

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
January 11, 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

Arts and Culture Specialist, Catherine Cathers

Assistant City Attorney, Naomi Levi-Garcia

Economic Development Director, Belkys Perez

Parking Director, Kevin Kinney

Public Speaker(s)

Aura Reinhardt

Agenda Item H-2 [5:04 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing development of a public art project of artistically designed storefront window coverings for use by businesses within Coral Gables in partnership with the Business Improvement District; allowing for staff to draft and execute a call for artists to develop proposed designs; and allowing use of Art in Public Places funds up to ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) toward artist fees associated with the project. (Unanimously recommended by the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 6 to 0).

Mayor Lago: Moving on to I-4, City Manager items. Oh, I'm sorry, H-2.

City Attorney Ramos: H-2 is a resolution of the City Commission authorizing development of a public art project to artistically design storefront window coverings for the use of businesses within the City of Coral Gables in partnership with the BID; allowing for staff to draft and execute a call for artists to develop proposed designs; and allowing the use of Art in Public Places funds for up to \$10,000 toward artist fees associated with the project.

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: Good afternoon. My name is Catherine Cathers, Arts and Culture Specialist for the City of Coral Gables. Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. Historical Resources and Cultural Arts Department, in partnership with the Economic Development Department and Business Improvement District, wish to develop a program that contributes to the beatification and welcoming atmosphere of the downtown area. I would like to note that Aura Reinhardt with the BID wishes that she could have been here today and is fully supportive of the initiative, as well as Belkys Perez from the Economic Development Department. The proposed program, which we're calling Art On Windows -- storefront windows --- will invite area artists and designers to submit qualifications for consideration to develop customized window coverings that also function as public art and opportunities for social engagement. I do have a PowerPoint if the Commission is interested in...

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: Seeing it. So, this just kind of goes over the goals and objectives and the -- starting out with the need. So, as you know, there are unoccupied retail spaces that leave windows bare and expose the unfinished interiors. The brown paper coverings or other coverings are unsightly but covering windows with creative designs will bring positive attention to the site and increase the possibility of occupancy. Covering the windows with creative designs also enhances the downtown experience and provides opportunities for local artists. The goals of

this program will be to increase the use of aesthetically pleasing window coverings throughout downtown, provide five modular artistic designs for property owners to select from, and enhance the City's public art program. The objectives and the actions that we'll take towards this will be to draft and release a request for qualifications for artists and design professionals. We'll convene a selection panel that will be arts professionals, community members, and staff. We'll select five artists or designers to work with to create modular designs that may be replicated to fit a variety of window sizes, and we'll partner with the BID and Economic Development Department to promote the designs and the ability to produce the wraps. These are some examples from a similar project that's been done on Lincoln Road on Miami Beach. And these are the general areas that we'll be looking at along Miracle Mile and Giralda Plaza. Some of the criteria that we'll be looking at would be that the work is original and of the artist's making, and it doesn't infringe on anyone else's copyrighted material, that it represents the artist's body of work as represented in their submission materials, that it's easy to transfer or replicate to fit a variety of window sizes. It may be produced in whole or in sections or tiled using the same image. The images need to retain clarity and intent when reproduced in large format and not contain any offensive language or nudity.

Mayor Lago: So, let me ask you a question. What are the current standards that we have now for a project that's going to go under construction or that's vacant? What do we have --? What are our standards right now?

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: The standards for vacant storefronts?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: That is something that somebody from the Economic Development Department could answer better than I could. I believe that there's...

City Attorney Ramos: I'm trying to look it up in the Code, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I'm sorry?

City Attorney Ramos: I'm trying to look it up in the Code. I think we have specific requirements in our Code.

Mayor Lago: The reason why I bring that up is because there's been a lack of compliance in the downtown, and it's something that I brought up to Code Enforcement, and that's why we're here today. And we're here today to bring some uniformity and some beauty to the downtown, which I think is important. And I hope that my colleagues will support this opportunity, which is monies that are not coming out of the general fund, and it's an opportunity to give artists a chance to design something that's tastefully in the same line as the City Beautiful. So, I think it's a good thing that we're trying to do in the City so -- and there's -- by the way, that question was a question, but I knew the answer.

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: I kind of figured.

