

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-5
December 5, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-5 [12:30:40 p.m.]

Discussion regarding bulk trash pick-up and reviewing potential alternatives to trash pits.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Discussion regarding bulk trash pick-up and reviewing potential alternatives to trash pits.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you Mayor. I want to make this as brief as possible. What I wanted to get out of this and maybe I just want to make sure Commissioner Quesada and I know that he was a proponent of this before and he had several discussions about this. I'd like to see if we as a Commission can either empower staff to come back with some sort of action plan to see if there is any appetite to basically looking at the way that we handle bulk trash pick-up. There are multiple different opportunities to be much better than we are right now. I think right now what we are doing is obsolete, I don't think it's environmentally friendly, and I think it's, in my opinion, not representative of what Coral Gables stands for, we are the City Beautiful. You drive around the City and you see the day before bulk pick-up or two days before you see garbage

thrown throughout the City, it's just not representational of what the City of Coral Gables stands for. So I wanted to see if my colleagues wanted to kind of explore this option. I don't have an answer, I wish I did. I received a lot of phone calls and e-mails of people that say, get rid of them, get rid of the trash pits, let's find an alternative solution like other cities are doing where you can call in and have a bulk pick-up once a month, twice a month, three times, weekly, I don't know how exactly it will work. But then you have certain people who are adamantly opposed to you even touching their bulk pick-up. So I think it's not a simple discussion that we can have on the dais, I think that we need to have staff maybe speak to a consultant, really come back with a plan of action of an opportunity to address this issue, or we could just leave it the way it is. If you think that it's having giant moon-size craters in your front yard that again don't serve the City in the best light, in my opinion.

Commissioner Mena: I think we should absolutely look at what the alternatives are, but I think that's what's going to drive the conversation is what's the actual alternative and how practical or logistically challenging it's going to be to execute. If there is another system that we can make work then we should absolutely explore that.

Commissioner Lago: I'll give you my system which is real simple. I spoke to my neighbors; I'm getting rid of my trash pit on the swale. I'm done.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: But be very, very careful with this. Every time that this comes up there is an enormous amount of opposition, discussion, whatever, and this has to be considered. I am in favor of leaving things as they are for the moment, but if you want to bring it up that's fine.

Vice Mayor Keon: I would like to start with training our drivers not to create pits. I truly believe that we have the ability to train people to not make pits, because there are other places that have a pick-up trash in the same manner with those same types of, what do you call those?- trash pit picker-uppers, whatever that means.

Commissioner Mena: Claws.

Vice Mayor Keon: Claws, whatever it is and they are not doing pits. So I think that to some extent it is a training issue for our drivers. I think that they are rewarded for picking up trash very quickly, so there is not a lot of incentive...I just think that – I really would like to give them the opportunity to train some of these drivers and see if you can pick up trash without making a hole. I do agree with you about having stuff out on the swales, other than yard debris, because I don't know that everyone can get their yard people to come the day before their trash pick-up day. So the grass and the cuttings I don't find so objectionable, and I think that we can train them to pick up that trash without making a pit. The other stuff I do find, I really do find buckets and paint

cans and your kitchen chair and all of that stuff out on the swale at any time, I don't like it. So I think at some point we can move toward just allowing the vegetation and then requiring people to call for a bulk pick-up for the other stuff; and the other thing, I will tell you, I would feel very strongly about Code Enforcement, if that stuff is out there before it's supposed to be out there, you know what?- go send them, the trash go pick it up and send the resident a bill.

Commissioner Lago: Two things; number one, if you just go by my neighborhood you'll see the amount of people that are throwing items into the pits when it's not supposed to their scheduled time. Number one, it's an eye sore, number one; number two, when you talk about yard clippings, I would love for staff to show us and staff send me some of the documents of the tipping fees and how that's moving in the direction that its moving in regards to the cost associated with that; and again, the idea of having a trash pit and throwing your yard clippings there, everybody here knows I've said it like five times and I'll say it for a sixth time, you do understand that the gardeners that are working in the City of Coral Gables are cutting the yards of all the other municipalities and then coming to the City and dumping in our City and we are paying for it to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. That to me is just -- again, we are supposed to be financially responsible.

