

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-9
May 14, 2019
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

**Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Jorge Fors**

City Staff

**Interim City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

Public Speaker(s)

Raul Carreras

Agenda Item G-9 [0:00:00 p.m.]
An update regarding the US-1 corridor study.
(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, Vice Mayor Lago, update regarding US-1 corridor study.

Vice Mayor Lago: Okay. So, basically, I put this on the agenda -- a lot of it has to do -- it's been thoroughly discussed for I think the last two or three years. I think we've been discussing this since 2015. But a lot of that also has to do with the benefit of our newest colleague on Commission, which I think can gain a lot from understanding the full history of what's going on on US-1. I also

have a few concerns and I also want to hear from staff to hear where we're at and where we're headed because I've had certain residents who have called me and told me, look, there's concerns about certain issues about the projects that are being considered for US-1. We just got through a pretty -- an extensive campaign election where certain projects that were brought out and used in mailers were predominantly based on US-1. And I took a lot of interest in that because there was a message being sent. And from the residents that I've spoken to, they have concerns about certain -- the direction on US-1 and whether -- are we headed in the right direction, are we not, but that's a discussion for another day. What I want is a little bit of clarity. And I think US-1, when you talk about the corridor study, which was -- we called for that study -- I called for that study and then it was abandoned and then the Commission again adopted it again and we spent -- we provided the City Manager with \$150,000 to study the entire corridor. When I talk about studying the entire corridor, I'm not only talking about the zoning. I'm talking about pedestrian and bicycle accessibility. I'm talking about open space. A few things that I would like to see studied that I think would be a benefit of our neighbors near Sunset would be the issue of trolley connectivity. What's the plan for the trolley? I've had several meetings while on the TPO and the Public Policy Board. We've been talking about connectivity. How do we deliver on connectivity for the residents of Miami-Dade County? What are our options? What are our options right now? The trolley. The trolley's working incredibly well throughout the cities. What we're failing to do is connect it. We've connected it in the City of Miami in three different locations, on Flagler, Coral Way and on Grand. But I think there's opportunities -- and we've discussed this on the TPO -- to connect it in South Miami and connect it in West Miami. What about potentially doing a trolley route on 57th Avenue? Go ahead, sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no, no. I...

Vice Mayor Lago: No, no, no.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We're talk -- now you're talking about something else. But you mentioned the campaigns and I want to mention this issue on US-1. The people who live in certain areas

south of US-1 don't want any development whatsoever on US-1, which is their choice. But they want to deprive us of the right or ability to make any decision having to do with US-1, which I think is grotesque. I think that's wrong.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I agree with you on that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: In the last...

Vice Mayor Lago: And I agree with you on that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: In the last two elections, 2017, 2019, those who were against "development" five candidates were against development and those five candidates lost. They lost.

Vice Mayor Lago: I agree.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And yes, the margin was small, as the Herald printed out 17 times, but this is not horse shoes. This is an election. And whoever gets one more vote than anybody else prevails. There are 400,000 cars passing through US-1 every day, and yes, we need to preserve the integrity of our residential areas surrounding US-1. But 400,000 cars are passing through it. Whatever was done there is done. I mean, and now we have to make sure that whatever mistakes -- if there were mistakes -- and I'm not saying they were -- but if they were mistakes are not repeated. But I support your idea of having a US-1 study, but I don't -- I very much oppose the retention -- the desire to deprive us of the right to make any decisions whatsoever and no development. Maybe there is good development. I don't know. I'm not saying that what's there is good or bad, but I refuse to tie our hands based on the desires of some of the residents who lost in the last two elections.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I want you to know that I agree with your comments 110 percent. But the reason why I'm bringing this up is it's not only about zoning and development. It's a bout a lot of

other things. That corridor is becoming probably the most important corridor in Miami-Dade County.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: In the county.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, I brought up the issue of zoning and I think it should be studied, but we're going to touch zoning really quickly. Why do I think the zoning issue should be touched? Because there's potentially five projects on the US-1 corridor that are being considered right now, serious projects that are going to come before this Commission piecemeal, as PADs. Does this Commission want to deal with these issues as PADs, or does this Commission want to have a US-1 study that is all encompassing, that talks about, like I mentioned, trolleys, pedestrian accessibility, cycling, open space, zoning issues? Our trolley -- I met with the City -- another issue that we could potentially bring up is 57th Avenue. I met with the mayor of South Miami. They just got the approval 5-0 to redevelop Miracle Center, Sunset Place.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: 5-0?

