

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-1
February 13, 2018
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
Assistant City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Historic Preservation Officer, Dona Spain
Public Works Director, Ed Santamaria

Public Speaker(s)

Connie Crowther
Karelia Carbonell

Agenda Item E-1 [1:26:22 p.m.]

Comments regarding the 1926 White Way Street Lights by the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The next item is comments regarding the 1926 White Way Street Lights...

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Agenda Item E-1 - Comments regarding the 1926 White Way Street Lights by the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you, Manny.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: 1926 Street Lights by the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables.

Vice Mayor Keon: Very nice.

Connie Crowther: Good afternoon. My name is...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Good afternoon.

Ms. Crowther: Connie Crowther.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Hi.

Ms. Crowther: And my husband, Tim, and I live at 3612 Palmarito Street, here in Coral Gables, and I run a business as well. I'm a member of the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables and a previous vice president. Tim and I have admired these unique, highly decorated Denman Fink-designed White Way Street Lights since we moved to the University Riviera neighborhood in 1976. We used to walk the neighborhood and would always remark on them. The lights -- at that time, several hundred of the historic lights were still standing along University Drive, from Granada to Ponce, and all along Riviera Drive. But in the past decade, we have noticed that they were disappearing at an alarming rate due to wrecks, vandalism, hurricanes, disrepair and neglect, bureaucracy, whatever. Several of them had large road signs attached, detracting from their presence. The distinctive lights were replaced with plain light fixtures as they fell. Now, the historically designated street lights are shockingly rare to see. Of the original 500 back in the 1920, only a few more than 40 remain. Most of those still standing are in poor condition. Without aggressive intervention, the purchase from FP&L, who owns the lights and has for a long time, restoration and/or recreation of these unique Coral Gables

treasures will soon disappear. In early 2011, Tim and I were both members of the HPACG board. We put forth a resolution to begin a program of strong advocacy, education, negotiation and fundraising to help the City restore these historic lights. Some of you will remember Sara Anderson. She was a beloved colleague and historic preservationist. She's now deceased, but she joined me with this project as co-chair. The resolution was unanimously approved and our work began. We met six times with City Manager Pat Salerno, City department directors and many historic preservation leaders collaborating to save the historic street lights. Mr. Salerno appeared to be very enthusiastic in supporting of restoring or recreating all of the original historic lights, but he never followed up. When Karelia Carbonell became the president of HPACG in 2014, she again picked up the gauntlet on the project, working with City officials and historic resources to reinvigorate the restoration effort. She has generated extensive publicity, positive publicity about the historic lights and led the launch of a fundraising campaign and the placement of a striking historic marker near the library. This brings us to the meeting today. The City must lead and HPACG and other citizens actively support the restoration of these now remarkably rare lights. They are as much of the historic legacy of Coral Gables as the Alhambra water tower, DeSoto fountain, Colonnade, the decorative 1920s gateways and other revered sites. We respectfully request that the City move ahead with the purchase from Florida Power & Light so that we can altogether begin the restoration of these historic street lights up on -- and move this up on your list of priorities before they disappear completely from our streets and our collective memories. HPACG stands ready to assist in every way that we can. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. Ms. Carbonell, you want to say something?

Karelia Carbonell: There are some pictures that I just want to have put up.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, CGTV -- I know that you sent them. Can you put up the White Way lights? There you go.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: No.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Is that...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's mine.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Oh, that's Dona's. Okay, there were some individual photographs. I saw an email that transmitted them. Let us see if we can get them as CGTV gets ready.

Ms. Carbonell: Okay, well, let me start by saying thank you for welcoming me back.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Karelia...

Ms. Carbonell: Yes.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: They just placed them.

