

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-4
September 13, 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 (On Zoom)

City Staff

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Senior Transportation Engineer, Melissa DeZayas

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-4 [9:45 a.m.]

Discussion regarding Alhambra Circle sidewalks (between San Rafael and the bridge near Taragona Drive). (Sponsored by Mayor Lago).

Mayor Lago: Moving on, since we have the residents here, who live in the area, G-4, the item that I'm sponsoring. It's a discussion regarding Alhambra Circle sidewalks between San Rafael and the bridge near Taragona Drive. Mr. Public Works Director, please join us. Can you give us a quick update of where we are in regard to the project and talk a little bit about the legwork that we've done up to now.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, a few weeks ago, we actually went ahead, and we walked the neighborhood. We met with three of the five homes.

Mayor Lago: Yes, so we are taking a little bit of a different angle this time. To me, I think sidewalks are critically important. I think they are important, especially in areas where you have significant traffic, and also the bridge.

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Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: And you also have sidewalks available, except for three blocks. So, what I wanted to do was, I want to take a little different angle in an effort to speak with residents on a one-on-one. So, what I decided to do was, I asked for the Assistant Public Works Director and the Director of Public Works to meet with me, and we would visit the residents and show them the proposed plan, instead of just mailing them the proposed plan, and potentially allowing for a lot of miscommunications, because its normal for it to happen. We were very successful. I think we spoke with five. There are five homes, correct.

Public Works Director Diaz: There's five homes, we spoke to three.

Mayor Lago: We spoke to three.

Public Works Director Diaz: Two were definitely yes, another one was...

Mayor Lago: No – but that home now is for sale, this home is for sale, so that individual when we spoke to him who was kind of iffy, is now for sale; and then we spoke to another resident who is here, who said that they needed to confer as a family unit, which you have to respect that, obviously. So, one of the things that critically important that we talked about was the issue of funding, which was brought up before by one of the public speakers. I think that this is, and I'm speaking with my Commission, I know that there is legislation in place in regard to funding, but this is a little bit of a different scenario. If we are going to get buy-in from the residents here, we have to make sure that we remove all hurdles before us. And this is something that the Manager and I have spoken about over the last two weeks in preparation for today. This is a very small swath of sidewalks that in my opinion and the opinion of many are critical. If you drive through this area, it becomes basically like a choking point, as all the cars go down Alhambra and then it goes into the bridge.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: So, you already have multiple accidents at the bridge. If you drive by there right now there are cones, where you've actually seen structural, I don't want to scare anybody, but its not a structural issue, but you see the actual columns blown out on both sides.

Public Works Director Diaz: It was hit recently. We fixed that up about a year and-a-half ago, and it was hit again, it got hit again.

Mayor Lago: It was also hit on the other side.

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Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: The other side. So, this bridge has had multiple encounters with cars or cars have had multiple encounters with the bridge. So, to me, this is an area, which again, you see a lot of individuals, elderly individuals, disabled, parents with their kids in strollers having to walk on the street; and I know there's already a planned project in regard to traffic calming there.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: And that's why we haven't gone forward with repaving that street, because we received a lot of e-mails from residents saying, hey, repave the street, its in horrible shape. It is in horrible shape.

Public Works Director Diaz: Makes sense to do it all together.

Mayor Lago: Makes sense. We are trying to make our dollar spread as much as we can, so we are going to do everything at once. We have some residents here that we sat down with, and we talked, excuse me, we didn't sit down with them, we talked to them at their front door. And they had some viable concerns about how the sidewalk would meander through their property. We are trying to find every solution we possibly can, even going with the curb route to get the sidewalks away from the swale and away from damaging the tree roots, as much as possible.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: So, we are looking at every angle we can. And what I need from the Commission is direction in regards to funding, in regards to funding saying that these two blocks that we as a city will provide, because this is not a collector street, but its such a critical piece of infrastructure, in my opinion, for the city and its such a safety issue, and I drive this street every single day on the way to City Hall from my house, that I just imagine a horrific accident happening on that bridge and somebody getting run over. And I just want to bring this to your attention and plus, I know the residents are going to speak and I called it out of order, out of respect for them, because they have to go to work.

