

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C
January 23, 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, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz**

Public Speaker(s)

**Maria Cruz
Robert Ruano
Carolina Estefan Chahine**

Agenda Item C [9:30 a.m.]
Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker today, Mr. Mayor is Maria Cruz.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Welcome back.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

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Ms. Cruz: It is Mrs. Maria Cruz. This is very hard. First of all, I would like to thank the police and the fire departments whose names I did not get, because in the middle of everything, I couldn't think of writing down names. They were absolutely magnificent, and they did everything they could do, but it was not to be. So, I wish I could get their names, maybe later on when I have a little more time perhaps, I will get their names because they were really, they got there so fast I didn't know how they got there, and you know the end result. I would also like to thank the many, many, many residents, the elected officials who reached out to me and most of them, even supported me at the viewing and the Mass, and of course, there are some of you that are glaring absences and you know who you are, because at this time anybody should have put aside their issues and be a human being and that has not happened with very few people that surprisingly couldn't do that, and I'm not talking about elected officials, because they had been absolutely great in any way, shape or form from people calling me several times a day to make sure I was okay. The last comment is going to surprise some of you, because when I was going through this very difficult times, I know, I know that some people were kind of, I'm not going to say happy, because it hurts me to say that, but there were very, I guess enjoying the moment because my husband's death was going to keep me from doing what I do for this city and much to their surprise I am doing what he would like me to do, which is to continue what I've done all along which is what I think is the best for the city. So, for those of you that are upset because I'm here today, be ready, because now I don't have to run home to check his sugar, now I don't have to run home to make sure he doesn't need me, but the city still needs me and I will be here and be warned, some people have already told me, you need to go back to the old Maria Cruz and that's what the intention is. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Robert Ruano.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Mr. Ruano: Good morning. Robert Ruano, 1544 Mercy Avenue, Coral Gables. Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts on an issue in the city that's seriously concerns me. I'm here as a 22-year resident of the City of Coral Gables, but also as a tireless advocate for cycling and pedestrian infrastructure. Thank you also to all of you that could attend the walk-through for the Alhambra sidewalks from Salvatierra to San Rafael last week. Personally, that was my sixth walk-through of the area in question, and I can say I have walked that three-block site with each elected official at least once. So that's two, two, three, one, two. After last Friday's Sunshine meeting, I have to tell you, I came away extremely disappointed. After many walks and discussion, it is obvious that the current design almost exclusively with a sidewalk along the street with a curb, a concrete curb is not the best location for a sidewalk on this street. And yet, the Mayor, and city staff are pushing to add a curb along Alhambra Circle, a historic corridor where none existed before. The Mayor's plan would completely change the character of this road and would go against accepted standards in engineering best practices. The city should immediately ask for the arborist to draft an option with all sidewalks behind the trees to see what, if any, tree impacts there would be. In all my years of working on pedestrian mobility issues, I have never ever heard of a municipality offering to put a sidewalk against a road if the adjacent resident didn't want it at their property line where a sidewalk goes, and Mr. Iglesias, you know this. Think about traffic calming for example. The city asked for

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a yes or no vote, not where it should go or how. The location is based on engineering judgment and standards. Nonetheless, here we are. Many years into discussions about approximately 820 feet of sidewalk and we're still not even, have not even asked residents officially if they want a sidewalk. As one of my neighbors asked during the meeting, don't we always design sidewalks against the property line? Thank you again for your time and patience. Please do the right thing and have the City Manager's team revise this design. And thank you, I'll reserve any remaining time for questions.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Inaudible.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry.

Mayor Lago: So, I have a rebuttal. You can sit down. I'm just going to respond to your comment that was not correct.

Mr. Ruano: Oh, okay. Well, I save time if I could make comments.

Mayor Lago: It's perfectly fine.

Mr. Ruano: Okay.

Mayor Lago: My statement is very clear, and I want to put it on the record. The same thing I said in front of all my colleagues that were there, except for one. I am not and you keep perpetuating this lie that I'm in favor of, I'm just asking like I gave you the respect to provide me with the same respect, that's all.

