

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item H-2**  
**February 23, 2016**  
**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)**

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Agenda Item H-2 [1:32:14 p.m.]

Update on South Dixie Highway Master Plan Initiative

Mayor Cason: Finally, let's move onto H-2, which is the update on the South Dixie Highway Master Plan initiative.

Mr. Betancourt: Good afternoon Mr. Mayor, Mr. Vice Mayor, Commissioners, for the record Javier Betancourt, the City's Economic Development Director. I don't have to tell you that South Dixie Highway is a critical and complex corridor for the City. It is the most traversed corridor in the City by far, by both cars and transit, and holds some of the City's most prominent and visited destinations, including the University of Miami and Village of Merrick Park. Those very characteristics are not attracting development investment along the corridor. Along with that come many challenges, especially in terms of traffic and commercial encroachment into residential areas. But it also offers tremendous potential for quality of life improvements, such as opportunities for parks and open space, bicycle and pedestrian activity, and high quality right size development that enhances the corridor and promotes business activity, while honoring the City's heritage and preserving the quality of life for our residential neighborhoods. The true

challenge with South Dixie Highway is the absence of a plan or a vision for what we want that corridor to be over the long term, and in that absence we often find ourselves reacting to things as they happen or as they are proposed with no common agreement on how to proceed. So following the wishes of the City Commission, we are embarking on a planning initiative to study the corridor, one that will touch on land use, design and zoning issues and prepare potential development scenarios that draw those out; economic development issues, opportunities for parks and open space, transportation and infrastructure issues. Although to be clear, it's not intended to be an engineering or traffic study. In fact there is a parallel transportation planning effort underway that will more precisely tackle those issues as you are aware. The ultimate objective is to engage the community, particularly stakeholders along the corridor, but also citizens from throughout the City to create a vision and holistic plan for the corridor. One that finds that elusive balance between residential and commercial interest and enhances the quality of life for all. It will include a considerable amount of public engagement and bring together various disciplines, including our department, Planning and Zoning, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Parking, etc., to ensure a well-rounded consensus oriented approach to planning the corridor's future. We are currently in discussions and refining a draft scope of services with a potential consultant to lead this effort, one who we believe would be a fair and honest broker by all parties and one who brings together experience and capacity on the one hand, but just as critically a keen understanding and appreciation of a...community on the other. Given the urgency of the matter we are hoping to bring them on board as a piggyback contract to expedite the process with a potential start date as early as April. Procurement is determining whether that is a possibility as we speak. From there in line with your expressed wishes, we would push for a six-month turnaround with final recommendations and deliverables presented to this Commission hopefully by early fall. Finally, anticipated cost of this planning initiative is approximately \$150,000, which may require a budget amendment that we will bring back to you for your approval. That's the concept at this point in time and I would certainly welcome any feedback or questions.

Mayor Cason: Well worth it.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Commissioner Lago you were the one that said, can we bring it back in six months?- and so under the piggyback if we are able to – certainly we are not compromising the caliber of the consultant, but we are expediting the selection of it through piggyback, if we can do that we'll be able to meet, our goal is to meet that deadline, if not we are going to have to come back to you with a more extended schedule.

Commissioner Keon: How does it affect applications that are in process?

Mr. Betancourt: It does not.

Commissioner Keon: It doesn't. I mean the things that are there will continue to move on and everything else. What again is the...

Mr. Betancourt: Obviously, as the process moves along we will incorporate those proposed developments into the discussion.

Commissioner Keon: What South Dixie Highway are we talking about?- what stretch of South Dixie Highway and I'm assuming it's on both sides of the highway.

Mr. Betancourt: Both sides of the highway, we are looking at the entirety of the stretch within the City of Coral Gables and perhaps a bit beyond, so we would envision it stretching from the Douglas Metrorail Station, just outside of the City's boundary on the east side, down to the that would be the South Miami Metrorail Station, just outside of the City's boundaries.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And given our discussion this morning, we'll be very careful...

Commissioner Keon: Make sure you call them.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark:...going beyond our municipality in any of those discussions.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mr. Betancourt: Absolutely. When we say we are going to engage the public at-large, we are also including our sister municipalities. Obviously traffic doesn't start and end just within our section, it continues on either side and so there are some synergies there to be had and that will be part of the conversation as well.

Commissioner Keon: Some of the parcels that, I always think of the east and west of the highway, I know that people think north and south, so I don't know, from the bayside of the highway, whatever that is. Some of the parcels, I suppose that there is always the opportunity to assemble parcels, so I suppose it wouldn't – things could change depending on the footprint, but some of it is the width of those parcels won't change, the length of them may change, but the width of them won't change, the depth won't really change.

Commissioner Lago: That's a big indicator of what can be...

Commissioner Keon: Right – the depth will tell us, so as we go up, because all along there, particularly on the east side, the depth of those parcels change, not only – until you get further south it becomes a more commercial area, but the more northern part of it, they are residential, but some are quite near, some are quite deep, so I would assume we'll talk about that.

