

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-1
February 24, 2015
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

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark

City Attorney, Craig E. Leen

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Works Director, Glenn Kephart

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-1 [1:23:27 p.m.]

Update on the Residential Sidewalk Restoration Program

Mayor Cason: Let's move onto H-1. This is an update on the Residential Sidewalk Restoration Program. City Manager?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And I'm going to ask Glenn Kephart to come forward. This is a follow-up from a request from a Commission, where you wanted an update on what's happening with the residential sidewalk program.

Mr. Kephart: Good afternoon Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to come here and give you an update on a program that restores restoration of the neighborhood sidewalks throughout the City. Last year in the Capital Improvement Program Budget you improved \$2 million for the restoration of sidewalks citywide, residential sidewalks, citywide that had become damaged over the years due to City trees and other causes. And then we discussed that with you several times on a program and on October 28th you approved an actual

program to begin that restoration. At that time we had estimated that there were approximately 10 miles in length of City sidewalks that needed restored and repaired and replaced, and we actually begin the construction of that program in December this past year, and have been working aggressively since that time. Out of the 10 miles, currently we have completed about a third of that, which amounts to over three miles or approximately 75,000 square feet, or 15,000 linear feet, and that number is changing daily. The program has been going well.

Mayor Cason: Two contractors?

Mr. Kephart: We have two contractors working. It's the same contractor with two different crews. Its Metro Express, we talked about, and they've been doing a good job. I think we've been getting good feedback from our neighbors, and what we did is we've created a map, which a similar map is on the website, so we can keep the community apprised of the progress we are making and where we are at and how it's going. And if you look at these maps, if you see the green areas marked 1 and 2; 1 and 2 coincides with the months of the year, those areas have been completed. We did the Craft section first and then the northwest section of Gables second. They happen to be probably the two worst areas, residential areas because of the age of the trees and the width of the swales. We are currently working in the yellow area, which is 3, and 3 means that it will be occurring this month, actually through March and should be completed in March; and then the blue is 4, that's the next section of the City we'll go to. We should complete that in April, and so forth, and you can see we should by May have, by early this summer we should have all the sidewalks north of U.S.-1 completed, and then we go south. The areas that we have done so far, based on our preliminary estimates are the highest concentration areas with the greatest degree of sidewalks that need repair. And I'm also pleased to tell you that based on our preliminary surveys, we estimated those particular areas would have about a six and-a-half percent replacement rate, and we are right on target with that.

Commissioner Lago: Can I ask just one quick question. How are we doing?—I know we spoke about it before, when the project was just commencing, in reference to replacing all these sidewalks and having the issue whether they are adjacent to rather large mature trees, and then stopping the future destruction of the sidewalk, are we using some sort of fiber system to protect the sidewalks that we don't have the same occurrences?

Mr. Kephart: We are using various methods and our Public Service Director has been keeping an eye on this also, but most of the time we are strategically cutting roots, sometimes we are raising the sidewalk and elevation to allow for the roots to go, and we haven't done too much of the actual root barrier, but we've been doing multiple things and it's been going pretty well.

Commissioner Lago: Let me tell you that I am fortunate enough to be able to drive on the way to work. I live in North Gables, and I've seen the magnitude of the project that's underway, that's going on currently, and Metro Express has been doing an incredible job. I've been noticing that they have been replacing sidewalks efficiently without compromising safety, so they are doing a really, really good job, and I've received probably at least two or three dozen phone calls from residents who are super excited about the fact that it's been, I think close to 30 years...

Mayor Cason: 30-40 years.

Commissioner Lago: Forty (40) years since the sidewalks had been replaced in the City, and I just wanted to make sure that everybody is aware and I don't want to steal the Mayor's thunder, but this is monies that were budgeted over the last few years, so we are not incurring any debt with this, in my understanding, so. This is something that's going to bring up the value of the homes; people are super excited about it. I got an e-mail the other day from a friend of ours, E.J. Martinez, who had his sidewalk corrected in front of his home, he's got a three year old son who wasn't able to use his toys or his bike because of how bad the sidewalk was, and for the first time the sidewalk has been replaced. That's what Coral Gables is all about.

Mayor Cason: And I've been very impressed with the efficiency they are going about it, with the forklifts, they are really fast. It's like an assembly line; they are doing a terrific job.

Mr. Kephart: I'd like to add too. Our contractor is doing a good job, but they are also doing a good job because of a couple of staff members that we have and Mike Grant is overseeing the construction administration, along with Ludwig Gunega, who is overseeing the design and they are going out ahead, they are actually – you'll see white marks on the sidewalk. As fast as they are going, more than 15,000 linear feet, they are staying ahead of the contractor and properly identifying the right sidewalks to replace.

