

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item K – Discussion Items
January 24, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
Assistant City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Public Works Director, Ed Santamaria
Planning and Zoning Director, Ramon Trias

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item K – Discussion Items [3:23:10 p.m.]

Mayor Cason: Let me take the opportunity to usually I go last on this, but on K, since we have Public Works here. I would like you to come up and talk to us about something that's about to happen soon, I'm not sure exactly, but you can tell us, in terms of the bridge at Coco Plum Circle that is going to be demolished and cost significant traffic as well as problems for people who have boats getting in and out of the Granada Waterway. When I heard about it, I asked to make sure that the County understands that anytime they rebuild anything they've got to build with sea level rise, because right now that bridge you can only get out at low tide with many, many boats, and imagine if they rebuild it the same height, we are just condemning all our properties for the next 40 years that are behind that in terms of everybody to get their boats out. So if you can explain where we are.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Gladly Mr. Mayor, Ed Santamaria, Director of Public Works. We have had a couple of meetings with the County regarding work of an urgent nature, it has not become an emergency yet, meaning that chunks of the bridge are not falling off. However, the County would like to address this problem before that happens. They've recently had experiences with other bridges that became emergencies and so they want to avoid that here. The bridge has been deemed structurally deficient.

Commissioner Keon: Could you tell me where the bridge is again?

Public Works Director Santamaria: Absolutely. It's the Le Jeune Road Bridge approaching the Coco Plum Circle.

Commissioner Keon: Oh.

Public Works Director Santamaria: It's kind of a major bridge.

Mayor Cason: It's a major route for anybody coming from Cutler Bay, all the way up; it's going to be a traffic disaster.

Commissioner Keon: Well it also affects the response time among our particularly Fire and EMT coming from Fire Station No. 3.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And you mentioned how long this would be down, correct?

Public Works Director Santamaria: Yes. We have discussed this. Initially they told me a year closure of the bridge, and the second meeting that we had, which happened day before yesterday, I told them that that was way too long; and so they are looking at alternatives, but realistically we are looking at a six month period at a minimum where that bridge is going to be impacted. Now the idea for six months is if they were able to close down the bridge completely and get a contractor in there to work without encumbrances for six months. If they do it in a manner where they phase the work and they do one side and then the other that will take longer. So impact the traffic would be felt over a much longer period of time.

Mayor Cason: What would the impact be on the boats? - there are hundreds and hundreds of boats inside the bridges will they be not able to get their boats out, and therefore they should be making plans?

Public Works Director Santamaria: That was a question that I asked and the response was that there may be periods of time where navigating the waterway would be complicated, but that it would only be brief periods of time.

Mayor Cason: Any idea when – you said it was structurally deficient, so meaning the tractor trailer comes over its not going to collapse or maybe?

Public Works Director Santamaria: Not yet. Not yet.

Mayor Cason: By when do they want to, if they have their druthers, so they want to start doing this?

Public Works Director Santamaria: Well they are looking at a design-build project and they are looking to solicit the contractor and the designer over the next couple of months, and so we are looking at probably within the next year they'll start construction.

Mayor Cason: And we need to insist that they build it higher or at least the clearance underneath is higher, so that we gain 15-20 years, because the sea level rise in here one inch every three years, so it doesn't take you long.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Mr. Mayor I heard your concerns and I conveyed them to the bridge engineers and the administrators over at Public Works at the County and they said that they would seriously look at raising the bridge. The only concern that they had is that obviously when you raise the bridge deck then you may affect the approaches on either side, and then you start affecting potentially private property and harmonizing everything...

Mayor Cason: There is private property all up and down Granada Waterway if you no longer can have a boat that can get out of the bridge.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Absolutely.

Mayor Cason: We've got to look at our interest and our interests are, they've said they take sea level rise seriously, they've got to start the first project in Coral Gables build it up, so that we are not affected by sea level rise or gain a few more decades.

Public Works Director Santamaria: We are definitely advocating for as high a bridge as possible.