Vice Mayor Mena: Can I just ask you a question.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Vice Mayor Mena: Obviously, you are the sponsor, so I think you have more of the details probably. Are you talking about doing it a) on both sides of the street, or just one side of the street?

Mayor Lago: No, just one side which will then connect us all the way to Blue Road.

Vice Mayor Mena: This is on the west side of the street?

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Public Works Director Diaz: It will be on the west side of the street, yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay.

Ms. DeZayas: It goes north, south of Blue Road.

Mayor Lago: Sorry, north, I apologize. Thank you.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, it would be on the west side of the street.

Vice Mayor Mena: San Rafael south to the bridge on the west side of the street.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct, which is actually going to tie in, because the pedestrian crossing at the bridge is also on the west side, so it provides that connectivity on that side.

Commissioner Anderson: It goes all the way down to a park.

Mayor Lago: Sorry, not to Blue Road, sorry. Please strike that before somebody says that. I wish there were sidewalks all the way down to Blue Road. We are missing sidewalks to that critically important park that's there that gets a lot of use.

Public Works Director Diaz: That's another conversation for another two blocks to get to Betsy Adams.

Mayor Lago: Another conversation. We're not discussing that. But right now, we are really talking about this connection with the bridge, the water and if you drive by, the bridge has been involved in multiple accidents already.

Public Works Director Diaz: At least twice over the last three years.

Vice Mayor Mena: I have it pulled up here, so I can kind of see where the sidewalk.

Mayor Lago: See there is actual sidewalk already going north on Alhambra, going all the way to...

Ms. DeZayas: All the way, I think to LeJeune.

Mayor Lago: To LeJeune.

Vice Mayor Mena: From a funding perspective, I don't have an issue in terms of the sidewalks themselves.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Menendez is trying to get your attention.

Mayor Lago: Oh, okay.

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Vice Mayor Mena: My only question would be, are there any issues – how do we handle it when they traverse like a pre-existing driveway, let's say somebody has pavers?

Public Works Director Diaz: It's a case-by-case. For example, pavers usually easier you can depending on how they are.

Vice Mayor Mena: They have concrete, for example.

Public Works Director Diaz: There is one instance where there is concrete. In that specific case, we most likely will stop just before and after and just have people walk over the driveways. Its not ideal, but I don't want to be cutting the one concrete driveway. Sometimes pavers are easier because you can remove the pavers and put it back, and then you can put the sidewalk through, which is the ideal condition because you kind of create that idea of this is a sidewalk, drivers beware, but yes, in that block there's one concrete driveway approach. I will not want to touch that concrete driveway. I would just land it on it and continue on the other side.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor, Vice Mayor, every time that we have a non-standard approach, which is not asphalt, there is an understanding and its in writing that if the sidewalk put in that you can go through it, but its easier said than done sometimes.

Vice Mayor Mena: I understand we have the right to do it. I'm just mindful of not – to avoid ruining somebody's driveway, it cost a lot of money for people to do that. It beautifies the house, so if we could still have the driveway connectivity and then continue through, I think that's a good thing.

Public Works Director Diaz: Usually with pavers, we've done that too, we remove the pavers. We put the sidewalk through, and it gets...pavers are not problematic. There is no way for you to match. I mean you know they fade with the sun, so we don't want to touch those.

Mayor Lago: Before we hear from Commissioner Menendez. Another important thing, it's the same situation we are having on Blue Road is that a lot of these properties, they are side yards.

Public Works Director Diaz: Right.

Mayor Lago: So, this is a positive, except for the resident that you are going to hear from now, who has a beautiful home on Alhambra, one of the most beautiful ones on Alhambra. But a lot of these homes are side yards, which again, makes it a lot easier of an impact on the resident and also on the construction company, because they don't really have to deal with many driveways. Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you Mayor. Mayor, I echo your sentiment and your thoughts exactly on this issue. Soon after I was – I became a Commissioner, I had the opportunity to walk

