in the park. So, there's an issue about visibility and once city that was drawing like 50,000 people, they anticipated drawing maybe 5,000 people once they switch over to lasers. And finally, and I have a question for Fred, how long does this show last itself?

Parks and Recreation Director: So, there's a couple of different shows that you're talking about.

Commissioner Menendez: I mean the actual fireworks.

Parks and Recreation Director: The ones that we set off?

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Parks and Recreation Director: We're about 28 minutes, almost 30.

Commissioner Menendez: My quick math is that there are 528,000 minutes in a year, and 525,600 minutes in the year and we're talking about 20 minutes. Supposedly based on what I heard, and I agree, folks were saying this was perhaps the best 4th of July celebration we had in the community. So, I'm open to introducing lasers as part of the show. I know Fred, it cost more money.

Parks and Recreation Director: No, no, no. I hate to interrupt, but I want to make sure because there's a difference. There's laser shows and there's drone shows. Laser shows have that issue where you have to be right on. Drone is higher up. So, I don't know if you mean the same thing, or you mean just lasers no drones.

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Commissioner Menendez: Lasers.

Parks and Recreation Director: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to interrupt you and the reason that I interrupt you is because I did look at a number of YouTubes, Australia's doing it. I mean this is across the water, over the bridge laser shows. I think it was MGM that did one, if my memory serves me correctly, but I looked at a number of them. It could be choreographed where the music and the fireworks could be synchronized and done.

Commissioner Menendez: I agree with synchronized of the fireworks, that would be good.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, Mayor Thomson was one of the ones that did e-mail me applauding this that it's been long, long overdue to be researched and done.

Commissioner Menendez: She reached out to me too, sorry Dorothy.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, our esteemed staff, I think can do the necessary research about the height and the visibility of the drone shows and to bring us back information on the cost.

Commissioner Menendez: Because what we've been able to create with the band, the orchestra we have is very much like Boston has with Boston Pops, and the Boston Pops fireworks and the music that's telecast nationwide, and because of the historic significance of fireworks being part of our American tradition, you know, I think it's something we can research. I'm more than open to having a study research come back with us, but I'm going to be hesitant on breaking with the tradition from one year to the other when this tradition has been going on since 1777 and is being followed in our most historic cities around the country.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We have vessels that were wood back then and we moved forward. Okay. So, history is one thing, instead of buildings that degrade, we now can build with better materials. We can put impact windows in places. History is wonderful, but when we have technology, we can't pass it up.

Commissioner Menendez: And jokingly now, if our founding fathers would have intended for lasers, they would have had it in 1777.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I understand, and I get it. This is a resolution to explore. We have a long agenda. We've got to move. So, someone make a motion in regard to exploring the option of potentially using technology.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

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Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Commissioner Fernandez: I just had a couple of comments which I never had the opportunity.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're too slow. You've got to move it. (Laughter)

Commissioner Fernandez: On July 4th I sat there, and this came to mind...

Mayor Lago: Just wait one second. Just wait one second. Why don't we do this through the Mayor, So, when the minutes are coming out, again, they are perfectly done. You want to speak, go ahead.

Commissioner Fernandez: On the 4th of July there was an article about cities and municipalities changing to drone, specifically to drone usage. But I'll be honest with you, the one thing that sold me on not changing was watching the fireworks show. Seeing the reaction that our residents and the people that were in the crowd had watching that firework display. We also have issues with the acoustics, as I shared with you that day. I walked out to where the food trucks were, they were a lot of people sitting in that area and the sound didn't get out there, so they couldn't hear the concert. So, there's a lot to go forward with it, but I would support looking into the possibility, maybe it could be like a hybrid show where we still have some fireworks and have something else.

Parks and Recreation Director: That's what people are doing now. I will say we've done some initial research on drone shows, and its going to be a substantially higher cost, well over double what we pay now, because its depending on how many drones. There's a lot of other technical things. We just got an initial estimate, we're not really sitting down with the Sky Limits people to do it, and these are the people that are doing all the South Florida shows, so its pretty pricy. Just so you understand it's pretty pricy.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: I like the idea of both elements being together, but I would love to know how the residents feel about this. If this is something that they would like.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'd also like to hear about the health impact of the copper and so forth elements in the air. People that have breathing problems, etc. There's more to it than just the noise and we have to consider any impact upon animals and individuals.

Mayor Lago: Fred, if I may. You can come back to us when you get all this information to move forward. Can you also do me a favor and find out where drones and lasers have failed and where you end up in a situation where you neither have drones, you neither have lasers and you neither have fireworks. I didn't do the research on that, but it just came to mind right now. Something that would be catastrophic if on the 4th of July we don't have the drones, if that's the route that we're going. Anybody would like to make a motion.

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Commissioner Menendez: We have first and second.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)