

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-7
August 24, 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

Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Police Sergeant, Rhonda Jenkins

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-7

Discussion regarding Public Safety Aides Courtesy Notification Program re: parking over sidewalks, scooters blocking sidewalks, cardboard in trash pits, and unsafe /deep trash pits.

(Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: G-7 is an item sponsored by myself and Commissioner Anderson, discussing public safety aides notification program, parking over sidewalks, scooters blocking sidewalks, cardboard in trash pits, and unsafe/deep trash pits. Thank you for your patience.

Police Chief Hudak: Good evening, Mayor, Commissioners.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Police Chief Hudak: Good to see you today.

Commissioner Anderson: It's not as bad as the last Commission.

Police Chief Hudak: No, no, no, no. Yesterday, I got my first (INAUDIBLE) for the (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: We're going to try to do City Commission items in five minutes an item.

Police Chief Hudak: Five minutes an item?

Commissioner Menendez: It's still sunlight.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Police Chief Hudak: Yeah, the sun is gone. The sun's...

Mayor Lago: What do you think?

Police Chief Hudak: The sun set already. We can do that.

Mayor Lago: Alright, let's do it.

Police Chief Hudak: The Manager just ordered a Murphy bed from the United States of America that we're going to put (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: Listen, I'll take it.

Police Chief Hudak: Staff's going to roll over and we'll just keep flipping up the...

Mayor Lago: You have four minutes and 30 seconds.

Police Chief Hudak: I'm ready to -- oh, see, if I have four minutes, I'm going to defer the rest of it to my sergeant. I think you all know Sergeant Jenkins, and she is the sergeant that's over the NSAs, the NTL unit. She's the sergeant of the NTL unit. Really, probably one of my smarter assignments, not just to promote her, which she was due, but also to run that side. We've had lengthy conversations. I know we put together a presentation of a door hanging issue, if you will, where the NSAs could put that up. Personally, and professionally, we don't believe that's a real good idea. We've tried to stay away from putting it on our residents' door hangers because it's a clear indication from porch pirates and other people that somebody's not home. So, we -- and years ago -- for history -- we used to do this with the false alarm ordinances, where someone would have a false alarm, we would take it, we would hang it on the door. Tried to put it in the mailbox -- hence, we're not allowed to put things in the mailbox unless it's the mail. So, what we're putting together for you all is the same format that's on that door hanger, but we are going to make sure that we institute or initiate contact as we want the NSAs to do with the individuals who own the property. Again, around the University, some areas that we see -- that we've seen -- and Mayor, you know we've addressed this a few times where people that not necessarily live in that place want to park across the street, park on the swales. They're over the sidewalks. We understand that's a quality-of-life issue. So, what we are going to do from a communication standpoint -- which we've talked about at length with the Director from Building Development -- is better our communication. So,

our NSAs will have direct contact with the parking officials and also pit issues where they see that they can -- our NSAs can talk to them. Our officers will actually take enforcement action or try and give those warnings ahead of time, but also, we need to document them. This is an ongoing conversation we had about code enforcement issues, which we're going to present to you at a much later date about how we're trying to all work together and strengthen our communication for a more effective way. As you know, our NTLs, which is the Neighborhood Team Leading officers, everybody in their area gets a phone number specifically for that officer. The sergeant has her phone, but she also has a number that all the residents can use and have. They have all access to talk to every other department, department head to get things done. Because we've now focused on some of the issues, Commissioner, that you brought up about the parking over the sidewalks and things like that, the officers pretty much are going to write tickets. That's pretty much what we do. But with the warnings and things like that -- now, during the day hours, which is really confined to 7 o'clock in the morning, 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when they're out -- when the NSAs are out -- is we're going to encourage them to go up, knock on the door and talk to them and get them. And again, my -- don't -- I don't want you to view this as a reluctance on my part; it's not. I just -- I like the role of the NSAs are goodwill ambassadors. For as much as my brethren firefighters are loved for everything they do, we're constantly trying to enhance our good image because people don't like being held accountable for the laws. Got it. The NSAs are somebody that can go out nicely and say, "These are the issues. Here's the people. If you want, I'll call." They can contact our Public Works Department and get them out there, again, and make sure they understand what the messaging is, instead of just putting a ticket or a pamphlet on there. And only because I -- the historical value of the pamphlets is also an ordinance where if there's 10 pamphlets on the ground, whoever's responsible for -- on the pamphlet, they're responsible for the violation. So, I really don't want to get into 10 or 15 people throwing our notices off their cars, we pick it up, and then we're back in the same process/problem where somebody accuses the Coral Gables of littering, which is what came up in -- back in 2014, I think it was, when we did that. So, the sergeant pretty much has her marching orders. We're going to clarify with the Manager and Public Relations exactly what's going to sit on there. They will have them. I just don't want them to hang them on the door. That's something that we do from a crime prevention strategy. However, if they

