

CITY OF CORAL GABLES
WATERWAY ADVISORY BOARD
 HYBRID MEETING AT BUILDING DEPARTMENT/ZOOM
 WEDNESDAY, November 6, 2024 - 5:30 P.M.
 MEETING MINUTES

MEMBERS	District	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	APPOINTED BY:
		23	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	
Manny Chamizo	2	A	A	P	A	A	A	P	*	*	A	*	A	Vince Lago
Pat Nolan	1	P	p	P	P	P	P	A			P	*	P	Melissa Castro
Juan A. Galan Jr	3	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	*	*	P	*	P	Rhonda Anderson
Kevin Ritzenthaler	1	A	p	P	P	E	P	E	*	*	P	*	P	Kirk Menendez
Nancy Sanabria	7	P	p	P	P	P	P	P			P	*	P	Ariel Fernandez
Douglas Yoder	CR	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	*	*	P	*	P	Amos Rojas, Jr.
Bertram Goldsmith	7	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	*	*	P	*	P	Commission-As-A-Whole
Levi Meyer	6	A	p	P	A	E	P	P	*	*	P	*	A	Board-As-A-Whole
Vacant														Commission-As-A-Whole

- P – Present**
- P*- Present (zoom)**
- E – Excused Absence**
- A – Absent**
- R – Resigned**
- (-) – No Appointment**

- (*) – No Meeting**

STAFF:

- Lorena Garrido, Central Division Administrative Manager
- Yannissey Solivera, Administrative Assistant
- Jessie Acebo, Assistant to the Public Works Director
- Sergeant Guido Antezana

GUESTS:

- Amos Rojas, Jr., City Manager
- Jose “Joe” Gomez, Assistant City Manager
- Hermes Diaz, Public Works Director

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Mr. Yoder. Quorum was met.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL:

Mr. Goldsmith made the motion to approve the minutes of September 4, 2024, seconded by Mr. Nolan, all were in favor, and adopted unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

OLD BUSINESS:

As requested by the Board, Mr. Amos Rojas, Jr., City Manager; Jose “Joe” Gomez, Assistant City Manager; and Hermes Diaz, Public Works Director, were present at the meeting to discuss and address questions regarding issues on the waterways.

Mr. Amos Rojas, Jr., City Manager, introduced himself and thanked the Board for their participation and dedication in ensuring that the waterways are clear and safe.

Mr. Yoder brought up the subject of the 6100 Caballero Boulevard/Gables Waterways project. He mentioned that the Board’s intention is not to act as a quasi-judicial body but rather to identify issues related to water quality and safety, ensuring that reviewing and recommending agencies take these concerns into consideration for such developments. Mr. Rojas, Jr., City Manager stated that the City recognizes the importance of maintaining the safety and quality of the waterways. He assured the Board that the City remains attentive to issues impacting the waterways, both during construction and in the future, and continually seeks to address these concerns effectively.

Mr. Yoder brought up the subject of mangroves, recalling that the Board had previously passed a resolution addressing the clearing of vegetation that poses safety and navigability issues. He noted that as one moves further down the bay, there is significant vegetation, including mangroves, that requires trimming. He reiterated that the Board’s recommendation at the time was for the City to consider becoming the permittee for managing this issue. This approach would ensure compliance with County and State Codes while facilitating proper management of the vegetation, thereby eliminating the need for homeowners or Associations to go through the permitting process themselves. Additionally, the Board recommended that the City undertake periodic reviews of the conditions to identify areas requiring maintenance. However, he noted that the previous City Manager, Mr. Peter Iglesias, held the position that this responsibility should fall to Associations or individual property owners, with the City’s role limited to issuing notices of violation and addressing issues through Code Enforcement.

Mr. Rojas, Jr., City Manager, stated that the City had a conversation with DERM (Department of Environmental Resources Management) and was advised that each property owner must obtain their own permit because each property has its own identity, as defined by its unique folio number. However, he noted that there are areas along the waterways that are the City’s responsibility. He has directed staff to identify these areas, obtain the necessary permits, and commence cutting back vegetation to the allowed percentage to ensure that the canal remains navigable and does not close in.

Mr. Diaz, Public Works Director, stated that he was present at the meeting when the issue of overgrown mangroves was discussed with the previous City Manager, Mr. Peter Iglesias. He explained that overgrown mangroves on private property are being addressed through Code Enforcement.

Additionally, he noted that in Cocoplum, certain areas with mangroves fall under the responsibility of the Cocoplum Homeowners Association, based on research conducted by the City Attorney. However, there are four parcels abutting a couple of bridges where the City is responsible for maintenance. Mr. Diaz mentioned that funding for trimming these areas has been approved by the Commission, and the permitting process with DERM has already begun. He clarified that the City must follow the same permitting process as individual homeowners, which may cause delays before the trimming work can commence.

