

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-3
September 26, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro (On Zoom)

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

City Planner, Jennifer Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item E-3 [11:46 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission providing for text amendments to the City of Coral Gables official Zoning Code, Article 6, “Landscape,” by amending the utilization of artificial turf on open joints of pavement; and Article 10, “Parking and Access,” by providing review of materials in pavement joints; and providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto E-3.

City Attorney Suarez: E-3 is an Ordinance of the City Commission providing for text amendments to the City of Coral Gables official Zoning Code, Article 6, “Landscape,” by amending the utilization of artificial turf on open joints of pavement; and Article 10, “Parking and Access,” by providing review of materials in pavement joints; and providing

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for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date.

City Planner Garcia: So, these are two text amendments to the Zoning Code. As you recall, a couple of meetings ago, there was some concern about allowing artificial turf being located between the joints on the driveway. So, this is proposing to eliminate that allowance the artificial turf between the open joints and then to include some natural material that they could be able to include between those two joints on the driveway.

Mayor Lago: So, as the sponsor of this item, again, this is just about maintaining the integrity and character of the city. If you drive around the neighborhood there's been certain exceptions that were made, because they were allowed by the code. In my opinion and the opinion of the Board of Architects, which reviewed this, they also believe that this is not in line with our standards here in the city. Here's an example, it just doesn't look Coral Gables, that's right adjacent to St. Teresa. By the way, it's allowed by the code now, so if you get even closer to it and you drive by it, to me, it doesn't really provide that quality standard here in the city. We can either use grass, we can either use pebble rocks. There's a lot of things that we can do to fill those gaps, crushed stone, which will look a lot cleaner. It will bring a different feel and touch to that type of surface. So, Mr. Manager, my understanding is this was discussed at the BOA before.

City Manager Iglesias: I don't believe the Board of Architects doesn't like synthetic materials, most architects do not. So, I believe this can be very well handled by our City Architect, as long as it's not something artificial. So again, if you have it already installed, it is what it is, stakes, but moving forward, I think that this would be just something that fell through the cracks that I think that we can remediate with this legislation. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I applaud the effort to do this, but I do have a question about the stones. Are we doing something to kind of keep them in place now?

City Planner Garcia: I think usually they use some kind of glue to keep them from spreading all over the place. I would be submitting it for review by the City Architect and his staff to make sure that depending on what material they are going to propose stays in place.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor, I think if they are kept reasonably below the actual pavement, I don't think they should be an issue as far as displacement, because you have the actual concrete pavers or concrete sections restraining it.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, in my neighborhood I take a lot of those off the sidewalks, so that's why I'm bringing it up. Maybe they were older installations, but yes, that adhesive I think is an excellent idea, because you still get the percolation down in between the cracks and you prevent a tripping hazard out there on the sidewalks, because the tires, the movement of the tires is what's causing those rocks to come out.

Mayor Lago: If you've gotten a chance to see how this turf weathers, it doesn't weather very good. So, think about having this in the front yard of people's homes, being exposed to cars driving over and over and how it's going to look in the next three or four years as it weathers even more with the sun and the traffic. So, this is just, not only aesthetically is not very appealing right now. I have no issues with it on the side yard and the back yard, even in the front yard, in areas where it's not visible from the street, but if you look at this quality – I know the intent is to minimize maintenance and give that look of grass, but it just over the long run it just falls apart, it just looks cheap.

Commissioner Fernandez: I drive by this location everyday and I think the biggest concern that I have is, it stands out like a sore thumb, it really does, and this location in particular, there isn't much of a tree canopy so its not as if grass wouldn't grow there if it was planted. So, I think this is specifically in the swale, I'm not even sure, do we allow it in the swale?

City Planner Garcia: No.

Commissioner Fernandez: We don't allow it.

City Planner Garcia: The turf, no, we don't allow turf in the swale.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. But even in the cross hatched pattern as it was in the photo?

City Planner Garcia: In the driveway approach.

Commissioner Fernandez: Um huh.

City Planner Garcia: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, we do allow it in the swale.

City Planner Garcia: The continuation of the driveway.

Mayor Lago: That's not the swale. What you see, if you could put the picture up again. You have to sign a release – that piece right there between the sidewalk and the street, when you do your driveway, you don't have to do that area, you can leave it asphalt. But if you sign a release with the city, a covenant with the city, that you assume responsibility of it, the city will let you pave that area, excuse me, not pave, put pavers, put a six inch slab or four in slab as you see right there, so that you have a contiguous driveway and it looks a lot more beautiful. It's more costly, but you can see there are certain driveways throughout the city that they only do the driveway on the other side of the sidewalk, not on the sidewalk that touches the street. That right there is not the swale. That will be, obviously, considered part of their driveway.

City Planner Garcia: The approach.

