

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
February 11, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item G-1 [10:56 a.m.]

An update by the Coral Gables Police Chief on the strategies used to enforce the City's 25 MPH speed limit on residential streets.
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Now, we have Commissioner Lago's item, G-1, Coral Gables Police Chief on strategies to enforce our 25 mile an hour limit on residential streets.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mayor. I put this on the agenda today, as we've had multiple discussions about, you know, items that we have placed as legislation and it's been approved into law. And what I want to make sure is that this is obviously being effective and this tool actually makes sense. I don't want it just to be passing legislation that again has no teeth and then doesn't bear any fruit. So, I wanted the Chief to come up and talk a little bit about the 25 mile an hour legislation, how effective it's been and how that's playing hand in hand with another one of the pieces of legislation that I worked on very hard and I appreciate that the Commission supported, was the issue of traffic calming initiatives and the MOU that we passed with the County. So, can you give us a little bit of background in regards to the 25 miles an hour and what we're doing to enforce that?

Police Chief Hudak: Yes, sir. Well, Commissioners...

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Police Chief Hudak: Thank you again. You know, part of our job in the Police Department is, obviously, mitigation through enforcement. And working with Public Works throughout and some of the initiatives that have come from this dais, I believe we're being successful in our patrolling the passing of vehicles that come through our City limits every day. I've said this many times; this is a pass-through oasis. Challenges that were not on the books when I first started some 30-plus years ago...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: There were no cars then.

Police Chief Hudak: There were no cars then. That's why I brought the horses back. Was the Waze app. And you know, I've used it myself, not in our city, where people don't know what streets they're on, where they're at, what they're driving by. They're listening to a voice on their car -- in their cars telling them, take a right here, take a left there. And that changes every day depending on what the Waze app sees or other apps see if there is a wreck or a crash. This morning,

826, there was an accident; 874 was already that the computer was diverting people down into the South Miami area, which eventually put them through our city going north on US-1. So, we will see an automatic increase. I believe the comprehensive, collective thinking that we're doing in regards to the 25 mile an hour speed zone -- zones has worked. We have seen a reduction and we've done it several different ways. After going through this will's -- the Commission's will of managing the posting that we legally had to do as well as not over signing these neighborhoods, I think we've been able to accomplish that and we added a layer of signage that does not impede what the Commission wants as far as our sign pollution throughout the City. That being said, there's, several things that we did during the 25 mile an hour change. We did an operation we called "Operation Slowdown" from April 2018 to November 2018. Again, as the ordinance was written, we were not writing tickets. As soon as it went down, we went through a three-month educational process. We used our message boards deployment, the Shield 12 units, which is -- which also records data and gives us input. Whether the sign -- the speed is showing or not, it still collects data. We used that 131 times throughout 2018 and '19 in different areas. We receive a lot of issues as far as speed in neighborhoods from a lot of different ways. So, we get direct telephone inquiries, email requests, GovQA, requests that come through my office and also through the City Commission and your websites, as well as the City website through our PIO offices. The final installation of our 25 mile an hour signs were completed in June of 2018. The "Operation Slowdown," which was our operational plan that we put out, kind of did a comprehensive look of everything else that we did and kind of enforce -- and had our officers go out starting in May of 2017, when we first were tasked to do this. It took us about a year or so to get to where those signs were up. They were approved and we started the enforcement areas from the first one that we put in on Southwest 8th Street. And when we opened that up -- or I should say unveiled it throughout. We still continue to get issues of speed in those areas. However, what our data shows, more importantly from that, is that our speed has been reduced because of the 25 mile an hour. Based on the data that we've written of the hundred-plus tickets, specifically where the speed limit was 25 miles an hour in residential areas, we saw an average -- excuse me one second so I can quote the data of the -- from January 1, 2019 to today -- or yesterday, I should say -- of the tickets that we wrote, the average speed of the violators -- so this is where an officer actually did -- was down

to an average speed of 36 miles an hour in a 25 mile an hour school -- in a 25 mile an hour posted area. These were both tickets and warnings that were written in this time period. They were in different areas of residential neighborhoods. Nervia, South Greenway, Orduna, Blue Road, Blue and San Amaro, Maggiore, just to name a few, Arvida Parkway and some of those areas, Certosa, Madrid and Messina and other parts north of that. The other part that we have in this comprehensive plan is because of this Commission's action, we have three part-time neighborhood traffic officers that work the morning rush hours coming to the east. We have two officers that we've brought back in the afternoon to handle the westbound traffic. The next budget cycle, as discussed in our last budget workshops from last year -- because we'll be asking for an additional part-time officer so we have three in the afternoon and three in the morning. I believe it's successful in a few different parts because we know that the rate of injuries or the type of injuries at 25 miles an hour versus the 30 mile an hour that was posted, does significantly reduce the severity of the injuries when people are involved in accidents. We have seen that. You know, the other thing that kind of went along with this that didn't have anything to do with us was then the state of Florida reduced the speed limit on Bird Road to 35 miles an hour. I'm going to be very honest with you. I can put every cop I have on Bird Road all day long and we will continue to write tickets because people just don't slow down. As soon as it -- the traffic pattern goes, they get frustrated and they take off and we write -- we continue to write those tickets on Bird Road, both day and afternoon. So, overall, I think the comprehensive plan is working. I think the 25 mile an hour speed zone is something that was needed. I think it is needed. Again, a majority of our data that we show through the Shield 12 is it is not necessarily a speed issue. It is more of a volume issue that the neighbors -- and rightfully so, I understand that -- complain about. As we continue to partner with Public Works, with what traffic calming devices there are, you know, we will continue to change our enforcement efforts. In other words, if we put a traffic calming circle in and people are spinning around the circle, the complaints to us are just different. It's not people speeding. It's people not yielding the right-of-way. You know, we know we have talked with our public relations arm, our Communications Section, about just trying to put out how to navigate a circle. Quite frankly...

