

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-1
May 26, 2015
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

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)

Meg Daly, Founder, Friends of the Underline

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Update regarding the Underline by Meg Daly, founder of “Friends of the Underline”

Meg Daly: Ready?

Mayor Cason: Yes.

Ms. Daly: Hi. Good morning, everybody. Thanks for having me today, and welcome to our new Commissioner. I met with Commissioner Slesnick last week and gave her an update on the Underline. But, I would like to have these updates on an ongoing basis because so much is happening so quickly. My name is Meg Daly. I'm a proud resident of the Coral Gables, and the founder of Friends of the Underline. As you all know, we selected through a competitive process

James Corner Field Operations to be our design team. We contracted with them in March, and we had our first set of public meetings, April 16, 17 and 18. The Coral Gables resident meeting was on April 16; Commissioner Keon came out and spoke to the audience. It was at University of Miami/School of Architecture. We had about 120 residents on that meeting, we had two more, so we had about 300 total residents to our public meetings. Our public outreach actually began at History Miami a few months ago, and we have a current exhibit at the Coral Gables Museum, which has been up for three months, and we've gotten lots of public input at that time. Our next public meetings will be June 23 and 25th. The one for Coral Gables residents will be on June 25 at Temple Judea. We expect about about 200 or 300 people at that one, and we'll be publicizing that, beginning June 1. We did have 600 surveys completed. We've collected them in numerous events and online, and the results of those are kind of interesting. I'll just share a few of those statistics with you. Seventy-eight percent of responders said they would use the underline for a leisurely bike ride; 68 percent for a walk; and 62 percent for a farmer's market. For trail amenities, 85 percent of responders want lighting, which will also improve the security conditions; 83 percent want separated trails, one for pedestrians and one for bicyclists, which is part of our plan; and 72 percent want water fountains. Regarding landscaping, 90 percent of responders, an overwhelming, said they want shade trees, and they also want us to use native plants. Fairchild Garden is our horticultural consultant. We've met with Bruce Greer and his team, and we have three horticulturists advising us, and there's a real push to use plant life that will not require irrigation. There's really only a few environments that will survive in oolitic limestone and without irrigation, and that is pine rockland and hardwood hammock, which is what we had there before we cut it down to build our wood floors. Our two one-mile demonstration areas are Brickell and the City of Coral Gables. I don't know if you remember, but part of our master planning is going to give us 10 miles of requirements and standards, but a lot of detail in two areas, which are Brickell from the Miami River to Southwest 15th Avenue Road, about a mile, and Stanford Drive to Red Road, which is what we're going to call the "UM Colonnade." We have some very preliminary plans. By September, we'll be done with our renderings and with our plan, and I'll present it to the Commission. We've just completed a very time-consuming tree audit for the Brickell area. We documented 400 trees, and that's an all-volunteer effort, and the next one is going to be at UM. As I mentioned, our final presentation will be in September. We'll have a third round of public meetings. As you can see, we're

engaging the community and we're inviting their comment. In November, we're participating in a "wheels conference" in which we're going to have a five-day event inviting people to ride their bikes in conjunction with transit, and we're trying to attract 10,000 bicyclists to the area. I hope that I can come back later in summer with some more news. And if you all have any questions at this time, please let me know.

Commissioner Slesnick: Meg, just to repeat, your meeting for Coral Gables is June 25, which is a Saturday?

Ms. Daly: Thursday.

Commissioner Slesnick: Thursday. At Temple Judea. What time?

Ms. Daly: 6 to 8 p.m. And that'll be on our web site. And the City Manager has worked with us in the past in getting the word out to Coral Gables residents. You know, it's really important that people come out. It's like voting; you have to tell us what you want, what you like, what you don't like, and we take every comment very seriously.

Commissioner Lago: Madam City Manager, can we make sure that we put that on eNews, if possible?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And I think it would be helpful for us to do a special eNews just on that, so I doesn't get lost.

Ms. Daly: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Meg, just a simple question from my side. How can we help you achieve this goal? What else can we do? I mean, obviously, I know we've made a financial commitment. I've gone to speak, as requested by you, before the School Board. What else can we do?

