

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-3
September 11, 2018
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

**Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Michael Mena**

City Staff

**Interim City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Assistant Public Works Director, Jessica Keller**

Public Speaker(s)

Robert Ruano

Agenda Item D-3 [9:55:20 a.m.]

A Resolution accepting Miami-Dade County Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) Smart grant funds for the pedestrian and bike network level of stress assessment study.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: OK. We have bicycle, Roberto Ruano, D-3, Consent Agenda.

Mr. Ruano: Good morning Mayor, Commissioners.

Commissioner Lago: Good morning.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Good morning

Mr. Ruano: Thank you by the way, Commissioner Mena and the Commission for moving this forward, you are going really fast today.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You are very lucky and a typical Commission meeting your item would have come up at 3 p.m. or something like that, so you are very lucky.

Mr. Ruano: Robert Ruano, 1544 Murcia Avenue. As Commissioner Mena actually stated, I am the Chair of Bike/Walk Coral Gables, but today I am speaking on my own, on behalf of myself because I have not had time to speak to the board on this. I just wanted to talk about that Smart plan grant; and first I want to say, I commend the City for applying for these grant dollars that are out there to improve the bicycle and walking network. But I would like to say; at least put on the record that this City did a plan and paid, I believe at the time was \$50,000 in 2004, a bike plan. In 2014 they did another bike plan, paid quite a bit more; and then now there is an intermodal plan that is currently working; and then now we have the Smart grant, which is another plan or another study. And I think that we really need to start acting, particularly there are a lot of good things on that 2014 plan, a lot of good corridors that could really make a network or at least fix the connections, but even in this grant and in this proposal, I see the same comments from the 2014, these are these areas that we could fix. We really need to start acting on these. I hope, according to the resolution this is going to take six months, but I hope that we are not going to slow down or stop any of the other implementations because of any other plan. We have a lot of data; we've got a lot of community support, a lot of community input. I think it's time to act on these and start spending these monies. Secondly...

Commissioner Lago: So Robert, may I interject one second. I want to kind of qualify your statement because you are saying that we should and we haven't. So can you give me an example of why you think we haven't implemented some of the low-hanging fruit that we should have taken care of already that just keeps coming up over and over and over again in these studies; and again, if we move forward with the TPO's grant money and we actually do another study, it's going to say again for the fourth time that we should implement x, y, and z. Can you just give me a quick reason why you think it hasn't been done?

Mr. Ruano: Sure – sure.

Commissioner Lago: If it's political, maybe the residents don't want it in certain areas. You have an opportunity to educate us as a person who is an expert in this field, who has a lot of knowledge, more than I do. Tell me why you think it hasn't been done.

Mr. Ruano: Do you want to know first what the opportunities are or why it hasn't been done?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Why it hasn't been done.

Mr. Ruano: OK. Why it hasn't been done and it says there that, it says actually in the, I believe in the application that the problem is right-of-way, we have narrow right-of-way in many cases. I believe quite frankly that the biggest reason it hasn't been done, there hasn't been political will, enough political will.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Tell me about the...pursuing your line of thought with your experience, we had 50 out of 52 residents from Riviera here opposing it. It was amazing and that's the reason why it wasn't done. There is not the political will, but it's not our political will, it's the residents' will.

Mr. Ruano: Can I tell you something and I mentioned at the time, Riviera was not something that, that particular area, was not something that our group even proposed, it was proposed by a group of two people. But I think....

Commissioner Lago: If I could just add something really quick to the Mayor's comments. I just don't want to brush this aside. That was pretty impactful, very impactful. When we are trying to do something for the community and then you have that many groups come out opposing it and by the way, I was in favor of it. I thought it was – I just couldn't vote against what 50 residents or 50-plus residents are saying. It made sense.