Commissioner Keon: For two years.

Police Chief Hudak: Two years.

Commissioner Keon: For two years we've been talking about that.

Police Chief Hudak: We've been trying to get that done.

Commissioner Keon: And they haven't done it yet.

Police Chief Hudak: The problem -- and I'll tell you, the problem we're having is we have so many little different variations of circles that everything is different. The question is why is there a stop sign at some circles and a yield sign at others. So, that -- there's a lot of different ways. So, having that video come out where we say, you know, you have to yield to what is in the circle. Listen, the only way to correct some bad drivers is to write tickets. The oldest person we wrote a ticket to was 77 years old. Obviously, the youngest is 18 years old. So, in looking at, you know, the data that we've seen and just pulling the tickets for 25 miles an hour, I'm encouraged because the speed limit that we're getting the violators on average is 36 miles an hour over the -- I'm sorry, 36 miles an hour average speed. The highest in that neighborhood I believe was 60 miles an hour and that was in off hours, and that's -- that almost rises to the level of a criminal citation. So, we are out there. I wish I could put a cop on every street corner. We can't, but I think collectively with our working with Waze, working with IT to make sure that Waze knows -- and we've talked about this as recently as last week about making sure that the Waze people knowing that, that our residential speed limit is that, 25 miles an hour, unless otherwise posted. We're getting that message out. We talked about signage. You know, and people used to use Pinecrest as, you know, an example. You know, Pinecrest signs illuminate at night. And if you're driving down a dark Pinecrest street, you see the signs and they stick out. That's not something that was decided. That's something we didn't want in Coral Gables, and I get it, but it does raise your attention. I submit to you that, you know, looking at my officers going to court and what they're writing is, it's working,

it continues to work. You know, it's kind of like the red-light cameras and the other traffic program. It may not necessarily reduce the number of accidents, but it does definitely reduce the severity of accidents.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Chief.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I looked at, you know, for...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Maria Cruz wants to speak.

Vice Mayor Lago: Just two comments really quickly before we get on to Ms. Cruz. Thank you, first off, for your presentation. I did look at -- and I appreciate you sending me the information in regard -- and I asked you to please send it to my colleagues on the Commission. I think they'd find it interesting, the red-light cameras because I was approached by people who viewed red-light cameras as an invasion of privacy as, you know, overreach by the government. But it was interesting to see that it has a significant impact in fatalities. Obviously, it increases rear ends because people are slamming the brakes. But it does have a function and the financial windfall is not that great. It's just another tool that makes people aware that when they're driving through the City to make a decision to be a little bit more cautious and careful. My only question to you is after listening to your recap of the 25 miles an hour, and I appreciate it, is I want to make sure that you and your team have all the resources necessary. I know that we're adding into next -- in next year's budget, we have more additional retired or off-duty officers coming in to help us in the morning or in the afternoons. I see them all the time on Coral Way. I see them on Alhambra. That just happens to be my route in the morning to work or to City Hall. I imagine they're in other areas of the city writing tickets for a lot of people who are coming into the City. I want to make sure that if you need any resources, now's the time to tell us. You have a few months before we start having further along discussions in regards to the budget. I want to make sure that we have everything in place because we all get a lot of calls in regards to enforcement, enforcement,

enforcement. I know we can't have a police officer at every entrance to the City, but I want to make sure you have everything you need to just continue to chip away at this behavior.

Police Chief Hudak: And I -- Commissioner, I appreciate that. And I think, you know, the Manager and I have had conversations as recently as last week about, you know, what's our strategic plan from the Police Department as we continue to grow vertically and bring in more people, you know, bike -- the use of bike patrol, having a secondary motor unit, things like that. You know, that is in part and parcel to our hiring as well. You know, we're at 11 right now. We have -- we're looking at five people in the Academy. We have another seven. We're slated at targeting seven to take care of that by next month in that Academy class. We have modified our hiring process to get to those people because it is a competition. That being said, you know, our resources, you know, the patrolling is guaranteed. That was a decision from this body years ago that this is what our minimum staffing is to be, and that's always the same. You know, coming out of the Super Bowl, we never were down below. The ability to do the specialized traffic enforcement is the next list of the priority of as we have bodies in those positions, then we would look at that. We have been very upfront with the Manager and I think the Administration with you all about this is what we need. You know, we do have a higher officer per resident ratio than most places in the country, and I believe that's what you all and the people that we serve want. We're going to continue to do that. As we continue to do innovative ways and using technology, we're going to continue to drive it down. Interesting fact on the red-light cameras: We have a 2 percent -- on average, 2 percent recidivism rate of somebody that gets one of those tickets first and gets another one. And a majority of our tickets -- and I don't have the exact percentages in front of me -- are not people that live in Coral Gables. It's people that pass through. You know, I believe in the technology. I don't think it -- you know, it's still -- and the way we do it, it still is issued by one of our employees, so it is not just a cash grab. But it does -- you know, the US-1, we've seen it. We manage over 700,000 cars Monday through Friday.

