

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
Assistant City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-5 [0:00:00 p.m.]

A 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. This is -- I wanted to make this as brief as possible. What I wanted to get out of this -- and if maybe -- I just want to make sure Commissioner Quesada -- because 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, you know, empower staff to come back with some sort of action plan to see if there's any appetite to basically looking at the way that we handle bulk trash pickup. There's multiple different opportunities to be much better than we are right now. I think right now what we're doing is obsolete.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 or of the City Beautiful. If you drive around the city and see the day before bulk pickup or two days before, you see garbage thrown throughout the city. You have -- you know, 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. Some people are -- I received a lot of phone calls and emails of people saying 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 pickup once a month, twice a month, three times -- weekly. I don't know how exactly it would work. But then you have certain people who are adamantly opposed to you even touching their bulk pickup. 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 we think that it's -- having giant moon-sized craters in your front yard, you know, that, again, don't serve the city in the best light, in my opinion.

Commissioner Mena: No. I think we should absolutely look at what the alternatives are, but I think that's what's going to drive the conversation...

Commissioner Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Mena: Is what's the actual alternative and how practical or logistically challenging is it going to be to execute. If there's another system that we can make work, then we should absolutely explore that.

Commissioner Lago: I'll give you my system.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: If there's another system, I...

Commissioner Lago: I'll give you my system, which is real simple. I spoke with my neighbors. I'm getting rid of my trash pit in my swale. I'm done.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright, but...

Commissioner Lago: And you know...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Be very, very careful with this. Every time that this comes up, there's 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. You know, I truly believe that we have the ability to train people to not make pits because there's other places that have -- they pick up the trash in the same manner with the same types of -- what do you call those? Trash pit picker uppers. What is that machine?

Commissioner Mena: Claws.

Vice Mayor Keon: Claws, whatever it is -- and they don't have to make pits. So, I think that, to some extent, it is a training issue for our drivers. I think that, you know, they're rewarded for picking up trash very quickly, so there is -- there's not a lot of incentive...

Commissioner Lago: But I mean, I think there's...

Vice Mayor Keon: To do it slowly.

Commissioner Lago: And...

Vice Mayor Keon: I just think that there's -- I'd like to -- 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 pickup day. So, the -- you know, the grass and the cuttings, I don't find so objectionable.

Commissioner Lago: But let...

Vice Mayor Keon: 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, you know, buckets and paint cans and, you know, your kitchen chair and all of that stuff out on the swale, at any time, I don't like it. I mean, so I think, at some point, we can move toward just allowing, you know, the vegetation and then requiring people to call for a bulk pickup for the other stuff. And the other thing -- I 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: Well, let -- two things. Number one, if you just go by my neighborhood, you'd see the amount of people that are throwing items into the pits when it's not supposed to be their scheduled time. So, it's -- number one, it's an eyesore; 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 it's 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 -- and 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're paying for it, to the tune of...

Unidentified Speaker: I agree.

Commissioner Lago: Hundreds of thousands of dollars. I mean, that, to me, you know, is just -- again, we're supposed to be financially responsible.

Commissioner Quesada: The problem is, everyone agrees with you on that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, we agree.

Commissioner Quesada: No one's going to disagree. But the biggest problem is -- because I've -- I'm frustrated with this topic because I don't know what the alternative is. I remember when the City Manager and I...

Commissioner Lago: Well, there is alternatives.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's exactly the problem.

Commissioner Quesada: We sat down and we started looking at all -- like the most progressive, green cities in the countries just to see what they do. Portland, Seattle are known to be as green as, you know -- and you know what they use? They use trash bins, like the City of Miami does. They use large trash bins...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I tried to propose that.

Commissioner Quesada: But the problem is, any time we have a discussion to say use trash bins -- real large trash bins, maybe even bigger than the ones that Miami-Dade County has, but leave it

behind the house or the side of the house, I think the Mayor's 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...

Commissioner Quesada: Which is not the case and...

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

Commissioner Quesada: I know. It's just -- it's hard to figure out what the right answer -- what the solution is.

Commissioner Lago: No, what...

Commissioner Quesada: There's 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 items in 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...

Commissioner Quesada: The only other option is...

Commissioner Lago: Where they can come -- 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 don't need to use the claw to get it, and that's what other cities are doing. And that way, you don't have to have a trash pit.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah, but don't other cities in Miami-Dade County -- I just -- I'm sorry for my tone, but I just -- I'm frustrated with this topic because 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 sites and you drop it off there.

Commissioner Lago: You don't even need to do that. If you had...

Commissioner Quesada: So, you can leave it in the driveway?

Commissioner Lago: If you pick up -- you leave it on your swale right now.

Commissioner Quesada: Well, what if I live in North Gables and I've got a tiny driveway or it's...

Commissioner Lago: You...

Commissioner Quesada: Or it's not a circular -- it's not a -- you know, the U entrance.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You have a little driveway and you can't back out.

Commissioner Lago: But I think it's worth...

Commissioner Quesada: You can't back out of it.

Commissioner Lago: But let me ask you a question. Do you think it's worth studying those type of examples...

Commissioner Quesada: Oh, absolutely.

Commissioner Lago: To try to find an answer...

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.

Commissioner Lago: For a different...

Commissioner Quesada: Absolutely.

Commissioner Lago: Parts of...

Commissioner Quesada: I think everyone's going to agree with that. I just...

Vice Mayor Keon: Can we try training...

Commissioner Quesada: I guess I'm so pessimistic...

Vice Mayor Keon: The drivers?

Commissioner Quesada: As to a positive outcome.

Vice Mayor Keon: Do you believe you can train drivers not to be -- 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. I'd 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 we're engaging in this conversation. I know it's a very touchy one. Thank God these are the type of touchy...

Commissioner Quesada: No, it's not touchy. It's frustrating.

Commissioner Lago: I know that this is...

Vice Mayor Keon: 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 out some ideas, see how it will cost the city, see if maybe we'll save some money some way or -- you know, you never know. Maybe there's opportunities here.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You were here...

Commissioner Lago: Let's just explore it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You were here the last time that this issue came up and the uproar in the community was...

Vice Mayor Keon: Oh, my god.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Astonishing, and I don't want to be a part of that.

Commissioner Lago: No, but I don't think -- I think it was...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I don't want to be a part of that.

Commissioner Lago: But I think the issue there...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You know, we're coming up for election and I don't want (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Lago: But...

Vice Mayor Keon: You don't want to be a part of it.

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

Commissioner Mena: But that's why the only way to -- for it to come up again, you'd have to have a solution.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Mena: You can't just say get rid of it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Right (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Mena: You have to have an alternative.

Commissioner Lago: But I think inaction...

Commissioner Mena: And until we have that...

Commissioner Lago: But I think -- by the way, I think that not doing anything is, you know...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Commissioner Lago: It doesn't make any sense.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Well...

Commissioner Lago: Just leaving it there 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, so I will -- let's go to the next discussion.