Ms. Carbonell: There they are, okay. And there's a few, if they could just maybe move them along. Connie basically gave you all the institutional history of where we are now at, and I want to talk about moving forward. And in 2015, the Commission -- there was a resolution back on July 7, 2015, that authorized the City Manager to acquire the White Way lights, the White Way light locations from Florida Power & Light. So, moving along -- so, that was the resolution. And we basically, in 2016, we put up the marker. And then on April 11 of 2017, myself and several City officials and a representative of FPL, we met and the consensus was that FPL would submit an estimate for the City to acquire these lights. Now, the lights, as Connie mentioned, originally, there were 500. I believe when the designation of the lights were -- was presented or approved, there was about 79. And we are -- several board members, last year, we actually used that same map that was created from the Historic Resources Department, and we actually inventoried the lights that were still standing, and there's less than 10 percent, so it's about 45

lights. Now, not to mention, we got Hurricane Irma, and we lost more lights, okay. So, here we are -- met with -- in 2017, met with this group, and the consensus was that an estimate would be submitted. The estimate was submitted. April 26, 2017, FPL submitted an estimate to handle the lights. This is not -- they're not selling back our lights. They are, you know -- and correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe it's their -- it's the electrical part of the lights that have to be -- they have labor, you know, and they have to sort of turn it over to the City. But I -- correct me if I'm wrong. But -- so, the estimate was time sensitive, 180 days. So, April 26, the clock starts running. We feel, you know -- our group feels, wow, you know, we've really got -- because we can't do anything with -- the City cannot do anything. Your hands are tied.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: How much was the estimate?

Ms. Carbonell: The estimate was for over \$15,000.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Per light?

Ms. Carbonell: No, for the -- for all -- for the project. And so, it was 180 days. But what happened was -- and I feel that -- I think this is why now, you know, we -- the contract expired is because we had Irma in between. We had -- in September, we had Irma -- and the City -- no, we had been communicating about the status, so...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Ms. Carbonell: Irma hit, and I think the City -- obviously, the priority was, you know, the -- that emergency, and so, we lost September and October. So, now our contract is up -- or the estimate is up. So, what we -- you know, the action step -- and we ask the Commission, and of course, City Manager, is because of this emergency that happened, you know -- and can the City go back and, you know, ask for it to -- you know, ask for this estimate to still be either good or have a conversation about this estimate and get it done. Because during the hurricane, you know,

several lights were lost. We had residents emailing saying there's lights on the ground, and I personally had to email Public Works and, of course, and then Dona. You know, we were on email because basically these lights were on the ground, and there's still a few -- and I don't know if we were able -- but there's still a few lights with those yellow tapes around. Those are -- those lights are historically very significant to the City. They were designed by Denman Fink and Phineas Paist, who designed this City Hall. And they were commissioned by the founder, George Merrick, in 1926. So, they are the Mona Lisas of Coral Gables; they basically are. And many people don't know that they exist. And I -- you know, we believe that because of the hurricane and because, you know, there were so many other priorities, we hope that now, moving forward, that we can -- or that the City can resolve the FPL issue. Because, if not, we will keep losing lights and we won't -- or the City cannot preserve them as they should be.

Commissioner Mena: Is the 180 days that you described, is that just like the stated expiration on the quote, or do we have reason to believe that that's no longer...

Ms. Carbonell: That's what the quote said.

Commissioner Mena: In play? Okay.

Ms. Carbonell: That's in the letter -- and certainly...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Tell me exactly what are you asking for.

Ms. Carbonell: We ask that the City Manager, or whoever is able to get back to FPL, can resur -
- or you know, can sort of come back to this estimate.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, Mr. Mayor, if I may. It's a very special part of our story, if you think about in the 1920s, he did undergrounded lights that were branded Coral Gables. The complication isn't the \$15,000. The complication is that it is not consistent with the

National Electrical Code, and it has to be restored. So, if I may, with respect, we love the lights. We even included it on our map as the -- our new maps, not the -- you know, the ones that are coming out of printing, to show where they are located. But I'd like a combination of Public Works and Historic Resources to just share a glimpse of what it will take us to restore those beautiful lights. So, I don't want you to think we've been lax and not wanting to write a check for \$15,000. If it was only \$15,000, it would already be addressed. And so, they're going to provide some of the details; doesn't mean -- that are significant details for us to all learn.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Will you make the...

Ms. Carbonell: May I...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Presentation, and then I'll call you back.

