

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-11
August 24, 2021
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

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-11

Discussion regarding leaf blowers in the City of Coral Gables. (Sponsored by Commissioner Menendez) (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson) (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto G-11, a discussion regarding leaf blowers, Commissioner Menendez or Anderson would like to take the lead on this.

Commissioner Menendez: Go ahead Commissioner.

Commissioner Anderson: Oh, leaf blowers, yes. The first step would be for our city employees to do it. I sent you all some pictures of what I just found at a local home supply store, when I happened to go there for something else, I was impressed by the CFM's that are available now on these pieces of equipment, because I have one that's much smaller, takes the same 40-watt battery. I didn't check to see where it was made.

Vice Mayor Mena: I can give you a guess.

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Commissioner Anderson: That's an after market one that I got for half price. So, the purpose of this is we need to be the example for the rest of the community and start moving off the gas-powered leaf blowers. The two cycle engines are much noisier. I've looked at the difference between two cycle, four cycle, the bottom line is these are so much quieter. They are quite powerful, because an electric motor is powerful, and I would like to encourage staff to move away from gas leaf blowers.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: So, Commissioner Anderson, we have some history on that, and this is something that we've looked at in the past, probably going back a couple of years where perhaps the technology had not risen to the level where it may be at this point. We do have some equipment, our employees have tested the equipment that we have for testing, have indicated to us that it really doesn't meet their needs. We have high heavy use, we have commercial use at a very, very intense level. For example, when the leaves are wet, and they are heavy it doesn't really tend to move the leaves; and then there are issues with the batteries themselves. The life cycle of the batteries, etc., etc. That said, there is a possibility of going onto a pilot project with the latest technology, and I think we have been talking about steel as a potential supplier. The steel equipment, which is commercial grade, typically runs about \$4-\$500, we can buy some of that, and see and evaluate it, see if the technology has gotten better. It is something that is obviously an issue because of the noise, and it is internal combustion engine. So, a move to electric would make sense, provided the technology would allow us to do our job in an effective manner. In one of the conversations that we were having with some of the members of the Commission, there was a discussion about hours, I think that it was the Mayor that brought it up, perhaps having an hour for leaf blowers, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I was thinking about, first of all, I have an electric leaf blower, and I have to change the battery, if I use it for more than 30-45 minutes, I've got to change it to the backup battery, because it just runs out of battery. Steel, by the way, American made, everything is about American made today, that's incredible, and they are the best product on the market, in my opinion. I would love to see our staff test. I'm not going to mandate anything in the private sector, because I think that's an over-reach, in my opinion, but I'd like to see staff test it and see if we can get it to work and set the example. What I would like to see, and this is what I wanted to propose, after having a conversation with the ACM was that, why don't we mandate that you can't use leaf blowers till 9 o'clock in the morning. If people are concerned about the noise, let's at least make it so it's not at 7 o'clock in the morning. Well, let's consider.

Vice Mayor Mena: What time is it now?

Mayor Lago: 7 in the morning.

Vice Mayor Mena: 7.

Mayor Lago: 7 in the morning. For me...

Vice Mayor Mena: Residential is 7?

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Mayor Lago: Yes, that's my understanding.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: I can chime in if you like. So currently the power tools and landscaping equipment used by our residents, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., that was recently changed back in 2018, we changed that.

Mayor Lago: Who wrote that law?

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: We did.

Mayor Lago: We did? Okay.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: I drafted it, presented it and you guys adopted it back in 2018.

Mayor Lago: Who was the sponsor of that?

Vice Mayor Mena: Probably you.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: Probably you.

Mayor Lago: Just a guess.

Commissioner Anderson: I think it was you, as I recall.

Mayor Lago: I think the most...

Vice Mayor Mena: Douglas entrance area there was an apartment up there. Yes, I just remembered.

Mayor Lago: So, I think the best one that's worked is the Saturday no exterior construction. That really quieted the neighborhood down.

Assistant City Attorney Ceballos: For commercial entities, they can still use outdoor maintenance equipment on Saturdays, currently from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., they are prohibited on holidays. They are slightly different, basically have an earlier termination time than residents, Monday through Thursday its 6 p.m., Friday its 6:30 p.m., as opposed to a resident is basically till 8 p.m. everyday, Monday through Sunday, except holidays.

