

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
May 25, 2010
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II
Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.
Commissioner Maria Anderson
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.
Commissioner Wayne “Chip” Withers

City Staff

City Manager, Patrick Salerno
City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Ruben Arias, Representative of County Commissioner Carlos Gimenez

F-2 [Start: 10:42:17 a.m.]

Discussion regarding the City of Coral Gables supporting the resurface project of Sunset Drive from Cocoplum Circle to Red Road to include bicycle lanes.
(Deferred from the May 11, 2010 City Commission Meeting)

Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.

Commissioner Cabrera: Mr. Mayor, I know you took this item out of order, I was just curious that you would take another, if you would consider and the Commission would consider taking another item out of order just to get Mr. Ruben Arias back to County Hall and his priorities working with Commissioner Gimenez, is that something that you would entertain?

Mayor Slesnick: I would certainly entertain it. Without objection we will go to Item F-2.

Commissioner Cabrera: Last time we all met on this item, we discussed it – does it need to be read?- no, it doesn’t require, but what we’re discussing right now, my personal discussion item regarding the City of Coral Gables supporting the resurface project of Sunset Drive from Cocoplum Circle to Red Road to include bicycle lanes, this was deferred at the May 11th Commission meeting. Ladies and gentlemen once again, this is not a City of Coral Gables Public Works project, this is a County Public Works project that to the best of my knowledge is being funded through federal stimulus money, and the way I learned about this project was through a very well meaning citizens who wanted

the city to consider supporting it, but more importantly to support also bicycle lanes between that stretch of road, and there was a fairly lively discussion amongst the Commission about this. This is not about little kids using a roadway, and/or the people I ride with, I ride in packs of 30 and 40 men in spandex, I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about people who commute to and from work, people that are adults that do like to recreate, people that use a bicycle for their primary mode of transportation, and I have to share with all of you that, that road is exceedingly, exceedingly dangerous. I can also tell you that I do take it with the group of folks that I ride with very, very early in the morning when there is only about half a dozen vehicles that we cross or cross us, and there is about 40 of us. So there is strength in numbers, and there is some sort of safety in numbers, but I have to tell you in spite of the time of day, in spite of the fact that I'm surrounded by a group of people that know what they are doing, it's still a very dangerous stretch; and all I'm suggesting is that if the funding is available, if the County is willing, if Commissioner Gimenez' office is able to do this, I guess if the stakeholders, the citizens are willing to support it, but I have a problem with that one because that's public right-of-way, that's not private property, its public right-of-way, and unlike the rest of our swale areas, it happens to be a very wide public right-of-way, much wider than most residential neighborhoods, but nonetheless, if it's the will of this Commission to not move forward with this I understand, but I want this Commission to also understand that until I leave office I'm going to continue to support these kinds of initiatives that makes bicycling a safe recreation, mode of transportation, and it makes it a safe and enjoyable part of this community's lifestyle. With that in mind, I don't know if Mr. Arias would like to join us up here and give us a bit of a background on this issue, and then I guess the Commission would decide what it wants to do. Good morning Mr. Arias.

Mr. Arias: Good morning Mr. Mayor, Commissioner's, Ruben Arias from Commissioner Gimenez' office, I bring you greetings on behalf of Commissioner Gimenez.

Mayor Slesnick: Before you start, I would like to point out that we have hung the County flag now as part of our display.

Commissioner Cabrera: If you get us a District 7 flag, we'll put it up too.

