

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
July 7, 2015
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

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

Public Speaker(s)

Kay Summers, Grant Manager, Go Solar Florida Program

Agenda Item F-2 [11:12:04 a.m.]

A Resolution authorizing support for Solar Photovoltaic Energy and the Florida Solar Financing Action Plan --- Commissioner Lago

Mayor Cason: Let's do F-2 now because you have some people here.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you. I appreciate, Mayor, taking this out of order. Good morning sir.

Mr. Matt Anderson: Good morning everybody. Matt Anderson, Sustainability Specialist with the Public Works Department. Commissioner Lago, good morning Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. Sustainability, it's an exciting time in the City of Coral Gables when it comes to sustainability. We've been Tree U.S.A. for 30 years and running, we are working on our tree succession plan, planting 3,000 more trees over the next 10 to 12 months. We are working on our Sustainability Master Plan, which is going to be our guide for the next ten years in making our

sustainability efforts enhancing them. We recently had our collaborative workshop of all of our department directors and City Manager, Assistant City Manager, they came and participated and they gave their input on the Sustainability Master Plan and they are making recommendations also going forward. Part of that is, we want to look more into renewable energy and I want to introduce Kay Summers who is here, she is with Broward County, she is the Grant Manager for the Go Solar Florida Program, and she is going to be speaking to you guys a little bit about the importance of supporting solar and their Solar Financing Action Plan. So Kay...

Ms. Kay Summers: Good morning everybody. Mayor, Vice Mayor. Commissioner Lago, thank you very much for inviting me to come here and speak to you today.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to be here, appreciate it.

Ms. Summers: You're welcome. I wanted to talk to you briefly about – there you go. I want to speak to you briefly about Go Solar Florida; it's a grant initiative that we got from the Department of Energy back in 2013. It's a \$2.25 million grant, it was awarded to Broward County as the grant administrator, but we have other partners, Orange County, Alachua, Miami-Dade, and the Florida Silver Energy Center. And as part of this grant, we have four major tasks that we are working on; one is a streamline permitting system, another is standardizing solar zoning issues, enhanced availability of financial options, and then aggressive marketing and outreach on it. And I'm here today to speak to you a little bit about the financing options. Before I do that though, I'll briefly talk to you about streamline permitting, this was very important to the Department of Energy, because the cost of solar have come way down, but still the upfront cost of installing solar are too much for a lot of people to afford. So the Department of Energy wanted us to look at what are called "soft costs". "Soft costs" are the cost for putting solar on your roof that is not the actual panels, because the panels have come down. One of the major soft costs that local governments have control over is the permitting. Permitting is very expensive, it's different in every jurisdiction, and the solar contractors need to learn how to get the permit from all the different jurisdictions. So that's one issue that we've been looking at and we've come up with a really nice system that we think is going to make it easier, more streamlined, and easier for the building inspectors themselves to know what to expect when they go out to the site. The reason I'm here today though is to talk to you about our Solar Financing Action Plan. What we did is we looked at what different financing options are available in the State of Florida and we put together a report that is like a menu of options, and the resolution before you today is not to dictate to you what you have to do, but to say here are some options and are any of these options a good fit for the City of Coral Gables. So it's available for everybody in the State of Florida. We've been asking all the different counties within Florida to adopt it. You can see from this map here that all of our partners have adopted it, a few others of counties as well. You'll be

the first City in Miami-Dade to do it, so you are a leader, thank you very much for that. You can see we have 34.8 percent of counties in the state that have adopted it so far and we are hoping to get the rest of the state. We want to show the office at the state level that Florida is really interested in solar and this is one way that you can demonstrate your interest as well. As I've mentioned before, this is just a menu of options and we are not dictating anything to anyone, so if you adopt this resolution today you'll just be saying, yes we recognize that solar is a good thing for our community and we support looking into this document and seeing if any of these options are a good fit for us. One last thing I'd like to announce is that we are going to have another solar fest. We've had two solar fests in Broward County in the past two years, and we've selected the date for the 3rd, will be October 9th and 10th this year, and we'd encourage you all to attend and maybe help advertise it to your residents. It will be at the Broward County Convention Center, it's not that far away. It's totally free to attend and free parking, so it's a way for your residents to get to learn more about solar and other renewable energies that are available to them. And if you need any information you can always look at our website: gosolarflorida.org or send me an e-mail at my e-mail address: kaysummers@broward.org. If you have any questions?

Commissioner Lago: Kay, I have a question for you, not a question, but more education for the rest of the Commission, which you had touched upon the streamline permitting resources cost and also the financing. The City of Coral Gables was one of the pioneers in reference to the PACE program and we recently adopted residential, which is going like gangbusters. We are seeing a lot of people becoming involved with PACE. I had a PACE Board meeting yesterday that lasted close to five hours and we are seeing the program really growing. Other cities are becoming involved with the Why Green and it's been an incredible benefit which is making an impact in regards to CO2 emissions. I know that we are in a hurry and I don't want to take up much of your time, as you came down here and this Commission has a pretty long agenda today. But one of the really interested parts of Go Solar Florida, which I just wanted you to really touch upon quickly, is the issue of streamlining and electronic permitting systems that uses pre-approved designed plans. A lot of individuals have this misconception which states, solar is very difficult to deal with. I have to get an electrician, I have to get an architect, I have to get an engineer, I got to get plans, I've got to bring them to the City. I would love to hear from staff how many individuals have attempted to put forth solar in their residence or in their commercial properties. A lot of individuals just don't even entertain it because at the end of the day they have a misconceived notion how difficult it is. Please talk about what this grant money is doing in reference to streamlining the process and utilizing pre-approved design plans so we can standardize solar related zoning ordinances also.