Mayor Lago: So, what we're trying to do is we're trying to have the BID -- which I am the happy liaison between the Commission and the BID -- and the Chamber have direct answers to when we have an empty storefront or we have a product under construction. Because currently right now, we have a hodgepodge. When you look at, for example, the old site of Starbucks, they had card - - they had paper up. When you look at the old -- not Graciano's, excuse me -- the old salad -- Giardino's salad, they're using plastic black bags to cover. It doesn't look very Coral Gables like. So, if we have to have an empty storefront -- which by the way, they're less and less every day, which is a good thing, as Zeida brought up -- I think it was about two months ago when we discussed it here in the Commission -- let's do something that at least is beautiful.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Current standards for window wraps. So, they're actually regulated both in the City Code and the Zoning Code. If you have a vacant space, it does have to

be shielded. The City used to provide a motif that had a palm tree and City branding. I understand we no longer do that, so we're allowing for white paper and brown paper to be used, which is not perhaps the most aesthetic product.

Mayor Lago: I want this to be cheap, as cheap as possible for the landlords. But again, I know that we're not going to assume the cost. But I don't think that brown paper and garbage bags is really the answer. And if you want to see garbage bags, go look at Giardino's salad and you'll see it. It's right next to Hillstone. So, imagine, that's one of the main corners on Ponce -- not corner, excuse me, but basically a corner on Ponce, and there's garbage bags up.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: So, Mayor, at your request, we're also working on an ordinance to try to update those provisions of the Code and organize them.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: During our last meeting, you suggested that we pause on that ordinance until we meet with the BID and Chamber, so we're in the process of setting up those meetings.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. I appreciate that. Mr. Clerk, who do we have that would like to say a few comments?

City Clerk Urquia: We have Belkys Perez from the Economic Development Department, and we also have Ms. Reinhardt from the Business Improvement District.

Mayor Lago: Would they like to speak?

City Clerk Urquia: Belkys.

Economic Development Director Perez: Mayor and Commission, I'm really sorry. I had to leave to pick up my kids. I'm short staffed to...

Mayor Lago: Never a problem, never a problem.

Economic Development Director Perez: But I did want to let you know that this is just -- what we're doing today is just a process that we want to get started...

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Economic Development Director Perez: In order to make sure that we have something in place and we're moving the ball forward as we work on the new guidelines for the storefront wraps.

Mayor Lago: No worries. I just wanted to put that -- I wanted to show that this is just another one of the many items that we're doing to raise the bar in the downtown. And that, by the way, if this gets done today because of staff and because of your efforts and because of your leadership. So, I want to say thank you for that, all of you for putting -- because this is a team effort. Anyone else?

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Reinhardt.

Aura Reinhardt: Yes. Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Ms. Reinhardt: Yeah, thank you very much. The BID works very closely with the Economic Development Department on taking care and handling the frontage of empty stores. And you will

notice that we've had a variety of really creative window wrappings that have gone in the last two years, so we're thrilled about that. We are totally in agreement, as you heard from Catherine Cathers earlier, that there's an opportunity here to actually upgrade and to bring in some new concepts to the street for those windows that will be ready for wrapping. But quite frankly, as the Mayor said, there are going to be fewer and fewer of those, as in fact, lots of our businesses are opening in the next couple of weeks. So, we're very conscious of that. We're very committed to the work that Belkys is doing with Catherine right now into bringing in a new concept with some artistic designs to that. So, we're really pleased to be a partner in all of that. Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, if I may have the opportunity now to speak on a topic that I actually had requested to speak earlier, and unfortunately, the comment didn't go through. And that was to go back to the BID's role in the maintenance program on downtown. Do we have an opportunity to say a few words on that?

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Ms. Reinhardt: So, Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, I know this has been a project that is very dear to all of us, and you have seen me standing in front of you with Mark Trowbridge many times in the last three months as we've discussed how to move forward on this program. I'm delighted to say that we are communicating to our members, our BID members, what the maintenance program is. I have actually gone ahead and printed my own copies of the flyers because I didn't have any copies myself so that we can send them out to members and to property owners, which might be for some of them a second time, but because it's coming from us, it might be the first time they get it. I'm not sure, but we do feel it is important that they hear from us as well that this is part of the bigger movement that we're all doing now in Coral Gables in general and in downtown Coral Gables in particular. I would, however, like to mention that there is a disconnect with what we have available to us in the BID because of the Block by Block team who work on particularly two streets only and not the rest of the downtown BID. So, we must be very careful when we talk about downtown as to what we're referring to. I was delighted to see that Commissioner Kerdyk is cleaning -- or having the front of his real estate office cleaned, and I think that's terrific and a

great leadership place for him to be. However, you will agree the many blocks on Salzedo going north, they're tiny little stores -- storefronts with people who cannot go out and rent a machine to clean the sidewalk and whose buildings don't have any outside hose for them to attach any kind of normal hose in order to clean the storefronts. So, we have a little bit of a disconnect, and I'm hoping that as we talk to more and more of our property owners, which we're doing right now, we get a sense of what their concerns and difficulties are so that we can address their difficulties and not just blanket statement what everybody can do, whether you're a leading real estate magnate to a little tiny cafecito place on the corner that might not be able to handle that. So, there is -- there are some discussions that are out there, and we're happy to address them when members come to us. But we're looking at those elements that just are possibly going to be very difficult for the individual businesses to handle. So, I just wanted to make sure that I shared that with you all because sometimes undue burden on the smaller businesses is a tough thing to push through. And I certainly know that I would like to -- and with others we're having this discussion with -- find a solution for everybody.