Mr. Ruano: You called me a liar.

Mayor Lago: It is a lie what is being said that I want curbs. I can ask Mr. Manager whose here and staff, have I ever insisted on curbs with anybody here. There is no public record. There's nothing. All I have said is very simple. I've been advocating for this project for as long as I've been here. I just want to get a sidewalk, whether it's on the curb or we're talking about the property line, whatever is requested by the professionals and is voted on by the residents, that's all I want. I want the residents to be happy and to finally say, let's put a sidewalk there so we can deliver pedestrian safety to those individuals that are there and move forward with a project that is funded and has traffic calming and is resurfacing and is going to address an issue that we have in regard to the bridge. I say it again, I continue to say it, and I said it in front of all the residents that were in the meeting and in front of my colleagues. If the residents and the professionals say it goes behind the trees, we go behind the trees. I don't have an issue with it at all, at all. I have visited the site more than a dozen times with residents, with Mr. Ruano, with staff, it is time that we deliver on a sidewalk. Just like it is time that we deliver on a sidewalk on Blue Road and people do not have to

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continue going up the bridge on the street. In one form or another, we need to deliver a sidewalk in this area. We have to stop being adversarial about the feelings of whether a sidewalk is correct or not. A sidewalk is required. It is something that's important, especially for people who are disabled, the elderly, children in this community, we need to figure out a way to finally do this and stop arguing about the location of the sidewalk or not. If the professionals say that it goes behind the trees, it goes behind the trees. If it says that it goes around the tree, like we discussed in certain areas, it goes around the tree. Let's just build consensus and move forward with that issue. Okay. Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Ruano: I'm not lying. Your two proposed plans have a curb. You said that on the record at the meeting. Those plans have a curb.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Ruano, Mr. Ruano, the arborist said in multiple different instances in the meeting that we had, my colleagues were there, in certain areas it goes around the trees, in certain areas it goes behind the trees. As a matter of fact, certain trees are even going to be cut down because they are not healthy, which will allow us to not to have a curb. It's very simple. It was there. It was on the record.

Mr. Ruano: For those areas where the trees are to be gone, you should know, they are still designing it with a curb and the sidewalk against the road. How does that make sense? – and Mayor, in 2020, you were trying to get people to support putting curbs in residential areas and that's the truth.

Mayor Lago: That is not the case, Mr. Ruano. Mr. Ruano, you know that's not the case, bottom line. There is no document saying that I want curbs.

Mr. Ruano: Inaudible.

Mayor Lago: Then show it. Show it. Again, it's very simple, you can stand up here and say all this. All I want is a sidewalk to be finally completed, that's all I want.

Mr. Ruano: Why don't you direct the administration to design an option all behind the trees along the property line.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Ruano.

Mr. Ruano: That's not one of the plans that you asked the administration, through the Manager though.

Mayor Lago: What we're trying to do, what we're trying to do very simply is, find common ground between the residents and the city, and the common ground is, how can we save as many trees as possible so that they don't have to be cut down.

Mr. Ruano: Again...

Mayor Lago: Or the roots – I’m just asking you to be respectful. There’s no need to be antagonistic with me.

Mr. Ruano: I’m not.

Mayor Lago: I’m being a gentleman like I was at the meeting, like I always am.

Mr. Ruano: Oh, you are. Yes, thank you. Thank you. I’m blessed to have you. Go ahead.

Mayor Lago: What I’m asking you is, like many of the residents who were at the meeting, they said, let’s try to save the trees. The arborist said, in certain cases the trees can be cut down, in certain cases, we have to go in front of the tree, in certain cases we have to go behind the tree, where its acceptable. We talked about many different scenarios, slopes on the sidewalks as they meet a resident’s driveway. There’s a lot of things that are in play that we’re trying to figure out now with staff to see how we can deliver the best option for the city, for the residents.

Mr. Ruano: The right option is against the property line. Why don’t you instruct the administration today to give you an option against the property line if you are so concerned.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Ruano. Mr. Ruano.

Mr. Ruano: Why don’t you do that?

