

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item 2-1**  
**February 11, 2025**  
**Police and Fire Headquarters**  
**2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**  
**Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson**  
**Commissioner Melissa Castro**  
**Commissioner Ariel Fernandez**  
**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Alberto N. Parjus**  
**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Doug Yoder**  
**Maria Cruz**  
**Roberta Neway**  
**Daniela Garcia**  
**Peter Bomberger**  
**Alfredo Izaguirre**  
**Anthony Escarra**  
**Levi Meyer**  
**Ian Sheldon**  
**Alex Barrios**

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Agenda Item 2-1 [12:09 p.m.]

A Resolution of the Waterway Advisory Board recommending the City Commission object to Miami-Dade County's (MDC) design for a viewing area at

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Agenda Item 2-1 - Resolution of the Waterway Advisory Board recommending the City Commission object to Miami-Dade County's (MDC) design for a viewing area at the US-1 bridge as part of the Underline Project; and requesting a 30-day extension to the U. S. Coast Guard to allow sufficient time to review MDC's presentation and other related information.

the US-1 bridge as part of the Underline Project; and requesting a 30-day extension to the U. S. Coast Guard to allow sufficient time to review MDC's presentation and other related information.

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item 2-1. Madam City -- you have the resolution for...

City Attorney Suárez: This is the Board's...

Mayor Lago: The Waterway Advisory --

City Attorney Suárez: It's the Board's resolution.

Mayor Lago: Do we have somebody from the Board that would like to stand up? How are you, sir? Thank you for joining us.

Doug Yoder: Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. Manager, my name is Doug Yoder. I reside at 4800 Alhambra Circle, and I chair your Waterways Advisory Board. We were here a while back to talk about the Underline bridge, which is planned where it crosses the Coral Gables waterway. And we -- subsequent to our last meeting at your direction, we met with the County Public Works staff on February 5th and had a productive workshop. I want to publicly express my appreciation to the staff, which is here, for their assistance with that. We had a number of residents, concerned residents in attendance, and out of that meeting came two recommended resolutions that I believe you have before you today. Now let me say, based on my 50 years of public service, that anytime you undertake a project, even if you follow all of the rules of notice to the letter, inevitably at the end of the process, someone or some group will emerge with a concern that makes them sort of late to the party. And our Board was admittedly late to party because we didn't see the notice until the Coast Guard issued their public notice of hearing which is very close to the end, not very close to the beginning, where any advice and recommendations that we have would have been most useful. So, just that's a caveat. Our two resolutions are as follows. One is to request the Coast Guard to extend or reopen that public comment period for 30 days so that both the City's comments, whatever they might be, as well as residents who also apparently didn't know about the details of this proposal could have their recommendations on the record. And second, if you recall some of the details of the proposal, there is a viewing area that is designed into the bridge crossing the waterway. And one of our concerns is a -- as an advisory board regarding the waterway is that fishing from bridges is not a good practice and is basically prohibited throughout Coral Gables. And the viewing area, in the view of our Board, simply invites further violation of that premise. And so, we have recommended, for your consideration, eliminating the viewing area, which would primarily look over US-1, in an effort to limit the temptation of people to go and fish off that bridge. There are some other issues regarding the combination of bicycle traffic with pedestrian traffic, which I know the staff has looked at, the Public Works staff. That's not our area of expertise, so there may be other solutions that would -- that could be done in that regard,

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but I'm not going to opine on those. So, the two -- those are the two recommendations that we have. We are planning a follow-up session with the County staff to review in more detail the actual survey data that was used to determine the separation -- the vertical separation between the bottom of the pedestrian bridge and the elevation of the waterway, both at high tide and low tide. Because that is a major concern that the bridge be as high as it can be within the constraints that Metrorail has and what requirements there are for public access and so on so that we don't find ourselves down the line with that bridge as a constraint on traffic in the waterway. So, I'm going to stop there.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. Yoder. As always, thank you for your guidance.

Commissioner Castro: I want to thank you for -- for being here and for serving. I want to let you know that I take all your concerns of the of the Board very, very seriously. However, I won't be able to take action on these items today. I've had an infinite amount of residents contact me. In fact, I brought in all the emails. I got 30 emails, besides calls, and people approaching me in physical, supporting what's already being proposed. And I got three -- and I got three emails supporting the resolutions. And I -- after a lot of thought, I won't be able to support those two resolutions now. I also want to acknowledge that Senator Calatayud also reached out in support of what was being proposed. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Can we cover some public comment now? I imagine there's some.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: (INAUDIBLE) public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Maria Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Once again, we do have a Waterway Advisory Board, and I -- they are here to advise. And I think there's -- I don't believe there's any harm with adding a little more time and making it -- and doing it the right way, so I do support them.

