

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Items E-1 and H-1 are related**  
**June 10, 2025**  
**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 Richard D. Lara**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**  
**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**

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Agenda Items E-1 and H-1 are related [9:57 a.m.]

E-1: An Ordinance of the City Commission amending City Code Section 78-101, “Compulsory Connection Required Where Sanitary Sewer Available,” to provide for city responsibility for sewer laterals located in the right-of-way under certain conditions; to establish circumstances under which property owners remain responsible for repairs; to establish triggers for mandatory lateral replacement during new construction or substantial improvements; providing for repealer provision, severability clause, codification and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

H-1: A Resolution of the City Commission amending Ordinance No. 2015-17, as amended, Resolution 2016-148, as amended, Resolution 2017-167, as amended, Resolution 2018-219, as amended, Resolution 2019-223, as amended, and Resolution 2020-158, as amended, to adjust the Sanitary Sewer Charges providing for severability clause and providing for an effective date.

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item E-1.

City Attorney Suarez: E-1 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending City Code Section 78-101, "Compulsory Connection Required Where Sanitary Sewer Available," to provide for city responsibility for sewer laterals located in the right-of-way under certain conditions; to establish circumstances under which property owners remain responsible for repairs; to establish triggers for mandatory lateral replacement during new construction or substantial improvements; providing for repealer provision, severability clause, codification and providing for an effective date.

Commissioner Castro: Were there any changes to the first reading?

Mayor Lago: If we may, before we do that, make sure we adhere and we do everything through the Mayor, before we go on that route. Mr. Clerk, do we have any public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I have a simple comment here on E-1. The Ordinance is a little difficult for some of us to understand, because I don't know what substantial improvements are. What's substantial for me may not be substantial for somebody else. I appreciate the fact; you know the improvements I understand, but there are some things here that, how do we know what is going to trigger it. That's my only comment. You know when you talk about charging people, you know some of us are retired, some of us are on limited income, and we would like to know what we are getting into and substantial to me may not be what substantial to other people. Okay. I think it would be a good idea if there is a percentage of how much things are going to cost or something like that, so we have an idea what it's going to cost us if we do such and such. Okay. That's it.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Please close the public comment. Can I have a motion and a second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Lara: Second.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, you'd like to speak on the item.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Briefly. I think this is a very amazing improvement because we have a number of laterals going to the street that are difficult to repair, they are affected by our trees. What happens with residents on many occasions is that they don't get them fixed and they continue to leak down into our water table, so this is a critical and necessary piece. I think staff can speak to what substantial improvement is. It's not going to be a small improvement.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara do you have any comments.

Commissioner Lara: No. I just think it's a win-win for the city, for the residents. It absolutely is a step in the absolute right direction.

Mayor Lago: Commissioners.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. I think this is good legislation. The only thing here is that I would like to know how much a resident is really saving by us absorbing this cost and what is the fiscal impact to the actual city. I know it's on a property-by-property basis, but in reality, I would like to know that fiscal impact.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, a couple things. Your first question about the changes from first to second reading. When we discussed the laterals, we added gravity to make sure that it was clear it was only for gravity laterals. This does not cover folks who have pump stations. So, this is exclusively for the gravity laterals. And the other change that we did is that we actually removed some additional...language that was no longer relevant because the residents are no longer responsible for the lateral in the right-of-way. So those are the changes between first and second reading. As far as the impact for the resident, there is an accompanying item to this one, which is to do a small increase to the sewer fees and you are looking about a couple of dollars per month to a regular user, to what is called a moderate user, and we expect this to generate about \$300-and-something-thousand dollars a year. How much it actually cost the resident to repair, it depends, right. It would be a point repair which would be a lot cheaper than somebody having to replace the entire lateral. You've got to replace the entire lateral, depending on where you are. Like for example, if you are on a heavy roadway, it could be really expensive; you are on a narrow street, it could be anywhere between \$10,000, upwards to \$25-\$30,000. So, in this particular case, we collect a little additional revenue, and we are responsible for the laterals on the right-of-way. I think there's a caveat about it, if it gets damaged by a tree on private property, then the owner will have some responsibility, but more than that, as opposed to the way it is right now where the property owner is the one responsible for the lateral even on the right-of-way, which more often than not, they are not really equipped to address that.

Commissioner Castro: So, what you're trying to tell me.

Mayor Lago: But through the Mayor.

Commissioner Castro: It's my turn so I don't have to say through the Mayor but thank you very much for trying to correct me. I'm still talking to Hermes. So, what you're trying to tell me is that we are going to go ahead and increase a little bit in the utility bill to subsidize for this expense.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct. Yes. And this is the way that Miami-Dade County does. In fact, I'm not aware of any municipality around that makes the laterals in the right-of-way the responsibility of the property owners. The property owners are responsible for the portion in private property, but everywhere else except in Coral Gables the right-of-way is the utilities responsibility and that's not the case right now, so we are changing that. So that's what we're doing, and I think it's probably better for everyone, for city, for the residents, for a very small increase, and in answer to Mrs. Cruz point. The code revision includes, it is actually very specific; level 2 and level 3 alterations, which those are terms that are on the Building Code that are for

very specific types of remodeling or alterations, and it goes into for work not exceeding \$150,000 or 100,000 square feet or more. So, you're looking at someone who's either building a brand-new house, doing a significant addition, doing significant remodeling, at that point you should make sure your utilities are up to code as well, and wanted to make sure that that will be part of those larger jobs. Somebody doing a kitchen, a roof, and stuff like that, they are not going to be responsible and have to, oh by the way, do the lateral now. So that is actually covered within the Exhibit A and the code revision on Section 78-101.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Director.

