

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

--MEMORANDUM--



TO: City Commission
City Manager, Peter Iglesias

FROM: Mayor Vince Lago

DATE: August 21, 2025

SUBJECT: FPL and Telecommunication System Undergrounding: Benefits and Considerations.

As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance the resilience, safety, and aesthetic appeal of our community's electrical infrastructure, I want to highlight the significant benefits associated with undergrounding power lines, a strategy that Florida Power & Light (FPL) has been actively implementing in South Florida. Additionally, I would like to address some challenges that impact these efforts to renovate the electrical systems in the city, the remaining utility poles, as well as the consequences this poses to our constituents.

Legislation

My office and I worked diligently to prepare and pass the legislation allowing for FPL's undergrounding project to take effect within the City. The approved legislation, Resolution No. [2023-126](#), references the approval of an agreement, granting FPL the right-of-way to access private and public land to facilitate the undergrounding of utilities within the City based on the procedure outlined by the FPL Storm Secure Underground Program and any other such programs that may be approved by the Florida Public Service Commission. These requests for access by FPL are to be authorized by the City Manager on an ongoing basis for specific locations, forming a mutual agreement between the City and FPL.

Benefits of Underground Power Lines

Underground power lines are notably less susceptible to damage from natural disasters such as hurricanes, severe weather, and accidental damage (e.g., construction or vehicle accidents) due to being buried between 6 inches to 3 feet beneath the surface depending on the area. In fact, according to FPL, underground power lines performed up to 14 times better system-wide than overhead lines during the hurricanes of 2024: Debby, Helene, and Milton. Additionally, the time needed to restore power following outages is significantly reduced when utilizing underground lines, ensuring quicker service to residents.

Underground power lines enhance public safety by reducing the risk of downed wires and electrical hazards. It also minimizes the danger posed by fallen lines to pedestrians and motorists, contributing to a

safer environment for our community. During severe weather emergencies, the reliability of this underground electrical system is significant to critical services such hospitals and emergency response teams who need constant coverage. Additionally, underground systems require less maintenance in comparison to overhead power lines, limiting invasive digging and construction measures which can disrupt traffic flows and negatively impact home and business owners.

Beyond visual improvements, underground lines contribute to increased property values and economic development by creating a cleaner, more attractive cityscape. The removal of overhead lines can facilitate urban renewal projects and reduce visual clutter, making our city more appealing to residents, visitors, and potential investors. Furthermore, reduced restoration costs and times from storm-related outages translate into economic savings for both the community and utility providers.

Florida Power and Light Involvement

FPL's Lateral Hardening Program, under the Storm Secure Plan, prioritizes undergrounding where feasible, following approved methodologies. Once completed, overhead facilities are removed. However, third-party equipment on poles remains a complex issue that involves coordination and approval processes. FPL's process is conducted as follows:

- FPL provides advance notice to all communications companies regarding facilities scheduled for undergrounding.
- Communications companies advise whether they will remove their facilities or purchase the pole.
- FPL removes poles after project completion once communications companies have removed their facilities, or transfers pole ownership if companies elect to purchase them.

Issue at Hand and Proposed Strategy

Unfortunately, if FPL fails to receive notice from these communication companies or is unable to work through an agreement to transfer services bilaterally, they are unable to proceed with removing the utility poles leaving services split amongst different systems. Due to this grey area between what FPL can do and what is up to third party discretion (AT&T, Comcast), the benefits of streamlining power line systems fall short. Besides being a concern for aesthetics, the remaining poles could disrupt access to necessary utilities for residents. Additionally, unpredictable weather patterns in South Florida further impact this issue as residents may find themselves with unreliable utility services during our lengthy hurricane season.

I fully support efforts to collaborate with state legislators and urge our representatives to require that the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) enforce similar undergrounding initiatives for entities such as AT&T and Comcast. I plan to attend the upcoming September 4, 2025, PSC meeting in Tallahassee, Florida to urge the commission to recognize that the future of this project is successful only when all third-party telecommunications companies agree over a bilateral transfer of power line systems alongside FPL's Lateral Hardening Program.

As we continue to improve our city's infrastructure, it is important that we are aware of the complex issues that transformative projects such as this one involve and are prepared to mitigate the concerns that they create for the City's residents. Thank you for your attention and ongoing commitment to our community's growth and safety.