Mr. Ruano: I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to speak on that because I will tell you, Riviera there was a lot of misinformation. I knew some people who lived on Riviera and they were being contacted and said, you see this wonderful swale that you have here, you see these trees, they are going to knock down these trees, they are going to put a big...you don't want that. So there was a lot of misinformation going to the residents of Riviera. In general yes, there was a lot of opposition from the residents, because there was a very organized group of residents that said you know, they are really going to get rid of our street, they are going to rid our right-of-way, we are going to have bikes all over here; and obviously, it's a lot as you know, it's a lot easier to oppose something than to propose something or support something and you'll get a lot more people out here opposing something. But I will say on the Riviera, I think that and I have told some of you individually, I think that the Commission made a mistake on Riviera because it really should have gone back to the staff. The staff should have had an opportunity to sit down with the residents and try to educate them on the reality. Riviera, for example, with a very simple striping would have decreased those Saturday morning cyclists because they would have to have gone on the bike lane. Now they can go all over that street. If they had a bike lane, they would have had to stay in the bike lane, that's number one. Number two, it has been proven that if you do striping and you narrow the roadway you are going to get people going slower. So they were actually, the Riviera residents were actually arguing against something that was going to help the problem that they had, OK; and I think that if they had just had the opportunity to sit down with

staff and been educated on that, I think it would have been different. It would have gone a little bit differently.

Commissioner Lago: In reference to staff, because you made several points. I think staff had multiple discussions with the residents, did their best, but at the end of the day...

Commissioner Keon: I don't think so.

Commissioner Lago: You don't think you had any discussion at all?

Commissioner Keon: We didn't give them the opportunity to have that discussion. We just said no.

Commissioner Mena: They had a public meeting.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: If you want to bring it up again...

Commissioner Lago: How can we just say that we didn't have discussions with staff and then we had public meetings, so then what would that be? We didn't have one public meeting?

Mr. Ruano: There are different things.

Commissioner Lago: So we had one or two public meetings.

Assistant Public Works Director Keller: I didn't come completely prepared to talk about Riviera.

Commissioner Lago: I think it's important to talk about it. We have time today so it's a good thing. We have time and this is important. Take advantage of it.

Assistant Public Works Director Keller: Mr. Ruano made some very good points and staff did not have the opportunity to sit down and educate the residents along Riviera Drive or any other streets in the City of Coral Gables. If you go back in time when all of this began last year, we had a series of open houses; and from that point in time, we were supposed to have smaller neighborhood groups so that we could educate each community on the opportunities that bicycling infrastructure would provide and that was following the Riviera Drive, the community that came here the day when the Commission voted to no longer support the infrastructure on Riviera Drive.

Commissioner Mena: There were two public meetings shortly before that, right, including...

Assistant Public Works Director Keller: Open houses, yes.

Commissioner Mena: Open houses – when there were Riviera residents at.

Assistant Public Works Director Keller: There were Riviera residents. Staff actually did reach out to the community and we did request to sit down with that community to educate them. They did not take that opportunity, they did not want to.

Commissioner Mena: They weren't interested.

Assistant Public Works Director Keller: That's correct.

Commissioner Mena: So I think that's an important distinction.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: They were opposed.

Commissioner Mena: It's not that we cut off that opportunity for a dialogue; it's that they didn't want a dialogue and they made that abundantly clear, and for a lot of reasons, some which were fair and some which were unfair.

Assistant Public Works Director Keller: Right – And I think also there was a significant amount of misinformation was distributed. I did see some of the information that was distributed and staff did not comment on any of that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Can I make a point, a very important point I think. We are not discussing Riviera here, we are not opening Riviera. Please go on and let's get away from Riviera.

Mr. Ruano: OK. Commissioner Lago to your point, there is a section on Alhambra between Coral Way and Salzedo, Segovia, no Sevilla, sorry, all the S's are confusing me here, OK. There is a two-block section there where the road is very narrow, OK. You have a bike lane on Alhambra and then you have a bike lane on Sevilla; two-block section, extremely, extremely narrow if a cyclist goes on there with a car it can be very dangerous. That is one spot that has been mentioned on the 2014 plan and is being mentioned now. There is a section on Segovia where you have the bike lane and then Alhambra...

Commissioner Keon: It's...so what would be...

Commissioner Lago: What's the remedy?

Mr. Ruano: The remedy could be just expanding the road just a little bit and making the bike lane to connect Alhambra to...

Commissioner Lago: Expanding the road in essence taking away from the swale, correct? I want to be very clear.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: ...the middle of the median, and so the median with beautiful trees...

Mr. Ruano: No, no, there is no median there sir, I'm sorry. This is Alhambra from Coral Way to Sevilla.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: OK.

Mr. Ruano: It's going north and south.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: OK.

