

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-2
December 12, 2023
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
City Planner, Jennifer Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item E-2 [Start: 9:41 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission providing for text amendments to the City of Coral Gables official Zoning Code, Article 6, “Landscape,” by amending the utilization of artificial turf on open joints of pavement; and Article 10, “Parking and Access,” by providing review of materials in pavement joints; and providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. (10 11 23 PZB recommended denial, Vote 4-3) (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto E-2. Good morning.

City Attorney Suarez: E-2 is an An Ordinance of the City Commission providing for text amendments to the City of Coral Gables official Zoning Code, Article 6, “Landscape,” by amending the utilization of artificial turf on open joints of pavement; and Article 10, “Parking and Access,” by providing review of materials in pavement joints; and providing for a repealer

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provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. This is a public hearing item.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Madam City Attorney. As the sponsor of the item, the Commission requested that this go before the Board of Architects to kind of get a review and a feeling in their opinion. How was the consensus.

City Planner Garcia: So they prefer not to have fake materials in the front yard. They prefer to have it in the back or use very sparingly. They added another material to use between those joints, that would be slate chips. I guess they are very costly material, but its very nice. And they agreed that it should be reviewed by staff and not by the Board of Architects, just to add to their agenda.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Do any of my colleagues have any other comments.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. When you say this is reviewed, was it reviewed by the whole board, how many, was it just the Chair. Who was it?

City Planner Garcia: The vote was taken by a voice individual votes.

Commissioner Castro: So everybody voted?

City Planner Garcia: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: How many?

City Planner Garcia: It was a voice vote, so I have to look at the minutes to see who was there.

Commissioner Castro: That's fine. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I've been there for their voice votes before and any decent its noted as well. Unlike some of the items that I had in front of the Board of Architects on the Mediterranean design. They are pretty strong. I heard their comments at the time. During that discussion on Mediterranean design, they do not like artificial turf in the front. So, I had no doubt where this was going.

Mayor Lago: It was unanimous.

City Planner Garcia: Yes. So, I think they just did a voice vote, so it wasn't like individual votes. So no one said nay. So, I'm assuming everyone was okay with it.

Mayor Lago: Okay. I'll make a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, before you do, I have a member of the public requesting to speak on the item, Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning again. Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Sometimes we come up with things that not everybody agrees with. We come up with things that they are ruling class, if you want to call it that, think that that's the best, but the people that deal with it not agree. So, I'm here to tell you that since I sit on the Code Enforcement Board, we hear a lot about artificial turf, and I think this is a mistake. I think that maybe we should have some guidelines as to how it should look, because there is artificial turf and there is artificial turf. We had a man that came in that was being fined because he put artificial turf in the front of his house, and as you know, that is not allowed. But he had a very good reason. His wife has Parkinsons, has difficulty walking and has fallen and he wanted to have an exception so he could have it, and Code Enforcement couldn't do that for him because it was not in the rules, but we suggested he talk to people about it. So, I'm here to tell you that and he said he paid thousands of dollars for the turf that he used. It really looked like real grass, the pictures we saw. So, to me, this is just adding more rules to the book and trying to force what cannot be enforced, and I say that having artificial turf between the concrete or whatever will make it look very nice. Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a question for Jennifer. What does the city have on the books that cover what type of artificial grass is used. Do we have anything that manages, there's good and there's bad of everything.

City Planner Garcia: Correct. So the Board of Architects actually has one or two preapproved type of artificial grass that they prefer to have in the backyard and use sparingly. We put the specifications into the zoning code actually. That is part of those couple of brands that they like the best. I'm not sure if that answers your question or not.

City Manager Iglesias: This deals with, Commissioner, with basically concrete pavers where you actually do large pavers in the areas between paver and paver. The board also looked at slate stone. Slate is a fantastic material that comes in dark, reddish, and blueish colors. There is a number of very good materials for that. Traditionally, our Board of Architects has never liked fake materials and they have always, just like instead of using stone or precrash, using full moldings and things like this. So, this is something that's been traditional for our city and the board is free to chose from a large number of actuals materials. Slate, for instance, which was just talked about by our board is fantastic material for that. It takes a real load, weathers very well, so there's very good materials that can be used for that. Probably artificial turf is probably not the best.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I have a few questions as well.

