

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
October 23, 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

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Public Works Director, Ed Santamaria
Assistant Public Works Director, Al Zamora
Senior Sustainability Analyst, Matt Anderson

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item H-2 [11:20 a.m.]

An update from staff regarding the comprehensive sanitation plan.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I'm going to call on H-2, an update from staff regarding the comprehensive sanitation plan. Staff isn't here?

Commissioner Lago: Okay. I put this item on the agenda...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Commissioner Lago: Because, I know that we're having some changes in regards to our Sanitation Department and we're bringing some new staff members in. And, I wanted staff to -- just to give us a quick update in regards to what they're working on. And, I wanted to get the Commission's support on finding a final resolution for the cardboard issue that we're having here in the City of Coral Gables. I know we've had multiple discussions, but I want this to be a priority for 2019. If you notice, every single day when you drive through your neighborhood, there is an issue of more and more with cardboard. From my understanding, cardboard is probably the most recyclable in regards to reimbursement of any of the glass, plastic or paper recyclable products that are out there. By throwing that out into the trash pit, all we're doing is increasing our tipping fee, which is going through the roof and not dealing with the issue of that could be possibly all recycled. So, it's -- you know, we could be making money on it and it's actually costing us more money, because we haven't been able to find a resolution. The Mayor brought up some points, which are very valid in the issue of breaking down the cardboard, and I understand it's a problem. But we, as a community, cannot accept the fact that we can just toss this into our trash pit, something as valuable as cardboard, which can be recycled. We need to find a resolution. If that is finding vehicles that will pay itself off over time, because of these products that we're now going to start recycling that can take those unbroken-down boxes and recycle them, we have to find an answer. And, I've been talking about this for two or three years and every day it's getting worse and worse and worse, because all of us are buying from Amazon. And Amazon, as you know, is one of the largest, if not the largest company in the world now and they're not stopping. Everybody now is getting deliveries to -- if you drive by the City, there's -- the mountains of cardboard are ever-growing and they're not going to stop growing. So, we either deal with this issue now or it just continues to get worse.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So, what are you -- what are you proposing?

Commissioner Lago: I'm going to tell you what I did, okay. I put my money where my mouth is. I pulled a permit and I got rid of my trash pit this week. Okay, I no longer have a trash pit. My landscaper takes the landscaping -- takes the clippings and I recycle. If I need to throw something away, I put it on my driveway the day of, the morning of so it gets picked up by the company. Or I take it to Goodwill or I find somebody that's suited for that item. The cardboard, I break it down and I put it next to my recycling bin. I make sure it doesn't get wet. Because, the idea of throwing away good cardboard and not reaping the benefits from it is just something that I can't do. So, I really want this Commission to understand that we have a new individual that's going to come in that's going to be helping out in the Public Works Department. And I think that the capabilities are there, so I'd like to make sure and ask this Commission to make this a priority over the next, you know, few months so that we can come up with a plan to address this issue.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Is there anyone from staff that...

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, I -- or Vice Mayor, I'd like to -- I'll have our Public Works Director...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yeah.

City Manager Iglesias: Introduce our new Assistant Director for Sanitation, Al Zamora.

Commissioner Lago: Perfect.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, everyone in attendance. Ed Santamaria, Director of Public Works. I'm happy to introduce Mr. Al Zamora, a highly motivated professional who has joined us from the City of Miami Beach, where he served as Director of Solid Waste. Mr. Zamora has 33 years in the solid waste

industry, in both the private and public sectors. He spent 12 years at Waste Management, and he spent the balance of his time serving the City of Miami Beach in providing world-class service to its residents. We're very happy to have Mr. Zamora here. We think he's well-suited for the position. He has the experience of managing 183 employees at Miami Beach. And, he has the experience also of the private industry in solid waste. Waste Management is one of our vendors, our primary vendor -- actually, our only vendor for commercial waste services. So, we think Mr. Zamora fits quite nicely. He also has a skillset that involves debris management. And as we know, that was a skillset that came very, very -- became very important to us last year. So, without further ado, here's Al Zamora.

Commissioner Lago: Welcome.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Lago: Welcome.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Welcome

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Good morning, Mayor, members of the Commission. I'm Al Zamora, Assistant Public Works Director. First of all, I'd like to give a big thank you to the administration for giving me the opportunity to serve the residents, business owners and visitors of this city. And, I look forward to joining this great team we're putting together here. Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Okay, perfect.

Commissioner Keon: Welcome.

Commissioner Lago: Welcome.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much, sir.

Commissioner Lago: We're happy to have you here.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Happy to have you.

Commissioner Keon: Find a way to get rid of cardboard.

Commissioner Lago: So, I'm not going to put you on the hot seat.