City Clerk Urquia: Manny Portuondo.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir. Good afternoon, excuse me.

Manny Portuondo: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. My name is Manny Portuondo, and I live at 820 Jeronimo Drive, and I'm mad as hell. I'm mad as hell, and I'm at as

hell to do something about it. And as a result of that, I met with my neighbors and decided to write a petition that's titled "No More Low Bridges on the Coral Gables Waterway." It doesn't say no bridges; it says low bridges. And I'm mad as hell because, supposedly, waterway users were advised of this bridge. The reality of the matter is that we were not. A waterway public notice was sent in September of 2023, makes no notice of a bridge. And they only sent that notice to about a quarter mile of the Underline. So, basically, the vast majority of homeowners, taxpayers, voters had no idea that there was a bridge coming over the waterway. And so, actually, I asked my son last week, "What can we do about this?" He said, "Dad, you know, at school, when we've had these situations, there's an app called Change.org." I said, "Well, tell me about that app." He said, "Yeah, you write your petition, and you let it rip." I said, "Well, that's great, son, but I don't think that's enough." So, this Saturday, my family and I took it upon ourselves to walk for five and a half hours and we hit every single home, every single home north of the US-1 bridge. As many of you have probably experienced as politicians -- I'm not a politician -- not everyone's home. But I'd say a good 60 percent of folks were home that Saturday. And I got to meet -- I wish I would have done it sooner actually because I got to meet really a bunch of great people that were my neighbors that I didn't really know. But I had a chance to speak to every single one of those neighbors that I met. And what I learned was no one had any idea of a bridge over the waterway. And furthermore, no one was really opposed to the idea that there's a bridge over the waterway. What folks are opposed to is setting a standard for a low bridge over the waterway. And what residents, property owners, taxpayers, and voters don't want is for another low bridge to set a precedent, and in essence, discriminate against those homeowners that are north of US-1 and doom us the next 80 years of having a safe and navigable waterway. So, I want to introduce that petition here today for the record.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Commissioner Castro: You're one of the three emails I received. It's right here. Thank you.

Mr. Portuondo: Great. Maybe you should go talk to 300 people that signed the petition that didn't have time to be here for four hours since 9 o'clock to voice their concerns because they work. They have a life. They signed the petition, and they're property owners, taxpayers, and voters of Coral Gables. So, because they didn't have the time to write you a personal email, doesn't mean it isn't important. They signed the petition. So, you know, we're not here to stop the Underline bridge. We're here to say, hey, guys, pause. You may have done a good job -- I would question that -- at communicating to voters on top of the bridge, but you forgot the folks underneath the bridge. The folks underneath the bridge, the people that use the waterway, that traverse the waterway, that paddleboard on the waterway, that kayak on the waterway, you didn't communicate with those guys. Furthermore, you didn't communicate with the Waterway Advisory Board, folks that you appoint. How is that possible? How is that possible? This issue is of extreme importance to us voters, property owners, and we want to work in a constructive manner. So, the past, no pun

intended -- well, actually, pun intended. That's water under the bridge. The future is what we're here to talk about. How do we fix this problem? We fix this problem by having time to work with the Underline, conduct a peer review of what they are proposing. I'm not an engineer. I'm not expected to know what the bridge is supposed to look like or the height of the bridge, but I do know enough to hire the experts to look at what they've designed, conduct a peer review and come back with recommendations. So, my petition and the petition that 314 neighbors have signed is requesting an extension of time to do that proper peer review and come back with recommendations as to what is the appropriate level of a bridge in Coral Gables that will peg the future standard of bridges in Coral Gables. It's not a big ask and one that's extremely important, and I ask for your consideration. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Roberta Neway.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Ms. Neway, good afternoon.

Roberta Neway: Good afternoon. I'm Roberta Neway, 1236 South Alhambra Circle, 33146. Please do not delay the Underline. This project was extremely well publicized. I've known about it for about 10 years. I went to the first meeting in June 2015. We've all had ample notice and ample opportunity to give input. I understand worry about rising sea level and climate change. The Underline is going to help our climate. And the bridge is -- the proposed bridge is higher than what we have now. So, I don't understand where the complaints are coming from. As for fishing, I don't know why people want to take away space for people to enjoy looking at the waterway. Years and years ago, at the old University Inn property off US-1, people used to fish all the time. There was a no fishing sign, but people were always fishing. That stopped at some point, and I suppose it was because that was being enforced, and that will be the case now. To me, this is like saying none of us should drive a car because somebody should -- somebody may run a stop sign. I'm confident that the Underline will be one of the best things to happen to Coral Gables and to the rest of Miami-Dade County. Please do not delay enjoyment, our enjoyment of it, and the increased safety it will provide because some have decided now it's not to their exact liking. Thank you for your time and have a good day.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Neway.

