

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item L – Discussion Items
June 13, 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

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item L
Discussion Items

Mayor Lago: Anything else for the good of the order from my colleagues on the Commission.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes. I distributed to all of you something that I shared with Commissioner Regalado that is a bit timely, as the incinerator site out west in Doral has now been decommissioned, not willfully, but otherwise and that land can be opened up to be repurposed for something that I don't think the City of Doral is going to allow anything that burns. I had an individual approach me or her company, I should say, approached me a number of months ago, and I asked them so that I can share information with you all to put together a pitch deck and I pressed them to include some pricing so that we can start looking at it for the purpose of lack of better terms. I brought this to Commissioner Regalado's attention because that land out west needs to be repurposed somehow and we lack the ability and the space to do anything of this nature, whether it's to do the char process or for doing a mulching and turning it into soil process, which is about the ultimate goal of reducing the cost to our residents, because I believe we're paying, City Manager you can correct me, \$48 per ton.

Mayor Lago: And it's only getting more expensive.
City Commission Meeting
June 13, 2023

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, so we're looking for something less expensive. So far, this initial number which, of course we can negotiate is less and we're trying to do something that's going to benefit, not only the residents, but benefits the environment and the material that is repurposed here can be turned into soil for farmland, it can be turned into soil for landscapers. I think it's something worth taking a look at and for the county to take a look at. Commissioner Regalado shared with me that they have purchased various areas out west, parcels of land, and that ideally what would happen is, we stage areas all along for these alternative repurposing facilities, depending on what can fit in the area. Take a look at it, we can revisit it again later. I also talked to her about, she brought up to me their composting idea. Having a couple of locations where compost can be picked up by the county, so it's something that we might be able to fit into our model later on. And I also talked to her about the education process for the septic to sewer and funding as well, where the county can come in with some matching dollars for residents to do the hook-up. I know our plan is not supposed to be ready for us to roll out until September of 2024, but this is going to take a while to get the education process done with residents. So, I'm hoping to move that forward and be ready to start educating residents in about six months.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor, I asked Matt Anderson to be here this afternoon to take a look at this and see if we can do a deeper dive and get more information than that. So, we will be looking into it and see what we can do, especially considering what happened to that site in Doral that may not come back.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, may not come back as an incinerator site, maybe we can make it into something else that's more useful. I'm done. That's it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: I had a resident, actually a resident spoke today about lack of communication when it comes to Sunshine meetings, and I was wondering if maybe we could incorporate an extra step of maybe putting door-hangers in the immediate neighbor's doors or forming a campaign to better inform all the neighbors surrounding the Sunshine meetings. Yes, no, anybody has any ideas on that.

City Manager Iglesias: I think our Parks Department does a lot of that work already when they are doing Sunshine meetings, as far as parks. Do you want to do that in every Sunshine meeting. There are some meetings that are just Sunshined because multiple Commissioners may go, but meetings of substance we go ahead and do that and put as much information on as possible.

Commissioner Fernandez: The Commission in the past tried to get a system where we would be able to geo-fence the e-mail addresses.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Correct.

*City Commission Meeting
June 13, 2023*

Commissioner Fernandez: What ended up happening with that?

City Clerk Urquia: That system was actually generated by the IT Department. They created the system, it works, it's been tested, however, we weren't getting the – residents were just not registering.

Commissioner Fernandez: Maybe we can start promoting that again, and then try to send out a special e-mail just to those who live within that zone, I guess.

Mayor Lago: So, we'll be trying the same thing that didn't work already. You want to try it again, see if we get a different result.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, may I ask a question? What e-mail addresses are we feeding in there. Are the people signed up for E-NEWS or are we having a separate sign-up process?

City Clerk Urquia: That's the issue. So, right now we have a sign-up process to receive the Commission meeting agendas, we have a separate sign-up process to get E-NEWS, and then there would have been a third sign-up process for you to register and then we can use GIS with IT, we can geo-locate, pinpoint where the meeting was taking place, and then all those who had registered within a 500 or 1,000-foot radius we would notify them. We were not getting traction when it came to that.

Mayor Lago: The Commissioner wants to do, let's do it again. Let's try it again.

City Clerk Urquia: It was Commissioner Fors' idea, the system is up and running, and we can definitely put it out there.

Mayor Lago: Try it again.

Commissioner Fernandez: Or maybe we can just send out an e-mail to our current E-NEWS asking for more information. Birthdays would be a good information, their addresses, phone numbers in case we need to communicate, anybody who wants to provide that information we'll have it in our database.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I was going to suggest something like that. Use e-mail, E-NEWS, send out a separate e-mail that says, if you would like to have GIS notification of projects, etc., in your area, you need to sign up here, a separate sign-up. People don't know that, so they need to be told separately.