Mayor Lago: Mr. Ruano, what we talked about is very simple. In certain cases, you can put it in front and in certain cases you can’t put it in the back. All I know...

Mr. Ruano: In all cases you can put it behind.

Mayor Lago: All I know and I’m happy that my colleagues were there to see how we were nothing but kind and respectful in the meeting. You were antagonistic.

Mr. Ruano: I was not sir.

Mayor Lago: Even your own neighbors told you on multiple occasions, we’re trying to have a dialogue here.

Mr. Ruano: No. One neighbor that thought that the right-of-way belonged to her and that’s what you’re perpetuating. You started this back in 2021 when you went to neighbors and said, we’re going to tell them if they don’t want a sidewalk there, they can have one against the street.

Mayor Lago: That’s not the case.

Mr. Ruano: And Mr. Diaz was there and that started it all.

Mayor Lago: That’s not the case.
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Mr. Ruano: And that's why the city has been designing with a curb.

Mayor Lago: What started it all was very simple. Again, the fact that we're trying to save as many trees that are well over 75 years old, if possible.

Mr. Ruano: How come it took them two years to do an arborist report, if they wanted to save trees?

Mayor Lago: I asked for the arborist report, it's here.

Mr. Ruano: After I was pushing for a year and-a-half.

Mayor Lago: I asked for it. I have it on record with e-mail.

Mr. Ruano: Its very simple. Ask them for a plan.

Mayor Lago: I have.

Mr. Ruano: No. You asked them for two plans that had curbs.

Mayor Lago: We're asking them for two plans so it can come before the Commission and the Commission can...

Mr. Ruano: Why don't you ask them for a third plan? I'll ask any one of you to ask them for a third plan that goes against the property line.

Commissioner Castro: City Manager, is there any possibility that we could provide a third option?

Mayor Lago: Of course. You can provide five options.

Commissioner Fernandez: Actually, a third option was requested. I requested a third option at the meeting following the Mayor's...

Mayor Lago: I welcome it.

Commissioner Fernandez: I asked for a third option which would not affect any of the older trees which is to have the sidewalk across the street where you have younger trees, you have a delineated line of where the properties are, because all the properties on the other side have a perimeter wall around their properties, and it would not affect any root structure, and I know staff has already begun working on that option because the director has already reached out to the county to see if we can have the crosswalks to implement that. So, there is a third option, it would be behind the trees, but it would be across the street where it would not affect the older trees on this side because regardless of which side, the arborist said there was going to be an impact.

Mr. Ruano: Commissioner, I would tell you, and I think that's a great third option, but you've got about twelve neighbors there. Look how long its taken with five neighbors, all of which have moved in, in the last three years; two of the five are new neighbors, in the last year and-a-half, and we still can't get consensus with five people. So, while I think that's a great idea, I think that's a great idea, I think the better option is, I think what Commissioner Castro is pushing, is an option where it should go, and I'm not against your option. I just think it's going to take forever to get consensus, because you're trying to push this concurrency issue on Alhambra when you don't really have to.

Mayor Lago: If I may address it. And I welcome that, I welcome that as a fourth option, I welcome Commissioner Castro's as a third option. We can have as many options as you'd like. I don't have an issue with it, but we're going to run into what we always run into. I'm going to have to go before the residents and we're going to have to deal with the residents, and we haven't been able to build consensus with the residents.

Mr. Ruano: All you have to say is, do you want a sidewalk, yes or no.

Mayor Lago: Listen, listen, with all due respect, let me run the meeting. Let me just finish the meeting because we have a long meeting today with a lot of items here.

Mr. Ruano: Sure.

Mayor Lago: So, we've given a lot of time to this issue.

Mr. Ruano: Sure.

Mayor Lago: So, this is very simple. If you say Mr. Hermes Diaz is the one that's in charge and that you requested, he can answer every single question, I have no issues with having him come up here, through the Manager, and they can answer all the questions, but the bottom line is this, if you put the sidewalk on the other side, you still have to cross the street, because there's no sidewalks running all the way down.

Mr. Ruano: I know that.