Ms. Summers: The pre-approved design plans were from Go Solar Broward and we found that that system didn't work very well, so what we've done instead now that we've got partners

across the state and the Florida Solar Energy Center, we've come up with a new model that a licensed contractor will go to our website for his specific installation, and he will put in the address and it can be anywhere in the State of Florida and he will put in all the details, what panel model he is using, what inverter model he's using, what fasteners he's using, and the contractor will know all that, and based on the data that he puts in our website, our website will then give him code compliant plans, both electrical, three-line electrical plans and structural plans, and a permit-ready package. He'll get that as a pdf. He can either e-mail it to you to the City or if a City is not electronically ready, which some are not, he can then bring them and physically turn them in, and that will streamline the process for everybody. We have a working model of that already, we are working between now and October 31st, we have our deadline to get it online and working in the entire state, that's our deadline from the Department of Energy, our deliverable deadline; and we already have one system but we are upgrading it and will have about four more upgrades between now and then. It's really an exciting thing; I don't believe anyone else is doing it in the nation. DOE is very, very interested in our progress and watching us closely.

Commissioner Lago: The reason why I'm interested in this is because this will basically take out and remove any hiccups or hurdles that are in the way right now. Obviously our City thrives on aesthetics; we are a City that makes sure that we consider George Merrick's vision and historic preservation, one (1). I want to make sure that 1 (a) or 1 (b) be sustainability, thinking about the environment, thinking about the future. Without the environment, without reducing greenhouse emissions – there will be a future in my opinion, because you already see what's going on in reference to a multitude of issues from sea water level rise to just the fact that it is getting hotter every day, and not only that, why would you not want to put yourself in a position where you can lower your energy consumption and what you are paying on a monthly basis to large energy conglomerates. If this is adopted, which again it's not even close to being the testing phase, we would always allow the Board of Architects to final review over any of the potential plans, the location of the panels and are you seeing that as an issue in the future with other cities?

Ms. Summers: No, no, because what we are giving you is a permit-ready package, they may bring it to you and then you issue the permit any way you see fit. So you'll still have all the controls, what we've done is we've made a nice neat package of everything that they need where they don't even have to go hire a professional engineer to do the design.

Commissioner Lago: Which eventually also, besides making the process simpler, drives cost down significantly.

Ms. Summers: Which is the whole point of the grant from the Department of Energy.

Commissioner Lago: The more and more people buy solar, the more the prices will go down also, so it's a win-win situation.

Mayor Cason: OK.

Commissioner Slesnick: Kay, thank you for bringing this to our attention today and Commissioner Lago thank you very much. I'm very pleased with this program and hope we can implement it.

Commissioner Keon: This is also related to both commercial and residential?- office buildings and whatever else as well as for our residents?

Ms. Summer: At this point, no. The grant was for residential and small commercial, so that's under ten kilowatts, but we feel very confident that once we have the small program up and running we will then make it better and extend it for larger installations.

Commissioner Keon: What could be interesting for us here in the City is, we are looking at building two parking garages, could you use enough solar to generate, could you generate enough power from solar to actually operate a garage?

Commissioner Lago: The opportunity is there, it's not only the solar, it's also the replacement of all the existing bulbs and LED bulbs and a multitude of other upgrades that can be done that if you mix it in with solar, along with LED and all these upgrades, you could get really close to minimizing your energy requirements; and I'm going to be presenting a medal to you probably in the next day or two, I'm just finalizing it, which has some really important articles that have been coming out, other initiatives that other cities are partaking in that deal with solar. This is a real big interesting movement that could really bare some fruit in the near future. Hopefully in October it's a success, I'm praying that it works out well. I handed out this resolution along with this Go Solar package yesterday at my PACE Board meeting, I handed it out to five cities that were there, you should be receiving phone calls from all the elected officials there in reference to hopefully jumping on the bandwagon like the City of Coral Gables.

Ms. Summers: Thank you for that.

Commissioner Keon: So it would be October by the time that you would have the permit application.

Ms. Summers: System up and live.

Commissioner Keon: And live – OK. And so the only thing that an individual city, they will deal with are the particular zoning requirements with regard to aesthetics or whatever.

Ms. Summers: Right. Whatever the city wants, we are just giving them a package to make it easier.

Commissioner Lago: And let's say there are some changes that are made in reference to the Board of Architects for aesthetic reasons. They say we prefer to have those panels on another portion of the roof, then the contractor will go back to the site, input those changes into the system and a new set of drawings would be produced.

Ms. Summers: Because the one the contractor goes in, he will put where on the roof they'll be, how they are oriented, so he can always go back and change it, yes.

Commissioner Lago: Perfect.

Mayor Cason: OK. Actually this is Item F-3. Do we have a motion? F-2? At least the one I have has F-3, but anyway that's fine. Do we have a motion on this?

Commissioner Keon: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I'll second.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Keon makes the motion, the Vice Mayor seconds.

City Clerk

City Attorney Leen: Do you have it as F-3?

Commissioner Keon: It's F-3.

Commissioner Lago: On the Agenda it says F-2, on the document it says F-3.

City Attorney Leen: Oh, I understand. Let me just read it. It's a resolution authorizing support for Solar Photovoltaic Energy and the Florida Solar Financing Action Plan, that's what you are voting on, sorry Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Cason: City Clerk

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes
Commissioner Keon: Yes
Commissioner Lago: Yes
Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes
Mayor Cason: Yes
(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you, great work.

Ms. Summers: When we get a copy of this executed resolution, we are putting it on the Go Solar Florida website so that everyone will know that you are a leader. So thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

[End: 11:27:34 a.m.]