

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-7
December 16, 2014
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason

Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.

Commissioner Pat Keon

Commissioner Vince Lago

Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark

City Attorney, Craig E. Leen

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Marina Foglia, Business Improvement District, Executive Director

Agenda Item F-7 [Start: 12:04:11 p.m.]

Discussion regarding zoning regulations for Miracle Mile.

Mayor Cason: All right, we're going to move on to F-7. This is regarding zoning regulations for Miracle Mile.

Commissioner Keon: You can stay Marina too.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Keon.

Commissioner Keon: I asked to have this placed on the agenda because as we're going through the design process for the Mile and we know that we're anticipating the redo of the Mile, I know that the BID (Business Improvement District) had worked for a very long time on a zoning

overlay for that, that has never been really dealt with and that I kind of would like to talk about. I know a number of people have talked about some of the zoning requirements or impediments to renovating their storefronts, also the cost for permitting and whatever else related to a relatively small renovation of their storefronts. I'd like to look at the issue of transparency of storefronts. I find that having a store like Ross Dress for Less, it has all its windows blocked up so that you cannot communicate with the street. It's not conducive to a lively activated street. I think it's a little issue for Navarro. I mean, maybe there's a better, whatever, for that. I spoke with Ramon Trias at length about the zoning regulations and some of the issues regarding the Mile. He said, yes, because of the zoning that's in place, it is extremely difficult. I know that at Merrick Park, because they were developed as a PAD, they can have displays and things in their windows; that if it's on the Mile, Code Enforcement treats it as a sign violation, wherein around Merrick Park, in those retail areas, it's perfectly acceptable. I think that there are a lot of issues that need to be looked at with zoning and in consideration of the BID's overlay that I think we should begin to talk about now so that when the Mile, you know, is done in two years, that, you know, these things are already addressed, and we come back with a better package entirely for the Mile. I know Frank is involved with the BID, so it's probably more your issue, so I was going to talk to you about it. Since I can't talk to you about it, I'm talking to you here, that maybe, you know, because you worked so much with the BID, you know, maybe you could maybe look at that or continue that conversation. I think with having staff now be involved with looking at the BID overlay and everything. Because up until now or previously under other management, it wasn't ever considered.

Commissioner Quesada: So you mentioned something that I hear complaints from the merchants downtown all the time with relation to signage. Everyone says our signage ordinance is archaic for downtown, because it really doesn't promote the businesses. I mean, something very basic: we don't allow a-frame signage, which, if you walk down any downtown of any city throughout the country, it's a basic, simple little frame.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Commissioner Quesada: When you open up your front door, you put that on the sidewalk; we don't allow that.

Commissioner Lago: If I could interject, I mean, I'll give you another example that I was made aware of this past week. For example, I was notified that the Coral Gables Museum two weeks ago, was cited because it had a small sign, you know, outside their door basically hoping to advertise the fact that they were having some sort of exhibit.

Commissioner Keon: And we approve banners and everything.

Commissioner Lago: And they were cited on the issue by someone, I guess, in regards to Code Enforcement. Again...

Commissioner Keon: I think there's a disconnect between what is appropriate.

Commissioner Lago:...they're doing their job.

Commissioner Quesada: Coming back to the issue.

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: So there's been a lot of complaints about signage, been a lot of complaints about the actual zoning for downtown Miracle Mile. With the previous Manager, the discussions that we were having were always, and with the BID as well and the business owners, was let's get streetscape done and then we'll deal with the zoning overlay after the fact, because that's a longer process. So that was always the concern. Let's get the infrastructure completed and then we can discuss that zoning overlay. Because if people are going to start investing and making these changes now, these property owners and businesses, once streetscape, occurs, then there might be other things that they might want to do, so it might be wasting some money and time ahead of time. That was the conversation we had with the previous Commission before you

and Commissioner Lago were on the dais, so we were really just holding back, but if the desire is there to move forward now. I'm sorry?

Commissioner Keon: But how do you feel about it?

Commissioner Quesada: How do I feel? I always felt "let's get it done."

Commissioner Keon: OK. So I kind of think everybody is saying "let's get it done."

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.

Commissioner Keon: I think also it gives us an opportunity to maybe look at some sort of incentives for property owners to upgrade their storefronts. A lot of the storefronts are...

Commissioner Quesada: Of course.

Ms. Foglia: They're in need of...

Commissioner Keon: They're very dated. They're very old, you know, aluminum or some sort of metal that's, you know, badly pitted and whatever else just because they're old and our weather conditions and whatever else, and I don't know that they need to be monetary incentives, but maybe they can be incentives that of expedited permitting during a particular period of time, waiving of certain fees during a particular period of time. So we want to see, people that will actually come in and take it seriously and look to, maybe redo their storefronts, you know, in the process of this whole streetscape and everything too. So I would like us maybe to direct staff to, with Planning and Zoning and possibly Code Enforcement and, Finance, to put together a group that really look at, as well as the public dollars that we're putting in. Then, you know, what are the other things that we should come forward with to begin to move this along, and it may be a year, it could be two years -- a year or two years before this actually is all finalized, but it's going to take us a year before we start to see anything move you know, actually, a physical change on the Mile anyway.

