

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Virtual Meeting
Agenda Items G-8
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 P.W. in charge of Sanitation, Al Zamora

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-8

A discussion regarding the development of an action plan to address the open trash pits on the Red Road swale. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Next item is G-8, trash pits on Red Road, Vice Mayor Lago.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes, just very quickly. Before I even get into this discussion and it should be a brief one, because I need the ACM to just kind of give us an update. This is not a discussion about removal of trash pits. We are not removing trash pits and I received a few phone calls about people concerned about it. What this is, is an effort to try to reduce garbage fees, because we are facing a lot of illegal dumping on 57th Avenue. So, I'd like for staff just to kind of give us an update in regards to how we are addressing it. Last week there was a mattress thrown out in the middle of the weekend. There was a litany of garbage that shows up there, as I showed you on video, not only green matter, but just articles of clothing, printers, mattresses. There's that common thought from people who dump illegally in the City of Coral Gables that if you throw it on 57th Avenue,
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the City of Coral Gables will pick it up, because that's just what we do. We are all about beauty. I'd like to just get Mr. Santamaria and give us a brief overview of the progress that we are making, addressing these concerns and the trash pits that we closed or removed, excuse me, we moved those trash pits to a more desirable area. We don't take away anybody's trash pits, please, I want to be very clear of that. How are we addressing that? Thank you sir.

ACM Santamaria: Good afternoon once again, Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, Ed Santamaria, Assistant City Manager, Operations and Infrastructure. There has been a lot of effort going into correcting this issue on Red Road already. We are happy to continue to do so, but we feel that moving forward we are going to need direction from the Commission. So, I'd like to turn this over, with the Chair's permission, to Al Zamora, Assistant Director of Public Works in charge of sanitation; and Al has a report to provide, including a presentation.

Director Zamora: Good afternoon Mayor, Commissioners. Billy can you please put up the map that staff came up with just to facilitate this conversation please. Okay. What this map depicts is, we actually walked 57th Avenue and tried to identify what actually was out there. We classified each property in two ways, actually three. One, only 57th Avenue frontage; the second one was properties that had a side elevation or frontage on 57th Avenue and on the side street; and the third was empty lots. We came up with 78 properties that do not have anywhere to place a pit, but in front of their, on 57th Avenue; 62 properties or actually 93 properties that had dual elevations and again, the 8 empty lots. Out of the 93 properties that had frontage, 62 properties had no evidence of a trash pit, leaving 31 properties that actually have evidence of a trash pit on 57th Avenue. Back about a year and-a-half ago, we went out and leveled the trash pits. We did knock on those corner units that had a side elevation and asked them. The people that we were able to contact, if they could move their pits to the side street. Again, we went out there last week, we still have 31 trash pits that are being shown, that shows evidence of a trash pit of being used. Next slide please. Thank you sir. Next slide please. I want to give you an overview what the city ordinance is today. Basically, the key points are that the limit is one cubic yard, anything over one cubic yard there is a charge of \$10 per cubic yard, which we've had several discussions on, and we've come to the agreement that one cubic yard is almost unenforceable. With that being said, maybe we are going to need the direction of the Commission to, at one point fix that. Green waste is a different thing – yard waste where it says in the code that you can put it out anytime, 365 days a year, 24/7. The difference that that makes is, if you have bulk pick up, you can only put it out, bulk pick up meaning furniture, bulky items, you can only put out 6 p.m. day prior to pick up. And that to me, creates what we've talked about in the past, the broken window effect, I don't know, like the Vice Mayor has said, you are going to find problems with illegal dumping because of two to three things. An existing pile; a dark area where its not accessible. These are the key factors that people look for when they want to illegally dump. And to be honest with you, I don't really think, I'm almost positive its not our residents, but its people that are taking advantage of either the pile being there. We have a classic example, which is not on 57th Avenue, but behind a high school. It's a dead-end,

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its dark, and we are constantly picking up illegal dumping from there. We've put up some cameras, we've done certain things to try to eradicate that. Next slide please.

Vice Mayor Lago: Mr. Zamora, if I may. I forgot to mention in the beginning. Can you also talk a little bit about the safety hazard it is for our employees? When the cars, when the waste trucks are on 57th Avenue and the workers how they are putting their life in danger addressing these issues.

