

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items G-2 and I-2 are related
May 31, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Mark Trowbridge

Aura Reinhart

Carlos Centurion

Agenda Items G-2 and I-2 [11:00 a.m.]

G-2: A discussion regarding outdoor dining in Coral Gables. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

I-2: A Resolution of the City Commission extending through August 30, 2022, the authority granted to the City Manager to relax current standards for outdoor/open-air dining and signage in order to provide for expanded outdoor seating opportunities to assist with social distancing at restaurants and suspending all applicable fees. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago) (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, I'm going to jump over to G-2, really quick.

City Clerk Urquia: G-2, yes sir.

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Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, I'm going to jump over to G-2, a discussion regarding outdoor dining in Coral Gables.

City Attorney Ramos: We have I-2.

Mayor Lago: Yes, and I-2. Mr. Trowbridge it is always great to have you. How are you doing?

Mr. Trowbridge: Great. Thank you so much Mr. Mayor for making this item. A little bit early, it certainly helps our restaurants that are able to tune in, as they'll be a little bit busy, obviously with the lunch hour and afternoon, so I always appreciate your flexibility, much like you have done with our wonderful residents and doing that with our businesses, so thank you. I know that we have two items, one is more of a discussion item, and more is more of a resolution. So, Aura and I are here, I'm Mark Trowbridge from the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, 201 Alhambra Circle, Suite 100.

Ms. Reinhart: I'm Aura Reinhart from the Business Improvement District.

Mr. Trowbridge: First of all, I want to thank the Commission, this is I think the third time that we have come back for an extension of the temporary outdoor dining, and most likely the last time that we'll be here to ask you for that. I know we've got a chance to chat with a number of you about the need to continue to do this. We have talked to our restaurants, taken informal polls with them. They are eager to see this continue. We do know that we need to pay attention to some very specific issues, especially those that are using dining in the right-of-way, dining that takes their numbers up significantly which can have other ancillary affects; and so, I want to thank the Manager and certainly the Assistant City Manager and Julian Perez for working with us and having conversations with us so that we could kind of work through this in a discussion. We have seen, unfortunately, you know, another round of Covid numbers, but in a conversation, I've had with many of you, including our Mayor, we need to move forward. We need to help our businesses, like we have been doing and you all have been true champions of this. This started in mid-2020, when the economy opened back up here in South Florida and Coral Gables, and we created this pathway for the restaurants, specifically, that outdoor dining. And I will tell you, you have seen the great success of it. It's not only the opportunity to continue to dine outside, it's the optics of that, and as people drive through our city and they see people sitting outside and the activation of the outdoor dining and the restaurants, it's really a very positive effect and people stop, and they dine and they feel comfortable, and so, I really appreciate the opportunity to have a discussion and certainly will ask Aura to weigh in on anything she'd like to add.

Ms. Reinhart: Thank you Mark. I think the last point you made is the most important one that I would like to stress and that is the optics. There is nothing like filling up the incredible space we have on our sidewalks here in Coral Gables, and when our restaurants are full, when our cafes have people around, when people can walk their dog and sit down outdoors and enjoy the time, we

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actually bring business to our businesses. It's about bringing people out and having them enjoy. So yes, the optics are very important part of this as well.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Perfect. So, I wanted to give you kind of a little bit of an update of what we're working on. The Manager and I have sat down with staff and with the ACM and our Public Works Director, and we are looking at different opportunities in regard to outdoor dining. How are we going to continue to provide this great amenity, I think its paid significant dividends for everyone, not only the business community, but for people who are Covid sensitive. People who may say, listen, I don't want to sit indoors, because I'm nervous. We need to accommodate those types of individuals. And also, I think for a long time, maybe my colleagues don't agree, but I think for a long time we've been a little bit hesitant to have additional outdoor dining, and I think that's something that we've shown its only positive, as long as it's done in a very tasteful way, where there aren't chairs and tables thrown everywhere. We also have to be very cognizant of ADA requirements. There are certain things that we need to address in the near future. For example, if we are going to expand outdoor dining, we've got to be thoughtful and careful of hedges and AT&T have certain boxes that are in the way. For example, in Bulla, so you can't just put the outdoor dining and not allow a person, a handicap individual to be able to have modes of ingress and egress. You have to be thoughtful about that. Those are things that we are considering. But one of the things that we are working on right now and it's the Manager's team is working on is, putting forth an actual plan on how to redesign certain areas of outdoor dining for a restaurant, and we are working with one or two restaurants, I think it's one.

City Manager Iglesias: Two.

