

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item 2-1
January 27, 2026
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro (Absent)
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Interim Human Resources Director, Jose Rodriguez

Public Speaker(s)

Willy Jauregui
Virginia Jacko
Carol Brady-Simmons

Agenda Item 2-1 [Start: 11:05 a.m.]

A Resolution of the Coral Gables Advisory Board on Disability Affairs urging that the City of Coral Gables prioritize the installation of audible pedestrian signals on the crosswalks of Miracle Mile.

Mayor Lago: Moving on to item 2-1, time certain 10:30. Sir.

Interim Human Resources Director: Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. Thank you for your time on this. So, this is an item that came forward from the Disability Affairs Board. This is an item that they're advocating for. So today I have most of the members for the Disability Affairs Board present. So, they'd like to share their thoughts on it. This was a motion that was made that resulted in that resolution to push this item forward. So, I'd like to call up the actual
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board members so they can give you some context on the item, some background, and why they feel it's important to push forward.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Welcome back.

Speaker: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: It's always great to have you, all of you.

Speaker: Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: Our friends from Crystal who are here.

Speaker: Yes, yes. Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: It's not a day in Coral Gables where Crystal's not involved, which is a great thing. How are you?

Speaker: Good morning. Okay. So, we're here today to discuss the audible crosswalks. And it's been an issue that our board has been in conversation about for some time now. And as you know, I'm new to the board. And I did some research on it. And I found out that the crosswalks were approved over a decade ago. And there's a lot of concern about why they haven't been implemented. And we are honored today to have members of our board here. Mari, who has been on the board and now is a citizen advisor. And also, we have some very special guests to discuss the audible crosswalks. So, I just wanted to give a little history. And I was hoping that maybe Willie could give his input because he has personal experience with this. So, Willy.

Mr. Willy Jauregui: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Mayor and distinguished Commissions. I wanted to bring to your attention that we do not have audible crosswalks in the beautiful City of Coral Gables. I suffer from retinitis pigmentosa. So, I'm looking at you, Commissioner, but I can't see the Mayor and I can't see Richard. I have what they call tunnel vision. So, what that means is that it's very difficult for me to cross the street, even with those little new devices wandering around the neighborhood. I urge you to listen to our plea and approve this and move forward because it will also include the city in all the disabilities that are available to everyone in this beautiful city.

Speaker: I served on the Disability Board for six years. And for the past 10 years, we have been discussing the audible crossings. And it's not only for the low vision, it's also for seniors, for children, and for guests that visit our city. So really, the ask is to really prioritize, at least starting with Miracle Mile, those audible crossings and that they actually do take place and actually be implemented. And thank you.

Speaker: I just want to step up here and say thank you to everybody for listening to us on this issue. I find it very important. As you know, I've been on the board since 2019. And my job is to advocate

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for those who cannot speak on their behalf. And this is an item that really, truly is something of really a lot of importance, simply because of the amount of visitors we have on top of the constituents. I know that this was something that was brought up by one of our constituents. It's in our, I guess, in the paperwork since 2013 that Virginia Jacko has brought this up. She is the CEO for the Lighthouse for the Blind. So, it is an important aspect that not only for those that are visually impaired, but also for those with intellectual developmental delays across many spans. This would help many individuals. And so, I really do appreciate you taking the time to listen to us. And yes, at that moment, we're so honored that we have Miss Virginia Jacko here with us. And also, Miss Carol Brady-Simmons, who can sort of give some context on the history of the discussion. And if you have any questions about the audible crosswalks and they can really speak, they're the experts on that on the issue.

Mayor Lago: Good morning. It's great to have you with us once again.

Ms. Virginia Jacko: Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity. I ask you, when you've got a state highway, a county road, and they intersect, some people think, well, that's going to be difficult. Think about in Little Havana, where you've got 8th Avenue, 8th Street, 7th Street. Some years ago, I was told it's impossible, Virginia, because the county doesn't have control over the entire intersection. And with the help of our Chief Program Officer, an internationally recognized orientation mobility specialist, we made it happen. We were asked more than 10 years ago to provide a recommendation for Coral Gables. Every week, I go to Avant Garde on Miracle Mile. Depending upon how I am getting there, where I'm dropped off, I say to myself, if only there were accessible pedestrian signals. When I go to the Palace, and I visit people there that are low vision, and I say, do you get out? Do you walk down Miracle Mile? And do you know what one of the excuses are? Oh, no, I'd probably be killed as I tried to cross the street. It is not costly to retrofit an intersection. It provides equal access. And while we're no longer talking about DEI and some of that stuff that was pure BS, this is not BS. This is giving everybody the right to access your intersections. And Miami Lighthouse, under the leadership of Carol Brady-Simmons, volunteers again to help Coral Gables begin again the process of implementing at key intersections accessible pedestrian signals. Carol Brady-Simmons, take over.