Commissioner Fernandez: I was pretty connected. I never knew that it actually was implemented.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, will you do me a favor, so we can show Commissioner Castro the doorhanger samples that we've done before. For example, like for a park's discussion, where we're considering buying a piece of property in a neighborhood, and we want the neighborhood to come out. I remember Commissioner Slesnick, she expanded the outreach in regard to individuals that we want to notify about a public meeting, I think she got it to like 1,500 feet, which is the largest of any, the largest span of any municipality in Miami-Dade County. So maybe we can get that information, send it to the Commission as a refresh. I think she did a presentation where we compared what we do as a city versus other municipalities in regard to outreach. Here's a copy of the doorhanger right there. There you go.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Wow. Talk about efficiency.

Mayor Lago: So that's an example of a doorhanger public meeting that we did, right there for you. I'm up for anything that gets more people out to the meetings, but Commissioner Slesnick at that point, she wanted to do over 1,000 feet. I think it was 1,200, 1,500, its far. Some municipalities only do 200, 300 feet. We take it to a different level in regard to outreach for doorhangers, mailings, to homes, notifying them of a public meeting. Mr. Clerk can you get us that information?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: It's probably going to come through you and just send it in an e-mail through the Manager and to the Commission.

City Manager Iglesias: Comp plan issues is 1,500 feet. Nobody does that.

Mayor Lago: There you go, 1,500 feet.

City Manager Iglesias: Text amendments, 1,000 feet.

Mayor Lago: Nobody does that.

City Manager Iglesias: Nobody does that.

Mayor Lago: Nobody does that.

Commissioner Castro: The concern that the resident had today was about the sidewalk on Alhambra. He didn't know.

Mayor Lago: I'll tell you. The meetings that I had that Commissioner Fernandez went to the meeting while he was campaigning and I think Vice Mayor Anderson was there also, was a meeting that we Sunshined and just to talk amongst ourselves with the director about things that were happening on that street, because we wanted to get the lay of the land. We wanted to understand what we were going to do, what were our options, how were we going to connect the

*City Commission Meeting
June 13, 2023*

traffic calming that was proposed, the bridge, the sidewalks, the swale, how we were going to work on that. And then we said, you know what, let's notify residents who have been in conversations with us and if they want to come, they want to come. We knocked on the doors. I knocked on the doors with the director and Melissa on five or six doors to speak to those residents, instead of just mailing them. Why did we do that? – because we send them mail, the mail gets lost, they don't open it. I wanted to have a face-to-face conversation with people to tell them listen, don't say no to the sidewalks. Let's work on this and let's get it done for the first time in 20 years. And then I imagine, you had a meeting there with some residents. So there hasn't been really a public meeting that we've actually noticed that hey, there's a plan we want to consider, there's a public meeting.

City Attorney Suarez: Right. There hasn't been a community meeting.

Mayor Lago: There hasn't been a community meeting. Thank you for correcting me. There hasn't been a community meeting where, like for example, there's a plan; there's a plan for Catalonia Park, we are going to exhibit it to the community, they are going to vote what they like, what they don't like. This was just more meetings that we Sunshined just to kind of have the Commissioners understand how we are going to coordinate. This area in our city has like four or five things going on; the embankment project; the bridge having issues; portion of the bridge collapsed; we had issues with the asphalt; we had issues with traffic calming that we were finalizing, that we're about to implement; we had sidewalks; we had trees that needed to be relocated or removed, they were under consideration. It wasn't really a meeting. What they are talking about is what we talked about before. We are going to do a community meeting where everybody is going to get in a room and we are going to talk about all the issue at hand, and then people can say, I like this or I don't like this, and this is the direction. But if you want to do doorhangers for other things, I'm down for it. Many people want to come to meetings, I welcome it.

Commissioner Castro: I was just thinking the immediate neighbors.

Mayor Lago: Yes, of course.

Commissioner Castro: Letting them know we're going to be in your neighborhood or we're having a meeting in your neighborhood.

Mayor Lago: In that case, I knocked on their doors, we knocked on their doors. We actually knocked on the doors and said, come outside, come outside and join us, we want to tell you what's going on, to show you a survey. We knocked on that gentleman's door, the gentleman who was here before, the civil engineer, and I happen to know him for a long time.

Vice Mayor Anderson: For the dog park, I knocked on every single door facing the dog park with plans, proposed plans.

Mayor Lago: Anything else Commissioner?
City Commission Meeting
June 13, 2023

Commissioner Fernandez: No, I didn't take the dogs.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes. Billy, I have IT has it. So, does Communications have my poster?

