

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
February 9, 2016
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Community Services Director, Jessica Keller

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-2 [0:00:00 a.m.]

Discussion regarding trash piles in single family residential areas.

Mayor Cason: F-2, trash piles, Commissioner Keon.

Commissioner Keon: You know it's the -- my continued discussion about having cardboard and things in the trash piles. At some point, I think we need to make a decision as to what we're going to allow in those trash piles. And I know that, you know, the dump sites are willing to take 10 percent of non-yard waste in them, but I don't think that -- I don't think we should. I think if people put boxes and stuff at the street, we should -- when the trash guys pick them up, leave them a notice that says that boxes will no longer be picked up along with your trash.

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Here's an additional recycling bin. Put them in the recycling bin. But, you know, we have been talking about this -- I've been talking about this for two and-a-half years, and I know it's been talked about for many years prior to my ever, you know, being on this Commission. There are a lot of people that would like to see no trash piles at all. That's a much longer discussion in how we, you know, accommodate people that do their own lawns and have to, you know, dispose of their own -- you know, the yard waste or whatever. But you know, under no circumstances should there be furniture, big bags -- big boxes, pizza boxes, diaper boxes, packing boxes in our trash piles. It is so unsightly for a City that concerns itself with, you know, having to only paint your house a certain color, according to a Code that we can allow, you know, the streets to look like dumpsites.

Mayor Cason: You know, in a sense, it's a job for Code Enforcement.

Commissioner Keon: It's terrible.

Mayor Cason: And as I walk around Granada Golf Course, I constantly -- you see part -- you see the doggy bags, which there's nothing you can do about it because people throw them...

Commissioner Keon: And as long as we have trash bag -- piles...

Mayor Cason: But you do see...

Commissioner Keon: You're going to have those doggy bags.

Mayor Cason: You see -- they have a pickup on Tuesdays and Fridays in my neighborhood, and you see right after they've picked up on Tuesday, all kinds of boxes and things just sit for the whole week there. So, I think Code Enforcement needs to make a particular effort to give them warnings and tell them what the rules are on cardboard boxes.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: We have done -- excuse me one second, Commissioner. We have done a door hanger reminder that we're -- you know, that the cardboard boxes have been -- you need to recycle them, and we have had increased compliance. Code Enforcement is working on that. The discussion about hard junk and whether, or not it's permitted in the trash pile, we would welcome the discussion from the Commission.

Commissioner Keon: You know, someone has, you know -- something that -- I mean, we traditionally have picked up, you know, some furniture. I think it is outrageous to go down a street and see somebody's mattress sitting in front of their house on the swale. And you see it not infrequently, you know, and especially where there's rentals. It's like a -- you know, somebody moves out of a rental and they end up piling -- you know, they empty the house out on the trash pile. You know, they need to either make arrangements to have people come get them, or you know, if there's a number you can call and have somebody, you know, pick it up but you can't put it out until the night before it's going to be picked up. I mean, I don't -- you know, that's a discussion we need to have with -- to what level of service do we provide or what level of service do we expect residents to provide for themselves. But you know, I would like to get to a point where, you know, before we start the discussion about the existence of trash piles at all, that nothing else gets put at that swale other than yard waste, nothing.

Commissioner Slesnick: I'd like to have us consider -- I like that idea. I mean, at Christmastime, you have a lot of things out on the trash piles. But on the trash piles, people will have their trash picked up on a Friday morning and then the yard services come and put out things three or four feet high and they're not picked up until the next Friday. I would really like to see us implement something where no green area or anything like that yard waste goes out on the trash pile within 24 hours of when it's usually picked up.

Mayor Cason: But you know, the problem with that is it means that all of -- I don't know how many people use the commercial services, but they would all be jammed up a couple days before the pickup time.

Commissioner Slesnick: Well, no. I keep all of my things on the side of the yard, all my -- I have lots of palm trees and branches and so forth that fall. I keep it on the side of my house until the Thursday night before the trash is picked up on Friday and then put it out because it kills the grass if you leave a lot of greenery and lawn clippings and everything out there. And I just think even my yard man, who could carry off the things, leaves it out there, but he comes on Thursday afternoons. So, you could make arrangements with your private -- your lawn service people to do it the night before or the day before so it doesn't sit all week. It's -- these piles, when you go around the City, that they're three and four and five feet high that are there all week are really disgusting.