Mayor Lago: And that's the problem. So that's why we've been having a problem through this whole time about building consensus on the issue of sidewalks. If you build a sidewalk across the street, and people want to walk across the street, that's perfectly fine, but it defeats the purpose of having sidewalks run all the way down to the bridge, that's the point, because we already have almost 80 percent of the infrastructure on one side. Why do we have to build it on the other side.

Mr. Ruano: Right.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro. Hold on a minute, hold on a minute, hold on a minute. Please sit-down sir.

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Mr. Ruano: You want me to sit down?

Mayor Lago: Yes sir, it'd be great.

Mr. Ruano: Okay. Do you want to keep addressing me?

Mayor Lago: No, I'm good. I'm going to bring up Mr. Diaz. Mr. Diaz, may you come up please. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And Mayor when you're done, I'll follow up on a couple of points.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Mr. Diaz, we've been working on this for a few years now, we're trying to build consensus. The issue of an arborist report was brought up. How long did we have to wait for the arborist report, when was it issued. Do you remember to the best of your knowledge.

Public Works Director Diaz: It hasn't been two years, but I don't recall the exact time when we were directed by Commissioner. You know there's a difference between him wanting an arborist report, but the Commission directs us to that report, and that's what triggered. So, I really don't know at the top of my head. I don't think it's been two years.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we've been working on this thing, this project for years. The problem that we have in our city is that we've had almost a hundred years of no sidewalks in many areas, and it's very difficult to come back and retrofit sidewalks in the property line which is the normal area where you would have sidewalks. So, for instance, on University Drive, between Blue Road and Bird Road, the Public Works Department did a fantastic job on the meandering sidewalk. It's very difficult, because you've had over almost a hundred years of no sidewalks, and so you have a tremendous amount of infrastructure and so forth. So, there will be times when you either have to remove an oak or come along the street. If you provide a curb, then you meet the traffic standards, if you're close to a sidewalk. We always try to avoid the curb and meander the sidewalks as much as possible. We always try to put them on the property line, which is where the normal sidewalk belongs. However, we cannot just destroy all our canopy and so we try to do the best we can based on that. I think University Drive is really – the Public Works Department did a phenomenal job there, and we didn't have to use curb. So, we don't want to use curb.

Mayor Lago: Agreed.

City Manager Iglesias: The only issue is, do we tear down a major tree, do we tear down a specimen tree, and those are the issues we have. We have approaches, we have trees, we have landscaping, all sorts of issues that have happened almost for a hundred years, and now, we want to put sidewalks in, which are really a public mobility issue.

Mayor Lago: Can I ask you just one thing. Through the Manager, if you'd be so kind, will you please provide the Commission and copy Mr. Ruano, the dates of when the Commission requested the arborist report.

Public Works Director Diaz: Sure.

Mayor Lago: And when that arborist report was engaged and when the report was finally done and when it was provided to the Commission, so we can get the actual dates, because that seems to be a point of contention on when it was delivered. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to follow through on a couple of things. One of the key elements here is we have a bridge, a walking bridge on one side. So that is what's dictating that we need to have the sidewalk on the side where the bridge is a walk bridge for pedestrians, otherwise you have a double crosswalk situation on a very busy street. On a curved street on top of it, something historically that Miami-Dade County has not encouraged due to lack of visibility for those crosswalks. So, it remains to be seen whether or not the county is going to entertain requiring people to cross the street on one side, wait for the traffic, come back and double switch back over to get back on the other side of the street just to traverse that bridge. The other aspect of it is, and we looked carefully at every single tree there, including some of the ones that are questionable, and I know our staff is going to go out there and do some exploratory on those to determine whether or not they are worth saving. Because there's one tree in magnificent shape with a spiderweb of exceptional roots going in all directions. There is room on this street because its so wide, to give it a road diet and provide for that, but I explored with you Director, and with our city arborist, the aspect of bridging some of the roots, the expanse of the root system in this particular area is so immense, bridging it is not readily feasible. There are other areas where we can do it. We can redo the driveway for a resident who creates the proper slope. What I discussed out there is, let's provide the residents with a couple of options, maybe even three options and they can vote for which one that they prefer for their property. The meeting was fruitful because I was able to speak with some of the residents to encourage them to allow the sidewalk to be closer to their home, because some folks felt that it was more concerning to have so many people walking by your home. I live on a very busy street, people walk by all the time, and the pedestrians are not the issue. We have other issues than people walking by the front of our homes with strollers and bicycles and its much safer to have your kid there. A meandering sidewalk is something I pushed for many years ago, because we were putting these sidewalks too close to the trees, they were constantly getting busted up. It just didn't make sense to put in a straight sidewalk, and quite frankly, a meandering sidewalk is much more aesthetically pleasing, I would say, than something just constantly going straight. So, that was what I saw at this meeting. I think it was very productive. I think we need to provide these options to the residents, allow them to ballot it, just like we do on every other traffic calming projects that we have in the city, and if 51 percent of them want option A versus option B, versus option C, or D, or F, then we'll move forward and get this project done. That's what my experience has been at these meetings.