City Clerk Urquia: I have it, sir.

Commissioner Menendez: They have a better one. So, Saturday June 24th, my senior's movie series, anybody 40 and older, at the Gables Art Cinema, I'm showing a classic romantic comedy with Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn, 1953, Rotten Tomatoes gives it a 95, as the critics, and then 96 by the residents or by the people, and it is a fantastic movie, a great summer movie. If any of you want to join, bring your significant other, by all means, I have some seats for you. I had scheduled Monty Python's Holy Grail, couldn't get that one, so we went with – actually we're almost sold out. I was told we only have a few tickets left, so whoever is watching this, and you want to go see it, go to playables.com and get your tickets to this lovely romantic comedy and we'll be having more movies after the summer, but I just wanted folks to know. It's a great movie classic.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fernandez.

Commissioner Fernandez: Just one item. I've had conversations with many staff members over the last couple of months and there's something that's been coming up in conversation quite a bit, and I thought this is something that as a Commission we can tackle, and I started doing some research and I found what Miami Beach is doing in this regard. Its whistle-blower protection. There is concern among staff about bringing up issues and retaliation taking place against them. Miami-Beach enacted this in 2017, I believe it was, and it basically creates a process for any issues that staff believe should be brought up to somebody's attention, and protections for retaliation that could be taken against them. I do have some suggestions on things that could improve this, because right now its limited just to the City Manager. The City of Naples has a similar thing where they create a separate board. I think that would be a little too much, but I think we can do something where the complaint can be brought to the attention of the City Manager. If they don't feel comfortable doing it within the city, we can recommend that they bring it up to the Commission on Ethics. So, I thought this was a positive step that we could take as a Commission to alleviate some of those staff concerns and give some protection to people and staff.

Commissioner Castro: That's such a great idea.

Vice Mayor Castro: I have a question, because I know there are federal whistleblower laws, I'm pretty sure there's state whistleblower laws, do those not protect our city employees, they do.

City Attorney Suarez: I will review them, and I can review this, but generally yes.

*City Commission Meeting
June 13, 2023*

Vice Mayor Castro: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: And this references those.

Mayor Lago: So, this would be, if that already exist and those protections, would this be just more of an educational campaign to notify people that if they have concerns that they can go this route to address issues.

City Attorney Suarez: I apologize Mayor, I haven't reviewed this. I'm not familiar with this.

Mayor Lago: Alright. Would you like to review it and then maybe...

Commissioner Fernandez: And we can bring it back at the next meeting.

City Attorney Suarez: I can come back next meeting, yes.

Mayor Lago: But I'm happy to know that this already exists though, that these laws are already in place protecting employees and ensuring that if there is an issue that needs to be brought to the attention that their rights are protected, both by the federal level and at the state level.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I've done whistleblower cases, but the employees haven't, they are not aware of it.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct. Even with the protection laws, there has to be more at the local level. I've seen it myself where there has been retaliation at local levels, even with the state and federal, it kind of fallen through the cracks. By enacting something here within the city, something we can do to kind of protect our own employees.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It might be that we need to have a separate process whereby identity is protected.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Commissioner Castro: I like that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And I've done that type of work as well, we won't get into the weeds of it, but that's my suggestion. We already do have state and federal laws, but still that's not going to make someone feel protected unless their identity is protected, just like any other individual who brings forth information that's concerned about their safety or job, etc.

Commissioner Fernandez: I can share the few that I found which is Naples, Jacksonville, L.A. County, New York City, that way you have different versions of what the other municipalities have done.

*City Commission Meeting
June 13, 2023*

Vice Mayor Anderson: No. I understand, but it's different when you are identifying somebody versus not identifying somebody, because you can have all the paper you want, it won't make...

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Anything else.

Commissioner Fernandez: I just wanted to thank our Parks staff for Sunday's event, the Cars and Coffee Event. We had over 140 cars that came out. Unfortunately, we didn't do a very good job of communicating it, Parks did it, but wasn't on the E-NEWS, wasn't shared on our social media accounts, and even some members of the Commission, I believe weren't even informed that the event was taking place. I think that's something we can work on internally, just to make sure that we're getting the information out to people, because we had really good turnout, despite the potential rain, but it probably could have been a much bigger event. We had great reviews from the car folks who were there. I mean it was a really nice event.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I wish I had known it was there. My husband would have totally loved it, if it had been one day earlier, his brother and nephew would have just been drooling over the cars.

Commissioner Fernandez: It was great.

