

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-2
October 28, 2014
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason

Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.

Commissioner Pat Keon

Commissioner Vince Lago

Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff

Interim City Manager, Carmen Olazabal

City Attorney, Craig E. Leen

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Robert Ruano, Member U.S.D.A. National

Ed Macie, U.S.D.A. Urban Forestry Regional Director

D-2 [Start: 9:35:53 a.m.]

Ed Macie, U.S.D.A. Urban Forestry Regional Director to speak about the agency's initiatives.

Mayor Cason: Moving on to D-2. We have with us today Ed Macie, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Urban Forestry Regional Director to speak about the agency's initiative, and I'll ask Commissioner Lago to introduce, Mr. Lago.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you Mayor, appreciate that. I have the pleasure of introducing Mr. Robert Ruano who was the individual who brought forth Mr. Macie who is going to provide us with some insight in regards to what his agency does and how his agency can assist in the future of the City of Coral Gables, because many of you know we are embarking on a lot of initiatives which deal with green initiatives, sustainability, which deal with a tree master plan, which is forthcoming which is about to be finalized. So I thought it was a good idea when Mr. Ruano brought it forth, it was his idea, to see if we could bring Mr. Macie down to just give us a little

bit of quick synopsis of what his agency does and how they can assist the City of Coral Gables. Thank you sir.

Mr. Ruano: Thank you. Good morning Mr. Mayor, Mr. Vice Mayor, members of the City Commission. I come to you today as a City resident, but also as a member of U.S.D.A.'s National and Urban Community Forestry Advisory Council. It's a volunteer group made up of 15 people across the country. Actually represent small cities under 50,000, so we can still get on there for another couple of years. I've seen the good work that the City does on urban forestry street trees and I'm happy to share with the rest of the country and I'm happy to bring other folks that can help really give you opinions on your program and may be introduce you to some best practices from around the country. I've known Ed for a number of years, we've worked together for probably about 8 years, and Ed Macie is the Southern Region Urban Forestry Group Leader for the U.S.D.A. Forest Service in Atlanta, Georgia. He has nearly 30 years' experience in urban forestry, having served with the Forest Service as a County Arborist and as an agricultural consultant. For the past 25 years Ed has directed the Southern Region Urban Forestry Program for the Forest Service, administering grants and educational programs to help states deliver their urban forestry programs, community-based group's plant, and maintain trees and improve the environment where people live, work, and play. Ed also strongly supports urban forestry research and science delivery, having established a Center for Urban and Interface Forestry located at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia and the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. His educational background includes a B.S. in Environmental Horticultural Agro-cultural from the University of California, Davis, and an M.S. in Urban Forestry Ecology, from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University. Welcome Ed.

Mr. Macie: Thanks Robert, good morning.

Commissioner Lago: Good morning.

Mr. Macie: I apologize for that long bio, I think I've used up most of my time.

[Laughter]

Mr. Macie: You have any questions? I do travel around the country a lot and my main job is to work with state forestry agencies, local communities, non-profit groups, and others to build capacity, their capacity to manage their urban forest. I started over the years developing a checklist to sort of define what a gold standard is for community, what a gold standard might be in terms of their ability to nurture their urban trees, manage their resources, and I think I pretty much found it in the last couple of days that I've been here in Coral Gables. I congratulate you

all on the efforts that you are making. When Robert first invited me down here, the first thing I did was went to Google Earth and take a birds-eye view of Coral Gables to see what your urban tree canopy look like and I was pretty impressed. There is something special here, I'm looking forward to taking a close look, and over the last day or so I had a chance to see it from the ground looking up; and there is really nothing, I think more valuable than seeing tree-covered tree-lined streets with canopies touching from both sides. It talks to the richness of the community that's not necessarily monetary, but a value system that's suggesting that you really appreciate the natural world around you. So I congratulate you on that. So I have a short list of things that I consider important for communities that would sort of find that gold standard, its actually categories that are used in a more formal audit process for communities, if communities are interested in that. To ask the question, what do I need to have the perfect urban forest program?- or what am I missing?- and as I went through this list thinking about Coral Gables over the last 24 hours that I was here, in my mind I kept going check, check, check, check, see you there. It may not all be in one place at one time, but you are definitely moving in a very positive direction. But I'm going to run through this list very quickly because you know your City better than I do and you might ask yourself, do we have this component in place?- or do we not? The first is policy and ordinances and very clearly you have some policy that addresses urban trees, whether you have canopy goal or canopy standard that you've established, I'm not sure. For instance, by 2020 we want to have 60 percent urban tree canopy or 70 percent. I think you are around 55 percent right now just taking a glimpse. Or climate change policy or formal utility policy, conflict with trees, utility lines and things like that. Number two is professional capacity and I've clearly seen that. Talking to your directors of Public Works and Public Service, I can see a level of professionalism that really speaks to how you take care of your trees. Building on that is continuing education and things like that, training, networking ability for your staff, things like that. Clearly there is funding, number three is funding, and the funding prioritization process. One thing that may not be there is a contingency plan for natural disaster; I'm just throwing it out there something to think about. Number four is clear lines of authority, who is responsible for the trees?- and I clearly saw that, so that's there. Five is inventories and the City does have a very comprehensive street tree inventory, it's kept in a computer database and its geo-spacial, which is very good, that means there is a dot on the map that shows you where the tree is. The next generation of inventory is canopy analysis – what is your canopy?- what's the percentage?- how is it changing over time?- and how can you use that to set policy; and that's a really important goal for a City to have and many cities are moving in that direction, I'll explain why in a second. Six is management plans and I see that you do have plans in place and I just heard that you are developing a master plan, which again is the next step to bring all these plans into a single document that guides the management of your resource. Seven could be seven and eight, but I like to clump them together – a risk manager and protocol and disaster planning. In this part of the country it's not a matter of if, but when an actual disaster will strike and it's usually a big storm. So a comprehensive disaster plan helps reduce risk in the

