

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
March 25, 2015
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

Finance Director, Diana Gomez

Police Chief Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-1 [9:53:48 a.m.]

An update on the reduction of the Citywide speed limit to 25 miles per hour
Commissioner Quesada

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: F – City Commission Items. This is an update of the citywide speed limit to 25 miles per hour – Commissioner Quesada.

Commissioner Quesada: Maybe about a year ago, we had discussed on the dais and I had asked staff where do we go from here? We didn't vote on it, but it was general consensus to look into this that we were in favor of lowering the speed limit throughout the City, particularly the residential neighborhoods. At that time, staff had indicated that we have a lot of county roads and we have some state roads as well, so we needed – and also there are some regulations affecting whether we can do it or not with neighboring municipalities. I know we spoke about it again maybe two or three months ago, but I want to ask staff to see if we had any updates on how the

communications were going with neighboring municipalities, or can we implement this and if we can, how quickly?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And I'd like to call Glenn Kephart, the Public Works Director up to give you an update. Thank you Glenn.

Mr. Kephart: Good morning and thank you Mayor and Commissioners. This is something that staff has been looking at as the direction that you gave about a year ago, I think it was. We actually had David Plummer and Associates do a study, two studies, one citywide as to what it would take to do a reduced speed limit of perhaps 25 from 30. It was just preliminary analysis to what would the process be, and then they also did a study of, specific study of Gables By The Sea, and talk about citywide that in order to reduce the speed limits there are a couple of ways to do that. One is, you put the counters out and you calculate how fast the speed is currently moving, and then you go through a calculation to determine what 85 percent of the people who are considered reasonable drivers, the speed that they are travelling at. That's one mechanism for setting speed limits. Then if you do that and you determine that the speed limit is appropriate there are other factors that you can consider, and I think our City has a lot of those other factors. Those other factors being narrow streets, perception of the driver, what it feels like, what speed feels safe, sight distance considerations. We have a lot of trees with maybe blocking sight distance to yard, or a driveway where children may be playing, all of those factors – what's it look like at nighttime, can be taken into consideration and further evaluation that allows you to lower the speed limit between four to eight miles per hour, below that 85th percentile speed. You always hear the 85th percentile speed that's what FDOT (Florida Department of Transportation) uses, nationwide that is the standard, but there are mechanisms to lower it. We have been looking specifically at Gables By The Sea who has requested to lower the speed limit in their neighborhood and...

Commissioner Quesada: You said that neighborhood requested that as well?

Mr. Kephart: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: OK.

Mr. Kephart: That neighborhood association requested that...

Mayor Cason: Pardon me. Isn't that because that community is split between Pinecrest and the Gables and it's been lowered on the Pinecrest side, not on the Gables side.

Commissioner Quesada: That's right.

Mr. Kephart: That is correct. That is correct.

Commissioner Lago: Since we are talking about Pinecrest. Have we been able to ascertain any information in regards to how – what has occurred?- what have been the implications of lowering the speed limit to 25 from 30, I guess, in Pinecrest.

Mr. Kephart: Pinecrest actually lowered from 30 to 20, and we had been doing...

Commissioner Lago: How recent was that? That's pretty drastic.

Mr. Kephart: That was before I was here last summer. It's been probably, I don't know, more than a year, it's probably a couple of years. I'm not sure of the exact date when that got lowered. So we have been evaluating – we had David Plummer and Associates do an analysis of Gables By The Sea based on the 85th, the traditional method where they put out the hoses. They calculated that the average speed on the street is 30.6, therefore the 30 miles per hour is an appropriate speed, but the statutes allow for us to do a supplemental investigation, and we have proceeded with that. We have the draft memo written and we met with the County; the County just needs a report from us recommending a lower speed if that's what we determine. We've done that report and it is our recommendation, staff's recommendation that it is appropriate to lower the speed in Gables By The Sea to 25 miles per hour, based upon the width of the street, limited sight distance, you have heavy vegetation blocking yards and driveways, kids are playing and in some cases you have those little signs letting you know kids are playing. In some cases people have driveway hoops that they move out to the roadway temporarily, so that kids can play. You have very short segments, you have limited sight distance on a bridge and other areas and considering all those factors, I feel very confident that the County will agree with our analysis and we will be able to...

Mayor Cason: What do we have to do then – so that will put it at Pinecrest, so it would be the same speed limit?

Mr. Kephart: Pinecrest is 20.

Mayor Cason: Twenty (20)?

