

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
April 26, 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

Assistant City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton

Landscape Director, Deena Bell

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-2 [Start: 4:05 p.m.]

Discussion regarding banning gas leaf blowers.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: G-2 is a very simple discussion. We've already adopted Commissioner Anderson's legislation today. I just wanted to have this conversation, because we get residents who talked to us about banning leaf blowers. I would like for staff, especially the Manager to really talk about how feasible is it for us to go 100 percent electric or for us to go rakes in our parks, especially when its wet. I'm all for removing leaf blowers. I think it's a great idea. They are noisy. I'd love to see at a minimum time be restricted to 9 o'clock maybe on a Saturday and Sunday, 9:30. Let somebody sleep in. They deserve it. They've worked all week. I want to be honest with ourselves, I don't think we can ban leaf blowers. I just don't think it really – how could we possibly accomplish that? What have you seen other communities do?

Commissioner Anderson: I see that other communities have done it; technology is advancing.

Mayor Lago: Fast enough – advancing fast enough though.
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Commissioner Anderson: There are a lot of articles. I think we need to talk about this more. I'm a little concerned when we are running gas leaf blowers at Salvadore Park when kids are out there playing. I don't think we need to remove every single leaf, because I see that type of mentality sometimes out there. A few leaves out there should be tolerable in the AstroTurf, etc. My grandkids, my kids like to explore leaves, rocks, leaves, bugs, everything else, but the leaves are kind of interesting.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: So, Mayor, we do have noise restrictions currently in place. There are time restrictions for use of leaf blowers. I know staff has updated you all before on city use of electrical blowers and I'm sure Deena can expand on that if you all would like to hear about that. Mayor your request was also pulled and Commissioner Anderson's request some nearby ordinances, but again, I'm talking about city staff's use, I'll defer to Deena about that.

Landscape Director Bell: Well, I'm speaking for Greenspace Management. Right now, we do use a few electric blowers. The Mile crew uses them in downtown. They are effective for about two hours. They are effective in tight spaces where there are a lot of cars and pedestrians, but if we were to get rid of the gas blowers citywide for city use, we are talking about our large park spaces, productivity would come very low. We would have probably to extend our maintenance cycle time allowing more visits to completely clean specific large green spaces. It would just be more expensive labor-wise. And we'd have to tolerate a little bit more leaf drop. Remember we are a city with 41 percent tree canopy coverage. Some of the other cities that we've done research on have recently banned the blowers don't have the glorious tree canopy and all the leaves that we do.

Commissioner Anderson: At least...dog waste.

Landscape Director Bell: Its hard to compare city to city. Those are the pros and cons, but we are using a few of the electric pieces of equipment now.

Mayor Lago: How are they going, I'm sorry, you mentioned electric. I have an electric leaf blower at home. I have to change the battery probably like every, I don't know, ten minutes.

Landscape Director Bell: Every two hours is about the max.

Mayor Lago: Mine is not that fancy. It's not that fancy.

Landscape Director Bell: We have Stihl brand, Made in America, they are pretty high-quality equipment, but two hours. To make them more effective we could buy some battery backpacks and we would have to buy more equipment to make sure that all of the crew members had backup batteries in their trucks, so they wouldn't have to leave a site, go back to the Public Works yard and then drive back in traffic.

Commissioner Anderson: I've done some reading and I've asked staff a more in depth look at battery technology. I know its evolving. I know, maybe two years away from the higher end lithium
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batteries don't have the fire hazard, they are much lighter weight. They have deeper discharge rate and more capacity, so that we can forecast this and at least provide some information for folks, because I think we are going to get there. My battery capacity is more; you must have an early model.

Commissioner Menendez: A suggestion – because I've seen how they do these types of things. First off, I agree with the Mayor. I'd like to visit when people can use the leaf blowers, the time, during the day, during the week. I think that's something that a lot of people welcome that discussion. We may want to set as the resolution, sort of a vision to be gas-free by a certain date, like our goal as a city, that we can set the timeline by 2023 or 2024, to be off of, as a vision. We can pass a resolution to set that tone.

Commissioner Anderson: I think that would be helpful. There is a Wall Street Journal article that came out the 25th, yesterday, about what other cities in the country are doing and how Turo and Stihl, other companies, made in the USA products are advancing, not just leaf blowers, but their lawn equipment in a commercial area be electric power, so that's why I said I think we need more research on that and see where that vision is. When are we going to get to that point where the cost effectiveness? I think the article mentioned that the return rate would take two and-a-half years, you know how that is. Solar panels are getting less and less and less. So, I think we're going to get there, and I think that vision would help also manufacturers...City of Coral Gables wants to do this.

Commissioner Menendez: So, let's word it and do it now.

City Manager Iglesias: And as long as it doesn't really hurt our productivity.

Commissioner Anderson: Can we bring it back to the next meeting?

Mayor Lago: Would love it. Let's do it.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes, let's do it.

Mayor Lago: And we can co-sponsor it for the Commission.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes, set the vision.

Commissioner Anderson: Set the vision.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Thank you.

Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Come with that and Commissioner Menendez and Mayor, I'll share with you the time restrictions we currently have in place, if you'd like to look at them to evaluate, the whole Commission certainly.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.
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Assistant City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.