

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
September 14, 2021
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

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-4 [Start: 12:20 p.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending the City of Coral Gables Code by creating Chapter 2 “Administration”, Article III “Boards and Committees”, Division 7 “Landmarks Advisory Board” providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-4.

City Attorney Ramos: F-4 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending the City of Coral Gables Code by creating Chapter 2 “Administration”, Article III “Boards and Committees”, Division 7 “Landmarks Advisory Board” providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. This item is being co-sponsored by Mayor Lago, along with Commissioner Anderson.

City Commission Meeting

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*Agenda Item F-4 – Ordinance amending code by creating Chapter 2 “Administration”
Article III “Boards and Committees” Division 7 “Landmarks Advisory Board”*

[Date]

1

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Good afternoon Mayor, Commissioners, Stephanie Throckmorton, Assistant City Attorney here to present the item sponsored by Commissioner Anderson and the Mayor. This item is an ordinance on first reading creating a Landmarks Advisory Board. I can let the sponsors discuss it more, but just to give a brief description of the purpose of the board would be to identify and recommend improvement opportunities to city staff with respect to the city-owned and/or maintained entrances, plazas, fountains, historically significant poles and lights, historic markers, statues and other historically designated landmarks or items. The board will establish a collection of written records and photographic inventory of each item within its purview and document its state of preservation. Quarterly they will provide non-binding recommendations to the city staff. The board would be under the purview of the Public Works Department and have seven members. I'm happy to discuss any of the details of it and I'll turn it over to the sponsors for further discussion.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Before Commissioner Anderson takes the lead on this, I had the privilege of co-sponsoring Commissioner Anderson and I asked her and she obviously, graciously accepted. I've been working on this with the Manager and with his team looking at other opportunities to purchase land, like we did two Commission meetings ago, in regard to 37th Avenue. I've also had several discussions in regard to residents bringing to my attention the fact that certain, even though we just renovated a lot of our landmarks over the last three or four years, that certain of them lacked a little bit of more care, and we got into a discussion on, what exactly can we do? – how should we really step up our game in regard to maintenance, proactive maintenance? And I think having Warren here, to the city has been a real plus, a real benefit with his ideas, and his ability to always get involved. So, when the Commissioner brought this forward, I wanted her to talk a little bit about her interest. I thought it was a great opportunity to again, continue the discussion, and like we talked about before, using the expertise of individuals in our community who give up of their time to really work on issues like this one and only make the city better. Only continue to beautify and take the city to the next level. So, Commissioner, the floor is yours. Thank you for allowing me to co-sponsor with you.

Commissioner Anderson: Oh, absolutely. I really – it's the individuals in our city that came to me that are passionate about historic features and landmarks in our city that brought this idea to me. So, I really don't deserve any credit at all, except just to sponsor it with you. We've had a number of discussions, Mr. Warren Adams participated in that, to determine the best way to structure this board. And the way that we wrote this up is to have them report to Public Works as to the maintenance issues and Mr. Adams will participate in the meetings on an as needed basis, so as to not to take too much of staff's time. I looked at our Historic Preservation Board, I noticed they did cover this area. This is not to take this issue away from the Historic Preservation Board, their agendas are quite lengthy. They have some complex issues that they have to handle, so that this is just to augment to help our staff without having to run around so much. So that's the reason for this board formation and I'd ask you all to support it.

Mayor Lago: Anyone else, anything else?

Commissioner Menendez: Could you elaborate a little bit more as to the community. I think it's a wonderful idea. The types of things that they'll be discussing in that environment, like examples.

Commissioner Anderson: The examples are, and I found out after this item has been put on, that there is already a very dedicated member of our community has put together a comprehensive list. I don't know if its complete, but to have all of our landmarks itemized and have an inventory of them and they will go around and examine them for time to time to see if they need Strangler Figs taken out or some cleaning done on them or if the landscaping needs enhanced, they can report back to Public Works and say, we really need, all the flowers are dead, so we need to do something about it, or there are weeds growing in it. So that's the purpose of it and I think it helps our staff not be over strained with just going out and driving around to look at all these items.