City Clerk Urquia: Daniela Garcia.

Daniela Garcia: Good afternoon. Daniela Garcia, 1521 Bella Vista Avenue. All right, so good afternoon. Today I stand before the Commission in support of the Underline, specifically the bike and pedestrian bridge at the Coral Gables Waterway near Rivera Drive. This feature will enhance beauty, safety, and activity for residents of Miami-Dade County and surrounding municipalities. I'm urging the Commission to keep construction of the Underline as scheduled and on budget and to reject any proposals that would delay the construction of this fast-moving project that's on track to be finished by 2026. We know how construction delays can completely derail a project, and as

community residents, we're already really eager for the Underline to open in all its phases and we don't want to interrupt that. So, during Phase 3 planning, there were eight public meetings held, and during the civic engagement, the community collectively decided that safety of Coral Gables pedestrians and cyclists was paramount. Commissioners, please honor those residents and community's requests. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Peter Bomberger.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon, sir.

Peter Bomberger: Good afternoon. Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. Manager. My name is Peter Bomberger. I live at 545 Vilabella Avenue. There's nobody in here who has a problem with the bridge. That's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is making sure we get this right. It's too important. We're not talking about a sidewalk. We're talking about a permanent structure over a crown jewel of our city, a permanent structure that will be there 80 to 100 years. Notice. We've all known about the Underline. There's been lots of talk about the Underline. The fact that the public has been aware of the Underline is not in question. What the public hasn't had notice about is the bridge and its dimensions. There are -- I live 0.4 miles north of US-1, along with, and I was surprised to see this, 140 other homeowners who are on the water on the other side. There are numerous people who paddleboard. That is one of the most pristine areas to kayak, to paddleboard. Nobody knew about this bridge until, until a Coast Guard notice was filed -- this is important -- on December 25th, Christmas. And it ran from December 25th until January 2nd. And it was a tiny little thing that said, this bridge is going to be as high as US-1. It was wrong. That was caught by a member of the Waterfront Advisory Board who knew nothing about this. How is that possible? So, I think we have to start with the notice wasn't right about the bridge; not about the Underline, but about the bridge and its dimensions. That's the issue. So, all the neighbors who are on my side, along with lots of other people who use the waterway, they just want to make sure we're getting this right. They want to make sure that this bridge is built as high as possible. They don't want to get rushed into something that's going to be there permanently for a really, really long time. So, what's the problem with waiting? That's just curious to me. On top of canal access, on top of, you know, utilizing the amazing waterway that we have, there are -- the increased access for paddleboarding is going to go up significantly. There's a Blue Road project. There's a launch area that's already existing, and it's going to be made more improved. More and more people are going to be using the waterway. Let's get this right. We got storm surge issues, sea level rise. Let's just make sure that we get it right and it's designed as high as it can possibly go. So, I'm in favor of the policy. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Juan Galan, Jr.

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Mayor Lago: Good afternoon.

Juan Galan, Jr.: Good afternoon. Not good morning anymore, huh? First of all, I'd like to commend our chairman, who I guess is not here anymore, for the great job that he's doing.

Commissioner Castro: He's right there.