Ms. Carbonell: I know, but may I -- before -- there's two issues. There's the conversion issue, and then there's the restoration. The conversion issue from FPL to Coral Gables, that's one issue. I don't know if that -- I mean, that \$15,000, I don't know if that's grown as far as -- but for Coral Gables to do whatever it is that they plan on doing, we have to have those lights. Or the City -- that's how I understand it. And I know that back in 2011, that was the issue again.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright. Let's listen to...

Ms. Carbonell: Yeah, sure.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: What they say, and then I'll call you back. You can stay there, if you want.

Ms. Carbonell: Thank you.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Just briefly, I have some slides to show you. Very brief, just a few slides, if you could queue those up. Next slide. Okay, this is what they look like. This is a 1920s photograph at Douglas Entrance. It was actually called Tamiami Entrance then. So, it -- and this is a closeup of the base. This is what we're talking about. It had emblems of Coral Gables.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Beautiful.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: This was also taken in the early days. They were in the residential areas of the city. This is one at Sam LaRue and his estate.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: One that what?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Sam LaRue. He was a local...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Historian.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, of course.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: He died, and he left us one of the lights that he had either restored or he got them in pristine condition, so we've installed that in the plaza by the museum, by my office, with a plaque, with Sam -- so, we have one in very good condition that we can use as a mold. And now, when Florida Power & Light takes them down, they contact us and we collect them, so we have about a dozen over in the equipment yard, but they've fallen into disrepair. So, I just want to just give you just an update of where we are as far as Florida Power & Light. And then I'd like Ed Santamaria to talk about the cost, and I'll come back.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Good afternoon, once again, Commissioners, Mr. Mayor. Ed Santamaria, director of Public Works. Karelia is right. This is a fantastic asset for the City historically. I was not aware of them until they came to my attention, and I immediately fell in love with what they are. They're fantastic. The \$15,000 that as been discussed is the figure that FPL has offered to us for us to take over the lights. However, that is not the only cost involved in this project. I don't think that FPL would have a problem holding fast to that number. And if it changes, it probably wouldn't change significantly. The issue is here is that FPL is very happy to get rid of these lights because, to them, they're a maintenance headache. The problem is that once we assume responsibility for these lights from FPL, we are on the hook. We're on the hook for liability. We're on the hook for maintenance. We are -- the City would be held responsible for everything that happens with these lights. And that is nothing that is a small consideration. So, to take over these lights also involves doing some work. First and foremost, FPL would require us to install new service points for these lights. There would be 21 service points that would be required. And then, when we do that work, we have to do it in accordance to the National Electric Code. FPL has something called the National Electric Safety Code, which is a whole set of different standards which allows them to have installations that the National Electric Code does not provide. One such installation is what they have right now, which is direct-buried cable which is not grounded. This is not a safe condition. It's something that our own electrical inspector would reject upon inspection. However, FPL is exempt from that. So, there are a number of moving parts here, and those are two. To address this really, we'd have to take them all. And we'd have to have a discussion with FPL if we could do this little by little to find out if there's a way forward to get this done. But we'd have to install new conduit. The conduit would house new wiring, new electrical grounding circuits that would be grounded. There would have to be pole boxes. There would have to be all kinds of ancillary equipment, and then they would have to be restored. And so, at the end of the day, when all is said and done, you're talking about a project that is upwards of \$800,000 to a million dollars, in our opinion.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Eight hundred thousand dollars.

Public Works Director Santamaria: To a million dollars.

Commissioner Lago: Twenty...

Vice Mayor Keon: To a million.

Commissioner Lago: For 21 lights?

Public Works Director Santamaria: For 77; 77 lights is the number that we're working with. There are over 40 right now out there. We do have over a dozen in our yard, and there's probably others somewhere. FPL may have them. So, we had -- when we were discussing this back in April, we did have 77 lights up.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's a lot of money.

Commissioner Lago: Well, Dona's not -- Dona may not like what I have to say...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: So...

Commissioner Lago: But we could just always entertain it.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Well...

