

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
August 24, 2022
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 Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Senior Transportation Engineer, Melissa DeZayas

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-1 [4:45 p.m.]

Update from staff on the sidewalks on University Drive, Alhambra Circle, Blue Road, Venetia Terrace and Pisano Avenue. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Commission items, G-1, update from staff on the sidewalks on University Drive, Alhambra Circle, Blue Road, Venetia Terrace and Pisano Avenue. First, I'd like to say, I had a great meeting with Hermes and Melissa. We went to Alhambra this week, was it this week or the previous.

Public Works Director Diaz: No, it was the previous week, I think.

Mayor Lago: It was the previous week, and we went nice and early, and we met with five residents, because we are going to extend from the bridge the sidewalk and we got some buy-in, contiguous buy-in, and others that are thinking about it. So, I think we'll circle back and have a good

City Commission Meeting

conversation with them, but at least we have two people who are buying in that are going to push a sidewalk where its much needed and that's a big move, that's under design right now on Alhambra. Another area that we discussed with the Manager and the ACM was the area of Bird Road, in front of the Presbyterian Church, to Granada, right off the bridge, there is no sidewalk, it's very dangerous. When you cross Bird Road and you are on Granada, on the corner there where the empty lot is, we've got to put sidewalks there. I think it's a great opportunity knowing that the church will play ball with us, because they own all those lots, and it runs all the way from Granada going down Bird Road to Toledo. It allows to connect that bridge where right now there is no sidewalk on that bridge, so we can connect the bridge on Bird Road, continue crossing Granada, and continue down Bird Road all the way to Toledo, and there you will be able to connect to an existing sidewalk, and we own a park there.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, the Manager's office brought that to our attention, so that's the next one we'll be looking at, absolutely.

Mayor Lago: So very quickly, tell me how we are doing in regard to Alhambra Circle, Blue Road, University Drive, Pisano and Venetia Terrace, please.

Public Works Director Diaz: I'll let Melissa.

Ms. DeZayas: So, just to give you an update. University Drive – a consultant got our final comments. They are revising it right now, they expect to have the final plans completed by September 2nd, so we are expecting to start construction this year.

Mayor Lago: I love it. Congratulations.

Ms. DeZayas: Some good news there.

Mayor Lago: That's thanks because of you. That's it.

Ms. DeZayas: Our team. Our team has worked really hard to get this moving.

Mayor Lago: It's you. It's you. Forget Hermes, it's you.

Commissioner Anderson: Take credit.

Ms. DeZayas: I can't take credit. I really do have a very, very good team.

Mayor Lago: It's you. You did a great job.

Ms. DeZayas: Thank you. For Alhambra Circle, like you said, we had the meeting out in the field with the different residents. Now it would be next steps, would potentially be balloting to see if we are going to move forward with.

City Commission Meeting

Mayor Lago: Yes. When do you think we'll do the ballots?

Public Works Director Diaz: So, one of the things that needs to be ironed out is ordinance no. 2016-95.

Ms. DeZayas: 2016-95.

Public Works Director Diaz: Right. So, the way the ordinance is written right now requires a 50 percent contribution.

Mayor Lago: So, let's talk about that. This is why I want you to have a conversation with the Manager and my colleagues. If you want to deliver sidewalks in this community and you are serious about getting people off the street, especially the elderly people. For example, my father-in-law who just passed away two weeks ago, who could barely walk and was using a walker, and doesn't have sidewalks on Alhambra, because he is missing three blocks of sidewalks. So basically, he was homebound because he couldn't get in front of his house in that he had to use his walker to go around the sidewalk. That to me, is a travesty. That's not who we in this community. People deserve to have sidewalks in their home, elderly parents, people who are disabled. We can do better. So, if you are telling me right now that a resident is paying 50 percent, that's one of the hindrances when they say, I'm not going to do this, I'm not going to pay for it. So, we need to find the money in the budget somehow, somehow, to do certain things. I know that we want sidewalks everywhere. I know. But there are certain areas that we can connect that will be gamechangers, like what we are talking about. These are why they are so important, because we got Baptist Hospital, Doctors Hospital, to do that all that connection of sidewalks, to fix that street, to do parallel parking, that's going to be huge, that's your win. You guys did it, the Manager, your team did it. With University, that's a huge win for us, Alhambra is a huge win. These are the types of situations that you need to have a conversation with the Manager, bring it to us and I will find the money. If I got to go to the State, I will get the money.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, you would like us to revise the ordinance?