Ms. Daly: Well, our real push right now is to get funding for 2016 to start building on Brickell. We want to also start building in Coral Gables right after that, you know. So that's where our focused areas are. I think it's sort of obvious why. There's built-in user base. There's easy proof of concept and demonstration of usage in front of UM and Brickell. As you know, the State Legislature, we have an allocation of two million. They're going to be in special session starting next week. We'd like to hold on to that allocation, if possible. We are working with the County right now on really a governance for this district. You know, you have to look at it as a 10-mile corridor that have three municipalities that front, and businesses and residents alongside, and that governance document is in front of Alina Hudak, Vice Mayor, the County. As soon as we have that done, we're going to distribute it to the municipalities, because we want the County, the Friends of the Underline, and the municipalities represented. So, we have a lot of balls in the air. So I think supporting our initiative to start building in 2016 is very important, because Coral Gables will be right on the heels of that.

Commissioner Lago: Let me ask you one last question. I know that we talked about a number per mile prior to the design phase commencing. Have we been able to tighten up that number and get a more of a realistic budget number for construction costs?

Ms. Daly: No. And the way it's going to be working is master planning, and that includes all the engineering and design, you're familiar with the process, and the last piece is cost estimating, and that will include all the lighting, all the landscaping, everything. And that won't be done until the end of September. As soon as I have those numbers, I'll run them over here and present them. You know, because we really have to reality test the numbers and make sure that there's consensus with what we're proposing, and once we're there, we're going to work on raising the money to build.

Commissioner Lago: One last thing. I just want to commend you again as always, because you're putting forth a stellar job and I mean, I've spoken to many residents and constituents who are just clamoring for this project, so I can't thank you enough. And I know that I speak for this Commission, that you've done an incredible job, you know, holding the flag for this cost.

Ms. Daly: I'll keep coming back until you guys get tired of me.

Commissioner Lago: You can come back at every Commission meeting, and we're willing to do whatever it takes to help you achieve this goal.

Ms. Daly: Thanks so much. And, you know, there's a large piece of this. There's private dollars as well. So we're going to be working harder raising private dollars, probably pushing that effort within the next month, which puts us into the middle of the summer, but we do have a number of interested parties, which we're excited to go talk to and bring them into the fold.

Commissioner Slesnick: Meg, one more question. And I commend you also. You've given a lot of hours to this. Thank you very much. Just for the viewing public, is the survey online, the survey that you just talked about? Is your survey online?

Ms. Daly: That survey's concluded, so we've taken that down. The next survey is going to be up two days before the next public meeting, so that would be June 21.

Commissioner Slesnick: And your online address for the viewing public.

Ms. Daly: Is www.theunderline.org, and we're also on Facebook, we're on Twitter, and Instagram.

Commissioner Slesnick: One other thing that people can do if they're interested in supporting this is to contact their legislators, which will be in Tallahassee after next week, to encourage them to support this.

Ms. Daly: Right. And we have a few leaders in that regard. Obviously, we're a Dade Delegation priority, and this was written in as a priority during the last session. Our leaders are Representative Fresen, Representative Diaz, and Senators Garcia and Miguel Diaz de la Portilla.

Commissioner Slesnick: But if people in general want to support this, they could contact their legislators?

Ms. Daly: Absolutely.

Commissioner Slesnick: One other thing. Can private funds be designated just for the Coral Gables section?

Ms. Daly: Yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: OK. Thank you.

Ms. Daly: You know, and I think that 10 miles is a lot, but it's really many stories that makes up 10 miles, and Coral Gables represents over 30 percent of this. And so, that's the way we're fundraising, is sort of by parcel. And if we could get one funder to take care of the whole thing, that would be great, but that's highly unlikely. This is going to be like an onion with lots of layers that we have to direct to certain areas. So we have to start building the war chest for Coral Gables.

Commissioner Slesnick: Thank you, Meg.

Ms. Daly: Thanks.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you. Great work.