

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
September 25, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Sergio Leymarie

Agenda Item F-1 [Start: 11:29 a.m.]

Swale Package Update
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to F-1, time certain, 11 o'clock. Good morning.

Mr. Leymarie: Good morning, everyone.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your patience. And I apologize for the last Commission meeting. I'm the one, the responsible party.

Mr. Leymarie: No, of course. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I appreciate that. I apologize myself. Last time I had to catch a plane, so I had to flee from this Chamber. So, it's a great honor to be able to talk to our great city leadership team. And this is going to be very short and simple.

Mayor Lago: Can you provide us with your name, your address, and the board that you sit on?

City Commission Meeting
September 25, 2025

Mr. Leymarie: Yes. I am Sergio Leymarie, and I'm Chairman of the Mayor's Board of Advisors. And I'm going to talk to you today very briefly about something that we call the NOPO North Ponce Pilot. And I say it's going to be very, very short and simple because this is about, you know, we think more freedom, no cost to the city, and some benefits to citizens. So, it's extremely simple. It's a good example of how we can sometime engineer or re-engineer some rules to bring benefits to our citizens. So, we could call it beautify your block. This is not about just adding one more page to the swale package, but it's an example of how we can beautify an area without creating expenses to the city, as I mentioned before. So, thanks to our friends from the Public Works Department and especially Deena, who we teamed up to work on that. So, the issue was, and Deena, feel free to jump in to add anything as I'm going through this. The issue is that the North Ponce streetscape standards kind of lag behind other areas in terms of quality and living experience and certainly don't bring the same opportunities to property value and to businesses. So many homeowner associations would like to take an active part in beautifying their block, but they can't really do that right now. Besides, outside of their boundaries, the current swale package really applies to single-family homes mostly. It doesn't apply to North Ponce either. Sidewalks are narrower, and street parking is parallel to the sidewalk, et cetera, et cetera. So, if they want, if HOAs want to do that, they have to hire a landscaping architect. They have to create a project on their own. It's complex, it's costly, and everything. So, the concept is just to empower, to unlock the possibility for HOAs to beautify their streetscapes. And we've put together a very simple addendum, draft addendum, to the swale package with a pre-selection of native plants, some very, it's kind of a menu, really. No need to hire a landscaping architect. The process is very simple. It's about a two-week turnaround. And the benefits, totally optional, by the way, for HOAs. So, it's not that HOAs are forced in North Ponce to do that. Totally optional. And the benefits to citizens, there is no additional cost to the city, of course. Property value appreciation, you beautify your block, you get direct benefits and some property value. More business opportunities for retail. Some parts of North Ponce right now are not the best areas to set up, say, a restaurant with a terrace or a high-end store. And again, the cost to the city is zero. So, this is what this project is about. It's very simple, as I promised. And I'm happy to take any questions.

Mayor Lago: Deena, would you like to add any color to this amazing opportunity?

Public Works Assistant Director: Yes. Good morning, Deena Bell-Llewellyn, Public Works Assistant Director, Green Space Management. So, our swale permit package has been in effect for many years, probably eight years. As Mr. Leymarie said, it was mostly for the larger swales and single-family residential areas. But we want the North Ponce residents to know this is also for the narrow planting areas in front of their properties and even the street bump-outs that might be a landscaped area with a tree in front of their property. If they would like to beautify it and replant it, they follow the simple permit. It's a Public Works permit. They can reach out to me at

publicworksgreenspace@CoralGables.com directly. We'll give you the application and help you with the process to beautify your area.

Mayor Lago: I love it. So, I just want to first and foremost thank Mr. Chairman for your hard work and commitment. I know that you have a thriving business. You're very busy. You take a lot of pride in Coral Gables and especially in the North Gables area. I want to thank you for volunteering on this board. This board is made up of 100 percent of volunteers, people who want to give back. Two years ago, they came up with the idea of the app, which was funded, thank you, by our incredible Clerk. That was one of the projects that we worked on. And the whole purpose of this organization is to bring incredible people like yourself, Harvard-educated individuals who want to give back to the community in their expertise. They see a need, and they want to be able to advise. I ask my colleagues to take advantage of these individuals. How many members do we have now of the Mayor's Council?

Mr. Leymarie: I think we are one, two, three, four, five, six. Six members.

Mayor Lago: Six members.