Mayor Lago: If I may, I just want to add onto that. While it may help staff, what it really helps is me, helps the people on this Commission, because I'll give you a perfect example. Karelia, who we all know is very involved, I think she comes from a great place. She was the one that came to me and told me, hey Vince, are you aware that in front of Liberty Café there used to be these two beautiful light posts. I didn't know, I had no clue. I found this gentleman, who has a robust history on these light posts and where they came from, and let's bring those back to their original beauty. We raised the money, we got the commitment, we brought it to the Commission, it was a process, staff took over and they did a great job on making sure that we got it, basically brought back to its old beauty. But without a person like Karelia, without a person like Brett Gillis, there are a lot of people in this community that have a real vested interest in our history, and I would love nothing more than to see them on a board where they could potentially opine on, to be honest with you, that we miss sometimes. And we may depend on staff, but the staff is very busy and unless I sit down with Warren every single week to talk about issues, in regard to our city's history or our monuments and entrance features, I'm only really playing catch-up in regard to when something doesn't look as good as it should look. I'd like to be more proactive, even if we have to say, we can't deal with this until another five years from now, three years, but we know that that issue needs to be dealt with and these are individuals that can work on just continuing to make sure that our rich history is, not only maintained but is continued to be worked on.

Commissioner Menendez: What I like the most is what you mentioned Mayor is, we have such a wealth of resources, people in the community with so much knowledge, so much passion, this is a perfect example where we can activate them and tap into their expertise, but also tap into their passion. And so, I think it's probably long overdue.

Commissioner Anderson: I really thank the residents that came forward with the suggestion. So, I'd like to move it.

Commissioner Menendez: Second.

Vice Mayor Mena: How does it work if there is a historic landmark, obviously? I'm assuming under landmark we are counting historic and non-historic.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: So, there are some purviews that may appear to overlap with the Historic Preservation Board. Our code provides that between first and second reading of the creation of a new board, the City Manager's office put together a report that details those kinds of potential conflicts, looks at the finances of a new board, etc. Its all set out in the code, so we plan on working with the Manager's office to put that report together between first and second reading. The purview of the Historic Preservation Board is a little bit different when it comes to these monuments. It has to do with the designation of them and considering them when looking at other applications in front of them, less about the maintenance. So, we'll have to look very closely to make sure we are not creating overlapping duties there, but that report from the Manager's office will sort of detail what would be unique about this report, and given that, this item probably won't come back on the second September meeting for second reading just to give the Manager's office some time to put together that report, if that's alright with the sponsors.

Commissioner Anderson: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: The purpose of this board is only for good things, at the end of the day. Its to really, again, do everything we possibly can to memorialize, to really work on our history and especially these buildings and these entrance features that again, for a long time maybe we hadn't paid enough attention to them, or we have, and they just need continued maintenance.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: And to the Vice Mayor's point, what we'll need to look carefully about the definitions of what falls under the purview of this board. For instances, statues may be under the Arts Advisory Panel, you know, we'll have to look carefully about what gets included on this list to make sure that this board has a clear mandate about what's under their purview or not.

Vice Mayor Mena: Just so you don't create a sort of bureaucratic nightmare that just kind of do the same things. I just want to be clear on who's responsible when you have landmarks that have so much overlap between boards.

Mayor Lago: I have an idea. I want to share something with you. So, I've been working on something for the last four or five years that I failed miserably at trying to resole it, and that is these White Way Lights that are in pristine condition, but they are located in a private, in Ft. Lauderdale. I brought it to the Commission before, but I failed. I've tried everything in my power to try to figure out a way to see if I can preserve that history and bring it back to the city. They are in pristine condition and on one can understand how they ended up in Ft. Lauderdale. They probably do, they probably found them in scrap or in salvage or who knows what the owner, the connection they had with somebody who had those and purchased them, and they are beautiful. So, I would love for this board to, this is maybe one of the issues they can dig into this, and they can try to make those inroads when staff is way too busy addressing a million and one things. They can try to find ways; they can be creative in regard to our historic monuments and our White Way Lights and our bridges and different things that we sometimes maybe can't. Not saying that we'll be able to tackle all of these issues, because again, we are seeing the cost, for example on the White Way Lights how expensive they are, but its good to document and memorialize that these issues

City Commission Meeting

exist and then maybe in the future when we do have the financial wherewithal capabilities we can say listen, we'll prioritize these issues.