Mr. Betancourt: Yes – absolutely. The corridor is clearly, the street and the immediate properties along the street adjacent to it, but as these issues lead us to explore maybe a little further in, we'll look at that as well, including the mixed use district...park, including on the other end the area around Sunset and Bird. The only thing it affects or is affected by the corridor would be part of that discussion.

Commissioner Slesnick: So the Underline and up to Ponce on the south side, south side of Ponce.

Commissioner Lago: That's the goal. Can you do me one favor just to ensure, and I know that no one has brought it up to me, but I want to make sure that we preempt it. When we speak with the consultant, when you speak with the consultant, make sure that we have a delineated amount, or total for public meetings. Let's say we have three, or we could have four, we have four. I want to make sure that everybody's voice gets heard and that everybody has an ability to give their opinion in regards to what their vision of the corridor is. And I wanted to commend you and your staff for really taking action on this and delivering on today. This is going to be something that I think is going to provide us with an action plan for that area, which is sorely needed. At least give people who are interested and investing in that area the ability to have an idea before they even purchase a piece of property of what the City is looking for, and more importantly what the residents and the business community are looking for.

Mayor Cason: City Manager what else do you need from us now, anything else?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: This is an update as to where we are going. If we are successful with the piggyback, we will move forward and engage that consultant. We need to come back to you with a budget after we have a specific scope, including your public engagement meetings, and so we will be back on the expenditure side, but we would not be back on the selection, if we're successful in the piggyback.

Mayor Cason: Anybody have a problem with that?

Commissioner Slesnick: Do we want to have a motion for expenditure up to a certain amount, so we can get started on this, because we don't meet for another two weeks?

Mayor Cason: Do you need a motion on that, or can you just...?

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: If the Commission is comfortable that the amount would be up to \$150,000 and that we would, we've already spoken to the Budget Director as to where the funding source would be. I just want to make sure though that you're comfortable with that scope, so we'll continue to update you on individual meetings. Your next meeting is not till March 15, and that's where the delay comes.

Mayor Cason: Why don't we have a motion then?

Commissioner Lago: I'll make the motion.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Lago makes the motion.

Commissioner Slesnick: Second.

Mayor Cason: Commissioner Slesnick seconds. City Clerk.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Slesnick: And Javier that would include that expenditure of informing the citizens and also the business property owners, and maybe the shop owners and so forth, up and down there, because they are not always the same.

Mayor Cason: And realtors that might deal in that area as well.

Commissioner Lago: Going off what Commissioner Slesnick said, if they say we'll do three outreach efforts, give me a price to do a fourth. I want to make sure that everybody, like what Ramon Trias does when we present on a project, puts on a board how many times people have had the ability for public input, I think it's important.

Mayor Cason: And just make sure to try to do them, not when people are away on vacation, so we don't have that kind of argument again.

Commissioner Keon: Not in August.

Mr. Betancourt: Public engagement is at the core of this effort, we know it's important.

Commissioner Lago: If we have to split them up, if you tell me it's going to take eight months, it will take eight months, but that's a great point that the Mayor brought up. I don't want to make it seem as if there is anything done under the cover of darkness, or during holiday season. I want as many people to attend.

Commissioner Slesnick: And maybe in different locations too, so you have access and more parking in some locations rather than others.

Commissioner Keon: You know one of the issues that I'm sure you will, or tell me if you do that, if you include it in when you come up for a plan for development along there is, because of the height of the Metrorail, I know that under – when Chuck Berkowitz was before us and they were looking at their planned development at that site were big box stores, so you had walls against the Metrorail, so it really didn't affect them what level, whether they were below the Metrorail, at the Metrorail level, above the Metrorail level, or whatever because it was a blank wall behind them that protected them both from the site and the noise from the Metrorail. If you start introducing either residential or some sort of office kind of space along there, I would like recommendations as to heights and setback, but its more height along that side of the Metrorail, because I can imagine somebody wanting to build an office building that there is a wall of windows that looks out at the Metrorail racing by, or maybe somebody does, maybe it's an art opportunity. But I don't think it's the residential part, I don't think people want to look at that.

Commissioner Lago: And that's happening, just if I could interject, that's happening on 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue right across from new buildings, across from Coral Gables those new buildings were built, right before you get to Coral Way, you can literally see a balcony and the power lines are probably about 15-20 feet from...

Commissioner Keon: Yes. We need to decide if that's what we want there, how much height are you going to give them to allow them to clear that Metrorail?- I mean there are a number of those kinds...but there are a number of those issues along there just because by the nature of the Metrorail on that side of the street.

Mr. Betancourt: Understood. From my days in downtown Miami, I can tell you this, it does become an issue, both residential, and in that case it was near the Metro Mover, having those units just adjacent to...privacy concerns, noise concerns.

Commissioner Keon: Right. So we have to decide is that a use?- is that an appropriate use?- and if it is, are you going to give them the additional height to be able to accomplish that use?

Mr. Betancourt: That was already part of the discussion.

Commissioner Keon: OK. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

[End: 1:45:09 p.m.]