Mayor Lago: If I may respond to you. Are you still there?

City Clerk Urquia: She's there.

Ms. Reinhardt: I'm still here, sir.

Mayor Lago: Aura, can you hear me? Okay.

Ms. Reinhardt: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: You and I have engaged on multiple occasions. I think the last time we engaged was at a ribbon cutting, and the one before that was at the yearly meeting for the Business Improvement District. I also have the privilege of being the liaison for the Business Improvement District, and I take that role very seriously attending the meetings. You have never brought this to

my attention. I'm more than available. You have my cell phone. You can call me, you can visit me whenever you'd like. You've done that on multiple occasions. You've never brought this issue to my attention, especially when we've been discussing this matter in regards to the downtown and explaining our plans to really clean up the downtown, not only for the private sector, but also for the public sector so that we can together work on ensuring that we have a viable downtown that is warm and inviting for everyone to conduct business. I think we can agree that a beautifully landscaped and maintained downtown is a positive for everyone. It's a positive not only for the City in regards to our tax base, but it's also a positive for the people who are spending and taking massive risks opening businesses in this day and age. We want to make sure that the climate is as appropriate as possible for them to conduct business and to have repeat business and to invite people. That's why we extended the trolley, and that's why I legislated that to ensure that we could offer the BID every tool possible so that the members of the Business Improvement District not only survive, but that they thrived. So, like I mentioned to Commissioner Anderson -- that's why I asked her who had asked her -- who was putting forth questions about garbage cans. I'm your liaison. If you're having trouble, I haven't missed one of your emails. I haven't missed one of your text messages. If you'd like to switch me out for somebody else, I don't have a problem with that. If you feel that maybe I'm not serving you appropriately, we could move in a different direction, and that's perfectly fine with me. I want you to have -- I want you to be able to serve your residents as much as possible, and I want there to be the best relationship between the City. In regards to the concerns that you have about certain small shops not having a spicket to be able to clean the sidewalks, we can find an answer for that too. We're more than flexible. We can always find an answer to an issue. We can always find a solution to a problem, but this is the first time that it's brought to my attention and...

Ms. Reinhardt: May I? If I may now, Mr. Mayor, I'd like to say that there's nothing that I brought up today that actually hasn't already been said either in your office face-to-face with you and with Mark, or when we were standing at a Commission hearing. The difference only now is that we are going and listening to our members and hearing what they have to say, and that's where sometimes the waterspout comes out and other issues like that. So, there's nothing that you haven't

heard before and that we haven't talked to you about before that is -- I would -- if I may, I would suggest that that's not quite true. We've had all these discussions. The difference is now we're putting it together in order to reach the audience that we have to reach and giving them the full story. So, when we have conversations with members in City Hall about things that are outstanding and other things that we need to work on, I think it's -- and you are the very first person who suggested -- gosh, it was nearly last September -- that Mark and I call each of the Commissioners individually and discuss with them what was going on and what we thought we might be able to do, and so all this has been open. And sir, you've been -- you're a terrific partner, and I'm delighted that you're part of our team. And I know you come to the meetings. But please don't take anything personally. We do talk to as many people as possible about how we can move forward. One of the things I did want to mention regarding -- and this is not something that hasn't been said in writing to various people as well -- is that recently Giralda had an in-depth cleaning that took place. And we -- as we are apt to do, we asked all of the businesses to move all of the furniture, to put it all away. And the team comes in, the team from Block -- I believe it's Block by Block and some of their...

Commissioner Anderson: You're frozen.

Mayor Lago: Let's see, Mr. Clerk, if we can get her back on.

