

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-9
July 1, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez (Absent)

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Joe Jimenez

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item E-9 [12:14 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution No. 2022-284 which granted site plan conditional use approval for the mixed-use project referred to as “4311 Ponce” on the property legally described as Lots 36 through 43, Block 5, “Industrial Section” (4311 and 4225 Ponce de Leon Boulevard), Coral Gables, Florida, to replace the requirement that all overhead utilities along the adjacent rights -of-way be underground with a contribution to the City to construct certain public realm and/or beautification improvements in the vicinity of the project.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, we are going to start with E-9. Yes.

City Attorney Suarez: E-9 is a Resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution No. 2022-284 which granted site plan conditional use approval for the mixed-use project referred to as “4311 Ponce” on the property legally described as Lots 36 through 43, Block 5, “Industrial Section” (4311 and 4225 Ponce de Leon Boulevard), Coral Gables, Florida, to replace the requirement that all overhead utilities along the adjacent rights -of-way be underground with a contribution to the

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City to construct certain public realm and/or beautification improvements in the vicinity of the project. The applicant is here, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: And who will be presenting for staff.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor. I will take care of it.

Mayor Lago: Sir, good morning.

Mr. Jimenez: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and thank you for the accommodation. I know you have a busy agenda with a lot of important items, so hopefully we can dispose of this quickly. Joe Jimenez, with an address at 2020 Salzedo Street, on behalf of the applicant. Over the years as costs have risen and I will say from experience of different projects dramatically, when the requirement to start undergrounding utilities abutting a development project has come up, I can tell you that what was budgeted and what winds up being the price given to you by the utilities has substantially increased over time. In this particular case, and while I believe it is an important policy of the city, in this particular case, we ask for this amendment to the resolution approval based on where the utilities are. 4525 Ponce is a large office building, across from Nordstrom that backs up to what can only nicely be called an alley, even though it's 39th Avenue. Orange, also from the City of Miami, also runs perpendicular into this property. Now, if it were just the abutting poles that need to go, because the utility companies, as you know, when you drop that line, you don't only drop, depending on the property, you don't only drop abutting your property. You have to drop sometimes two and three poles down. In this case, and I have graphics for you to show you, we'd have to do loops inside the City of Miami, which and nothing against another city, but its also an industrial section of that city and we felt that the funds could be better used and having sat here for a little while and seeing the grants and everything and all the needs that the city has, that the funds could be better used to beautify something that can actually be appreciated by the residents of the City of Coral Gables and not an industrial section in a different municipality. So, I'm happy to show you the pictures. I'm happy to let the City Manager present and then show you the pictures so we can put them in context at your pleasure.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you, Mayor, Commissioners. This is an area on the west side of the city, excuse me, on the east side of the city and it is an area that is 39th Avenue. It's very industrial. The electrical has been underground, those are concrete poles, very difficult to deal with and we feel that undergrounding an area that is highly industrial and really outside the city, I think that we are better off using this \$50,000 for other areas within the city, crosswalks, etc., that can be better

utilized than this really heavy industrial area to the east of the building. That building is really the end of Coral Gables at that point.

Mayor Lago: One second. Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Alright.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Our city has borders. It's very interesting when we drive on Red Road, because we have a border there, and people that live there live in Coral Gables. They pay Coral Gables taxes and yet, it doesn't look like Coral Gables. I can tell you, my parents used to live on the other side, and I can tell you; it's not a good feeling when you drive on 57th Avenue. We even have sidewalks that are not the same as our sidewalks, because FDOT did it and we haven't been able to change it, but now, we are looking on the other side. You know, pretty soon any property that's on our borders will not be the same as the rest of the city. There is something wrong with that. I think that we have – I've heard everybody here talk about the importance of undergrounding the utilities. Its happening all over the place. We are undergrounding utilities, but now, we have a good excuse, it's on the border, its industrial, but yet if there's a hurricane they are going to be affected also, like the rest of us, so why are the rules different if it's on the border or it's in the center. The city is the city. If it's on the side of Coral Gables, the rules should be the same as everywhere else in Coral Gables or else pretty soon, you know that is on the border, I guess the north-end, the south-end, everything that's on the border, you can do whatever you want because its on the border. No. It should be the same. The rules are the rules and if we really believe that undergrounding the utilities, we need to underground the utilities. Period. The end.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Jimenez: And Mrs. Cruz, thank you for reminding me, there is something I didn't mention. FPL has already been underground, so what we're talking about here is the low voltage material, its AT&T, its Comcast, its things of that nature. So, the grid has been hardened by this building. So, I want to thank Mrs. Cruz, because that is a very good point.