Commissioner Lago: Let me ask you another quick question. I know we discussed this and I know there may not be an answer for us today, and I know that we had some time with the City Manager and she's been copied on this, but I received two e-mails, I think you were copied on both of them, I forwarded them to you. In reference to areas in our City which do not have sidewalks or where the sidewalk just basically ends adjacent to someone's property and that individual wants to continue the sidewalk. That happens in my property and that happens in the adjacent property, it happens on Granada. Are we coming up with some sort of plan or answer or guidelines for those homeowners who have an interest in potentially exploring putting sidewalks in their neighborhood?- are there guidelines where they have to follow?- I guess build some consensus in regards to the adjacent neighbors, notification in regards to fees associated with this, what are we doing?- or what's the plan for this?

Mr. Kephart: I can tell you that from staff's perspective and the City Manager, and I haven't had a full discussion on this, other than that there is a need, but we believe, and Jessica and I have had a lot of discussion about putting together a program that we would recommend for this upcoming budget year to address that, because there certainly is a need. When we get caught up and we get the requests all over the City, and if we are going to become more pedestrian-friendly it's all part of that, and there is no program currently. We have to sort of figure it out with the neighborhood, go through an assessment district, and we'd like to discuss some options, be looking at what other cities have done and maybe putting together a program to discuss...

Commissioner Lago: Let me tell you, just so you know. The two individuals that spoke with me, that I think we had a conversation with them, they were adamant about the fact that they are willing to pay for the sidewalk. They don't want City assistance – they said, listen we'll pay for the sidewalk. All we need to know is give us a document which gives us a five-point plan in reference to every homeowner on the block needs to fill this out, and when you reach a certain threshold then we'll get the sidewalks.

Mayor Cason: There really is “no rhyme or reason” why some streets – we have sidewalks sort of stop....

Commissioner Keon: But historically in the City neighborhoods paid for their own sidewalks and that's how they were built, is that people got together, they wanted sidewalks, they put in sidewalks and there are some neighborhoods and some streets to this day do not want sidewalks on their streets because they like that large swale area, I don't know if it gives them, makes them feel like they have a big yard...

Mayor Cason: A number of them think the swale belongs to them.

Commissioner Keon: But it is – it was that you did pay to have sidewalks put in as the City...so now you think, to need to figure out a way to be able to offer that to people if they want it.

Mayor Cason: Come back with a plan – that's the next stage, and those of us that push baby carriages with grandkids know that you go from sidewalk to mud into the street, over the tree roots where there is a path that's been done by the DEER or something and then you come out on the sidewalk. I think somebody in the audience here as well – I've been pushing baby carriages sometimes and the wheel comes off and I hit a root, so.

Commissioner Lago: The Mayor just said that's the next step, and I want to make sure that we really put it on the record, that we took a huge step this year, something that hasn't happened in

40 years, and I think that's something that the Commission should be really, really proud of, because I talk to the residents all the time and they are ecstatic something as simple as replacing sidewalks.

Mayor Cason: So sidewalks, trees, and painting.

Mr. Kephart: And I would add to that, I mean staff is very grateful that you funded this program, it's a need and it's something that I'm glad that we are able to take care of this year, and we likely is very pleased to come to you with a program to extend sidewalks and other parts of the City.

Mayor Cason: I was going to ask the Attorney how much does this potentially going to reduce our liability?-if people trip and fall on sidewalks.

Commissioner Keon: Sovereign immunity –

Commissioner Lago: That's a good question.

Mayor Cason: It is a good question because I know we've had cases that people don't know who to sue, because they fell in front of a City street, a City sidewalk, their residence, but the problem with this will probably reduce trips and falls.

Commissioner Lago: Which has also been an issue on Miracle Mile.

Commissioner Keon: But in our Code, it calls for the homeowner to be responsible for their sidewalk, so it is the homeowner that generally is the first person that they can go against, but the City always comes in because of sovereign immunity, I think it limits whatever our liability is anyway.

Mayor Cason: Let us know sort of monthly progress, maybe e-mails or something, so we know what to tell people how far we are toward – you said we have one-third sort of roughly three miles worth of ten are done.

Commissioner Keon: I would like to see – I mean actually I think when there are some projects going on in the City that are really important and are of great benefit to our residents and in our commercial areas, that we would want to have a regular update on those projects at this meeting, so that they are televised and notified and people are made aware of them, so that we can identify those and have those kinds of updates, just a very quick update once a month on some significant projects in the City.

Mayor Cason: It's a good idea.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much. Good work Glenn, thanks.

Mr. Kephart: Thank you.

[End: 1:35:05 p.m.]