Commissioner Lago: Let me give you just a little bit of my idea in reference to this discussion. I think that there's a larger discussion that needs to be had and that is in reference to why do we even allow any type of green matter to be thrown into these pits? I think we're one of the only cities that doesn't force these landscaping services to take the material with them. I know that this is an additional cost to the resident, but we could reimburse a portion of that cost based on the fees that they pay every year. Because, at the end of the day, we're going to pay for it. We're either paying it through the disposal of this green waste when we take it to the landfill, number one; or number two, we're going to pay for it because of obviously the aesthetic issue that's there and the grass that needs to be replaced and all the other things that come with that. So, I think there needs to be a larger discussion in regards to the grass clippings and the palm fronds and all that other type of vegetative material that just sits there for days.

Mayor Cason: But remember, there are a lot of people that don't have services; they do it themselves.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Mayor Cason: So what are they going to do with it?

Commissioner Lago: I mean...

Commissioner Keon: We have to address that issue.

Commissioner Lago: That has to be addressed.

Commissioner Keon: That's a problem.

Commissioner Lago: And that goes back to what I mentioned before in reference to what Commissioner Keon stated about blowers. Like the City of Miami does, how do you get in contact with all these entities? How do you do it? You do it through some of sort of business tax license, \$25 a year, \$10 a year, where that way they have to come in and they have to basically pay \$10, \$5, and we have their information and we start educating these people.

Mayor Cason: I agree with that.

Commissioner Lago: Right now...

Mayor Cason: I agree with that.

Commissioner Lago: And by the way, another good thing about that is you know who's in your city.

Mayor Cason: Yeah.

Commissioner Lago: You know that these people are licensed. You know if these people have been involved in criminal activity before.

Commissioner Keon: And they know the rules.

Commissioner Lago: They know the rules, and then you can disseminate information and educate people based on whatever this Commission legislates.

Mayor Cason: You know what's...

Commissioner Lago: That's a big issue that -- I mean, we could charge \$5 and when Code Enforcement or staff or our permitting staff or anyone who driving through the City sees a landscaping company, they hand out a document and say, listen, have you registered with the City. Or if you haven't registered with the City, we have a six-month moratorium before we start imposing some sort of required, you know, fees.

Mayor Cason: That's important from the public safety too because you see a lot of white vans that are -- people are doing work out of them, but they don't have a name on them. You don't know who they are or what they're doing.

Commissioner Lago: And if you're going to -- you know how we talked about the other day about having the garbage trucks being our eyes and ears on the street? Well, we can also notify hundreds of landscaping companies that work in the City saying, listen, we're looking for this individual. We're looking for this type of car that was stolen or that's been involved in several criminal activities. But besides the grass clippings, which I think should not even be allowed on the swales in regards to these trash pits, what about all that garbage and all those pieces of paper and all those pieces of plastic that are thrown out there that could be recycled, number one; number two, are unsightly and are left there for days. I sent Chelsea a text message this morning based on the fact that there was a couch thrown on the swale on the way to the office here this morning. And that's another issue that City staff has to go out and deal with and remove because obviously it's unsightly. It was on Cadima and Le Jeune this morning.

Commissioner Slesnick: We do have charges for special pickups, so maybe we should start assessing more special pickups when people do put large pieces of furniture out or mattresses.

Commissioner Lago: Or we could also do what the other cities do. I mean, it's not very sightly, but I think it's a lot better preference than what we have right now, is provide a garbage bin for that type of material. If you're going to throw something out, instead of throwing it in the swale, just...

Commissioner Slesnick: I'm talking about your sofa.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, but a sofa.

Commissioner Lago: No, again, a sofa -- again, you can't put a sofa...

Commissioner Keon: That's a big bin.

Commissioner Lago: Into a roller, but I mean, you can at least be cognizant of the fact that, okay, every two weeks, we're going to have a special pickup.

Commissioner Slesnick: And maybe it's just a matter of alerting or educating the residents...

Mayor Cason: Educating people because even the huge piles after it's more than a cubic meter, I think, or yard, you have to pay extra for it. A lot of people may not know that, and I'm not sure whether we're actually collecting from them. So, part of these humongous piles that you see, we're probably picking it up and not charging them. I don't know.

