

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-7
September 10, 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

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Greenspace Management, Deena Bell-Llewellyn

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-7 [2:29 p.m.]

Discussion regarding the Biltmore Way Streetscape.

(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez) (Co-Sponsored Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto F-7.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Biltmore Way Streetscape is something I think both of us had been working on.

Commissioner Fernandez: We skipped F-6.

Mayor Lago: We'll come back to it.

City Commission Meeting
September 10, 2024

Vice Mayor Anderson: We'll come back to it. Talking about trees and flowers and stuff like that is a nice change of pace.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes. So, the reason I asked for this to be on the agenda, I know we've been pending the next step on Biltmore Way Streetscape, what's going to be happening. I know that the consensus seems to be from residents they wanted the shade trees. So just wanted to see where we are right now, what the next step is, because I think this will have to be part of the budget in October, so I just want to make sure we're ready to hit the ground running.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, we currently have \$250,000 assigned, \$253-ish for design for improvements in that corridor, and we've been working and negotiating with one of our consultants was to work on the simplest, easy actionable one, which is basically the concept of you have twelve-foot sidewalks there. The idea was to create trippets, 6 by 8, 6 by 6, whatever the landscaper folks, and then plant, it would have to be medium size trees, you don't have enough space to plant larger trees and unfortunately, we couldn't reach an agreement with the consultant. We felt the price was too much and we're moving on and we're trying to get pricing with someone else. There were other discussions about other things possibly on that corridor, but I think for right now, at least we were working towards just the landscaping element of it. If you desire to do anything else beyond that, we're more than happy to take the Commission's direction. I'm sorry, if I may add. The idea was, unfortunately, like I said, we couldn't reach an agreement with this consultant. We should probably have preliminary drawings towards the end of the year, but it's usually not a good idea for us to have a community meeting in December because people are out of town, so probably sometime in January we can probably have a conversation with the community with something preliminary to show and get their feedback.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I want to bring you up to speed of the work that I had been doing with some of the residents and our team and when we said they had \$253,000 to do the next presentation and community meeting, it was along the same vein of the type of community meeting they had in the past, but I think it's pretty clear what the residents want. They want sidewalk, hole cut in and trees installed, so the decision was made instead of using it just for presentation purposes, to get an actual design plan going and we've had some preliminary discussions about species of trees that could work out. The resident that was in the meeting loved that particular tree and because we're only dealing with condominium units, my thoughts were, let's get the plan together, let's share it with them, and their board at least preview it. Then we can gather those residents that live on that street and let them make a decision and have a discussion about the tree choice, location. I mean we are constrained in front of the David Williams, because of the parking garage underneath it, but at least if we get three-quarters of it with shade trees, we're going to be so much further ahead, and we can deal with the structural issues with the David Williams garage at a future point in time but get the trees in and they can start growing.

Commissioner Fernandez: One thing that I know I had discussed in the past, I don't think it's ever happened, have we been in discussion with Dr. Feely Elem regarding our tree canopy and suggestions that he may have?

Public Works Director Diaz: I have to – Deena.
City Commission Meeting
September 10, 2024

Commissioner Fernandez: I know we had asked for that. I don't know if that ever happened.

Landscape Director Bell-Llewellyn: Hi. So, Dr. Feely regarding trees on Biltmore Way, we talked about diversity, not just using live oaks and the proposal of that Hermes was talking about, with removing parts of the sidewalk to create planters, right, is the idea using the current width of the sidewalk and creating removing flags to create openings, that's going to be a more medium size tree, its not going to be a large tree like an oak.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, it wouldn't be. You...for instance the yellow flowering tree...

Landscape Director Bell-Lewellyn:...was one that we are looking at, and that's from South America, a native to South America, so Dr. Feely's research is pretty much based on picking more trees that are native to close to the equator and used to higher heat so that as temperatures rise, they are more adapt to the hotter temperatures. So yes, we've looked into it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right. And Biltmore Way in particular is going to be a very hot environment for any tree to be planted. So, it's critical at that point that we pick something that's used to very difficult situation to grow in. We have those yellow flowering trees, as you pointed out down near the Library between the Library and the Youth Center. We have them on other locations underneath powerlines, so they are manageable, and they don't get too extremely large and keep them contained. So, I would love to get this thing moving.

Commissioner Fernandez: Timeline-wise, I mean I know that there is the issue of not being able to find the proper contractor and pricing-wise, but I think January is a long way away, and January then becomes March, and then it becomes April, and then we don't have a tree canopy on Biltmore Way until 2029. What can we do to get this process moving quicker and get this project completed. This has been a work, the Vice Mayor has put a lot of time into, and I know your team has put a lot of time into, residents have been asking for a while. I want this to be top priority and getting this accomplished.