Ms. Brady-Simmons: Hi, thank you. So, one of the things I want to do is invite you all to come to Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and have the opportunity to go under the blindfold and use occluders and maybe some different eye diseases like retinitis pigmentosa and have the experience of walking with someone's sighted guide and also without, maybe with a cane. Also, going out to the intersections and just standing there, closing your eyes and listening to traffic patterns. Traffic appears much closer auditorily than it actually is. It's very frightening when you're out there on the street and you hear a lot of cars going on and then you have people walking around on top of that to really make the designation of when to cross. And then on top of it, we have incredible cars that are very silent now and you can't hear them. So, it's really, really important and for the safety of

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Coral Gables to have these pedestrian street crossings so that your residents and visitors will be safe. And so, I highly encourage you to take the opportunity. You can call us anytime. I will even come out here and bring some blindfolds and different types of simulation goggles and give you the experience and just walking around the neighborhood sighted guide. You don't have to use a cane, but just so that you can have the experience of what your consumers and your residents are experiencing and how important it would be to have pedestrian cross signals.

Speaker: A great media event, Mr. Mayor. I promise you.

Mayor Lago: I am beyond grateful for you being here. Trust me. I want to let the Vice Mayor, who has a real, the leader here in regard to ADA issues here in the city. We just follow her, and we do as we're told in regard to that, very thoughtful. But before I hear from her, I want to ask the Manager a very simple question. Is this a funding issue? Do we have the funding? What are we facing here? Because I want to be honest. Her candor to me is amazing and I wish more people were like that. You know, people try to beat around the bush and they have their own agenda. I mean, her candor was straight to the point. This is BS. This is what it is. You know, this is what you need to do. I mean, I appreciate that. There's value in that. There's value in that. So, I want to understand what is it that's holding us back from being able to deliver this service which is so needed.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor. Traffic control, including civilization, is part of what Dade County provides to us. As you know, there's a large percentage of our tax base that goes to the county.

Mayor Lago: I think it's 30...

City Manager Iglesias: 32 percent.

Mayor Lago: 32 percent of every dollar.

City Manager Iglesias: 32 percent. So, we will be working with Dade County. And we currently have worked with the state to do this on various intersections in LeJeune Road. And the state has been very cooperative. And we will work with the county to see if we can work through the more important intersections for this, but traffic is civilization is for us, a Dade County function.

Mayor Lago: So, before we hear from the Vice Mayor, I'd just like to see if we can include, if the Commission is in favor of including this in our legislative priorities. So, Mr. Manager, you can speak with Chelsea and have this as an issue that should be in our legislative priorities to see if we can get some funding. Funding on the matter. Last night, I had a long conversation with State Representative Demi Busara Cabrera on multiple different projects. She was asking me what are the priorities on behalf of the Commission. So, Madam Vice Mayor, take it away.

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson: So, I'm going to start by giving you two types of a little bit of a history. One, I have a sister that had a stroke at a young age and has peripheral loss of peripheral vision. So, crossing a street, you're not going to see the cars coming. Hearing is also affected. My father also had macular degeneration. So, some people wonder why I have the glasses that automatically change like that to dark glasses. That's why because genetically, you know, it runs in my family. It was about two and a half years ago, our staff had a meeting with FDOT and sent a comprehensive letter asking for audible crosswalks at key intersections along LeJeune Road and along other major intersections, including Southwest 8th Street. Every FDOT street was addressed. They're doing a road safety audit. The report, as best as I can recall right now, was due to us in December. But the key intersections you're discussing were addressed. LeJeune Road, Coral Way, Ponce and Coral Way. Every location where you have public transportation was a priority. In addition, when we have projects coming through, such as the Publix site, it's asked for, again, for those audible crosswalks to be installed in Valencia and Andalusia so people can get to the store. It does cost money. So, it's not something that, you know, is going to come up from a developer usually wanting to do it. It has to be something we initiate. At least that's my experience. But along US-1, we have the same problem. All the way along the Underline, we have the same problem. Pedestrians are at peril, sighted and unsighted, for traffic all the time. I asked our traffic engineer, who's in the back of the room, to follow up with FDOT. I don't think she's had an opportunity yet to speak with them because they keep playing, you know, it's not play. I didn't mean to use the word play. There's unavailability. I hope to have the response through her to these requests that were made back in 2023, 2024, so that we have a real time schedule now because the deadline for the road safety audit has come and passed, and we're not there yet. So, I am fully supportive, but I think we do have to prioritize the key intersections first. Every location where you have public transportation has to have an audible crosswalk, so people with disabilities can get across. Whether you're sighted or unsighted, the time to cross is inadequate. If you don't press that button, it's not going to even put up a walk signal. It doesn't. I experienced it here. We have an audible crosswalk at Hernando and Biltmore Way, but if you don't press that button, there is no time to cross. We're very dependent upon the drivers seeing us, and that doesn't always happen, especially if you're talking about the experience that my sister had when she walked in front of a truck, and she was shorter than the hood. It didn't go well. So, we'll move this for the prioritization of intersections where we have public transportation, key intersections like were covered in the letter to the FDOT, and I'm fully supportive of the goal to have more of these crosswalks available throughout our city.

