

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
August 22, 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)

Josenrique Cueto
Josiel Ferrer-Diaz

Agenda Item F-3 [11:56 a.m.]

An update regarding the letter written to Miami Dade County on behalf of Mayor Vince Lago's Office relating to the maintenance of county-owned assets within the City of Coral Gables.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

City Attorney Suárez: F-3 is your update, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Thank you for the County for being here. I apologize for making them wait. I sent a memo, more like a letter, with the help of my staff that was put together over a few months period along with the Manager and with our colleagues at Public Works. And we put this together

talking about City assets that was sent over to the County. It's about, I think it was about a 30-page letter, three pages were the main body, then the other pages were just photo examples of certain things that we're dealing with here in the City. This is all about County assets in an effort to -- you know, this is not about, you know, showing off or, you know -- this is about working collaboratively with the County. We have issues that we need to address. So, we met with staff in the County after they brought back an updated list of accomplishments which I think was critically important. I think we met about two weeks ago, right? Two weeks ago in my office with several members of the team along with Mayor Cava's team. And I sent that over now as a memo to my colleagues in the Commission requesting that, again, more eyes, more ears, we can get a lot more done. And I know that I miss things because Hermes' corrected me on a whole host of things that I thought were the County's responsibility but ended up being our responsibility and vice versa, I thought our responsibility but are the County's responsibility. Everything from bridges, everything from asphalt repairs, signage, a litany of different things. So, I'd like to invite our county team. We have a representative from Mayor Cava's office. We have Josenrique Cueto here and other members. And I'd like to just get a quick update and invite my colleagues to engage in this. This is really important, really important because this is about beautifying and making our City safer. This is something that's going to be a big project that I'm going to be working on. As you can see, here's the letter that we provided. And I'm going to be providing this to all the residents. The next page. It was two -- I think it was two or three pages of body, and then we just gave a ton of examples with locations and just examples of what we're facing here in the City. So, it's all about collaboration. I need the help of the Commission and I need the help of the residents to address issues like bumpers, you know, sidewalks, things like that. I'd like for the County to kind of talk to us a little bit about what they're working on and what we can do. What can we do to make this process as easy as possible? Case in point, took me four years with the help of the Manager and Craig Leen, who's no longer here, to get that agreement with the County for traffic calming along with dropping the speed limits to 25 miles an hour. How can we do something similar where it's kind of, you know, collect all this information, then get it over to you and get these things addressed as quickly as possible, you know, build a repository.

Unidentified Speaker: Well, Mayor, Commissioners, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for joining us, by the way. More importantly, thank you for being here, and I apologize that I made you wait an hour. I'm sorry.

Unidentified Speaker: No, no worries. Thank you for having us. So, you know, the Mayor heard your letter, and we've worked pretty...

Mayor Lago: Responded, responded quickly.

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah, worked pretty quickly on...

Mayor Lago: Making corrections.

Unidentified Speaker: Yes, sir. And I brought a couple of our public works experts here to kind of walk through some of the items on that list, let you know what's already been accomplished and what is already set to be accomplished. And like you said, kind of interact and get more things down on the record that we can help with, we can collaborate on.

Mayor Lago: Just so you get an idea, I'm going to be sending out a newsletter like I do every month for the last eight or nine years. This is going to be part of my newsletter. You know, we're going to take a picture, the whole thing. I'm going to include the letter with a link, and I'm going to say this is what we're doing. Help me out. And how do we get residents and business owners to identify County assets? Because they're going to get confused like I did on City assets. How do we get -- how do we make it easy as possible for them?

