

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-5
September 14, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant Public Works Director, Deena Bell-Llewellyn

Assistant City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-5 [Start: 2:14 p.m.]

Staff update regarding obtaining a hold harmless agreement with the county for the control and eradication of strangler figs on Coral Way oak canopy. (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto G-5, staff update obtaining a hold harmless agreement with the county for the control and eradication of strangler figs on Coral Way oak canopy, sponsored by Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Anderson: How is it going?

Assistant Director Bell-Llewellyn: Good afternoon. Since we spoke about this item, I had city arborist do site inspections up and down Coral Way from Red Road to LeJeune, and we identified about 66 live oaks that had strangler figs growing on them. Now strangler figs they start as

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epiphytes, they are native, they sort of vine in, they come in through seeds through wildlife and birds, and they grow very quickly. So, we've gotten a proposal from Superior, our tree contractor, to remove them and I think it's the right thing to do, because the epiphytes will eventually take over the tree and the strangler fig will become the dominant tree taking over the live oak. And these are heritage live oaks. We identify a heritage tree as a tree that's 50 years old or older, and so, I think these will qualify as that. I've worked with Stephanie to come up with the hold harmless agreement. Its ready for your review before we move it over to the county.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: We drafted an agreement, like our other interlocal agreements with the county, that the city would enter into the county right-of-way, remove those invasive species and then have no further obligation to maintain those oaks as they are the county's responsibility, so this would be a one-time only right of entry and removal and we would pay any permit fees, etc., as needed. So, it's been drafted, and I believe, I don't know if it has been already, but will be sent to the county for their review.

Commissioner Anderson: When you say one-time approval, when eventually we are going to have some more strangler figs, we have to go back to the well each time?

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: I believe so. I think there is budget consideration, and we don't want to imply that we are responsible for maintaining those oaks. This would not be any trimming, any pruning, any maintenance of the trees themselves. It would only be the removal of the invasive species, so this would be just for this discrete task at this one point, and we would go back again if needed.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay. Which is probably what, how many years in your educated?

Assistant Director Bell-Llewellyn: Probably every, we'll have to monitor it, but every, I'd say two to three years, we might be addressing this again. We constantly need to monitor it.

Commissioner Menendez: Regarding that question, how far – is it a recent phenomenon, because I just want to learn a little bit.

Commissioner Anderson: We actually have problems with some of our other trees too, which is something perhaps we can take up with our tree trimmers while they are there, take out those little, smaller strangler figs and keep them under control. But the ones on Coral Way were massive by comparison.

Mayor Lago: Yes, they are big.

Assistant Director Bell-Llewellyn: We have strangler figs growing on historic structures, on walls, on fountains, I mean those seed in really easily from birds, and as soon as they catch, they'll start turning into a tree. These are county trees, the responsibility is on the county to maintain and prune these trees, so that's why we haven't removed them, but now we are seeing the problem and the

county does not go in and remove them. As per county code the responsibility is on the resident in front of the swale.

Commissioner Anderson: That's not the best solution.

Assistant Director Bell-Llewellyn: Right. On heritage trees that are so important to our main corridor, we really wanted to look at this specifically.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, thank you for doing that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much for the update.