Mayor Cason: OK. Keep us informed, because people have to make a lot of plants, not only for their boats, but for traffic and fire and everything else.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: As soon as we have some real dates we will partner with them on the communication. It's not that we should be postponing the establishment of the bridge, but just with all due haste, they may even be able to incentivize the contractor for finishing ahead of schedule. It is a residential neighborhood, we are usually cautious about night work, but this may be an opportunity for night work as well.

Commissioner Keon: I think also there is the pedestrian bridge that's there now, so are they going to touch the pedestrian bridge also?- so the pedestrian bridge will remain intact and they'll just do the vehicle bridge.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Correct.

Commissioner Keon: OK. You know you really need to notice that entire neighborhood east of U.S.-1, because people are going to start using instead of Le Jeune the only way you are going to go across is to get to like Granada, you know to cross Granada, and then go across and come up, or Hardee, but you are just going to keep going closer and closer and once ways figures it out the amount of traffic that's going to be diverted from Le Jeune onto the other residential streets is going to be tremendous, there is going to be a real outcry from the community about that.

Mayor Cason: Can you get us for the next Commission meeting or just send us an e-mail on the number of cars a day that come down Old Cutler Road. I had it somewhere, but I mean it's a lot. Coming both ways and coming from Coconut Grove coming in.

Commissioner Keon: But it's not even that, that's the road to Pinecrest, it's the road to...it's how people come and go through the whole City. If they come up Ingraham Highway it's not going to do any good to come up Ingraham from the Grove anymore; they come up Douglas, up Ingraham, and then cut onto Le Jeune to go south, they are not going to be able to do that either, so they are going to start cutting back into all the other residential streets as well. I know that there was a County project that was on the books for a long time and there was considerable planning related to it on the paving of the Coco Plum Circle, which would give us an opportunity if they are going to redo the bridge and have to repave to continue the paving to finally pave the Coco Plum Circle. There was just tremendous disagreement between the County's plan and the residential community's plan for Coco Plum Circle. The County wanted to, I guess there are new specs out on traffic circles and they wanted to reduce it down to much narrower lanes and put in lots of other triangles or whatever, something in there, and the people in Coco Plum, the people in the immediate area that use that all the time were exceedingly opposed to what the County

wanted to do and always said, this is an existing traffic circle that people have developed habits and whatever, and there have been no serious accidents at that circle that the police could ever even pull up, so it's really not a danger, they wanted the more open lanes and it really allows for traffic to go. Anyway, do you think we could come up with or we could start to work with them on a plan to do the Coco Plum Circle at the same time and we could meet with the residents of Coco Plum on it, so that when the paving is done they'll pave the whole thing, and I know we wanted to put in crosswalks there at Sunset and Old Cutler, particularly Old Cutler because of the way of where the bus drop offs are and the people that work in those neighborhoods have to cross the street. Those have been the most incidences of anyone being hurt are people from the buses; they get off the bus and try and cross either Le Jeune or Old Cutler.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Commissioner Keon, fortunately Jessica Keller happen to be at the meeting with me and she is very familiar with that circle and the issues there regarding the County's project and the residents' concerns with the County project, so that is something that came up and we will definitely be working with the County on that.

Commissioner Keon: OK. So maybe we can come up with actually finalizing a plan on that circle. OK.

Public Works Director Santamaria: And I will say this, if the County is definitely partnering with the City on this, they understand that we, although it's their right-of-way it's their bridge, but they want to partner with us, we told them there has to be public engagement, at least a certain period of public engagement to get input from the community. We told them that we wanted something that was aesthetically pleasing, not just a slap up a steel bridge that doesn't really fit the nature of the City in terms of aesthetics, and they are receptive to working with us.

Mayor Cason: Let's pay attention to the color because there was controversy when the pedestrian bridge went in – it's not green why is it orange? - we said orange is what we do, so we need to make sure we have some pleasing color next time.

