

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-9
March 11, 2025
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, 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, Alberto Parjus
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-9

Discussion regarding an amendment to City Code Section 78-101 requiring property owners to maintain and repair the sewer lateral located within the public right-of-way. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: F-9. Oh, yes. You're ready. This is an easy one. This is a good thing we kind of did the other day, did a walk-through with some residents. I was with the DCM and the whole team, and this makes sense to help out, especially our most elderly people in the community.

Public Works Director Diaz: Hermes Diaz, Public Works Director. In section 78-101 of the city code, the maintenance...including the portion of the public right-of-ways is the responsibility of the abutting property owners. This is not typical. Florida, Miami-Dade County and other municipalities have their own sewer, the city is responsible, the county is responsible for the lateral portion of the sewer all the way up to the property line. The city code makes that the responsibility of the property owner unless it was damaged by city trees. We looked into fiscal year 2024, and we had 25 laterals, 24-25 laterals that we ended up referring back to the property owner in

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accordance with our code. Although those laterals are old, they are made of clay and even though they could potentially be repaired, it's probably best to replace. At \$15,000 per lateral and 24-25, you will need to generate about \$400,000 a year; 3.75 increase on the sewer fee, which comes up to about \$2 to \$3 per month on a medium, an average size user would generate sufficient money to allow us to take over, that is currently the responsibility of the property owners, if the Commission wishes to direct us to go ahead and change the code and the fee schedule for this to happen.

Mayor Lago: So, we're the only city that does it this way.

Public Works Director Diaz: I don't know if we're the only one, but I know for a fact that the county doesn't do it this way and I know that other local municipalities around us they...

Mayor Lago: I meant to say.

Public Works Director Diaz: The county is a big one.

Mayor Lago: The two or three that I have encountered that have called me about this issue have been people in their 70s and 80s, retired, so it's a significant financial hit for them. They always fall back on the county doesn't do it this way, the City of Miami doesn't do it this way, other municipalities don't do it this way. So, I brought it up, I want my colleagues to be aware, the team did great leg work. Talk about it with the City Manager and the ACM. We don't have to rush to do anything today. I think it's something that we're going to have to look at, because I just think it's the right thing to do for people who are no longer working, retirees, people who – by the way, this is not on their property, this is on the city's property.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct – in the right-of-way.

Mayor Lago: The right-of-way. This is a right-of-way issue, and our code just happens that we force the residents to pay for it, which is not like any other city. So, I'd like for you to consider that, think about it, because again, I think it's just a little over-reaching in my opinion, it's over-reaching.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor. One of the things that distinguishes the water bills from those who have sewer versus those who don't have sewer is there are additional fees for maintaining the lines, and in reality is we have a lot of trees and they break a lot of pipes, and the homeowners that have the ones breaking in the swale area are not incentivized to repair those. So, since they are already putting the money in the system in this dedicated way, and I think it's the appropriate thing to do is for us to take care of those laterals.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, if that's the direction of the Commission, we actually had a discussion with the City Attorney's office and the process will be, because we have to change the

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code, we have to come twice. So, we'll have to bring it to the next and the following Commission meeting, along with a fee change, because that only requires one reading. So, this is something to address over the next couple of Commission meetings, if that's the desire of the Commission.

Mayor Lago: Again, just thinking of those in our community that are on subsidized income or that are on fixed income that I've dealt with the two or three people that have come to me, they've all been elderly, and this has all been on city property, it's not on their own property.

City Attorney Suarez: So, we'll bring the ordinance for next meeting on first reading.

Mayor Lago: Okay.