Mayor Lago: If I may. If I may. Thank you for being so kind. That was not an effort to – that was obviously an effort to take a dig, but you are a gentleman. Let's be honest with ourselves. We have a major issue here in the city. Its happening throughout. This is something I worked on for ten years with FPL and we got it done, and it didn't cost the city a dollar, when it was going to

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cost \$270 million. The big issue – the next step that we’re going to have is the one that you’re facing today with the poles that are existing is the low voltage; its AT&T, its Comcast, which I’ve been working with the DCM and the Manager on that already in an effort, we’ve met with Comcast, we’re trying to find ways to see how they can jump on board, because once FPL is off those lines, it becomes a maintenance issue, but again, that’s a problem when everything has to be politicized. When your project is politicized to take a jab at the Commission and it’s unnecessary to do that, when they don’t even know what they’re talking about. They don’t even realize this is not even about FPL. This is about low voltage, but it’s an opportunity to take a jab at the Commission, let’s take a jab at the Commission. This is pretty clear the position that we’re in. We have to work and our staff has our hands tied in regards to the low voltage, not only in this location, but throughout the entire city, and one of the things I would like to do, through the Manager is, start working with Tallahassee, with our lobbying team, to make this a priority, because now that we worked for ten years to get FPL underground, I think its going to be about 70 percent of the city is going to be underground and I hate to use your time. You probably have nothing to do with this, but it’s a great example.

Mr. Jimenez: It does...the property, so I appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: When you have somebody come up here and constantly taking jabs in an effort and then obviously opens up the door, I have to take advantage of this, because it’s great, when a jab misfires and opens the door for me to talk about something. So, we have to address this issue, because in one way or another, once FPL is off all these lines and these poles remain and its just low voltage on these poles, who’s going to maintain these poles. Every single day, if you run a number through here and I’ve talked about this with the Manager and the DCM, if you notice, I’ll make a point of it, do you have a land line at your house.

Mr. Jimenez: I’m sorry.

Mayor Lago: Do you have a land line in your house.

Mr. Jimenez: No.

Mayor Lago: Neither do I. If you start polling people, you’ll notice that less and less people have land lines, so there is less and less ability for AT&T to make money. How do they make money? – they make money off of internet connection, a few different things. So, we can either face the problem in ten years or we can face the problem now through legislation at the state and this is what we’re working on, but I’m happy that, obviously, this opportunity came up.

Mr. Jimenez: I can tell you that I’ve been involved in large projects that span every pole and those are easy and the economies of scale are there to do it, but as the smaller projects come up that are actually sometimes in between poles, you’ve got to go two poles in each direction and the cost is

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just unbearable, especially in the urban core. So, you've got to do FPL one way or the other, because of OSHA, but this low voltage, and they don't go in the same trench.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mr. Jimenez: So that's what some people keep asking me, why don't you just do it when you did FPL. It doesn't work that way. And the price just makes things, it's just not feasible.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I would like to make a motion, because one extending and burying lines an exorbitant distance into the City of Miami is not serving the purpose of the original ordinance. So, I think we have a valid reason to deviate here and better utilize the funding that you otherwise would have used to bury essentially a Comcast cable and an AT&T line that no one's going to see. It's not going to be like on Red Road in front of someone's house. It's behind the buildings that are on Ponce and we have some needs in the area that can benefit residents, particularly crosswalk enhancements or crosswalk buttons that need to be added throughout our city and I'm going to mention three; one may be handled by FDOT if we take it that route and be able to utilize the funding for other city locations instead, but I wanted to highlight, there's a need for a crosswalk button, I should say, but there is already a light existing on LeJeune Road at the exit to the garage to the Shops at Merrick Park, so that folks can cross there safely and have an opportunity to cross the street. The second is roughly a half-way point between Bird Road and the Plaza on Ponce, which is at Cadima and Cadima also has a trolley stop at that location, so it's a good midway point; and the third that I get a lot of contact and requests for is at the Segovia Library. We have a crosswalk there, but there is no button with flashing lights to alert drivers that are not always paying attention that there is someone there in the crosswalk to stop, so we need the signs with the flashing lights that pedestrians can engage. So that's my motion to try to better utilize these funds.

Commissioner Castro: I'll second that.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: This is a very unique condition because it's in an industrial area, it's in an alley, it's in an alley that's actually a street. It requires work in the City of Miami, so this is something that we need to coordinate better city to city, and this is a very unique situation. If it were inside the city, we would not be promoting it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

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City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 4-0)

(Commissioner Fernandez: Absent)

Mr. Jimenez: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Have a good afternoon.