

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
September 26, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro (On Zoom)

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

Transportation Division Manager, Melissa DeZayas

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-3 [2:12 p.m.]

Discussion regarding the potential installation of a median on Ponce de Leon Boulevard (South of Bird Road). (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto F-3. This is simple and very quick. Just putting it on the radar of the Commission. I got a bunch of phone calls, I imagine certain members of the Commission probably did too, e-mails of accidents that were happening in this area of Ponce de Leon adjacent south of Bird Road, and people were inquiring due to the size of the street and four lanes, why couldn't we put a very thin median there, maybe put some palm trees or something that, again, could just beautify the area. I spoke to staff, there are some concerns in regards to that, but again, I wanted to address it in the public. People are requesting, potentially in the future when we budget for a project like this, is an opportunity to not only beautify, but also make it a little bit safer, so that people are not making all these illegal U-turns, there was a pretty bad accident there the other day.

City Commission Meeting
September 26, 2023

Public Works Director Diaz: Good afternoon, Hermes Diaz, Public Works Director. Melissa put together a brief presentation, so she can show the Commission.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Melissa.

Transportation Manager DeZayas: Welcome. Melissa DeZayas, Transportation Division Manager. So, based on your request, we went out, our team went out, we got some measurements just to see what we could fit out there. The area that we were looking at was basically Ponce de Leon, south of Bird. Right now, what you see out there is like a mixed parallel and angle parking spaces. Basically, you have parallel parking spaces on the east side just north of the mid-block, and then everywhere else there's angle. North of the mid-block, there's a small median with palm trees. You've got some wide sidewalks, they have some palm trees, and like I said, the mid-block. So, this is a picture from the mid-block, facing south on Ponce. You can see there's no median right now, south of mid-block.

Mayor Lago: And again, if I may, if you went back. I'm not proposing doing angle, excuse me, parallel parking. I want to be very, very careful what I say, because then the rumor-mill starts that we're trying to take away angle parking. I wanted to take a look at how we could fit, potentially a median and then as people were talking about cost before. How do we address the issue of cost? The Mayor is talking about doing projects if there's no money. There are two major projects that are proposed within 200 feet of the street right here. One of them is in front of Nordstroms and the other one is adjacent to Nordstroms on Ponce. If we ask nicely, like I asked in the case of Doctor's Hospital and they agreed to pay for \$700,000 worth of sidewalks, to be added around Doctor's Hospital and University, you could potentially get some beautification and infrastructure projects in the street, because those developments would benefit from these upgrades. So, I wanted you to keep in mind that if we are able to do something, I would ask the Manager to have a discussion with those two potential entities that are in the process right now to come and say, hey, let's look at some infrastructure upgrades, which again, they should pay. They should pay because there are public benefits that I think will pay dividends to the entire corridor. I want you to respond to that because that was brought up about me doing that. I don't bring things up without having a plan in place.

Transportation Manager DeZayas: So, like I said, we went out there and we took some measurements. These are the existing conditions that are out there right now. The lanes that are going southbound on Ponce are extremely wide, they are actually above the standard lane width that we need. Going northbound since the geometry of the roadway on Ponce is a little bit tricky, because it starts widening as you get closer to the intersection, because

*City Commission Meeting
September 26, 2023*

there's a left-turn lane and everything. We actually have one lane that's like sub-standard, technically right now, but since there's like a gore area in the middle it's not noticeable. Based on what the Mayor just said about maintaining angle parking, we had one option which is basically, that's where we would maintain the angle parking and based on the widths that we need for the lanes, we basically have like four feet.

Mayor Lago: The reason why we maintain the angle parking is that because I think it's most effective. If we went away from that we would lose 50 spaces. So, I want to reiterate on the record, before anybody runs off and says that I want to take off angle parking in that area. I don't. My goal is to bring this up here on the Commission, have the Commission talk with staff and then as these two projects are coming down the line say, why don't we take advantage of an area that doesn't have a median in the city, but potentially have a partner step up to the plate and do something beautiful in the area.

Public Works Director Diaz: I think we can definitely look into that.

Mayor Lago: Talk to the Manager.

Public Works Director Diaz: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: And you figure it out.

Public Works Director Diaz: Hundred percent.

Commissioner Menendez: Because there's a crosswalk there where the trolley stop is. You mean when you do a crosswalk, there's not even median there. So, a person is crossing, and the car is not stopping, you're sort of really vulnerable. So that's a serious safety issue.

