

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-6
June 8, 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, Jr.

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant Public Works Director, Al Zamora

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-6 [1:34 p.m.]

A discussion regarding a Commission Workshop to discuss current garbage disposal standards and potential improvements to the existing process. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Let's move onto G-6. This is really simple. I'm requesting and I don't know if you are being contacted, you should have, I sent a memo in regards to having a discussion, a Commission Workshop in regards to our current garbage disposal standards; and I know that Al's here to talk a little bit about that, but I'm looking forward to having a moment we can sit outside the Commission, obviously in the Sunshine, and talk about all issues that we can do or we can address to make the way that we handle garbage in our city and recycling even better.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Good afternoon, Al Zamora, Assistant Public Works Director. We are now called the Solid Waste Division. Actually, this is an excellent topic. This is not only one of the components in our industry that cost us the most money, but it also keeps us up at night. Where to put the stuff? – how to handle the stuff? So, I think this is something that is

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going to shed a lot of light to the disposal end of my business. We have done some things as far as the low hanging fruits. I just wanted to mention, I don't think its mentioned enough that currently we redirect 99 percent of the household garbage that's picked up in the city to the waste to energy facility. That's something that was done a couple of years ago when I started here and there are two factors to that; one, we are being good stewards to the environment; and second, it's actually cheaper, the tipping rate is cheaper at the facility than it is taking it straight to the landfill. Right now, we have an interlocal agreement, as everybody knows, our garbage, household garbage must be taken to one of the facilities and that to me, makes the most sense is taking it there. The one thing I am seeing, I don't know if it's because of Covid or we have seen an increase, about an 8 percent increase in garbage. Unfortunately, there is, and we'll be discussing this a little later on, this interlocal agreement is tied to a CPI increase that comes across every year. And this year we are looking, I think it's at 1.5 percent increase and I'm sure Finance will be able to give you the rundown. The other thing I want to mention is, and I want to give kudos to the residents, our contamination rate and the recycling that we are picking up, that's phenomenal. We are working in partnership to keep that percentage at about 8 percent, and you say, wow, 8 percent – well, a lot of municipalities are at 35-40 percent, and not only are we recovering what we are disposing of, but we are not paying a processing fee that other cities are. Just to give you an idea, we are paying zero right now. We have an agreement with Waste Management, as long as we keep it under 15 percent contamination rate, there is no tipping fee, there is no processing fee. So that's something that needs to be discussed and celebrated. I think that's great.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Thank you for the recap. So, what I want is for my colleagues to please, let's make this a priority, let's meet this month. I really want to have this discussion in regard to what is the future and what changes do we need to make or how can we help Al and his team do the best job they possibly can. I'm seeing a lot of things that come through certain habits of the residents that I think needs to be addressed. I think that we need to find solutions, but I want to be very clear, because we have certain individuals that take this opportunity to run their own agenda and they like to mislead the community. I am not advocating, and I would not advocate, and I don't think anyone on this Commission would advocate for the removal of backdoor service. That is something that has always been part of Coral Gables and sets us apart from other communities. So please, what we want to do is have a candid conversation, we want to have a real conversation about cost associated with garbage, because as you can see later on today, the costs are only going up and we have serious issues where people are coming into our community and I have taken multiple videos, especially around my neck of the woods, where people are taking advantage of our generosity so they don't have to spend money. Eventually we have to stop kicking the can down the curb and we have to address the issues at hand, and that's what I want this meeting to be all about. I want it to be a productive discussion, but I will start and end every meeting with having to preface the meeting with, we are not discussing removing backdoor service. Please do not proliferate that rumor in an effort to intimidate people on the Commission to not have this discussion. It's critical that we talk about issues that we need to face in the city. We are talking about millions and millions and millions of dollars that should not be paid by the City of Coral Gables. We need to find a solution. So, I ask you to please talk to the Manager, talk to the Clerk and let's get a meeting together so we can have this workshop.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor before you move on, we do have a member of the public requesting to speak on this item.

Mayor Lago: That's fine.

City Clerk Urquia: Its Ms. Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Good afternoon. I'm very, very happy that this has been brought up, the fact that the Mayor reenforced the idea that we are not talking about changing the way the placement of our garbage. I think this is very important because people – there are some people that would like to bring it up to get everybody excited, but having said that, it's really very important that we enforce the ordinance. Our garbage cans do not go in the front, our recyclable containers do not go in the front, the go on the side or the back. And unless we do that, today is Tuesday as you know, and every Tuesday I drive up and down and today was a disgrace. There was more garbage recycle bins outside than in; and the workers who are collecting from the side of the street, from the side of the road, instead of telling the people not to do that. So, I am very pleased that we are going to have a discussion. I'm very happy that it's going to be a Sunshine meeting and I think it's very needed if we want to keep our city the way we want it as a City Beautiful, not as a dump. Thank you.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: I'd like to respond to that.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Obviously the Solid Waste Division does not have an enforcement arm, so this is something that should be brought up at this workshop, because right now we tend to pile things on to our Code Compliance Division. I have one person and he is for Public Works. He's a field inspector who is a former Code Compliance Officer. So, Maria brings up a good point. The problem is that I don't have an enforcement arm. I'd just like to clarify that.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, that's one of the many topics that I'm going to be bringing up, because like Maria said, I also see that we have changing behaviors in this community and we need to start educating people in regards to where, when I say people it's both staff and the residents, where are we allowed – I've seen people roll their garbage cans out to the front, I'm seeing it become more and more prevalent. That's not allowed here in the City of Coral Gables. We have backdoor service. We have certain people that won't open their gates which is an issue. So, we make accommodations, but we need to have a real discussion about what we are going to do in regard to a litany of things. By the way, please, when we have more anonymous letters and more blogs that are written about this and more Herald articles, I am not advocating for the removal of trash pits and I'm not advocating for the removal of backdoor pickup, so let's be clear. It's embarrassing that I have to say this over and over and over again.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: And just to clear the record, none of my...

Mayor Lago: I know. But there are a lot of things that we can do, there are a lot of things that we could do without touching and save millions of dollars, and again, those are your taxpayer dollars, so at the end of the day we fund, the General Fund basically has to fund our shortfall in garbage to the tune of almost \$3 million dollars a year, and that's why I think the residents need to be made aware that even though we pay almost \$900 a year for garbage fee, it falls short and that we are continuing to go up because we have more and more green matter and eventually we are going to have to face this issue, and that's what I want to discuss at the workshop. Thank you.

Assistant Public Works Director Zamora: Thank you.