Mayor Lago: Yes. I want you to have a conversation with the Manager, please, and sit down with our team and have a conversation where of grave importance where somebody cannot leave their house. If you're an elderly person you cannot walk on Alhambra, if you are a disabled person you have to walk on the street. If people right now are in the middle of a recession with all this inflation and we are having these issues, I don't care what anybody tells you, this is a recession. Two negative quarters, two negative months of negative growth, it is what it is, excuse me, quarters, it is what it is. We need to find ways to deliver on the funding for the sidewalks. Let me deal with the Manager on that issue. First off, get me all the tools, let's finish Blue Road, they already started working on that. Let's get moving on these things and I'll get you the funding.

Public Works Director Diaz: And the other guidance we are going to need is what level of concurrency are we going to ask for, because I think that very same...

Ms. DeZayas: Its two-thirds concurrency.

City Commission Meeting

Public Works Director Diaz: It requires two-thirds concurrency, for non-collector streets.

Mayor Lago: So, listen, we've got to be honest with ourselves. Again, you going to allow one person to hold you hostage from doing projects? I'm sorry, I can't do that. I'm not going to do that. Have a conversation and come back at the next Commission meeting. Mr. Clerk, I need that at the next Commission meeting, please. Have a conversation with the Manager. This is going to take time. This is not the conversation we have today. Conversation – we can do a Sunshine meeting, whoever wants to attend. Let's have a real conversation about this.

Commissioner Anderson: So, I'm going to add to your reasoning. The ADA requires us to provide accessible routes to areas of public accommodation, whether it be a bus stop, and if we start following that code as well, I think it helps resolve the concurrency problem. There have been cities that have been sued for lack of sidewalks, bad sidewalks, City of Key West is an example, City of Miami Lakes is another example. We need to keep moving forward on this. As long as we keep moving forward on it and not allowing impediments, such as a person that doesn't want a sidewalk in front of their place to cause a lack of accessibility for individuals who are disabled then I think we'll be just fine.

City Manager Iglesias: The prior look and the prior resolution was to for collector streets, there will be no concurrency and no assessments for collector streets. So, we already have that.

Mayor Lago: That's fine.

City Manager Iglesias: The question becomes non-collectors that deal with concurrency and deal with the 50 percent assessment and that's what we need to discuss.

Mayor Lago: And we'll discuss that, and we will discuss that among ourselves. First off, let's get all the CD's, let's get all the things of the county. Let me help you. Let me deal with DERM. Let me deal with WASA. Let me deal with the County Mayor, whatever you need, just like you are getting everything done and we hope to have the plans done by September, just like I went to meet with you early morning last week for Alhambra, just to talk to the residents and to explain to them, hey, we have a way around that tree, we have a different scenario. We can build, we don't want to, but we'll build a curb, and we'll push the sidewalk all the way to the street. You saw how immediately people were more receptive. I think that when we send, when we sent the letter in the mail, that says, hey, we are putting sidewalks on your street, it's like the person says, I don't want this in my street. I don't want this cutting in the middle of my swale. We sat there, we had a great conversation with these owners, even when they were a little bit intimidated about it. We said, look here, we have a plan. Let's just show up with a beautiful plan. Show how it's going to zig-zag, how it's going to be on the street. The person who is opposed to it, you know, I could get behind this potentially, because it's a curb on the side of the street. It doesn't impact the trees and cut right through the middle of their property. So those are things when you talk to them, you build their trust and then we deliver on that. I think people will say immediately no, when they receive

this type of situation in the mail and hey, I don't trust government. They are not going to do what I want. Let me oppose this.

City Manager Iglesias: It requires some discussion there, because we have so many areas that don't have sidewalk. If we were to do that throughout the entire city, as you know, the time would be tremendous. So how do we deal with – certainly we can deal with that with the most critical areas and then work our way from there. I think that's what you're looking for.

