

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item I-1
September 14, 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

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Senior Transportation Engineer, Melissa deZayas

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Public Speaker(s)

Tim Plummer

Agenda Item I-1 [Start: 12:00 noon]

Ponce de Leon Phase III – Project Update

Mayor Lago: I have a 11 a.m., we are an hour late, I apologize, I-1, Ponce de Leon, Phase III, Project Update, City Manager item. Good morning for two more minutes.

Ms. deZayas: Transportation Engineer, Melissa deZayas. We've asked our consultant, Tim Plummer to give us a presentation so that we could have an update on the project and the progress so far.

Mr. Plummer: Great. If we can call up the PowerPoint. Good morning Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. City Manager, my name is Tim Plummer, I'm the President of David Plummer and Associates

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here in the City Beautiful. And I'm going to give you a brief presentation on Phase III of the Ponce Median Project. The first two phases are in place today, they started at Ponce Circle Park and end at Salamanca Avenue; the third phase is underway from a design standpoint from Menores Avenue to Southwest 8th Street. One important thing to note in Phase III, the city entered into a Joint Participation Agreement with the Water and Sewer Department for water main extensions on this section of Ponce and on several side streets. There is a water main upgrade from 8 inch to 12 inch on Ponce and the side streets are also going to be upgraded to 8-inch water laterals; and the reason we are doing this is, want to just tear up Ponce one time, so this is very good timing for the Water and Sewer Department as well as the city.

Commissioner Fors: If I can interrupt you. You said Phase III, on your second bullet point you said its seeing now with respect to signs, you said.

Mr. Plummer: No, no. The whole project from Menores to Southwest 8th Street.

Commissioner Fors: Okay.

Mr. Plummer: That's the entire third phase. And this next slide, Commissioner, shows you where that area is. So, it's just south of the signal at Salamanca, all the way north to Southwest 8th Street. So, in 2019, the city wanted an additional traffic study to evaluate some potential changes along the corridor after we've done Phase I and Phase II. Some of these changes included looking at directional median openings, which means you can only turn left on Ponce, can't go across from the side street, some median closures and two potential locations for roundabouts. And these changes were made in order to evaluate reducing conflicting movements along the corridor, wanted to reduce crashes along the corridor, bring speeds down, especially this north section of Ponce where the speeds are higher, and improve the overall pedestrian experience. And in mid-2020, the city and Miami-Dade County both approved the changes to the corridor. In this exhibit, just briefly shows you where these locations are. Where you see the green sections of the intersections, those will be median closures. You will not be able to go east/west across Ponce in those locations.

Vice Mayor Mena: Are those all currently open?

Mr. Plummer: Well, there is no median now, so anyone can go straight across, yes. So, where you see in yellow, those are our directional median openings, where you'll be able to turn left going northbound or southbound on Ponce, but if you are on the side street you cannot go across. And then you see the roundabout there, its anti-lane, which I think is going to be a real improvement to the corridor. So those are the kind of major changes. This is going to look a bit different from Phase I and Phase II. Phase I and Phase II we have a lot of traffic signals on the corridor, and so I think this is going to be a big plus.

Mayor Lago: Quick question. You said there has been some changes. I want to make sure, my understanding, I asked Commissioner Fors to give me some more information on this, along with staff. There was public comment, obviously that was provided, there was a public community

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meeting, community engagement. Has there been much change from when we had that community outreach or no?

Mr. Plummer: No, I do not believe so. As part of the traffic study there was some public outreach for what we were planning on doing.

Mayor Lago: The reason why I say that is because I don't want it to come back in the future that we had community outreach and then the design changed and I'm putting it on Commissioner Fors, because as a property owner, as a prominent property owner on that property, excuse me, on that corridor, I want to make sure that he has the contacts probably that not even the city has, in regards to his neighbors. So, I think its critically important that if there is one change here that we be as clear and we notify all the neighbors as quickly as possible, and the reason why is not only because we want to be as transparent as possible, is because I really want this project to happen already.

Mr. Plummer: Yes.

Mayor Lago: I mean this has been something that I've been working on for years and its overdue for the businesses. You know how many times I get calls for people saying, hey, we feel like the stepchild of the downtown.

Mr. Plummer: Yes. [Inaudible]

Mayor Lago: I didn't want to say...you've been here for decades, but I mean the point is its gotten to the point where we need to do something here guys.

Mr. Plummer: And we're ready. And you lead up to my last slide, which is our schedule. We are going to have another public meeting in November, so we'll call everybody out, we'll get all the notices out. We'll have our draft landscape plan, the pretty pictures and everything so people can visualize it. I'll be going through the presentation on where the changes are made, what its going to mean for movements and all those kinds of things, what the roundabout is going to look like and all those kinds of things.