Mr. Galan, Jr.: There you are, good. I didn't see you. And also, I'd like to commend Lorena Garrido, who has been assigned by Hermes Diaz to work as our staff liaison, and she's really been doing a good job for her, and I know that too often we forget that the people that do all the work behind the scenes are the ones that need to be commended. And she's here, so I'm happy to commend her and Hermes for assigning her to us. All of you know, because I sent you an email with a solution. I'm the one that reads the Coast Guard documents because I'm a former Coast Guard officer. I know quite a bit about safety. I spent two years developing the search and rescue system for the U.S. Coast Guard. I looked at all the accidents in the United States for two years, so I know quite a bit about safety. The current design is not safe. It's not safe for a number of reasons. First of all, if it were to be approved with a viewing area, it would create more of a tunnel effect. Most of you would know what that is, but I've traveled the United States all the way up to Canada and back on my boat many times. There are a couple of bridges that are essentially tunnels. You don't want to be under them. It's kind of scary to be in a boat under a tunnel, which is what the current design would be with a viewing area. The viewing area needs to go because the City spent a lot of money putting up signs to say no fishing from bridges. And even so, one of our board members has actually been caught by a hook from a fisherman coming out the Mahi Canal. And it's ridiculous, really, that the original plans that they showed actually showed a picture of a fishing rod as part of what the plans were. Okay, so that's silly. That should have never been included. Now why did we join the pedestrians with the cyclists? Well, because they were going to have a viewing area. The viewing area, if it doesn't exist, should not have in any way cyclists and pedestrians together. If you travel at all through Europe, you will note that the cyclists go along with the road. They do not go along with the pedestrians. It would be great liability for the City to allow any particular pathway to include cyclists and pedestrians in the same pathway. The Underline brings all the pedestrian traffic north of the Tri-Rail and all the cycling traffic south of the Tri-Rail, separate roadways. When they come to Ponce de Leon, they decided, obviously because the viewing area was going to be designed, to bring the pedestrians through to the cyclists, bring them together so they have a pedestrian area, cyclists and pedestrians. Please do not allow any bridge that allows cyclists and pedestrians to go together. And if you do, make sure you get indemnity from the Underline because you're going to get sued and you know that, okay. So, I provided a solution. It's a very simple solution. The pedestrians go on Ponce de Leon Road. We reduce the speed by putting in speed bumps and if you want to reduce the speed limit, okay, you build a bridge. That is what George Merrick, if he were here, would tell you. He built three bridges, Hardee Road, Minata, Granada. All of them are 14-foot clearance. All of them, 80 years later, function perfectly. So, I would say George Merrick is not here, but if he were here, he would

tell you why are you limiting the waterway? Why are you reducing the height to less than 14? That was done in 1940 when people that were sitting in the old City Hall maybe didn't know any better, couldn't do any more. But there is no reason for us to accept today that that water would be limited to seven feet of height, okay? Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Alfredo Izaguirre.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon.

Alfredo Izaguirre: Good afternoon, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Welcome back.

Mr. Izaguirre: Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, thank you for your time. I emailed you all on, I think it was a Sunday, and I appreciate the responses that I got from some of you. I'm here, I normally don't speak, I'm normally not involved in politics. I purchased 704 Jeronimo in March of 2024, less than a year, and now here we are. In real estate, the term is bridges to bay. That is the key thing when you purchase a home on a waterway, bridges to bay. If this bridge is constructed -- and I'd be crazy to believe that me and a couple of residents are going to stop the Underline and this bridge. What we ask is that it be as high as possible. The US-1 bridge was built I think in the 1940s. I'm not an engineer, I'm not an architect. I imagine that if it were to be built now, the bottom of that bridge would be higher, and I think the Underline actually admitted to that at our meeting two weeks ago. I propose that the height of the US-1 bridge should not be the threshold and should not be what it be measured by in regards to how high this pedestrian bridge is going to be. I think it could be a lot higher than what was discussed two weeks ago at the Waterway meeting. I think they had issues about ADA compliance with the slopes. I think that the approach to this bridge could be built in a form of a Z with handrails, which would allow the bridge to be higher. I think if this bridge is at the US-1 bridge or anywhere near that, every resident north of that bridge will be prejudiced financially and recreationally. I ask your loyalty is again not to the Underline, but to the residents of Coral Gables. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Anthony Escarra.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon.

Anthony Escarra: Good afternoon Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Honorable Commission and City staff. Thank you for taking the moment to listen to what I have to say. I am Anthony Escarra, 111 Northwest 1st. I am Commissioner Regalado's Chief of Staff. She apologizes for not being able



to be here herself, but we have committees this week, so it's just not possible. We have been meeting with residents. We have been meeting with the Underline folks, our own staff, and we are taking into account all of the input and our Underline designers are making changes. Exactly what those changes are, I don't want to make characterizations that may be wrong, so I don't have the exact details. But what we do want to do is have a webinar providing all this information to the community before your next meeting if you're inclined to defer this or as soon as possible, even if you are inclined to deny these proposals. The -- what has been noticed by the Coast Guard is not accurate. Everybody knows that that's not accurate. I believe all of you know that it is not accurate. The proposed bridge is going to be higher than what is currently there. Obviously, we're not going to make everyone happy, but there are many considerations, one of them obviously being County funds, which are your taxpayer funds. Delays cost money. They're not free. I think that's a very important thing. And we are all -- we are all in a financial pinch. I think every community in this county knows that there are going to be conversations about budgets, and I think that's important to note. Other than that, I would like to meet with the Commission and figure out the best time to have this community outreach and inform everybody of what's actually going to happen and the changes that are being proposed before you make any decisions that would delay this project, which is a very important project to Commissioner Regalado. If you have any questions or comments, I'm more than willing.

