

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-2
January 25, 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

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Development Services Director, Suramy Cabrera

Public Works Assistant Director for Landscaping, Deena Bell-Llewellen

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item D-2 – Mayor’s Comments [Start: 11:45 a.m.]

An update from staff regarding downtown clean-up efforts

Mayor Lago: Moving onto D-2. Director, how are you? This is our continued efforts in regard to downtown clean-up efforts. I want to make everyone aware on the Commission, they are more than welcome, we’ll call a Sunshine, we’ll do a mobile Sunshine meeting. I have called for the first week in March for Ms. Bell, Mr. Diaz, Ms. Cabrera, Mr. Manager, the two members from my office and anyone who would like to attend, we will do a mobile drive-through in the city. I’m going to borrow or rent a van to drive-through and look at certain areas in the city that I’ve sent a lot of photos, and staff is addressing it, but see areas that I think we can approve on. And with that being said, I also want to commend those members that I mentioned right now who are standing before us, for being incredibly receptive, working hard, knowing that we have things that we’ve got to work on and just going after it. So, I commend you for that. Thank you for that.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, thank you; and we’ll be ready for that walk-through whenever it happens.

City Commission Meeting
January 25, 2022

Mayor Lago: We've done it before.

Public Works Director Diaz: We have. We have.

Mayor Lago: This time I promise you won't get seasick in the back of my little car.

Public Works Director Diaz: That was a long time ago. By the way, you're still driving that App. I'm just kidding...on Miracle Mile. We actually have an irrigation project that is coming. We don't want to spend landscaping money just to rip it out later.

Mayor Lago: I know.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, we are working through that. I think Ponce, they are doing good – she has some good ideas about.

City Manager Iglesias: We are also redoing the median.

Public Works Director Diaz: Yes – correct.

City Manager Iglesias: Which is in need of update.

Mayor Lago: But we need, for example, if you look at Ponce and Bird Road, in front of the gas station, there are just twigs, just twigs. So, what we've got to do, we've got a lot of landscaping there and we walked this already, that we looked into it and it's a nightmare. So, this is just basically trunks and a little bit of leaves. We've got to replace all that landscaping down Ponce. I know its going to cost money, but its just a beautification project. I know that our team just likes to basically go over and brush over it, and our sub-contractor likes to brush over it very quickly, but it comes out every 10 or 15 years, you've got to rip it all out and you've got to redo it.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: That's one thing. The second thing that I wanted to talk to you about was, and Suramy, you are always accessible by text message. I can't thank you enough. Texting you last night at 9 o'clock at night about a tree that's missing, about a light post, and you are responding. So, I'd like to put it on the record, because people are quick to judge, and I think that its important that people understand the level of effort that's being put out there by the staff. That's part of the drive-through that we are going to do. I really need to understand, and I don't want to point people out, but when you look at Merrick Park's landscaping, its not acceptable. I need to know if its our responsibility or its Merrick Park's responsibility, and that runs down the gamut. For example, the building that's on the corner of Alhambra and Ponce, the glass cube, which is my understanding was the reason why Mediterranean bonus was derived, there is no landscaping, literally a trench. If you look at the building next to the Quickie Mart on Ponce de Leon, next to University of Miami, I've taken photos of it. There's been a freezer outside of that facility for over three months, and I know this because I go to that facility three or four times a week to get coffee, or a Gatorade before

*City Commission Meeting
January 25, 2022*

I go workout. The property across the street, there is no landscaping; the building there is no landscaping, literally. There are no poles where the pots are and there is no landscaping. How do people not get cited without having landscaping. We have a code. People when they build a building, they have to maintain their property, that's one thing. The second thing is, I've been speaking to a lot of business owners, and also DC's, they are concerned about the issue of potentially not having a spirket to clean their sidewalk. We will help you figure it out. This is my last point on this, and I'm to the point where I spoke to the Manager about it, if four times a year is too difficult, I'm willing to do it twice a year, every six months, because guess what, every six months is better than what's going on now which is every ten years. I'll take every six months. It's a win. And my last point. I need an action plan from the B.I.D. and from the Chamber and from staff, because I do not want to see one little business clean their front and then the other business is dirty, and they clean it in three months. I want it to be done in blocks, so people can clean it in blocks. Either everybody cleans it the first week in January, there's a window, and then they do it again six months later, they have a window or a month to do it. That would be perfectly acceptable for Code Enforcement too, so Code Enforcement can say, hey look, that sidewalk hasn't been cleaned. Case in point, where Madruga Bakery is. I had coffee this week in Madruga Bakery, with two residents. If you look at the Bank of America across the street, I took pictures of it and I sent it to staff. Bank of America does not have any landscaping, there are construction signs all over the downtown area. There is a project that's basically stalled for three months. Have them pick up all those construction signs that are tossed in the trees. Have them clean their sidewalks. Bank of America is a Fortune 50 company in the world. They should clean their sidewalks, plant their landscaping. They should take pride. We have standards here in the city. All those pictures were taken and sent to staff. So that's going to be part of their drive. I want to find out how we can make it easy for people to say every six months, let's clean it, and let's clean it together.

Public Works Director Diaz: I'd like to add something about the whole concern about the spirkets.

Mayor Lago: That's the whole point of having this discussion.

Public Works Director Diaz: There are actually portable pressure cleaners that come with a tank.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Public Works Director Diaz: Now usually this was something that you could just hire a handyman now because it was a lot easier, you might need to hire a company to do that for you, or you may need to rent a thing, but those things are available.