Commissioner Keon: Recycle cardboard.

Commissioner Lago: I'm not going to put you on the hot seat, because I have too much respect for you, but I'm -- we're blessed to have you here. I just want you to be aware that I think this Commission, as a whole -- and I don't want to speak for the Commission, but we've been talking about this for some time. This is a very touchy subject. People, for some reason, are like attached to their trash pits. Like you say you're going to get rid of a trash pit and people are like -- they freak out.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Commissioner Lago: I got rid of my trash pit this week. It was very liberating, very liberating. I pulled a permit, which is a piece of legislation that I wrote, along with these Commissioners, to use a swale treatment, which was designed by our City staff. It looks beautiful. It has low-lying ferns on the swale. There's no longer issues with the fact that the grass doesn't grow, because of the canopy over it. You know, I don't have people parking on it illegally. I don't have vultures coming in the middle of the night.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Vultures?

Commissioner Lago: Yes, vultures, yeah. That's what they're called. Individuals who -- individuals that roam the neighborhoods and you don't know who they are, and I know that's a tough word to use, but it is -- that's what it is. They're walking into your yard. They're picking over your garbage and knocking things over. They're actually depositing items into your trash bin. They're unloading, illegally dumping. And as we've discussed before, another major issue that we're having -- and I'm just making you aware -- you know this. We are the butt of the joke in Miami-Dade County. And, I have actually caught my previous gardener doing this. That's why he's no longer my gardener. I came home early one day to find my gardener cutting my yard, but I see a pretty large pile of green matter in his truck. So, when I came back, I looked into my trash pit and I noticed that there was ferns. There was arecas. There was a litany of other, you know, green matter that wasn't from my yard. And I asked him, you know, how did this get here into my trash pit. And he told me, oh, I dumped it in there. You don't mind, do you? I mean, Coral Gables picks it up. So, our tipping fee -- from what I remember -- and correct me if I'm wrong -- our tipping fee has been going up year after year after year after year.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: It will go up.

Commissioner Lago: And, it continues to go up because landscapers in this community understand that they can cut the yards of other communities and come to ours and just dump it in the City of Coral Gables, that way, they don't have to go to the garbage pit or garbage disposal in the County to get rid of the items. So, you're talking about they're saving hundreds of dollars, but again, we're having to spend those hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Yeah. We're basically subsidizing a lot of the garbage.

Commissioner Lago: We're subsidizing the county as a whole, which, to me, is something that if we, as a community want to continue to do, I'm opposed to it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Well, what's the alternative, Commissioner?

Commissioner Lago: Well, no, but the alternative is -- the alternative is that we have to -- like what I do. I tell my gardener, you know, an extra \$5. He takes the green matter with him. You have to...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We have tried that before.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah, hold on. But then there's also issues. When you have a trash pit -- and I'm not saying to get rid of trash pits. I'm not saying to get rid of trash pits. When you have a trash pit, you also fall into the situation where people dump paint. There's contaminants...

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: A safety hazard.

Commissioner Lago: In your swale. Just because you're not dealing with it every single day, your swales are contaminated, because people are dumping things into the swale. And again, it's not aesthetically pleasing and it doesn't fall in line with The City Beautiful moniker. So, these are decisions that we have to make. And I think that one that we can start, which is a low-hanging fruit, is finding a way to recycle cardboard and telling people, like I mentioned when you had stepped out for a second. The Mayor made a very good point. Let's stop asking people to break down cardboard, especially elderly, especially people who have issues with disabilities. Let's just tell them -- find -- let's find a way to put the cardboard adjacent to recycling. They don't even have to walk it down to the trash pit, and our incredible team can dispose of it. If you tell me that our trucks and that our infrastructure cannot handle this, I want to make a plan to address it in this budget cycle.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: I can tell you, from 30,000 feet in two and a half weeks being here...

Commissioner Lago: I'm not asking for that. I just want to know...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: No, I'm just saying what I saw in the two and a half weeks that I'm here is we need to automate our vehicles at one point. We are -- we do things inefficiently, so that should help. The trash is one of my three business cycles that I do, and by far, it's my costliest. In other words, garbage, recycling and trash.

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: And we have an issue there. It's costly. It's out of control. Whether -- I mean, we can discuss it later on whether we pass some ordinances where -- I mean, trash cannot go away 100 percent, but there might be other options.