Mayor Lago: First off, I'd like to thank you for being here and send our best to the Commissioner. We've been in conversation over the past week with your office and you've been available at every moment. So, thank you. Thank you for always being available not only to the Commission but also to our staff and to all the employees here in the City of Coral Gables. What I'd like to do is finish -- finish with public comment then bring you back up along with the County just to basically iron out what next steps we're going to take after the Commission has a brief conversation.

Mr. Escarra: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Is that okay?

Mr. Escarra: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Fernandez: And what I would say is I have been working with City staff and communication with the Underline about scheduling a town hall meeting here at the City. So, it may be an opportunity to work together, not double up efforts, because what I want to make sure is, as the residents have said, they feel they didn't have an opportunity to speak early on. I want to make sure that any concerns that residents have about the Underline that can be addressed are addressed. And I want to make sure we have an opportunity for people to voice their concerns, explain what the issues are, and we should try to find resolutions where resolutions can be found. I think working together, we get a lot further than just trying to, you know, delay the process and

maybe not find a resolution. I think there can be a path forward and I think we can find a resolution. It's just about getting all our heads together and finding a resolution.

Mr. Escarra: Commissioner Fernandez, I agree with you wholeheartedly. My only trepidation is having a town hall meeting on incorrect information because everybody has...

Commissioner Fernandez: That's exactly why. I think what needs to happen is...

Mr. Escarra: Correct. That's the -- that's the point of having a webinar providing...

Commissioner Fernandez: We've heard a lot of things here that perhaps we hadn't heard before. And I think what we need to do is -- we represent the residents. If our residents have not been able to voice their opinion throughout the process to the extent that they believe they needed to, we need to have a forum to allow them to do that. I don't know that it is physically possible to have the Coast Guard open up the process again. That's something that has to be worked out with the Coast Guard, but let's have a forum where we can voice those concerns and maybe those changes, if they can be made, can be made internally, you know.

Mr. Escarra: That's what I was about to say. To continue with what I was commenting on, is I would pre -- the Commissioner would prefer that any meeting first be purely informational to provide accurate information from all parties. Let people then come to a conclusion with that information and then maybe we can have a subsequent meeting for commenting because what it's going to become -- and that's what the Commissioner wants to avoid -- is, you know, people being uninformed, poorly informed, or misinformed prior to them actually making an informed comment on what is being done.

Mayor Lago: So, what I was trying to do before we got into it was I wanted to hear everyone's opinion or interest in the matter. That's number one. Put it on the record. And I was going to lead into the conversation that I've been having with Mr. Escarra and Ms. Regalado and what they've been having with our team here in the City. Commissioner Regalado has been working incredibly hard on this issue. I've received phone calls every single day from her office and from members of her team to address this issue. One of the big issues that we're having here is that we have two sides having a conversation, back and forth, but there's a lot of misinformation. So, the point is, and I see Levy, because I've talked to Levy probably 15 times in the last five days about this, and one of the main points is the issue of misinformation. So, what I think is the best thing to do is, number one, defer the item, okay? Get all parties together, but we need to have the County lay the groundwork in regards to what is the actual information. What is the information at hand, which is what we're talking about. And then we can have a sit-down conversation with everyone, and everyone can voice their opinions. But what I'd like to do is get everything on the record so that the County can have all these concerns on the record and already start working and addressing these issues. One of the things that I've spoken to a lot of the residents is, and one of the things we have not built consensus on, what is the appropriate -- what is the appropriate height? What

are people looking for? Mr. Meyer will tell you in the back, that's one of the conversations we had on the phone for almost an hour this weekend, back and forth. What is the appropriate height? So, I think the most important thing is like what Mr. Escarra said, let's work with the County. Let's get all the information. Let's see exactly where we stand, what's happening with the Coast Guard. What is the actual design? Clear up any misinformation that we may have on both sides. But before we do that, I want to get everything on the record today, and I want to hear from our friends at the County. It's not only Commissioner Regalado's office. I want to put it all on the record here and then we can defer the item, and during that time period, we can really lay the groundwork to build consensus. That's what I'd like to see.

Mr. Escarra: Yes, I don't want to give you the impression, Commissioner Fernandez, that we do not want to have, you know, an open dialogue with the community. I just want -- we want to make sure that we set a baseline of information so that everybody is working on that same information. And you can -- you're opposed to it, we want to listen to you. That's why we're actually doing and making -- already making changes, right? Even to what we had previously proposed, my understanding is that the County and the Underline are proposing changes to that, right? So, it's not even -- we're not even going to have the actual -- even what was provided before is not -- wouldn't be accurate, right? So, I want to make sure that we set a baseline of correct information so that we can then properly listen to complaints. That's all. I don't want to give you the impression that we don't want to do it.