Mayor Lago: The lease owner, the owner of the property, they shouldn't pass it onto the renter or to the leasee. They should say, once every six months I'm going to clean my sidewalk, and I want to make it easy for Code Enforcement for Code Enforcement to say, when they walk by and say, hey look, the sidewalk hasn't been cleaned. It was supposed to be cleansed in the first two weeks of January, it was supposed to be cleaned in the first two weeks of August, it's a window. That way we can make it – I want to make it so easy that its transparent, that everybody knows how to address the issue.

*City Commission Meeting
January 25, 2022*

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, there is a plan to clean it, which I hope the Chamber can help us on. You can put a meter on a fire hydrant, and you have water there, so there are many ways you can bring your own water, you can connect correctly, there are many ways of doing that, and I think its an issue of really working together on that.

Mayor Lago: And I want to be very clear and put this on the record, so everybody knows, so they don't say you didn't put it on the record. The Business Improvement District does not clean the streets. The City of Coral Gables pays \$450,000 a year to clean Miracle Mile and Giralda, okay. When you look at other B.I.D.'s and I'm doing my research, you look at the B.I.D. in the City of Miami, you look at the Wynwood B.I.D., all those B.I.D.'s are responsible for cleaning up the streets, pressure cleaning the street, ensuring that garbage is picked up. We really need to analyze that, because we are spending a lot of money every year and the B.I.D. is not paying for that. Do we want to continue with that model? – perfectly fine, if it's the will of the Commission. But I'm flexible as long as my Commissioners agree with me, that maybe every three months is too much, maybe we should do it every six months, but I want to make sure that we follow through.

Commissioner Anderson: My only comment is, if you have a restaurant out there, you are going to have to do a lot more maintenance in between, food drops, things of that nature.

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct. I think if you are using the right-of-way to make money, then you should be responsible for cleaning that right-of-way on a continuous basis, because you are using it at that point, Mayor, as a restaurant.

Mayor Lago: But Mr. Manager and Commissioner, if it hasn't been cleaned in ten years and we can get them to clean it every six months, it's a win.

Commissioner Anderson: It is. It absolutely is. I agree with every six months pressure clean. That footnote was for...

Mayor Lago: I'll take the win. But you are 100 percent right about the restaurant. You are 100 percent right about the restaurant. You should want to clean it for your patrons who are going to sit there and see the food and see the stains on the floor.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I think every six months for non-restaurant use is fine, if its restaurant uses then we reserve the right to say you need to clean it further because if you spill something, it could be a slip and fall, it could be all those issues, but I agree with you, I think if there is no restaurant maybe six months might be.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cabrera.

Development Services Director Cabrera: So, we have prepared a map of locations in the business district that have had citations for maintenance from October and November, that's it there, and some of those dots are overlapping, but all those locations have been cited. We continue to enforce it, but lately in December and January we were concentrating more on the cardboard, but definitely there was a major effort to walk these business districts and cite the locations that had egregious

*City Commission Meeting
January 25, 2022*

violations because at one point we were just issuing warnings. We were waiting until January to really come down on the sidewalks and all that, but those locations there have all been either cited or have had warnings issued to them.

Mayor Lago: For example, corner of Ponce and Miracle Mile, main and main, we tried during Christmas to get the Colonnade to plant some trees, something nice, some little landscaping, shrubbery, maybe get in the festive spirit. I'm not asking you to go crazy, but they didn't plant it. So, what did we end up doing? We went out there, through the Manager, through his leadership, through his effort, through the team, and they put mulch out, instead of it being dirt, they put mulch on literally the planter, pretty significant planter, on the corner of Miracle Mile and Ponce. You know, its one of the biggest taxpayers in this community, its on the main street. You want to put your best foot forward, especially everybody that's visiting Crema, having coffee outside, and they just didn't want to plant it. And I don't understand what is it that, have they been noticed?

Development Services Director Cabrera: Yes, and actually Deanna has been working with them closely on getting an acceptable landscaping plan.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for that. What I would hope Ms. Bell is that they would run to you and say, tell me what we can do, let's get some landscaping out there. It's the most important corner in our city. If I owned that property, if I had the privilege of owning that property, what I could do with that property.

Assistant Director Bell-Llewellyn: I'll just mention that our department has been working very closely with the business owners that have covenants and we've been giving them ideas on what type of specific plant material they can improve their sites with. Conversely, we are paying special attention to our own sites too, because if we are asking the business owners to improve their landscaping, we are doing the same. So, I'm holding our own staff to task on that.

Mayor Lago: And when we replace all that landscaping from Merrick Park Circle, all the way down to Eighth Street and we remove those green...fichus, which are just so overgrown and they are full of garbage in them, its going to send a message. And if you noticed, they just planted all the landscaping in front of Carver; they redid the landscaping, finally the landscaping was done, but it's a good step forward in the right direction, along with cleaning up the park which I appreciate you, Mr. Diaz, for making sure that that park was taken care of right next to Carver. This is going to continue to be on the Commission. This is an agenda item that is important to me. There is a direct correlation between having a clean, vibrant downtown, and our taxes. The more welcoming and beautiful our downtown is, the more the taxable value is going to be, because guess what, people are going to want to come and spend money in the downtown and the property values are going to go up. So, I would just want to say again, thank you enough to the entire staff, everyone on your staff, Ms. Cabrera, Mr. Diaz, Ms. Bell, the Manager, you guys are working hard. This is a tall task. This is a tall endeavor and I appreciate your efforts on this. Thank you. So, this is a priority for my administration. Thank you.