

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-8**  
**August 27, 2024**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson**

**Commissioner Melissa Castro**

**Commissioner Ariel Fernandez**

**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**

**City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Finance Director, Diana Gomez**

**Public Speaker(s)**

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Agenda Item F-8 [3:46 p.m.]

Discussion regarding duplicate residential waste fee bills issued and future methods for calculating and issuing single family residential waste fees. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-8.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Discussion regarding duplicate residential waste fees issued and future methods for calculating and issuing single family residential waste fees.

Commissioner Fernandez: With the noise I heard residential waste fees.

[Laughter]

Vice Mayor Anderson: It might be appropriate, but right now we're talking residential.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. Alright.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm fairly sure, like I, you've all received emails from residents who got duplicate waste fees.

Commissioner Castro: Oh yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And that the reason why they got duplicates is it was based upon the number of units on a piece of property as opposed to the address being serviced historically through our city and the units described by Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser are different for historic properties because they had those little cottages in the back for maid quarters, etc. from a decade or so ago. So, our staff made up an excel sheet. I've talked to a lot of residents as you all have regarding the next steps for the future. In the meantime, when we lowered the waste fee we talked about, we need to start wrapping our heads around a better way to calculate residential waste fees, because the amount that people utilize or I should say, put into waste is different from smaller homes or smaller properties than it is for larger properties. So, somethings that are food for thought and I'd like some input and ideas from staff, not necessarily today, but perhaps let's keep this discussion moving, so we have a conclusion some time I would hope before the end of the year is, you are dealing with the square footage of the homes. You have to deal with the number of bedrooms in a home and you have sizes of yards that all impact differently the amount of waste that a yard produces, albeit some of us have more palm trees and some of us have more trees. So, opening this up for you all to share your thoughts with staff, have meetings with staff and let's bring this in for a landing before the end of the year.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I've been sitting with staff working on a solution, I'll probably be bringing that up to Commission before the end of the year. My target is October after budget season is completed, so that we have enough time to vet it, run it through the community before we have to vote on it in June. So, we're working on a potential way to calculate it that will be a little more equitable. This has been brought up – this isn't the first time I hear this; it's been brought to my attention before. People who don't have two units, but they've been billed for two units in the past, and the reason that some people are being billed for two units now is because we're using the system, the data given to us by Miami-Dade County which has designated certain properties as having two units. So, I'm working on something. I'll probably be presenting it in October.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, this is what I'm going to ask staff. Each and everyone of us need to have meetings with you to discuss alternative proposals and hear your suggestions, so that by the time we come back here in October we can have a more intelligent discussion, that certain proposals back and forth and figure out what's going to work out best for the city and what's going to work out best for the residents.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, I want to be sure we're clear. So, I had three individuals, and I dealt with Gus and their law office in regard to clarifying these residents that were having issues with their bills. Are we talking about a handful or a dozen people, or are we talking about our

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waste altogether? I want to understand because that issue, they are dealing with it, they are dealing with the county. It's pretty straightforward how its got to be addressed, we've got to find a solution. I talked to the DCM about it. We actually met with some of the residents to see how we can get that fixed but are we talking about the entire waste effort or are we just talking about the billing.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I talked about the billing issue because we did it by address in the past and because we have a different computer system, it really shouldn't become a headache for the residents, because our computer system is drawing down data differently, so that's problem number one, and they made up an excel sheet, its roughly 200 residences. Number two, we talked about examining other ways to assess waste fees that is more equitable across the board to residents. Its something we need to explore, and I don't want to wait till May of next year when we have to decide on what the waste bill will be to at least have a robust discussion and the best way is to look at alternative proposals with staff ahead of time and then we can come back and discuss it in October to see if there is a feasible solution. We can also look into additional things that we can do to help bring down waste fees and see if those opportunities are available, in the past they haven't been. So, it will help bring down waste fees at least, a portion of it.