Commissioner Fernandez: And that's what I've been working on.

Mr. Escarra: Yeah.

Commissioner Fernandez: It was going to be a panel where the panel would present what is currently being discussed in order to then answer the community's concerns.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Commissioner Fernandez: There's also concerns about the actual height that's being considered. I know there's already been changes to the height, so I just want to make sure that the accurate information is out there as to what the plan is. I know that some of the graphics don't exactly show what's going to be there, and I know that the graphics were being updated as well, but this is what has been worked on here internally since Thursday of last week.

Mr. Escarra: And we'd love to continue having that dialogue with your office and with yourself...

Commissioner Fernandez: All right.

Mr. Escarra: And make sure that we come to something that is, you know, workable for everyone.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor?

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, Mayor, I just want to bring up a couple of things because we need -- do need accurate information because there's more impediments than just this bridge. In fact, this bridge is not the major impediment. The FDOT bridge is the major impediment. One of the pieces of information that I'd like to receive is what is the forecast for replacement of the FDOT bridge, and I don't expect you to answer that now. And whether or not that bridge at that point when it's replaced can also include or replace the Underline bridge because you just make it a little wider and make it ADA compliant because we all know that you have to comply with the 2010 guidelines on accessibility and not make individuals with disabilities a second-class citizen and put them on a six-foot-wide sidewalk that's only capable of handling one wheelchair at a time in one direction and no pedestrians could pass at the same time. So, I'd like to know what the forecast is for that because I know the Cocoplum Bridge, for instance, has been something that's been planned for well in excess of four or five years and has been taking a very long period of time. But we need a plan for the future. So, that's one of the pieces of information I'd like to see shared with us.

Mr. Escarra: We will definitely get that from the Secretary.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: I just...

Mr. Escarra: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Menendez: I'd like to add that a couple of weeks ago, the County had a public meeting with Coral Gables residents regarding a traffic circle at Coral Way and Anderson. Drawings were provided, a lot of information. It was very productive. A lot of -- all the questions were answered. I'm sure information was provided before so I, like Commissioner Fernandez, I'm sure my colleagues at some point it's good because if there's a petition with 300 signatures, well, they're not here and I'd like them to know what's going on so we can bring everybody in together with the right information. In terms of what was said and when I had my agenda review, at some point I'd like to know exactly what the federal guidelines are regarding height of this bridge, what can or can't, because as we all know, if the federal government has a regulation that says you can't go above, then I think it's important to state that fact. A gentleman said that, well, the approach to the bridge could change. I think that's also something to be considered. So, I want to know what the law is regarding the bridge height. I'm not an expert in bridges, but in terms of federal regulations, we all comply. And I also want to learn a lot more about the concern about cyclists and pedestrians on the same path because I walked -- you know, I go on Segovia and it has a bike lane, and you have joggers, walkers, and cyclists, and you see confrontations, who's going to blink first? And you know, and it's a recipe for failure or disaster actually. So,

those are my two issues, see what the guidelines are, and also, we need to avoid just common -- have a common sense approach for safety. That's what I want to see and then eventually some kind of town hall meeting.

Mr. Escarra: And as you know, our team is here so they've heard all of these...

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

Mr. Escarra: Comments and they will definitely -- I will make sure that they get back to everyone here with your questions answered.

Commissioner Menendez: Appreciate it.

Mr. Escarra: Absolutely, sir. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker, Levi Meyer.

Mayor Lago: Levi, good afternoon. What's going on?

Levi Meyer: Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you for being here and for hearing our concerns. My name is Levi Meyer. I live at 600 Jeronimo. I'm a resident of Coral Gables. I'm a boater, a kayaker, a paddleboarder, a father, a husband, and I sit on the Coral Gables Waterway Advisory Board. I myself, living less than a half a mile, was not made aware of a bridge being put over the Coral Gables waterway, both as a resident and as a member of the Waterway Advisory Board. Notice was sent out and when we requested information about that notice, we were provided with a 7,000 name spreadsheet of which only 500 and change were Coral Gables addresses. Over 100 of them seem to be commercial properties; less than 50 of them were waterfront residences. And so, 6,750 of the 7,000 people are people that don't even know a waterway exists. But the fact that they don't know about it doesn't make it any less important to the City of Coral Gables. Frankly, what's being asked is only to take a moment to make a proper decision on a bridge that is going to be here, as we all know, for the next 80 to 100 years, much like the bridge that was put in 1942, that is too damn low, clear as day. There's nobody sitting in this room, nobody that Manny approached when he went door-to-door that is opposed to this bridge. The Underline put out their own Change.org petition. It was signed very largely and widely because the Underline has a very wide reach, and quite frankly, when you read it, it's not very clear. It doesn't even mention what the bridge height is; nobody seems to be concerned about that. The reality is that we just need to do it right and we need to do it one time. It'd be great, as the Vice Mayor suggests if the FDOT would redo us one and create a pedestrian pass and even more so maybe even overpass over Riviera, which is a dangerous crossing. But that may take five years or ten years, and the reality is, the Underline is here and they're ready to put a bridge in. I