Jose Cueto: Mr. Mayor, Commission, good morning. Thank you for having us here today. My name's Jose Cueto, Deputy Director of the Department of Transportation and Public Works. I'm here with my colleague, Josiel Diaz-Ferrer, also Deputy Director of Operation and Maintenance. Mr. Mayor, as you said, the relationship between the City and the County is a collaborative effort, and the County, DTPW specifically, we're committed to ensuring that our assets are in the best shape possible. We received a letter from the City in March, as you indicated, and the team -- and Josiel will go through it in detail -- has responded immediately, have addressed a litany of issues from pavement marking, debris pickup, painting of bridges, installation of traffic control devices throughout the City, as well as designing a number of intersection improvements that will be forthcoming in the very near future. There's a number of capital, larger capital improvements scheduled within the City, including the resurfacing of Old Cutler, the Cocoa Plum bridge, and many others. But we're here at your disposal to answer any questions, and again, go into further detail about any particular requests and the process to go about receiving those complaints, receiving that information so that we can take a corresponding action.

Mayor Lago: I wanted to add something just really quickly. Besides, I'm very grateful for you coming to meet and everything. You guys have been awesome, okay, and so has the Mayor. But I also got to pay respect to this man here. Josenrique Cueto is a star at the County. Every time that our team at Public Works -- because we run into hiccups at the County, there's a lot of work. Every time there's a hiccup, I copy the Manager, I copy Josenrique Cueto, and this guy gets it done, okay. He gets everything done. Traffic circles, speed calming, you know, we're waiting for something. He works with Hermes and Melissa and we get that sidewalk approved, you know, in days. So, I just want to say thank you for your hard work. Listen, it's incredible.

Mr. Cueto: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And a lot of that's actually Josiel's team.

Mayor Lago: I know, I know. I had to point it out.

Mr. Cueto: Thank you, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Because you're always so gracious and you always say, listen, it's not me, and you always tell -- you always give, you know, credit to this gentleman. So, thank you again and I appreciate you.

Josiel Ferrer-Diaz: Mr. Cueto: I appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: Pleasure to meet you today and take it away.

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Much appreciated. Good morning or afternoon, I believe.

Mayor Lago: We're right there.

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: We're right there. Good morning, Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, Josiel Ferrer-Diaz, Deputy Director of Operations and Maintenance for the Department of Transportation and Public Works. So, following the receipt of that letter, which we took very seriously, we went ahead and within a month we addressed the painting of the bridges. Now I want to pause for a second in that one of the things that we want to do as a result of that letter, we went back and I checked with my team on the cycle that we were doing that at. And we felt that the cycle that we had been following in the past and to date was not necessarily up to par with the needs of the City and the needs of the community in general. So, we're actually going back to try to revise and try to balance out our work in terms of the aesthetic versus the safety and -- the safety items. We do have 212 bridges throughout the county, 14 of those are movable. And with some limitations in staff, we do have to give priority to some of the safety work orders that we handle. But we are -- we do have to take a lot of -- we have to really also concentrate on the aesthetic items, so we're trying to do that as well. On the milling and resurfacing that Josenrique mentioned, all of the projects that were included in the letter have been programmed or either have begun, are about to begin, or have been programmed for the upcoming years. So, we do have some projects that are coming up that are going to do pavement improvements and pavement marking and signage improvements. Beyond that, we do have the Metrorail Station, which you also brought some concerns there. I've also asked -- one of the teams in my portfolio is a facilities team, which oversees that group. So, I've also asked them to do a holistic look, and I've actually visited this station twice with them, and we've developed a list of improvements that need to be performed.

Mayor Lago: Can I interject just one second?

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Sure.

Mayor Lago: I want to explain to my colleagues the extent of this.

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Okay.

Mayor Lago: So this is real -- this is addressing real issues here in the City, and I'm going to give you an example, okay. There was a beautiful, massive oak tree at the station in front of the

University of Miami, massive oak tree. Lightning hit it. I pass it every day. Every day I pass it on Ponce. And lightning hit it and it died over the last year. The County was trying to address it, it became basically just dry and it became a liability. That was one of the things that we addressed. You guys were out there in two days, anything that dealt with a safety matter, and you guys cut it down and it was gone. A lot of the things now are aesthetic, aesthetic issues. You know, the signage is just, you know, signage is 30 years old. The Metrorail is, you know, certain of the sound insulation has been changed. You know, we want that in the Gables also. It'll help the residents. You guys are working on that right now. That's coming next year, right, correct?

