

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-2
February 15, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant City Attorney, Naomi Levi-Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item D-2 [Start: 10:12 a.m.]

Mayor's Comments

An update relating to a Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) resolution which provides the scope of services and the budget required to conduct a study along U.S. 1 from SW 27th Avenue to SW 72nd Street.

Mayor Lago: Item D-2 under Mayor's Comments. I want to update you in regard to the Transportation Planning Organization Resolution, which I sponsored which provides a scope of services and a budget required to conduct a study along U.S.-1, from 27th Avenue to S.W. 72nd Street. During the October 21, 2021, TPO Board meeting, Resolution No. 51-2021 was approved authoring the TPO Executive Director or designee to develop a scope of services and budget to conduct a study along U.S.-1 from 27th Avenue all the way to 72nd Street, to maximize the capacity of this corridor via multi-modal and/or roadway improvements. During the January 20, 2022, TPO meeting, a request to develop a scope of service for a study was approved by the TPO Board. The objective of the study is to conduct a traffic analysis to assess vehicle and pedestrian crossing access along and across U.S.-1, from 27th Avenue to 72nd Street, and provide recommendations to maximize the capacity of this corridor via multi-modal and/or roadway improvements. U.S.-1 is

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an important north/south corridor in Miami-Dade County linking residential communities to Miami's urban core. The study corridor includes the City of Miami, City of Coral Gables, and the City of South Miami. Currently U.S.-1 experiences considerable traffic congestion, specifically between the areas of S.W. 27th Avenue and S.W. 72nd Street in Miami-Dade County. In part due to the increase of commercial and residential development projects in the area. This study will analyze the accessibility and mobility impacts of recently constructed and future approved commercial and residential development projects in the area along the corridor. The study will identify potential congestion locations, bicycle and pedestrian demand, and constraints and evaluate multi-modal transportation improvement needs on future travel demands along and across U.S.-1 from 27th Avenue to 72nd Street. This study will also serve in place for the much-anticipated study that residents were promised five years ago, for U.S.-1 corridor study. At the time the city paid a consultant over \$40,000 and no study was concluded or followed through. As a member of the TPO Board representing the city, I saw the opportunity and thought it was an effective way to use 100 percent of the funding acquired from the Federal Highway Administration Surface Transportation Block Grant Urban Funds. The study is projected to be completed in seven months upon issuance of a notice to proceed. The reason why I mention its 100 percent from Federal Highway Administration Surface Transportation Block Grant Urban Funds is because there has been a miscommunication for some reason that the city is paying for this study. Under no circumstances is the city paying for this study. This is not coming from city tax dollars or from the coffers or any impact fees or anything of such. What we are doing here is taking advantage of an urban block grant fund, which will provide us a much-needed study, finally after years and years and years of discussing it, at no cost to the city. I'm looking forward to the findings of that study and seeing how we can work with the county and with the state to find areas of major congestion. For example, on LeJeune and U.S.-1, major issue now that you've seen projects that have been developed in that area, for example, the Gables Station Project, that's absolute gridlock, on Ponce and LeJeune in the mornings. We need to find ways, even if those ways may take years to implement, but at least we need to have a roadmap to find solutions, and I think this is a good opportunity at no cost to the city. So, I appreciate my colleagues trusting in me as your TPO appointee and if you have any other ideas on how we can make this study even better, please feel free to add. My staff sent this along to you in a memo and we also sent it along to the appropriate city boards for their review, their consideration, and for their ideas. So, thank you for that. My final point is discussing Tallahassee, so I ask Naomi Levi, please join us, so she can give us a quick briefing on the trip and tell our visitors who are joining us today during this Commission meeting, how successful our third trip was during this session.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Good morning, Naomi Levi-Garcia, Assistant City Attorney and Intergovernmental Affairs Manager. Successful is a very good word to describe our last trip, and while I can go on and on, I think a picture says a thousand words. We have a bunch of photos from the trip, if we can please pull them up so we can take a look at all of the individuals who you guys were able to meet with. This is Speaker Pro Tempore Brian Avila, a sponsor of the city's Gondola Building appropriation request. Here we have the Chamber and the entire Commission, also Martha Pantin; Brian Avila again; and here the man of the hour, the Governor, who we were able to meet with. It took a few tries, but we were successful in getting some time on his calendar; and the Mayor in action describing the city, our appropriation request, how much we would hate

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to see the veto pen in action when those requests reach his desk through the budget. Here we have Rep. Nick Duran and the future Speaker, Mr. Perez.

Mayor Lago: This was a great meeting because it shows the bi-partisan effort of two South Florida leaders understanding the importance of what Coral Gables is going through and what we need, so we were able to speak to a Democrat and a Republican explaining to them the needs of South Florida, especially Coral Gables, and they both understand our issues and what we are trying to achieve and why we are visiting Tallahassee.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: And I think that's illustrative of the Dade Delegation this year and the last couple of years, there's a lot of collaboration between the Dems and the Republicans. And this was a very important meeting here, if you go back one, that is the House Appropriations Chair, Rep. Trumble. I think we had maybe 20 or 30 minutes with him, where we spoke about our projects in detail and about the city in general. So, a lot of times when we go to Tallahassee, individuals may not be familiar with the City of Coral Gables, maybe they've never been to the City of Coral Gables, so part of the mission is to educate them about what kind of city we are, and what kind of government we are.

