

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D – Mayor’s Comments
April 26, 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
Landscape Director, Deena Bell
Assistant to the Mayor, Chelsea Granell

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Items D-1, D-2 [Start: 11:05 a.m.]

Mayor’s Comments

D-1: An update from staff on the landscape maintenance in downtown Coral Gables.
D-2: A Resolution of the City Commission amending the Mayor Lago’s Strategic Priorities Plan to include priority number nine – “Trailblazing with Technology”

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Mayor’s Comments, before we go to the 11-time certain. I’d like to start off with D-1, an update from staff on the landscape maintenance in downtown. If we can run through these as quickly as possible, so we can get to the 11 o’clock time certain would be great. Deena, thank you for being here. Ms. Bell, thank you. How are we looking in the downtown? I see progress. How are we looking?

Landscape Director Bell: We have slideshow, Billy, if you could pull that up. I’ve got some nice images. Thanks for inviting me, you know landscaper architecture month to talk about landscape architecture in downtown. Greenspace management update. Back in March, as we know, we had the public meeting, the trolley ride, where we all went through the downtown district. We drove
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from basically, Flagler all the way down Ponce, south of U.S.-1, all the way down to the Kerdyk Park area, in the south part of the Gables, and we identified with the Mayor many areas in the landscaping that were old and tired and needing refreshed. Next slide.

Commissioner Anderson: That's too small a print for someone my age.

[Laughter]

Landscape Director Bell: Well, you're not supposed to read all of this, but this was the trolley ride item. I just want to bring this up to show you that this is our internal chart identifying and organizing every little corner of the city, that we rode on that trolley ride; and this is on our desk in Public Works, and we are all working diligently to deliver on updating all these specific little spots. A lot of the specific spots include businesses and covenants. We've been working with our Code Enforcement officers on helping business owners update their landscape areas in the public right-of-way. And city staff, we are taking responsibility to upgrade our own areas in the public right-of-way to, at the same time. So, I'm not going to read through all this.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Landscape Director Bell: But you can see the list we came up with from the trolley ride. That brings me to an internal project, our own landscape architect in Public Works produced these drawings recently, to upgrade Ponce de Leon, starting on Miracle Mile, working north to Minores. The city Public Works engineers are currently working on a project for Ponce Phase 3, from Minores up to 8th Street. So, this year, the whole Ponce corridor from Miracle Mile up to 8th Street is going to be upgraded, new streetscape, all in landscaping in the medians and along the sidewalks.

Mayor Lago: And we are going to expect that this year.

Landscape Director Bell: Yes. These plans are currently, I'm working with our Procurement office right now to get them to bid. I expect in the next couple of weeks we finalize all the specifications to get them to bid. So, this is happening now as we are speaking. The design is removing all of the old and tired Fichus Green Island. You know we created a monoculture with that Fichus Green Island, and you know there are many issues with it. It collects trash and debris, and its so aggressive, it grows so fast that's its growing taller than our staff can keep it low and its hurting visibility, especially unsafe for traffic in the medians. So, we are removing the Fichus Green Island, we are coming back in with a palate of plant material that remains naturally lower than 24 inches tall without having to mechanically prune it. Its going to be safer for everyone, safer for our city staff to get in the road and maintain this plant material. Its going to bring color. It's going to be drought tolerant and relatively low care. This is monotonous, but you can see that we've put together all the specs to get this to bid. We have irrigation that's existing in these areas that we have to upgrade, because when we rip out all the Fichus Green Island, its going to bring all that drip irrigation with it, we're afraid. So, we are working on the specs for that. Again, lots of details put into this, ready to go to bid. Now, to the last part. Miracle Mile, we know is our main street. Talking about small businesses earlier, I think working with the B.I.D. and Trowbridge.

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Mayor Lago: Can we just stop for one second, I apologize.

Landscape Director Bell: Sure.

Mayor Lago: Miles, will you do me a favor, will you please have individuals sit over here. We are in the middle of presentation. I just want to make sure that we can finish this presentation so we can get onto the 11 o'clock time certain.

Landscape Director Bell: We're almost done.

Mayor Lago: No worries. Take your time.

Landscape Director Bell: Last slide.