Commissioner Castro: I couldn't agree more with her, however, I think providing an option, as Mr. Ruano, an additional option wouldn't hurt. We really wouldn't be losing anything just

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providing another option. At the end of the day, we go to a vote. Whatever we vote for, residents, that's what it is.

Public Works Director Diaz: We can certainly do that.

Mayor Lago: So, let's do this. Like I said, Mr. Manager, through your lead, will you provide a third option addressing including the landscape, excuse me, the arborist report, everything, all the engineering, everything that's done, take an additional count and provide a third, which would be not having any curb, as long as we don't damage the trees. That's all I want to make sure.

City Manager Iglesias: We will take a look at that Mayor, but let me say that on Blue Road, we did take a tree down, we took a non-native Fichus, we couldn't get the sidewalk in. So, if the tree is, if it's a tree that has very little survival rate or is at the end of its life, then we would certainly look at that and we've done it before. We took a tree down, but the residents didn't realize it was a non-native Fichus on Blue Road. So, we would be happy to do that, to do that again, but we do look at all the alternatives. We do look at the meandering effect of the sidewalk, if that's something that works better, and also, we do have a pedestrian bridge on the west side, which makes it very difficult for the county to look at crosswalks going on the other side and then coming back again. Its very difficult for the county to actually approve that, because we have a pedestrian bridge; and by the way, that bridge is an old bridge, it doesn't have a sidewalk, so that sidewalk on the west side is very important. So, it's very difficult for the county to have a crosswalk going back and forth. They normally frown on that, but we can also take a look at that.

Mayor Lago: Let me ask you a question. I think we did this already; we did this exercise one time. The county was not in favor of allowing us to do a crosswalk.

Public Works Director Diaz: We forwarded the request to the county. The thing with the county and crosswalks where you have a stopping condition.

Mayor Lago: Did we get an answer. I don't remember if we got an answer or not.

Public Works Director Diaz: I don't remember if we did. We sent the request again. With the county and sidewalks is the chicken and the egg. For you to put a crosswalk, you need to show that there is pedestrian activity there, but there won't be any unless there's a sidewalk, so you end up with this almost no-man land, and it's a source of discussion between us and them, but we certainly – I believe we already did put the request to the county about that.

Mayor Lago: And in reference to what I mentioned. If you put the sidewalk on the other side, you're still missing 80 percent of infrastructure all the way down Alhambra, so it really doesn't serve a purpose, the residents still have to cross and when you get to the bridge on the other side, you've still got to cross the street anyways, because there's no pedestrian bridge on the east side.

Public Works Director Diaz: We'll need two crossings.

Mayor Lago: Two crossings.
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City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, the county is going to look at warrants for the crosswalk, the county is going to look at also, the fact that there is a circular curb there that could have potential issues. So, the county is going to take all that into consideration.

Mayor Lago: I think the consensus that we have here is simple. Let's have staff, through the Manager, work on finding an option, third option, like we talked about. Again, I don't care what option it is, either A, B, or C, let's see to put a sidewalk there to finalize the pedestrian infrastructure that's so sorely needed there, so people can cross that bridge and finally deliver on a little bit of accessibility without having to play frog around all the cars there, because as you know, when we were driving there, I don't know how many times people stopped and basically said, hey, get off the road on multiple different occasions, they said that. There's a lot of traffic in that area. When do you think we can have this third option?