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Keon: Sunset Place.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: 5-0?

Vice Mayor Lago: 5-0. It was 5-0.

Commissioner Keon: I think they finally got it 5-0.

Vice Mayor Lago: 5-0.

Commissioner Keon: I understand, yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: 5-0. So, you're going to see a new Sunset Place. Maybe I'm dating myself, but it was named Miracle Center. What was the one before it?

Commissioner Mena: Bakery Center.

Commissioner Keon: Bakery Center.

Vice Mayor Lago: Bakery Center.

Commissioner Keon: Bakery Center. I remember when it was Holsum Bakery.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I do, too.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, why am I bringing that up? Because I met with the mayor of South Miami and he said, listen, let's do a beautiful promenade on 57th Avenue. Let's do something special. Let's plan for the next two years. Let's sit down with staff and say, you know, we'll work on this together and we'll do something on 57th Avenue that complements both the City of Coral Gables and South Miami. Let's talk about trolley connectivity on 57th Avenue. What is South Miami's plan? What's the City of Coral Gables' plan? Can you imagine if we did something that went down Ponce, connected in that area, hit South Miami and then went all the way to West Miami? We'd have true connectivity. More and more people are riding the trolley every single day because, again, we have a failure -- we have a failure currently. Right now, we haven't delivered on the SMART Plan, which is very, very difficult. As your TPO representative, it's very difficult right now. You're not going to see a delivery on that for the next five, ten years. This is going to take a long time to bring it to fruition. So, there's a lot of things that we could do that I think we would get benefit of having, like the Mayor said, a study which is -- takes all the stakeholders -- if it's the University, if it's the residents of Riviera neighborhood, if it's the residents that live behind

some of the other projects that are not in Riviera, if it's the business owners, like case in point, which I forgot to mention. I also met with Mark Trowbridge. And he told me that it's important to bring this back up. And Commissioner Keon will know better as our representative in the Chamber. This is important because we need to engage the businesses. We need to create a gateway with signage; 57th Avenue, Douglas. We need to incentivize businesses to open in South Gables by working through our permitting assistance, existing business recruitment. These are all things that we can discuss as part of our study, updating the look and feel along the stretch of US-1 corridor to be more Gable-esque. I don't get the feeling that I'm in Coral Gables.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We could even have trash pits there.

Vice Mayor Lago: We can have trash pits, yes. But there are certain things that we could do to make it even more beautiful, to indicate that you have arrived here in the City of Coral Gables. We can work with the University of Miami. We can work with Meg Daily, who's doing an exceptional job to deliver on the Underline, which we, as a Commission, did, which I'm very proud of. I don't want to give up on this study. We have the funds allocated. I want the Commission's guidance. I want you to tell me what you want. I would love for a developer to say, listen, we're going to come and redevelop these five parcels that are under consideration. This is what we, as a Commission, as a city want. We're not all going to get what we want, but I think it's better than what we have now, where developers are looking to purchase and redevelop these projects without real guidance from a community. Then people come here -- and I hate to say the word "complain," but they -- you know, they're not happy. And I think we need to make sure that we have an open forum where the -- all the stakeholders are there and we can memorialize what the issues are on US-1 so that we can have this -- and really do a US-1 that's incredible, that brings -- that really fits into Coral Gables.

Commissioner Keon: I agree with you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. City Manager, would you bring, for the next Commission meeting, a proposal or some alternatives as to a US-1 study?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Vice Mayor Lago: But you have the money. The money's there.

Commissioner Keon: Right, the money is there. And I -- you know, I -- and I agree with Commissioner Lago when he talks about zoning and some of the things that we need to do. And some of it is -- you know, we need to decide if, you know, do we ask them to step back from that very narrow sidewalk and do you give them some additional height for it? I think, you know, with a new urban planner on our staff as the deputy building director is -- you know, we have more resources within the City to help guide whatever group that we also, you know, will contract with to help us on that. You just -- we can't allow -- you just cannot allow a very small group of people to hijack an entire process.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I agree with you. I'm sorry if I cut you off, Commissioner Fors. I agree with you, but I still think that we...

