

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-3
October 26, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item G-3 [Start: 12:52 a.m.]

An update from staff regarding the use of Neighborhood Safety Aides to assist with the educational outreach relating to sanitation rules and regulations. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Item G-3, an update from staff regarding the use of Neighborhood Safety Aides to assist with the educational outreach relating to sanitation rules and regulations. Chief.

Chief Hudak: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Chief Hudak: Mr. Manager. We have continued as we've talked about here with our educational process and also intervention techniques from our NSAs. We've had one or two cases involving an actual Code Enforcement dumping violation, which was sent over right away to Code Enforcement and responded. Also, a number of furniture disposed of trash pits, wrong day, wrong time, were also notified, and subsequently we've taken care of. The NSAs themselves have had 33

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To assist with the educational outreach relating to sanitation*

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community contacts in this time period educating residents about proper disposal of cardboard, recycling. We've also submitted all of our GovQA request for deep trash pits to be fixed or put on the list for Public Works. Over the past two months, Neighborhood Safety Aides have seen a decrease in the number of garbage or cardboard that they've seen in the trash pits and the one thing they have brought back to us is that some of our senior population have a hard time breaking down the box. So, they've actually assisted on several occasions, but they are working on that. The one thing that we are still in the process of doing is finalizing and getting out the educational material that we had talked about as well, for them to hand that out, but we've been taking a very hands-on approach with the NSAs, and we do believe that the educational process is working well, and people are adhering to it.

Mayor Lago: A few points, Chief. Thank you very much by the way, I appreciate your guidance with the NSAs. I've spoken to my NSA, and I've asked him, obviously if there is direction to ask our neighbors to move in a direction of not breaking down their cardboard, but just putting it adjacent to the recycling bin, and they said that there hasn't been that direction given that they can engage in that fashion. In my neighborhood, the amount of cardboard that is in the trash pits is, if people are getting the e-mails or the mailings and they are not following the rules. They are not even starting. They are going to wait till the last minute. I'm hoping that that's what they think that they are waiting till the last minute in December to, I don't know, maybe they want the exercise, or they want to walk from their front door to the trash pit to dump their cardboard. Now all they have to do is put it next to the recycling bin and we'll take it, and we'll save the city money, and we'll do something that's environmentally friendly. So, the breaking of the box issue is not really an issue, as long as they put the biggest box, the smaller box inside the biggest box, our garbage guys will take it away, because I've seen them do it. So, I just want to make sure the NSAs have all the tools, if it's a pamphlet, when they see repeat offenders, knock on the door, give them the documents and say, listen, in December this ends. Let's start complying now to save the city money, save the city money and do what's right by the environment. We are not asking you to break it down. There is this misconception that we are asking people to break this down. We're not. We're not asking to break it down. We would like for you to break it down, because it will make it easier for our employees, but if you can't do it, we'll make exceptions for you. Are we falling short? Are we falling short on messaging? – am I not doing a good job? Do I have to visit certain people? What do you recommend that we do?

Chief Hudak: I think, and again, our messaging is consistent. I think we are looking at it in two phases, so break the box and I think somebody comes up with that understanding that they are not going to take the box, if its not broken down. So, I think that's a messaging change that we can address as well, we do something different than what the county does and what some other cities do, where they won't take it if its not broken down in some cases and those could have been the sub-contracted private recycling.

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Mayor but we don't ask them to break it down, we just ask to cut the tape and dispose it, that's it.

Mayor Lago: If they don't want to break it down, like for example. If I have a person who does not want to break their box down and they are willing to put the smaller box into the medium box, the medium box into the bigger box, let's just take it, let's just take the box. Let's take it, because we are going to run into a problem coming here in a month and two weeks where the deadline comes and goes, and people are not complying. In my neighborhood people are not complying, they are not complying. So, my NSA which is incredible, by the way, he's very active, very active, I've spoken to him, and he said, Vince when I have a document, I can give to somebody, I'll knock on their door and I'll say, look, here, we need you to comply with this, we need you to comply with this. And then we'll slowly but surely see compliance.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, but if you can open the box, you can fold it, because all you are doing is cutting tape. So, if you take whatever you can out of the box, you should be able to just cut the tape and fold it.

Mayor Lago: I understand.

City Manager Iglesias: We have backdoor service, so its very difficult to take a lot of boxes from the back. So, all we're asking is that you cut the tape and just fold it. Its really not even breaking the box, it's just folding the box together. So, it seems to me if you can open the box, you can cut the tape and just fold it.

Mayor Lago: And I agree with you. I agree with you. But for those who do not want to comply that insist on not complying, what do we do? What are the options?

City Manager Iglesias: Well, our options December 1st is a warning and then a citation and that's what we discussed.

Mayor Lago: And we will not be picking up...

City Manager Iglesias: We will not pick up the box, we will not pick up the boxes at the right-of-way. This is what we've discussed before, and this is what we are planning on doing. We won't pick up the boxes in the right-of-way, you get a warning and then you get a citation as of December 1st.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Can we take advantage of the NSAs right now who are doing a good job patrolling the neighborhood, who know the residents, who knows every single resident in their neighborhood, can we take advantage of them right now and say, listen, go and speak to the repeat offenders, to individuals who may be confused and explain to them quickly, briefly via pamphlet of what we are asking.

