

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-5
December 7, 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

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Senior Transportation Engineer, Melissa DeZayas

Assistant Public Works Director, Deena Bell-Llewellyn

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-5 [Start: 3:05 p.m.]

An update from staff regarding the sidewalks on Blue Road, bridges and Riviera Country Club.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto G-5. Hermes great work, by the way, in advance. I saw the kind of the layout and Melissa also. Melissa has done a great job. I saw the, I don't know if my colleagues on the Commission have seen this, but this is something that, again, I've always been wondering since I lived in that neighborhood, why hasn't this been taken care of. But this is something beautiful that I think is going to alleviate a lot of the issues and its going to be a good opportunity to get off the streets and be able to walk on the sidewalk.

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*Agenda Item G-5 - Update from staff regarding the sidewalks on Blue Road,
Bridges and Riviera Country Club*

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Public Works Director Diaz: So, in relationship to G-5, there are multiple items here actually. One item is the Riviera Country Club and the last change that we've had with the developer. Ramon has been talking to them, and they want to come to the Commission on January 25th.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Public Works Director Diaz: That's what we have on that. The updates on the bridges – and I can report that the two bridges on Blue Road have been cleaned up and pressure cleaned.

Mayor Lago: Can I tell you something about that, may I. I drove by there this morning intentionally to go look at them. They look so good, and I know that its not our responsibility, but your team and our staff has done such a wonderful job.

Public Works Director Diaz: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: That it looks like night and day. Its night and day, and I hate to say this, because its not our bridges and we are not responsible for the maintenance, but the way it looks today is the way it should always look. And I'm sorry to say that, but its night and day.

Public Works Director Diaz: Appreciate it. So, in addition to that, we actually constructed some sidewalks, the bridge at...university abutting between UM and University Drive, the concrete work is completed, the restoration hasn't been finished, sodding, some restoration, but the sidewalk and the concrete work is done. We are currently trying to wrap up Granada, that should be done within the next week or so. What's going to follow is the two ramp connections to Hardee, which will complete the loop between Riviera and Granada; and then this is the next...which I'm going to leave with Melissa.

Ms. DeZayas: We have a presentation that we put together, just to be able to show you guys the progress that we've done so far. So, we were asked to put together a preconceptual design for the sidewalks on Blue Road, basically connecting Riviera Country Club to the future arch on Blue Road. The sidewalk itself will cross three different intersections; two of them are signalized, one of them is unsignalized. The entire length of the project would be approximately a quarter of a mile. So, we divided up each of the slides to show you, basically the impacts that we have found. This is out team going out and identifying what they feel would be the conflicts in terms of trees and things like that before its being proposed. So, the yellow portion is being shown here is basically what the developer is going to be responsible for, for the Riviera Country Club, and then anything that you see in the pinkish/reddish color is what we would be putting.

Mayor Lago: And if I may add something, because I was speaking with the Manager yesterday in our preparation meeting for the Commission meeting today, and we didn't have that little strip for that house included in the project. That piece of property where the sidewalk is on their side yard, that's not even their front yard. Their front yard is on University. All the homes that are going to be, hopefully receiving sidewalks, this is all on their side yards. Its not even visible from the front, so it makes complete sense.

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Public Works Director Diaz: There is actually a separate project that was previously funded approved by the Commission for sidewalks on University and that's something that we are working on and should be coming sometime next year.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Perfect.

Public Works Director Diaz: But that's in the works.

Mayor Lago: And the reason why I bring that up is because, like you said, the sidewalks that you are presenting to us today, to me, it's a no-brainer. First of all, I'm a big proponent of sidewalks, but I think it's a no-brainer especially when you are installing a sidewalk on a property owner's side yard, like you see here, all these properties on side yards. I think it makes complete sense, not only because it's abutting the bridges, which is basically impossible to traverse, because there is no sidewalk now. So, I just want you to think about that and my colleagues to think about that, because if we run into any roadblocks with residents, we need to explain to them the importance of the fact that these are heavily traversed streets that people shouldn't have to be on the street. They should be able to walk on a sidewalk.

Public Works Director Diaz: It's an urban collector.

City Manager Iglesias: Its also a good project, Mayor, because we can show what we can do and how these sidewalks can be done without a lot of construction.

Mayor Lago: Exactly. And I think you build a lot of goodwill, showing people that its not that invasive.

Ms. DeZayas: So, for this particular section, which is just west of University Drive, we've identified one tree that would be in conflict with what's being proposed, and we did go through the exercise of trying to make sure that the sidewalk was winding to avoid making, to minimize the impact that we were going to have with the trees. So, there is one tree, and we'll show you in a later slide what the tree looks like, because we took pictures of these trees. This one would need to be relocated; I believe it's a yellow oak tree. So, east of University Drive, we identified three trees that were in conflict with the sidewalk that's being proposed. Two of those trees are actually, just to give you a little bit of a background. We coordinated with Green Space Management, and they took a look at the trees. Ena's here if you wanted any more explanation about it. Two of those trees are invasive Banyan trees.