Mr. Kephart: Twenty (20). Our official analysis leads us to 25, and we need to meet with Pinecrest and talk about that.

Commissioner Lago: That's what I was going to ask you right now. Maybe it was more of a question for the City Manager or request. I'd like to find out since Pinecrest has already gone through the process, both locally and in the County, why don't we find out what the results have been of lowering the speed limit to 10 miles an hour. Maybe they have some hiccups that we can avoid, maybe they can tell us 20 wasn't the appropriate speed limit, it was 25, maybe it was 23. Again, I just want to kind of see if there has been any downturn in regards to accidents?- has there been a downturn in regards to congestion? Those are things that maybe since they've already gone that route, I hate to say, we can use their homework to find out if maybe any of that information applies or is applicable to the City of Coral Gables before we actually expend any monies or have staff work on something which maybe at the end of the day – I'm in favor of it. I think it's a great idea, I think we should lower. I just want to make sure that since we have a neighboring community which has already gone through the process, let's use all their information. I think it will make the process even...

Mayor Cason: I'm happy that we'll be able to go from 30 to 25, because they've been trying to get that for a long time. They are very worried about what they feel is speeding there. While we wait for happens, information on Pinecrest – what do we have to do to get the County now to agree to lower it to 25?- is there something the Commission needs to do?- a resolution or something?

Mr. Kephart: We need to support a – we need to submit a supplemental report to the County that includes David Plummer's assessment and then a supplement memo and report to it. We have a draft of that supplemental report and it's still a work in progress, so we certainly can add additional data to it and some of the things that you said in consideration of that. So we submit that to the County, then we would have to enter into an agreement with the County and this is when it would become a Commission item, I think, is to enter into an agreement that we are going to take over the speed limit signs and maintain them; currently the County is responsible for them.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm sorry, would you speak up a little bit. It's tough to hear you right now, I apologize. You said we have to enter into an agreement with the County to take over those signs within our boundaries?

Mr. Kephart: Yes, that is the process – an interlocal agreement with the County.

Commissioner Quesada: Have we started that conversation?

Mr. Kephart: We have had that conversation and they've told us what the process is and we are in the process of – I have actually a draft, this is what our draft report looks like at this point...

Commissioner Quesada: OK.

Mr. Kephart: You see it's a work in progress and the timeliness of being able to discuss this with you this morning is perfect.

Commissioner Quesada: Does it put any other – I guess are there any negative burdens that are placed upon us, whether costs or other items maybe I'm not thinking of?

Mr. Kephart: Yes there are, because then we are responsible for the signs – and citywide when David Plummer did his assessment, he calculated that we would need an additional 600 signs in the City to lower the speed limit from 30 to 25, because you have to notify people when they come off a street that's not 30 that you are going into a lower 25, that would be case with all of our county and state roads, and that's 600 signs based on his initial assessment would have a price tag of about \$180,000 initially, and then a few thousand dollars a year to maintain that. I will say that we haven't fully vetted that or tried to negotiate with the county that maybe we don't need all those signs, so I think that's a maximum and I would hope that we could reduce that.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: I'll just add to this. The amount of signs can be decided with the county, but to consider "Drive Slowly and Enjoy the City Beautiful" or "Slow Down", I think it can be incorporated in our branding, and we've heard in our neighborhoods that speed is an important issue, so how we address the signage I think that's something that we can do, but clearly one of the big, I guess you would say costs, are for this kind of initiative to work we need enforcement and that is why Pinecrest has been so successful in slowing down the traffic in their community. It was heavily enforced so you may want to call on the Chief for...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Chief Hudak please.

Commissioner Lago: Good morning sir.

Chief Hudak: Good morning. Like anything else the officers have what we call a seven mile an hour discretion rate on tickets and this is using both laser radars, as well as the other moving radars that we have. A reduction of the speed would obviously reduce that discretionary...so those ticket prices which we would be issuing would come into play for the individual violators. We agree, all of us, that the enforcement side for lowering it is, we believe there is some additional signage. I think if you look at our neighbors Pinecrest, there is actually additional signage that they have put along the strips of the poles, which is almost like another reminder; it's a reflective type thing. It is indicative of Pinecrest...

Commissioner Quesada: Does that work?