Mr. Galan stated that, based on the information provided by Mr. Diaz, the City has determined that the Cocoplum Conservation Corps is the entity responsible for maintaining the mangroves on the Islands of Cocoplum. Mr. Diaz confirmed that, to his knowledge, this determination is accurate. Mr. Galan then noted that there is another parcel in the area that is owned by the State of Florida. Mr. Diaz mentioned that City staff have gathered contact information for the relevant state authorities, but there remains uncertainty about how proactive the State will be in addressing mangrove trimming. Nevertheless, the City will make its best effort to collaborate with the State on this matter. Additionally, Mr. Galan pointed out that the canal in question serves two communities: the Islands of Cocoplum, managed by a Homeowners Association (HOA), and a portion of Phase One waterfront residents located along the canal. He asked whether the entire canal area, including the entrance, would be addressed by the HOA or the individual homeowners. Mr. Diaz responded that this issue is still being worked out. He explained that one challenge is that the entity responsible for this area has been inactive for some time, and DERM requires the legal owner to sign off on any permit application. This introduces a legal ownership issue that needs to be clarified before moving forward with the permitting process. Mr. Galan added that the HOA has apparently been paying property taxes for this area, which may indicate an effort to avoid a lien process. He expressed optimism that the City's determination of responsibility would facilitate progress, especially in trimming the east side of the mangroves in the canal, which is essentially the back of Tahiti Beach. Mr. Diaz confirmed Mr. Galan's understanding, except for the portion owned by the State of Florida, which remains a separate issue.

Mrs. Sanabria inquired about the funding approved by the Commission for mangrove trimming and asked Mr. Diaz if the funds were strictly allocated for City-owned areas. Mr. Diaz confirmed that the funds were indeed designated for City-owned properties and identified two parcels adjacent to the Coco Grove Drive bridge and additional parcels near the Prado Boulevard bridge.

Mrs. Sanabria further inquired if those were the only areas covered under the funding. Mr. Diaz affirmed this and added that there are also areas in Arvida that the City is responsible for maintaining; however, he noted that funding restrictions might limit the trimming of those areas. He emphasized that the City's goal is to obtain the necessary permits and implement a regular maintenance schedule for the mangroves in the future.

Mrs. Sanabria inquired about the status of the monthly report from Code Enforcement. Ms. Garrido responded that Code Enforcement is currently in the process of completing the report and assured the Board that it would be emailed to them once it is finalized.

Mr. Galan raised the issue of Code Enforcement and the ability to submit anonymous complaints. He noted that recent changes from Tallahassee have removed the ability for residents to report Code

Enforcement issues anonymously and asked if the Board could serve as an intermediary to bring potential Code Enforcement issues on behalf of residents without disclosing their personal information. Mr. Rojas, Jr., City Manager, responded that he would need to consult with the City's legal department to determine if this approach is permissible and would report back to the Board with their findings.

Mrs. Sanabria inquired about the possibility of installing additional surveillance cameras on the waterways. Mr. Rojas, Jr., City Manager, responded that while the City recognizes the importance of enhancing surveillance, they cannot disclose the locations of the existing cameras for security reasons. He added that he has discussed the matter with Chief Hudak, who supports the installation of additional cameras, with the understanding that the details of their placement would remain confidential once implemented.

Mr. Galan expressed concern about night-time thefts occurring on the waterways and suggested the need for video and FLIR (thermal and night vision) cameras. He emphasized that such cameras would significantly assist Marine Patrol in addressing crimes that currently go unresolved due to insufficient surveillance. Mr. Rojas, Jr., City Manager, acknowledged the suggestion and stated that he would discuss the matter with Chief Hudak to explore the feasibility of implementing such technology.

Mr. Yoder suggested that the City encourage residents living along the waterways to install their own surveillance cameras for additional security.

Ms. Sanabria inquired about the deteriorated sewer line on Lugo Bridge. Mr. Diaz assured the Board that the condition is not as severe as it appears and that repairs are already scheduled.

Mr. Ritzenthaler asked about the timeline for the Cocoplum Circle bridge replacement. Mr. Diaz explained that he currently does not have the information; however, staff will contact the County for an update and report back to the Board.

Mrs. Sanabria raised concerns about a severely corroded seawall at 12560 Virtudes St, noting that it was on the verge of collapsing into the water and may have already done so. Mr. Diaz assured the Board that staff would follow up with Code Enforcement and report back to the Board. Ms. Sanabria also inquired about the process of addressing such situations. Mr. Diaz responded that he was unsure if a formal process was in place but committed to having staff check with Development Services and report back to the Board with more information.

Ms. Sanabria inquired about the additional vessel for Marine Patrol, noting the Board's understanding that the budget for the vessel had been approved. Mr. Rojas, Jr., City Manager, confirmed that the Urban Area Security Initiative allocated \$150,000 to the City of Coral Gables for the acquisition of a third vessel, and the City is actively proceeding with its procurement.