Commissioner Quesada: The problem is everyone agrees with you on that, but the biggest problem is because I'm frustrated with this topic because I don't know what the alternative is. I remember the City Manager...we sat down and we started looking at all of the most progressive green cities in the country just to see what they do - Portland, Seattle are known to be as green, you know what they use?- they use trash bins like the City of Miami does; they use large trash bins.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Try to propose that.

Commissioner Quesada: But the problem is anytime we have a discussion to say use trash bins, real large trash bins, maybe even bigger than the ones Miami-Dade County has, but leave it behind the house, the side of the house. I think the Mayor is correct, residents will come out and say; well you know something that's just the first step to you putting trash bins in our front yard.

Commissioner Lago: But no one's in favor of that.

Commissioner Quesada: I know. It's hard to figure out what the right answer, what the solution is. There is no other municipality in the country that we've been able to find that's got a better system.

Commissioner Lago: What I'm going to do is, I'm going to get rid of my trash pit, resurrect my swale, make it look beautiful, and then what I'm going to do if I have any items, green clippings, I'm going to have my gardener take them with him when he comes to my house every two or three weeks, depending on the season; and the other item with regards to bulk trash what I'm going to do is, I'm going to have the bulk trash put very carefully on my driveway, on my side yard and they can come like other municipalities are doing, they can pick it up by hand – let's say I have a chair, let's say I have a sofa that can be dumped, you need to use the claw again, that's what other cities are doing, and that way you don't have to have a trash pit.

Commissioner Quesada: But other cities in Miami-Dade County, I'm sorry for my tone, but I'm frustrated with this topic, I feel like we can't find an answer, is Miami-Dade County, Pinecrest they have dumping areas or dumping sites, so you drive your junk over to the dumping site and you drop it off there.

Commissioner Lago: You don't even need to do that. You leave it on your swale right now.

Commissioner Quesada: What if I live in North Gables and I've got a tiny driveway, or it's not a circular, it's not a "U" entrance.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It's a little driveway and you can't back up.

Commissioner Lago: But let me ask you a question. Do you think it's worth studying those types of examples and try to find an answer for different parts?

Commissioner Quesada: I think everyone is going to agree with that. I guess I'm so pessimistic as to a positive outcome.

Vice Mayor Keon: Do you believe you can train drivers not to dig holes Mr. Osgood?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So we know this is a big and important discussion. What I'd like to do is meet with staff, like to develop some additional research, meet with you all individually, but we hear the message in terms of the creating of the trash pits and how we can minimize that and also the conflict in convenience, how we balance convenience with aesthetics. So we'll work on that.

Commissioner Lago: And by the way, I'm grateful for my colleagues that will engage in this conversation. I know it's a very touchy one.

Commissioner Quesada: Not touchy – it's frustrating.

Commissioner Lago: I'm happy that this is the type of touchy, frustrating conversation we have in the Gables versus other cities that are dealing with a lot more serious problems. I think we can find an answer and I think what the Manager stated right now in reference to having her sit down with staff, put up some ideas, see how it will cost the City, see if maybe we will save some money somewhere, you never know, maybe there are opportunities.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You were here the last time when this issue came up and the uproar in the community was astonishing, and I don't want to be a part of that. I don't want to be a part of that.

Commissioner Lago: But I think the issue there is you have to paint it in a different – really put it out there in an appropriate way.

Commissioner Mena: That's why the only way for it to come up again, you'd have to have a solution. You can't just say get rid of it, you have to have an alternative. Until we have that...

Commissioner Lago: By the way, I think that not doing anything doesn't make any sense, just leave it the way it is.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The people like it the way it is. This is not a public hearing and we have a request to speak, but this is not a public hearing.

[End: 12:40:28 p.m.]