

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Virtual Meeting
Agenda Items G-9
July 14, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

**Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena**

City Staff

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria
Assistant Director Landscape Services, Brook Dannemiller**

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-9

A discussion regarding Red Road landscape improvements
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: G-9 which is a discussion regarding Red Road landscape improvements.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Mayor. I'd like to see if Ed and his team can put together and give us a recap or an update more likely in regard to where we are with the Red Road landscape improvements. Just to give you a quick background. We've been talking about this project for the last few years, and we actually had a permit that was active for this project and which would have allowed us to start, but now that permit was allowed to lapse and expired, so from the last time I checked, we were trying to reactivate that permit and I'd like to find out where we are currently. And I've also heard from a few different residents this week about why we are not incorporating shade trees. This is something that the entire Commission has advocated on behalf, but we were made aware that FDOT requires frangible trees, more like palm trees located on Red Road. I would like for staff to address all these issues that I've outlined, so people can really understand because

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like all the issues that we've talked about 57th Avenue, this is a major corridor that for a long time has been too neglected.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor, ACM Santamaria and Brook Dannemiller will be presenting on this item.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Mr. Manager.

ACM Santamaria: Peter, thank you for the introduction. Good afternoon Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, members of the Commission, Ed Santamaria, Assistant City Manager Operations and Infrastructure. I'm going to pass off the baton to Brook Dannemiller that's prepared a presentation to discuss this very topic and explain where we are, how we got here, and the steps moving forward, including a public meeting that is coming up this Thursday. So, with that Brook, please.

Director Dannemiller: Brook Dannemiller, Assistant Public Works Director for Landscape Services. I'm going to pull up a presentation here real quick, just a moment while I bring this up.

Commissioner Keon: Hello Brook, its nice to see you again. Its been a long time.

Director Dannemiller: Good to see you too. Can everyone see the presentation okay?

All: Yes sir.

Director Dannemiller: Alright. So, project overview. This project is part of the city's ongoing tree planting program that is being implemented by the Landscape Services Division of the Public Works Department. The city's Public Works Department has planted over 400 trees in the last six years. Red Road is a state road and is designated state historic highway. Tree plantings along Red Road require a Florida Department of Transportation landscape permit and must comply with FDOT design criteria. We received FDOT comments for the FDOT landscape permit requiring a public meeting be held in accordance with state laws regard state historic highways.... larger trees this is a question that we've been getting, and we'll outline that here. The FDOT design criteria does not allow for new trees to be planted in the grass swale areas along Red Road. The city then received approval for a design variation from lateral offset, clear side triangles and stopping sight distances to allow the solitary palms to be planted. Solitary palms meet the FDOT frangible or breakaway requirements for maximum of four-inch trunk diameter, as well as the eight and-a-half foot high clearance to the bottom of the palm canopy for visibility. These plantings are subject to FDOT approval of the submitted landscape permit and the final solitary palm locations and quantities may vary somewhat from the proposed plans. And you see the scope of the project is the east side of Red Road, from U.S.-1 to S.W. 8th Street. A summary of the plantings. Its about a three and-a-half mile stretch of Red Road; 227 solitary palms and three planting beds of green fichus shrubs. To break it down to roughly where the palms are going – U.S.-1 to Bird Road, we have 107 palms; Bird Road to Coral Way, 103 palms; and from Coral Way to 8th Street...so we only have 17 palms going in there. This is a gant chart showing kind of the progression of the project and our tree and palm planting efforts for Red Road and following hurricane Irma. In 2015, the city began the tree succession project and the ongoing planting of trees and palms citywide