Mayor Lago: So, I have one item that I want to bring to the attention of the Commission. I have some pictures that I'd like to show you and give you a little bit more detailed understanding, something that I wanted to test today. I did not give any formal warning to staff, neither Ms. Cabrera, neither the Manager, anybody on staff. So, this morning, I decided to show up at 7:30 to submit my own plans for a renovation that I'll be doing at my house. I submitted plans this morning. I walked in at 7:40 a.m. I used the kiosk. The kiosk literally took me about a minute to input the information. Within three minutes, I was notified, its your turn, please go to the BOA desk and the following staff member will be with you shortly. They jumped the gun. I wanted to show you another screenshot. This is me sitting down. There were probably about five or six people in the lobby being helped by different employees. My name is up there, along with the other three individuals who are in the queue. And the next slide. The person who is coming to help me, literally two minutes later is the following individual. They came to help me. I left, submitted documents, signed. Obviously, I was prepared. I had the copies. I had the CD, not he CD, but the jump drive. I had all the documents filled out. I had done everything online, follow the procedure. I was in and out in less than fifteen minutes. From the moment that I got there, filled the kiosk, probably like twelve minutes. And as you go back to the first slide, no, the second slide, excuse me, that is the end result. Thank you for visiting Coral Gables Development Services Center. To fill out a survey please go here. I haven't filled the survey yet, but it was a very pleasant experience. Simple and I spoke to a few different individuals that were there. They were mostly permit runners and I asked them, because they kind of asked me, why are you here, and I said, I'm submitting something for

*City Commission Meeting
June 13, 2023*

my house. I'd like to kind of get your opinion on the matter. And they all gave rave reviews in regard to the new system, how quickly they are in and out, and how efficient, and when you compare it to other municipalities, its something that is a breath of fresh air. I didn't contact one employee. I wanted to test it myself with my own project to see how the process would go through and I wanted to congratulate the Commission. I wanted to congratulate the Manager, Suramy Cabrera and the whole team, for doing a wonderful job, because it was delightful. I expected to be there two hours. I had enough time to go have breakfast at Sucre and come up to the meeting.

Commissioner Castro: Mayor, what was your test though, because you could do all of that online. What was the thing that you tested?

Mayor Lago: I wanted to engage and test it myself. As a person who is in the construction industry and a design professional, I wanted to walk in there and be able to work the kiosk, understand the kiosk, walk in there, sit down with a staff member, have them come down the stairs, as the BOA, sit in the queue, present the documents, do everything, because you have to do it in the BOA, as you know. You have to submit actual hard copies to the BOA, because it requires two hard documents to be reviewed through the BOA, along with the other necessary documents. So, you can do it online, but you still have to provide two hard documents.

Commissioner Castro: But what did you accomplish in those fifteen minutes?

Mayor Lago: Those fifteen minutes, I submitted all my documentation. I scheduled my BOA appointment. I made sure that I had everything was properly taken care of. I went through the checklist with the employee. First time I met her, very nice lady, we went through the checklist of every single item that I had to make sure that I had everything addressed. She doublechecked. I submitted the documents and I walked away. And now I have a BOA appointment forthcoming in the next two weeks, and I look forward to going before the panel, getting their recommendations and their reviews in regard to what my plans are for my backyard. But I wanted to bring it to your attention, because I thought it was refreshing having never gone myself in regard to my own personal capacity. I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity and really witness it myself.

Commissioner Menendez: So, it was user-friendly.

Mayor Lago: It was amazing, amazing; and trust me, I go to City of Miami, I go to Doral, I go to the county, I do all these kinds of things when I have to go pull permits and have to go do things for obviously construction projects, and I deal with those kinds of situations. The ability to walk in and have employees come – I'm in the City of Miami every single day and I don't want to talk bad about any other city, but it's a completely different experience, completely different experience, going to the City of Miami or going to Miami-Dade County. You walk in and you're literally at a moment's notice you're addressed. Simple as can be.

Commissioner Castro: So, you're going to the BOA for your backyard.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am. I have to go to the BOA for my backyard, because I'm building a structure and building a structure and building a summer kitchen and I'm also building a back wall to enclose my side entrance with a gate, so I have to go to the BOA; and plus, as you know, if you are over a certain threshold in regards to a project cost, you have to go...

Commissioner Castro: Its \$5,000.

Mayor Lago: No, its actually 75. You actually go to either the full board or a three-people board. So those are things that I didn't know, and I learned those things today and she told me, you have to go to the following board. So, I just wanted to bring it to everybody's attention. It was a very pleasant experience. I wanted to commend staff, as always, awesome job, awesome job, and its only getting better. If there's nothing else, I hope everybody has a wonderful week, enjoy the summer.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll see you tomorrow.

Mayor Lago: I know, but some people may not be here with us. Enjoy the summer, enjoy this time, get out there, stay dry. God bless. Thank you.