

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-1
February 12, 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 Frank Quesada

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-1 [11:58:12 a.m.]

A discussion regarding undergrounding workshop and Section 5-2201 of the Zoning Code entitled, “Requirement for underground utilities.” (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: H-1 regarding undergrounding workshop – discussion regarding undergrounding workshop and Section 5-2201 of the Zoning Code.

Vice Mayor Lago: This is very brief, very simple. I’ve requested staff, I don’t know if Mr. Santamaria wants to comment on this, to consider putting together an undergrounding workshop. I know Commissioner Quesada was one of the first that ever spoke about this, and I just wanted staff to prepare, because it’s a simple presentation in regards to what are the feasibilities and the cost associated with embarking on this initiative; and maybe we can all partake in it and make a decision whether we want to put this on as a referendum in the near future or if this is right now more than we can handle. I just want to kind of get all of educated and see what the will of the Commission was.

City Attorney Ramos: As to that first part, it would be good to have a motion from the Commission as to whether you want to move forward with the workshop, and if so, what the timing of that workshop should be.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Do I hear a motion?

City Attorney Ramos: And then we'll put together – or just a general sentiment that we want to move forward.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We want to move forward.

Vice Mayor Lago: If we want to do it.

Commissioner Mena: I just want to get more information, but I want to make sure we have enough information for it to be a fruitful exercise...

City Attorney Ramos: It's going to be a robust workshop. It may take several hours. We have a number of people that need to come.

Vice Mayor Lago: The reason why I put this on – I agree with all of your comments. I just didn't want to call for a workshop. I wanted you guys to be included and I wanted you guys to be helping me on this effort, but since we can't speak about certain issues as a result of the Sunshine, I want to take advantage of this moment that we have.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very good.

Vice Mayor Lago: So I want everybody here to be part of this. This could be a very lengthy and costly endeavor, but it could pay dividends in the future, and I've already heard from several residents who keep calling us saying, listen, out of sight out of mind. If you really going to go after this, you need to do it now, not in five years or in two years when people have forgotten about what we just went through. We went through a category one storm that many of us lost power for two and three weeks. Imagine if we would have had a major catastrophe here in the City.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

City Attorney Ramos: What is the timing of the workshop?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: What?

City Attorney Ramos: When would you like the workshop scheduled?

Commissioner Mena: I think it depends how much time staff needs to get real information for us.

City Attorney Ramos: That will take a bit.

Commissioner Mena: I don't want to just talk about the concept. I want real actionable numbers.

Vice Mayor Lago: Numbers. Commissioner Quesada did a lot of legwork in regards to finding out numbers about two or three years ago. I think we actually engaged Mas Tech, not in a formal way, but we asked them to give us just some back of the napkin numbers in regards to what we could potentially be facing. So, I don't know if we want to dig up those numbers, if we also want to bring in a consultant to have a real discussion to see what other municipalities have done. I've spoken to consultants already in reference to what other cities have done in the State of Florida to address this issue. What do you think?

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: I agree with all of the suggestions. In fact, I know that the City Attorney's Office is working already with someone to put together this workshop; and as she mentioned previously, it will be a robust workshop. We'll have all the details laid out in front of us and it would be at that point that any decisions as to the subject matter can be made by the elected five.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: We'll probably have multiple consultants.

Commissioner Keon: Can we do it by June?

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: I'm sorry?

Commissioner Keon: Can we do it by June?

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: I don't foresee that would be an issue.

City Attorney Ramos: I think May is fair, whatever meetings.

Vice Mayor Lago: I'd like to make sure that if anybody in this community wants to attend, they can attend this workshop. Again, they may not give their input, but I want us to be very transparent.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Absolutely. So we'd have to find an appropriate venue.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: Do we need to vote on this?

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor we are talking about May or June to...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The sense of the Commission is that we should vote.

Vice Mayor Lago: May or June – Commissioner Keon mentioned May, I think May is perfect. That gives staff enough time, like Commissioner Mena mentioned that we could do something really...

City Manager Iglesias: We can provide very, very viable information.

City Attorney Ramos: Did you want to speak about 5-2201 Vice Mayor?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: What?

City Attorney Ramos: That was the undergrounding section you had asked to put on the agenda for Mr. Santamaria.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes. Yes. Sorry about that. Ed can we talk about 5-2201 to see if my colleagues have an appetite in regards to embarking on this type of legislation also, in regards to the undergrounding of the connection points.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Sure – absolutely. 5-2201 is a section of our zoning code, which does have requirements for development for undergrounding of utility services, which means that essentially whenever you have a subdivision in the City of Coral Gables, a new subdivision, we don't really encounter those that often, because our City is fully platted out. It has been since the 1920's. And in the case, for example of the plaza project where there was a replat, where there was an aggregation of lots to create a new subdivision that would have automatically applied and in fact it did. It's a requirement imposed on this development to underground all utility services. So there is a portion of our code that does address it, a new development process. It's also for any substantial or significant upgrading of existing facilities that requires you to underground your electric service or anything that might be appropriate at that time.

Vice Mayor Lago: And the reason why I put it on, I wanted to make sure that our billing department and our inspectors and before we provided someone with a permit, I wanted to make sure that we were adhering to this section of the code and that we are following, because it's important that people underground these connection points. If we are considering undergrounding all transmission lines, all of the main points. Right now in the code it already states, did I speak inappropriately or no? I wanted to make sure that if we're going to have this discussion that if somebody is remodeling their home and it meets that threshold as per section 5-2201, that we are actually following our rules that are already in place; and I have a feeling that sometimes it slips through the cracks. I don't know. So, I really need staff to really take a look at it, maybe they can pull the last 100 permits that were done in reference to renovations; new construction, I imagine it gets done, but let's also analyze that. But for renovations, extensive renovations, I want to see if people are being required to underground the connection point.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: We can look into that sir.

Vice Mayor Lago: Will you bring me that back at the next Commission meeting or write a memo to the Commission?

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: Sure – absolutely. We’ll work with Building and we’ll do the research on the data.

Vice Mayor Lago: The last 25 – just look at the last 25 to see if it’s even been done. And I’m not talking about interior kitchen remodel, or bathrooms. I’m talking about somebody whose built an addition or someone who has done more than 30-40 percent of their interior remodeling of the home.

Assistant City Manager Santamaria: What the code provides is that anything in excess of 50 percent over the appraised value is deemed by Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser automatically kicks in this requirement, the underground.

Vice Mayor Lago: I have a feeling that we are not doing it. So what I’d like to make sure is that, again, we start from today to adhering to what’s already law.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: OK. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[End: 12:05:08 p.m.]