Mayor Lago: Take your time.

Landscape Director Bell: Look at this colorful slide. We are talking about bringing vibrancy to the landscape in downtown. Miracle Mile the way its designed now, its incredible. The landscape architects that designed it, but it was more of a mixture of native plants for sustainability, and a few colorful plants turn in. And listening to the Chamber and the B.I.D. and comments from the Mayor's trolley ride, we want to bring in more color, more ornamental plants, bring some vibrancy to downtown, and freshen up all these areas. We have an irrigation repair project, we are currently working on in-house to repair a lot of the drip irrigation in Miracle Mile that's clogged, some of the areas are.

Mayor Lago: And also, some of the lighting is broken.

Landscape Director Bell: And lighting – the whole ambiance of Miracle Mile. So, I just brought this slide to let you know that color is coming, and we are also working with Keep Coral Gables Beautiful. This year we are going to implement a partnership to actually go to all the monuments and signs in the city and add color to them. We have challenges. A lot of these areas are in high traffic areas. We have cars; we have car exhaust; we have heat island effect; we have pedestrians that walk across planting beds. We have all these challenges to work through, but as the year goes on you are going to see more of this colorful aesthetic brought through the landscape.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Before you move, any further. I'd like to bring down this slide and bring up some slides from New York where I'd like to share my visit this weekend. And I was very intrigued, because as many from I have heard, New York is dirty, riddled with crime, there is homeless people everywhere. That is farthest from the truth. I was there with my two daughters, and it was a wonderful experience. There is a new Mayor, police – look at this, police are everywhere. The landscaping is all fresh, its brand new throughout all the boroughs. People are enjoying it; they are being respectful. And why are they doing this? – they are doing this because, look how clean the streets are. They are doing this because they understand that people are leaving New York. They are leaving in droves, because they are tired of the crime, they tired of the dirtiness, they tired of not putting their best foot forward. I just got tired of taking pictures. There

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were so many pictures of every corner, all the plantings. You see all different types of plantings throughout New York, ornamentals, annuals. It was beautiful. If New York City, which has millions upon millions upon millions of people living in it, on an island can do it, we can do it. I know we can. But like I've said before, in a few weeks this would be my one-year anniversary, we'll be putting forth our strategic plan. I will not rest, I will not rest if I'm here two years, or four, or six, or eight until we deliver a beautiful downtown. And I will tell you why. There are a lot of residents that are wondering why does he harp so much about the downtown? Twenty-seven (27) percent of the tax base that comes into the city come from the downtown. If you beautify the downtown, if you make the downtown cleaner, more walkable, more pedestrian-friendly, more inviting, as you can see, we are filling up with restaurants, we are filling up with businesses. We are in the very high nineties, as Belkys will tell you in regard to our census, and Zeida will also tell you where we are currently right now throughout our downtown. People want to be in the City of Coral Gables. The more that property values rise, the more money we have to spend in the residential neighborhoods, to do more parks. This is an example, and I use this picture, because obviously these are the two most special things in my life; and they were mesmerized, they were mesmerized, they love to be in the outdoors, they were mesmerized how Fifth Avenue looked and how the City of New York looked. It was something to marvel, because it was that beautiful. So, I tell you this because we took the trolley ride, you are making great efforts, staff is making great efforts. I want you to know that we support you 110 percent. I want you to hold, not only our staff, but I want you to hold our consultants accountable. If they are not accountable, its time to move on and find people who are going to clean, because when Commissioner Anderson, Commissioner Fors, Vice Mayor, Commissioner Menendez, Mark Trowbridge, members of the B.I.D. who are here, when we go and we dig into a Green Island Fichus and we find five, 5-gallon buckets full of garbage in front of the theater, goes to show you somebody is not doing their job. Its as if the five Commissioners here didn't show up for work on a Commission Day. You may get away with it once, I don't think you'll get away with it twice though, pretty sure of that, because the residents will be coming in droves saying, where are our elected officials. Why are we allowing this to happen, and I know we can change that? I know that Code Enforcement is on it. Ms. Cabrera is addressing those issues. I know that your team is addressing it and the Manager. And I continue to do this because I want you to know, we support you 110 percent and its time to crack the whip and deliver on a beautiful downtown. Because by the way, very simple, that's a reflection of who we are. If we're dirty, we are not kept up, who's going to want to do business here, who's going to want to come and open a business here. Who's going to come and want to dine here, if the sidewalks are dirty. Final point. June 30th is the deadline, six months – six months that we gave businesses to clean their sidewalks. The Manager is writing a letter, another letter, reminding businesses if they do not do that, I will be bringing to the Commission in June a program that is already been implemented by my friend, Commissioner Manolo Reyes from the City of Miami, where I will be cleaning sidewalks myself personally, buying pressure cleaners and we'll send you the bill. Someone's going to do it. I do it at my house every six months. I do it on my roof. And guess what, if you don't do it on your roof, you get cited. You don't clean your sidewalk, you get cited. If you don't clean your walls, you get cited. It is time for the business community to be accountable. Okay. So, I want to say thank you for your efforts, for that's very important. You're the best. Thank you. Moving onto the next item.