Mayor Lago: And this area is going to change once we do that second Farmers Market and the north part of our city is growing, because it's the area where right now we have affordability to a certain extent and where you have a lot of young people, young professionals moving and you have the trolley, now its going to be extended to Saturdays. So, I have a feeling that the north Gables is going to be hot in the next two or three, it already is, but I mean its going to be a better place to live, and its about time that we get this done. Do we have all the funding in place or how are we addressing the issues of funding? Right now, we are probably funding the design. Do we have the funding in place for the actual implementation and construction?

City Manager Iglesias: We will have the funding in place.

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Mayor Lago: Are we doing a two-tier step or are we doing a onetime lump sum, the funding? Mr. Director.

Director Diaz: Hi, Hermes Diaz, Public Works Director. It is my understanding that this project is fully funded.

Ms. deZayas: We have a JPA (Joint Participation Agreement).

Director Diaz: Yes, and we have a JPA for the water, with the Water and Sewer Department.

Ms. deZayas: And for the roadway.

Director Diaz: And yes, so the whole thing is fully funded as it stands.

Mayor Lago: So, we've already dealt with the items like WASA, issues with the county, any right-of-way issues that we may have. We got that all addressed?

Director Diaz: So, they are going through the permitting process, once that finishes the design, they are going to have to go through the permitting process, so no, that hasn't happened yet.

Mayor Lago: Can we get ahead, and we meet with WASA and maybe we can meet with the Director, the Interim Director who the Manager knows very well, and I know very well, and kind of start working on potentially any hurdles that we may have. I want to do that now, because you know that it takes, Mr. Plummer step in, you know that this takes, that could be our biggest hurdle.

Director Diaz: We will be happy to schedule maybe a preliminary meeting to have some discussions on and see how we can possibly move the process.

Mayor Lago: Get ahead of it. I really don't want to see this not started next year.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I think this is a very important for us and we want to get it finished.

Mayor Lago: You want to raise revenue for whatever issue it is that the city needs to take of. The only place where we can really have a significant increase in revenue is in the north Gables and this is the type of beautification project that will bring in those dollars, because property values will go up and the tax revenue – Commissioner Anderson you had some comments?

Commissioner Anderson: Yes, just a question Director. While we are doing this project, do we need to expand any of the sewer system lines in that area that's anticipated?

Mayor Lago: That's being handled privately, correct?

Director Diaz: So, there is an existing sewer system in this area. I believe there is a project in this vicinity that is being handled by its...

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Mr. Plummer: 1000 Ponce.

Director Diaz: 1000 Ponce.

Mr. Plummer: The ALF.

Director Diaz: That they are doing a project across the street, but they should probably be ahead of this.

Mr. Plummer: And the good news with WASA is they've been bugging us, what's taking so long, let's go, let's go, so all the changes to the traffic study and the median, so they are anxious to get started as well.

Director Diaz: And we'll bring the private developer...as well, just to make sure that everything is properly coordinated, and I think it's probably...

Vice Mayor Mena: What's the general schedule after this design phase?

Mr. Plummer: So, after this design phase we'll have our public meeting in November, we should have plans wrapped up, and then for final permitting in February, that might be March/April, the city can start to get bids from the general contractor, and then construction is probably a six-month process.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, you are not looking at starting then really till summer.

Mr. Plummer: Summer.

Mayor Lago: Summer 2022 – I'll take that.

Mr. Plummer: If everything goes well, we are done end of 2022, if everything goes very well.

Mayor Lago: I know that usually we are used to in our industry going to WASA and DERM when we have some sort of like maybe a 50 percent conceptual drawing. I'd rather sit down with your expertise, staff's expertise, our Manager, sit down with the Director of WASA, sit down with the Director of DERM, whoever we may need to right now and say look, what do you foresee as issues, because you know that, again, I have the utmost respect for the county, but there are certain times where we get bogged down there and it could take months, if not years to resolve an issue.

Mr. Plummer: I live that dream every day.

Mayor Lago: I want to be as kind as possible. We need them.

Mr. Plummer: Good advice. We'll do that.

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Mayor Lago: Okay. I'm excited about this. This has been a long-awaited project and I think its going to really benefit, not only that neighborhood, but for a long time we've been waiting for it. I'm happy. Commissioner you have anything you want to say, or no?

Commissioner Anderson: No. I just want to make sure we cover that, so we don't dig up these streets twice.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Thank you for your hard work. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Plummer: Thank you.