

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
October 27, 2015
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Sustainability Specialist, Matt Anderson
Assistant Director Public Works, Jessica Keller

Public Speaker(s)

Mark Trowbridge, President, Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce
Rhonda Anderson, Coral Gables Resident

Agenda Item F-3 [Start: 10:14:54 a.m.]

A Resolution encouraging City of Coral Gables residents, businesses, vendors and visitors to cease using and purchasing products made from expanded polystyrene and replacing expanded polystyrene products with reusable, recyclable and compostable alternatives that are safer for human health and the environment.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Lago)

Mayor Cason: Let's move to Item F-3, this is Commissioner Lago's.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you Mayor. I'll make this brief. Basically, the purpose of and I wanted to see if I can maybe have some of our staff step up here. I just want to give you a few

points in reference to why I'm bringing this potential polystyrene product and reusable, I hate to use the word ban, but basically ceasing usage of this product, not only in the private but also in the public sector and I wanted our staff to see a little bit of a background in reference to what we are trying to do with the resolution, and then I'm going to give you more information of why I'm trying to drive this forward, hopefully we can get some consensus here.

Mr. Anderson: Good morning Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Matt Anderson, Sustainability Specialist for the City of Coral Gables. Basically what this resolution is asking, we are encouraging our residents, our businesses, our vendors, our visitors basically to cease using and purchasing products that are made from polystyrene, most commonly known as Styrofoam, and replacing those products with materials that are more sustainable, more reusable, recyclable, compostable, and polystyrene is a petroleum based product and it's not readily bio-degradable or recyclable and actually takes hundreds of thousands of years to degrade in the environment. So it's very harmful and we actually had seen a percentage of our litter in the City is coming from polystyrene and numerous local municipalities have actually passed ordinances banning polystyrene, such as Miami Beach who's taken the most aggressive of it locally; Bal Harbor, Surfside, and Key Biscayne are some other examples that have done it; and we think that this resolution which has been unanimously supported by the Sustainability Advisory Board will help us preserve our environment in our City and is necessary for the preservation of public health safety and the welfare of our residents.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you sir. What we have here before us today is a resolution and I want to make, if we can get support for this resolution the next step that I would like to proffer with the help of our City Attorney would be to move forward with an ordinance in a similar fashion as Miami Beach did. I don't know if everybody here is aware, but when you use polystyrene products that has carcinogens in it, which leaks into the food and it leaks into the water or beverage that you are drinking, that's a fact, there is no debate in regards to that. Another main important issue is that when you think about all the waste that is produced, over 15 percent of the waste that is produced in this country come from polystyrene products. If you would tell me they would come from recycled products or from items that could be broken down through some sort of compost, this is not an option, this is thousands of years and if you burn this

it hurts the environment, so there really is no incineration, so it's even a double-edged sword; and this is just an issue about a cheap product when, I think that we should heed the warning of what we've seen before us as the Mayor has brought on two occasions, sea level rise, a bunch of other issues that we are having with the environment. This is a simple process where we can just get rid of using polystyrene, we wouldn't be the first to do it, we'd be following suit of other municipalities. I think the State of California on a whole throughout the entire state already has a full-fledge ban on polystyrene; and there is a whole smorgasbord of different products that can be used to replace polystyrene that are pro-environment that would benefit this, and I think that as a City we lead on so many examples, like Commissioner Keon just lead on behalf of Uber and Lift, I think we really need to step forward and lead on this because this is not only about the present, this is truly about the future. Our marine life, another main issue is, like we've discussed on many occasions, we have over, I think 40 miles of coast here in the City. You know that what ends up happening is that another problem with polystyrene is that it breaks up into a lot of small pieces and then what ends up happening it blows in the wind and ends up in the water. A lot of our marine life, a lot of the mammals that live in our seas here, they basically end up eating this product and end up dying because it doesn't degrade, it doesn't get absorbed into the system. So this is another reason why I think that we should make a positive step forward and send a clear message in this resolution that we are going to really take our environment into account and that we are going to move forward in offering different opportunities and I'd like to hear the Chamber's view.

Mayor Cason: The Chamber's view.