Mayor Lago: I have a question for you, is find critical areas, find critical areas, number one; and number two, let's talk about the Blue Road open space. They have a beautiful park. We spent a million dollars to acquire that land. We got a very good deal back then and we programmed it for probably half of what it would have cost now. Staff did an incredible job. That park is full of kids and a lot of older people, like my mother-in-law who take my daughters there, right. She's fine. She can walk well, but there are no sidewalks to get to that park and you are not walking in an area that's a neighborhood. You are walking down Alhambra. People are driving through Alhambra. It's a cut-through street, they want to get out of 57th Avenue. They are rushing through Alhambra. So, if you can't get on a sidewalk, someday we are going to have a catastrophe, we are going to have a catastrophe there. I'm not saying that Alhambra, the one that I want to focus on. I haven't asked you to do Blue Road or do any of those sidewalks there at all. I'm not asking, because the next thing they will say is that I'm doing it because my mother-in-law lives there. Not saying to do that. I'm giving you an example. You have a park where there are people that are going to. You are asking people to enjoy this beautiful park, but you are not building a sidewalk for them to get there. That to me, its backward thoughts. Then sell the land.

City Manager Iglesias: There is a very legitimate park there, that beautiful park, and I've seen ladies with strollers on the street.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: So, if you are going to have parks you have to walk to, you have to have a route to get to them that's safe.

Public Works Director Diaz: We'll work with the Manager's office and the City Attorney's office.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I think we can start with the most critical areas, such as those where we have parks and issues like that, and work our way, and resolve those issues there. I think that would be a good start and then we can discuss in those particular area's concurrency and assessment.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Menendez: I just want to add, Hermes and the Manager, as you recall a resident reached out to me in the Riviera area, Blue Road, that their sidewalk sort of just stops short, there was a gap, and their concern was safety issues. There are a lot of kids on the street in that area. As we move forward, I want to find a way that we can address their concerns. Its right off of Blue Road and they have a sidewalk, and it just stops.

City Commission Meeting

Mayor Lago: You know another area like that, there is a beautiful piece of open space, an entire block right in front of UM, right before you get to San Amaro, they don't have a sidewalk. They have a sidewalk on a portion of the property. Literally no one's going to say no there. But this is going to be a conversation to be had on the third Budget Hearing. We are going to have to find the money if we want to attack the sidewalks to get them done. We are going to have to find the money somewhere.

Public Works Director Diaz: And extending the sidewalk, I think it makes a little sense once we do Blue Road, because we keep extending it and it keeps going nowhere. There is another connection, its way down south. So doing Blue Road and then following up with that connection, I think that's the order where it makes sense.

Commissioner Menendez: And I understand the concern and I understand the process, and you're right, its tough to be a parent or grandparent that everyday the kids on the street are at risk.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Commissioner Menendez: And especially when you see the sidewalk, sidewalk, sidewalk, and all of a sudden it ends, and its like no man's land.

Mayor Lago: And then you have a park four blocks down and you're asking people to go to that park, it doesn't make sense, it just doesn't make sense. I tell my mother-in-law, do not take – you have to literally walk on people's swales or go up their driveways and come back down and go up their driveway, because who knows what happens. Somebody drops their cell phone, not paying attention, we are all careless sometimes. You swerve and you run somebody over. God forbid somebody has a heart attack in their car and they run somebody over. That is my nightmare to think that that would happen.

Commissioner Anderson: So, I'm going to just add a little footnote to the sidewalk discussion. That's something I talked to the City Manager about on the NSA's is, blocking the sidewalks with vehicles, needs to be one of those items added to the list. Not only is it block accessibility that it also doesn't help those areas of sidewalk, but not built with the thickness, the six-inch cement necessary for driveway areas, they break up the sidewalks. So please make sure that's added.

Commissioner Menendez: And I'll jump on that bandwagon. I just recalled the Church of the Little Flower, Saint Teresa, and I've noticed it on other streets, we have some kind of utility poles or something that are like right in the middle of the sidewalk, so anyone with a wheelchair is blocked, and I've seen that on several occasions, on the corner of Sevilla and Indian Mound Trail, but there are other places that perhaps a utility company, I don't know who, and all of a sudden you realize if you have a wheelchair you have nowhere to go, because its pretty much coving the whole sidewalk.

Commissioner Anderson: And some of those areas are so tight, they do the bare, bare minimum, I know 32 inches for certain distances is okay, we can do better. If utility companies want to come

City Commission Meeting

in and swallow our sidewalks, then they can widen then in areas or put a pad into the swale. Let's have that type of discussion and keep our sidewalks open and welcoming.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Public Works Director Diaz: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: We'll talk next month again and happy about the updates. Thank you so much for your hard work.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Tell the whole team thank you, everybody, please, thank you.

Commissioner Anderson: Can see its an area of lots of passion.

Mayor Lago: Yes.