Mr. Arias: Actually we have a collection of flags in our office, and the Coral Gables is hanging there as well. Just a little bit of history on this particular location. Some years ago the County did some minor improvements, drainage and curb improvements on Sunset from 56th to about 54th and when they accomplished that they added a bike lane. Well that has created a lot of questions in the community. As we all know the cycling community has grown and obviously Coral Gables being as green as it is, so many trees, it has attracted a lot of cyclists as well. So over the years both residents and non residents have contacted our office saying, why is it that we have a bike lane that is only two blocks long, then after that it simply disappears. We agree with what Commissioner Cabrera just pointed out, there is right-of-way and there is an opportunity to consider bike lanes on Sunset. Recently the ARRA project funded the resurfacing of that road, and we

thought it would be an opportune moment to consider it. Once the signs went up the calls have continued to come into our office requesting that we add bike lanes. Since it's not a shovel ready project it cannot be included in the ARRA project, but we thought that it would be opportune to also look into this and come to the city to see if there is support from the city to consider that. Since it was deferred last time, our Public Works Department has looked into preliminarily, what it would take financially to undertake that, and this is not something that we are asking the County, I mean the city to consider this, this is simply just for us to know how much funding we would eventually need, and it's not a simple or inexpensive project. Preliminarily, it would be about \$400,000 for the bike lanes.

Commissioner Withers: How much?

Mr. Arias: \$400,000 – Now there are some areas, and this is contemplating all the way up to 57th Avenue, that would require right-of-way acquisition that we don't have at this point, and there is some angle parking that would then have to be changed as well. So it can become quite an expensive project, but it's worth looking into since the community has reached out to our office, and I believe it has reached out to the city as well.

Commissioner Cabrera: Mr. Arias, I'm curious, if this item had not come before this Commission, would the County, let's just take this discussion further, if the County had, and I'm not trying to be critical, but if the County had planned appropriately to include the bicycle lanes, would this government, would it have any kind of approval process? - or would this have been a County initiative without any approvals or input from the City of Coral Gables? Do you know the answer to that question?

Mr. Arias: Yes, but before I answer that, Commissioner Gimenez would never support a project without coming to a city that it's affecting.

Commissioner Cabrera: Yes, I understand.

Mr. Arias: And in this particular stretch of road has a State designation as a historic road, and it also has a County designation as a historic road, both of which require a public hearing...

Commissioner Cabrera: OK.

Mr. Arias: ...So we would have had to go to the community. Before we get to that step, it would be most appropriate to get the support of the city; on the other side is High Pines and Ponce Davis area which is unincorporated.

Commissioner Cabrera: So you would go through a public hearing process for this?

Mr. Arias: Absolutely.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK. I just wanted to clarify that, and I do understand that Commissioner Gimenez would look strongly to the stakeholders affected before he would move on his own process to support or not support something like this. So I appreciate you clarifying that.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Ruben, I have a couple questions. I'm fully supportive of trying to put bike lanes where you put bike lanes, the issue I have of course is what you're talking about, how much of the road would be expanded into the swale area, do you have a number?- is that four feet?

Mr. Arias: At a minimum it would be four feet for each lane, if you consider....

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: So eight feet total.

Mr. Arias:...if you were to consider both lanes in each direction, it would be a minimum four feet. Now, there will be a couple of trees also that would be affected at least on that stretch of road.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I'm comforted by the fact that you plan on having an additional hearing on that with the affected homeowners, because I know from a long time ago that "no good deed goes undone", and I remember when I first got into office here, I remember trying to put sidewalks up and down Granada Boulevard because I thought it was such a great thing, and all the people were jumping up and down because we are taking their area because, even though it was the City of Coral Gables swale area. So when you start chopping off four feet, which is of course a hundred percent a great thing for biking and safety and all that, I think it's going to have a lot of push back from the residents there. Now the bikers are all for it, and I'm for it as a biker, I bike and I love to do it, but I'm concerned about that; I just want to make sure there is a process at the end that the city has something to say about it at the end of the process too, because you might say, Coral Gables, and I think you would do the right thing if there are a bunch of residents upset and we are going to make a call there, but there's got to be some way that the city opines at the end of the process too.

City Attorney Hernandez: Are you doing it on the north side or the south side?

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: They are doing both sides; they are taking four feet each side. So I just want to make sure that we support this, we move forward that if our residents come back and push back on this item that we have some way to revisit the issue.