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continued through September of 2017. In the summer of 2016, the city submitted Red Road landscape permit plans to FDOT. For the rest of 2016, the original FDOT landscape permit for Red Road landscape improvements was obtained and had an expiration date of November 9, 2017. In late 2016 to early 2017, the first solitary palms and the green ficus shrubs were installed in the swale areas along Red Road between Cantoria Avenue and Bird Road. The remaining solitary palms were programmed to be installed in the fall of 2017. So, these are the palms that were installed. On the top here, far right, you have Bird Road, moving to the left, which is to the south, you have six solitary palms between Bird Road and Elgardy Avenue, those are the red markings there. And you have one between Elgardy Avenue and Cantoria Avenue, and the corresponding photos are below, and those were planted in 2017. Here are some photos – this is Red Road looking north towards Bird Road; this is Google Earth image, Google street image from February of 2019. Elgardy Avenue looking north on Red Road on the left side, on the right side is Elgardy Avenue looking south on Red Road; and Red Road looking south towards Cantoria Avenue. So, this is existing now, this has already been installed. Irma struck on September 9 and 10 of 2017, and it was months of clean up and recovery efforts. New tree plantings were suspended until post hurricane clean up and recovery efforts were nearly completed. On November 9, 2017, the original Red Road FDOT landscape permit expired. March through May of 2018 the remaining 150 oak trees were planted in Old Cutler Bay. Hurricane Irma had interrupted the planting project and it resumed in March. On June 28, 2018, invitations for bids was issued for 1,000 new trees and palms to be planted along residential streets throughout the city to replace those lost or damaged during Hurricane Irma. At the July 10, 2018 Commission meeting, Agenda Item J-5 was unanimously approved by the Commission. Item J-5 was a resolution accepting the recommendation of the Procurement Officer to award the Irma Tree Replacement Project for Public Works to the lowest responsive and responsible bidders in an amount not to exceed the available budget pursuant to the invitation for bid and the Procurement Code. On August of 2018, the bidder worked for the post Irma citywide tree replacement planting was signed by the City Manager. Irma trees were installed on July 26, 2019 and the miscellaneous items were completed in August and September of 2019. In 2018 and invitation for bids was issued to procure the solitary palms for Red Road. Out of the two lowest bidders did not have solitary palms that met the FDOT size specifications. The price of the third bidder exceeded the city’s budget for the palms. As a result, the bid was cancelled in August/September of 2019. In July of 2019, the plans for the new FDOT landscape permit were submitted. In September to November of 2019, our City Landscape Superintendent reached out to numerous nurseries in order to find vendors that had solitary palms that met the specifications of this special bid competitive price. Ackley’s Trees was the lowest priced vendor that had solitary palms that meet the specifications at the city meetings. Ackley’s Trees was awarded a special bid waiver procurement in October/November of 2019, and they are currently holding and caring for the solitary palms at their nursery. On November 12, 2018, tree plantings in the North Ponce neighborhood swales began on... Avenue and the remaining plantings are slated to be completed by the end of November of 2020. Due to new FDOT design criteria changes, that would now prevent palm plantings on Red Road, the city submitted and received approval for a design variation from Ladder Offset, clear triangles and stopping sight distances and resubmitted

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for the new FDOT landscape permit. In May of 2020, the city received FDOT comments for the FDOT landscape permit requiring a public meeting be held in accordance with state laws regarding state historic highways. Once the public meeting is held, the city can proceed with the FDOT landscape permit process. On July 16, 2020 at 6 p.m., which is this Thursday, a public meeting will be held virtually via Zoom regarding the Red Road landscape improvements, that includes planting of palms and shrubs in the median islands and along the grass swale areas, along the east side of Red Road. The scope of work includes the planting of 227 solitary palms and three planting beds of green fichus shrubs. In summer of 2020, pending issuance of the FDOT landscape permit, approximately 227 solitary palms and three areas of green fichus shrubs will be installed along Red Road. And finally, also in summer of 2020, additional tree plantings in Gables by the Sea will continue, removal of invasive plant species from the mangrove areas along...will be conducted in collaboration with the county and along Cartagena Avenue in collaboration with...Botanical Center. If you have any questions or comments, they can e-mail trees@coralgables.com and they have a project web page coralgables.com/redroadlandscapeimprovements, it has the plans and the public notice posted there, if anybody wants to download those and look at those before Thursday's public meeting.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me ask a question then we'll open it up for comments and Commission discussion. But why solitary palms? I understand that they have to break and all of that, but you can plant 7,000 solitary palms per block and it still wouldn't look like we have trees there. They are the loneliest and saddest and that's why they are called solitary, I guess, loneliest and saddest trees that I've ever seen in my life.

Director Dannemiller: We would love to be able to plant trees with lighter trunks and bigger canopies, but that is all that we could get FDOT to approve that meets both the frangibility, the lateral offset, if a car comes off and hits it, it needs to break, and also the vertical sight visibility has to be eight and-a-half clear. So, the trees will meet that, but then the diameter is too large, and they won't approve those.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: If we can have Royal palm trees on U.S.-1, why not in Red Road?