Public Works Director Diaz: That area is probably around four and-a-half feet. If you hybridize it, you end up with about four minus the curb, that means the planting space is left is very small, but.

Commissioner Menendez: But even on Miracle Mile if you cross the middle of the block where you have, near Seasons 52.

Public Works Director Diaz: You've got a median.

Commissioner Menendez: If the car is on the other side, you have a safe zone. You have some safe zone in the middle. The crosswalk there doesn't have a safe zone.

*City Commission Meeting
September 26, 2023*

City Manager Iglesias: [Inaudible – off mic]

Commissioner Menendez: I'm just saying, in terms of safety, there are several safety concerns regarding that part of Ponce. And if you could find out again, I've said it 50 times, why the street going northbound on Ponce also jogs left when you are coming out of the circle, out of the fountain, going north and you're passing Nordstrom, all of a sudden it goes left and then up. That's where cars just cross lanes because all of a sudden, their lane is going straight and also their lane tells them go this way and then up. I'll be more than happy to walk it with you. You go in there praying that the car next to you figures it out.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I agree that this should be taken care of. Segovia used to be one of these streets of four lanes, asphalt and people racing down at 50-some odd miles per hour, and you have to run for your life and if you're not in good shape or you are not young, or you get tangled up in your dog leashes, which I did, it's not pretty in the middle of the street. So, I agree, we need to have the safety zone. It's a good idea on most of these large boulevards where we can put it in to do it, even if it's just palm trees or maybe we can put in some white tabs. It's sort of like the palm tree that is a leafy tree.

Public Works Director Diaz: Right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's amazing how nice and narrow they stay.

Mayor Lago: So, what else do you recommend.

Public Works Director Diaz: I think, unfortunately, without turning some of the parking into parallel, that's basically the only option that we have available to us, given the width of the right-of-way. It's a 100-foot right-of-way, you have four lanes.

Transportation Manager DeZayas: You have very wide sidewalks there.

Mayor Lago: Which are great. So let me ask you a question. Do you think we could fit a little median there, something small.

Transportation Manager DeZayas: Very small.

*City Commission Meeting
September 26, 2023*

Mayor Lago: That's fine though. Again, you guys are the engineers when it comes to infrastructure and traffic and all that kind of stuff. My understanding is that if you were to grab those lanes and just make them a little bit tighter, it would slow the traffic down a little bit, correct.

Transportation Manager DeZayas: We can make the inner lanes tighter.

Mayor Lago: That's what I'm saying.

Transportation Manager DeZayas: The outer lanes we have to maintain.

Mayor Lago: My understanding is that speaking to traffic engineers it would slow traffic down and also, we add trees it would slow traffic down also. That's my understanding. What I would like to see, if possible, through the Manager, if it's the will of the Commission, is to put together a plan, but a plan that we don't pay for. I want that plan to be paid for by the developers in the neighborhood that are putting up those two projects as part of their public benefit package, along with lights in the area that are required and pedestrian crosswalks, restriping, reasphalting, all that kind of stuff that's going to be required. We're talking about a neighborhood that's potentially going to have two to three projects going on for the next two to three years. So, we need to work on that, along with the alleys in the back. These are small infrastructure projects that I think are in line with what we're doing. Mr. Manager, yes sir.

City Manager Iglesias: [Inaudible – off mic]...affecting the angle parking. So, I think we have a reasonable, the best cross-section available there without going to parallel parking.

Mayor Lago: So, Mr. Manager, we potentially have some conversations with the interested parties and see what the appetite is and then we can reverse-engineer it and understand where we stand in regard to a design. Something very, very simple. We should take advantage of the fact that there's two major projects that are going on and I think that we could potentially have something that will change the way, not only the look, but also the safety aspect. I don't think we have to spend a dollar from the city to study it or to start planning. Something we could start working – the Manager sets a meeting and starts saying, look, I think this is going to be very beneficial. I know that these people are going through the process already. They've already submitted, its public record, they've submitted plans to the city. They've been reviewed by multiple boards, and I think we could potentially have something nice here in the city that would pay dividends.

City Manager Iglesias: We can certainly look at that Mayor.

Public Works Director Dias: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. I appreciate it. Thank you. So, I'll leave it up to you guys and I guess we'll follow up in a few months.