

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-5
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

Assistant City Attorney, Naomi Levi-Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-5 [1:42 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Manager to pursue federal funding opportunities for septic to sewer conversion. (Sponsored by Commissioner Menendez) (Co-sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-5, Commissioner Menendez, Commissioner Fernandez.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, F-5 A Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Manager to pursue federal funding opportunities for septic to sewer conversion.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you. I was hoping to have our federal lobbyist Omar Franco on Zoom. I was in contact with Naomi. I don't know if Naomi is around, but nonetheless, we'll move forward. We've had so many discussions on the septic to sewer challenge and you made a great many points, Mayor, on the efforts and the work that we've done, especially with state grant dollars and we had a gentleman who spoke on behalf of the county. The way I look at it is a three-pronged approach. I think I'm not alone on that thought and I appreciate the colleagues that have co-

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sponsored this item; and I spoke to a federal lobbyist last week and there are a lot of opportunities even with opportunities with deadline that I think we can, I think, how do you say, focus on what the details are, the process, the paperwork that's involved, what the deadlines are. It's been brought to my attention that there are other cities in the county that have already reached out to our group in DC to get the ball rolling on pursuing earmark and other grant opportunities as well. So, there's a whole array of dollars, but it requires having somebody on the ground there to help us file the paperwork and make sure the deadlines are met. So, the purpose behind this resolution is to give direction to the administration to work directly with our federal lobbying team from Becker and Koloff and through, I think Naomi, now in the City Attorney's office, so we can start moving in that direction. I think the details will come, but I think if we don't give direction specifically to get traction there, we'll perhaps fall behind an opportunity, windows open, and windows close fast. I don't know if anybody else wants to perhaps comment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I do have a couple of comments and applaud your efforts to move this forward. I would like to add to this resolution the need also for the federal lobbyist, but also the state lobbyist to coordinate, because you do have to have the legislation in the state to be able to fully access some of these grant opportunities, whether it be from the EPA under section 319 of the Clean Water Act or other programs that HUD or the USDA offer. We do need to have legislation in the state to really be able to open up the door of these types of funding that are available right now. So, with that suggestion for a friendly amendment, for the language, I'd like to move this forward.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I agree. I think this is a very important first step. This will be a very expensive project for our city, and I think we need to start looking at every resource that's available right now. We are already, through your leadership Madam Vice Mayor, we've already started working on the master plan, so I think we've taken that first step. From what I heard from the county, they are looking for that master plan to maybe make some changes, so we may be able to be the leaders when it comes to septic to sewer conversion, and I think this is a very important first step.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor and Vice Mayor and Commissioners, as part of the study, we'd like to start get a communications program out there to really let people know what is available, what the positives are, and what the issues that are coming up with the septic tank issue, and also initiate outreach to various areas, because I think the study will give us a lot of information as to how we can proceed forward and maybe in some smaller steps, like we were looking at with Kings Bay.

Commissioner Menendez: And Naomi, I think is working her way here. I'd like if you don't mind wait a moment for her to come in so that she – we all know the work that she's done in the past.

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Mayor Lago: You want to move on or...

City Clerk Urquia: She's on Zoom.

City Attorney Suarez: She's on Zoom.

Mayor Lago: I thought she was coming here. Okay. Perfect. Naomi, how are you. I hope you are well.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Hi, good afternoon, Commission, Naomi Levi-Garcia, Assistant City Attorney. Thank you for letting me chime in. We appreciate the direction, we'll work accordingly. Just something to think about. If we do pursue some federal funds, whether its through a grant or through an earmark, we will likely have to identify a specific area that would be improved with the conversion. These funds are not typically completely open-ended, right. You need to have an area you need to show some data, you need to make the case for why it's appropriate to do a conversion in that specific location. So that's just something to think about. We'll work with staff to figure out what area we can identify, but I just wanted to provide that context to the Commission.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: If I may add. We do have some water quality data that may help us identify the areas of most critical need; and if you could get back to us with what the criteria is that we must satisfy, it may help staff with the direction that they need to move forward on.

City Manager Iglesias: If I may say Mayor, please. Vice Mayor, we're looking at the engineering study, looking at the environmental study, putting everything together, getting communications, getting outreach, and looking to see how we can what areas are the most affected and what areas, from an engineering point of view that we can do, similar to the way we're handling the undergrounding. Connecting various areas can be very difficult, so I think we need to work holistically on this and that's what we plan on doing and if the Commission is good with that, we plan on handling item F-5.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I'll entertain a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll second.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

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Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)