

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-3**  
**October 24, 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**

**Historic Preservation Officer, Anna Parnas**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Karelia Carbonell**

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Agenda Item F-3 [2:14 p.m.]

Update on White Way Lights  
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Welcome back. Going onto F-3. It's an item that I placed on the agenda today. This is something that we've been working on in my office, and have been working on, for the last few years.

Vice Mayor Anderson: About two and-a-half years, if memory serves me correctly.

Mayor Lago: And it's important to put a few things on the record, because I'm going to need the help of the Commission so that the Manager, even though he has the ability to be able to address issues under \$50,000. What I'd like to do is just get the Commission by-in, after all this hard work over the last few years, so that we can just get through this process and move quickly before anybody maybe changes their mind. So, a brief overview of what we've been working on. So, Chelsea from my office has been leading point and we've gone through a few individuals, Anna,  
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please join us, she's here and she's taken over now for the Historic Preservation Department, and in 2018, I included this in my newsletter, which I'm going to read the excerpts from that newsletter, and it talks a little bit about Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables. It's a non-for-profit organization in 1991, whose mission is to promote, protect and preserve historic landmarks. The organization works to focus attention and support of local historic treasurers and for years the President of that organization, Dr. Karelia Carbonell has been working to preserve historic White Way Lights of Coral Gables. Recently, Dr. Carbonell made a very interesting discovery, and she contacted my office; and in the 1920s supervising architect Phenious Paste and Denman Fink, our director for Coral Gables designated an intricate collection of White Way Lights, design, excuse me. In Coral Gables, these lights can be seen along both sides of Riviera Drive, from Anastasia Avenue to University Drive and on both sides of University Drive from Bird Road to Ponce de Leon. Several weeks ago, which was in 2018, a local attorney met with a client in a relatively remote location in Fort Lauderdale. During his visit, he was amazed at how similar in appearance these posts were to the ones in Coral Gables. He shared this story with Dr. Carbonell, who was eager to see them. Intrigued yet doubtful that these light posts were part of the original historic White Way Lights. Dr. Carbonell visited the site. Following a detailed inspection, the lights were determined to be part of the original collection designated by Paste in the 1920s. Excited to share this discovery with the city, Dr. Carbonell met with me to share this fascinating story and my team. But how could these original lights have ended up in Fort Lauderdale. The mystery remains unsolved, but it's an interesting mystery. But beyond the mystery, working together with HPHCG, I would love to understand the story of how this collection ended up in Fort Lauderdale. Ideally, I hope we can reclaim these lights. So, over the last five years, we constantly got in contact with these individuals. Just drop them a little note and see, maybe they're interested in helping the city in one form or another so we can recover our beautiful history. So, what ended up happening is, we got lucky. So, our staff had been in discussions with the property owner, Mr. Robert Givens to acquire the White Way Lights on his property, and in coordination with the property owner, we were able to complete a site visit on Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup> and \_\_\_\_\_, Gabby from my office and Chelsea were also present to inspect the condition and location of the lights. Staff found there were eight standing poles, and ten poles on the ground that had been stored at the rear of one of the vacant lots. The lights range from good to poor condition, but they would need to be assessed by the Conservator. I have some photos here that I know that maybe the Clerk can put up. These photos have already been sent to the Conservator in advance of our next trip. Our team here from the city will continue with Public Works and Historic Preservation, we'll continue to coordinate with Mr. Givens and the City Manager's office to finalize the details for acquiring these lights. So, what I would like to do is, I would like for the Commission to give adequate support to the Manager, so we can finalize this negotiation, acquire these White Way Lights, bring them back to the city and install them here. My understanding is it's going to take about \$1,000 per White Way Light. So potentially, it's under \$10,000, is my understanding, and then they are going to give us all the pieces that you saw in that heap, which are in good shape, but it just needs to be sand-

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blasted, powder coded to bring back to its old splendor and potentially some pieces are missing, but you see there's an intact bulb. It's a beautiful picture that, again, that's probably been there for I don't know how long and that's part of the city's history; and it's something that I think after five years of working on this, it's a project that another legacy project that I think will be celebrated for years to come, because the more of these that not only can we salvage, that's why we took money from the Art in Public Places fund to get all the current ones taken care of, but it's also the ability to bring back original ones here to the city and get them installed. Again, this is a project that probably once we get them in our hands could take five years to complete, but I think it's a project worth at least getting it in our hands for a small nominal fee, and then this Commission or future Commissions can decide moving forward through the Manager on how to get this done.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Interesting. I remember the day that Karelia Carbonell came to your office all excited with this treasure find that she had, and then it was written up in Coral Gables Magazine, I think that did the article, and it's quite a find. I'm glad that we're finally getting closer. I'm a little surprised it's taken this long to acquire them. So, I wholeheartedly support moving forward and giving the City Manager the authority to take the next steps.