don't think anybody, my wife included, is opposed to it. My wife is very excited about the Underline bridge, as am I. We just bought new bicycles for our kids, and we intend to use it and cross it probably more than most people in this room. I just want to make sure that when it's done, it's done right. And I don't see any reason by asking for 30 days to gather information, to even understand what the actual bridge height is, which is very unclear. I asked the Coast Guard yesterday, and they did not give me the accurate response as to the response that was given at the Waterway Advisory Board meeting. Three, three, is it four, is it 3.2? Nobody really knows. Let's get the facts, let's get it done right, and let's do it quickly. We asked the Underline for a 90-day extension in the advisory board meeting. They said it's too much; it'll affect their budget. We all agreed to do something close to a 30-day, and let's hustle to get it done. So, that's all I ask for is just 30 days.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, the next speaker is going to be on Zoom. It's Ian Sheldon.

Mayor Lago: Sir, good afternoon.

Ian Sheldon: Good afternoon. I -- a couple of things. Sorry, I'm driving, I can't show my video. And I'm not looking at my phone, trying to be responsible. The Underline has been around for a decade. It's gotten to the point where I talk to my friends in New York or Atlanta, and you know, the same people who know about the Highline or the Beltline, you know, it's world-class. It's -- you know, I'm happy that the previous item came up when it did because we talk about place-making, and you know, what can Coral Gables do to really put us off on the map and something like the Underline I think really delivers that. And I think, oh my god, how many meetings have we had? I mean, even just a couple years ago, I remember there was that week where we had three meetings packed in Sunset, and I believe the website is still on the City's page about those meetings, like specifically focused on Coral Gables residents. I have -- trying to be polite. I have little -- I don't understand why some people talk about, you know, they're not aware of something happening, but I mean, this is a \$120 million project, and I mean, just the amount of meetings that have already happened are just constant. And the second thing is more of a question. I don't know who to direct it to. As far as I'm aware, these items, the City doesn't actually have a recourse to stopping or slowing down. These are -- are these items a request to the Board of County Commission and the Coast Guard, or does the City actually have like a mechanism here, a lever they can pull to like enact this 30-day pause? Or is this just a request to the Board of County Commission?

Mayor Lago: Okay, I -- is it...?

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.



Mayor Lago: All right, so it's my understanding, Madam City Attorney, that we can't just scuttle the project or stop the project. We can request from the County to give us some additional time to review, and we can defer this item, correct?

City Attorney Suárez: My under -- that is my understanding of the request also from the Board, is that they're asking for an additional time period, yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay. All right. Anything else, Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: No, sir.

Mayor Lago: All right, perfect. So, is anybody from the County here? Come on up. Would you like to take some time and speak a little bit about the process and where we stand and what you'd like for us to do over the next --? Noticing the amount of people that are here and the requests from the community, I'd like to see what the County would like to do in preparation to coming together with what the representative from the Commissioner's office just said. Good afternoon, sir. Thank you for being here with us, by the way.

Alex Barrios: Good afternoon. Alex Barrios, Deputy Director, Department of Transportation and Public Works, 11 Northwest 1st Street. So, we've heard the concerns. We've been working with the Commissioner's office. We've got the design team here who's been hearing the concerns all day. We're going back. We're looking at the engineering to make sure we can -- whatever modifications we can do, we'll try to do, and we'll be ready to present in a short period of time what those modifications are. We have to balance both the pedestrians, the bicyclists, along with the boaters, and we're trying our best. And I'm personally meeting with the design team to address this issue, and we'll be ready to present something in the very near future on what we can change.

Mayor Lago: So, just to lay the groundwork, because obviously during this time period, there's a lot of misinformation, and you know, you have many different sides speaking. They have concerns. What are we talking about in regards to a time frame where you think you'd be ready to present something to the community?

Mr. Barrios: We could probably...

Mayor Lago: And I imagine also you'll probably present different options, correct?

Mr. Barrios: Correct. We're looking at all alternatives to maximize the benefit for both pedestrians, bicyclists, and the boaters.