Director Dannemiller: There is no curve and so the curve prevents the – makes a lot of offset much greater.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Don't ask the question or you'll make us take the Royal palms out of U.S.-1.

Director Dannemiller: We wished we could do bigger trees, we really do.

ACM Santamaria: Mr. Mayor, we are actually engaged right now in a conversation with DOT, because I mentioned to you a few weeks ago, they were looking at removing some palms on the intersection of Grand and U.S.-1, and we are in an ongoing dialogue to save those palms. I think we maybe having success, because at that same intersection we had some success in changing DOT's mind in connection to phasing for pedestrian crossing there. We are appealing to folks at DOT and we think that they are listening.

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Vice Mayor Lago: So, Mr. Dannemiller, I appreciate the timeline, but I would really appreciate it if possible is, how many years have we been waiting already to plant some sort of trees on 57th Avenue, and we are supposedly scheduled to plant now, the summer is almost over, hopefully my kids will start school in August. What are we looking at in regard to – how many years, three, four years has it been?

Director Dannemiller: We initiated the efforts in summer of 2016, around the summer of 2020...

Vice Mayor Lago: So, it's been four years.

Director Dannemiller: Interrupted by Irma.

Vice Mayor Lago: I know. I understand. I understand that. But I think the biggest interruption that we had here was the fact that we allowed a permit to expire a year ago, and now the city in a very tight budget is going to have to even spend more money to reactivate that permit.

Director Dannemiller: There is no fee for the permit, there is no fee for the permit.

Vice Mayor Lago: Well, I've been asking for that information for a long time and no one has given me that information. We've been waiting four years to beautify this corridor, allowing residents just asking for something. I know we can't have oak trees and we can't have mahogany, because of FDOT and that's perfectly fine, and I want that information to be disseminated to the public, so there isn't any misunderstanding, because we've all received e-mails of why is this happening. We just need to get this done. When is the permit going to be activated again, so that we can move forward and get these trees planted and progress forward with the beautification?

Director Dannemiller: The last item to address all the FDOT permit comments is the public meeting, which is being held this Thursday at 6 p.m., so once we hold that public meeting and there is no public outcry against the project, we should be able to proceed with the permit. It's the last thing that we have to address from FDOT.

Vice Mayor Lago: And out of respect for Commissioner Fors, if you look at G-10, it's a discussion on notice procedures which we've all been involved with these issues now. Have we noticed everybody appropriately, because I don't want to have another debacle where we don't notice people and then we have individuals, for examples, we've all received the e-mail from Cheryl Gold about her concerns about Biltmore Way? I want the notice to be perfect. I don't want there to be any issues. We've already allowed for the permit to expire, it was the city's fault, it was our fault, and now I can't have another hiccup, because we keep promising, its been four years and we keep stumbling on ourselves to deliver something simple as trees on the median. So, I need to know that we have followed all the protocols, legal has reviewed it, the City Manager's office, everything has been done perfectly, so that we can start installing these trees. I'm not even going to say in the summer, I'll say in September, let's just say in September to deliver. I just want to make sure that we do this, because I'm really asking you. I don't want to put this on the agenda again, Brook.

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Director Dannemiller: So, the notification was done, the Clerk's office posted that. Direct mailings went to every mailing address of the single-family residential homes on the east side, as well as if the mailing address was different, it went to the home and to the alternative mailing address. It was posted on ENEWS and all the normal electronic postings that the city does. So, we went above and beyond the minimum requirements for notifying the adjacent property owners.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Brook. You can see the Commission's frustration, the Vice Mayor's frustration on the delays here and we really would like to encourage you and the city and the Assistant City Manager in getting this project underway. It's a very important part of our city, a fragile part of our city, and we really would like to do things for them.

Director Dannemiller: Understood.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Mayor, I appreciate that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Any other comments?

Vice Mayor Lago: And the frustration is not even mine, the frustration is just the residents.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no, it's everybody of course.

Vice Mayor Lago: The residents are just – they sometimes feel abandoned. These are issues that we talk about the garbage issue, these are issues that we talked about the trees. It just gets to the point where...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It's a fragile part of city of course.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I know that my colleagues deal with it constantly, because I know that Commissioners Mena, Keon, Fors, yourself constantly getting call from the residents and four years is enough. So, thank you for that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you everybody.