Public Works Director Santamaria: And so joining me at the meeting was Dona Spain and Ramon Trias. We will have representation on the selection panel for the bridge, and so we'll have some input there as well. The County has agreed to making what the Manager raised in terms of expediting the work, some sort of a bonus for a potential design builder, and also there will be some points given for aesthetics in the package that they may present.

Commissioner Slesnick: Are you saying that the bridge needs to maybe go up four feet on each side; I mean have a lot of space there if we are going up like four feet.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I don't think you saying an actual measurement just that it be elevated higher.

Commissioner Slesnick: Elevated higher.

Mayor Cason: Or you make the top of the bridge if they can do it thinner, so the boats underneath can get under, I mean there are various ways to do it, but just keep that in mind.

Commissioner Slesnick: It would really enhance property values for all along the waterway there and make the owners happier to not have access for months if it's higher than the pedestrian bridge, so that they can get bigger boats.

Commissioner Keon: But the pedestrian bridge is fixed, so if it's higher than the pedestrian bridge you are going to have to do the pedestrian bridge too.

Commissioner Slesnick: I know. But there is space since it's a big open circle there and coming up by the park you have space to elevate the bridge there.

Commissioner Keon: Right –,but the pedestrian bridge is fixed, so even if you make the vehicle bridge higher the boats are going to be affected by the pedestrian bridge, so you probably can't go higher than what the pedestrian bridge is now.

Mayor Cason: Next time I go under I'll measure the difference.

Commissioner Lago: What may end up happening, they may have to scrap the pedestrian bridge and bridge a new bridge higher, can you imagine that, that would be terrible.

Commissioner Keon: No.

Assistant City Manager Iglesias: The pedestrian bridge is a Truss bridge; it can be lifted and adjusted.

Commissioner Keon: OK. Good.

Commissioner Slesnick: So let's lift both of them about four feet and you raise the property values for everybody there.

Commissioner Lago: What are we talking about money there; you need to give a little explanation a significantly more expensive than probably what they have planned – probably right?

Mayor Cason: Alright. That's all I have on that subject. I just wanted to introduce it and make people aware of it.

Commissioner Keon: We could also look at where the traffic all cuts up the swale at Ingraham Park there, you may be able to widen it a bit, that turn lane.

Public Works Director Santamaria: We are also working with the County....

Commissioner Keon:...it gives you a lot of opportunities.

Public Works Director Santamaria: There is also some work we are looking at on Riviera Drive at that intersection and working with the County on that as well. All those pieces are in play. I can tell you that as we have further meetings with the County on this subject matter, we'll be glad to pass on.

Commissioner Keon: That would be great. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Keon you have any other items?

Commissioner Keon: I have two things I'd like to ask about; one is, Ramon is here – Ramon you were working on the updates to the residential code that we know are problematic.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Where are you with that?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: We are working on a draft and we wanted to have one last meeting with the committee...

Commissioner Keon: OK.

Planning and Zoning Director Trias:...and we probably will have something for you within the next 60 days at most.

Commissioner Keon: OK. Does it go to the Planning and Zoning Board?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: And then will come to us, so sometime this spring it will come?

Planning and Zoning Director Trias: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: OK. The only other thing I had, thank you, the only other question I had is, we talked about the noise related to leaf blowers and I was told that the City was moving to use electric or battery powered leaf blowers, because they are not noisy, the noise is a result of the type of motor that's in the leaf blowers, and also they cause a lot of pollution; and we were looking at, I know we were switching over to the battery ones, are they effective?- are they good?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Doing the test – the leaf blowers I understand proved solid for us, but the hedge clippers did not. It didn't give us enough power that was needed, so I know that we can get an update from Public Works by memo to you all, but that I did understand that the leaf blowers were well received by our staff.

Commissioner Keon: If they were satisfactory, if we can begin the discussion again about the leaf blowers, because the issue with the leaf blowers that we get so many complaints about is noise, we could begin to transition to battery operated leaf blowers, so that you can inform the different landscape companies and whatever else that we are going to go in that direction and ask them to start moving toward replacing their equipment with battery operated ones, that would be a discussion we could have sometime.