Commissioner Lara: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Okay. You'd like to say something.

Commissioner Fernandez: First off, I appreciate the board's interaction with this issue. This is the reason we have advisory boards because a lot of things we think they're being done, we think

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they're already moving forward, and they've hit a snag in the road, and you hold us accountable, and you bring this to our attention. Virginia, I've known you for 25 years since my days at Congresswoman Ros Lehtinen's office. This is Commissioner Fernandez, and you've always been the same. You've always been a steadfast advocate, and you have never had any issue with telling truth to power, and I commend you for the work that you have done throughout your career, throughout your life, for people of all walks of life who have had a need because you have never said no, and I definitely recommend that my colleagues do the walk that has been recommended. It really gives you a perspective that you generally don't get because even if you're standing at an intersection with your eyes closed, it's not the same thing. It really isn't, and you mentioned a point about our vehicles today, and they don't sound the same way. I know that federally they've added either music sounds or some sort of noise to ensure, but if the car is just above the mileage, which I think is 20 miles per hour, sometimes you just can't hear it, and just us walking, we can't hear it, and the Vice Mayor brought up a very valid point as well about the timing to cross because that is important. I've noticed that in some intersections where I have pressed the button, and I have barely had enough time to get across at regular speed. We definitely need to ensure that we have enough time to get across. So, a friendly amendment, if we can also review the timing of our crosswalks at the intersections to ensure that there's enough time for folks who need additional time to get across.

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson: That's in the letter to the FDOT. It's a pedestrian lead signal. Okay. So that has already been covered.

Commissioner Fernandez: Perfect.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, we have a motion. Oh, Commissioner, go ahead.

Commissioner Lara: Very, very briefly. I'm completely in support of the Vice Mayor's resolution, and I echo the sentiments of our fellow Commissioners here. Just the suggestion of doing a walk, I'm going to reluctantly do it because just your suggestion of it kind of made me think about it in a different way. And I guess through empathy, you can open the path to activism and get something done. And I want to just take a point of personal privilege to thank each and every one of you for being here. By the way, this is Commissioner Lara. Thank each of you for being here because in one way or another, you all are all dealing with one challenge physical and are trying to make a difference. And coming here, as the Mayor noted, to educate us firsthand is invaluable. And Willy Jauregui, you are a force, and you are my appointee to the Disability Advisory Board. And Mayor, he asked me, "You want me to kind of sit back or you want me to be at the front line? I said, Willy, I want you to be you. And Willy, by the way, is proud, and we are proud of him, veteran of the United States Marine Corps.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your service.

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Commissioner Lara: Absolutely. Thank you. And he was a star baseball player on top of all that. So, to be dealing with retinosa pigmentosa, I think, is particularly difficult for a man, retinitis pigmentosa, for someone who has had RP, for someone who's had superhuman vision at one time to accomplish the things you've done, both on the baseball diamond as well as on the battlefield. So, thank you very much for what you do. And all of you for being here today.

Mayor Lago: Well said, Commissioner. Thank you for your service. Thank you so much. And we're going to make this happen. Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right, we'll close. We have a motion and a second.

City Attorney Suarez: Mr. Mayor, can we just restate the motion so that we're clear for the record? So, it's a motion, as I understood it, it was a motion to prioritize the key intersections as identified in the letter to FDOT.

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson: No, not only in the letter to FDOT, but the communications with the county because some of these are county intersections as well. Every place where we have transportation hubs, bus stops, trolley stops, if we have a signalized intersection, we'll ask the county to, because Douglas Road is a county intersection. So, each one of those needs to be prioritized.

Mayor Lago: And I also want to add; this is a legislative priority. And I would also like to add through the guidance, and I'd like to have the Vice Mayor run point on this, is I want to understand what is the cost associated with delivering this as per the letter that the Vice Mayor is talking about? So, what are we looking at across the board so we can really attack this at the state and at the local level to make sure we can get as much money to really make an impact? So, we have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Commissioner Castro: Absent)