community, but it also helps expedite recovery of your urban trees once they do get hit. So it's a very important thing to have. Number eight is a little technical, it's the implications of standards of care and practice and that refers to the application of industry best manage and practices and industry standards in your arbor cultural treatment of your trees; and I see signs of that in looking at your trees that these are being employed and I know just through conversations that attention is being paid to that. The next one is called green asset evaluation, this is number nine on the list; and this is sort of principle based and it has two parts to it. The first is, do you occasionally evaluate the health and condition of your resource beyond an inventory?- how is it looking?- are standards, practice being employed?- are the trees healthy?- is there good diversity? The second part is more of a philosophical treatment of your trees, do you think of them as green infrastructure? In other words, city trees work hard for us, they help manage storm water, they help improve air quality, they help property values, they do a lot of things that we call ecological services, and just like our gray infrastructure works hard for us, pipes move sewage and water and our overhead power lines keep our refrigerators cold, the trees are every bit as much infrastructure and once the community starts philosophically thinking of them that way then they tend to manage them like infrastructure. So it's sort of a philosophical shift in your thinking and that's why this whole canopy analysis starts becoming important, because if you had a snapshot of your total canopy cover there are models that can quantify not only the value of the trees in dollars and sense, but those values in terms of their storm water management and all of a sudden the trees becomes as important as the pipes, so it's a very important step to take. And then the very last thing is an engaged community, from what I've seen the community is very engaged in trees, very active and in some cases local, so the bottom line with that is that a community that owns their urban forest takes care of their urban forest. That's a quick list of things. I am impressed. If you have any questions I'll be glad to answer.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I'd like to just say something. Of course as you have been here in the past day or so, you've probably met with staff and you are right, our tree canopy is very impressive and we are very proud of our tree canopy. About two or three years ago, we made a cognitive decision here on the City Commission dais to go ahead and do a tree succession plan, which we basically and you may know this, but in case anybody doesn't know this, we surveyed all our trees in the City of Coral Gables, every single tree, I can't remember how many thousands.

Mayor Cason: 36,652.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: 36,000 trees. We found out which ones were damaged, we found out where there were holes in our canopy, and now we are about ready to embark upon spending \$3 million to fill in those holes, replace those damaged trees so the tree canopy can only be as good as it is now, but will survive into the future and would be even better, so I think the City of Coral

Gables, you are right, is the gold standard as far as trees go and probably the county, the state, maybe even in the country. I appreciate your comments.

Mayor Cason: We've been a tree city I think for 29 years, and we have another initiative that you might not be aware of, I think only Singapore is doing it, which is to put a quarter of a million native Florida orchids being reproduced by Fairchild Botanical Gardens into our City trees.

Mr. Macie: That's great.

Mayor Cason: We love trees; we have a good sense of which ones need replacement. We've been working with the neighbors, I think 6 communities to get their input on the type of trees and we always want to maintain a balance between various types of native trees, some are palms, but some are oaks and mahoganies and black olives and others. This is a City that really appreciates trees and spends a lot of money on them.

Mr. Macie: That's clearly obvious.

Commissioner Lago: Mr. Macie first off, thank you for coming down and speaking, not only to us, but also more importantly to staff because that was the more pertinent reason why when Robert brought this forth, I thought it would be a good idea for you to come down and I appreciate you coming down at your own expense, which is something that I'm grateful for. Not going to reiterate the comments of the Vice Mayor and the Mayor made, which are incredible comments and that's what sets the City of Coral Gables apart from a lot of other municipalities. My goal for bringing you down was, as we are embarking on these major projects which are going to redefine the future of this City, I thought it would be no better person than yourself to potentially not only give us guidance, but also assist us in maybe achieving grants from the federal government, from the state. I know that you have an extensive background in regards to grant follow-up, grant writing, an understanding of not only public but private sector entities which write grants which provide grants for what we are going after right now. Two major projects; the tree succession plan has been completed; now we are talking about implementation. The Vice Mayor came up with a great idea which is a million orchid project, as the Mayor had mentioned that's coming is being worked on, but we are always looking to potentially making it even better, expand it if possible. So if you have any issues you can always contact me. I'd like to see if maybe you can help us in any capacity, any role provide us with a little bit of guidance as you have 30 years of experience, which is something that is to be commended.

Mr. Macie: I appreciate that and I'll certainly keep my eyes open for opportunities. In fact, we have a conference call coming up in a little while with the Florida Forest Service and we deliver our grant program through them and so definitely keep Coral Gables on the radar screen. For us

it's nice to have a really good example of what a program should look like, so I'll definitely tell your stories as I travel across the country.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much. Thanks for coming.

Commissioner Keon: Can I ask you one question with regard to funding. The grants that you have available, that you make available, are they available to cities?- or are they through the Forestry Division?- are they through states?- or are they through counties?

Mr. Macie: They are available for cities....

Commissioner Keon: Cities can access them also.

Mr. Macie:...but they are delivered through the Forest Service – yes.

Commissioner Keon: OK. Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: One thing I forgot. The last point I was going to make its not only about grants, any advice that you can give us to just make us even better.

Mr. Macie: Sure. I'll be glad to help.

Commissioner Lago: We are here to listen. Thank you sir.

Mr. Macie: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

[End: 9:50:48 a.m.]