Mayor Lago: I think the issue is the time and we have to send out, because we should have all the information from the Landscape, because I remember writing that law that required us to get all the information and we could send a notice to the landscapers, these are the times you have to work, because I know that my landscapers in my neighborhood are working at 6:30-7:00 in the morning.

Vice Mayor Mena: They are not supposed to until 8.

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Mayor Lago: I know. That's why I thought it was 7 o'clock, plus I'm out the door at that time anyway, so I hear them, because I'm getting into my car at that time, so I hear them, so I know exactly that they are working outside of the limits. So how do you stop them? – you've got to educate them, they are breaking the rules. I stand with the Commissioner on this point. I think that we should test out the latest equipment with our staff, maybe buy two sets of it and see if it works.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to add that, I'm sure Commissioner Anderson on the campaign trail besides in addition to the septic tanks issue, leaf blowers were probably number two, especially sustainability and the carbon emissions and that concern, but also, obviously the noise. As soon as this item came up listed on the agenda, I received a lot of communications in support of doing whatever we can to address the issue. So, I don't have a prop like you did, the battery, I have a latte, but nonetheless, I think its something that we should move forward. I would love to hear from the administration what their timeline would be for the pilot program, more of a definitive idea, but we should, I think the two-prong approach, the time and see what we can do.

Vice Mayor Mena: We have the time.

Commissioner Anderson: We already have the time. I want to add here that I saw the folks over at the Biltmore Hotel, the one who had a backpack on was definitely an electric leaf blower being used plenty of power, out in the parking lot using it. So, the power is there, and I agree steel is definitely better than what I have, but I have a little yard, so I didn't need the power behind steel.

Vice Mayor Mena: I guess my question is, what's the objective here and when I ask that, are you willing to bend it for private landscapers that people hire for their house or not? The reason I ask that is because if the answer is yes, I get this, but if the answer is no, what are we really doing because we are talking about how many crews does the city have, 8, 9, 10?

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Something like that.

Mayor Lago: If it works with our crews, we could mandate it that any SFM, or any of those crews use it, but I just want to make sure that before we say, hey listen, use this, I have it at home, I use it at home. It's nothing in comparison to a gas power.

City Manager Iglesias: We would like to try with one crew and let's see how the batteries hold up and how effective it is and if we find it effective then we can go to our crews and then come back and address it again.

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm not willing to bend it in the private sector, its not something I'm going to support at any point in time. So, I get the notion if you're making a real impact and kind of doing that on a broad scope, but I'm not going to be willing to do that, so that's why I ask the question. I think at the end of the day that's going to be the question, right.

Commissioner Menendez: The way I look, we have electric vehicles, we sort of shifted in that direction. We are not mandating residents drive electric vehicles, but some of the members of the Commission do, they are privately and I think I said lead by example, and I honestly believe or I

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know for a fact that a lot of folks in the community want some kind of relief so this would be a step in the right direction and we can cross that other bridge another time, but right now let's take that first step.

City Manager Iglesias: I believe the pilot program would be good, have one crew use it, see how effective it is, battery life, etc., if that works out then certainly, we could do it from a city perspective and then we could discuss it, the private sector, but the private sector may not be as receptive to that as we will be.

Commissioner Anderson: They may not be, but I've gone as far as if I hired somebody to do something, I handed them my leaf blower, so mine is obviously the battery-packed one. So, there are different ways to cut this, slice this one, but right now I think the first step is our step to try it out.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: So, we'll do some research as to what is the state-of-the-art equipment as far as electric leaf blowers are concerned. We will try to ensure that they are American made of steel, that would be a good thing.

Mayor Lago: I like that.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: And also, I would like to add, I understand your concern, Vice Mayor Mena, I will also say that in my opinion, I think that the industry is trending toward the electric equipment, probably not there yet, for whatever reason.

Vice Mayor Mena: Well, it's for the same reason as every other industry, because until the cost line up in a way that it makes business sense.

Mayor Lago: It's like solar too.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right – exactly.

Mayor Lago: Solar has fallen dramatically. But why don't we look at what other municipalities are doing and how that's affected private industry when they migrate to electric.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: I can tell you that as you noted at the Biltmore, there is a transition toward electric equipment. I do know they have electric mowers, etc., and whenever they deadline a piece of equipment at the Biltmore, they are replacing it with something electric.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.