



City of Coral Gables
CITY COMMISSION MEETING
March 28, 2016

ITEM TITLE:

A discussion regarding the opening/closure of Giralda Plaza to vehicular traffic.

DEPARTMENT HEAD RECOMMENDATION:

Close Giralda Plaza to vehicular traffic as a pilot program for two years.

BRIEF HISTORY:

The construction on Giralda Plaza (i.e., the 100 Block of Giralda Avenue commonly known as “Restaurant Row”) is underway and substantial completion is currently scheduled for May 2017. The Design of Giralda Plaza provides the flexibility to open and close the street to vehicular traffic as desired. In planning for the operation and programming of the street upon its completion, it became clear that certain decisions, such as outdoor dining locations, type and storage of furniture, placement of bollards, maintenance activities, programming, and other considerations, depended in part on whether or not the Plaza would remain open or closed to vehicular traffic. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with each approach, as described in the two scenarios:

Close Giralda to vehicular traffic

- The street would be closed off to vehicular traffic via the simple placement of bollards at the endcaps of the street (removable as necessary by Police/Fire or for special event set-up) to create a “permanent” and safe public gathering place.
- Other than for valet parking, there would be no parking on the street. This would allow businesses to have an extended area for outdoor dining and activation at all days and times.
- Furniture could remain on the Plaza at all times (no need for easily moveable furniture or storage)
- The valet would operate at the end caps of Giralda and Ponce, and Giralda and Merrick Way
- Additional guidelines for events, on-street or sidewalk activation, etc. would need to be determined.
- **Tradeoffs:** (1) This option will impact the ability of customers and smaller delivery trucks to park or be dropped off directly in front of businesses. (2) Businesses that depend on visibility from vehicular traffic may suffer. (3) The street closure may result in a practical limitation of the types of uses that would be feasible on the street. (4) Traffic circulation in the immediate area may be affected (to a minor degree).

Open Giralda to vehicular traffic (Flexible street)

- The street would remain open to vehicular traffic and 17 spaces of on-street parallel parking would be available between the Bridal Veil trees when the street is open. The center area where the lighting structure is located will not have parking. Outdoor dining could take the place of the parallel parking, provided that protections are put in place to safeguard them from vehicular traffic.
- The street could be closed on a regular basis, including weekends/special events/etc or as agreed upon with the BID and City.
- Valet operation would take place on the street when the Plaza is open, and at the end caps of the street when it is closed.
- Additional guidelines for events, on-street or sidewalk activation, etc. would need to be determined.
- Smaller deliveries may be able to take place on the street (vs the alleys)
- **Tradeoffs:** (1) This option would significantly limit, and in some cases prohibit, outdoor dining opportunities while the street is open, and will require the frequent moving of outdoor furniture to a yet-to-be-determined storage location, which will cause frequent disruption to the Plaza, require moveable furniture that may be harmed over time, and require an ongoing expense. (2) The option may also damage the pavers and trees, as oversized delivery vehicles are likely to traverse the street regardless of any signs or regulations prohibiting them from doing so. (3) The street would almost certainly pose greater safety risks to pedestrians and diners (although this has not been fully studied). (4) Opening the Plaza to vehicular traffic would require greater maintenance.

Under either scenario, the street's design will allow the City to reverse course in the future should the chosen scenario prove unworkable or harmful to businesses.

The Business Improvement District surveyed the merchants and property owners along Giralda Plaza with respect to this issue. The results of the survey are included as an attachment to this item, and generally point towards a preference for closing the street to vehicular traffic.

The Economic Development Department, Public Works Department and Planning & Zoning Division are in agreement with the street closure. Staff proposes a pilot project in which the Plaza is closed to vehicular traffic for a two year period, during which time the effects can be studied and evaluated.

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Giralda Plaza merchant/property owner survey results