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that specific area with some residents and I believe since its like you said, four or five homes, the burden shouldn't be on those four or five property owners, since it benefits everyone in the community to connect the sidewalks. And I've seen folks in wheelchairs trying to get out of their homes and they go into the street, and you describe, Hermes has described the accidents that have occurred there. I think safety first. I think we definitely should find a way to fund it without placing the burden on those four or five properties; and I do believe that the sidewalks should not be abutting the street, because since the street curves and sometimes cars pick up speed. We should do everything we can to push the sidewalks further away from the street for safety. I think its long overdue and I support whatever plan you, Mayor, and my colleagues come up with to make it happen.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Commissioner. You know one of the things I wanted to put on the record also, and this is something that we've been working with the Manager and our Public Works team who is here is, I don't have an issue with the sidewalks, and we have no other choice being on the curb with some sort of curving. I'm not concerned about that, because I live in front of the University of Miami and there is a sidewalk which has a curb that runs all down San Amaro. Its better to have something than nothing, and if you are telling me we are going to have to jeopardize and cut down the trees or its going to be an issue where the resident says, under no circumstances do I want to have a sidewalk so close to my property, for one reason or another, we need to be as flexible as possible, like we are being flexible here on the funding issue, because if not, we are never going to get these projects done and then one day, one day, God forbid, you'll be driving down the street, on the way to the office and you are going to see an ambulance there, like we saw that day with the bridge, and there've already been two major accidents in less than three years, correct.

Public Works Director Diaz: Yes. At least of what we are aware of.

Mayor Lago: That we are aware of.

Public Works Director Diaz: That we know of because it caused damage to the bridge. There might have been other accidents that we never got around to see.

Mayor Lago: So, my point is, that this is something that I wanted to bring to your attention, and I wanted the Commission to tell me yea or nay, so that we can have staff address it, and plus, also listen to the residents who are going to speak now, to get their input, their feedback because without their support, we can't move forward.

City Manager Iglesias: And if I could say something Mayor. We discussed this. Funding sidewalks is a huge issue, its millions of dollars, \$12 to \$13 million dollars. However, in this particular case there is an alignment issue, there is a bridge, there is a pedestrian bridge. There are so many things

in this particular spot that really makes it unique from the funding perspective, as you and I have discussed.

Mayor Lago: Yes. And I want to be very clear. When I went to speak to the Manager about this a few weeks ago, after we had met with the residents in that area. He was the first one that told me, you know Vince, this is not a collector street, obviously the law is the law, but at the end of the day, I think its worth making an exception here, because of the safety issues. So, we are trying to make this and remove as many hurdles as possible to finally deliver on sidewalks, as long as the residents who are here, who are going to speak now, we can get their buy-in, which is critical.

Public Works Director Diaz: And if I may, based on we've already spoken to at least two to three of the residents who live there, I believe there is more – most people indicated that they would favor the sidewalk closer to the street than the back. And the other item, I think we need to get clarification on from the Commission is the concurrency requirement, because right now, on that very same ordinance that its two-thirds concurrency. So, we need direction from this Commission.

Mayor Lago: We are going to address the concurrency, we are going to address that legislatively, but right now, I'm not going to allow that to hinder us moving forward, as long as again, I'm going to say it again, because they are looking straight at me, that the residents buy-in and that they are happy.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: I already have three residents from the bridge that said yes, but it doesn't serve me to have a gap with one resident in the middle, and I want them to be happy to have the sidewalk. Listen, I love having the sidewalk. To me, its something that again, my kids use every single day. Nobody has more traffic than I do, in between Doctor's, St. Augustine, University of Miami, Riviera Country Club, West Lab, I'm surrounded by traffic, 57th Avenue, and there are people constantly walking in front of my house, there are people constantly riding bikes, there's constantly people traversing up and down. Again, the last thing I want to see is somebody get run over on a main thoroughfare like Alhambra. It's a beautiful, beautiful tree-lined street that I think deserves decent, at a minimum, decent pedestrian access.

Commissioner Anderson: Couple comments.

Mayor Lago: Of course, and then we hear from the residents.

Commissioner Anderson: The traffic on the street is not their fault. This has been an ongoing problem for an extremely long period of time. I live on a very busy street as well. All the public benefits from having the sidewalks and the connectivity there. I'll add that because of my experience I went from a no curb situation on a corner to a curb situation, actually helped slow

down some of the traffic, because they can't roll up on your lawn, cut through your swale and get around all that traffic that they are trying to do to get where they need to go. I even had that problem with some of my older neighbors. Sometimes they would go through my yard to get to their driveway. They don't live there anymore. Those were some of the observations that I had, and I think because of the broad public benefit that's going to exist here for everybody, that the cost should not be borne by those homeowners.