Mr. Ruano: There is no median there. So yes, you would expand the road a bit to accommodate bike lanes, but then you would have people that would come from the west that are coming in through our City that could bike on Sevilla and instead of having a bike lane that stops at the church, you basically making a left and then connecting all the way down Alhambra to the downtown.

Commissioner Lago: Look, I'm not a cyclist, so I'm asking questions that you may think are ridiculous. Is that a main thoroughfare for people who are biking through our City and have we encountered issues where there have been accidents, potential accidents?

Mr. Ruano: There's been a lot of potential accidents that I've seen. I don't know, I haven't measured if had been accidents there. It's almost the chicken and the egg; there's not a lot of users, but it's not a safe place to go, so people aren't going to use it, so they are going to find another route.

Commissioner Lago: So you are saying if you build it they will come.

Mr. Ruano: Yes. If you build a safe network and particularly a protected network, people will use it and you will get cars off the street, which is ultimately your goal. I'm not a cyclist really either, I'm not the Saturday morning people, I'm just trying to help the traffic and get people out on the road.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The problem we had with the neighbors is that we would take away their swale.

Mr. Ruano: You would not take away their swale because you need the swale for the drain, but you would cut their swale a bit.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And for the possibility of people bicycling to work from outside of Coral Gables, I see as a difficult proposition.

Mr. Ruano: Ultimately, you are not going to solve the traffic problem if you are not going to give them alternate modes to get into town, OK, because there are a lot of cars going in and out of the City and this is a way to start getting people out of their cars. Commissioner to yours, the other one was on Segovia, between Segovia and Alhambra, actually. There is a spot there where the circles are, there is no connection there and that's also mentioned in this plan too. What you are going to get, it's always not in my backyard. People are going to love these plans, they are going to love the idea of a bike network, or the walking network, but when it goes, as the Mayor says, Oh, my swale is going to be reduced by three feet, then you are going to get people say, well, I like my swale, or you are going to put in a sidewalk where I don't have a sidewalk, well, I like my sidewalk. But that's where the political will comes in.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Right – the political will and the political necessity of listening to the neighbors. When you have 50 out of 52 Riviera neighbors here and I go back to Riviera, I'm sorry, I said I wasn't going to, but you know we have to listen to them.

Mr. Ruano: Yes sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It's not our political will. We are elected to represent them and....

Mr. Ruano: Yes sir, but you also have staff that you've hired to be professionals so that in that case the Commission can certainly say, I agree with your point, I see your point, but let's sit down with staff, let's have an education, let's really see what this really is about and then maybe come back and find a way that works for everybody.

Commissioner Lago: So you think that's where we fell short as a Commission?

Mr. Ruano: I do.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: OK.

Mr. Ruano: I didn't come here to say that, but I do.

Commissioner Lago: That's why I'm asking. I don't have a problem admitting it. That's the purpose, we are not perfect, I'm not a cyclist. So at the end of the day when I asked you to come and speak and answer questions, we are not here to grandstand, we are here to actually learn from mistakes that we may have made in the past and maybe we should have done that. Maybe we should have spoken with the residents that day they were here and say listen, I think what you should do is sit down with staff, not avoid staff, on a one-on-one discussion to see if we can come to some happy medium. If not, we move forward.

Mr. Ruano: But I'll tell you, I didn't even come here to talk about that, Riviera is in my rearview mirror. Going forward we have an opportunity to really do good bike network, a good walking network and when those people come up then we can hopefully educate them and we can get something in. The City has passed a complete street ordinance, a complete street policy, now it's time to start to implement some of these policies.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you sir.

Commissioner Mena: Can I ask Jessica a quick question? Is there a distinction between the study that this grant calls for and studies in the past or its just sort of an update?

Assistant Public Works Director Keller: So this is a level of stress which is a change we approach planning corridors and essentially what it will do is so much of what Robert was just saying, we have a missing connection, we have missing connections all over the place and this will measure and provide justification about why we should be – additional justification of why we should be implementing additional infrastructure, complete street infrastructure in these corridors. Why don't people ride their bicycles on Alhambra between Coral Way and Sevilla?- Well because there is not a safe place to ride and so they measure that and so we'll be able to qualify that, so it's an additional layer. So then we are presenting facts to the Commission as it relates to this infrastructure, we are armed with those facts.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Mr. Ruano: One final thing to this. I would ask and ask the staff and I guess the Commission, is it this report says that they will, the proposal says it will have stakeholder groups get together and opine on this. I would ask them that they go a little bit further and have it open to the general public. It's not just about what we think, obviously, it's the general public and that was a complaint of the 2014 plan, so we'd like to avoid that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's essential. I agree. Thank you sir.

