

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
March 28, 2017
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
Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-2 [2:07:00 p.m.]

A Resolution approving an interlocal and mutual aid agreement between the City of Miami and the City of Coral Gables providing for the creation of a joint enforcement zone, provision of law enforcement services and creating a multi-agency anti-prostitution and human trafficking task force. (Sponsored by Commissioner Lago)

Mayor Cason: Let's move next to F-2.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, Item F-2 is a Resolution approving an interlocal and mutual aid agreement between the City of Miami and the City of Coral Gables providing for the creation of a joint enforcement zone, provision of law enforcement services and creating a multi-agency anti-prostitution and human trafficking task force. This is sponsored by Commissioner Lago. Miriam Ramos, the City's Prosecutor is here to speak about it. I know Frank Fernandez; the Director of Public Safety has worked on this. You also have I believe Chief Hudak over there in

the back, everyone's here to talk about it. The one point I wanted to make was that this has gone to the City of Miami, they have deferred the item, because their Chief wants to talk to us a little bit more about it, but my understanding is they are still generally supportive of it, we are still going forward with it. So, what would happen today is, assuming the Commission supports it, you would approve it, and then you would grant the City Manager and I the authority to conform it within the purpose that you've indicated in the resolution, but conform it to match whatever the City of Miami approves, so that we can then sign an agreement. My understanding is that they are going to go forward with this at their next meeting and the reason why they deferred it was that their Chief of Police was out of, I guess vacation for approximately a month, so was just not able to have enough time to look at it and wanted that time, so that's why they deferred the item. But, my understanding is that there is support for the item on both sides. City Prosecutor any thoughts?

Deputy City Attorney Ramos: The agreement basically, as we said, this is in form right, there are minor edits that could occur after the City of Miami Chief looks at it, but essentially we have a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with our neighboring municipalities for other types of things, so emergencies during a hurricane, things like that. This is a specific MOU to target a specific issue, and it came up after we looked at the motel on our side and we have the one hour rental. While, this doesn't address that on the Miami side, because that's something that Miami has to do, it adjusted the underlying problem, which is the proliferation of human trafficking and prostitution that occurs in that particular corridor, essentially from 57th Avenue to LeJeune along 8th Street, and would allow us for our officers to conduct traffic stops slightly into the Miami jurisdiction to combat this type of behavior, because often that's how its caught; and also more importantly to have joint operations and serve as the Director often says as a force multiplier for the City of Miami Police Department to give them the tools that they need, which oftentimes they don't have, because obviously their resources are more strained than, to allow us to go in there with them and conduct, essentially special operations to try to combat these things; and we've seen in the past that when it has been done consistently through a period of time it is very effective and reduces the amount of the activity that's occurring.

Mayor Cason: And as we were discussing in our preliminary meeting, there are street walkers on the corners there, it's not just the motel is the problem; it's the street walkers that then go to the motel.

Deputy City Attorney Ramos: That's correct.

Mayor Cason: So, you have people wandering the streets.

Deputy City Attorney Ramos: And residents of both the City of Miami and the City of Coral Gables will tell you that when they drive late at night they can see these individuals standing there, they are in their car with their children and they have to witness this kind of activity. What typically happens is the pickup occurs kind of on a street corner or on a sidewalk and then exactly was taken into the motel. So, by allowing traffic stops and things like that, we are able to catch these individuals before they take either the victim or the prostitute into the motel.

City Attorney Leen: One other thing, the joint enforcement agreement, the interlocal does allow the City Attorney's office for Miami and the City Attorney's office for Coral Gables to cooperate and work together and bring nuisance abatement type action within the zone. So, that also gives us an additional tool that we can use. So, what I would think is that we would first let the police do their work, their good work to try to address the situation, but if there are specific problems that arise, which cannot necessarily be addressed in a criminal way or through a traffic enforcement type way, then there is also the possibility of civil enforcement through seeking an injunction or going to court, so that also is preserved through this interlocal agreement.