Director Zamora: Sure. Sure. That's one of the issues and that's one of the most important issues, and again, it is not exclusive to Red Road. We have any major thoroughfare that we work on, there is a safety hazard first to our employees, second is congestion, and third its an eyesore. And again, I agree with you, we are not looking to do away with trash pits, but we do need your help in relocating the trash pits to solidation where possible. And if you look at – I mean we can eliminate 31 trash pits on 57th Avenue through this legislation, which says that if you have a side elevation, you no longer can use 57th Avenue, and that's a start. That's 31 less times we have to stop and expose our people to the dangers of cars; 31 less pits that we are holding up traffic; and 31 less pits that we are illegal dumpers. Next slide please. I took it down even a step further. We kind of do it by zones, so there's an understanding of the issues that we have. As you move from the northern part of the city to the southern part of the city, residents have more of a choice up on the north end than they do on, I'm sorry, on the south end of the city than on the north end of the city. Obviously, between Eighth Street and Coral Way, we have 73 properties and out of those 73, 57 have no choice. Next slide please. As you crisscross those numbers relatively get better, we have a better chance at relocating these trash pits to the side streets. If you go up one more it gets even easier. Next slide please. That would be the corridor between Bird Road and Miller; and if you go to the final slide, it will give you the numbers of properties and the breakdown from Miller to...So basically, we need direction from the Commission on, you know, and I wouldn't limit this to Red Road, I would probably include any major thoroughfare that we have in the city, for those three reasons. Now back a year and-a-half ago, we did go out and level out all the trash, we leveled them out, we did not close them. We knocked on some doors of people that had a side elevation. We have seen some improvement, but we still have issues. The way the code is written right now, we feel we don't have enough teeth in it. The code right now as it reads addresses locations of pits when it comes to distances from trees, distances from fire hydrants, and storm drains. So, I think if we tighten up the code a little bit better, where it says that if you have a side elevation and a frontage on a major thoroughfare, you need to use the side elevation that's on a cross street.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Zamora we are getting away from the issue on the agenda, which is open trash pits on Red Road.

Director Zamora: Okay.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I think we should concentrate on that.

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Vice Mayor Lago: I'll bring it in for a landing here, because I know we've got a few items left on the agenda. So my purpose here again, I want to preface it, because there are a lot of scare tactics that people are using in this community to even talk about trash pits. You can't even talk about the issue because it immediately comes that you are trying to get rid of people's trash pits. I'm not trying to get rid of it and I don't think this Commission is. What we are trying to do here is two things. Number one, find a safe opportunity for our workers to get the job done; number two, is to curb the illegal dumping that's occurring on 57th Avenue. The reason why I take the pictures of the illegal dumping that I've sent to Ed and to Peter and to Devin, is because I have residents on 57th Avenue that call me and advise me of the items that get thrown in their neighborhoods throughout the weekends. And I think that we have this moniker the City Beautiful, I think that we can do much better. And I just wanted to gauge the appetite, we don't have to have the discussion today, if you don't want to, I just wanted to put it in your radar, that we are not taking away anyone's, we are just saying we have to relocate those trash pits. And plus, the next item that I'm going to talk about, G-9, is going to be the trees that are going to be planted on Red Road. So, we are talking about beautifying this entire corridor that's going to run all the way from Ponce beyond Bird Road. It's a great opportunity to really book-end the city from a city where illegal dumping is occurring to beautiful trees and shrubs, and I think that's not only increase property values, but its going to really solidify the fact that we are the City Beautiful, and I think this has been an area that's been neglected for a long time. So, I just wanted to put it before my colleagues and maybe we can talk about it in a few months or you can talk to staff about it, but I appreciate your time.

Director Zamora: Thank you. And that's the conclusion of my presentation.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Al. Thank you Ed. You guys have done a great job. Thank you.

ACM Santamaria: I just would like to know whether there is any direction given to us in terms of putting together some sort of legislation and change the code regarding how we handle trash pits on Red Road and perhaps other thoroughfares along the city's boundaries.

Commissioner Mena: So, I just have a question which was, and I don't think Al covered this, but if he did, I apologize. Al, you guys dump and you don't really have any way to sort of tracking or do you track the volume on that level? In other words, do you know like you have a lot more volume from the pits on 57th than you do on other places?