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Next year. We talked about it. So, these are things that take time because obviously budgeting reasons, budgeting reasons. You want to know, and this is just to show you certain things so people can understand, the residents can understand. You know how many crews the County has for trees? Tree -- around Miami-Dade County, they have three crews. You know how many crews Coral Gables has for tree trimming throughout Coral Gables? Four crews, okay. When we talk about sidewalks, our budget for sidewalks is more than the County's budget for sidewalk. So -- and that's not, I'm just showing you that there's limited resources everywhere, and it's all how you allocate these resources, and where do you put this money. So we got to work -- we have to work collaboratively addressing the safety issues, but we may have to find different answers in regards to addressing beautification issues that can't be addressed for four or five years. They're not going to be able to be addressed. They just won't be able to because the County doesn't have the resources. And by the way, it's not only money, it's manpower. And talk a little bit about that because that's what we've been talking about.

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Yeah, then...

Mayor Lago: If you don't mind, please.

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Yeah, of course. And the Mayor brings up a good point. I think we do -- we try to do the best that we can in terms of addressing the aesthetics and resources do become an issue. I mean, attrition is a main issue, and I think all of us are dealing with it, both your city and our county as well, and trying to find willing and able personnel. And in addition to that, taking a look at the needs of our infrastructure going forward. We're doing a big, big effort in this budget year that we're in, and as well as the upcoming budget year to try to right-size some of the crews. And it's going to be a multi-year effort. I think our sidewalk crew, our bridge crew, those are crews that need immediate strengthening, and we're trying to seek that through this budget year and in the upcoming budget years. So, those are items that we're going to be concentrating heavily on. One of the things that I think with our director -- our Mayor, first of all, setting the standard and our director and from there on, you know, to the rest of the team, we started to take a more strategic look at things, not just addressing issues. How do we become sustainable with addressing those issues going forward. So, one of the things -- going back to, for instance, the Metrorail stations. These Metrorail stations are 40 years old and they haven't been changed in 40 years. So, one of

the things that we have to do is strategically take a look at them, see what items need to fall into cycles and make sure that we implement those cycles with the staff available. One of the things, for instance, that we noticed, and I have a comprehensive list that I've put together for the Metrorail Station in front of the University of Miami and that one in particular so we've already done -- we've already done some maintenance to the drainage in the guideway so that we don't see any leakage into the columns, and then we're going to be painting those columns in short order so that, you know, that issue doesn't become -- that doesn't -- that issue doesn't continue going forward and it becomes an eyesore to be honest with you. But more importantly, I think one of the things -- I think we've shown you through this list that we can respond quickly, but one of the things that I want to do, and it's important to weigh in all the resource issues, funding issues for both of us is, I think we need to -- and you know, we have a good relationship with your team, so we'll work together with them once you have the comprehensive list, Mayor, that you and your team are putting together as well as what we have, and start setting up prioritization. I think that's important to do, because with limited resources and limited funding, the most important thing is what do we want as a priority? What do we want in a cycle? And what do we want to address more on an as-needed basis? And we handle it in that fashion. I think we can be much more effective in that manner. So I think this is going to take a little bit of work in terms of working with your team, addressing priorities, and making sure that we can right size our teams going forward or right size our cycles to make sure that we can address the needs. And I think that encapsulates what our plan going forward is.

Mayor Lago: Can you do me a favor?

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Sure.