Commissioner Cabrera: Absolutely – and philosophically, look I would love everything to remain the same, I really, because we both grew up here, and we know the importance of that historic road, but the reality is that it's just simply not the same and it's a dangerous stretch of road. Look at what happened at Old Cutler, they realized it was a

dangerous stretch of road and they created bicycle lanes for cyclists. But by no means do I want this to move forward with the impression that we are not seeking public input and public acceptance on something like this.

Commissioner Withers: I'm not in favor of the project for a couple of issues, just so you know. I don't know what it would do to those store owners from Whip and Dip and all that angle parking, I'm assuming that would all be lost, I don't know where all those folks would park because that's going to go up into their sidewalks, so there would be absolutely no place for retail parking from Cocoplum Women's Club, and if you go north, excuse me, west on Sunset, the angle parking that we have in front of the banks and what was the Beverly Hills Café all that, I assume is history also...

Mr. Arias: That would be an area that....

Commissioner Withers:....so we are going to lose all that angle parking from Cocoplum Women's Club all the way west to Red Road and I just don't think – that's going to put those businesses out of business; and then on the south side of Red Road when you hit the High Pines area where they've got that asphalt walkway in there, I'm assuming the integrity of that's going to be modified. So I think the walking pedestrians along the south side of Sunset will also be compromised, and I don't know how that walking path would be replaced. So you might give up, I think you are giving up pedestrian amenity for bicycle amenity, and for that neighborhood I just don't think it's appropriate.

Mr. Arias: The existing sidewalk on the south side, I think pretty much disappears right after Sunset Elementary, there is nothing there.

Commissioner Withers: I'm talking about from Cocoplum Women's Club west to Red Road on the south side, it's a red asphalt pedestrian walkway, and there is a couple of old monolithic type entrance ways that are there, and I went out and actually walked it off, and there is about three feet from the road to that walkway, which I'm assuming would then be eliminated and you're right, there are a couple of very large banyan trees in there that would have to be removed. I think it's a great idea, but logically I just don't see how that can be accommodated on that stretch of road there, I don't want to lose parking on one side for those retailers, and I really don't want to lose pedestrian amenities for the neighborhood of High Pines on the south side. So that's my explanation for not supporting it. Just so you know, Carlos is a great guy, I like the way Ralph picked up the initiative, but logically I just don't see it would fit for that stretch of road.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK – so....

Commissioner Withers: I'm sorry, but that's just how I feel.

Commissioner Cabrera: And I appreciate it, and I think you bring up some good points, listen, I really respect the fact that you've got some very strong positions on this thing; I

could sit here and tell you that I don't believe the pedestrian access is going to be handicapped because I think they are trying to look at the entire street. One of the gentlemen that serves on my ad hoc cycling committee, Robert Ruano, I believe he's an engineer, and he's made it very clear when the County looks at these kinds of initiatives, you not only have to look at, OK, what's it going to do for the bicycles, what is it going to do for the pedestrian, what's it going to do for the traffic flow, the volume. So I understand your concerns and they are well founded. I simply wanted to show support for something that I believe we need to take a stronger position on in this community, in this state, in this nation, and that is, this is a greening initiative, this is a way to get people out of cars, and into bicycles, but I do understand, Chip, and I appreciate your honesty and candor. So at this juncture all I can ask for is a motion that this Commission support the efforts of District 7 Commissioner Carlos Gimenez, with the understanding that nothing has been finalized, there will be a public process in all of this, and in fact this Commission may get the opportunity to give a final decision on its ability to support something like this. I would ask you that you consider the following: I would ask you that you consider supporting this from a fundamental and philosophical standpoint and allow the process to move forward, and at least show to the County that this city is progressive enough to want to see bicycle lanes on a very dangerous stretch of road.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: As long as it's going to come back here, as you said.

Commissioner Cabrera: I just said that.

Mayor Slesnick: I don't think – why would we need to vote on anything?

Commissioner Cabrera: We don't, you chair this thing...

Mayor Slesnick: No, no, but I'm saying if Carlos is proceeding on, I would not want to hinder nor would I....

Commissioner Cabrera: Well you are not going to.

Mayor Slesnick: That's what I meant, I don't want to do anything in the sense of letting him proceed when it gets back to us, it gets back to us with all the information.

