

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-5
May 9, 2023
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, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Parking Director, Kevin Kinney

Public Speaker(s)

Jackson Rip Holmes
Tom O'Malley

Agenda Item G-5 [4:05 p.m.]

Discussion regarding current and future parking capacity and demand on Miracle Mile and the Central Business District. (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: G-5.

Commissioner Anderson: Parking capacity – do we have staff ready for it, the discussion regarding current and future parking capacity for Miracle Mile in the Central Business District.

Parking Director Kinney: We have over the years done several parking studies, but just in general, if you're talking about two blocks north or two blocks south of Miracle Mile, on-street and surface lots, actually the numbers I ran a couple of days ago were a little bit off, it's actually 752 on-street and surface lot parking spaces. In our four garages we have 1,655 parking spaces. On any given day, maybe the exception of Sunday, the on-street and surface lot parking lots hit capacity. It is

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true that if you drive the streets you feel like all the spaces are taken, and in particular right across the street the parking lot next to Abbracci, the last study we did, they visited eight times; five times there was 100 percent full; one time there were two spaces. Our surface lots and our on-street parking are essentially at capacity. The last study we did for the garages showed at peak on the days they were studied that there was a capacity in the four garages of 69 spaces open and available. Now that's – we need to be careful, that's the effective capacity, so when professional engineers are studying this, if there's five spaces left in the system, the system is full. So, they are actually measuring usually from the 85th percentile to the 90th percentile. So, there may be a few spaces in the garage, but if a garage is 90 percent full, it's effectively full, because people will perceive it as full. That's the same thing that happens on the street. So, in total, in our query we have a healthy parking supply, 2407 parking spaces, and those are relatively heavily utilized. I will tell you since the pandemic, the short-term parking, the on-street and the hourly parking in the garages has fully recovered. We have had this conversation going on now with staff and some folks on the dais that prior to the pandemic, we were selling about 2300 monthly permits. That lagging is likely, I believe this month we sold 1900 monthly permits, but it has been coming back, but I would expect it will take a little bit longer before we're back to capacity on the monthly permit.

Commissioner Anderson: When the planning was done for the number of parking spaces needed for the proposed parking garage behind the Miracle Theater, can you share with the Commission what the analysis was?

Parking Director Kinney: The analysis at that time, that was actually an update of studies that were done, I believe one of the studies was done in 2013, but in the middle or end of 2018, there was an update of that study and because the project that was being reviewed, essentially removed both the garage across from Publix and the garage across from Chocolate Fashion. Those two garages are 636 spaces currently. Because of other things that were happening, including the overlay for Miracle Mile, where parking was being prohibited on the Mile and the overlay of Giralda, the engineers at that time came back and recommended that we look at a thousand spaces to replace those 636 spaces. Now, things look a little different now because there is no plan immediately to tear down and redevelop the Publix facility, but we do know that it is obsolete. It does not function operationally as it should. There are access issues, it's not a comfortable facility. So, there's issues there, but because we are not tearing it down right away, those 345 spaces are going to be available until potentially we see some changes in the mobility plan. So, we don't support the concept now that the new Mobility Hub should be 1,000 spaces. The Mobility Hub plan is to build 626, 627 spaces; of those, either 74 or 79 spaces are electric vehicle charging facilities. We will have 16 accessible ADA spaces. It's not something we talk about a lot, but because one of the facilities on Andalusia was built in the early 1960s and the other one in the early 1970s, access issues are a serious concern, and so that is one of the reasons. I began discussing at my first Commission meeting in 2007, I gave that Commission, and it was Bill Kerdyk, Chip Withers, Don Slesnick,

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Maria Anderson, and Ralph Cabrera, I gave them a list of 20 things that we needed to do over the next decade. I can tell you the number one thing on that list was the garage across from Chocolate Fashion needed to be redeveloped because it was not functioning well. People are essentially forced to park there, but it is not a comfortable garage to use. If you have a vehicle of any size, even a small vehicle, if you start trying to navigate those ramps or use the elevator, or use the stairwells, it's just not designed for people. In 1960 they did not design that garage for people, and especially if we install and they are legal, ADA spaces that you can look at the pictures of the entryway, the main entry. If you're in a wheelchair the only way you can get out on Andalusia is to go down the ramp for the cars into the garage. Its not a good situation; and so that facility, even in 2007 when I first started, my position was, we need to build a new facility there; and our current position is that a little over 600 spaces is the right number since we are keeping the garage across from Publix.