Mr. Yoder raised concerns about water quality in the canal, recalling past discussions with FIU on the issue. He noted that the City is undertaking a septic-to-sewer analysis, which he believes could impact the canals.

Mr. Diaz stated that the City is currently developing a septic-to-sewer master plan, noting that approximately 7,700 of the 11,000 single-family homes in Coral Gables still rely on septic systems. He added that the City intends to initiate resident engagement meetings early next year to address the substantial costs associated with the transition, estimated at nearly \$400 million. Funding options will be discussed with the City Commission at a later stage.

Mr. Diaz also mentioned that the study conducted by FIU left several years of data, which the City is utilizing to design a water quality structure for the Riviera Outfall. This project will be partially funded by a grant. Once the structure is completed, the City intends to leave it open for a year and then request FIU to conduct further testing to determine if water quality improvements are achieved. He further explained that there are approximately 160 outfalls within the City, with the Riviera Outfall being the largest, encompassing the downtown area. Additionally, the City is advancing on a stormwater master plan, which is expected to be completed early next year. This plan, which will also require funding, includes a water quality component specifically addressing the outfalls.

Mr. Galan stated that many residents are transitioning to synthetic grass. He noted that residents along the waterways often receive notices during certain times of the year advising them not to use fertilizer, as it can run off into the canals. He inquired whether the City has considered implementing an incentive program to encourage the use of synthetic grass instead of traditional grass. Mr. Diaz responded that if this is something the Board wishes to pursue, they could draft a resolution and submit it to the Commission for consideration. However, he emphasized that such a proposal would first need to be discussed with Development Services to assess feasibility and determine the cost of obtaining the necessary permits.

Mr. Yoder raised the issue of iguana overpopulation, referencing a concern voiced by a resident at the previous meeting and inquired whether individual homeowners could utilize the City's contractor for assistance. Mr. Rojas Jr., City Attorney, explained that while the City has had discussions on this matter, using the City's contractor for private properties is not feasible. He further noted the challenges of controlling iguanas, stating that they are highly intelligent creatures. While it is possible to trap one, subsequent trapping becomes significantly more difficult, as iguanas quickly learn to avoid the traps. He emphasized that the most effective method for managing iguanas involves humanely dispatching them.

Marine Patrol Report:

Sgt. Antezana reported on the below October activities:

Hurricane Milton Preparations:

On October 9th, Marine Patrol assisted in removing vessels from the water in preparation for Hurricane Milton. The following day, an assessment was conducted, and no significant disturbances were found.

Distressed Kite Boaters:

On October 11th, Marine Patrol responded to a report of two kite boaters in distress off Matheson.

Strong winds carried them far from shore. Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) located and rescued them without injury.

- **Tahiti Beach Structure Fire:**
On October 16th, Marine Patrol responded to a minor structure fire on Tahiti Beach. The fire department quickly extinguished the fire, resulting in little to no damage.
- **San Pedro Vessel Fire:**
On October 19th, Marine Patrol responded to a fire on San Pedro, where a 60-foot vessel docked behind a residence caught fire. The fire department responded swiftly, and fortunately, the vessel was unoccupied. The fire was determined to have been caused by an electrical short circuit.
- **Theft at 7-Eleven:**
On October 24th, while having coffee at 7-Eleven, Sgt. Antezana witnessed a theft in progress. He chased the individual but was unable to apprehend him; however, his colleagues successfully detained the suspect and took him into custody.
- **Abandoned Vessel on Old Cutler Road:**
On October 27th, Marine Patrol responded to an abandoned 30-foot motorboat on a trailer left on the side of Old Cutler Road. The boat, missing its motors, was towed and impounded. It was traced back to the City of Miami.
- **Infant Locked in a Vehicle:**
On October 31st, Marine Patrol responded to a report of an infant locked inside a vehicle at Whole Foods. The infant had grabbed the car keys, and the mother accidentally locked the door. The team successfully retrieved the infant within a minute.
- **Hurricane Milton Relief Efforts:**
During the last week of October, an officer from Marine Patrol was deployed to the Tampa area to assist with Hurricane Milton relief efforts.
- **Derelict Sailboat Removal:**
Sgt. Antezana reported that the derelict sailboat on Lugo was finally removed. The County and DERM collaborated to successfully address the issue.
- **Fiel Activity Report:**
 - 12 calls for service.
 - 4 traffic stops on the water and 12 on shore.
 - 2 safety inspections.
 - 4 Citations.
 - 98 area checks and Two community contacts.

Mrs. Sanabria inquired if everything appeared to be in order during the area checks. Sgt. Antezana confirmed, stating that everything has been going very well.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

NEXT MEETING:

Wednesday, December 4, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.