Assistant City Manager Iglesias: We had a discussion with Brook concerning that and the electric powered were sufficient, except when it was wet, then they have to use the gas blower once, because they needed more power and for the trimmers, so they are trying to use the electric ones as much as possible, which is what we already have and reserve the gas blowers when they need additional power when it rains and so forth.

Commissioner Keon: So will you give some thought to how that would relate to a homeowner, I mean I don't know if we do more leaf blowing than a landscape company would do, the volume is – does the leaf blower with a battery is it effective enough for like residential use?- if it's not then...

Assistant City Manager Iglesias: It's simply not effective when it was wet and the leaf would stick, so that was an issue of moisture.

Commissioner Keon: Right –, but I would think that relates to the volume of leaves or the volume of clippings and the volume of cutting when its wet, if that's more than what you would normally find in a house, then I don't think it's a big issue, if that's the same as what you would find in somebody's yard then it becomes an issue. So maybe if you could just think about that and then we'll talk about it at a later date. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: It's going to be a controversial issue, other than what the City does, it will be controversial, because it was something that was raised six years ago and I was opposed to it at the time because I looked at the cost for a homeowner of turning in their gas powered one and I figured, you know we have almost 11,000 homes times \$100 minimum, plus the wires, you are talking about \$1.2 million dollar hit to homeowners, plus the fact that a lot of them use companies, not just for the Gables, they go all over the place. So whether or not – we don't even have a handle on who the gardening companies are, we can't even contact them now.

Commissioner Lago: I've been trying to work on this for a while.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And we have been too sir.

Commissioner Keon: I think they are a pollutant, I think it's a problem, so I don't think you can say one day, OK, you can't have that anymore. I think it's an issue that you begin to talk about it and you raise public awareness of, and then if you decide it's something that you feel is better for the community, the community would prefer to not have that noise, then you very slowly ease into it, and maybe it's a five-year period, I don't really know, but it's really an ongoing discussion of whether it works or not.

Commissioner Lago: I'm in favor along with the issue of just the fact that when we drive through the City during the day there are lawn trucks everywhere. When, for example, I tell my lawn maintenance company, they park on my yard, they park on my swale or they park in my driveway, but again, I have a circular driveway and it's easy for them, but that's another issue that we can talk about along with having these lawn companies pay \$5 a year, \$2 a year, whatever it is, and we have control of who is in our City and we can contact them when laws change, when there is a BOLO, a "Be On The Look Out" for a certain individual, when requesting their input in regards to whatever is going on in the City, we have contact with these individuals and we know who they are. By the way, I just bought an electric blower, cheap; I think it was like \$60, they've gone down in price. I bought it in Home Depot, it works incredibly well and it makes a fraction of the noise and there is obviously no pollution.

Mayor Cason: Is it plugged in with a wire?

Commissioner Keon: No, it's a battery.

Commissioner Lago: Battery and wire, both.

Commissioner Keon: They charge the battery, so that's what we asked him, is how long does the battery last?- amidst all those issues, so a lawn company could go out for eight hours or whatever, and it would work, so you need a lot of other information.

Commissioner Lago: My issue is, remember Gables by the Sea, we installed that – we were there for when they installed the sale art. I've met with several of the residents, they've probably called you, they want to light up the circle where the Lugo Circle is, and they are having just a little bit of issues and I'd like to see staff maybe we can sit down with them and figure a way if either, I'm not sure if its budgeting constraints that they are asking for or they are asking for assistance in regards to the permitting process, but I think it was a few thousand dollars and I want to make sure that we take advantage of the sculpture and we light it up that's what the residents want. Number two, the K-LA on Ponce de Leon next to Rob and Stucky, several residents have called me, they are asking for a crosswalk in front of the school, it's a major issue for them. Number three, I brought this up to the Manager, if you drive by the City and I'm going to say this at every Commission meeting till we get this right, the garbage pits are unacceptable, there is garbage everywhere in the City; and this is what I'm asking, if we drive through the City on a Saturday or Sunday you know there is no garbage pickup. Code Enforcement – if we don't have enough people working in Code Enforcement, I know that we may go to zone enforcement, where we have certain individuals designated to that area, we need to stop at every single individual's home where there is cardboard box, where there is a planter, where there is a refrigerator, whatever is in the garbage pit on a Saturday and Sunday, it should only be green material, it should not be anything else. We need to stop them, give them a warning and the next time we need to cite them, because it's getting out of control, I'm telling you. I brought it up to the Manager, I called her on Saturday and I go, just drive down the street, you'll see, if you look left and right into the streets everybody is dumping everything, and it's not only residents in the City, because I've had some residents on Robino come to me and say Vince, I didn't dump that, and I know they didn't dump it. Somebody came and dumped it. We've got to get a handle on this and if Code Enforcement needs additional assistance, if we need to really break this down into zones then people need to be held accountable in reference to this issue.