Commissioner Anderson: So, is it still your recommendation, as we sit here today to have 627 spaces in the parking garage behind the Mile?

Parking Director Kinney: Yes – and one of the reasons we wound up with a little more height – well let's start here. The project we were reviewing in 2017-2018 was 190 feet, over 190 feet, that I believe, I can't read minds, but I'm pretty sure what we got from the Commission was it was too big. So, the project we're looking at now is the railing on the roof, the top of the railing is 121, I think, but that's a little taller than the Museum Garage, which is on the north side of the Mile, on Aragon, but there's a couple of things that are causing that. One is, and I have to admit I'm one of the people that's been preaching this is, for a garage to be comfortable and safe it needs to be open, no dark corners, nice turning radiuses, and it needs to make people feel like its easy to get around and they are safe, and if its bright and open people feel safe. So, I have been part of the group preaching that that's what we need to look for. What that means is the floor-to-floor heights are a little higher in this garage. Part of that helps with adaptability in the future. We don't know when, I will tell you my opinion is, we're decades away from it, but there may be a time when mobility changes. Everybody has been paying attention that all the conversation about autonomous vehicles, all that talk has really slowed down, and to be honest, even when I hear from some of the major automakers where they were saying a few years ago, 10 or 15 years, they are not saying that anymore. Its in the future likely, but we don't know when that's going to happen, so we need to build a facility that will work and yes, there may be a time, 20, 30, 40 years from now where the number of spaces may come down, the number of spaces needed, but its not in the near term.

Commissioner Anderson: Right. I don't know if you're familiar with the parking garage across from the federal courthouse, it's shaped like a ship. The first couple of floors on the top are office spaces.

Parking Director Kinney: Yes. That's Miami Parking Authority's main offices. I'm very familiar, Art and I are good friends.

Commissioner Anderson: I have a colleague that has an office on the top floor, but my item was really just to focus on the parking needs. There are a number of spaces that were lost on the Mile when we went to parallel parking. Can you share with the full Commission how many spaces were lost there?

Parking Director Kinney: There's a number of different uses on the Mile, but I'll just talk about the actual metered spaces that were available for people to use. Prior to Streetscape, there were 197, after Streetscape there's 111, though just of metered spaces open and available to the public, we lost 86.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Mayor Lago: If I may Commissioner.

Commissioner Anderson: Sure.

Mayor Lago: I'm in downtown every day. I'm either having lunch or meeting with a client. You cannot find a space to park. Yesterday, I parked on Giralda, I had a lunch meeting at Abbracci, you couldn't find a parking space either at the Aragon Parking Garage or the surface parking lot next to Abbracci. I ended up having to go around five times before I was able to find a parking space. We're at capacity. So, there's a very interesting presentation that Zeida puts together that I think would be great for, if you haven't gotten it already, for you to take a look at it. Just to give you an idea right now how things have come back here in the City of Coral Gables and how highly regarded we are. If you look at the office space in the city, we're at 90 percent, we're at 90 percent, and if you look at retail, we're at 98.3 percent citywide; on Miracle Mile we're at 94, and the CBD we're at 96 percent. There is no parking available and the calls that I'm getting are from people that are saying, we can't park on the Mile, we can't park in front of a retail establishment, then at least let's find a place that is within 50 feet where we are going to build a parking garage. What is the plan for the future needs of the city?