Landscape Director Bell: Thank you.
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Mayor Lago: Ms. Granell would you please join us for item D-2, A Resolution of the City Commission amending the Mayor Lago's Strategic Priorities Plan to include priority number nine, which is "Trailblazing with Technology." Before Ms. Granell takes the stage, one of the things we put together when I got elected and people thought it was a crazy idea, but I think it's a critically important idea to hold ourselves accountable. We put together a Mayor's Strategic Plan. It's never been done before. I know its ratified by the Commission. And we have a Mayor's Council, which meets on a monthly basis, to make sure that we implement the Strategic Plan, and at one year we are going to come back and Chelsea and her team, along with the Mayor's Council are going to present what we've accomplished in one year. Most people in public office will not do that. They don't want accountability. They don't want to be judged. But we are going to be judged in one year, and we are going to be judged in year two, and we are going to see what we've accomplished and what we didn't accomplish. So next month, we will be having our first update of our Strategic Plan and we will see where we're at and see where we failed. And if we failed, we are going to have to come back and readdress to see what we can do better and what we can push to deliver on certain things. So, Chelsea, the floor is yours.

Ms. Granell: Thank you Mr. Mayor. Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor and Commissioners, my name is Chelsea Granell and I'm the Chief Community Engagement and Policy Advisory to the Mayor. I'm here today on behalf of the Mayor's Council who's been working diligently to ensure the items of the Mayor's Strategic Plan are being prioritized. The Mayor's Council would like to encourage the Commission to support the recommendation to adopt the resolution amending the Mayor's Strategic Priorities Plan to include an additional priority entitled, Trailblazing with Technology. This new priority will allow for the enhancement of the city's technology infrastructure to support the current Smart initiatives in place and improve communications with the Coral Gables community.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. By the way, I want to thank our Mayor's Council which meet every month. I know we have one of our members here, Maria Cruz, and I know that Mr. Bucelo was going to join us, but I think he was in court. Thank you, Chelsea. I'd like to thank all the members who give up so much of their time to make sure that our office is a success. If anybody would be interested in supporting me in that resolution, I'll accept.

Vice Mayor Mena: I'll make the motion.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

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Mayor Lago: Two more items before we move onto the time certain. I'd like to, please if we could, and again, you have a lot of residents here showing you certain things, have a bad case of OCD. The employees know that, really bad, and its okay and I admit, I admit my OCD, but I need you to join me in this OCD to make this city better. And by the way, little things add up to big things. A little thing here, a little thing there, a little thing there, they add up to big things. I'm going to show you another little thing. Can we get the photos of the New Times news racks? So, this is something that I noticed some time ago. These haven't been cleaned. You never probably noticed that when you walk by. They are full of stickers; they are full of graffiti. Why do we allow graffiti and stickers on the New Times racks with foul language on it, but we don't allow it on our streets, excuse me, we don't allow it on our streets or on our walls? Why do they get away with it? So, thank you to the City Attorney and her team. They wrote a letter to the New Times and for the first time in, I don't know how many years, probably decades, they are taking responsibility and making sure they clean these New Times news racks. If you are going to conduct business in the city, you are going to abide by our rules. If you do not, you will not be conducting business in the City of Coral Gables. You see how it looks before and after. Does everybody here agree that this is a worthwhile effort to clean this up? Yes or no.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: If anybody disagrees, please tell me and we'll stop doing this, because I have a lot of other things to do, and so does my colleagues and so does the members of...