Public Works Director Diaz: Rather large.

Ms. DeZayas: And one of them is...

Vice Mayor Mena: In addition to.

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Public Works Director Diaz: Yes, those will have to be removed.

Ms. DeZayas: Those will have to be removed. These three that are identified here will have to be removed. Its tree number two, three and four, if you are looking at the circles. So, the fourth tree was a Tamarind.

Public Works Director Diaz: It's a wild Tamarind.

Commissioner Anderson: Is the Banyan tree a Benjamina Fichus or an actual Banyan tree?

Public Works Director Diaz: Deena will have to speak to that.

Assistant Director Bell-Llewellyn: They are the Fichus Benjamina, so there is no concern with removal.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Assistant Director Bell-Llewellyn: Of course, the shade canopy will be mitigated with new tree planting, I'll say that too, with nice native trees.

Mayor Lago: By the way, Commissioner, I think the resident, I don't want to speak for the resident, but I've met that resident in the corner. I think they actually may be happy, because the canopy is so big that their entire swale is a mud pit. There is no way to grow one ounce of grass. So, they would love nothing more than probably a few oak trees to be planted that will allow them to have some grass.

Vice Mayor Mena: Just talk to them and engage them.

Public Works Director Diaz: And that's actually one of the things that we wanted to get your direction as to this collector street, so technically there is no concurrency needed, but we would like to get your direction as to what level of engagement.

City Manager Iglesias: Even though there is no concurrency, we will contact all those neighbors to make sure that we get – I don't want any surprises from any of them.

Public Works Director Diaz: So how about we send them a letter notification with the sketch while we are planning this.

City Manager Iglesias: We will work that out Hermes, we will work that out, but I want to make sure that we have good contact with everyone there.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Mena: Even more contact with the people whose trees are...

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Public Works Director Diaz: Sure. Makes sense.

City Manager Iglesias: We will do that Vice Mayor.

Public Works Director Diaz: And the one caveat I want to say, and she might bring it up later. This is a county road; we have to go through a county process. The next step is for us to do a survey, so the county may have different ideas, so just want to make sure that you are all aware of that.

Ms. DeZayas: The next portion of the sidewalk is just west of Granada and continuing east along Blue Road, just east of Granada Boulevard. No trees have been identified as being in conflict with the sidewalk that was being proposed there. I don't know if I mentioned this, but west of University, we were planning on continuing the 10-foot path that the developer is going to be putting in for Riviera Country Club, but east of University we are looking at the 6-foot concrete sidewalk and continuing six feet along to the park that's being proposed on Blue Road. So, just to reiterate, there are no conflicts that we identified at this location. East of Orduna Drive and continuing onto the park, we didn't identify any trees in conflict either. So, these are the trees that we identified as being conflict. The first one, that one's west of University Drive. That one is a young tree, we are looking to relocate that one; and tree number two, which is east of University would be removed; tree number three and tree number four would also be removed.

Commissioner Anderson: What was tree number four?

Public Works Director Diaz: Wild Tamarind.

Ms. DeZayas: Wile Tamarind.

Commissioner Anderson: Can we move that maybe?

Assistant Director Bell-Llewellyn: We could re prune it and relocate it, but the tree is not in great condition. It doesn't offer a large canopy. Its sort of tall and thin, so we have to weigh the cost to relocate it if we are putting in a brand new, I think we can put a brand new, nicer tree in that would have a better chance of survival actually.

Public Works Director Diaz: It's got some significant roots actually getting close to the bridge abutment.

Ms. DeZayas: Just to summarize the presentation. So, one tree needs to be relocated; three of them need to be removed; two of those to be removed are invasive, it's a good idea to remove them anyways. So, approximately 10,000 square feet of sidewalk is being proposed for this project. We have like an estimated construction cost of \$132,000 for this, and like mentioned before, this would require county approval. The trees identified are the ones that we identified out in the field, however, when we submit plans to the county for their approval, they might identify other trees that might need to be removed. They might also be requesting a traffic signal update for the two

signalized intersections, because currently you have push buttons, but you don't have pet heads, basically the signal telling you to walk.

Mayor Lago: So, let me ask you a quick question. How long do you expect, obviously you have to do the survey, you've got to do the plans, what are we talking about before we can submit to the county?

Ms. DeZayas: We are probably looking into moving forward with this project, well, not moving forward, like survey design and everything, but we wouldn't be looking to construction till the second half of the year.