Mayor Lago: Like different structures, when, you know, you go from concrete to steel.

Mr. Barrios: Correct.

Mayor Lago: You know, maybe you gain some height.

Mr. Barrios: Correct. That is one of the alternatives we are considering.

Mayor Lago: Okay, I imagine so. Okay, so when do you think you'll have -- you'll have these alternatives?

Mr. Barrios: Let me check with staff. I can come back. We're probably looking at two weeks, two to three weeks for us to have a better layout, a conceptual layout of what can be done with the alternatives.

Mayor Lago: So, you'd probably say within the next 30 days we can have a sit-down, the community can have a sit-down, and we can have a conversation in regards -- we can lay out all the pieces, lay out all the information, where we stand, and you know, have a good conversation in regards to what the City, the County, and all the residents can collectively put together and move forward.

Mr. Barrios: Yeah, I think that's a fair time frame. We'll work through the Commissioner's office, which is represented here today, to make sure we schedule that.

Mayor Lago: Okay, do we have a way -- do we have a way that we can get the 350 people that signed that petition, along with everybody who's here, is there a portal? Is there any way that we can put all this information together so you can have it accessible? Because there's a lot of -- there's a lot of things. For example, Mr. Galan mentioned some things that, again, to me, I'm not -- I'm not privy to. You know, he talked a little bit about the tunnel effect. You know, he talked about certain things that, again, I don't have any experience with. So, those are things that I'd have to speak to you and speak to the bridge, the bridge engineers to get an understanding if that's something that could potentially affect this bridge. Are you -- is there any way that we can get all this information, they can put all the requests, you know, any concerns, any ideas, and it can be sent to your office so that it can be incorporated in that meeting in a month?

Mr. Barrios: We don't have a mechanism right now, but I'm sure we can develop one. I know the -- there's a website for the page -- for the project.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Barrios: That might be the easiest way of getting us their concerns and we'll look at them and address them. If not, they can submit them directly to my office or through the Commissioner's office which would refer them to us.

Mayor Lago: So, what I'd like to do is just be able to have just a repository so everything that gets submitted we can see it that day as like a public record. You understand? So that it can be had in one location and everybody's comments, you know, can be referred back to, so everybody knows that they had an opportunity to say something. You know what I'm saying?

Mr. Barrios: No, I understand. We just have to look to see what type of mechanism we have available for that. It's not something we've done before, so we'll have to go back and check.

Mayor Lago: So, when we advertise this meeting, the forthcoming meeting, the collective meeting with everyone, you'll be able to provide me with some sort of email address where people can say send all your concerns to this exact location.

Mr. Barrios: Absolutely. We'll get that -- I'll get that to you before the end of the day.

Mayor Lago: No, don't get it to me, get it to the Manager and the Communications Department and everyone else. You can send a copy to the Commission, but more importantly, work with the Manager's office.

Mr. Barrios: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Does anybody else have any other concerns, any other ideas, anything they'd like to add?

Commissioner Fernandez: I think the other way we can do it is, can we create an email address in the City, Underline@coralgables.com, have folks send them there, and we can forward them to your office. That way the City is also aware of what the concerns are, and those can be forwarded to members of the Commission so that we can be looped into the process.

Commissioner Menendez: And any, you know, information, obviously, as the Mayor said, the Communications Department, our e-news, send it out, that way we reach as many people as possible.

Commissioner Fernandez: And loop in Commissioner Regalado's office as well. So, make sure that she's -- her office is aware.

Mr. Escarra: Yeah, [District7@miamidade.gov](mailto:District7@miamidade.gov).

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Barrios: That's all I have.

Mayor Lago: All right. Is there anything else? I'm going to make a motion to defer the item.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Sec -- I'll second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Please do me a favor to all the residents, all the interested parties that were here, please spread the word. I'd like for you to please, you know, if you could designate one person, I think that would be the best thing, designate one person who will be in contact with the Manager's -- the Manager's office, because there's a lot of emails that are coming in. I want to make sure we address them all, and that everybody has the opportunity to have their voice heard. So, designate one person who will set up this structure so that when we have that meeting in a month, you know, everybody in the Waterway Advisory Board is included, the residents, the business owners, everybody who's a stakeholder is included and they know where -- they know where to send their concerns and their ideas. I just want to make sure that everybody's well versed on that, okay? So, work with the Manager's office, if possible. Thank you very much for being here. We appreciate all of you. Thank you so much. And send our best to Commissioner Regalado. As always, thank you for her leadership. She's done an amazing job. To be honest with you, she hasn't stopped hounding me about this issue. So, thank you for leading the way and thank you to all the County employees for being here and all the residents. Thank you.