

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-2
April 16, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton
Police Chief, Ed Hudak
Major John Baublitz

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item E-2 [1:41 p.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending Chapter 74 "Traffic and Vehicles" to create Article IX "School Zone Safety" authorizing the enforcement of school zone speed limits by and through the installation of speed detection systems on school zone roadways; providing for a severability clause, repealer provision, codification, and providing for an effective date.

Mayor Lago: Item E-2.

City Attorney Suarez: E-2 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending Chapter 74 "Traffic and Vehicles" to create Article IX "School Zone Safety" authorizing the enforcement of school zone speed limits by and through the installation of speed detection systems on school zone roadways; providing for a severability clause, repealer provision, codification, and providing for an effective date.

City Commission Meeting

[Date]

1

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, Chief.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Stephanie Throckmorton, Deputy City Attorney. I'm accompanied by the Chief here to set up our first School Zone Safety camera program here in the city. This was amended by the State Legislature in 2023 to allow municipalities to have similar to red light cameras, school speed zone cameras. The city needs to make specific findings as to height and risk in certain areas before we establish that program. There's a public notice campaign. There's a lot of details about appellate rights, fees, etc., in the ordinance. We're happy to answer any questions, but if we could allow the Chief to explain the findings and where we would be placing those cameras.

Mayor Lago: Chief, thank you. How are you sir?

Chief Hudak: Good afternoon, sir. I'm doing good. Major Baublitz who oversees the traffic section, actually where we did these studies already. So, to go to the red light, I'm sorry, to go from the speed traffic cameras in some of the areas that we had discussed already in front of this board on LeJeune Road some of our school areas, we've identified some of them using what's required by state statute. The ordinance before you is the enabling statute that allows us to proceed further and with that then we would sit together who our vendor would be and what we would go forward. So, basically, we have the questions, we have done it per statute that the Major can answer the questions of what schools we've identified with our testing, if you will, of the speed, and then we will move forward from there. If you have any questions for Major Baublitz.

Mayor Lago: Major, how are you, good to see you again.

Major Baublitz: Good to see you, Mayor. I'd be happy to answer any questions you have about the program.

Mayor Lago: Any questions.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So, Mr. Mayor, just for the record, we did look at past historical data, we did some new speed zone speed traps, checked recent data. Not traps, that's not the right word. I don't know. Some enforcement. We looked at recent data as well.

Major Baublitz: So, what we did is we put our shields out there and what that does is it gives us the volume of the number of vehicles that go through that area, their speed and at the time. So, using that data and using where children and vehicles mix, that's how we determine what schools to pick.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I am in favor of anything to help deter people from speeding, especially around schools. I believe you have the Coral Gables High School where we've had some recent

City Commission Meeting

[Date]

2

incidents that are tragic, as well as the Coral Gables Prep listed. Are there any others that I'm overlooking?

Major Baublitz: Carver was the third school.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Carver Elementary School.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh yes, that's crazy there. So absolutely, I'm in favor of this.

Commissioner Castro: I was very happy to see this ordinance because it aligns perfectly with my initiatives of what we were speaking about last time with Coral Gables High School and traffic. So, thank you for bringing this up.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to mention, I'm glad, those are perfect schools, the ones that definitely need help, maybe a discussion for future. There's a small school nearby, Banyan Day School on Palermo, the 300 Block on Palermo that has the signs, no lights or anything else, but since there's parking on both sides of the street, those signs aren't seen and you have cars in the morning coming off LeJeune cutting through the city at incredible rate of speed, and you have parents getting out of the cars with kids and I'd like to see maybe you all can help me do a study, figure out what we can do or maybe put a flasher, something because they're especially young kids, you know, Pre-K, Kindergarten, First Grade, and its been a growing problem, so I just want to bring that to your attention. Maybe we can follow up with Banyan.

Major Baublitz: Yes. We can definitely do that sir, and like we talked about, this program allows our officers and our traffic units to address other areas. It doesn't mean we won't be in those school zones, but we might be addressing dropping off kids in the middle of the street or something to that effect. It frees up our officers to do more, and just so you know, it's not just during the school zone times, it's throughout the whole day of the school day. So, anything ten miles and over, say school starts at 8 and ends at 3, that will be enforced. And like the Chief has talked about many times, it's not a, we want to get you and issue a citation. This is to modify behavior and driving patterns. If you get that citation at one time, you're going to realize that it's there and it's always there. So, it's definitely a benefit. It's not a panacea, it's not going to fix everything, but it's a great tool for us to help modify the behavior and the traffic patterns in that area.

Mayor Lago: So Major, first off, thank you and I agree with Commissioner Menendez comments about Banyan, my daughters went to that school and there's a dire need in that area right there. They no longer go there, it's been a long time, but I still remember those days. I've always been opposed to red light cameras, but in this instance I'm in favor. I think it's a good opportunity to multiply our resources and I'm just asking the Manager, my colleagues on the Commission and the Chief and whoever he designates to receive the information. Prepare yourselves because we're going to get a lot of calls. We're going to get a lot of calls because I remember the red-light cameras that we had a few years ago. When did we take them down Chief, five years ago, six years ago, four, I can't remember.

Chief Hudak: The lawsuit you're talking about was actually filed through Aventura, we joined in that.

Mayor Lago: But I remember just the calls.

Chief Hudak: We got a lot in the beginning and really what we see, originally in the way our program is set up is, we had at one point we had ten, I'm sorry, we had two sets of providers, if you will. We did see a lot of tickets written and then the modification of the behavior on some of the main thoroughfares, U.S.-1 – actually we saw the severity of the accidents, not necessarily the number, but the severity of the accidents because people that had gotten a previous ticket would slow down and then the other person would rear-end them. But it was not the catastrophic injuries that we've seen. So, we are down to, I believe, its ten, we have ten operational red-light cameras in the city, and this would kind of mirror this project and do what our red-light camera operator operates.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. With that being said, I'll entertain a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Second.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Commissioner Menendez: Chief, by the way, before you go, southbound Ponce where Coral Gables Prep, the flasher.

Chief Hudak: Yes. I reported the flashers. Those are run through the county, still hasn't been.

Commissioner Menendez: Friday night I was driving southbound on Ponce at 10, I video taped it, there's still flashing at 10 p.m.

Chief Hudak: They're still flashing at night. Okay.

Commissioner Castro: It's been like that for probably five weeks.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Chief Hudak: Yes. I'm not sure if it was a power outage or not. I did push that along, along with some other concerns we have with Redbridge Road.

City Commission Meeting

Commissioner Menendez: My concern is if it's on at night what is during the day.

Chief Hudak: During the day, the good thing about that intersection is we have both officers, as well as School Board officers are right there at the corner. My bigger concern is at night the flashing. So, we will follow up and I'll get my office to get back to you.

Mayor Lago: So, moving on. Sorry, I apologize.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Mr. Mayor, quickly, I just wanted to thank our intern Matthew Gomez, who has been with us all semester and worked very hard on this ordinance, closely with the police staff and as well as our police legal advisor, so special thank you to Matthew who worked very hard on this.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. I appreciate it. Thank you for being here with us.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Major and Chief. Thank you so much.