Vice Mayor Lago: Chief, do me a favor. Send my colleagues on the Commission that information...

Police Chief Hudak: I will.

Vice Mayor Lago: So they can see the stats because it's...

Police Chief Hudak: We'll send that data to you.

Vice Mayor Lago: It's pretty interesting.

Police Chief Hudak: But to your point and just cause I know it's close to your neighborhood and it's something that jumped out at me, in a two-week period on Campo Sano Drive, 24,000 cars, in a two-week period. That is the flow issue that we're talking about. We don't see the speed except for those one or two outliers. Most of the streets that we have are in that 85percent percentile of speed. So, we see the big ones. And I'm not saying that those aren't egregious and we get there - - you know, when we get them, we can. And I think there's a good communication with the residents of those streets to try and get us to -- and we respond quite well. And we will use the resources. It's not just traffic. Midnight officers, afternoon shift officers, our part-time traffic officers or -- we understand that getting people through our City safely is our -- one of our primary goals in the Police Department.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Chief.

Commissioner Mena: What were the...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Mena: What were the two outliers on speed that you mentioned?

Police Chief Hudak: Well, the -- you know, you -- what skews the numbers as you make it -- like in this -- of the 180 or so tickets that we wrote, you had one person at 50 miles an hour in a 25 mile an hour zone. You know, so you will get some of those...

Commissioner Mena: Those are instances that were outliers, not...

Police Chief Hudak: The -- yeah, the instances.

Commissioner Mena: Locations.

Police Chief Hudak: The 85th percentile is about 35, 36 miles an hour. So, what we do is when we put those Shield 12s out, we look at that data, even if the sign -- so some people think that we're -- you know, just because the lights aren't flashing, we're not recording everything. We're recording everything and some of the trailers record the tags, but we're recording the speed, the direction, the time of day so now we know where to better put our officers at that time.

Commissioner Mena: Do you share your data with Public Works just to make...

Police Chief Hudak: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Sure that...

Police Chief Hudak: We -- not only do we do it for them, if they have something different -- and this is the collaborative effort -- if they have a complaint of something that I don't necessarily get or our department doesn't get, they can ask us "We need a Shield 12 put here to get this data." We then take that data, and again, you know, we have gone as far as to take people out with speed guns and people think they're speeding. Part of your training to be a radar certified officer is you have to first visually estimate how fast that car is going and then confirm it with the radar device. We just don't blindly look at the radar device, so it has to be moving at a higher clip or something.

Officers are trained to do that. Other people think that person's going 50 miles an hour; they're going 30 miles an hour, five minutes -- you know, five miles over, so...

City Manager Iglesias: I think, Commissioner, what the Chief is talking about is when you have -
- when you're collecting data and you have 5,000 cars, there's going to be some...

Commissioner Mena: Right.

City Manager Iglesias: Speeding. You can't have zero, but there is no -- technically, there's no speeding except for those outliers that you have when you're collecting data at that magnitude. Another issue is that even if you go 25 miles an hour, you're going by a normal 50-foot lot in just over a second, which means that the perception of speed is -- when you're standing is very difficult. And so, you have a 50-foot lot, you say a thousand one and a fraction and you've gone through that lot. So, the perception is speeding when it's really volume.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Ms. Cruz would like to say something. Thank you, Chief, very informative.

Maria Cruz: This is a good day in Coral Gables. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Well, thank you for discussing the 25 mile an hour speed limit. Thank you for bringing up the calming devices. We have a little piece of the puzzle missing. Not long ago we were discussing Alhambra -- the Alhambra corridor. And our employees were very nicely discussing calming devices, such as narrowing streets and such and such, circles, et cetera. But we need to address speed limit on Alhambra Circle. And you know how involved I was with that. And most of the people that live on Alhambra or near Alhambra Circle find it interesting that the streets that feed into Alhambra Circle are 25, but Alhambra Circle is 30. So, when people are trying to come into Alhambra Circle, they have to fight the people that are speeding down the street. And I know what the possible answer will be because I've been here for a while. Alhambra Circle is a collector street. Well, some of the stuff that we were shown before were not ready for collector streets, they were working

out. So, why can't we get somebody working out with Metro or whatever it takes to make Alhambra Circle in the middle of a residential neighborhood, to be also 25? That will solve that issue, if we could get all that area 25.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Ms. Cruz: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Maria.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.