Public Works Director Diaz: The only fund that we have available right now is for design and depending on maybe there may be a little bit left over, depending on, are we going to add other features to this besides the trees or not. There is no money currently available for construction for this. The issue that we've experienced in that corridor on several meetings that we've had is that there is sometimes not a cohesive agreement between several folks in that area about what exactly they want at that location. So, I'm hoping that there is an agreement.

Commissioner Fernandez: I would disagree. I think, like the Vice Mayor said, they want shade.

Public Works Director Diaz: Right.

Commissioner Fernandez: That's their top priority is, let's have shade in this area, you know, and they don't want to lose parking spaces, so we just need to get this done.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, we're moving forward with that concept and the consultant needs the time to actually go ahead and come up with the designs, go to the community, assuming there's no pushback with what we're proposing with the Commission, I don't see why we couldn't have a set of drawings ready by the summer.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That would be very good. It would be nice to have this summer.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes, exactly. I would like to be walking under the shade trees now.

Public Works Director Diaz: The question is, I guess, the funding. We don't have construction money available for this.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to ask you to provide the Commission what its going to take to do it. We field grow the trees so that they are ready to go; reserve some trees so they are ready to go and what kind of money is necessary to get this job done, because it's been at least two decades, two decades.

Commissioner Fernandez: The last number that you gave me was about between 4 and \$800,000, has that changed?

Public Works Director Diaz: For those two blocks, yes, roughly, more or less. You know, we come up with an estimate based on the spacing, but we also have utilities and that's really the bulk of the work really that the consultant needs to do.

Mayor Lago: Hermes, may I ask you a question?

Public Works Director Diaz: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: So you think for \$400,000, you can do all the bulb-outs, the asphalt, do all the utility work, you can plant the trees, do the curbing, do the striping, you can do all the work that's necessary, the demolition, the soft cost of the design, the permitting cost, you think you can do all that for \$400,000?

Public Works Director Diaz: No, no, no. We're not touching the pavement.

Mayor Lago: At all.

Public Works Director Diaz: No. And the estimate was somewhere like about – it depends on how far it goes, because remember we have the entire run of the David William that we cannot touch, so we figure somewhere between 4 to maybe \$800,000, but that's strictly the sidewalk. We're not touching the pavement.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No bulb-outs.

Public Works Director Diaz: No. No bulb-outs.
City Commission Meeting
September 10, 2024

Vice Mayor Anderson: No drainage change.

Mayor Lago: You think its going to look professional or you think its going to look like a patch job. What's your honest opinion?

Public Works Director Diaz: I mean, we have to put something together to show the community, I mean, you know.

Mayor Lago: I'm just asking you. I don't have a problem, if that's the budget that's the budget, but you think I would be impressed being in construction that the job could be done for \$400,000. I don't see it. I don't see it.

Public Works Director Diaz: Its roughly the numbers that we were...

Mayor Lago: 4 to 8

Public Works Director Diaz: 400 to \$800,000.

Mayor Lago: That's a lot of money.

Public Works Director Diaz: Well, I don't have plans, I mean, we need to get to the details.

Mayor Lago: You need to do engineering, you need to do geo-technical reports, you need to hire an architect, hire an engineer.

Public Works Director Diaz: That's in addition to the 150 that we currently have allocated for the project.

Mayor Lago: Listen, maybe you can do it for 450, that would be great. I'll be ecstatic. Ms. Sheryl Gold would be, she would be jumping for joy.

Public Works Director Diaz: It would probably be closer to the upper end than the lower end.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right.

Public Works Director Diaz: Again, until we go through the process, we need to figure it out.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You need that cost.

Public Works Director Diaz: Sorry.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Need the cost of the silver cells. Aside from the cutting the cement and making and excavating and so forth, but you need, you have to put silver cells down.

*City Commission Meeting
September 10, 2024*

Public Works Director Diaz: Our estimates were based on structural, silver cells will increase the price significantly higher.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. Structural soil. Whatever Deena says will make those trees grow pretty and keep them healthy and then we need an estimate on how many trees we can comfortably put in there and make the street beautiful. I mean, we can always come back and add other features, I mean, it needs to be repaved, I mean that's on my wish list for Tallahassee, the repaving. There is a crosswalk...

Commissioner Fernandez: Traffic calming.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes. A crosswalk that needs to be put in, a traffic circle that can go in and there are a lot of other improvements. There's an area where we could add additional striping instead of having a lane there, so it makes it easier for people who are parked in there to back out without getting rear-ended. Lots of other things, but if we start with the trees, we've got the biggest lift thing done, and hopefully we can bring back money from Tallahassee for the rest of this to at least assist with this.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.