Commissioner Lago: You know what I'd love to find out? I would love to find out what the City pays in regards to grass clippings and other vegetative matter that is imposed to us by the County dump. I would love to know how much of that we have to pay because if we request that

residents and that these landscaping companies take that material with them, again, if we deduct that fee from what we're having to pay, I don't have a problem -- I mean, again, the Commission has to make the decision, but I don't have a problem reimbursing the residents saying, listen, you're going to pay an additional 5, \$10 for your landscaper to take this vegetative material. But hey, we're going to reduce your overall waste fee by X amount because the City's not being charge by the County. I mean, and it's just good business practice.

Commissioner Slesnick: Another thing, the Mayor and I walk around the same areas, is that I see on a regular basis pink bags and blue bags and so forth from doggy refuge (sic)...

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Commissioner Slesnick: In the trash piles on a regular basis. I mean, and those aren't in front of people's homes and the trash pickups aren't for another week or four or five days. We really maybe need more -- in areas where people are walking with their pets on a routine basis, maybe more trash cans or something at some of these places.

Mayor Cason: Yeah, we have, on each end...

Commissioner Slesnick: Of the golf course.

Mayor Cason: We used to have -- at least there's one there. Get your bag here, deposit it, and it's not blue. It's a greenish color. But maybe having those in a more convenient...

Commissioner Slesnick: Maybe one at Granada Golf Course some place -- not near when you're first going in, but some place where dog people could deposit their dog bags. No, really, it's -- you walk along there...

Mayor Cason: Yes, they're everywhere.

Commissioner Slesnick: Different people, they just throw them...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Commissioner Slesnick: On anybody's trash pit...

Commissioner Lago: I mean, and don't forget also we have to maintain these trash pits. I mean, I think that from the last time I checked -- and I don't know, maybe your staff could tell us -- but I think we were spending over a hundred thousand dollars a year just in...

Commissioner Keon: Filling.

Commissioner Lago: In filling with limestone the existing trash pits on a yearly basis. I think...

Mayor Cason: Remember, we have an alternate. We have an alternate. I'm not sure if enough people are aware of...

Commissioner Keon: The asphalt one?

Mayor Cason: The asphalt, which obviates the need to keep buying rocks and...

Commissioner Lago: But it still costs money. It still costs money, and then, obviously, the swale's affected because -- again, it's an issue that we really have to look at. And I think that we need to maybe have a sit-down discussion where we analyze what other cities are doing. For example, I had a conversation with Jessica the other day in reference to recycling and the bins. A lot of people are complaining the bins aren't big enough and why don't the bins have tops. You know, those are things that we can do and plan for the future because a lot of people -- we're moving in the direction -- as we keep promoting recycling, we're trying to limit that waste

stream. So, again, with the trash clippings, it's a no-brainer. Let's find out what the number is that the County's charging us, and let's deduct that from the fees and educate the residents and these landscaping companies that they have to take that with them. And that way a big portion of the unsightly material that's left there because our City allows green material to sit out for days at a time, it stinks, it kills the grass, and it's extremely unsightly, in my opinion, we can maybe remediate that. That's like the low-hanging fruit.

Mayor Cason: Well, in the interim, Code Enforcement should give out more warnings, more information. There are a lot of -- if you go to Home Depot, you'll see people handing out cards, I pick up trash, haul away garbage. So, there's a lot of commercial companies that will do it. The people are just not aware of, well, if I'm moving or if I'm moving in and I want to throw everything out that was left in the house, what do I do. They just got here; they don't know, so...

Commissioner Keon: Well, but I'd like to start with taking everything out of those trash piles. I mean, now...

Commissioner Slesnick: Except for the green.

Commissioner Keon: Everything except green out of those trash piles.

Commissioner Lago: But how do you then -- then how do you -- people are so accustomed to basically just throwing it there and it'll be picked up by the City. There has to be some sort of receptacle, like the County uses, one of those large bins so that they...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Commissioner Lago: Can collect -- we don't offer that here.

Commissioner Keon: Right. The red bins that we use are not adequate for recyclables, and it also needs something with a cover because they sit out by your garbage and when it rains, they get soaked and wet. And so you have a very heavy, massive, a week's worth of newspapers or boxes and whatever that, you know, you -- if we're serious about recycling, we need to provide a place for people to recycle or some sort of a container to put the recyclables in and we need to, you know, not pick up stuff -- you know, I don't care if they empty the trash pile. They can take all the boxes. They can set them aside and pick up the yard waste and leave them a note that these are recyclables. Please place them in the recycling bin, when we get to that point. We just don't do it anymore.