do see cars on there, we have started looking at already -- we started looking at the trash pits already. Again, that wasn't something that was really directed toward them to do, but again, last season, we -- these people, these NSAs, NTLs and our police officers moved over 1,500 boxes out of sight from somebody's porch where it wasn't stolen from. Sergeant Diaz today picked off a porch pirate. This is happening more and more. I really want these NSAs in the golf carts to look at somebody that's embraced by the residents. However, they are going to -- they are fully vetted on what we're looking for and what we're going to address with these door hangers or information pamphlets that they have those. But they also have the ability to raise Code Enforcement on the radio or actually call them on behalf of -- I believe the NSAs have their own phones too.

Police Sergeant Jenkins: No. They don't have their phone, but we have a good communication with all the departments. And the NSAs, they also take care of -- they do put in Gov Q and A requests for the trash pits, trimming, things of that nature. So, they have a working relationship with the residents, and they act on their behalf some time. So, the communication with the other departments, we've been doing for years. I've been the sergeant in that unit for four and a half years, and the unit's been -- it was implemented five years ago. So, these are things that we're constantly doing now. Whenever we get something that we focus on, whether it's a crime trend or a quality-of-life issue, so now they know, "Hey, people are blocking the sidewalks. This is what I want you to look out for while you're looking out for other things." And instead of placing a note on the door or on the vehicle, they're going to go to the door and say, "Excuse me, you know, I'm your neighborhood safety aide. Do you know that your car is blocking?" And a lot of that happens now that the school has started again, so a lot more people that weren't here over the summer, now they're parking, and they may be blocking a sidewalk. But these are things that we already look for. And this is just a reminder that, hey, this is the start of, like I said, the new school year. Summer is over. We're getting back to enforcing things. And it's a reminder to the residents, "Hey, this is what the rules are." And also, they built a relationship with the resident if they don't know the resident already.

Police Chief Hudak: So, we believe the program is working, the NSA/NTL program. I will tell you that since I was sitting here today, I've gotten three phone -- three text messages from the area just west of Gables High -- it is back to school for the second day -- with pictures of people that are parked -- and again, our program going forward is to warn, to move, and within a week or so, then we will start to enforce. So, it is moving forward in that direction. So, with that, I'll open up for any comments or suggestions from the Commission that we should consider in partnership with -- or in association with the Manager.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, I appreciate the effort you've made to work on this goodwill ambassador program. I think it's going to help residents understand, you know, that we're not going to -- you know, these are the rules and a nice way to move them into them other than fining them immediately.

Police Chief Hudak: Right.

Commissioner Anderson: And again, like you said, it will help develop that relationship more. I've done that with some of my neighbors. And I said, "Well, did you know that --," you know, and you would inform them of something. And more than likely, 90 percent of the time, people are willing to do it, but they're just not reading the pamphlets that are mailed in, in the mailbox.

Police Chief Hudak: Right.

Commissioner Anderson: They just need that personal experience with you all. And thank you for all you do.

Police Sergeant Jenkins: You're welcome.