Mayor Lago: Of the approach, excuse me, that's the appropriate word, the approach, but you have to get clearance from the city to be able to do the approach on both sides. But just look at that, doesn't look like our city. Look at the beautiful grass. Again, it's not done, they are still working on it, and I hate to pick on anybody. I'm not picking on this resident. They did what's allowed by the code, but it just does not – when you look at the grass, on the left and on the right-hand side, look how beautiful the landscaping is. You can tell they are fixing up this house, they spent a lot of time and energy doing it, and that's not going to weather well. Eventually those strips come off and become loose, and don't age well with the sun.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm also concerned about a trip hazard. Is part of the process a waiver for the city if they do this a liability?

City Attorney Suarez: This requires an encroachment agreement because they are encroaching on the city right-of-way, so the city has to approve it, there's a public works permit, and yes, there's an encroachment agreement that includes hold harmless and indemnification language. Additionally, we require that they list the city as an additional insured on their insurance.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

Mayor Lago: For example, on my property I have a driveway, I have pavers and I extend the pavers all the way to the street. You have to sign that agreement. If those pavers are not

maintained and somebody falls, again, the city is indemnified from that situation; and a lot of that happens too, when you have the approach so close to the street, the driveway is right there and those pavers – its very difficult on the maintenance. That’s where you see a lot of cracking and stress on the product, so they have to maintain it as much as possible. That’s why you see the banding is usually in concrete to lock in whatever material they are using. I don’t know if anybody else has any other concerns, questions, ideas.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No. Do we have any public comments?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, we do. Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I think there are different ways to looking at things. At the Code Enforcement Board, we’ve seen some turf that looks better than grass. I think you’re dealing here with quality, not necessarily turf or not turf. I think the same way as the Board of Architects approves or disapproves styles for the roofs, maybe they could approve or disapprove the kind of turf that could be used, because I’m telling you, we’ve seen some that they had to say, it is not grass because it looks perfectly fine. So, let’s be a little more open-minded. I’m telling you the same way, the BOA checks your tiles, if they don’t approve the quality, the color, the whatever, they don’t approve it, the same thing could be, if its quality turf. We had somebody that paid thousands of dollars for the turf, and it looked perfect, glorious. Now, if you go to Walmart and you buy turf, it’s not going to be the same. So, there may be some way to balance this.

Mayor Lago: Any further comment?

Commissioner Castro: This is Commissioner Castro. I think it’s very hard to maintain grass between the joints. Maybe we could limit the turf – I know the picture we’re showing, I don’t know how many inches are between, how big the joint is, it seems pretty big. Maybe we could limit the amount of inches between the slabs. Just so that it gives it, like this green element of color, because putting stones – we’re the City Beautiful, we’re about trees. It’s going to really take off that green that would look better with the artificial turf and like what Mrs. Maria Cruz was saying, we could probably have certain companies that are preapproved like we have with colors when it comes to artificial turf.

Commissioner Menendez: My only question is, so the folks that already have it, the day they need to replace it, they’ll be required to change the material. How does that work. That’s my only question.

Mayor Lago: They would not be required.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay.

City Attorney Suarez: My understanding is no permit is required to change the turf, so they would not be required to change it.

Commissioner Menendez: What I'm saying is, let's say five years go by and they realize its falling apart and at that point can they put turf artificial back on?

City Attorney Suarez: Correct. They would not have to come back in for a permit. If they had a permit to do it that way and they are just replacing that, yes.

Commissioner Menendez: That's my only question.

City Manager Iglesias: They are all to repair it.

Mayor Lago: So, just to touch on two points. The reason why you cannot do larger slats is because of the size of the wheels and what would end up happening. The wheels would get stuck in between the slats, that's number one. So that's not really an option. Number two, the quality of the turf, that's great quality of turf. You can tell since it's not a long expansive amount of turf, that you can tell its faux. That's why we don't allow it anywhere in the front where it's visible from the street, no matter the quality. I installed turf for all my projects for the schools, public schools and private schools, especially on rooftops, just installed a rooftop soccer field at a school, and in a large school, and from a distance you can't tell its turf, because it's a lot of turf. When you have this, you can, and it just is not going to hold up well in regard to maintenance. So just because you expand the slats in between slabs, you can't. You'll have tires that will fall in there, you'll get stuck, because again, it's probably like two or three inches deep when that's poured. So that won't work. Again, it's an aesthetic issue. You can do rocks; you can do loose crushed coral; you can do stone; you can do river rocks, you see it everywhere, and you see right across the street, right across the street probably three or four houses down, you will see a house that has the same driveway that they use natural grass, and they have no issues with the natural grass. There are many different options, but this has become an option that has not become popular in other cities because it requires zero maintenance, but it does not hold up well, as I've seen in other cities, no matter the quality of the turf that you use. You can use the Rolls Royce of turfs; I've bought it for the schools, and it just doesn't hold up in such small little strips. It's got to be large expansive ones.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll put in my last comment. Just image a piece of carpet, it gets frayed at the edges and that's what's going to happen here with the tire tracks. If nobody else has any comments, I'll move this item forward.

Commissioner Fernandez: I just wanted to say, this is not a cheap option either. Its actually more expensive that putting brick pavers in the home, so this is not a cheap option, but going with a cheap turf is probably not something that most people are doing. I'll second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: No

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 4-1)