

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-7
May 14, 2019
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Landscape Director, Brook Dannemiller

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Items G-7 [11:57:35 a.m.]

An update on the Million Orchid Project
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The Million Orchid Project.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Mayor. This is just a simple update in regards to where we're at. How many we have planted?- how much are we spending a year?- what are the costs?- where are the orchids located?- and what is the potential, what is the end-date for this project?

Landscape Architect Bell-Llewellyn: Hello Commission, I'm Deena Bell-Llewellyn, City Landscape Architect, I think I've talked to many of you. The resolution was amended, as you know in February, and the original resolution of 2014 was just extended in time basically, that's all we did. Since February, we've been working with Fairchild Tropical Gardens on identifying the next area of installs, which we are going to focus on Alhambra median, all the trees, the Granada Avenue boulevard major trees and then next to Venetian Pool. So since February the team at

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Fairchild has been how many orchids to plant there. We plant during the rainy season, so now during the summer our plan is every Friday to go and sell more orchids. Miracle Mile is completed, which was 3,000 orchids I believe went along Miracle Mile, the four native varieties are up in the oaks. That was the major thing we've accomplished.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Which varieties?

Landscape Director Dannemiller: The native varieties. So all of the orchids we are planting are the native ones and they are small, about an inch in diameter size flowers, the ones that are in the trees. We also have some ground orchids that we've planted in various parks like Geo Park, the Merrick House. So there's both ground orchids and tresh orchids and the orchids that we put up in the trees.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: If you plant it on top of trees, will we be able to see them?

Landscape Director Dannemiller: Eventually yes. So we've had some flowers as soon as one year, usually its two to three years before they start to flower; and goal is to distribute them throughout the City so that over time they will populate all the trees within the City.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I had mentioned to the City Manager that I can get...donated palm trees here in the courtyard.

Landscape Director Dannemiller: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I would very much love to see that.

Landscape Director Dannemiller: We'll happily install those out there and also the mahogany trees in the parking lot and in between here and 427.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: [Inaudible]...in the palm trees here.

Landscape Director Dannemiller: Yes, we can do that.

Vice Mayor Lago: So what are we looking at in regards to cost on a yearly basis moving forward?

Landscape Architect Bell-Llewellyn: This is \$30,000 a year, that's the original resolution in 2014 and that did not change, that's an average cost; and our actual installs was 14,000 orchids per year, so we were slower than anticipated, that's the reason for the amendment in February, to extend the amount of time, but the money was not changed, \$30,000 a year.

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Vice Mayor Lago: The reason why I put this on the agenda and I want to be brief is, number one, I didn't know the figures; number two, I think I need to stop and maybe smell the roses, like the Mayor stated, because I've had a lack of ability to really find these orchids. And when I see the amount of money that we're spending and I walk the Mile all the time, maybe need to be a little more attentive. \$30,000 is \$30,000. I want to make sure that we are – this is something of a benefit for the entire City and that we are spending the money as wisely as possible. I don't know how my colleagues feel about it. I think it's a beautiful project and I want to see it move forward, but I want to see the benefits. Maybe you are telling me it takes five years, maybe it takes ten years.

Commissioner Keon: Even if they are very small, even if they are very small and you really have to look for them, because you don't know if it is something that has been blown onto the tree and whatever. So you need to know what they are and you need to really look for them. I know from the home I live in, had a very big oak in the back; and the first couple times I saw a couple of them and then they bloomed. Well within, I don't know, eight or nine years, they were walking all the way up the branch of that tree. So they take time. They do take time, it is slow. Unless you are really looking for them, the likelihood is in these early years is you are not going to see them. You are not going to notice them. You'll notice them when all of a sudden, you know they start spreading and you'll see all of a sudden this growth going up a limb and you'll realize its not something that just dropped them, and then you'll see the little flowers. They are so pretty and they are so – they are natives, what you look like long ago before we found that we could put...

Vice Mayor Lago: The native ones are so fragile and they are so small in comparison to what we are used to seeing... what we all have in our backyards. I just wanted to get a little bit more, because I've had residents come up to me and say listen, what's going on with the Million Dollar Orchid Project and its costing money.

Landscape Director Dannemiller: Its not a million dollars, its \$150,000 for the whole project. Its on Miracle Mile, you can see them, the new oaks and on the existing oaks that are there, you can see them tied up on the trees; and so, if residents or anyone wants to go see them that's the easiest place to see them.

Commissioner Keon: Right. But you have to know and remember that they are small. You have to look for them at this point.

Landscape Architect Bell-Llewellyn: And Commissioner, I have a full list of all the locations since 2016 where the installed happened, if you want to see it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Can you e-mail me that?

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Landscape Architect Bell-Llewellyn: Sure.

Commissioner Mena: Can you remind me the extension that you referenced, in February, remind me it was extended for how long?

Landscape Architect Bell-Llewellyn: Its probably going to take us ten years to get the 250,000 orchids.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes. But we are talking about probably the life of the project would be half a million dollars, the overhead cost?

Landscape Director Dannemiller: Its \$150,000 – I'm just reading from the February 12th Commission brief here.

Vice Mayor Lago: So we are budgeting at a year in, year out \$30,000, correct?

Landscape Architect Bell-Llewellyn: \$150,000 total.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Landscape Director Dannemiller: And we've been averaging, so far we've installed approximately 43,140 total orchids in three years, so at that rate we are doing 10-15,000 a year. We are trying to increase that rate, increasing the amount that we installed the crews, but we've also been giving them out to residents at the Farmers Market, so they can put them on their private property and help...

Vice Mayor Lago: Are we going back to where we've planted these and making sure that they are healthy and the correct exposure.

Landscape Director Dannemiller: We are kind of the ginney pigs for this project with Fairchild. From the beginning they've expanded it throughout the County. So the initial plantings we did at the Merrick House. A lot of those are tiny little ones, they are experimenting at what the correct size was; and they found that they need to be a little bit bigger. So now they grow them in the greenhouse until they are a certain size before we plant them and when the success rate is much higher and we only do it during the rainy season because we can't get up to irrigate them during the dry season. So, if we plant in the rainy season and they are a certain size, we have a much bigger success rate with them.

Vice Mayor Lago: Perfect. Thank you. I appreciate for the update.

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Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

[End: 12:05:00 p.m.]