Mayor Lago: Two – we are working with two different restaurants to present to the Commission options, and this may affect our parking, this may affect some of our green space. We need to find a way to balance all of these things. So those are things that we are working on, and I think that in the near future we'll have an actual design that will encompass all these issues, not going to be just conceptual, it's going to actually be a design that we'll be able to look at and say, do we like the direction that we are headed in? But I want to stop, I want to stop at one point just continuing issuing these permits. This week I asked for staff, our Code Enforcement team to really address the exterior signage, which just became a little bit of an issue. *We're Open*, that type of *We're Open* signage doesn't work anymore. We have outdoor dining signage. We need to clean up our act and go back to our old ways which have paid significant dividends in regard to our standards. So, I'm willing to expand, to extend it one more time, if we have to, but I want to find solutions, and we are working on two examples with two different restaurants to bring to the Commission for consideration. Mr. Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Mena: I've had similar conversations with, not only restaurant owners, but with the Manager. I think when you have a negative situation that disrupts society like Covid obviously

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did, sometimes there are some sort of silver linings that come out of that experience and I think one of those is, in this instance, that we can afford to maybe loosen up a little bit on some of the very strict requirements that we have and have it still work and still be consistent with the city's sort of character and standards, and I think we've seen that in certain instances and others maybe not so much, but in certain instances I think we have. So, I think the question now is, is there something that we can do to make some of those situations a little more permanent in a way that works for the city that is fair to all the business owners, not just the business that would like to utilize that space, but also neighboring businesses that may be, frankly are not on board with losing a few parking spaces. So, we have to find a way to approach that situation, but I think we're all, I can't speak for everyone else, but I can say I'm open-minded to exploring that possibility and seeing what we can come up with. I suspect there are other cities that have maybe similarly creative programs for using that type of parking area outside a store for either dining or other programs that are related to retail. I'm curious to hear what the Manager's office comes back with, as far as a proposal that we might be able to work with. I'm fine with extending this for now, but I do agree that probably the last time that we are just extending the status quo. I think if there is going to be a next step, we have to take the next step, and so, I'm looking forward to doing that over the course of the next few months and seeing what we can come up with.

City Manager Iglesias: And Vice Mayor, as we discussed, there are some technical issues that we have to overcome.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right. It's complicated. It's not an easy – I think everybody has the same notion and goal in mind, hopefully, but how you get there is certainly complicated, but I think you can figure it out.

Mr. Trowbridge: [Inaudible]...are available to have the necessary part of that conversation or input. We can certainly bring people together very quickly to give you that feedback, we've been able to do that. You all are out and about as well, you are consumers as well, so you see what we see in many cases, but also know the restaurant owners have no issue bending your ear when there is something that is challenging them. So, your graciousness is certainly appreciated, but I agree and in talking with Peter and Alberto and Julian, we'll make ourselves available to help you take this pilot program, glean from it what we think are the best attributes that don't take us into a place that requires a significant update or upgrade.

Commissioner Anderson: I enjoyed the times when I was able to walk the sidewalks and talk to some of the businesses, because even the boutiques did benefit from having the outdoor dining. The activation is key to bring people out sometimes, because the storefront doesn't invite. I do know there's design ideas that we've discussed, the folding doors, that can open up and help some storefronts and for others that are willing to make the investment, we can have that discussion on future design ideas. I'm looking forward to it.

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Commissioner Fors: And for the record, I'm open-minded to it as well. I think the key is just finding the balance. I'm also looking forward to what the City Manager and staff brings back in terms of...

Vice Mayor Mena: One last thing I didn't say, but I think it's important. It needs to be a real arm's length situation and negotiation that works for the city, it's not just going to be, this is no longer a pandemic situation where we are doing it to accommodate extraordinary circumstances. This is now an accommodation that is being asked for, for business purposes, really. And so, if the city is going to go into that discussion to do something that benefits a private business, it needs to make sense for the city from a financial perspective as well. So that's part of the equation. I think it's important because it's a little bit of change in dynamics from the status quo to what we are talking about.

Commissioner Fors: When we come back and discuss it, I know we always talk about how it's been nice and you know, been beneficial in a lot of different respects, but when we really get down to the meat and potatoes of it at the next meeting, I really want to see laid out what the disadvantages and undesirable effects of outright outdoor dining in parks, etc., even the ugly stuff, because sometimes we want to, we are up here and we want to be nice about it, but let's talk about why you don't go all the way and just allow it, a free-for-all, so that we can help inform us on what that balance is.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to comment that watching this evolve, it's interesting how I think our willingness to allow outdoor dining has actually changed the way, the habits of people that for years, I mean I'm one. I went to a restaurant I always preferred to be inside. Now people come to Coral Gables looking for that outdoor dining experience, because quite honestly, in South Florida there are very few places, I don't think there are any other places that you can have such a pleasant experience being outside, because Coral Gables is the City Beautiful. So, moving forward, we never do anything haphazardly. Everything is well thought out, well managed. I have confidence that we'll be able to come up with a permanent solution that keeps things moving forward, but obviously the Coral Gables way. My only concern is, if this temporary status expires and there is a gap between the temporary and more of a permanent, I want to make sure all the owners, the restaurateurs that they are aware that the clock is ticking that there might be a gap. I don't want to catch people off guard and all of a sudden, they find themselves unaware.