Landscape Services Division Chief Dannemiller: And we'll be looking at all those. The way we started -- we did the kickoff for the comprehensive sanitation plan in the spring. We've been sending data to our consultant, Kessler Consulting over the last month, month and a half. They were here on site for a full week, the second week in October, Al's first week, so he got to do all the ride-alongs and go through and watch as they did their field operational analysis. We have public meetings scheduled for Thursday, November 15, at 6 o'clock at the Youth Center, and then, Saturday, November 17, at 11 am, here at City Hall in the courtyard. That's the same morning as our household hazardous waste event, which I believe is 9 am to noon. So, the last hour of that will be -- we'll have a public meeting here to kick off this process. I have the schedule here that shows the full process, so that our aim is to have all of this figured out by

budget season. So, if we do need to ask for funds or if we do need to reallocate resources, that we'll have that. So, I'll hand this out so that you guys have that.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: But, what I really want and I appreciate it -- and thank you so much. I want you to be cognizant of the fact that this Commission is asking you to give us ideas to deliver on trying to eliminate the cardboard from the trash pits. Let's find a way to recycle it.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: And there's ways of thinking out of the box, where we can -- I've already got something in mind because you're right. You're absolutely right.

Commissioner Lago: We're losing money.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: We're losing...

Commissioner Lago: We're wasting money.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: A commodity that - but that's one of the best commodities out there in the recycling stream, and we're actually paying to get rid of it.

Commissioner Lago: It doesn't make any sense.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: It doesn't make sense.

Commissioner Lago: We're throwing out -- it's like we're giving away money.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Right.

Commissioner Lago: We're giving away money. So, it's just the oddest thing I've ever seen. I don't understand it.

Commissioner Keon: We're glad you're here.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: But you're new...

Commissioner Keon: And you have that background and experience.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Well, yeah. I mean, we can...

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Come up with all sorts of innovative ways of capturing that and working it into what we do today.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Well, you're new, and I welcome, you know...

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: A fresh look at the situation. But, keep in mind when you're looking at the situation that a very large percent of our population, especially in North Gables, is elderly. And by elderly, I mean 80s and 90s, and they cannot cut up the boxes or -- just keep it in mind, whatever it is.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Sure. And, I come from a municipality that we do have backdoor service over there, not only recycling, but we -- on the municipal solid waste. So, there is some ways to kind of work around it where we're not, you know, asking people to bring anything out to the curb or anything else with specialized...

Commissioner Lago: And don't be...

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Carts or...

Commissioner Lago: And, don't be afraid to tell me that maybe we just have to stop allowing it.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Right.

Commissioner Lago: Just say put your -- it's okay, and I'm willing to sponsor that.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Right.

Commissioner Lago: I'm willing to take the heat for that to say we will not pick up cardboard in the trash pits. Just put it next to your recycling bin, unbroken down, just tell me what I need to do as a Commission to give you all the tools, so that you can deliver on recycling cardboard that is not broken down, so that the elderly -- instead of having to walk it down to a trash pit, can just leave it next to your recycling, and it's -- I want to make it so easy that it's just second nature.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Right.

Commissioner Lago: And another thing here, just to give you -- I know you know this already. Our staff has made you very well aware of it. People here really value and appreciate their -- the service that we have right now in regards to the garbage and recycling. They will not accept anything else. There's got to be the backdoor pickup. They love it and it's -- that -- we'll have an all-out war here if that even (INAUDIBLE).

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: And that's fine. And I -- again, I come from a municipality that I served for 18 years that we had the same service. We had the valet service, backdoor service, so it's...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, sir.

Landscape Services Division Chief Dannemiller: And, one of the things we're looking at -- because the -- we do value our staff -- is reducing injuries. We have a lot of injuries with them going in the backyards, like getting caught on fences and gates and things like that.

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah.

Landscape Services Division Chief Dannemiller: So, we want to look at reducing our injuries of our staff because the residents don't really see that, but we do get a fair amount of injuries.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: And that's one of the ways we need to innovate, you know, our trucks, the way we actually handle the collection of the material. Right now, we're touching something two or three times, where we shouldn't be. We should be touching it once and then automating the rest of the process, and that doesn't affect, you know, the fact that we're still going into your backyard. We're still giving you the service. But when we get to the curb, when we get it to the truck, we want to automate that truck so we cut down on injuries, spills and everything else. The more you tend to handle something, the more things can go wrong. Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, sir. Thank you very much. This is not a public hearing, but Maria Cruz wishes to speak on this issue. And Maria, as a courtesy to you, please come up.

Maria Cruz: Very brief.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: But, as a courtesy to you because this is not a public hearing.

Ms. Cruz: I'm glad that Commissioner Lago brought up the cardboard, but we have other recyclables, okay. We have newspapers. And you know what I've seen? Because, we have uncovered recyclable bins -- I hold them inside my house until the last minute; put it out, a little shower, trash. It gets dumped. We need to do something about covering the recyclables, so they don't have to be trashed.

Commissioner Mena: We will be doing that.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah, we are.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Commissioner Lago: We are.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Maria.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you, Maria.