Vice Mayor Mena: They did it.

Mayor Lago: They did. They did it. But what I'm saying is we are holding people accountable. So, as you can see right now, these are the little things that add up to big things. I want to also show you a standpipe that we addressed. I don't know if we have that picture there. More pictures of before. It was 30, right, you have 30 of them throughout the city, Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Ramos: How many there are, I don't know. I know that Mr. Diaz actually his department was the one that sent the letter, we helped, but I don't want to take credit away.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Mr. Diaz, thank you for your hard work on this. Thank you for the commitment to getting this done, and again, you see it's a good improvement.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely. Hermes Diaz, Public Works Director. So, we originally identified about 20.

Vice Mayor Mena: All on the city right-of-way?

Public Works Director Diaz: Yes, on the Ponce area, yes. And we found a couple more that were missing that original canvassing that we did.

Mayor Lago: I sent you one next to 3 Chefs and a Chicken, which is also.

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Public Works Director Diaz: Right. So out of those original 20, 16 got done, one got removed, there's about four that needs to be retouched, just that they didn't bring it back better, but not to our satisfaction; and the two that were found, I think one was taken away. They are telling us that should be done by Friday, but we are going to keep an eye on it and make sure that it happens.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Another thing was, I sent over to the staff a pipe, we have to be cognizant, if we don't have businesses in the downtown, if there is graffiti on your pipes, stickers, all these kinds of things, its your responsibility to get this done, if not you'll be cited. Want to make sure that's on the record. Okay. Thank you for your hard work. One last item. I'll like for you to watch this video, if you could. This is an individual who I am a big fan of, and his passing was 18 years ago, and he's a person who I hold in incredible regard and I think that he is a true patriot and a true American and embodies what it is to live in the greatest country in the world, and I wanted to show you this quick two-minute video, if possible.

[Video Presentation]

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So, the word hero gets thrown around a lot to describe people, sometimes it fits, most of the time it doesn't. With Pat Tillman, it may not be a strong enough distinction. Tillman walked away from the NFL to become a soldier in the United States Army after September 11th. He died in combat in Afghanistan at the age of 27 in 2004. Everyday his legend grows bigger. Pat Tillman went to Lealand High School in San Jose, California and was a highlight machine on the football field as a Safety, Running Back and Kick Returner. He played Line Backer at Arizona State and excelled. He led the Sun Devils to the 1997 Rose Bowl in his junior season. His senior season he was named... defensive player of the year. Tillman was different. He had guts. Like all great football players do, but he also had brains, and we are not just talking about football IQ. He had a ferocious will to be the best he could be and squeezed out every drop of his talent. A marketing major in Arizona State, he graduated in three and-a-half years with a 3.84 GAP and took nothing for granted. Pat's brother Kevin joined him in the Army, and he went to Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. People have not forgotten about Pat Tillman. He was a son, he was a brother, he was a husband, teammate and friend. He once said, to be on the side of passion is human and right and the only way I'll ever live. I tailor my life a lot around Pat Tillman. We need more Pat Tillmans in this world. So, I put this before you today, when all you hear about is division and you hear about how we are different, how we can't get along, how we can't work things out, how this country is broken. Think about Pat Tillman. We celebrate 18 years of his death on April 22nd, and I wanted to put this before you because, and I've never done this before in eight years on the Commission. I think its important to celebrate an individual who is truly a gift. So, thank you. Moving on to item I-3, we are going to take a five-minute break so the Commission can go to the bathroom and then we'll listen, we have 20 speaker cards. Thank you.

Commissioner Fors: Before the break, I couldn't help but mention that I've heard the eyewitness accounts of how Pat Tillman died in combat and the manner in which he died too, under extraordinarily heroic circumstances where his actions resulted in saving a huge part of his platoon. If you have a chance to look that up, its pretty impressive as well.

Commissioner Anderson: It is.
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