Commissioner Keon: We can.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I know you agree with me on this point. We need to have the discussion because it's important. It's important because the projects are coming no matter what. The projects are going to come here.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Vice Mayor Lago: They're going to come before the Commission and I can tell you the five projects. They're going to ask for height increases. They're going to ask for density. They're

going to ask for intensity and we're going to have to make decisions. And I'd rather have a study that says, listen, this is what we need. We need to step back. We want more green space. We want a trolley that works to get people from Point A to Point B. We want connectivity. I don't want to attack this anymore piecemeal. I want to think at a more global level. And if you tell me that we've got to give an additional one floor of height to get a setback which will make that project more appealing -- that's what we were talking about the legislation that Ramon and I have been working on for two years that we just passed on first reading. It doesn't include the height, but if someone comes to me and says, listen, Vince, I want to give more than 20 percent on the first floor. I want to give 30 percent and it'll be a park. You've seen how the residents in this community how they -- when they've come back, and they've been arguing about a project and when that developer comes back and says, hey, we're going to give you an eight, ten, twelve thousand square foot park, the residents go from no, they go to yes.

Commissioner Keon: They at least go to maybe.

Vice Mayor Lago: Maybe.

Commissioner Fors: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Lago: It's more palatable.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Commissioner Fors: I just want to state for the record that I'm a hundred percent behind completing that study especially because we already approved it and then voted to resume it again. I think it's definitely something that the majority of residents want. I understand that there's small groups of people in certain areas that are especially vocal about it. However, I spent the last six months knocking on doors and it's not just really limited to that area. I think people all over the Gables want us to do it. And I think we need to be ready for when those developments do come

before us and have an idea or a macro idea of what we're going to do with that area, as Commissioner Lago said. I think the three most important things that we -- or two most important things is to ensure that all the stakeholders are involved in that process. I've heard complaints -- I wasn't around during that time. I've heard complaints that there's at least a perception that not both sides of the issue -- or three sides of the issue were given an opportunity to sort of steer...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That is not true.

Commissioner Fors: I don't know if it is or not, yeah.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I'm telling you it is not true.

Commissioner Fors: And I haven't investigated it, by the way.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Do that.

Commissioner Fors: I do think that one thing that is essential -- not essential, but a really good idea is what Commissioner Lago suggested, which other members of the -- in that -- from that neighborhood have suggested is collaboration with the neighboring communities because we can plan our particular boundaries as perfectly as possible, but you know, at the end of the day, to make it really work, we have to have the input of our neighbors. So, I think those are the two most important things.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Let's go on. Mr. City Manager...

Commissioner Keon: Are we going to...

Vice Mayor Lago: Can we give -- can we give some...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Would you...

Vice Mayor Lago: Would you mind giving the City Manager some direction just so we know what...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no. You've heard the discussion here.

Commissioner Keon: Can we do that from a resolution? Is that...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Bring us a...

City Attorney Ramos: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Proposal of a study that will take into account development, transportation, density...

Vice Mayor Lago: Neighboring...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Green space...

Vice Mayor Lago: Neighboring cities, like South Miami.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Right.

Vice Mayor Lago: We can do a beautiful 57th Avenue, transportation. And just...

Commissioner Mena: Yeah.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Vice Mayor Lago: And can I just add one last thing?

City Manager Iglesias: We will do that. Mayor, we will do that for next Commission meeting.

Vice Mayor Lago: And what I would like to see is -- I would like to see the Manager please bring forth a breakdown of what will be the makeup of the stakeholders. I want to -- so, I want to be very clear and transparent so that you don't hear back from Riviera or UM or from the business community, oh, we didn't have a voice. I want it to be discussed and decided by this Commission. I want it to be discussed by this Commission so that we can be held accountable for how that makeup was finally decided. And I think that's what's important.