Public Works Director Diaz: I'll need to go talk to Melissa. Well, we also have the one across the street.

Mayor Lago: We've got to get a response from the county.

Public Works Director Diaz: We need to get a response from the county.

Mayor Lago: On two crosswalks.

Public Works Director Diaz: The response from the county for that, we need to do a traffic study, so we don't know when the response is. As far as the rest, allow me to go back to talk to the team, the engineer, let's see how long it would take us to put the project together. There's a lot of detail that we're going to have to go through now, especially we want to get through the whole thing with the trees, so we have to get specific elevation, what root do you have, the slope that may get all the way down to the driveway, which is really the controlling issue. So, there's a little bit of work to be done to make sure that we give you the most accurate information that we can. So, allow me before I answer that question. Let me get back to my team.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll just add my two cents. The gathering of the walk-through with the community I thought was very helpful, very important. It was interesting and I agree with my colleagues. There was a difference of opinion, if you go from property owner to property owner, each one has their reasons why, they prefer one option versus the other. I'm of the opinion that, you know, if we can present viable options that later we don't have to renege on, I think that's the way to go, and if it takes a little bit more time to come up with a few concrete options, then it's worth waiting a little bit since, I think the process has been going on for a while. At the end of the day, we want to get it right. At the end of the day, you know, I think we're all in agreement. We don't want to impose on the neighbors our will. We want to hear them and then let them decide at the end of the day which option is best. So, I think it's important that we provide the best possible options and allow the residents to voice their opinion based on those viable options. So, if it's a

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“Baskin Robbins” assortment of options, so be it. If it’s two, three, four, let’s get it right, so we don’t have to reset the clock.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, there’s two different other requests on top of the A, B, C, D, if you want to add E, F, G, whatever. If you can do it underground, I’m down to doing it underground with a tunnel, whatever it is. I’ve got to be careful, because maybe Gables Insider will write an article saying that I’m proposing now a tunnel underground, so let me not say that. I’m being facetious as always. No tunnel underground. No tunnel underground. Let me take that back. I’m trying to bring a little levity to the situation. Thank you. By the way, thank your staff, wonderful job, Melissa amazing, the arborist, the additional employees that were there. I know I was only able to stay for about an hour and ten minutes and then my colleagues took over the meeting. I had to go to work, but I think people were happy, like Commissioner Menendez said and the Vice Mayor. I think people were happy about the fact that we were again, not the first time, not the second time, not the third time, they’ve been here before, like Mr. Ruano has been here, and we were able to really provide them with as much opportunity to speak about the issue, even when there wasn’t a full agreement, I think we’re going to end up somewhere, where I think people will be happy, and we just have to come to terms as a Commission that not everybody is going to be happy, and that’s something that I said before I left, that not everybody is going to be happy, but at the end of the day we are going to have a beautiful sidewalk, whatever that may be.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think there was participation from all the homes involved, which was good. We heard what the concerns each one of them had, which were completely different. So, I think for us, it was very beneficial to be out there and listen to their concerns as well.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you and your team for taking the time to draft up this third option.

