

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
October 24, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item: G-2 [11:51:25 a.m.]

A discussion regarding artificial grass in backyards.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Quesada)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Next is G-2, discussion regarding artificial grass in backyards.

Commissioner Quesada: Thank you Mr. Mayor, this is my item. So, I have a backyard that has a lot of trees and therefore, I have dirt like five years ago or four years ago I asked the question of artificial turf and I didn't realize that it wasn't allowed and that's when I was told by the Board of Architects it wasn't allowed. Recently just by happenstance, I've had a number of different residents ask me about placing artificial turf in areas of their homes where there is too much shade for grass to grow. I have been told by numerous professionals in the industry that you just get these grass plugs or you spray this liquid or you get this fertilizer and it will grow. None of it works. I've tried, I've tried everything. I spent a lot of money trying to get grass to grow where there is dirt in a shade and it never works. So with that, I want to have a discussion to see if maybe this Dias would be amenable to passing a regulation to allow artificial turf in homes. I figure that right now when you drive around the City, I think you see more artificial turf than you

realize and I think it's illegal; it's technically illegal at this point. You see it when you see driveways that have concrete blocks and sort of patches of the concrete, you can't really tell. I actually think it looks pretty good, but I realize that a large piece of grass that's artificial turf in front of a home maybe too big of a step to take right off the bat, so what my proposal at this point, again I'm bringing this up informally is that we consider allowing artificial turf in homes as long as it cannot be seen on the street, and I think this will help resolve some of the issues that residents face, particularly in my neighborhood where there are a lot of trees in backyards that line along the fence is always going to be dirt, you really can't do anything about it unless you want to put down some pebbles or something like that. So that's the idea, that's the genesis of it. I'd like to hear everyone's thoughts whether they like the idea or not.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Commissioner Lago.

Commissioner Lago: I don't have any issues at all, especially for individuals that are suffering from the inability to...

Commissioner Quesada: Suffering is a strong term, but inconvenienced.

Commissioner Lago: Listen, some people are spending thousands of dollars a year to try to keep their swale, again it's not swales, but...

Commissioner Quesada: You know what ends up happening, because it happened to me, you spend a lot of money once and then you see it doesn't work and they are like, forget it, I'm just going to...

Commissioner Lago: And, if you have young kids it's an issue, especially in your backyard, I know how your backyard, it's more like a side yard than you have a backyard.

Commissioner Quesada: Yes – exactly.

Commissioner Lago: You are suffering especially you have two young kids. So, I don't have an issue with it at all, but what I'd like to see is how do we tell the difference between somebody who is having an issue and not having an issue, is there like a process that we follow, because they are going to say...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: But, I don't want to have artificial turf inspectors.

[Laughter]

Commissioner Lago: I'm not saying that, but I'm saying there has to be a process where is it only a certain part of your backyard, or is it your entire backyard you just rip out....

Commissioner Quesada: As long as you don't see it from the street, I think is the only reasonable way to police it, unless having a better idea that's what came to mind for me.

Vice Mayor Keon: When we were talking yesterday, I think in this pre-agenda item, this item came up, a discussion on artificial grass came up, I think in a presentation from Ramon Trias over a year ago, you were talking about some changes to the residential building code and one of the recommendations was that there be no artificial grass and I remember at the time our saying that we believed that there was an appropriate use for artificial grass, and particularly and it is visible from the street, it is in driveways where you use those large blocks, or if somebody has a patio area that's in the front of their home that they be allowed to use artificial turf as the filler in those. I know homes where the walkway up to the home is shaded and there are stones or whatever, and there is artificial turf between them. They are visible from the street; you would have no idea that they are artificial turf, but they are visible from the street and we had that discussion and what was your – what was the outcome of that? You were supposed to go back and look at it and come back with some provision for artificial turf.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: There is some language that is being discussed right now with the committee for single family review, which allows the Board of Architects to review and approve artificial grass in the context of an overall design; and I think that in moderation the use of artificial grass in the right place is appropriate. The problem is that sometimes we've had some requests to simply have artificial grass all throughout the backyard or even the front yard, and to me that probably not consistent with the quality of Coral Gables.

Vice Mayor Keon: So, if you could bring back that – are you comfortable to have them bring back that piece of the code with that in it...?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: If you have it in the backyard we don't see it, why should we impinge on their liberties?- stop it.

Commissioner Quesada: That's where my mind was. What I want to come out of this is, I want staff to come back with a new regulation for us to consider implementing.

Vice Mayor Keon: I do too, but I want them to allow it in the front yard where it's a filler between stones and different...

Commissioner Quesada: I think in a front yard if we had artificial turf, you'll really start to tell, that is where I would draw the line.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Commissioner Quesada I would entertain a motion that we allow it in the backyard as long as you don't see it from the street.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Commissioner before you do your motion, would you all entertain making sure that the materials are recyclable. There are a lot of good materials out there...

Vice Mayor Keon: Before you make a motion, I really would like you to come back with a recommendation as to the kind of material that can be used and where it can be used.

Commissioner Quesada: Yes, that's what I'm asking for. We need detail on this, because I have seen and here's another thing, at one point I looked at before I realized it wasn't allowed in the City, I had someone, two companies, I'd spoken to two different companies and there is a big difference in the quality of the different types and some of the older variations could potentially be dangerous. So, I would like to have staff come back with a draft resolution for us and some background on materials and different examples of what we should consider moving forward on this, again if the rest of the Commission...

Vice Mayor Keon: And, I think you consider the time that you'd like to see this back.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm sorry?

Vice Mayor Keon: I think you consider time for when you'd like to see this come back.

Commissioner Quesada: There is a lot going on, this is not a terribly pressing issue.

Vice Mayor Keon: It's well over a year ago that it came up and it should have moved forward, but it hasn't.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright, so we will come back.

Vice Mayor Keon: So, when do you think you could bring that back Ramon?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: I was just going to say that the City Architect has samples of the quality materials that are preferred, because as the Commissioner said, there is a big

difference between the quality of the material. So, we do have that and is reviewed very carefully.

Commissioner Quesada: If we can just get a full staff workup, so that we can make an informed decision.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Remember if they are going to have it in the backyard and we are not going to be able to see it, as long as its recyclable and all of that, I don't want the Board of Architects opining on people's backyards that can't be seen from the street, that's too much.

Vice Mayor Keon: OK and they can include that in the item.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Next is changing the trees around Granada Groves Court.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, can I just say one thing?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes sir.

City Attorney Leen: You are the policymaker, but we do sometimes have the Board of Architects advise even on things that can't be seen from the street, because they can be seen by the neighbors, and that's how sometimes it comes up.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Grass will not be seen by a neighbor.

City Attorney Leen: I understand. But, I just wanted you to know that. One other thing I should just put for the record is we have allowed artificial turf where it's an ADA issue, like if someone is allergic to grass in certain circumstances. One other issue where it's come up is in Code Enforcement matters; sometimes you have a lot of trees in the backyard and so its dirt and we have a ground cover requirement, so I know that from time to time we've worked with staff to try to address that issue, so this could be helpful on that.

[End: 12:00:04 p.m.]