Mayor Lago: I need your help through the Manager's office, please, and then talk to my team. Copy my colleagues. It's fine. The more the merrier. I need to understand how to address it. I know that Hermes is going to be like, I can help you with that, but I want to come from the County. How can I address what is your responsibility? What items, like in particular? What items? Obviously, I know everything on the Metrorail, the signage, but then you get very close to certain areas where the curbing is not your responsibility. There's a curb on the corner of Le Jeune and Ponce that I've sent 15 photos of that is shattered completely on the corner, shattered completely. Who's responsible for that? My understanding is that Coral Gables is responsible for that, but I could be wrong. So, what I would like to do is have my colleagues in the Commission read the memo that I sent them. They probably read it already, but you know, let me correct myself. Not only read it but just send me ideas, start working on things because we can sit here and argue about policy, but this is things that we can really implement. We can implement and get done for the City. Get done for the City, make the City safer, make the City more pretty, more admirable, you know, have people come here. This is real issues that we can collaborate with the Mayor. And the Mayor wants to be, as she was a resident of the City of Coral Gables, she wants to, this is a priority for her, and I'd like to see us deliver on something that is going to take time, it's going to take a year, two years, three years, four years, but this should be something that should be implemented in the City. The Manager rolling forward should have like an ongoing dialogue and

list of issues. Some of them we won't be able to address for five years, and I get that. But we can start actually putting things in the front burner. And this letter, this 30-page letter commences that discussion. And it's not just like sporadic requests, sporadic requests, sporadic requests, sporadic requests. That's where I think things fall through the cracks. And then I can copy Commissioner Cabrera, Commissioner Regalado. They can be collaborative also. My understanding from what you told me -- I learned something new -- that the County Commissioners have some disposable money in the budget that we can ask them for some sidewalk money, Mr. Manager. And I think that we can work on these things together and maybe we can plug holes where we need money for sidewalks and we need monies for X, Y, and Z infrastructure.

Vice Chair Anderson: So, Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Chair Anderson: I really appreciate you coming. I mean this is a lot of time out of your day to be able to come to one of our -- one of the many cities that you have to take care of.

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: My pleasure.

Vice Chair Anderson: And I have been communicating with the Commissioners as well about some of these issues. A couple of them I want you to take back, and one is the safety issue, some of the tree trimming is the deadwood and the trees on Coral Way.

Mayor Lago: Old Cutler.

Vice Chair Anderson: And Old Cutler as well. The trucks are hitting them. You know, every rain that occurs, I know that our landscape architect and our Public Works Department just cringes waiting for the next branch to fall and hope it's not on a pedestrian or vehicle below. And I know we weren't able to take care of the Cocoa Plum bridge this past summer. If you could get back to us with when the timeline is that the County plans on taking care of that and some more details on the staging plan so we can work with the residents in planning this out.

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Thank you for that input. I think I have good news on both of those fronts. On the trees on Coral Way, we are working with the Parks and Recreation Open Spaces Department. I believe they either have commenced or will be commencing a trimming effort over the next three to four weeks. And that, you know, commencing now and into the three to four weeks, we were just talking with your Public Works director outside and we'll be sending a comprehensive schedule on that. So, that could be -- and any issues you have like that, feel free and we'll coordinate and serve as the liaisons for you guys on that. As far as the Cocoa Plum bridge, we're actually in the process of seeking a contract. Fortunately, that's not one we can do in-house. It requires sandblasting and some pretty major work. So, we're actually in the process of seeking a contract so that we can get that work done. So, we'll coordinate with your team as well on presenting a staging plan and making sure that you guys are informed.

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah.

Vice Chair Anderson: So, let me clarify. We were talking about that bridge replacement. There was a...

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: No, this is a -- my understanding was the pedestrian bridge in Cocoa Plum, that one that needs to be painted, that is a metal bridge. So, that one where actually it needs to be sandblasted and there's some repair -- minor repair work that needs to be performed prior to the painting. And in terms of the replacement, Josenrique can speak a little bit more about that.

Mr. Cueto: Thank you, Deputy Director. Commissioner Anderson, the reconstruction or the replacement rather of the Cocoa Plum bridge is on schedule to bid. We're at 100 percent design. Utilities are being relocated with FP&L, AT&T, and the other utilities, which is on critical path. Very challenging to move those out of the way. The project is on schedule to bid in June of 2024 and initiate construction towards the end of 2024, December of 2024.