Mr. Trowbridge: Which is where we are today, actually, because we actually had sent notification through the city to some of those that were had tables and chairs in the right-of-way. I explained to as many as we could that we were going to be with you all today on the 31st, and so, maybe we need to have a good plan, because we don't meet twice in August typically.

Mayor Lago: You brought up a good point. Madam City Attorney, when does outdoor dining expire exactly?
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City Attorney Ramos: After this resolution passes it will expire August 30th.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, what I plan in sending out a letter indicating this is the transition period to go from outdoor dining to either – we do have outdoor dining permits right now, but I think we can augment it with some of the things that we have learned, as we discussed, Vice Mayor, through the pandemic. However, there are some technical issues that could be problematic, so we have to discuss those.

Mayor Lago: There are a lot of technical issues in regard to DERM, WASA, grease traps, a lot of different things, obviously safety, ADA, major issue for me, major issue for me. But I think the Vice Mayor brought up something that I hadn't really considered before, and it's a concern for me and I just want to put it front and center. This has to be good for everybody. It just can't be somebody with a big deep pocket who ends up doing what we request and then everybody else just left behind, and I say that because, I'm just giving you an example, please, I hope nobody writes me an e-mail, if somebody designs a beautiful plaza after removing one parking space for outdoor dining, but the removal of that one parking space requires a fee to the city, along with a rerouting of a catch basin, along with pouring of a slab, along with relocation of a hedge, along with relocation of AT&T, case in point Bulla, right in front of Bulla there is a AT&T housing box, what is that called exactly? – what is it? – utility box. So, my point is that it's going to cost significant six figures to get something like that done. Some individuals are willing to pay for that, some are not. So, I want to make sure that we take those into consideration and also, we have to remember that we are in the process of potentially delivering world class parking for the downtown. Whether the design you like it or not, at the end of the day, we need to deliver parking. We can't continue to take away parking spaces and not deliver parking. So those are all things that I want – I'm willing to extend this, but I ask you please, Mr. Manager, remove the signage component of it. No more signs hanging by strings. Case in point, you drive by certain areas, I don't want to mention people here by name, but there are signs, *We Are Open*, *We Are Not Closed*. We know that.

Mr. Trowbridge: That ends today.

Mayor Lago: That ends today, hopefully. So, I ask all the businesses, even those that do takeout, remove your signs. I'd like for that to be as part of this resolution. With that, I'll entertain a motion.

City Attorney Ramos: I'll like to read it into the record, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Ramos: A Resolution of the City Commission extending through August 30, 2022, the authority granted to the City Manager to relax current standards for outdoor/open-air dining and signage in order to provide for expanded outdoor seating opportunities to assist with social

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distancing at restaurants and suspending all applicable fees with regard to signage that they must comply with the current sign code.

Commissioner Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Menendez: Second.

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: By the way, before we move onto the time certain, by the way, thank you very much.

Mr. Trowbridge: You're welcome. I just wanted to see if any of our restaurants were here, not all of them, identify themselves, that I want to thank them.

Mayor Lago: Please, you're welcome to speak.

Carlos Centurion: [Inaudible – off mic]

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Great work, by the way.

Mr. Centurion: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Great work. Can I say something really quickly? I know we have a long agenda today. I just want to say, first off, thank you for cleaning your sidewalks; thank you for maintaining the exterior of your building; thank you for watering your trees; thank you for always having somebody start and finish the day cleaning up the gutter, the street, even if its not your responsibility, you still go out there and put your best foot forward. Your alley is impeccable, by the way. There is no foliage growing in your alley. Its very well done. You really exemplify the City Beautiful and I just want to congratulate you on that and thank you for really setting the example.

Mr. Centurion: Thank you very much. Appreciate that.

[Applause]

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Mr. Trowbridge: Carlos is travelling...

Mr. Centurion: Yes.

Mr. Trowbridge: And I just want to remind you as well that they are bringing a second concept under the Centurion Restaurant Group, to Coral Gables, to Miracle Mile and it just shows you how invested Bulla and the team are in Coral Gables. So, thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: And I forgot to mention, the food is delicious.

Mr. Centurion: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: I've had my daughter's baptism there and it was wonderful, great quality food, I forgot to mention.

Mr. Centurion: Appreciate that. Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Trowbridge: Thank you. I know you wanted to say something else before you went off this item.

Mayor Lago: No, no.

Mr. Trowbridge: Thank you. We will work with the Manager and his team, and we will take into account everything that you have offered. I think the Vice Mayor really pointed to the fact that we've had a really extended pilot program to learn what works well and what doesn't work well and understanding that there are some that will need to be dealt with and work with, maybe in a slightly different vain, but I want to thank the Manager and his team for already doing that with us. We started this conversation some time ago.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you for both of you being here. I appreciate it.