Parking Director Kinney: And following up, Mr. Mayor, on that point. I guess I didn't emphasize it. I specifically said, the spot across from Chocolate Fashion, there's some really specific reasons for that. One is, we have really great access to the Mile. Whatever we develop there and connect Andalusia and the Mile in a very, in a situation that will help this city for the next 50 years, that is the location, and unfortunately, the garage that was built in 1960, yes, they probably only needed 282 spaces at that time. But that is the location where people want to go. There's people that avoid that location because they don't like driving in that garage, but it is the most central location we have, and if there were a facility there of an appropriate size and design, it would be, well I would

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say it is the busiest facility we have now, but it would be the centerpiece, it would be where everybody went.

Commissioner Anderson: I will concur with you with the – I live within walking distance; I take my two dogs out and walk the Mile at night just to see what’s going on. I did this before I was elected. I’ve done it since I’ve been elected and I’ve seen lines of cars to get into that Andalusia garage, backed up, just waiting and after getting to that one, they’ll go to the one down at Publix because that’s their secondary preference on where to go, and that too is at capacity. When we had Moon over the Park, I think we can do better. You know we can get people on the trolleys and instead of having people pull up on the grass all over the park, which is something we wouldn’t want when it’s a nicely refined park, an improved park, to bring people in, park there, we’ll trolley you in to be able to park in a proper location. And one last thing I was going to touch upon here, you mentioned access a couple of times and I knew what you meant, but to make it clear to everybody else, that garage does not comply with the ADA. It is dangerous. It is extremely dangerous. If any of you want to try with a wheelchair, I have one in my office, it would be like crazy to go down those ramps. Cars can’t see you and you’re at a slope heading out to traffic, an extremely dangerous situation and nothing we should put any pedestrian through. So, thank you. I appreciate it.

Parking Director Kinney: The last comment I would have is, when I saw that this went on the agenda, whatever day it was last Thursday, or Wednesday, I just walked over to the garages to take some pictures just in case we needed to look at them, not that we need to look at them, but there’s two of them I’ll mention specifically. So, as I was walking by the garage, we’re talking about across from Chocolate Fashion, I saw the entry sign, so I took a picture of that. Then I thought, well, I wonder about the other garages. So, I walked over to the other garages. There were eight spaces, there were eight spaces left, but out of 636 spaces, there were eight spaces, and any engineer is going to tell you that means you’re exceeding capacity on those facilities.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Fernandez: Just segway to mobility since he’s already up here and we’re already on the topic.

Mayor Lago: That’s fine.

Commissioner Fernandez: One of the biggest questions –

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, did we already address public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: No sir, we have not. We have not brought it up yet.

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Mayor Lago: We'll bring it up right now Mr. Clerk. Let's do it now.

City Clerk Urquia: You want to do it now?

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. So, the first speaker is Mr. Jackson Holmes.

