

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-14
November 14, 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

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Senior Transportation Engineer, Melissa DeZayas

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-14

Update regarding sidewalks and crosswalks on the south side of Bird Road
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-14.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh, that's just an update. I sent you all a memo and, especially since you are going to be heading to Tallahassee, I wanted to make sure you were aware of that, since it's fairly recent. The past couple of times I've been up there, I've been begging, basically for the sidewalk they put on the south side of Bird Road. The Underline, I was pestering the person from FDOT as well, went on the Zoom meetings as well to make sure it got on the five-year plan and finally, we got some fruit on this thing. It's not yet ripe, because they still have to design everything, but at least we're going to have a sidewalk. It's not going to include a walking bridge over the waterway, but there's going to be a crosswalk that goes from the north to the south to be able to use the walking bridge on the north side of the street and be able to cut back over at Granada. It's a lot better than what we have right now. So, it's a move in the right direction. One less thing for you to advocate for in Tallahassee.

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Commissioner Fernandez: And by the way, the FDOT is doing a great job on 8th Street. They are redoing all the sidewalks on the Coral Gables side and on the City of Miami side, changing all of the crosswalks, really nice work. I know it's been a work in progress. You talked to me about this probably three years ago, when this whole thing started. So, it's nice to finally see it come to fruition.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It is. You don't have to take your life in your hands. I will be out of town, so I will not be going up, otherwise occupied with my husband.

Commissioner Castro: Who else is going to Tallahassee?

Mayor Lago: I'm not going. I have a work issue. Mr. Director, quick question. I don't want to hijack the Vice Mayor's.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's okay.

Mayor Lago: It's the same thing on sidewalks dealing with Bird Road. There is a connection because we've done such a great job, such a great job you've done on University. I know Blue Road is going to hit it out of the park, and ___ is going to be a great area. One area that I think it's like ripe and I think we can get the approvals is the Granada to Bird Road connection, and I'll tell you why. First off, there are no sidewalks there, so when you cross Granada, you cross Bird Road, excuse me, there's an empty lot on the right hand that is owned by the church, which I bought land from them, three lots right next door for the city. We have a good relationship with them.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, you're talking about Bird between the bridge towards Granada.

Mayor Lago: Yes. You get on Granada – that area, I stopped my car there the other day and I was kind of looking at it, because you have sidewalks there all the way at the bridge and then it continues for a few homes, and then it just stops.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It does.

Mayor Lago: And since those are big lots, for example, where the Japanese Embassy is, Consulate where he lives, I know, I just have a feeling that if we were to advocate and speak to those residents, it's not that many homes because they are big, big homes, and with large driveways and grass. You know the church is going to be in favor of it. They are not going to give us an issue and we don't have a way right now that if you cross and you're on Granada and you are walking, there is no safe way except for going on the grass to be able to go down Granada till you get to two or three homes before the bridge, and then think about it, how well is that not going to be connected on Granada all the way to Blue Road, and then you're going to have right turn, all that area is going to have now sidewalks, as you have the bridges there.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, I think Melissa reached out to FDOT.

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Transportation Engineer DeZayas: He's talking about Granada.

Public Works Director Diaz: Granada proper. Okay. From Bird down to Blue.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Public Works Director Diaz: Okay.

Mayor Lago: You have that bridge, you have all those sidewalks already there and then when you get to Blue Road, we're going to have the sidewalks there also, because you have the two bridges that now are going to be connected at University. It's going to go down in front of Riviera Country Club. All that area used to never have sidewalks. That area now has sidewalks because of the work that you guys have done on University, Riviera Country Club, now we are connecting the two bridges on Blue Road, correct.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Which right now imagine, I've seen people in a wheelchair go on the street, because its probably a foot to a foot and-a-half to get onto the bridge sidewalk, there's no sidewalk.

Public Works Director Diaz: I think that's something we can definitely start looking into. We have to get a survey and...

Mayor Lago: It's a lift. What I would like to have a conversation through the Manager just to kind of start getting an idea and put it before my colleagues, because it would be a big connection because think about it. You will connect it all the way to Bird Road, you cross Bird Road and then you have a sidewalk that runs all the way down Bird Road, and it could work.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Plus, it could be put in, in an appropriation request. Now the sidewalk and its in our Legislative Plan, a sidewalk that's going to be for Bird Road on Riviera to the Underline is something that is part of one of Senator ____ projects to bring in the funding to get a connection to the Underline, to provide something safe, because you have sidewalks and then it stops, then you have no sidewalks, and it connects you to the high school as well. So, we can do the same type of request as to Granada as well, because they want as many safe routes to get to the Underline and get to the schools as possible. We're going to finally be able to connect these dots together.

Mayor Lago: The thing about Granada like you're saying, Granada takes you all the way to the Underline.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It does.

Mayor Lago: Takes you all the way to Lee Lincoln, which has sidewalks already and then you can pop through there all the way to the Underline. Again, you were almost right there, maybe a few blocks and you know that the church is not going to have an issue with the sidewalk you put there.

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Transportation Engineer DeZayas: No.

Mayor Lago: And also, one last thing since we're talking sidewalks. How are we doing on Alhambra. Its fine?

Public Works Director Diaz: We're going to come to the Commission in December with a presentation, just showing the findings of the outside arborist that we hired and make a decision as to where the sidewalk needs to go.

Mayor Lago: I've been working on this for a few years now. This is an important project, and that bottleneck is very tricky, where people have to get on that bridge, the embankment. Sooner rather than later we bring them before the Commission. It's an important project. We're talking about just a few blocks. Two blocks, right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Its three.

Public Works Director Diaz: I think the issue is where to put the sidewalk and we're going back and forth.

Mayor Lago: I've used this quote before. Let's not allow perfect be the enemy of good. Let's do something that's been long, long time needed. It may not be perfect, but at the end of the day, it's something that again, will serve the community.

Public Works Director Diaz: We'll come in December with a presentation. We'll present whatever the arborist recommended and then we'll make a decision then. You'll get an opportunity to make a decision then.

Mayor Lago: Its like what happened at University that certain people that were not in favor of the sidewalks and now you go and talk to them, they say, I actually like the sidewalks, they actually look great. Thank you for planting a beautiful oak tree on my property. When I say property, obviously on the swale. So, they are actually very happy. Remember we had those conversations.

Commissioner Menendez: I agree with the Mayor.

Public Works Director Diaz: And we're happy that...

Mayor Lago: You've got to get these sidewalks in. We've got to get these sidewalks in. I know it's a tough conversation. I know it's a very tough conversation, but we've got to have these public meetings and we've got to have these sidewalks installed, because for example, look at Granada. Can you imagine you're an elderly person or you are disabled and if you go two blocks and you try to cross over, you can't get there.

Public Works Director Diaz: Or even walking.

Mayor Lago: Even walking on the street. I'm just using it as an example as an elderly person or disabled person or a person with a child. We can do better than that and we can't allow that. We have to explain to people the importance of doing this and it may not be perfect, you may have to go around some trees, we may have to have a curb in one area or not, but at the end of the day, we've got to push for it.

Mayor Lago: I think we have one more item on the Commission, item 2-1. Vice Mayor, do you have anything else you'd like to add for this on your item. Sorry, I hijacked it. I apologize.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll take 2-1.

Mayor Lago: Do you have anything else you wanted to add to that item? I got excited when you started talking about sidewalks.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, no. I get excited about sidewalks too. I just wanted to add one little tid-bit. The resident that also worked on it told me she started back in 2015, because her son said he couldn't get to school, to the high school safely, so they had to drive me just from University. It was impossible for him to get there. We're going to make some progress here.