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Mayor, may I say something.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you, Mayor. This is a good way of handling laterals. It clearly delineates what is plumbing and what's engineering contracting. Up to the property line, inside the property, that's a plumbing contractor; from the property line to the sanitary sewer is engineering contracting. Very, very difficult for owners to get that kind of service. You are also dealing with check-outs for utilities, all kinds of issues, you have power, you may have all kinds of utilities. So, this clearly delineates from the property line in – plumbing, it's a resident from the property line out, its engineering contracting and the city makes sure that those lines are working well – infiltration is not taking place. It makes sense from a contracting perspective.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Commissioner Fernandez.

Commissioner Fernandez: No comments. Ready to vote.

Mayor Lago: As the sponsor of the item, I'll tell you why I bring this forward. Having dealt with this in other municipalities at the completion of a project, I've always noticed that the county is responsible for the areas on the swale. I think we're the only city that I'm aware of, Mr. DCM, is that correct, that we're the only city that did it this way. So you and I, and I think you were there too, and the assistant director, visited, I'm pretty sure at a minimum one, probably two elderly people in the last three months, four months, at their homes where this was a very financial impact, a very big fiscal impact for them, and I find it a little bit egregious that the city is passing this cost along to them. I think it's very simple. In reference to the previous speaker's comments, for the public, if you would read the detail, it says it here, it's a level 1, level 2 alteration, very clearly delineated, there are specifics there, very clear, very clear. And I think you said its affecting about, we did some research, it was affecting about 10 or 12 people a year that are having this issue.

Public Works Director Diaz: It varies every year.

Mayor Lago: About 10-20 – average.

Public Works Director Diaz: More or less that's roughly the number of calls that we get on a yearly basis for these kinds of issues.

Mayor Lago: So, at the end of the day, to me...

Public Works Director Diaz: It could be more some years; it could be less.

Mayor Lago: This is really affecting a lot of people who are retirees, and I think that it's a little heavy-handed for the City of Coral Gables to not fall in line with other municipalities. So that's why I brought this item forward. It's very clear, very thoughtful and methodical on how to handle the process and how to be very specific in regard to the matter. Madam City Attorney is there anything else we need to add for the record. No. Okay. We have a motion and a second. Mr. Clerk, please call the roll.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Moving onto item E-2.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, can we have the related item on the fees.

Mayor Lago: Of course. Which one is that, I apologize.

City Attorney Suarez: So that one is H-1. So, H-1 is a Resolution of the City Commission amending Ordinance No. 2015-17, as amended, Resolution 2016-148, as amended, Resolution 2017-167, as amended, Resolution 2018-219, as amended, and Resolution 2020-158, as amended to adjust the Sanitary Sewer Charges, providing for severability clause, and providing for an effective date.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Castro: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do we have any public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Once again, Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I know that everything we discuss here is very clear, very clear, extremely clear, but you know there are some older people that live in the city that don't find it clear, and I'm sorry, usually I find it clear, but I get phone calls, believe

it or not, I get people that talk to me and say, can you find out, because not everybody can come here, not everybody is willing to take the abuse, the humiliation, the bullying, that we see here. I have a question, because we do not have sewer in our area, but when we get the water bill, we do have a charge for sewer or whatever. There is something there that is not the water that we get. So where is the money. Maybe the Manager can tell me. The money that we pay that is not the actual use of the water. Since we don't have sewer, where is the money, is that on a trust account, what is it?

City Manager Iglesias: May I answer, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager will answer after. Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: Excuse me, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: You will answer after. Will you please finish your statement.

Mrs. Cruz: No. No. That's the question.

Mayor Lago: Okay. We'll answer after.

City Manager Iglesias: Its storm sewer.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, I want to finish public comments and then we'll answer all the questions.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mrs. Cruz: But you are going to vote before he explains it, and I'm sorry, we need to know before you vote on it, because if that money went into a dark hole and it's not our money, we need to know.

Commissioner Castro: Its sea level rise.

Mayor Lago: So, if I can. I'm going to try to continue the meeting.

Mrs. Cruz: Okay. So, you are not going to vote on H-1 till we get an explanation.

Mayor Lago: Please move forward ma'am.

Mrs. Cruz: Okay. The comment is, we, the people that have approached me and myself would like an explanation as to the sanitary sewer charges before the people that we elected to sit on this body vote on it, so we know whether we like it or not. That's a simple question and I don't know what your objection is, because you talk to other people that stand here, but I cannot get an answer because I'm me. I'm sorry, other people standing here, you talk to them, so what's wrong with the

City Manager explaining it. It may be a simple explanation. I don't know what the secrecy is. Transparency is the word of the day. Let's answer it before you all get to vote.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: No additional speakers, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Perfect. Can I have a motion and a second, so we have comment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it, please.

City Clerk Urquia: We have a motion and a second, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: We took it out of order without the public comment. I wanted to be clear. Mr. Manager, you wanted to respond.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor. Thank you. When you have a septic tank, you don't get charged for sewer, because there is no sewage going out of the property. There is a storm water charge and that storm water affects the entire city whether you have sewer or not.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: For a little more clarity, that's called your drainage. So, if you're complaining about drainage because it's rained, that's what that charge is for, that's another department that we have that takes care of the drainage issues.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Do you have any further comment before we call for the roll. Mr. Clerk, please call the roll.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)