Public Works Director Diaz: Okay. Not a problem. Thank you all.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Carolina Estefan.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: My name is Carolina Estefan Chahine and I’m appearing before you as a concerned resident of Coral Gables to bring attention to a matter of critical importance to our community. The unpaved portion of Old Cutler Road approaching 57th Avenue southbound, is in complete disrepair and poses a hazard to all who use it. Old Cutler is a one land road, except for the last few feet before that intersection. That has created overwhelming traffic congestion during morning and evening rush hours. There are several schools serviced by Old Cutler Road, so there are police there every weekday, trying to help with the congestion, but it is not enough. When Old Cutler Road backs up, cars try to escape the standstill by turning right and using alternative routes, as you can see in the video shown next to me. However, the right turn lane does not extend far
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back enough to accommodate the need, so cars use the swale. In so doing, the condition of the swale has become full of massive potholes and exposed equipment. The current condition of the area poses a hazard to all and critically to the Fire Station located directly adjacent, Coral Gables Fire Station Number 3. God forbid the fire truck gets damaged during an emergency. There have already been cars with flat tires stuck there and on the left side of that intersection, there was a beautiful Coral Gables entrance marker that was destroyed by a vehicle. Unfortunately, relandscaping the area would only help temporarily. A more permanent solution would be to amplify Old Cutler Road lanes, specifically leading up to the point of intersection with Red Road. Extending the right lane so that it would start further back on Old Cutler Road and paving the deteriorated area would better serve our community. This approach would enhance traffic flow, reduce congestion, and improve overall safety at this critical junction. I would also like to thank Mayor Lago for caring about this issue and raising it as an item for discussion today. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Mayor Lago: If I may. First off, this is the first time that I think you and I meet, and I want to say thank you for addressing me on social media, that was very nice of you, bringing this to our attention. I also had a gentleman by the name of, which I want to mention on my handwritten note back, he doesn't live in the city, but his name is Jeffrey Glazer, and he wrote me a letter, I think he wrote some of my colleagues a letter. We responded. The same issue. He's a dentist who happens to traverse Old Cutler every single day in one form or another. So, this is an item that's on the agenda today, F-3, but allowing my colleagues who are discussing other issues on Old Cutler, for example, the tree canopy which the county controls, bike lanes, and different other things. Our hands are tied on Old Cutler. We have a Commissioner named Raquel Regalado who is doing a great job. She's always very vocal and we're blessed to have her serving in the county. She's coming here at 3 o'clock and she's going to address the three items. I have an item, the Vice Mayor, and Commissioner Fernandez have an item on the agenda that deal with different issues, but again, they are inter-related as a result of Old Cutler. My issue is potholes, but it's also the tree canopy, which the Manager will tell you and our City Attorney will tell you, we've had individuals driving down Old Cutler and a tree limb falls and smashes a windshield. I've dealt with three of those in eleven years here, and it's always the back and forth in regard to who pays for it, how do we get this person made whole. The issues with the bike lanes have always been a problem there.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: Yes.

Mayor Lago: They've done some work, its gotten better, but we still need to address it. But the quality is an issue and you're going to be hearing pretty soon that they have some plans for Old Cutler in regard to repaving and I don't want to steal the Commissioner's thunder at 3 o'clock, but what I will do, through the Clerk, Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: I want to share her video and I have another video that I sent from another resident on Instagram that he sent me of big potholes and different things that are happening there, along with the letter from Mr. Glazer when Commissioner Regalado comes at 3 o'clock. I sent them to her staff already, but I want to share on the record, and I'd like to see, if possible, once we're done
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with the Commissioner in that meeting and everyone's voiced their opinions in regard to the issues of concern on Old Cutler, we send the video to this resident, please.

City Clerk Urquia: Will do.

Mayor Lago: So that she knows that we care, because I don't expect you to wait here till 3 o'clock on a time certain item.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: Thank you. I also wanted to mention that it creates, because it's unpaved and unlandscaped, there is dust everywhere and it's unbearable. I really am concerned about the safety of residents in need of emergency services by the Fire Department there, and also, just the procedure of Coral Gables. I know its controlled by the county, but if you turn into Old Cutler from 57th, we had a marker there that got destroyed, there should be kind of something significant there demarking the fact that you are entering Coral Gables, The City Beautiful, and the condition that its in does not represent our city.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, taking that into account, can we potentially work on something with a little bit of landscaping and maybe a marker to replace in that area.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor. There was a marker, and it was destroyed, it was hit by a car, we've reimbursed. Public Works Department is...

Mayor Lago: But can we present it at the next Commission meeting?

Unknown Speaker: Inaudible – off mic.

Mayor Lago: I know but maybe we can do something a little nicer, which won't cost that much – a little bit of landscaping, something that just enhances it mildly. Let's not just return it to, unless it was historic, but if it's not historic, okay, let's do something a little nicer. Maybe we can add something that will enhance the beauty of it with some landscaping on the left and right side.