Commissioner Lago: If I may Mayor, if I can just have the Chief come up one second, if he's available. I want to get his input, also with Mr. Fernandez input in regards to this issue, because I'm bringing something to you that I'm very passionate about and I've had the pleasure of going on four evening undercover surveillances with the City of Miami and they have exceptional officers and this is something, which I've been reached out to by several neighbors in the North Gables; and again, a lot of us are fortunate where we don't have prostitutes, drug dealers or pimps a stone's throw away from where you live, but once you've seen it with your own eyes, you can't turn a blind eye to it. I'm pretty sure that the creation of the joint enforcement task force will disrupt criminal activity through joint proactive law enforcement operations, and will give us the necessary tools to investigate, apprehend, and successfully prosecute offenders in engaging in such nefarious activity. I really think that once the City of Miami and the City of Coral Gables work together and we allow the police to do their job, they do great work, but this will just give them the necessary tools to really go in there and make a dent on this issue. Once the individuals who are not only committing the crimes, both the sellers and the prostitutes and the pimps, but the individuals that are engaging in that, that are going to this area to buy the drugs, that are going to this area to pick up the prostitutes or to deal with human trafficking, once they are made aware, obviously the Herald, the Sun Sentinel, whoever picks up the story, I think it's going to make an impact and you'll see a significant drop in crime. People need to understand that just because you are picking up or you are committing these crimes across the street from Coral Gables, we are still going to take action, it's still unacceptable.

Mayor Cason: And based on the results of the annexation for Little Gables, we may end up eventually with Little Gables with not only on our side, but even more on the other side.

Commissioner Lago: That was one of the points when I met with one of the residents from Little Gables, they had heard about this potential legislation, because I think this is like the third time that we discuss this. Again, I just wanted to hear from the Chief and get his opinion, and again, if you feel that we can change this ordinance, strengthen it, maybe you feel that certain areas are not as productive as we expect it to be, I want your guidance and Assistant City Manager Fernandez also.

Chief Hudak: From a historical perspective, we've worked over the years with the City of Miami on joint task force of this nature when there was a large sweep operation going on, using both our decoy officers as well as the City of Miami decoy officers. What this is going to do is give us a sustainable tool to work both sides of Eighth Street. No in deference to the media, but I'm not sure too many people that are walking the streets are going to read it, however word will spread within that community, meaning the criminal community that they are no longer safe on the north side of Eighth Street from a Coral Gables police officer driving on the south side of Eighth Street. Same thing goes the other way, City of Miami is working something on the north side and they come to the Gables side, we are going to have the ability both jurisdictions. I'm fully in support of doing it like this. I think as we are going to see with possible annexations it's going to give us a little bit broader reach to either intercept. Probably our biggest advantage of doing this is, there could be human trafficking that my officers see day-to-day, and now that we can see both sides of the street and enforce it, that's going to put us a little bit closer to trying and nip that huge problem in the bud. So, I think it's a good partnership on paper that we have experienced in the past with the City of Miami Police Department and I think it's going to continue to show us a good positive way that we can kind of nip it in the bud before it comes on our streets.

Commissioner Lago: Through the Mayor, if I may, can you just give us a recap in reference to the hotel, the motel ordinance that we passed, I think probably about six months ago and how effective that's been.

Chief Hudak: What our concern was and from the intelligence standpoint is that there were people who were charging by the hour. Depending on what the rates were, is if they were actually buying it for the whole day and then using it multiple times. So, I believe that kind of sent the message when we put the ordinance in effect and we addressed it to the hotels on our side that they could possibly move to the north side of Eighth Street, which was outside of our jurisdiction. Now we may not be enforcing that ordinance on the north side, however, it's going to give us the ability to look into those parking lots, see what's going on, establish surveillance, so if they were to come back on our side we'd be able to use that tool, if you will, to intercept,

find out who is coming into the City. With the annexation coming in for Little Gables, we'll proceed forward, if we get that, it's going to give us even a broader swath to patrol that area.

Mayor Cason: Any other discussion?

Commissioner Keon: I think it's a great idea, particularly if they can effect human trafficking and can deal with those issues that we know that are related to prostitution to the women themselves. I think it's a great thing.

Commissioner Lago: I'd like to say one last thing. I wanted to commend Commissioner Suarez from the City of Miami. He's been an exceptional partner in reference to potentially getting this ordinance passed, not only in the City of Coral Gables, but in the City of Miami. We hope it will come to the next Commission meeting in the City of Miami and he's given me his word. Again, we are only going to be able to achieve as much as possible with the aide and the true commitment of the City of Miami, so the City of Miami buys in, I think that this ordinance will bear fruit, so I look forward to working with the City of Miami on this issue.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, also in approving this and the Commission could also in doing that, its informing the Chief of Miami that we appreciate them working with us. The whole idea of this is mutual and we appreciate his trust in us and it's mutual.

Mayor Cason: Somebody wants to make a motion.

Commissioner Lago: So moved.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Lago makes the motion, Vice Mayor seconds – City Clerk.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

[End: 2:17:38 p.m.]