Mr. Trowbridge: Well thank you again. Again, Mark Trowbridge with the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce. We have about 160 restaurants in the City Beautiful and the majority of those are members of the Chamber. We met with them at the end of September with the understanding that the Commission was going to bring forward this discussion, and I was actually very pleasantly surprised to see not one restaurant who was in attendance that they be opposed to this issue, and the main reason was most of them have already moved away from using polystyrene products and so they have been kind of part of this process for some time. They've been educating themselves and they get a lot of pushback from their own customers

who look at that and say, we don't want you using that type of material for takeout or for other uses. So, I'm pleased to let you know, obviously we would need to educate those that were not there at that meeting, that are not members of the Chamber, but we would be glad to work with the B.I.D. and other entities to share that. I know this is a resolution that moves us to a more formal process and so we would work to gather any other anecdotal data; and I would just encourage you to set a timeframe where there is an opportunity for implementation. Give folks some time to look at their own internal procurement processes and helping them identify those types of products that can then be used in lieu of what may have strands of polystyrene in them and help them lead the way with you so that it's a cohesive and collegial effort.

Commissioner Lago: Let me just give you – and first of all, I want to thank the Chamber because I think we had two or three conversations in regards to this and the Chamber has always lead from the front in regards to a lot of issues and this being one of them; and also want to thank our sustainability group who is here, who has really been, the organization has been revamped and they are doing a lot of great things and we are very excited about what they are doing. I just want to read you a quick excerpt from the Surfside Foundation which talks about what Mark is mentioning right now. On September 2, 2014, the Miami Beach City Commission voted to approve an ordinance to restrict the use and sale of EPS foam coolers and food ware in the City limits, both in the public and private sector. The ban will begin enforcing with public education, then transition to a warning system, and finally to issuing fines for violations by November of 2016. So you are talking about a long, almost year to year and-a-half process, where we don't want to fine people. We just want people to understand that basically there are carcinogens in this product, it's not good for your health, number one; and number two, and it's not good for the environment on all levels. So let's try to push this forward and be the leaders that the City is and push our other municipalities that about us to understand that they should also follow suit.

Mr. Trowbridge: And we moved the program up that we were going to do early in 2016 to this upcoming month on reduce, reuse, and recycle, and it will focus on this potential ordinance and I want to thank again, the City as well and their group and Matt is active and engaged and I really appreciate that, but we'll help take the lead with you and just give us some direction, but I appreciate the time for implementation because we are going to be a little bit different than

Miami Beach, I mean I talk about the restaurants, we don't necessarily have the retail outlets that might be selling coolers and those types of products, but they are there, they are out there and so we'll have to look at that, but I think the warning system and doing it in a positive educational way will really pave the way.

Commissioner Keon: Can I ask a question on that? When you talk about these products, those are specifically Styrofoam cups, is that right?- Styrofoam...

Commissioner Lago: Styrofoam cups, Styrofoam plates, which by the way, the City Manager when I met with her, she was very clear to me, look the City has already stepped in that direction. We have already stopping the usage of these products, the key here is just to now get buy-in from the private sector, which as we all know, the private sector is always ahead of the public sector and they understand, they are very clear to understand, this is not in the best interest of the community as-a-whole.

Commissioner Keon: But that includes like those peanuts that go into packing that sort of thing.

Mr. Trowbridge: You may have to the folks at like Kinkos or a shipping store...look at a landscape survey.

Commissioner Keon: Right – that packing stuff.

Commissioner Lago: The problem is when you get a shipment, let's say from outside Miami or outside the state, its full of those.

Commissioner Keon: Yes, its full of those peanuts.

Commissioner Lago: Again, we are trying to push this agenda, but I don't want to hurt anybody who receives a package from Ohio or from New York and they have some packing peanuts in it.

Commissioner Keon: Does bubble wrap is that a good replacement for that or no?

Commissioner Lago: But there are options; there are other alternatives. Let's say when you buy something from New York, you can say please don't send me the crushed peanuts, send me something that's bio-degradable. There is that option because I've taken that option.

Commissioner Slesnick: Is it on the mailing slips?- I mean we order wine and it comes with these things, humongous Styrofoam containers.

Commissioner Keon: Styrofoam things.

Commissioner Lago: You call them and you say, listen, I would prefer an option, they will adhere to your request because they want your business, they literally want your business.

