

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-13
September 13, 2023
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, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz
Senior Transportation Engineer, Melissa DeZayas

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-13 [4:50 p.m.]

Discussion regarding Biltmore Way Streetscape
(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: Item F-13 – Biltmore Way Streetscape.

Commissioner Fernandez: I received a few e-mails and calls from residents regarding Biltmore Way Streetscape, so I talked to Director Diaz about status again. Its about the timeline, making sure residents are aware of what the timeline is and where we are in the process.

Public Works Director Diaz: Good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: How are you sir.

Public Works Director Diaz: Mr. Mayor, Commission. So, right now, our traffic consultant is going through the traffic studies and analyzing the feasibility of doing a road diet on the area west

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of the circle whether it's feasible to go from two lanes, actually four lanes to two lanes. The next step after that would be to go back to the community meeting to work on the two options that were the most favorable. One option was the landscaping only option and the other was to increase green space by narrowing the pavement, and we're looking to possibly going back to the community, I want to say early December.

Commissioner Fernandez: There's one question regarding that. The shrinking of the two lanes will end on Anderson, correct.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Commissioner Fernandez: My concern is with the Anderson and Coral Way Circle; I think there may be increased traffic at that area going forward.

Mayor Lago: I mean the goal is to have a traffic study that will give us that information.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right, but was that factored in?

Transportation Engineer DeZayas: It wasn't factored in, but that's something that – we're having biweekly meetings with our consultant, so we'll bring up the future project as their analysis when they do their buildout conditions.

Commissioner Fernandez: How much do we spend already on Biltmore Way?

Public Works Director Diaz: I will have to send you an e-mail on that. I'm not sure.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. I'd appreciate that.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, if I may, add a little more color on that front. So, in October we start having the community meetings, correct.

Public Works Director Diaz: I'm sorry.

Mayor Lago: In October we start having the community meetings.

Public Works Director Diaz: We are looking at early December most likely.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. My goal is to obviously, let's get it out to everybody in the area, make sure we cast the widest net possible. My issue is not really the idea of community meetings. My concerns are not based on the designs. My concern is going to be how are we going to pay for this. So, this is potentially a \$5 to \$10 million-dollar project, could be potentially even more, and it's a very, very big number and the numbers in construction just continue to go up. We're not seeing any relief in sight. So, its tough and I hope that when we move forward with these community meetings, we try to explain that the more scope and work that we add, its going to potentially

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lengthen the possibility to do this job, because we have to budget for this job over the next two or three, four years, or again, I'm not a proponent of it, because I don't want to go into further debt, but you could always bond these type of projects out which is something that I would not currently do, especially in this climate. Another thing that's done is a tax, excuse me, special taxing district, but again, I don't think the residents are going to be very happy about that either. So, these are all things that I think we need to be up front as quickly as possible so people understand and they are not under the impression that the city is going to be able to pay a Miracle Mile style roadway improvement which could be \$20 million dollars, \$15 million.

Public Works Director Diaz: We'll make sure it's a topic of discussion.

Mayor Lago: Just want to put it out there, please, because then people say we thought that the city was – we want all these great things, the lower scope that we had that accomplishes the goal of sidewalks, landscaping, reducing the heat island effect, shade, those should be our top priorities, in my opinion.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I think to your point, Mr. Mayor, at the community meeting there was at the church earlier this year, most of the people were in favor of just adding trees and shade, because a lot of them generally walk towards Miracle Mile and it's an extremely hot walk from their buildings all the way over to Miracle Mile. During my campaign, I actually polled that area on this issue and over 85 percent of the people who responded just wanted trees. They didn't want anything else. It was simply to add trees in order to add shade to their area and it's something that we can do to expand our tree canopy as well.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, if I could just follow up, because I went to the meeting as well, and apparently some people thought I wanted bike lanes on Biltmore Way. That was actually an idea of one of our Planning and Zoning Board members that was pushing to have bike lanes on Biltmore Way itself. I never ever thought it was a good idea with the number of cars parked out there and then people walking across the sidewalk to get into buildings. It looked like a recipe for disaster for me. And I'm going to ask you to do the same thing that I asked you when I called you Spock, to give me some guestimates on the amount of cost so people have some information to make decisions with. If you take the total cost per linear foot and number of units in the building to give people choices. If they want to see this some time within their lifetime or we have to work it into a Capital Improvement budget, with the number of units in those buildings it might be a number that they are interested in moving it forward more quickly.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, the area specifically that we're talking about is the area from the circle west.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Correct.

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Public Works Director Diaz: And I think it will be a lot easier, I think for the simplest option when it's just landscaping add trees.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Sure.

Public Works Director Diaz: The other one, it's a little more – if there's going to be a median, what's the extent of the median, that's a little dicier. To come up with an accurate estimate, I think we could take a look, we could take a stab at it, but I think they want just the standard plain, I won't call it plain, but just landscaping on the sidewalk, that would be a little more straightforward and a lot easier to come up with an estimate.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You cut a square out of the sidewalk, so we don't affect the drainage, so that reduces cost a lot.

Public Works Director Diaz: It's a little more than that, because the thing is that you want the tree to grow, you want to provide some space, but you've got to cut beyond that area, dig out all the compacted soil about three feet deep. So, you end up, by the time it's said and done, probably 75 percent of the sidewalk is going to have to be redone.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, I know you have to redo the sidewalk, but you're not talking about having to rework all the drainage.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct. Correct.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're going to need silver cells; you're going to need all that kind of stuff so the tree will grow. The more complicated block that we are going to have to deal with is the one over at the David Williams, because you're not going to be able to just do that.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're not going to be able to just cut out sidewalk and pop in trees. So, we might have to have a different design option there, not by choice, but by force because of that parking garage on Eighth Street.

Public Works Director Diaz: Right. And we need to figure out whether it can hold the weight of planters on the sidewalk. That's something that we are going to have to...

Mayor Lago: And that was proposed for the designs that we have.

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, we just had a meeting last week concerning how to properly deal with that building in case of a fire, because of the underground parking, so that's going to determine a lot of issues there. Our emergency vehicles are much heavier now and getting multiple emergency vehicles there is a problem. So, we've had a meeting, I've had a

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meeting with the Building Official and the Fire Marshall just for those structural issues there. So, I think we have to deal with all those things. Signalization in the Public Safety Building, just adding that signal for the fire site cost \$480,000 at that time. So, signalization has gotten to be just hugely expensive. So, we have to deal with all these parameters and make sure that we will give some reference and some magnitude as to what some of these costs, but a project like this could be \$5 million to \$15 million, depending on what the residents want.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you for realizing that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.