Finance Director Gomez: Diana Gomez, Finance Director. So, in terms of the operations and how to change the operations, that's not something that I would per say. I mean I can work with staff and the City Manager's office to see how that impacts how we bill. So yes, in that sense, we can work together, but in terms of how each unit, how much each unit is going to pay. So right now, if we remember when we reduced the solid waste fee, we're not covering the cost of solid waste. We are subsidizing at this point almost 50 percent, if not a little bit more of the solid waste costs, so that's a discussion that we talked about many times in the past about how are we going to overall bring down solid waste. Operations, I'm not going to pretend to understand how to change the operations of solid waste to make it cost less, but in terms of how we bill, we can discuss, okay, so how much of the solid waste expense are we willing to absorb versus charge and then, how are we going to charge it to individual properties. Its very difficult because – this is just my thoughts, if you do it based on the size of the home that may not be equitable either because sometimes in the smaller homes you have more people living there, sometimes in the larger homes, they are only there for two months out of the year or three months out of the year, and they don't generate any. So, it's very difficult and there is no way for us to know, right. So, our solid waste crew, they go to every house, as long as its an inhabitable house, its not under construction, they will go to the side and pull garbage whether there is garbage there or there is not, they are going to pull it. So, every home has to pay. Regarding the two unit versus one unit, our code has always required that an auxiliary unit pay, that rather the solid waste assessment is per living unit, and so, the living unit information is, we didn't have access to that. There are a lot of properties that do have auxiliary units which they would have to pay one and-a-half units, but we didn't have that distinction per the information that we had. I guess in the past it was really just self-reported. You had to report that you had an auxiliary unit for us to know about it. We never did inspections to see which home

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has or doesn't have. With the new system that came into play, we were able to – I was more involved with that pulling the data in, so as I was seeing the data that is available from the county, I was able to see, oh, they provide us the living unit information, so we might as well use it. And so yes, a lot of people came back and said, hey, its not a full second unit, its not a second address, its not a duplex. Okay, so they fix it with the county and then we are billing them for the one and-a-half units as we should. Whereas they've always had that structure, maybe for 30 years and they've never paid that auxiliary unit fee even though it has always been due, but we're not going back and charging. We are giving a courtesy this year, also letting them have time to work with the county in order to fix it going forward, because we understand that sometimes its difficult dealing with getting information changed. So that's for billing the units that actually that we have the information, and I don't even know, I couldn't even tell you that the county information of the two units or the one and-a-half units is complete either. I'm just billing it based on the information that we have access to. The Property Appraiser's information is the official record of a property, so I thought that is the proper way to do it. But in terms of moving forward as to what we're going to bill or how much we're going to or how we're going to bill different types of properties a different way, I'm not sure, we can talk about that and obviously, I'm willing to meet with everybody and anybody and we can have those discussions to see how we can get there, then I don't know about the operations part of things to say whether or not those operations have to change in order to reduce the cost.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let me give you a hypothetical.

Finance Director Gomez: Sure.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You have some homes that may have one can, some homes have two cans.

Finance Director Gomez: Right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: An auxiliary unit normally would have an additional garbage can because you have an additional person living in there.

Finance Director Gomez: It could. Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Whether it's a rental unit or not.

Finance Director Gomez: Well, its not allowed to be rented.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I understand, but how many cans are filling is one of the indicators. There are many ways that we can slice the bread, but I don't want to be waiting until May to have this discussion. I want my colleagues to start thinking about this now; is there a way we can be more equitable about it; can we look into what we talked about mulching services and the other one was the facility that turned it into char to deal with the yard waste.

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Mayor Lago: Its being done already in Tallahassee.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Its being done in Tallahassee and the other one is supposed to be available here very soon too. Either way the point is, if you can get clean yard waste, such as with the additional pick-ups when you do your tree trimming, you have that special pick-up just for yard trimming, instead of paying a tipping fee on that, you'll pay a lower rate. All this needs to be explored. Does that mean its going to happen this next coming year? – it might not, it might not, but at least if we can start planning and we want to have, for instance, convert the piece of property on 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue for a transfer station for garbage and waste, if we want to offer that out for different landscape firms that are certified and have worked here that they take it out there for us on their way out, as opposed to just dumping it all over the North Gables and so forth, and be able to control waste here a little bit more. I mean these are all discussions that we can have with staff and analyze the feasibility of each and every one of them. Some of them may not be feasible yet, it may not be feasible for two years, we might have to fix the property out of 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and cap it off first because it has issues. But it's a long-term planning project that we need to do. So, we'll have our meetings with staff, we'll bounce around some ideas and let's reconvene in October and have a deeper discussion. That's it.

Commissioner Castro: Agreed.

Mayor Lago: Alright. Thank you.