Commissioner Lago: Outside of restoration, can we maybe make a similar cast model that would also help us, you know, in the same, you know, material that maybe would save us a little bit of money?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: This is what I would like to do. I would -- number one, I think it's important to acquire them for Florida Power & Light. The restoration, I've talked

briefly to a conservationist. She won't know until she actually gets one, and I'd like to give her one -- the ones from the equipment yard, assuming we're going to go forward with this. She estimates it could be between 3 and \$5,000 a pole to restore these. They're made out of cast iron. It's, you know, complicated type of restoration.

Commissioner Mena: Is that included in the number he just gave us?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Is that the number he's working with?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Okay.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: So, if it's 77...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, but that...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: It would be...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I'm sorry. That includes...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Three hundred -- that's included.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Electrical...

Commissioner Mena: Yeah.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Three thousand dollars per light.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes. That's included in his estimate of...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: No, the restoration...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Eight hundred and fifty thousand.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Is the 3,000 to 5,000. The lighting -- they have combined estimates. One is for the electrical work that needs to...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Right.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Be done from a safety standpoint, and the other is the restoration work.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. How much is the...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, together...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Safety standpoint...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: It's 800,000.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alone, not restoration.

Public Works Director Santamaria: It's about \$400,000, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, per light.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Per light? Well, 77 into \$400,000, so it's somewhere around \$3,000, \$3,500.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Three thousand plus another three thousand, no?

Public Works Director Santamaria: Per pole.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Yeah.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: That's not -- your math is off.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Five thousand.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: But I believe that this qualifies for a special category grant from the Florida Department of State Division of Historical Resources. And we could -- it's a matching grant, so we'd have to have some money, and it's not guaranteed that we would get it. But I believe that it's such a unique and special project that we could write a grant. The time -- or the deadline is July 1, and they are matching grants up to \$500,000.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Why don't we try to do that?

Commissioner Lago: Do you...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: We're waiting for -- to close out the Merrick House grant, and we're in the process of doing that. Once that's done, I think we can apply for a grant. I think that, honestly, we should acquire the lights from Florida Power & Light...

Commissioner Lago: Okay.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And then deal with the...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, I want to be respectful from the liability standpoint. We love those lights. We want them. We have begun budgeting at your allowance in the capital plan so that every year we're adding money for the White Way lights...

Unidentified Speaker: That's right.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: So, it is in our capital budget now. I want to be careful with acquiring and not addressing the electric, so...

Commissioner Lago: That's what I was going to...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Absolutely. And I'd like to make sure that if we do acquire them, that that can be counted as a match. You know, I don't want to acquire them, do the electrical work, apply and have them say, well, that's something you've already paid for and it won't make the match.

Commissioner Lago: Cathy, how much...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: But I think it's important for us to move forward with this.

Commissioner Lago: How much do you have budgeted right now?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Not very much. We just put -- you agreed for us to put \$20,000 a year every year to start growing it. As a part of the wish list when you all are

prioritizing in your next capital Scrabble game, you may want to increase it, but -- so, the budget has already annually contributed. Unfortunately, it just started, so we haven't acquired many. We have \$40,000 so far in the fund. Purchasing isn't what's expensive. Making it safe, making it not a liability and restoring is what's expensive.

Commissioner Lago: My question to you is -- this is the final question. I'm in favor of trying to do whatever we can to save these lights. If we acquire the lights from FP&L, which is, obviously, the first step, should we do something where we remove the lights, you know, cap them, so there's no further damage to the lights. Make them safe, you know -- make them safe, some way, some sort so that we don't have any liability like you mentioned. And then, I don't know, extend our budgeting for the next two or three years. What do you recommend?

Commissioner Mena: I think that, if I'm hearing you correctly, that's \$400,000 to make them safe off -- from the get-go.

Unidentified Speaker: Correct.

Commissioner Lago: No, no, but I thought it was \$400,000...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Even if you replaced acorn lamps...

Commissioner Lago: To rewire them, to rewire them.

Commissioner Mena: That's how you make them safe.

Public Works Director Santamaria: That's correct.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: (INAUDIBLE) making them safe.

Unidentified Speaker: To make them...

Commissioner Lago: No, but I'm talking about removing them offline right now, off the grid.

Public Works Director Santamaria: So, then, we'd have to probably provide temporary lighting.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah.

