

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
October 22, 2019
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
Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz**

Public Speaker(s)

Debbie Swain

Agenda Item G-2 [10:58 a.m.]

A discussion regarding dredging in the Coral Gables waterway and water quality testing using tracers.

(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Coral Gables...

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Waterway. Thank you. I wanted to have Hermes come up. This is just a simple discussion.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Should this not be addressed with management before it comes before us?

Vice Mayor Lago: Oh, no. This is just a simple question to see if you -- just to bring up -- to talk about waterway dredging and to talk about the issue that, you know -- we had a long conversation and one of the conversations that I had was with Carlos de la Cruz from the Everglades Foundation about what the new big concern is, which is septic tank and sewer conversion. And one of the things that he brought up, which is very interesting also, that Doug Yoder brought up at the Waterway Advisory Board, was that they have a feeling that there could be a bigger issue and that is the fact that the water runoff and could that be affecting the -- really the health of the bay. And one of their concerns was very interesting. So, can you imagine we spent billions of dollars, you know, migrating from septic tanks to sewer and the issue is not addressed. So, I know that Ms. Swain is here and she has a pretty significant knowledge of waterways and dredging and all kinds of things that deal with the Waterway Advisory Board. But I want to talk about a little bit -- I know the last time we did dredging, the dredging was -- it was federally funded, correct?

Public Works Director Diaz: In 2011...

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Public Works Director Diaz: It was a small section north of Blue Road.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, yes, we did do that dredging.

Vice Mayor Lago: And we've heard from several residents that are saying they're having some issues, especially around the canals -- around the, excuse me, the bridges.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Vice Mayor Lago: Where they're seeing a sediment increase. And I just wanted to see what our plan was for the near future to address some of these concerns.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, at the request of the Commission, we hired a consultant and we're in the process of doing -- finalizing a dredging study. We have some information already. The study hasn't been finalized. There's some data that we're missing. But they did find we have approximately 5.7 miles of waterway, including the (INAUDIBLE) Canal and Tributary Canal. We found that it's an average of six feet of sediment along the waterway, and at its worst, it's slightly above nine feet of sediment. Some information that we're still lacking is under the bridges and they're gathering that information right now. And then after that, they're going to rank different segments in priority. And then after that, we'll have to appraise it and move forward. We have a very preliminary estimate for dredging the entire canal. It's somewhere in the vicinity of \$55 million. But that number could vary significantly depending on the composition of the material that is being dredged, and then also accessibility, where are we getting the material in and out.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: How much?

Public Works Director Diaz: \$55 million, but it is a very early preliminary estimate. That'll be for the entire canal.

Debbie Swain: Commissioners, Debbie Swain, vice president of Milian Swain & Associates, one of your consulting engineers, and also, a Coral Gables resident, of course. The last time the large-scale dredging was done, it was completed in 2011. And it was a cost of just under \$5 million.

That included the engineering, the surveying, the environmental permitting, and also, the construction. About 33,000 cubic yards of material was removed by the contractor. It was dewatered on site and then taken to the -- solid materials were taken to a landfill. It really focused on the bridges on the navigable part of the -- commonly navigable part of the waterway. That's where most of the buildup of sediments had taken place. And the purpose of that project was to increase the capacity of the canal. And the dredging took the materials down to the original design depth. And of course, testing was done on the materials to make sure that there was no contaminants.

Public Works Director Diaz: And also, the -- I'm sorry, I let my train of thought for a minute.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Of course.

Public Works Director Diaz: We do -- we're aware of certain areas that there's an issue with boaters. So, we actually get applied for grants. We applied for a larger grant for the entire amount, and then we also applied for a smaller grant where we might be able to hit, if we do get it, some smaller critical areas subject to City matching funds.

Vice Mayor Lago: And the final point that I wanted just to mentioned and see if staff agreed on entertaining this. I know that Mr. Yoder who is obviously probably the eminent individual in this community when you talk about water quality, who's also a Coral Gables resident and gives up a lot of his time to sit on that board, along with your husband, one of the issues that they were mentioning, which is great, which deals with water quality testing and I'm happy at the City's doing that. But I think something that we need to do that other cities are starting to do is using tracers to find out where that actual contaminant, if there is contaminant or additional phosphorus or additional nitrate, where it's coming from. So, you can say, okay, listen, this is coming directly from the following golf course or this is coming directly from the following property, which is over irrigating or is over -- or is not taking care of their catch basins in the appropriate way or from a construction site.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, the water quality that we're currently engaging in, where we're working with FIU and a number of other...

Vice Mayor Lago: Waterkeepers.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct. The multiple people involved with that, they should be able to tell us critical areas that are problematic. And recently it was brought to our attention this Dr. Helena -- her last name, it doesn't -- she did something for Fort Lauderdale a few years ago, and apparently, she's working now where the City of Key Biscayne, so we're actually inquiring -- trying to get more information from her to see if she's getting any additional information that maybe we're not getting from -- is there any overlap, something we could use. So, we're looking to that as well.

Vice Mayor Lago: Just do me a favor, if you can. Because when I spoke to the individuals on the Waterway Advisory Board, they were the ones that brought this up to me. So, if they're aware that this could be a potential benefit so that we know we can hold people accountable. That's the whole point of this, right? I mean, yeah, you find out...

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Lago: You find out that water has too many phosphorus or nitrates, but if you can't tell me where it's coming from, then it's a problem.

Public Works Director Diaz: Right.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, the whole point is just, you know, get back to me and see and just tell me about if tracers are an option. And if -- what other cities are using it and if it makes financial sense, and to see if we can potentially entertain including it in our next budget cycle.

Public Works Director Diaz: And one of the biggest things I wanted to check -- and our water quality study should be able to tell us that -- is how much of whatever issues we're having is coming from the gate, 57th Avenue, beyond our limits or how much is coming from the actual city.

Vice Mayor Lago: But that's important because when we have that information...

Public Works Director Diaz: Right.

Vice Mayor Lago: Because we can start tracing from that point on, we can go to the County and say, listen, your contaminants further south or further north are resulting in...

Public Works Director Diaz: That would be South Florida Water Management District, but yes.

Vice Mayor Lago: Whoever it may be.

Public Works Director Diaz: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: South Florida Water Management.

Public Works Director Diaz: No, and that -- we are working on that with the water quality that we're in the process of procuring, so...

Vice Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Public Works Director Diaz: Alright.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you for your hard work.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Could I ask a question?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. Mrs. Swain, when you did the testing on the material that was dredged, what -- there were no contaminants in it? Apparently, if it went to the landfill.

Ms. Swain: There were...

Commissioner Keon: What'd you find?

Ms. Swain: Some contaminants, but it was not above a level that was of concern.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Swain: And so we were able to go ahead and landfill it. Otherwise, we would not have been able to.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, right. No, I don't think that generally what we have in our waterways -- because they're not working waterways and they're not subject to the kind of traffic and use that -- like the Miami River and those different commercial waterways are.

Ms. Swain: Correct.

Commissioner Keon: We have yard stuff mostly. Is that what you find?

Ms. Swain: Yes. That's what we found.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. We also have to be careful though on our intrusion into our residents' lives. And the ideal is the enemy of the good, I think, sometimes, and we have to be careful with that.