City Manager Iglesias: We have door hangers that they can put in, and we have all kinds of outreach right now. So, we've got basically end of this month and November left. We've done a lot of outreach right now on break the box.

Mayor Lago: I know we are. I'm not saying we're not; we are. I want to use every tool that at our disposition.

Vice Mayor Mena: Does the door hanger say starting X date we will begin.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, it has. It has all the information front and back, and we've got a Code Compliance officer that does trash only, who is also doing that. We've done everything, I think from getting break the box perspective out.

Chief Hudak: So, you understand the program and to continue answering your question. As we get into the holidays, Black Tuesday, Black Friday, whatever it may be, Cyber Monday, and we have always had from the police department an attack or presentation on dealing with porch pirates that the same group being our NSAs moved over almost 2,000 packages last year out of sight. So, part of our strategy, if you will, is to go ahead and not only deal with the porch pirate issue, but also the boxes, because we have seen an extraordinary amount of boxes coming to homes now since Covid. It's like it's the holidays all year round. So, our NSAs and that messaging will be ramped up, so to speak, with that interaction with our residents as well, as far as the deadline on doing this.

Mayor Lago: Maria, yes ma'am.

Ms. Cruz: Forgot my title again. Alright. You know I love you Ed. So let me say that first. But having said that, we've been talking about this for some time now, okay. We had somebody here, I think it was whoever oversees NSAs, and at that point we were told we wouldn't use door hangers, because that tells people that there's nobody at home. So, there was going to be something printed to give the NSAs to give out. I haven't seen anything printed, number one. Number two, when we had that discussion, okay, Mr. City Manager, we said that if the older people like me, whose hands hurt, could not undo the boxes that we could just put them next to the recycle bin and they were picked up, and they have been getting picked up, okay. No issue. But this discussion was not only about cardboard boxes. This discussion was about all kinds of sanitation, rules and regulations, because when we discussed this before, we were also talking about the people that now have moved to Coral Gables and think that they live in Miami-Dade and they take out the garbage cans and put them by the swales; and the people that take out the recyclable, uncovered recyclable bins up to now, and put them by the swale, and then you have to see them that whole day. Because you know, they take them out, but they forget to take them in. So that pamphlet or piece of paper, whatever it was that the NSAs were going to give the residents included most of the stuff that was in the video, including the garbage cans and the bins, okay. So, it's not just the cardboard. It's everything that has to do with sanitation that we are having a big problem, because we look, you know we don't look like Coral Gables anymore, okay. That was the issue. So, the sooner we can get that pamphlet, card, booklet, piece of paper, whatever it is that we can put in the hands of the wonderful NSAs and let me say that Co-Mayor Lago and I live in the same area, and we have the best NSA and...and he does a wonderful job, but he has to have all the tools. If he doesn't have something to give them, it's very hard to make it happen, alright. And let me tell you, this morning it was like cardboard heaven. Every street that I drove there were piles.

Mayor Lago: Except for my house. My house had the cardboard stacked up ready to go.

Ms. Cruz: Well, mine was next to the recyclable bin, okay. So, we do need help. Definitely we need help, or we might as well forget about the whole thing. Bring in the rolling garbage cans and let's put them by the road and when they fall down, we'll have the garbage on the road.

Mayor Lago: Well, the whole point is to save money and do what's right by the environment.

Ms. Cruz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Hopefully at the end of the year, we'll go back to the Manager, and I'll ask, I'm going to ask for, what was our dumping fee or waste fee our totals in regard to cardboard and hopefully you'll see a decline, you'll see a decline as a result of removing cardboard from the waste.

Ms. Cruz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: That's the goal.

Ms. Cruz: And when you all decide what you're going to offer the residents to get rid of the trash pits, I have some people waiting to hear, so we can join...

Mayor Lago: I'm waiting for staff who said they were going to put together and devise a plan in regard to trash pits, to offer some sort of incentive program.

Ms. Cruz: There are some people on Miller waiting, by the way.

Mayor Lago: I know. I know.

Ms. Cruz: But once again, Mr. Mayor, and I know that you all have heard this before, but I can't keep from reminding you that you tell the staff, you all, you all tell the staff what you would like to see. The staff has to have time to think whether they want to go along with it. If they go along with it, they'll move a little faster, but if they don't want to see it happen, they'll take a long time because you all are going to forget, and unless some old lady comes and reminds you sometimes, it goes down through the black hole. Okay.

Mayor Lago: We won't forget. Staff doesn't do that. Staff doesn't do that.

Ms. Cruz: Please. Alright.

Mayor Lago: Staff is working hard; they are working to address our agenda.

Chief Hudak: Mr. Mayor, for the comment, I want to clarify this to the Co-Mayor. The door hangers – we don't necessarily...

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Ms. Cruz: We don't want those.

Chief Hudak: I know. But we are still going to hand those out, and as seen in the videos, I will drive the enwrap over to your house and crush your boxes anytime you want me to. I will come right down Miller Road, take out the tree you want taken out, fix the circle and crush the box all at one time.

Ms. Cruz: Now he just brought up...

Mayor Lago: Order in the court. Order in the court.

Ms. Cruz: Did you hear what he just said?

Mayor Lago: I got it.

Ms. Cruz: Fix – f-i-x. Its not a circle, it's a roundabout.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, let's move onto City Manager items

Ms. Cruz: He reminded me.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Ms. Cruz: Thank you.