Mayor Lago: And Madam Vice Mayor, just to give you a little more information, and I welcome you, please engage through the Manager. I requested in our meeting was to find out more information and make sure that we really cross our T's and dot our I's in regards to the MOT. For Sunset, Old Cutler, Le Jeune, it's going to be a nightmare and we need to make sure there's enough funding for MOT, maintenance of traffic, on that front to ensure that, you know, this project is, how long this project's going to be, when are we going to do it in the summer, obviously when school's out, figure out ways to minimize the impact as much as possible.

Mr. Cueto: Absolutely, Mayor. And it is a long-term project. It's about a two-year construction phase, so yeah, it has to be done...

Mayor Lago: You can't do this at night because you're covered by residential all around the property.

Mr. Cueto: And of course, we will be undertaking public outreach and working very closely with the residents to make sure that that's a success.

Commissioner Fernandez: And Mr. Mayor, piggybacking off of a comment that you made about the locations and what specifically is Miami-Dade County and City of Coral Gables, there may be something that we can work on through our digital twin to have some sort of overlay that we can put in there and maybe that may be the easiest way to be able to figure that out.

Mayor Lago: My end goal here is, and I'm working on this with my colleagues here, is to build a repository so that there is -- the Manager is the point person through Hermes and staff and everything gets dumped into this database and we build a database that we can, you know, once a quarter just really look into and say, where are we with this, where are we with that? Obviously,

with safety, you guys have gone out there through the leadership of the Mayor. Make sure I tell her, you know, how much regard and respect we have for her and her efforts, and you've addressed the safety issue., so thank you for that. In regards to beautification, I don't want to say it's just as important as safety, but we are the City Beautiful, so help us out with that a little bit. And let's find out what that curve on Le Jeune, which is completely crushed -- Le Jeune and Ponce -- on the other side of the gas station and who's responsible for that.

Mr. Cueto: Yes, sir.

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, we plan on working closely with Public Works. When that Le Jeune Road bridge project -- there's a tremendous amount of MOT work there and we plan to work very, very closely and also on the communication side to make sure that everybody is aware of the project, how traffic is detoured, and any changes that might occur. And if I could, since the plans have been finished, we would like to see if we can obtain a copy of the drawing so we can look at the scope of the work and the MOT and the MOT involved.

Mayor Lago: So, one last thing before -- unless anybody else has anything else they want to say - I just want to thank my staff, Chelsea and Gabby and the Manager's staff, along with Hermes, Melissa, and their entire team, the ACM. Again, this is a long-term project. This is a real project. This is a project that, again, is long overdue, and it's something that over a collaborative time, we're going to really address issues here. So beyond politics and beyond items that we're discussing and policy, this is what really is, at the end of the day, the crux of why we serve. And I want to thank the Mayor and please send her our best and send her our appreciation for her leadership. And you know I look forward to touching base on a quarterly basis through the Manager and let's build that repository together once my colleagues in the Commission have sent their input and we start collecting input from the residents and business owners. You know, anybody who has an idea or see something that's out of line, send it in send it in, send it in.

Mr. Cueto: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: All right

Mr. Cueto: Thank you. Mr. Mayor, one last note on Cocoa Plum bridge. On August 30th, we will be having a public meeting with the residents, your residents in Coral Gables.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Can you send us that information? And what we'll do, we'll disseminate that through Martha Pantin in the Manager's office and then each one of us will send it out to people and make sure --

Mayor Lago: I'd like to be there just to make sure. It's a long-term issue that we've been working for a long, long, long time. This has been years in the making and it's something that again we don't want to do but we have no choice but to do it. We have to do it. Mr. Manager, anything else?

City Manager Iglesias: No, Mayor, thank you.

Mayor Lago: I appreciate you guys.

Mr. Cueto: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ferrer-Diaz: Thank you very much, appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: I appreciate -- if guys ever want a job, don't tell the Mayor. This is the second time I tell you, you guys are more than welcome here in the City of Coral Gables. We'd love to have you. I know it's a public meeting, but if you want...

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Don't go too far. Don't go too far, don't go too far. Don't go too far.