Mayor Cason: And if it's going to take a long time, it's good to get started now, I think, because if we're going to widen the sidewalks to encourage sidewalk cafés and, you know, the question of menu boards that could come out so people know what they're serving, all of those sorts of things as a design in downtown, they need to know what kind of signs are they going to be...

Ms. Foglia: Exactly. And some of these changes are going to happen immediately; some of them take a longer time. I just want to let everybody know that the BID has had an overlay committee which has been working on this for many, many years. It was spearheaded, by the BID, but we invited experts from the University of Miami, so we had..

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, and they had very good people. Very credible people.

Ms. Foglia: These are top-notch, you know, urban planners, architects, experts who have done this overlay for us.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Foglia: And we already have a draft. And actually, you know, we met with them a couple of weeks ago to revise and review to make sure that it was updated, and it was still, you know, current. I believe streetscape will address some of these issues. But as you know, streetscape is really a two-prong process. The renovation of the street is the asphalt, is the physical. And the physical will not take care of all these different issues, so that is hardware, what we like to call it, and we need the software to really activate all the different needs, and that is what is going to attract people to come, have people come to the area and stay here. So I appreciate you, you know what, for stepping forward and allowing us to start this conversation. I think both of them, you know, it can happen at the same time. I do not believe that we need to wait. Both of them have to be ready. Once streetscape is ready, we have to have everything in place and in line.

Mayor Cason: Why don't you circulate to us your draft so we can see where --

Ms. Foglia: OK.

Commissioner Keon: I would like for us maybe to direct the City Manager to work with the appropriate parties, with the BID, you know, with the staff, your staff that it would be appropriate to be involved and to look at all of those issues that have been at a standstill.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I'm really happy to do that. This is a perfect time.

Commissioner Keon: And Frank is a representative of the BID; and if you can come back and talk to us about it all.

Commissioner Quesada: So the recommendations that the BID has given to us in the past, if staff can get them. Also, if we can have the Chamber take a look at them and our Economic Development Department, as well the Board. Because I think this is something that the Board is appropriate for.

Commissioner Keon: Right. And some incentive, maybe kind of incentives can we give to property owners to upgrade their storefronts. You know, all of those. All of that.

Commissioner Quesada: Of course.

Commissioner Keon: That whole package of things.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah. And if you could also, I know your membership includes all the business owners and the property owners on Miracle Mile and Giralda. If you can send them an e-mail (electronic) blast, say any of other feedback, any other new ideas, let's try to get any other good ideas that can help us out.

Ms. Foglia: OK.

Commissioner Quesada: Maybe there's some gold mine, some diamonds there that we haven't thought of.

Commissioner Lago: Maybe we could hold something where staff comes and meets with BID staff and the people who are on the Mile and have some sort of symposium just to go over that; tell me what their needs are.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: You know, just for your knowledge, there's a lot of storefronts there that are not to the property line. When we expand the sidewalks, it's going to encourage these owners or these properties to try to get additional square footage. So this may be a proper time to talk about storefronts because there may be some people that want to bump their storefronts out at that appropriate time.

Commissioner Quesada: That's a good point.

Commissioner Keon: Right. Well yes, in the way some of the entrances, some of the stores they're angled off and different things, and apparently, that has been a real problem with them being able to just kind of square up to the street, and I think we need to look at all of those issues so that...

Ms. Foglia: Series of issues.

Commissioner Quesada: Sounds good.

Commissioner Keon: The whole thing.

Ms. Foglia: Its hours of operation. Its uses, it's the different type of businesses. It is the signage, it is way finding. It's a very comprehensive. We have, you know, very detailed planning. We have a short, short, short version also, where all the bullet points and the main areas.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah.

Ms. Foglia: But it is a good idea to partner with everybody and have... because I think Streetscape will address some of the issues.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Foglia: You know, so you have Planning and Zoning --

Commissioner Keon: Right. And even Finance to look at what can be incentives, and what can we reasonably, and maybe waive some of those things.

Mayor Cason: Yeah, and our design firm will be able to come up with some ideas elsewhere around the world and in the United States that they'll bring to the table as well, so it's a good start the conversation, get the ideas out so we don't have to start too far down the pike.

Commissioner Keon: No, but it allows then the private property owners in the private sector to also, be part of this upgrade.

Mayor Cason: Thank you, Marina.

Ms. Foglia: For us to remain current and viable and competitive. So thank you very much.

Commissioner Quesada: Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: Thank you. We're going to try to do E-2 --

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: E-2 now.

Commissioner Keon: Craig, will you need to be involved?

City Attorney Leen: What?

Commissioner Keon: Do you need to be involved with this group, too? Yes?

City Attorney Leen: Well, certainly. I will work with Cathy.

Commissioner Keon: OK.

City Attorney Leen: I'd be happy to be on it.

Commissioner Keon: OK, thank you.

[End: 12:15:49 p.m.]