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Vice Mayor, the stake -- there are a group of stakeholders that do not wish to have any change there. And we -- that was an issue before. I think if we're going to do a study, the study needs to be comprehensive. It needs to be done professionally and we need to get -- we need to have the input in such a way that it's reasonable and not input where nothing should be done, and the Commission has no power to do anything. So, we're going -- I think if we go ahead with this study, it needs to be done professionally...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: (INAUDIBLE) desire.

City Manager Iglesias: And rationally.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah. And I agree with you, but we need to reengage them. We need to reengage that -- those individuals, that community and say listen, you're part of Coral Gables. We're going to do the study. We want your input. We want to memorialize it. We want to know exactly what you want and tell us what is it that you want.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Vice Mayor...

Vice Mayor Lago: And we'll do what we can.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I agree with you, but let's go on. But make...

Vice Mayor Lago: And Commissioner Mena, I want to...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: They should be engaged. Of course, they are, but they have always been engaged.

Vice Mayor Lago: I know they have.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Always.

Vice Mayor Lago: But no one's denying that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Right.

Vice Mayor Lago: No one's denying that. But I'm saying -- no one's denying that they have been engaged, but they have their opinion and the way they want to do certain things. But if we're going to do the study, which I think is important -- I think everybody here has agreed on that -- let's go back to them again one more time. What does it hurt? It doesn't hurt anything.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, it doesn't hurt.

Vice Mayor Lago: And you're the first one that...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It doesn't hurt.

Vice Mayor Lago: Wants to engage as many people as possible.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, let's...

Vice Mayor Lago: Commissioner Mena, you had a comment.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Commissioner Mena, but let's go on, please. Commissioner Mena.

Commissioner Mena: I'll just make a couple quick points to not belabor the things we've already discussed. I do want to be careful that this is -- I'm okay with the approach that -- what type of things do we want to see there, what do we want to prioritize, et cetera. If the idea is that we're going to like sort of pre-zone...

Vice Mayor Lago: Program.

Commissioner Mena: Properties, I don't see how you do that. I don't -- you know, like, this -- you're limited to this many stories or this much FAR in the future in, you know, perpetuity, and unless you stick to that, there won't be a project there. I don't think we can be that particularized on that type of thing.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, we cannot without having...

Commissioner Mena: But I think...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The facts before us.

Commissioner Mena: Right. But I think we can say things like what -- some of the things you described. We want to see green space. We want to see step backs. We want to see trolley connections.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Transportation.

Commissioner Mena: All those type of things that are going to bring...

Vice Mayor Lago: Sidewalks, sidewalks.

Commissioner Mena: Yeah, sidewalks.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, how do you get to a more expansive sidewalk? How do you get to a more beautiful building? How do you get there? You've got to provide certain incentives.

Commissioner Mena: So, that's one thing. You know, I think we need to navigate that and be careful with that. Two, US-1 -- I live in the Riviera neighborhood. US-1 is not a neighborhood corridor. US-1 is the biggest highway in the country. You know, everyone in the city is a stakeholder in what we do on US-1 for a variety of reasons. Sure, should neighboring communities have a say? Absolutely, but so should everybody else. And that brings me to my third point, Mr. Mayor, about, you know, the election and sort of what people have said or haven't said or what they voted for or mandated or whatnot. I think there are people who may have voted for a candidate -- yourself, for example -- despite having concerns about some of the things that have happened on US-1 because that's not -- maybe not their number-one priority and they think that you're the best candidate to be mayor and they voted for you, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they've rubberstamped every development that we ever approved.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no, no. Of course...

Commissioner Mena: So...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: They don't rubberstamp it, but...

Commissioner Mena: So, I think we've got to be careful...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We have to be very, very careful and we cannot, as you said -- very well said, we cannot impose zoning or impose whatever now without having the facts before us.

Commissioner Mena: Yeah.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And more green space, more transportation, more sidewalks, all of that, are very, very good ideas. And we should have that as part of our plan, but not say you cannot do it unless you have 17,500 square feet of green space and 14 trees (INAUDIBLE). We have to be very careful with that. Let's go on. And Mr. City Manager, you've got your marching orders and maybe you can meet with Commissioners Lago and Mena, Fors and Keon -- I'm sorry, Vice Mayor. And you know, before you present something to us so that you -- we can adopt something next time.

City Manager Iglesias: Understood, Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.