Chief Hudak: It does – and we believe it does. We’ve seen it in Pinecrest because it reminds them of one or two things and talking to drivers that have been cited by Pinecrest is, they see those and it really does kind of stand out. I think we have a few of them in Gables By The Sea when they changed it; they also changed the markings that go along, “Slow Down.” Again, our random enforcement efforts are still in play. We have seen a majority of our issues are volume coupled with speed and we have, what we call “Black Boxes”, which do the quiet or the surveillance type of measuring devices. So most of the complaints that we work on together are both speed and volume. Most of the speed is on the off-peaks and some cut-through areas, but again that it’s going to a consistent mapped out plan of enforcement throughout, not just our hot spots that we are trying to handle now.

Mayor Cason: Chief do you have any kind of statistics on what percentage of your tickets are going to people that don’t live in Coral Gables? My impression is that looking at the red light camera data that about 82 percent of the tickets are given to people from outside of Coral Gables coming through. You have a sense in terms of your ticket, the violations, what percent are...?

Chief Hudak: I believe that there is a higher percentage of people that do not live in the City of Coral Gables, they may work in the City of Coral Gables, we don’t have a way of actually delineating that to the best of my knowledge right now as far as the tickets. We would not necessarily break them down that way other than going historically looking at the court records of what we’ve done after the fact, that’s not something I think we should chart going forward.

Mayor Cason: Just wondering – because my impression is based on the other data that a lot of that is people coming from one way or another going through the Gables somewhere else.

Chief Hudak: And again, I agree Mayor, we are the pass-through oasis in the commuter world of coming through. U.S.-1 is....it’s a capacity issue and just this week with half the schools just in spring break, you see a difference in the commute already. We get less complaints on the arterial roads or the ancillary roads. There is not as much cut-through because those are flowing. We are going to have those issues throughout. We have the constant violators – identifying what we are doing – no left turn – no right turn, the merging issues. We don’t get a chance to get into those neighborhoods, however we have identified them, Mendoza, things like that, because it’s like water through a sieve where the cars are going to go and the drivers are cutting through, most of those violators in those neighborhoods are people that are passing through the community.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: This would be interesting to incorporate into our traffic study that we are doing, so that this is part of it. Supposedly, we are proceeding on that – Madam City Manager are we moving forward on this traffic study?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Absolutely. We are developing the scope at this point, as you know, it will be well deserved, but expensive and so we are budgeting it for the October 1 fiscal year rather than this current year.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: OK – very good.

Commissioner Quesada: That's a good point to throw that in. Because the ultimate goal obviously is to discourage cut-through traffic from the neighborhoods, so if you are cutting through and you go 26 miles per hour, you are getting a ticket. We've all experienced this everywhere, I think all of us live in areas where there is a lot of cut-through traffic, so it's really just to discourage that, so I'm glad, thank you for putting the work in and it looks like we are making progress to get there.

Commissioner Lago: Nothing to discourage individuals for using those cut-streets, but also have people be a little bit more considerate in regards to the speed that they are using when they cut through those streets, because a lot of those streets, especially where I live every home has children playing in the front yard and you see cars wizz by. I cringe sometimes.

Mr. Kephart: When I went home last evening, because this has been in front of my brain, we've been working on it, my neighbor, a five year old daughter and a three year old son were in the middle of the street playing "monkey in the middle" – is that a bad thing? – well it makes for a healthy neighborhood and they were able to do that on a calm street. I don't condone it, but it happens and the more we can do to make our neighborhoods safer from a speed standpoint the better it is.

Commissioner Lago: Agreed.

Chief Hudak: And a lot of it is in the police community, we see a lot of the road rage speed. Judge Phillip Bloom who was our traffic judge said something years and years ago to me that sometimes when people get behind the cars and this road-rage phenomenon really happens. When they are at a dead standstill from Blue Road, let's say, from Red Road all the way back past University, because it's bumper to bumper, when they get to Santa Maria and they take a left and they are going down Algringo, they are trying to get out and it's the same thing coming the other way. So when we do stop those people coming off of Red Road trying to bypass those

intersections at Red Road and Bird Road, we do see them going at a high rate of speed Mayor, to your point, those are the people that we see outside.

Mayor Cason: Any idea how many transient speeding tickets that you are giving?

Chief Hudak: I can get that information for you. I don't have it right now.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Traffic has always been an issue in the City of Coral Gables, but it seems like it's on a peak now. It was waning there for a while and now it's on the rise of being on the forefront of people's thought processes, so this is a very good initiative that we've been taking that will help alleviate that, and certainly appease many of our residents. So thank you very much.

[End: 10:10:14 a.m.]