Mayor Cason: I agree.

Commissioner Lago: And the final issue, one last thing, I'm sorry, I know I only gave you two, I know, I know, I'm sorry – what was the final issue?- Lugo, K-LA, the garbage pits, I think that's it.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Cardboard recycling, I've been discussing it with a lot of residents to see what we can do. I've spoken with the City Manager about it; I just want to make you aware of it. I've had some good conversations with the City Manager about it. I don't know if the idea is buying a separate vehicle just for cardboard for pickup...

Commissioner Keon: It actually collapses it.

Vice Mayor Quesada:...exactly so that we don't have to break it down, I've probably spoken to like 15 residents about it in the last week and-a-half.

Commissioner Lago: Let me ask you a question. When you drive through the City and you look at the trash pits, everybody is dumping cardboard in them, everyone...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Everyone.

Commissioner Lago: Everybody – and some of them say obviously, they are not educated in regards to the fact that the City is recycling. I think it's going to come to the point where we are going to have to make a decision whether we pick this up or not, if you want to keep continuing to pick up?

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes – absolutely.

Commissioner Lago: OK, well then....

Vice Mayor Quesada: I don't know what the answer is. The City Manager and I have been discussing it to see what we can figure out.

Mayor Cason: I think one of the problems is....

Commissioner Lago: Because I know that the Manager has tried incessantly and staff has done an educational campaign, we reached out, we had a recycling symposium.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I understand, but we've got to do something else.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Vice Mayor Quesada's comments, if I may, are beyond that where there is a real hesitancy of some residents to break down the cardboard and so what other solutions can we come up with to best serve them, because cardboard is a sustainable product we want to recycle and the market supports our recycling it.

Mayor Cason: Every person that has moved into the City in the last six years has gotten a letter from me with our garbage rules updated over time, so they know about it, they just – it's either that they have their maid or their gardener take their stuff out and throw it out in front of their house on the wrong days. I agree with you, unless they – give them a warning, but after the warning that's it, a fine, and a big fine, that stops them.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Well, I'm not sure Vice Mayor if that's what you were talking about, because there was some aversion that some people whether they were elderly in terms of actually the box cutting, breaking it down, and so we just thought we'd come up with some other solution if we could.

Mayor Cason: Anything else.

Vice Mayor Quesada: No that's it.

Commissioner Slesnick: Just my Town Hall meeting Thursday night, Biltmore, 5 (pm) to 6 (pm) for registration and 6 (pm) to 8 (pm) for brainstorming with about an hour's worth of discussion, and Alice Bravo will be there to talk about traffic and Pedro Garcia will be there to talk about the rising values of homes in Coral Gables, and how it affects our City's tax base.

Mayor Cason: OK. And just as I was discussing with the City Attorney, we've spent enormous amounts of time on the Segovia thing. As far as I'm concerned that's now at least for this Commission that's it, no more bringing it back, it's out of order if it comes back again. We were very clear today and so that's my ruling.

Commissioner Keon: So ordered.

Mayor Cason: So ordered.

City Attorney Leen: Understood.

Mayor Cason: With that close the Commission meeting. Thank you all.

[End: 3:47:42 p.m.]