Public Works Director Santamaria: And that's another expense, which I listed as unknown at this time until we do some photometric study.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Are we able to do that with the present condition (INAUDIBLE)...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Can I make a suggestion? Dona, and you and Karelia, come back to us with a plan of what you suggest, with expenses, and see what we could do. You know that the Commission's intention is to restore these, save them, and...

Commissioner Lago: Can we...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Use them.

Commissioner Lago: I agree with you wholeheartedly, but can we at least make the decision today...

Unidentified Speaker: May I say something?

Commissioner Lago: On FPL -- can we make the -- one second. Can we make the decision today in regards to FP&L so we can acquire the lights, at least take that first step? And then we can make a decision about...

Public Works Director Santamaria: Commissioner, if I may.

Commissioner Mena: But we'll become liability immediately.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, but we're going to become liable immediately, which I'm not for.

Public Works Director Santamaria: If I may, Commissioner. If I could suggest having a discussion with FPL to see how they would...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Work with us in transitioning the lights.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Have a discussion with them and bring a comprehensive plan as to what you suggest, cost, the grants that are available, et cetera, and come to the next meeting.

Commissioner Mena: And maybe, Ed -- Ed, maybe there's a way to secure the rights to the lights...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Commissioner Mena: Now with some -- as you -- I think you described earlier some sort of like plan for when they will transfer and when we would become liable, working with Miriam's office. Maybe you, you know, purchase the rights now, but it doesn't come on board for a year or something, you know, I don't know.

City Attorney Ramos: (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Mena: You guys can discuss that, but...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Commissioner Mena: That way, you, I think, address her concern that we're not sort of closing the loop with FPL, but we're not on the hook for liability yet either. That's just a thought. Obviously, I don't know if they're going to go for that or not.

Public Works Director Santamaria: No. That's definitely a good consideration.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: (INAUDIBLE) in the meantime (INAUDIBLE) and get the poles. So, it's not (INAUDIBLE)...

Unidentified Speaker: Okay.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, thank you very much. Thank you, Karelia.

Ms. Carbonell: Please, let me finish my thought.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah.

Ms. Carbonell: Because I do need to mention that we have been trying -- or HPACG has been trying to get the City to do this since 2011. It's -- we're running into seven years. And you know, I understand the costs. Believe me, they're well worth it. The City has restored landmarks all over and spent millions of dollars on landmark restoration, and that's why we are the City Beautiful. So, I -- you know, for it to come back that, you know, it's \$400,000 or, you know, close to \$800,000, you know, they are well worth the cost of not only acquiring them from FPL, obviously, making them safe, and then restoring them because they are a designated landmark.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: Is there -- he's working off a 77-light number. Is there room to discuss it not being off 77, for it to be 40-something or...

Ms. Carbonell: There's not seven -- unfortunately, there's no -- there's not 77.

Commissioner Mena: So, then that estimate should be...

Ms. Carbonell: There's 45.

Commissioner Mena: Lower.

Ms. Carbonell: Yeah.

Commissioner Mena: Right.

Ms. Carbonell: There's 45.

Commissioner Lago: Forty-five. Does that include the number that's...

Ms. Carbonell: No.

Commissioner Lago: At the 72nd...

Ms. Carbonell: Forty-five up.

Commissioner Lago: Facility?

Ms. Carbonell: There's 45 up and 10, in pieces, at the Public...

Commissioner Lago: Seventy-second.

Ms. Carbonell: Works yard.

Commissioner Mena: Well, when you talk to them at the Mayor's...

Ms. Carbonell: So, it's half -- that number is probably half.

Commissioner Mena: Okay, so let's figure that out.

Ms. Carbonell: Yeah. And HPACG, our members want to help with the fundraising. So, if it's \$3,000 a light, let us know. We will fundraise. So, you know, I really just want to make sure that you all consider this as an important item, and...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, we are. You've heard us...

Ms. Carbonell: Whatever decision you can make.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah. Thank you, Karelia.

Ms. Carbonell: (INAUDIBLE). Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

[End: 1:51:32 p.m.]