Commissioner Cabrera: OK. Listen, I've got so many other things that I want to bring to this Commission...

Mayor Slesnick: Ralph, really listen, you know I'm very supportive of lots of things that you want to do with bicycles, not because you want to do them because it's the right thing...

Commissioner Cabrera: Good for the community.

Mayor Slesnick:...but I just don't know that voting sends a message that we really analyze the situation and understand it.

Commissioner Cabrera: Now listen, I guess what is frustrating for me, not with you all, but what continually frustrates me is the bureaucracy of government and the fact that we've got a master plan for bicycle lanes in this city, and we can't get off the dime on it because we lack the funding or we lack the initiative or making it a priority.

Mayor Slesnick: Sunset – does that master plan include that area?

Commissioner Cabrera: To the best of my recollection it had a stretch, but I'm not a hundred percent sure, so I may be incorrect to say that it included Sunset, but you know what the master plan included?- Ponce, OK, and we missed that opportunity, I mean, it was like lights on, nobody was home. So we lost that opportunity with Ponce and I just don't want to see any more lost opportunities, because the reality is the chances of repaving Sunset again won't come for another 20-30 years, depending on funding. Here is that window that we are looking for, but I realize we may be premature, but you know what?- if I don't keep this in the forefront, it's not going to get the attention that it requires.

Mayor Slesnick: I appreciate this discussion, I appreciate you brought it, I appreciate your coming.

Mr. Arias: Mr. Mayor one last clarification, Commissioner Gimenez will not move forward on an item that is not supported by the City of Coral Gables, which is one of the cities he represents.

Commissioner Cabrera: And we appreciate that very much. Alright – I'm willing to defer to you as the chair.

Mayor Slesnick: Can we expect another report back on the next step?

Mr. Arias: Whatever is your pleasure. We can ask the...

Commissioner Anderson: What is Commissioner Gimenez...? Before you move forward you said – what would Commissioner Gimenez need, is....some type of support?

Mr. Arias: Just your support. Again, at Public Works all they've done so far is just a preliminary look, they haven't really spent any hard money on coming up with a design. If it's the desire of the Commission to have them come up with a more advanced design that would entail some of these hard costs, and perhaps answer some of the concerns about right-of-way acquisition, angle parking and all of that, we could do that. Again, we would rather not spend additional money in the times we are facing.

Commissioner Cabrera: Because the reality is this may not cause for changes to parking; this may be something that only gets done for – I can tell you the most dangerous part of the road; the most dangerous part of the road is not the downtown area that Commissioner Withers clearly outlined from Whip and Dip to Red Road, that's really not the most dangerous section, the most dangerous section is that residential area that stretches all the way to Cocoplum Circle. So there may be a lot of opportunity for changes and modifications on this thing.

Mayor Slesnick: Is there any way to do a simple artistic thing without getting into measurements and everything else?- but to show us a little bit that we would feel more comfortable saying, yes Commissioner please go forward, Commissioner this looks too daunting for us to handle, just something. I mean to be honest, Ralph describes one thing, Chip is worried about one thing, and I just have no idea.

Commissioner Anderson: Maybe we don't know...

Commissioner Cabrera: I don't disagree with the comments Chip has made.

Mayor Slesnick: And I don't have any visualization of what we are talking about.

Commissioner Withers: Hey Don, I guess we are going to let you liaison with the City Manager's office, is that?- and let the City Manager come back and I guess you can come back also with your architects.

Mr. Arias: The simplest thing on a bike lane is visualize four feet on the shoulder added to each side, and that would be the simplest way of visualizing a bike lane; now again, that's very simplistic.

Mayor Slesnick: But you are talking about cutting off of the pavement?

Mr. Arias:...we are not considering any trees that might be on the right-of-way.

Commissioner Withers: Don, get on your bike meet me on Saturday and we'll ride, because that's what I did.

City Attorney Hernandez: Buy a bicycle.