Mr. Holmes: Great to see you again. Mayor Lago, I ask your indulgence to give me some time on this. I want to justify to you all and to the audience why I say I'm an expert, second only to our Parking Director Mr. Kinney, because I've spent the last 25 years of my life upset with bringing a department store to the ground floor of 345 Andalusia, across from Publix, and then redeveloping that and then getting ten retail stores at the 245 location. I wonder if any of you are old enough, does anybody here remember Richard Bass. He was the Planning Director in the city in 1998, and so, he's the one who planted the seed for me. He said, Rip, you want to bring a department store to Miracle Mile to anchor ground floor retail, and he said, here's what you do. The only place that has a footprint large enough to accommodate a department store are the city garages. He said, the downtown is full, you've got to do it on garage at 345 and 245 Andalusia; and since I felt that that would be my generational contribution, my family is the oldest property-owning family on Miracle Mile. I've been -- literally that has been my goal the whole time. I have run, I'm a six-time loser, can we all laugh please, as running for City Commissioner, and there's only one reason, that I've run six times, its that I want to get the department store at these two garages. So, this has been my focus, and I was published in the Miami Herald in 1999, talking about these garages and a department store by Charlie Savage, who I think went on to win a Pulitzer Prize. He was talking about the Iraq war, Boston Globe. I've been, obviously, covered on this in our various campaigns. I've sat through so many meetings -- let me just make you laugh, Mr. Iglesias, in one of the meetings with Ramon Trias, we're talking about then the previous developers for this, who I pray we won't let them get their hands on these garages, I was told either -- I'm joking with you now, but I was told either shut up or we're going to escort you out, but that's how crazy I am and how much of an expert I've become over these garages. Forgive me for just mentioning this, Charlie Crist helped me get my civil rights restored so I could run and become a six-time loser, and they intervened on my behalf, right, Jeff Cott, the Lieutenant Governor personally intervened to make sure that I can run and I'm joking, become a six-time loser all because of 245 Andalusia and 345 Andalusia. Now, what do I tell you about this. I tell you that my tenant about four years ago, Mr. Kinney will remember this, three or four years ago, came to me and this guy is not that talkative, but he comes in desperation. He said, Rip, you got to get me a meeting with the Parking Director. I said, okay. What's the subject? He said, we are strung up, strung out, and we're losing customers because there is no place to park. We need to come up with a solution. So, Mr. Kinney, if he's still here, will remember, we went over, and we're like begging him to help us because there's not

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enough parking. If you remember the streetscape, give me a chance on this, I'm a loser but I'm a winner on this subject.

Mayor Lago: You're a winner. You're a winner. Bring it in for a landing, if you can.

Mr. Holmes: He's got a sense of humor. So, in Streetscape, we lost so many people, they moved away, there wasn't enough parking. Let me get to a central issue here. Women and parking garages. If I were to estimate right now, I would tell you conservatively 25 different women have told me over the years, they don't want to hear about parking garages because they hate parking garages because they can be mugged in parking garages. Now what's the importance of that? The importance is what Mr. Kinney was referring to, we need a transparent garage, we need a fully lit garage for safety for our people that are filling the pockets of the city and its tax base. We had here the courageous union rep for the City Police, and we had it for Fire, they got themselves some more positions. How are we going to pay for them if there's no parking in the downtown. If we don't keep this garage and give people parking, we're going to have a 7.5 percent hole in our city budget and all these new great jobs that you all have kindly given to Police and Fire will go right into the sinkhole because we don't have enough parking to bring in the people who are paying the city paying our Miracle Mile.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mr. Holmes: Give me just one second. I've got to go to a funny repartee. Vince Lago is my home boy. He has rescued Miracle Mile, this is why I ran against you, that's my funny repartee, a couple of years ago. So, touché. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Tom O'Malley.

Mayor Lago: Nobody can say we don't let everybody speak here. Sir, how are you?

Mr. O'Malley: Mr. Mayor, how are you sir? Commissioners, pleasure. So, I'm very pleased to take this opportunity to come up here and say, Mr. Mayor, you're right, there's no parking at lunchtime over by Abbracci, over by Ruth Chris, Saturday nights, Sunday afternoon, there's no parking, none at all. The parking lot, that surface parking lot also feeds Seasons 52, Belmont Restaurant, the ones on Miracle Mile. What is the possibility of putting a high-rise parking lot in that spot?

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

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Commissioner Fernandez: So, on item G-10, which is the discussion on the future of the Mobility Hub, this is probably after over development, permitting issues, the Mobility Hub was the third most discussed topic with residents over the course of this campaign.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry to interrupt Commissioner, just really quick. The previous speakers were on agenda item G-5, not G-10, we have not taken public comment on G-10 yet.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. Do we have people that are speaking on G-10?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, we do.

Mayor Lago: Let me run the meeting. It's your item. Do you want to have conversation first among the Commission and then public comment or how would you like to do it?

[Note for the Record] The Commission then took up agenda item G-10, discussion on the future of the Mobility Hub.