Mayor Lago: So, you talk about things that take a long time. So, this is an example of something that's taking a long time because we've had to massage the owner. Now that the property has changed hands, you're getting a more willing participant in regard to the new owner. I have a very similar situation that I've been trying for years, now working with the family to try to get a large piece of property that has Pine rock lands and has Florida Pine right across from where I live and it's a treasure and I would hate to see it develop to build it into one day, hopefully a beautiful park, along with another piece of property that we're finalizing negotiations now that I'll be bringing before the Commission for consideration, because it's a significant lift. Probably the largest piece of property in private hands that will be moving back, hopefully into public hands. But this is an example of something that finally, after years of contacting the owners, we have an opportunity to bring this history back. So, Ms. Parnas, what was your opinion when you saw it in person. I heard from staff, but.

Historic Preservation Officer Parnas: It was really impressive. The communication I've had with the property owners sounds like he's very amenable to getting these lights back to the City of Coral Gables where he knows they belong. They are doing a street improvement project within his area, and so they'll be replacing the lights anyways, and he wants to work with us to make it as easy as possible and get them back to us.

Mayor Lago: So, what I would like to see is, if we can is, I would like to see us expedite this as quickly as possible. I know that we're dealing with him. Mr. Manager, what do you need from the Commission, if anything?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I think they are willing to give us the lights that are on the ground. We need to buy the lights that are vertical now. Those even have the original luminaries, so if we put them back, we should not probably put them back in some protected area, not on the street, subject to damage, and so, I would like to really just purchase those now before they get damaged, and then the ones that are on the ground, they said that they would give them to us.

Historic Preservation Officer Parnas: We would have loaded one of our cars that day, if they would have fit.

Mayor Lago: I don't know if you know, but a few years ago, I worked with Karelia and I paid to have two of them installed in front of the Country Club, and it's a gamechanger, especially at night when you drive by and you see that gateway. We found original photos. I think it was Mayor Thomson that provided the photos, the original photos of that walkway having the lights and when they were reinstalled it was something beautiful. Again, I leave that up to you, as long as the Commission is in favor of purchasing this work. It's good to have you run with it now after I've been working on it for five years.

City Manager Iglesias: Those poles, Mayor, Commission, those poles are cast iron. Just a matter of sandblasting them, refinishing them and they should be fine.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, I want to make a motion, pass the gavel, I make a motion to accept these poles, along with giving the Manager the leeway possible, to obviously make the wisest decision and the most careful decision with the city's money to acquire these light posts. Again, my understanding was it was around \$1,000 per pole. They are functioning, they're in great shape. I think they are a gift. I think this individual is doing us a favor, we appreciate that, because again, they are coming back home.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Historic Preservation Officer Parnas: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.  
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Vice Mayor Anderson: Director, before you leave, I just wanted to thank you for your very quick response this morning to the alert I received last night about 444 Ponce, a historic building. It had a textured stucco on it being smoothed and windows being replaced all without pulling permit, without going through Historic.

Historic Preservation Officer Parnas: Once I saw the photos, knew that that was not permitted or approved by our office. So, I also want to thank the Code Enforcement officers for going out this morning again and reenforcing their violation that they've already done. So, we'll be figuring out when we get the property owner back on track.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Fantastic. We prevented more damage.

Historic Preservation Officer Parnas: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for calling that in.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, before you move on, Ms. Carbonell wanted to make a couple of comments.

Mayor Lago: Oh, I didn't know she was here. Great. Ms. Carbonell, hope you heard my comments before.

Ms. Carbonell: Yes. Hi everyone. I am – really, I really want to cry, but out of just happiness because I know that the Mayor has been working on this and his office from day one when I brought it to his attention, and to bring those lights back, bring them home is really a dream come true and they are going to finally, hopefully soon will be part of our city again. So, I want to thank, especially the Mayor, but everyone on the Commission for really voting on this and being so receptive and also the City Manager and Anna and everyone that went and visited, because they really are the ones in Fort Lauderdale are really in great, great condition and with great integrity, in terms of their historical value. So, I want to thank you all and here's our – I am getting teary-eyed, so anyway, thank you again everybody.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The advantage of Zoom.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Karelia. I appreciate you as always.