

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-2
December 10, 2019
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

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

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Silvia Pinera-Vazquez

Agenda Item E-2 [9:20 a.m.]

Personal Appearance by Silvia Pinera-Vazquez regarding the Alhambra Circle bicycle project.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We have a packed house, and I would like to take out of order that people who are here for Item E-2, which is the Alhambra Circle bicycle project. I have a few words. As I have announced in the past, I am against forcing bicycle paths, sidewalks, whatever it is, down people's throats, so I sympathize with many of you and I disagree with many of you too. But today is not the day for you to be here. This is not on the agenda. This is a personal appearance by Silvia Pinera-Vazquez. And I told her it was a personal appearance and that we were not -- I repeat, we

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were not going to discuss bicycle paths. That is not in the agenda today. You will have an opportunity to speak and that will come in a future meeting in January, February. You will all have an opportunity to speak for and against the bicycles, but today is not the day where I'm going to recognize you because this is not on the agenda. And I warned Ms. Pinera-Vazquez that I was not going to recognize you and to let everyone know that you were not going to speak today. We have received from her a Magnus Opus, which is like a hundred-page letter with attachments.

Silvia Pinera-Vazquez: Fifty-two.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, 52; well, that's pretty good; 52-page letter, which we have all read and which will be made part of the record. Mr. City Clerk, it'll be made part of the record. We have all read it. Ms. Pinera-Vazquez, it's your turn to speak and you have five minutes.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Five minutes?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Five minutes, yes, ma'am.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Well, thank you very much, Mayor. Thank you for putting me on the agenda. Thank you, Vice Mayor Lago, for putting us on. My name is Silvia Pinera-Vazquez and I live at 3516 Alhambra Circle, and I've lived there for 20 years with my husband. And I've lived -- I've been a resident of the Gables for over 50 years. The first thing I'd like to do is address the comments you just made -- judge. I was going to call you judge -- Mayor Valdes-Fauli.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I'm sorry, what? Yeah.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: First of all, I agree you did call me, but I explained to you that I could not tell other residents which are equally have the same rights as I do to voice their concerns and they've appeared here today.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And they will have an opportunity to do so, but not today.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I understand. But I'd like everybody to stand up that's against the bike path on Alhambra Circle and just -- so everybody sees there's at least over 30 people here, there's about 20 more outside. I think it's important to point that out because -- thank you -- quite frankly, this is the first time that us, as residents, have had an opportunity to voice our concerns and I'll tell you why. Because repeatedly, for whatever reason, the bike path issue, for some reason, there's a hidden agenda where we don't get noticed as residents. In preparing for this hearing, I went back and looked at several of the Commission hearings. And every time the bike path issue came up, whether it was for Miracle Mile, whether it was for Riviera, whether it was for any little thing, residents came in and said, we didn't receive notice. We didn't have stakeholder engagement. There were no public awareness meetings. So, that's why we wanted this hearing because we think that both the residents and the Commission have not had this open communication, which can only happen under the sunshine state laws in an open forum. So I'm happy the staff is here. I'm happy the residents are here because we need to have this conversation because our tax dollars are being wasted. Anytime a consultant does a bike path -- a bike plan, and then as in Riviera, the bike plan -- the bike path is set aside and pulled out.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We heard the people at Riviera, and it was voted down.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Right.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Didn't we?

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Exactly, exactly. And they were in the same boat as us because two months ago was when we first learned of this bike path. And the only way we learned about this bike path is because my neighbor, Janet Perez, happened to be looking at the website. Two months ago, a bike plan that had been in the process for five years -- in 2014, as you know, the master bicycle plan was developed.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That is not correct, ma'am, but we're not going to engage you, but please go ahead.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I am. Thank you. The bicycle plan was developed by people with special interests. Bike Walk was present, YouBike, the Max Cycle and we had no input. But I think the most important thing for Alhambra Circle, which is contained in my letter and I don't want to go into detail, was the FDOT grant. The FDOT deal grant required -- it was a material factor. It required public awareness meetings. It required evidence of community support. That was submitted by Ms. Keller on March 20, 2015. The day before that -- because she didn't decide -- she didn't go out and talk to residents on Alhambra Circle. Do you want a bike lane? She didn't do safety studies. There were no environmental studies. There was nothing done. She contacted Bike Walk, Mr. Swain and Ms. Swain and Mr. Ruano, who are here today and said, hey, the night before, March 19, can you send me a letter of resident support? She drafted the two paragraphs that she needed for resident support and the day before she got that letter and she submitted it as evidence of community support. Why? Why manufacturer a letter? Go to Alhambra Circle, talk to neighbors; do we really want a bike lane. You know why? Because nobody on Alhambra Circle wants a bike lane. But that misrepresentation led to a \$567,000 grant from the City, which was faulty because nobody on Alhambra Circle -- at least the majority of the people -- don't want that lane. I think it's important what Commissioner Keon said at the last Riviera meeting where it was confirmed that there had been no engagement. Commissioner Keon said that the bike plan was supposed to be flexible. It was a plan. And I think -- and actually I know the directive you gave Ms. Keller as she stood here was before you start implementation, we need -- you have to have resident input and neighborhood meetings. That was your quote. That was your directive. Did that happen within the two years of 2018? And as I stand -- January 2018 and today? No. There was no community engagement. There was no neighborhood meetings and they forged ahead with a bike path without our consent. And then I go to what Commissioner Fors said. You aren't a fan of "not in my backyard" mentality which today there was an editorial from Mr. Ruano that that's what we -- we don't want to put this in our backyard. It couldn't be further from the truth because