Mr. Trowbridge: Feel free to buy locally...

Commissioner Slesnick: That's true, that's true.

Mayor Cason: This resolution is just encouraging, it's the first step, so I think we can discuss alternatives...

Mr. Trowbridge: We can come back and let's continue to do some of that anecdotal – I'd love to bring some of our business leaders who maybe have gone through that transition. I think of people like Abe Eng who are doing that both in the business, but also even sustainable fisheries and things like that.

Commissioner Lago: I would love to have that, but the key is just hopefully in January to bring forth an ordinance, which takes that step forward and again, you along with Commissioners Keon, Slesnick, brought up a great point, what we are doing right now is we are also educating on issues that are outside of our control. When you do order outside the City, outside the state, outside the country, if you just ask, trust me, you'll be astounded to see how people are willing to comply because they want your business, and people are ready to comply.

Commissioner Keon: Can we do things like, is it possible to ask like at Kinkos to ask that they post a sign that says, you have the option as to how you want your product packed?

Mr. Trowbridge: You could even go a step further of creating some type of recognition for those businesses that is doing positive sustainable things.

Commissioner Keon: I think that if there is a sign that tells people you have the option to have your item packed in a bio-degradable whatever, I think people will take it. I think people

oftentimes they don't know and I'm not sure that everybody knows that polystyrene products are Styrofoam and they are peanuts.

Mr. Trowbridge: Styrofoam is technically a brand, technically a brand...

Commissioner Keon: It's a brand, but you know...

Mr. Trowbridge: But we are going on your ordinance we are talking about.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Mayor Cason: We have one person who wanted to speak, Rhonda Anderson, do you still want to speak?

Ms. Anderson: While you are under consideration of this matter, I wanted to bring the thought to what do we do with all the Styrofoam from the toys around Christmas? Can the Commission do something about that, such as having it on a special pickup after Christmas and its not end up in our landfills as well.

Commissioner Lago: Can I just interject for one second. I've been doing a little research and I want to be honest with you and answer you, that's where its going to go. You can't recycle polystyrene, there is no recycling unless you are planning on taking it home with you and offering it to people who may use it to pack certain items and ship it, there is really no recycling. Jessy would you like to talk about the fact, if you put polystyrene in the recycling bin what ends up happening.

Ms. Keller: It goes to the landfill.

Commissioner Lago: It goes to the landfill. I made that mistake and I ask Jessica, she said no, that doesn't get recycled.

Ms. Anderson: OK. Well we'll end up with a misconception because Publix is collecting it and places like that are collecting it, so what are they doing with it other than putting it in the landfill.

Ms. Keller: I can't speak specifically to what Publix does, but there are similar to how Waste Management doesn't collect plastic bags because they don't have a market for it, but Publix may have a market for it someplace else.

Ms. Anderson: OK.

Commissioner Lago: They may reuse it for something else, but I think it's a great idea and we'll explore it, I don't have an issue at all seeing if we can do something.

Mayor Cason: And we can research where Publix...

Ms. Keller: And...Publix as an example, I'm not positive.

Commissioner Lago: Can you do me a favor, can you find out to see if that is an opportunity.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Maybe they know something we don't know.

Commissioner Lago: Maybe they found something, again, maybe I'm wrong, I could be wrong, is there anything that maybe they are doing that we are not entertaining.

Ms. Keller: I'll look into it.

Commissioner Keon: Or they have an outlet.

Mayor Cason: Any other points that you'd like to make on this?

Ms. Anderson: Not necessarily on polystyrene, but I wanted to bring you an article and share it with you all. I made some highlighting on it; it does deal with the sustainability issues, it does with the water intrusion, erosion of the limestone, things that are going to impact this community greatly, and we have a great opportunity at this time since we doing so much rebuilding to rebuild correctly, such as do we require rain water retention to water the lawns, since we are going to have reduced rain, etc.

Commissioner Lago: Can you do me a favor also, can you give me your contact information so that maybe I can contact you after?

Ms. Anderson: Yes, I will.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you very much, I appreciate it. Thank you for making the time to be here.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So moved.

Mayor Cason: Vice Mayor makes the motion.

Commissioner Keon: I'll second.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Keon – City Clerk.

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

[End: 10:29:18 a.m.]