Ms. Reinhardt: Where did I leave off? So, we were saying that -- back to the Giralda piece -- that the cleaning that took place, the in-depth cleaning that took place appears to have been very unsatisfactory to all of the business members on Giralda. And I would defer this comment also to the Economic Development Department. I know they heard directly from businesses there. I went that down to review the street with those businesses who had some issues. And I would suggest to you that our -- the present manner in which we address cleaning Giralda -- and we call it in-depth cleaning -- is not working. Our pavement is still black. We're not getting the grease out of it. We're not doing certain things that are going to actually change it. So, these are all the conversations that are taking place constantly with the Economic Development Department, with

the business contacts at City Hall so we can move the project forward. So, Mr. Mayor, I would hope that you accept my apologies if in fact you feel you haven't heard some of this before. But I would suggest to you that nothing hasn't been said in any one of our meetings.

Mayor Lago: Let's get Aura back on if we can before I respond.

Ms. Reinhardt: I'm here. I don't know why it keeps going in and out. I apologize. Anyway, I don't know where I left off, so I'll leave it at that. But I apologize, sir, if you feel that way because that's not the intent. And we feel strongly at the BID that we have actually had these conversations either at our board meetings or with you directly in your office. And it wasn't -- none of this is new is what I'm saying. None of this is new.

Mayor Lago: So if I may respond to you. In regards to meeting with my colleagues, not only do I welcome it, I think it's incredibly appropriate and it's necessary because they have great ideas which help us refine our approach to everything that we address here in the City, so I welcome that, and I ask you to get involved. But what I ask is as the liaison who represents the Commission to the BID, to the Business Improvement District, so that I can address these issues in a much more expeditious fashion because I can't have certain conversations with my colleagues until it's on the dais, if you want to have -- if you want to make a request, make a request of one of my colleagues, but copy me or copy the Manager so I can understand and I can take care of this issue -- for example, the garbage cans -- as quickly as possible. In regards to the spicket conversation, I think I have a pretty decent memory. I'm walking the Mile with Public Works, Code Enforcement, many of our team members, and I've never heard an issue of anyone bringing this up over the last four months that we've had this conversation in preparation to the commencement of holding people accountable in regards to the beautification of the downtown, where anybody has told me that a spicket is an issue. Now that you bring it up, I can see where it's an issue. I can see where somebody doesn't have access to water. We may have to find a solution. We may have to run a hose from the alley. We may have to run a hose from the interior of the property, but there's always

solutions. But I will put it on the record that you have never told me this, and we've met multiple times.

Ms. Reinhardt: Possibly. Yes, it's possible.

Mayor Lago: So -- and -- but I'm all about finding solutions. I'm not about finding, you know, blame. I'll take responsibility that I forgot that you told me this. What I'm trying to do is find open lines of communication, engage people, push this community through with my own personal financial contributions of thousands of dollars to motivate people to clean up the downtown, which by the way, I don't own a business in the downtown. I don't own property in the downtown. So, what I'm trying to do here is just to help the Business Improvement District. I'm trying to beautify properties so that people feel welcomed, and they want to come back to the City of Coral Gables. I'm trying to finish sidewalks. I'm trying to clean sidewalks. I'm trying to make the crossing of our community as safe as possible. I'm trying to add parks to the downtown. So, I don't want this to be adversarial. I want this to be pleasant. And this is the first time that I hear -- and maybe my colleagues can chime in -- that we're having some pushback or that we're not living up to the expectations of the Business Improvement District. And please, I am not immune from criticism. I welcome criticism. I deal with criticism every Friday for the last seven years in Open Door Friday. What I ask is that we're all on the same page so I can get things accomplished and get done. And if the spicket is an issue, I'll just call one of my plumbers over. I'll pull a quick permit here at the City, and I'll have one of my plumbers in one of my many jobs come over and address the spicket, and I'll pay for it myself if that's an issue.

Ms. Reinhardt: Mr. Mayor, thank you very much. You know, it's an honor to be part of the City in the role that I have at the BID. So, please, please accept that for the record too. It's a pleasure. And the spicket, let's not make a big thing out of it, but I will tell you that there are property owners -- and actually, it's more the business owners who say that they would have to come out with their coffeepot and put water in the back of their kitchen on a regular basis. So, that might be I didn't communicate that to you, but I've been hearing that from the businesses, so I apologize for that.