number one, there is a bike path in our backyard. There's a bike path on 57th Avenue on Red Road that connects the north portion of the city and the south portion, so we have a bike lane. You said that you rely on substance, data and facts. The substance, data and facts here do not support a bike lane. Let me be clear. I grew up here in Florida. I am -- the Gables. I rode bike from Pizarro -- north Pizarro. I used to ride back to UM.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, ma'am.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: If I could just have five more minutes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Well...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please finish up.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I'd like to...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: To finish up because this is the only...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, please finish up.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Again, Mayor, this is the only opportunity...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, and we will not engage you in a debate, so please finish up.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: This is the only opportunity we've had, and I think it's important to point out...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Listen, you will have an opportunity, but not today. This is your personal appearance and you say that you haven't been notified. The room is full of people and there are as many sitting outside. You have been notified. You're opposed to it.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Of this hearing.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I'm opposed to it, but you know, this is not the time to discuss it.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I think it's important.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And you're not going to force us to discuss it today.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I don't want to. What I -- what we'd ask is if you could just give me five more minutes, I'm not forcing you. I think this is an open government. It's important that we're allowed...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It is open government, but you're...

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: To have our opinions.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Here and a hundred people are here.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Right. And I think it's important...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's evidence that it is open government.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I can't -- we can't have this conversation together, all of us, because of the law. I can't get (INAUDIBLE) together and I can't get the staff, so this is the only opportunity that we have to discuss it as (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It isn't. You're going to have an opportunity in January, February, whenever it is. Everybody's going to be notified. And let me tell you something, we'll do it at 5 o'clock, if that's more convenient for you and a bigger room so that we can all discuss the bicycle paths and whatever. We will have that, but today is not the day.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Right, and the problem is that...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And I told you that.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I know, and I explained that I couldn't...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: We don't want any more money spent on something that is so tainted from the beginning. Let me just get you the trees.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let's -- Mr. City Clerk, three more minutes.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Let me just get then to the merits. First of all, safety. Let me pass out -- this is my house on Alhambra Circle -- if I could just pass this out. Alhambra Circle is a very narrow road and it has (INAUDIBLE). It is extremely dangerous to put a bike lane and make the

roads smaller. If you can see from that picture, there's no way that a safety island or whatever they're called can be put there. It's inherently dangerous. There's been a death. There's been numerous accidents. That's the first reason. They say safety. They're saying that bike lanes are safe. They're not safe. They give a false sense of safety to the biker that thinks they're not going to be injured. The second thing is really the most important thing and really that's why everybody's here is the trees. Ms. (INAUDIBLE) has been there for over 30 years. Mr. Friedman (INAUDIBLE). My husband and I walked all of Alhambra Circle. There are 374 trees on both sides of the -- of Alhambra Circle. There's no question that if a bike path is put there, that at least half, if not more will be damaged. We are a tree canopy city. As the pastor said, we are privileged to be here. One of the reasons we're privileged is because we take care of our trees, we take care of our landscapes and we respect residents' rights to come here and voice their concerns and objections for something that none of us were ever consulted on. Again, if a bike path goes through, these will be gone because there's not enough swale. And I want to be also clear that there's been no studies prior to the bike path, prior to the FDOT grant, prior to as I sit here today because I met with Mr. Santamaria of the City. There have been no studies done, not one traffic impact study, not one environmental study, not one safety study. Basically, this is all on the word of a 2006 American Medical Association that biking is good for you. I agree; biking is good. We -- if you bike, that's great, but Alhambra Circle is not the place to put a bike path. Traffic. This is the other important thing. Traffic on Alhambra Circle, which is a collector street, is extremely tight. Sometimes a bike -- the traffic gets backed up from Bird Road all the way down to the bridge. There's congestion. If you narrow those roads, the quality of our lives on Alhambra Circle, which are the directly affected stakeholders, will be completely, completely, minimized because we cannot go in and out of our driveways. So, in order to put a bike path, you have to shrink the roads, which then will increase congestion. So, I just don't understand. There's been no studies; there's been no resident input. And I think it's important that...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Ma'am, I hope that...

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: You understand...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: When this issue is discussed, formally discussed, you will make as good a presentation as you have made today and we are listening to you.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I just want to request -- just to put it on the record, I would request...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: That you open the floor to additional...

(APPLAUSE)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Moving on.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: To additional people.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Ms. Pinera-Vazquez: I would make a request that you open the door.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We will take a break.

(APPLAUSE)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. Thank you. We will take a five-minute break to clear the room. Thank you.