Commissioner Lago: Jessica, may I ask you a quick question, if you don't mind?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And as she comes forward, we can also schedule this as a specific presentation at the next meeting because they put a lot of thought in already about the direction we can go.

Commissioner Lago: Trust me, I had a -- and I appreciate it, Madam City Manager. I had a conversation with Jessica the other day, and I know that they're researching as many options as possible. This is just me. I mean, in my household today, for example, we had three red bins to the top, and I cut the cardboard and I smashed it into the red bin, and I do everything in my power so that I don't throw anything into the trash pile. It's very unsightly. Again, but my landscaper, all the grass clippings and everything that comes from my yard goes into that trash pit. He usually comes on a Tuesday. He's licensed and insured, but my big, big concern is that I don't want us to look -- again, nothing against the County -- but I don't want us to look like the County, where you just have these rows of, what is it, 55 gallons, with the wheels and the top. How large are those?

Community Services Director Keller: The 96 gallon?

Commissioner Lago: Ninety-six gallons, excuse me. I think that they work to a certain extent. Again, you can't, like Commissioner Keon said, fit a couch or a mattress in there. That would be something for more of a special pickup. And I think -- but the City needs to head, in my opinion, in that type of direction for whatever's going in the trash pit that's not green matter that we can't get the landscapers to take away, that maybe we should incorporate something of that type of disposal, which, again, is left behind the house and the -- our staff goes in the back or the rear of the house, rolls it out, they throw it away with efficient trucks where it makes sense. Because right now, for example, I got an email -- I got a text message this morning which I told the gentleman to write me that the swales are very wet and our trucks -- again, they don't do it on purpose, but our trucks are going to -- you know, they rub against the grass and they destroy a little bit of the grass. They take a portion of the City with them when they have to throw away the garbage from those trash piles. How much are we spending a year in regards to maintenance for the trash pits would you say?

Community Services Director Keller: I don't have that number with me right now.

Commissioner Lago: My understanding when we last spoke...

Community Services Director Keller: But we do have...

Commissioner Lago: Probably about a year ago, it was like about a hundred and something thousand dollars.

Community Services Director Keller: Yeah. We are working on our remediation...

Mayor Cason: (INAUDIBLE) I think...

Community Services Director Keller: You know, it's continual remediation. We've already installed the recycled asphalt. And right now we're spending about \$100,000 a year.

Mayor Cason: Why don't you all come back and make a presentation with suggestions and the question of the size of the bins, what we can do about keeping the non-green in the interim, the whole set of options.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And if we don't come back this meeting, we'll come back in the end of March because I know Jessica also has another member of the team that will be joining and they'll have -- they'll be able to input this -- on this as well.

Commissioner Keon: No, I would like them to take the time that they need to come up with a solution, but we have to be willing then to enforce it.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Understand.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, can I add one thing? I just wanted -- you know, there's two different parts of our Code; one relates to the right-of-way, which is like the buttons, and that the City Manager has authority over. This particular thing is governed by an ordinance. It's Article 54, and just so everyone is -- and you can certainly amend that ordinance, but -- with two readings. But the -- I just want to just read what the ordinance says. So, right now what the ordinance allows is it basically require -- each household can have one garbage pit, by law, or they can share them, if they agree. And it says that once a week they put out their materials. It allows them to put out household refuse or clean yard waste. And the clean yard waste can be put out by law any time during the week. The household refuse can only be put out the night before.

Mayor Cason: Night before, right.

City Attorney Leen: And just so you know what household refuse is, right now -- and this may be something you want to amend based on what you've said -- but household refuse means an

accumulation of paper, excelsior, wooden or cardboard boxes or containers, sweepings, household furnishings, plastic products, other than recyclables, and all other accumulations of a nature other than garbage and clean yard waste which are usual to housekeeping and to the operation of stores, offices, and other business places. So, just -- so right now the law is pretty broad and includes boxes and things like that, so that may be something you want to address, but that would require a change to the Code.

Mayor Cason: Okay, well, we can look at that after we get the staff presentation to see...

Commissioner Lago: Thank you, Jessica.

Mayor Cason: If we want to amend it. Thanks.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.