Commissioner Lago: I know it cost money, but maybe we need to actually show examples to the community of how it would look in the neighborhood, and actually show implemented; and I'm not saying you have to do the entire street, I'll just say maybe do one span of a house or somebody who is willing to take care of that or willing to have it in front of their home, so people can get an understanding and see it firsthand what we are actually talking about. I think when you talk about things in the abstract; people get a lot more confused. I see infrastructure, I see that roadwork and I understand because that's what I do, but people may not understand that listen, this is not as complicated or as invasive as they may feel it is. Give examples and tangible, an opportunity to see it, to look at it, to stand over it, may convince some people that this actually works and this may be actually feasible. Do you agree with me? I know it cost money.

Commissioner Keon: I think that if the intent to not be responsive to residents, but sometimes we cut off discussion out of concern for the opposition when maybe we ought to give staff the opportunity to have a discussion with them on the specifics of what they are so opposed to and the opportunity to educate them. Now people come back after all of that and are still so adamantly opposed to us then we will make a decision based on that education and not just a reaction or just misinformation that may be given. So, I think sometimes we could slow the process a little bit and maybe find a way to deal with it that allows people to express their concerns and yet allow staff the opportunity to attempt to educate.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much Mr. Ruano.

Mr. Ruano: Thank you sir. Thank you for the time.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Jessica.

[End: 10:12:47 a.m.]

[Note for the record: The Commission resumed this item at 10:37:07 a.m.]

Commissioner Mena: I was told we never ended up making a motion on D-3.

City Attorney Ramos: That's correct sir.

Commissioner Mena: So I'll make the motion on that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Second?

Commissioner Lago: So moved.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: All those in favor say aye.

All: Aye.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Opposed?

Commissioner Lago: Before we move onto the next item Mayor, if I may. I'd like to make sure from staff that we have a report at the next Commission meeting in reference to bike racks, the locations, and whatever additional resources staff needs to make sure that we deliver on those bike racks. I don't want to come back six months from now, a year from now, the bike racks haven't been delivered. That's critically important infrastructure. Let's deliver on that. So tell us what you need and let's deliver on that please.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: I know its tangential Peter, but at the last B.I.D. meeting Belkys was there as well, so you can get her input. The members of the B.I.D. were saying that they are still in need of some common seating areas in Giralda Plaza. I think there were some back and forth on exactly what that would look like and what the exact items would be. I don't know what the status is as of today, but if you could just speak to Belkys and follow up with the B.I.D. on that.

Interim City Manager Iglesias: I will Commissioner. I will.

Commissioner Mena: I'd appreciate it. And more trash cans, sorry, that was the other thing.

Commissioner Keon: Somebody had recommended because we don't need the bollards for cars anymore that we would group the bollards together for seating purposes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We do need the bollards to prevent cars from going in or...

Commissioner Keon: The bollards that are along Giralda that were placed there because for cars that we could take those bollards that are placed individually along there and group them together for seating. I know that came from the B.I.D.

Interim City Manager Iglesias: The reason we did not do that is because Giralda has only been closed for two years. It has not been closed permanently. So the street has been designed as multi-use, the bollards on each side can be removed and the street can go back. Giralda has been designed as an actual street.

Commissioner Keon: Right

Interim City Manager Iglesias: So we only have it – the reason we went with the design only a two year period.

Commissioner Keon: Right – but we could use, as long as during the two years that its closed, we could rearrange those bollards differently and they could always go back to that original position. You know its not my idea; it was something the B.I.D....

Interim City Manager Iglesias: We have looked at the bollards to delineate; we wanted ten feet on each side to be clear and so we've used the bollards to delineate that ten feet on either side, so that we would not have any seating encroaching on that. So that's been the delineation, so that's how we used it.

Commissioner Keon: In all honesty somebody came and talked to me about it.

Interim City Manager Iglesias: We did look at those options, we did look at those options and we felt that just delineating that ten foot area, I think that there would be encroachment from the dining.

[End: 10:40:00 a.m.]