Vice Mayor Mena: Also, exactly what constitutes a landmark.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Yes. We may need to tweak a little bit of the language to clarify what we mean by what will be covered in this board to make sure that we've got a sort of explicit list so there is no confusion about who is responsible for what. Its my understanding from speaking with the sponsors, this has to do more with not designating them as historic landmarks, but just the maintenance that normally happens with our Facilities Division in Public Works. For instance, the White Way Lights, while those are historic, those are under the purview of our Public Works Department. So, making sure that we are clarifying the distinction between the designation and considering those historic monuments when Historic Preservation Board considers applications, certificates of appropriateness, etc., they consider those landmarks, but they are not looking at the maintenance.

Mayor Lago: And also finding opportunities to fund these strategies.

Vice Mayor Mena: What about new landmarks.

Mayor Lago: New landmarks – finding grant money.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: So those would still be designated by the Historic Preservation Board, is my understanding that that duty of determining whether or not something is historic would still lie with them.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, no, no, what I mean is literally new entrance features, which we talked about.

Mayor Lago: I would love to put one, and I'll be honest, we are talking historic, put it on 37th Avenue, we would love to put one on Bird Road, I would love to put one on Miller. Right now, the University of Miami just bought the church on Ponce and 57th Avenue, we have to start thinking about that island in the future when they come before us. We have such a great partnership with the University of Miami, let's take advantage of that partnership. Let' say when they come with a design, say I want you to put a beautiful monument, doesn't have to be extravagant, just a beautiful monument that tells people who are going on Ponce or going up 57th Avenue, you are entering the City of Coral Gables. So, these are things that this type of board can opine on, working with Historic Preservation, working with Public Works. This is not about designating. This is about just really being thoughtful and finding different opportunities to continue to build on our legacy and our history.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: As written it says that they would be responsible for the city-owned and/or entrances, plazas and fountains, regardless of their historic status. So those would be covered by this, if there were new landmarks or new fountains or new items like that.

Commissioner Menendez: I always find some simplicity is probably best and its always easy to add responsibilities later than to have to come back later and then remove things, because we found out like it was mentioned, there is an overlap. So, I think simple is better in the beginning and we can add as we go along.

Vice Mayor Mena: I just don't want people to designate things as landmarks that aren't.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Of course.

Commissioner Anderson: Oh no, no.

Vice Mayor Mena: What we intend to be landmarks.

Commissioner Anderson: This is not about designation. Gaye Bondurant forwarded me a list that I wasn't aware of that she had made, together with Collet Warm of various landmarks and designations. I'm going to go ahead and forward that unto the City Manager and if you'd like I'll forward it to all of you, so we can look at what that is. I haven't even had the time to look at it and see if that is a useful beginning point for us.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Between first and second reading we can certainly spend the time to maybe even an attachment to this item specifying at least what now, we know for sure is under the purview of this board to sort of delineate that, but again, the code specifies that the Manager's office should put together a comprehensive report about the need and the purview of a new board, so we'll make sure that gets done and those sort of details are included.

Commissioner Menendez: Besides writing in the code what it is created to do, can we add something to clarify what it cannot do?

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Certainly, that's the creation and purpose of the board. You can put in negative...limitations of course.

Mayor Lago: Or a roadmap, if you want to do something, what's your roadmap – deal with Historic Preservation, deal with Public Works, really clearly delineating what is the responsibility and goals of this board. I have no issues with that. I'd rather have, like Commissioner Menendez said, let's be as clear as possible, so if we are really going to push this forward that this board understands what their responsibilities are and what we expect from them.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Understand. We can work with the sponsors in between first and second to make sure that that's as clear as possible.

Vice Mayor Mena: One thing that just comes to mind, we were just talking about it, when you have, we've had situations in the past where you have private signs on public right-of-way that some might scribe as a landmark.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Sure.

Vice Mayor Mena: Even though they are not city landmarks.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: The way its written right now is city-owned and/or maintained, so that would sort of limit the purview of the board to those entrances and features that the city is responsible for maintaining. As I understand the purview of the board would be to discuss this sort of maintenance restoration issues with Public Works, so if we are not in charge of maintaining it, then that's not within the purview of the board.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. We need a motion.

City Clerk Urquia: We have a motion sir.

Mayor Lago: Second?

Vice Mayor Mena: Second.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)