Mayor Lago: If I can add something to that Naomi. So, this meeting was impromptu, and we have to give thanks to Speaker Pro Tempore Avila, who was able to get us that meeting. This is one of the most difficult meetings, along with the Governor to get, because this gentleman is very busy. Imagine, he has the keys to the coffers. Another good point about this meeting was that we were able to divide and conquer. So, Commissioner Anderson and the Vice Mayor and some of our other team members went to meet with another Legislator, while we were able to sit in this meeting, because we had the full team up there. We had a compliment of individuals up there, so we were able to divide and conquer and meet with as many people as possible. So, this meeting was important, like Naomi said, because we were able to explain to the Appropriations Chair why the City of Coral Gables needs to avoid the veto pen and needs to be considered for as much appropriations as possible, because we are a city who is incredibly fiscally responsible and we are fiduciaries, and we want to be rewarded for that, we don't want to be penalized. And those are things that we kind of explained to every elected official up there about how careful and how thoughtful we are as a city in regard to spending, and that is something that goes a long way in Tallahassee. I explained a little bit about our unfunded liability and how we made it a priority to address that over the last ten years. I also talked about how we have the second lowest millage rate for a full-service city, that hit home. I also talked to them about the amount of money that we have in the coffers to ensure that if a rainy day were to come that we are covered. I talked to the leaders a little bit about our infrastructure endeavors and how much we've invested in infrastructure. I talked about our Public Safety Building and all these points resonated, especially with the Governor and the Speaker and the Appropriations Chair, because they understand and they are fiscal hawks, so when they see a city doing that, I wanted to make sure that we hit home on those points, so they understood that. We are not spending wildly on a credit card. We are being very thoughtful, and we are being very methodical.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: And I think in that same vein, I just want to mention, the city appears to be very well positioned for the budget. We have five of our seven appropriation requests

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funded in either the House or the Senate Budget and now the Legislature is going to enter into budget conferencing, and we'll figure out where those numbers finally land, but we could be looking at as much as about \$3 million dollars in appropriation requests being funded, and that includes two of our parks that we've submitted for grants for.

Mayor Lago: Which would be a record, correct?

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: It would be the most we've ever brought home since I've been doing this. I can't speak beforehand. I would venture to say it's probably a record.

Mayor Lago: By the way, we are not only meeting with local elected officials; this is the Vice Mayor meeting with State Representative Williamson, correct?

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Correct.

Vice Mayor Mena: I had a lot of questions about this picture. He was generous enough to share his chair with somebody else, which is why he's somewhat bizarrely kneeling at the desk.

Mayor Lago: But it's a great photo. He's a gentleman and he gave us an unlimited amount of time and his position is...

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: He's the chair of a sub-committee for appropriations.

Mayor Lago: So, we really wanted to talk a lot about and hit home about our fiscal responsibilities. Commissioner.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to say that I'm so proud of being a part of this Commission and how well we work together as a team, up there in Tallahassee we were all on the same page. I have to compliment you, Naomi, it went so smoothly, and we were on point, and we were on schedule, and we met with the right people. I especially want to compliment Mayor Lago because in every meeting, especially with the Governor, you hit home exactly like you said, how fiscally responsible the City of Coral Gables is, and you explained to him in a way that they understood what Coral Gables is about, in terms of the way we run things. And I want to compliment my colleagues, I think collectively we were able to explain why each project is important, the spirit behind the project and what it means to our residents. So, I can honestly tell you in the short amount of time we were there, we accomplished a great deal and I think we made Tallahassee understand that Coral Gables is not going away, and that Coral Gables needs to be addressed in the right way for our residents. I want to just compliment everybody that was part of that venture, that job.

Mayor Lago: Very well said.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Thank you. If I can just wrap it up. I do appreciate each and everyone of you taking the time to become subject matter experts on our appropriation requests and on our policy initiatives, whether you were talking about mangroves or sovereign immunity or smoking in parks, or just making it personal by explaining your relationship to the projects and

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to the policy issues, because of you being a resident and you being passionate about the issues. I think that really resonated with everyone we met with, so thank you for that.

Mayor Lago: In closing, unless my colleagues have anything else they'd like to say or add.

Vice Mayor Mena: I just want to echo at least Commissioner Menendez' comments about Naomi's work, Chelsea joined us, Martha joined us, but we were incredibly well prepared, and Naomi knew everybody, had forged relationships already, and I think she knows how to navigate the Capitol very well and put us in position to be successful and have successful meetings. So, kudos to you for your hard work.

Mayor Lago: I want to echo everyone's sentiments and I want to thank Naomi for her hard work, Chelsea, Martha Pantin, also I wanted to thank Mark Trowbridge, because I think he gave us an added advantage, like I mentioned before when Mark was speaking, that it was not only about resident issues, but we came forward with the business community and we were able to explain, like for example, we talked about the importance of our downtown and why we need to have certain investments. For example, the monies that we are chasing in regard to the appropriations for our parking garage, for our mobility hub, excuse me, not a parking garage, a mobility hub. Why's that important? Its important because 27 percent of our tax base comes from the downtown, and then this mobility hub is going to strengthen our downtown, so when you strengthen your downtown, your tax base is going to rise, because property values are going to rise. So, it's a symbiotic relationship that we were able to play off each other with having Mark and the Chamber there, I think it was very important. So, we had a great team. We are hopefully do one more visit at the request of the Speaker and our lobbying team, just one final push, maybe just drop in and drop out for one day to make sure that before the veto pen potentially hits pen to paper that the City of Coral Gables is spared and that we receive appropriations that we've never seen before, and I think that's a testament to the hard work of the Commission, our team, which have really been committed this year to delivering on our efforts in regards to appropriations. So, thank you Naomi.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you so much.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you Naomi. It cannot be underestimated how difficult it is to get these meetings and navigating those buildings, and the effort you made for us to be prepared and have a cohesive presentation, just want to give you a special thanks for that.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.