Commissioner Fors: Do we have a rough estimation or is it too early of the cost that we are looking at for this particular project?

Public Works Director Diaz: So, the cost of the sidewalk alone is about just under \$60,000, right.

Ms. DeZayas: Yes.

Public Works Director Diaz: But there'll be some additional cost because as we put it adjacent to the roadway, we are going to narrow the road, there is some payment involved with that, and also...

Mayor Lago: That's a different project.

Public Works Director Diaz: It will have to be done together with this, but that has a different funding source, we have pavement, we have sidewalk. There also has to be some drainage improvement at this location, because now the water just kind of spreads into the swale, so we haven't figured out what that is, so there'll be some additional cost associated with it, because now when you put the curb the flow of the water gets trapped in, doesn't have the swale to spread out. So, we don't have a full cost worked out yet. The sidewalk version will probably be about \$60,000.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Before we hear from the residents and if you'd like to please come up, please join us. I'd like to commend Hermes and Melissa.

Public Works Director Diaz: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: They have done an incredible job, Mr. Manager, they have been front and center on this issue. My office has been very demanding. This is a legacy project where this Commission can take a lot of pride and the staff can take a lot of pride, and finally delivering a project that was discussed for many, many, many years and we found a way to bring the residents together, show them the need, meet their needs, meet their requirements, find common ground, and hopefully they run this project. But you have met on site multiple times, you've been more than flexible with your time and with your efforts, and I appreciate that, and it means a lot.

Public Works Director Diaz: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: It shows how your team works together and that this has been a project which is, again, your staff have been fully dedicated to, so I appreciate that. Thank you. Sir, good morning, name and your address.

Mr. Rodriguez: Roland Rodriguez, my wife Christie, we are at 3310 Alhambra.

Mayor Lago: First off, before we talk about your home, I wanted to tell these individuals who you are, and your background.

Mr. Rodriguez: Sure. So, my background, I'm a civil engineer, I'm a professional engineer, I know Melissa, we worked together in the Department of Transportation in the past, and also, I'm a proud Marine.

Mayor Lago: That's what's important.

Mr. Rodriguez: So, you'll see my flag flying out in front of the home sometimes.

Mayor Lago: You also have humbly given your home to the Coral Gables Country Club, excuse me, Coral Gables Community Foundation to work kitchens.

Mr. Rodriguez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Which was incredibly successful this year. You had hundreds of people walking in and out of your house, that's where you and I were able to catch up and talk about a few different things affecting the city, but more importantly your service to this great country has to be commended and we are beyond grateful for that. Thank you.

Mr. Rodriguez: So, again, thank you for the opportunity to speak. The home that we are talking about that has the driveway is my home; and again, I welcome a sidewalk. We've met many neighbors and become friends, because they walk through our driveway, and we experience it every morning walking our dog. Its not a collector street, but because of Ways, and because of all the traffic trying to shortcut through Alhambra to get to the school.

Mayor Lago: Trying to avoid 57th Avenue.

Mr. Rodriguez: Right. There is a lot of heavy traffic, and it becomes dangerous and walking the dog we experience the speed running through. So, the calming devices are great, a great device off the bridge. As far as the meandering, that's something that we're concerned with in front of our property and also the status of the trees that are there, having to cut through that close to the roots, that may be a concern. I don't object to the curb running through the front. In fact, I think when we put it through the DOT, when put sidewalks, we always put curb. It's a calming device and a protection device to the residents walking on the sidewalk. We did have a concern with the cost,

which I hear, we appreciate that, but again, we welcome the sidewalk. We wanted to have the opportunity to speak to what's happening in front of our home and hear our concerns.

Mayor Lago: Well, budgets are very tight, they are tight. We have a lot of projects on the docket, and we've seen, as you know, being in the business, construction costs have gone up 30-40 and 50 percent in certain cases, especially with civil. I mean the cost of pipe, as you know, has gone up double in certain cases, maybe more. You can't put a price on life safety at the end of the day, and this is something that's critically important to the future of everybody who lives in this community. I want to say thank you for taking time out of your busy day to be here, both of you, and voicing your opinion, and I promise you, before we make a move on anything, we will show you the options, and obviously, we have to get your buy-in.