Mr. Leymarie: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: I think we have an opening now. If you know anybody I would like to serve, it would be great. These are individuals that are interested. Do you have any ideas? Schedule time with Sergio. He's amazing. He comes to office hours. He sits down with myself. I know he visits with the Vice Mayor. I know he's met with Commissioner Lara. He's always interested in giving you a little helping hand. He's an expert. He has a lot of information, a wealth of knowledge, and he's doing this because he loves his neighborhood, and he saw a need, and this is something that the Mayor's Council is offering, offering the city to say, look, we're going to push this forward. What do you think about this? And they have a whole host of other ideas they're going to be presenting too pretty soon, very ambitious stuff. We're talking about satellites. We're talking about green space. We're talking about a lot of cool things that, again, we're very grateful because of highly technical individuals that are involved that are giving up their time to be involved with the City of Coral Gables. So, I want to thank you and thank the Mayor's Council.

Mr. Leymarie: Mr. Mayor, if I may build on what you're saying. So, thank you for this introduction. Yes, we are a board of volunteers. We donate our time. We are united with the passion for our city and the willingness to serve. And the way we work is very simple. So, the Mayor mentioned that there's an opening, so we identify collectively projects, initiatives. We assign a champion for each initiative, that individual is the primary owner, even though other members can be involved. And hopefully we're going to be presenting some, suggesting some of those initiatives to the Commission very soon.

Mayor Lago: And one of the interesting ones, I'm just giving you it out there because I know all of you are very involved in schools and public safety. They're involved; they're right now really analyzing Coral Gables Senior High. And they're really focusing in on child safety, pedestrian safety, accessibility. They're working with the School Board to devise a plan of how can we address the buses, how can we address the drop-off, and how can we address public safety. So again, they're like doing all this legwork for free. They've been doing it for years. They're the ones that put together the app. It was amazing. Some seriously technical, technically savvy, informed people. And I hate to say this because we have to use these people. If you have an idea and you want to look into it, go flush it out. Really interesting stuff. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor. I appreciate this update. It's nothing that we have to vote on. I appreciate the effort that's gone through it. We should connect. I'm going to throw another idea out to you. It's been gathering dust in my pile of things to do. And that is townhomes. We have a kind of a hodge-podge going on in these swales. And it's not cohesive with the true intent of that type of architecture. I'm going to ask you to take it under your wing and make some suggestions of how the landscaping should be done, whether it be one block's length. You guys have a discussion about it. Drive around and look at what we have and how we can improve it.

Mr. Leymarie: Fair enough.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'd like to meet with you on some other stuff, too, if we can brainstorm some more ideas. And you guys can run with it.

Mr. Leymarie: Of course. With great pleasure. We'll do that.

Mayor Lago: You had the actual example up a few seconds ago. Will you put that up one more time so the residents here can see it, Mr. Clerk? I want to see it. So, this is what they're working on, you see?

Mr. Leymarie: Yeah.

Public Works Assistant Director: I think it's page 11 in this package.

Mr. Leymarie: You want to go through it? Yeah.

Public Works Assistant Director: This is it.

Mr. Leymarie: Yeah. Go ahead, Deena.

Public Works Assistant Director: This is the new image we just added, specifically for narrow swales for multi-family and commercial buildings in the north part, more urban areas. And you can see there might be street parking. There's a curbed area. And between the curb and the

*City Commission Meeting
September 25, 2025*

sidewalk might be a very narrow planting space. You can plant small trees and fill it up with any ground cover of your liking. And it's a simple permit that we will walk you through. It's explained here in the swale package. It's online in the Public Works Green Space Management section of the website. If you want to download it there, you can read all about it.

Mayor Lago: Anything else? Perfect. Well, Sergio, again, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you. And I'll see you at the next meeting. Thank you for your hard work. Looking forward to the next few ideas.

Mr. Leymarie: Thank you. Looking forward to it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Okay. Moving on to item F-7, which was 1130 times certain. Deena, by the way, we're moving forward with this, correct? Or do we need action from the Commission? I just want to make sure.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir, Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: We're moving forward, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: We're moving forward. You're going to bring it to the Commission?

City Manager Iglesias: I believe that we can move forward with it.

City Attorney Suarez: Yes. The prior resolutions adopting this whole package gave authority to staff for administrative changes.

Mayor Lago: I just want to make sure that we're in good hands. Okay.

Public Works Assistant Director: Ready to go today.

Mayor Lago: Because they worked hard on this. So, thank you. Perfect.