Commissioner Menendez: I just have a comment. About a week ago, I was with a family member and I think I came across the house that was used as the example the first time around the presentation, or something similar to that, and it was interesting. There was a difference of opinion. One person loved it, the other person did not at all. I think at the end of the day, there is a lot of subjectivity. Do you like red wine or white wine, but I'm glad that we went through the process

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and had the Board of Architects chime in. I think that was needed. So, thank you for doing what you've done on this issue.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I need to follow-up with a few questions.

Commissioner Castro: I just want to clarify what we're really talking about is concrete slabs between the joints which is a very small space, which is hard to grow grass, right. So when we're really looking at it, it's not that much and it looks better when it's not dead or when there's nothing there, or when there's grass and it's dead and then we have mud everywhere. So, I appreciate the Mayor's attempt to keeping Coral Gables beautiful, but I cannot vote on this.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, that's fine. Let me cover a few items first. How many years ago was it that the Commission and I know I was sitting on the Planning and Zoning Board at the time, evaluated whether or not artificial grass in front of properties, on swales, etc., was not consistent with Coral Gables wanted and for also maintaining the environment. Do you have a vague recollection?

City Planner Garcia: I guess about 2018, around there.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Sounds about right.

City Planner Garcia: Maybe early 2019. I think year 2018.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And as far as an accessible surface, a surface that's firm and stable, it doesn't have roots intruding in it, etc. Is artificial grass eliminate roots from creating an unstable surface for an individual that has Parkinsons or any other disability from traversing the front yard.

City Planner Garcia: I don't believe so, no. They just kind of layer it on top. They have a requirement in the zoning code, they have to have a foundation of rocks, materials that percolate water, but it wouldn't stop any kind of root growth.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So the roots could still cause a tripping hazard in a grassy front yard or an area where you'd normally put grass. And I'll just share with you all. I had to make a decision when putting in my driveway, because my husband is disabled, and he is at times needing a wheelchair, a knee-roller, or he just doesn't walk well. The last thing I wanted to put into that driveway were gaps with rocks or artificial turf. So we have to make a choice based upon what the conditions are of our family and loved ones as to whether or not you want those gaps between the driveways and the other is based upon experience. The amount of mud and dirt and tires eroding on driveway aprons. When I had to pick up six 3-gallon pots of dirt out of my driveway apron and you pack that on top of artificial turf, it's never going to look good. You pressure clean that, it's going to be lifting up out of the cracks. So, based upon the reasoning that was expressed by when I was a member of the Planning and Zoning Board, as well as the Board of Architects who we trust for their opinion on aesthetics who we should respect their opinion on aesthetics, I am in favor of not having artificial turf between the gaps of driveways because I've seen what happens in a

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relatively short period of time. It doesn't last. Okay. Just like putting carpet out there. Its not going to last. Its not meant for that use. You want to put it in your backyard, you want to put it around your pool, you want to put it somewhere in an area that doesn't get tire traffic, truck traffic, delivery truck traffic, then that's a different condition and its not going to look bad.

Commissioner Castro: We have a Code Enforcement Department that is wonderful and I know that if its looking badly, we will do our best to make sure it looks good, right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're entitled to your opinion.

Commissioner Fernandez: My comment is simple. I still think that if the Board of Architects is mainly made up of non-residents, the Planning and Zoning Board is made up of residents, they voted against this. I don't think that we should continue to regulate, as you said, should be a decision made by the individuals based on the facts at hand. So, I don't think that we should continue to regulate, especially when we do have artificial turf in our city parks.

Mayor Lago: So, I'm just going to address two points very quickly, we have a motion and a second. We have artificial grass in one park that I'm aware of and it deals with disabled children, correct, Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor.

Mayor Lago: My understanding it's a very special exemption that was made so we can make sure that we have the entire community and be as inclusive as possible, so its not pervasive throughout the city, that's number one. Number two, Planning and Zoning does not deal with aesthetics. We're talking about aesthetics. When the Commission has to go before the Board of Architects, it did. It was unanimous support. I asked you in regards to whether this was a benefit of the city's aesthetics, the City Beautiful or if it was not. Again, at the end of the day, if it's the will of the Commission, it's the will of the Commission. If its not, we move onto the next item. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Castro: No

Commissioner Fernandez: No

Commissioner Menendez: No

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 2-3 vote)

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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