Public Works Director Diaz: But submitted to the county, I think probably the second quarter next year.

Mayor Lago: Once you are ready to submit, let me get engaged in the process, so that I can try to do everything I can to push this forward. I think it would be great. Like the Manager said, this is a perfect project to give as an example, to showcase what we can do and I think it would bring a lot of goodwill in the neighborhood for anybody who wants to see how sidewalks would look in your neighborhood and how we can do them in a tasteful way and really connect areas that right now you have to walk and its impossible to walk on the street there, be virtually run over with the amount of traffic that's there. I think its great. You've done so much.

Ms. DeZayas: You're welcome.

Mayor Lago: You guys have moved incredibly fast since we started talking about this, I don't know, like maybe two months ago, and I'm very impressed, I'm very impressed with what you delivered today, and I look forward to seeing it being implemented in the neighborhood. Mr. Clerk, do we have any comments, any public comments?

City Clerk Urquia: We do have a member of the public requesting to speak on this item, Mr. Mayor, its Ms. Jessica Keller.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Keller the floor is yours.

Ms. Keller: Hi there, can you hear me?

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Ms. Keller: Fantastic. Good afternoon, my name is Jessica Keller, I'm a resident of Coral Gables and I apologize for not providing a more thought-out message, but I'm only recently learning about this discussion item. I'm delighted to hear the Mayor's strong support for sustainable walking infrastructure, that's fantastic. It was a great presentation, good job guys. Installing sidewalks on the streets throughout the Gables is incredibly important for the health and safety of residents of Coral Gables, and I'm glad to see the start. While we know there are people in the city who will

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never walk anywhere or they will never bike anywhere, there are plenty of us who enjoy the benefits of safe walking and bicycling infrastructure. As mentioned in the presentation, the county will need to approve the construction of sidewalks, because Blue Road is county right-of-way. The 2019 Miami-Dade County Bicycle Master Plan identifies Blue Road as a roadway for bicycling infrastructure and is estimated as a project of \$1.7 million dollars in 2019. As you all know, the 2014 Commission adopted Coral Gables Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan also identifies Blue Road as a roadway for bicycle infrastructure. The section of shared use path that is being constructed in front of Riviera Country Club is consistent with both of the plans I just mentioned. The questions I pose to you today, are there residents aware that Blue Road is slated for a bicycle facility on this county owned road? Do they know what the roadway will look like, if you build a six-foot sidewalk today and the county builds bicycling infrastructure in their right-of-way in the future. Why not continue the 10-foot shared-use path that has already begun? If the answer is trees, a solution was designed in 2019 to construct shared-use paths in order to preserve our trees. A 10-foot shared-use path will preserve green space, rather constructing a six-foot sidewalk in addition to a potential widening of the roadway that will come with future bike lanes in the county's right-of-way. I urge you to work with Miami-Dade County, get ahead of the future issues when the county comes to build their infrastructure. Again, I'm glad to see safe pedestrian infrastructure built, however, I don't think you are looking at this holistically. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Hermes respond.

Public Works Director Diaz: Sure. We actually reached out to the county and the county to date do not have any, they don't have it on schedule to extend any bicycle facility at this location at the moment. As far as extending the 10-path, if it's something that the Commission would like to explore, we could certainly do that, however, I will tell you that the impact of the trees would be more than probably the other trees that we will have to remove in the process. But if that is something you want us to explore, we'll be more than happy to.

Mayor Lago: Do you think it would be a better product?

Public Works Director Diaz: If they ask for us to extend the bicycle infrastructure, yes, if that's ultimately the goal, absolutely. At the end of the day, that's up to you.

City Manager Iglesias: I would say Mayor that we have discussed the county proposed plan there. Internally, I feel when we present the project to them, we should get very good feedback as to what the future is going to be, and we can certainly look at any revisions or adopt any other issues that we might do, depending on what their schedule is going to be, and we will come back to the Commission with that.

Mayor Lago: Can you do me a favor? Can you forward an e-mail to Ms. Keller showing where her information in regard to what the county has proposed bike infrastructure or whatever they are proposing, or they are not proposing?

Public Works Director Diaz: It is in the Master Plan, but based on our conversation with them, they don't have any plans budgeted to proceed with it.

Mayor Lago: But I would like to have it in writing that they are not going to proceed with it.

Public Works Director Diaz: Sure.

Mayor Lago: I want to make sure that its very clear in writing and then forward it to her, so she can have it for her records.

City Manager Iglesias: And when we present the plan, Mayor, that should generate a lot of comments from that perspective.

Mayor Lago: I look forward to it. Thank you. Listen again, great work, great work. This is going to be something that's going to be a great addition to the neighborhood.

Public Works Director Diaz: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Congratulations to all of you.