Commissioner Anderson: But you know what's important?- I think what the Mayor is trying to do, a lot of us are not visual, a lot of our residents aren't visual and they may worry over something that may not need to worry about, or maybe we do need to worry about it. So I think from the drawing standpoint, I think it would be helpful to get that, so we can just talk about it and that way we can see where we go with that.

Commissioner Cabrera: I just really appreciate the fact that I was able to bring this before all of us, and I really appreciate your interest and your support on this issue. I think this is probably the second, the first or second time that we've had the District 7 representative here on a Public Works type related project. So I just very much appreciate all your support and understanding, and incidentally Mr. Arias is a stakeholder, not only is he a County official, he is also a Coral Gables resident.

Commissioner Withers: Is this going to go all the way to U.S. Highway 1 or is it going to stop at Red Road?

Mr. Arias: We've only considered Red Road at this time. I don't know if there is any way to incorporate...

Commissioner Withers: I was just curious; and I don't know if the City Manager has any questions that you might want to address when – you've been kind of silent on this thing over there.

City Manager Salerno: Ruben, thank you, couple of things, I think it would be appropriate if you could have county staff provide additional information to the Commission with respect to a few items. It's my understanding that the ARRA project has already been awarded and is moving forward.

Mr. Arias: That's correct.

City Manager Salerno: OK.

Mr. Arias: They released \$358,000, but mainly resurfacing for that area.

Commissioner Withers: What is the ARRA project?

City Manager Salerno: The project that has been talked about here is a federally funded project.

Mr. Arias: Right – it's a stimulus fund under the American....

City Manager Salerno: The resurfacing of the roadway. It would be helpful, I think, for the Commission to have some information with respect to if that project is let, where is the funding? We are assuming as you said this would be county funded, where are the dollars going to be coming from? - if the project was endorsed.

Mr. Arias: We are not there yet, we don't have the funding at this point.

City Manager Salerno: I know. So you don't know where the funding, I'm just asking a question, if the answer is you don't know then that's fine, but it would be helpful I think

to know that its county dollars and not potentially, at least for the Commission to know it's not city dollars coming out of Impact Fee funds out of our district, because in reality if its Impact Fee funds out of our district then it is so to speak coming from the city, but to have that information I think the Commission as a whole would like to have the benefit of that. It would also be helpful to know, does the historic, the County's Historic Designation Ordinance need to be amended? I think it's been talked about generally, so if you could provide the Commission with an answer to the question, it's from communications that I've seen between Public Works in your office, it states that only intersection safety improvements on historic designated roads can be accommodated, and its suggested that there be an amendment to the ordinance to allow bicycle facilities. So the answer to the question, does that ordinance need to be amended in order for the bike facility to be constructed with whomever dollars are involved?

Mr. Arias: From what you read, it seems that it would need to be amended, it was our understanding that it did not, that bike lanes are exempted, but if it needs to be amended, then obviously that's an extra step that we will need to take over, and consider at the Board of County Commissioners.

City Manager Salerno: OK. Those are the things that I think would be helpful for the Commission to get back, if we could get that information back as to those two points: where is the funding?- if it was, and 2) what's the procedure that would be undertaken as far as, does the ordinance specifically have to be amended first or not. If it does take an ordinance amendment first to do so, then where in the public process might the public become involved?

Mr. Arias: Absolutely.

Commissioner Cabrera: Just to comment on Commissioner Withers question about how far are you going to stretch it, the minute you go on the other side of Red Road, it's no longer Coral Gables, so we are on South Miami land, and you know, that's a whole different world over there. You don't know what you are going to get over there.

Commissioner Withers: So I guess all the bikers will have to turn left on Sunset.

Commissioner Cabrera: We do, we stay away, we don't want to get in any trouble over there, never know what could happen, we might all get fired. Thank you again, OK.

Mr. Arias: Thank you all for this opportunity and Mr. Manager, we will provide you that information to share with the Commission.

City Manager Salerno: Thank you Ruben.

Mayor Slesnick: Thank you. Our regards to the Commissioner too.
[End: 11:08:07 a.m.]