Mayor Lago: But with that being said -- there's no need to apologize. With that being said, this is the great thing about being in the sunshine. With that being said, we have our Public Works Director, we have our City Manager. We can sit down, and we can have a discussion and say, "Listen, I've got these 40 businesses in the downtown that can't figure out a way to address the issue with the sidewalks and they want to comply. What can we do?" And then you lean over, and you look at Commissioner Anderson, and Commissioner Anderson has brought up on multiple occasions the issue of having blocks comply, you know, uniformly and not having one neighbor do it and the other neighbor not do it. And those are things that we're trying to address. So, my issue is, let's find answers and solutions to make it as easy as possible for people to comply. I know that not everybody has the resources that Mr. Bill Kerdyk does. But I just put that picture up to show that he's taking the initiative to move forward. And I want to make it as easy as possible for people to comply. I don't want people to feel that they have to use a coffeepot full of water to go out there. That's not the purpose of the legislation. The purpose of the legislation is to put our best foot forward. Because at the end of day, the Business Improvement District is the one that's going to benefit from this. The Business Improvement District is the one that's going to benefit from a Saturday trolley service, from having more landscaping, from having better lighting on Miracle Mile, from doing all the things that we're doing in an effort to, at the end of day, just make it -- make this place the best it can possibly be.

Ms. Reinhardt: Yeah, thank you, sir.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, I think we lost her, but I...

City Clerk Urquia: No, she's there.

Mayor Lago: We're ready? Oh, alright.

Ms. Reinhardt: I'm here.

Mayor Lago: Is there anything --? Does anybody have any comments that they'd like to -- any recommendations, any ideas on how we can address concerns on compliance, on issues of not having water accessibility, anything like that? Mr. Manager, what do you think we can do about that?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I think there's -- as you know, you're in construction, so you know there's many ways of getting water out there.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, of course.

City Manager Iglesias: And our Parks -- our Parking Director is here who does major cleanings. The issue on Giralda has been used constantly for eating, and I think there should be more tenant input in cleaning...

Mayor Lago: Of course.

City Manager Iglesias: During -- between our major cleanings.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

City Manager Iglesias: It's the...

Parking Director Kinney: I -- and...

City Manager Iglesias: There are tables from one end to the other and the entire width. So, I do think that if you use -- if you're using it for your business, you should have additional -- you should be responsible for additional cleaning, and you should be responsible for your area, as we have designated it during our permit process.

Parking Director Kinney: Actually, I'm going to make sure everybody knows the next time the guys go out -- I shouldn't say guys -- when all our Block by Block folks and employees go out to Giralda. So, you know, at 9 o'clock when you -- everybody comes downtown, they can walk by and see because they start at about 5 o'clock in the morning.

Mayor Lago: Can you do me a favor? And I'm sorry to interrupt you. Can you notify me next time? I'll be there...

Parking Director Kinney: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: At 4:45.

Parking Director Kinney: No, there will be one the end of the first -- before we get to March 1st.

Mayor Lago: I'll be there at 4:45, and I'll be there present, and I want to see it. The other thing I just want to point out -- and the Manager's exactly right. We do not hook up to anybody's spicket when Block by Block does their pressure washing. And most pressure washing companies have a way to bring the water with them. So, I think there's ways around any perceived issues. And I agree completely that this is a team effort, and everybody needs to do their part. And one of the difficulties with Giralda is, as the Manager says, there's certain areas that seem to not be attended except for the four times a year when we pressure wash them. And that means, on the day that we do it, there's many, many layers of ground-in grime or whatever you want to classify it as. But having said that, I will tell you, I shared pictures with the Manager and Economic Development after they finished, and there were -- it was much, much different. Was it --? And I'm going to use this term and probably regret it. Was it Disney World? No. But you're talking about a quarterly cleaning on a street that was, you know, at the end of the quarter, it was in pretty bad shape.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Parking Director Kinney: But it looked worlds better when they were done.

City Manager Iglesias: Which should not be because if the tenants are using it for dining, there should be an ongoing cleaning process so that when we clean, then we really leave it like Disney World. Because we could, but if that's the only cleaning that takes place during that time -- and we've talked about with Code Enforcement to start enforcing that now that we are after COVID because I do think there's a responsibility and part of their outside dining permit provides for that responsibility to make sure that your area is clean and your designated area is taking care of.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, moving forward...

Parking Director Kinney: We'll get better.

Mayor Lago: Do we need a motion?

Unidentified Speaker: Yes, please.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes.

City Attorney Ramos: Well, you have a resolution about the storefronts, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, that's what I'm saying.

Commissioner Anderson: Yeah. We got a little diverted so...

Mayor Lago: So, will anybody make a motion on the issue?

Commissioner Menendez: Motion.

Commissioner Anderson: Second.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Unidentified Speaker: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. And thank you for everybody's input, by the way. It was great. And this is all the type of collaboration that we need to really put our best foot forward, so thank you to staff, to Aura, to Belkys, to Hermes, to the entire team, to our Arts Advisory team, Historic Preservation. Thank you so much for all your hard work. Thank you, Catherine. I appreciate it.