Mr. Rodriguez: Perfect. Appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: Its critical.

Mr. Rodriguez: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here and thank you for your service. So, moving forward, what would you like in regard to – would you like a formal vote in regard to the funding?

Public Works Director Diaz: Whichever you feel is appropriate, but yes, absolutely we'll be more comfortable we have a formal direction as to what you want us to move forward with design.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I would like a vote on it to make this an exception due to the specific conditions of the sidewalk.

Commissioner Anderson: We need a motion?

Vice Mayor Mena: Do you have like an estimate?

Mayor Lago: The sidewalks are about \$60,000.

Public Works Director Diaz: The sidewalks are about \$60,000.

Vice Mayor Mena: How about the drainage and everything else you discussed?

Ms. DeZayas: We don't yet.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sorry?

Ms. DeZayas: That we don't have yet.

Public Works Director Diaz: We don't have it yet.

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Mayor Lago: What I'm talking about today is just the sidewalks. I'm not talking about the traffic calming and the asphalt. That was a separate project that was never bundled with this.

Vice Mayor Mena: But the drainage has to be part of it, no?

City Manager Iglesias: The drainage, Vice Mayor, we need to really look at it and we need to tweak it as much as possible. I think we'll be looking at potentially using partially the swale and looking at those specific elevations, but I don't think the price would probably be more than double that, somewhere in that area.

Public Works Director Diaz: I'm thinking probably \$100,000, something along those lines.

Commissioner Menendez: Can I make a suggestion?

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Commissioner Menendez: Maybe the motion or what we pass has a cap on the high end, and if it goes above that cap, it comes back to us, but if we come up with a number based on what the Manager and Hermes say, I think we can run, at least I'm comfortable moving forward with it. So, whatever Hermes and the City Manager suggest would be the high end of the overall cost is perhaps what should be in the motion itself.

Vice Mayor Mena: I don't have a problem with that in principle. I would just say, I think I'd rather just give you the approval, a ballpark estimate of what you're saying. I don't want to – this Commission doesn't need to micromanage if you are within 10 or 15 or \$20,000 on an item, that happens every day. So, I'd rather, based on the estimate you are giving, I'm willing to approve the funding. Obviously, if something were wildly out of range with what you just said, obviously you'd let us know.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely. And the other costs involved, for example, the milling and resurfacing, but that was already scheduled, because it has to happen. That's one of the worst condition areas, so I'm not counting that here.

City Manager Iglesias: Say between 100 and 120, somewhere in there, Vice Mayor. I think that we have a unique situation. We've had areas in the city that for 95 years have not had sidewalks, and normally sidewalks are best at the property line, but we have a problem. We've got huge trees, we've got 41,000 trees in our right-of-way, we have approaches, we have all these things that were built out prior to the sidewalk. So, we do need a little flexibility when we do some of these sidewalk projects.

Vice Mayor Mena: Of course.

City Manager Iglesias: Because of that. So, we will try to do it as least expensive as possible, still functioning and I would say between 100 and 120. If its anything way above that amount, we will bring it back to the City Commission.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, I think some of it is timing too. Right now, prices are high, hopefully by the time you put the money into this project it will come down some.

Public Works Director Diaz: Hopefully. Absolutely.

City Manager Iglesias: And this is a very unique condition.

Mayor Lago: We still have to design it. Obviously, we've got to finalize the input from the residents. We are not talking about; we are starting this next month.

Public Works Director Diaz: Right.

Mayor Lago: This could take a few months. I wish we could start next month, but that's not a possibility right now. I'll entertain a motion.

Commissioner Anderson: I'll be happy to move it.

Vice Mayor Mena: Second.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So, I look forward to your staff speaking with the residents and just looking at different options in regard to the missing link, the other missing link right there. They are in, but I want to make sure I was comfortable as possible.

Public Works Director Diaz: Alright.

Mayor Lago: Good job guys. I appreciate it. It's a big win for us, for everyone. Thank you very much. Thank you to the residents.

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