City Manager Iglesias: We can certainly do that, Mayor, and bring it to the next Commission meeting.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: I don't know what the plans for Ms. Regalado is going to present, but I'm also part of the Landscape Beautification Board of Coral Gables and rather than – I have written directly to county, Mr. Yanis, that I haven't received any results of their traffic study at all. I've requested several times, emails, three emails, but it seems to me that a more permanent solution would be working on the paving of that road or extending it, widening it, whatever has to happen, because whatever landscape we put there, especially on the right side, its approaching 57th, is just going to get destroyed again. So, something very comprehensive. I know that Ms. Regalado has worked or has been successful in expanding Old Cutler further south through 67th and all that. I don't know, but I feel like for Coral Gables we really were left behind by the county in regard to
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Old Cutler and as a point about the bike situation, because it is a one lane road, everybody knows, there's just no way to get around a bike on Old Cutler, and it's truly unsafe for bicyclists and for drivers.

Mayor Lago: So, the goal is to have a conversation, a productive conversation that addresses multiple topics that are being brought forward by the Commission, and she's always willing and able and interested in helping us. She's going to put her best foot forward, I know that, but I'll get you the presentation at 3 o'clock, whatever comes out of it, I'll have it sent to you by our Clerk. Madam Vice Mayor, you had a few questions.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes. Just so you know that each member of the Commission here has been pushing things forward, even when I was out of town, I was forwarding, this even goes back a year, I'm a bicyclist, I've ridden down there. I know how incredibly dangerous the bike path is on that street area there and there is no place to ride, there's no place for you to drive, the potholes.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: You can't pass at all on Old Cutler.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I know. It's incredibly dangerous, but I purposely rode it so I could see the conditions of the side of the road and the most recent email that we received was from a doctor that had fallen and prior to that there was another individual. There was a medical doctor that had brought forth a very similar video that you had that we need this right hand turn lane desperately there. It is the county's responsibility. We just can't go in there and start repaving their street. We don't know what infrastructure they planned, have in there, do they need to replace a pipe, or whatever, but this is a critical safety need and it's been going on for a long time.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: There's exposed equipment there and a fire hydrant and all kinds of things there.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Its dangerous. I get that and that's why you know, I along with the rest of my colleagues, and I also called her office and said, please, please come here today, because we need answers.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: Thank you so much.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I just want you to know that we're all on it.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: I didn't know that you were working on it, and I really appreciate that, because I had written to county long ago, over a year ago.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You have a complete chorus here.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: That's great. That's wonderful.

Vice Mayor Anderson: They get it from surround-sound; they got it from me, they got it from Mr. Fernandez, so you did a lot of good coming here and reaching out to us, because then its not just
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your voice, its our voice as well reaching out to the county to say hey, this is critically important, this is a critical issue.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: The Traffic Transportation Board, I mean the Transportation Advisory Board for Coral Gables also wrote them a letter and sent the letter. So, I don't know if they've received any reply from county.

Mayor Lago: So, what I'll do is, when the Commissioner is here, I'll request both the traffic study that you mentioned, along with the letter to see how we can, hopefully maybe you can send me copies.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: Yes, I have a copy right here.

Mayor Lago: If you could leave it with the Clerk.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: We'll make sure that we request it, and we give it to the Commissioner so that she can address it with the county staff. Thank you for being here.

Commissioner Fernandez: And then to your point on the safety. This conversation has come up with the Fire Chief regarding response time down the further south communities during traffic, rush hour traffic, and the Fire Department is constantly looking for ways to mobilize down south and make sure that they have a prompt response time, so that is something that they're constantly working on that we will also be breaking ground next week, I think, on our new Fire Station. So once that comes online that will also help. So, we are taking measures to address that as well.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. The Fire Station we've been working on for five years and finally its funded and the groundbreaking is next week, right.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: And also, I have multiple videos.

Mayor Lago: Send them to us.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: And I also have a video showing how you can be at a standstill for many minutes, backed up into the street, that a fire truck cannot get past, because it's so narrow.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Ms. Estefan Chahine: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

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