Director Zamora: No. We haven't gotten that deep into tracking. We track what each route does, but unfortunately, I mean 57th Avenue is pretty long, so you are probably picking up, 57th Avenue twice a week, depending on if its south of Bird Road or north of Bird Road, but no, I have no way of tracking that, because that same truck that's servicing 57th Avenue is doing the southern streets also.

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Director Zamora: We do track what we pick up daily by route.

Commissioner Mena: I'm curious to see maybe like, take like a straw poll of your guys and see what they say about it, just to see if we can get some intel. Here's my thing. Listen, when the Vice Mayor showed the video last week of the guy crossing the street, it upset me, I think that's just really terrible. My concern is, I don't know how much of that is going on throughout the city, as opposed to only on the border street like 57th. I'm sensitive to what you are saying about the safety of the drivers. I also know that a lot of the homeowners who live right off 57th, a lot of those houses, at least the corridor that I drive through, they tend to be like 5,000 square foot lots, maybe slightly larger, but they are not big lots. And the frontage of those houses is therefore not particularly large, and so, relocating a trash pit to the front where they probably have visitors park and just from a beautification perspective of their own house, I suspect, we should talk to residents, but I suspect there is going to be some pushback to that for sure.

Vice Mayor Lago: Commissioner Mena, if I may add to your point, even if we ever seriously entertain this, we would, obviously have a discussion with the residents. There are always going to be trash pits on 57th Avenue, because you have a handful of properties that face 57th Avenue, those tiny lots, so they are always going to have some weight obviously, unless they do what you and I did and get rid of the trash pit.

Commissioner Mena: Yes, to your point, I got rid of my trash pit, partly because frankly, I don't have a huge lot, right, and so the impact on my lot of having a trash pit in the front, it was an eyesore, you know what I mean. If I lived on the corner, if I lived on 57th, I'd probably put it on the side too, because it's sort of out of sight out of mind for the homeowner, but obviously it's a blight on 57th when other people are driving through and it's attractive nuisance to illegal dumpers. Look, I'm in favor of exploring the discussion further and getting some input from the residents, if Ed and Al are looking for some direction that would be sort of, I think where we would start, I guess, but it would be helpful if you guys had some sort of data. I don't know how you would be able to get that, but I want to make sure like we are not doing this because we see it more on 57th when maybe we are getting just as much of that dumping in other places.

Commissioner Fors: Al, is it completely impractical for the employees to for two weeks take a picture with their telephone when they pick up the trash on 57th Avenue?

Director Zamora: I would probably send my field inspector out there. He would be better qualified for that, and we can do that, just get a general feel of what's out there. It's doable, it's doable.

Commissioner Mena: I know it's true, I've driven through and I've seen it. So, to the Vice Mayor's point, I am in no way doubting that it exists there, it's definitely there. My question is, I don't know, if you go over to Alhambra, the next street over, is it a lot different, is it a noticeable increase and

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therefore indicative of a lot of illegal dumping? – or is it just that those houses happen to put it on the side? That’s what I’m sort of trying to get a feel for.

Vice Mayor Lago: The whole point of putting it on the Commission today as a discussion item was to have this type of discussion, and its not something we are going to resolve today, and we may not even give – you know what, if it was up to me, I wouldn’t even give direction. I just want the Commission to put it on the front radar and just be a little bit more cognizant when they drive in certain areas, like for example, on Bird Road, on 57th Avenue, on the weekends and start kind of taking into account and maybe they’ll notice for themselves the eyesore that they maybe encounter. I think the residents, again, I don’t want to speak for all the residents, but its interesting to see that the residents in that area are the ones that are calling me about what’s happening. I think we have discussed this pretty thoroughly, so.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Its 2:15, you want to take a half-an-hour break?

Commissioner Keon: Yes. I’d like them to look at Kendall Drive too. The trash pits that are there are very, very deep. They are large properties, so there seems to be a lot of debris in them, but they also need to be filled. They are very deep, but I think this happens on Kendall, I think it happens on Erwin and I think it happens on Old Cutler also, where people there is a tendency to dump, because they are large, wide open areas.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you folks. Let’s take a half-an-hour break, its 2:15 and we’ll reconvene at quarter to three, is that okay? Alright.