

City of Coral Gables Virtual Commission Meeting
Agenda Item B-7
March 31, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

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

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Fire Chief, Miguel De La Rosa
Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Jack Thompson
Maria Nancheta
Maria Cruz
Rhonda Anderson
Mark Trowbridge

Agenda Item B-7

Update on the City's efforts relating to Coronavirus/COVID-19.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Now, B-7, update on the City's efforts relating to Coronavirus/COVID-19.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor and Commissioners, I have the -- our Emergency Manager, Fire Chief De La Rosa and our Police Chief, Chief Hudak to give you an update on the current issues as far as emergency management and policing.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Go ahead.

City Manager Iglesias: Go ahead, Chief De La Rosa, please start.

Fire Chief De La Rosa: Good morning, Mayor and ladies and gentlemen of the Commission. I'm going to give you an overall view or overview of where we are from an emergency management perspective with regards to COVID-19. We've been tracking the COVID-19 epidemic since January 29. We've been at a Level II activation with social distancing since March 16. Our overall action plan has involved the CDC guidelines, 15 days to stop the spread and the Mayor's Executive Order of "Safer at Home." That action plan has included for social distancing, cough etiquette, washing hands and high-touch surface areas, monitoring for flu-like symptoms, limiting gatherings of groups of greater than 10, and taking extra protective measures for persons of 65 years or older or underlying health conditions. With that in mind, the City has enacted a plan that concentrates on our residents, visitors, employees and business community. We've enacted Executive Order for public protective action. We've established a joint information center. We've developed weekly situational reports for staff. We've implemented CDC guidelines throughout the City to include for the treatment of COVID-19 (INAUDIBLE), employee safety protective actions, decontamination and cleaning of City facilities, City areas and vehicles, instituting social distancing plans into the City functions, which include work-from-home arrangements. We have had managing plans for employees who may test positive for COVID-19 or experience a significant exposure. We've communicated our CDC guidelines and information to our residents, visitors, and employees. And all our actions have been in consultation with our department medical director, Dr. Fred Keroff. Amongst the actions that we've taken, we've implemented various methods to communicate to our residents via in print, electronic, street signs and various other methods. We've been working with -- early on with our ALFs, medical rehab centers, and

nursing homes to ensure that they had implemented their public protective actions for a pandemic. We have instituted a stay at home if you're sick plan with our employees. We've been screening for the City's first responders prior to their start of duty, whether that be police officers, communications personnel or firefighters. We've restricted access to our City facilities and we've been actively collaborating with our community partners, whether they be state and local emergency management, Department of Health, area hospitals, neighboring agencies and departments, our divisional EOC partners, including University of Miami, our business partners, including the BID, the Chamber and our construction industry.

One group that we have particularly focused on has been our senior residents. In the past, we've heard their concerns with obtaining information other than electronic mediums. Focusing on them, we have gone ahead and instituted public protective information in print form, whether they be City documents, newspapers, or any other form that we can get to them that is not social media. We've conducted briefings to our Senior Citizen Advisory Board, as well as Crime Watch. We've provided protective actions to the homeowners association to give them information that they can disseminate on how to best protect the residents, especially buildings or associations that have a high senior citizen resident rate. Our community recreation staff has concentrated on directly contacting our seniors. We've consolidated our databases and up to this point have contacted or reached out to over 600 senior residents. As we speak this week, we have contacted them three times in the -- once a week in the last three weeks. What we've done is first communicated protective actions that they should be taking as senior residents. We've conducted needs assessments to see if they needed anything from medication to grocery shopping to at-home mail deliveries. Those that we have not been able to contact, we've done personal visits, knocked and announced using social distancing with our firefighters. This week, we'll be sending out a needs assessment form that allows us to forecast what their needs may be going forward as we've extended the "Safer at Home" policies. As I stated, as of this week, we contacted almost over 600, and this will be our third contact. So, we've been averaging one a week. Our business community, our Economic Development Department has been working closely with them to ensure a flow of information. We've communicated with them employee protective actions, traveler information, Executive Orders, guidance on financial assistance, and this week they have been disseminating a

business assessment survey to conduct a needs assessment to our City businesses and to identify what their recovery plans will be in the future. As I stated earlier, our EOC has been at a Level II activation. Through our logistics section, we've centralized all procurement functions to avoid duplication of efforts and multiple purchases. We've lined up vendors to make sure that we make large purchases at once for the entire City, and we have secured our supply chain management. Our Finance Section has established a process for tracking all costs, and I've identified those costs that'll be in Category B under FEMA for reimbursement actions. Our joint Information Center has provided for a collaborative approach to City communications. That means that all our information is commensurate with CDC guidelines and we are providing timely and appropriate messaging as the situation evolves and we avoid any information that does not fall under the CDC guidelines or the City's Executive Orders. Our Operations Section, I'll brief you on Fire, and then I'll have Chief Hudak brief you on law enforcement functions. So, if we took a comparison of March 2019 to March 2020, because of our "Safer at Home" policies and businesses being closed, we have experienced about a 5 percent decrease in call volume. However, we've experienced 100 percent increase in flu or fever or COVID-19 calls from one year to the other. We've restructured our 911 questioning to include anyone who has flu-like symptoms at the house and not only just the patient to better protect our crews. We've instituted a triaging of patients outside of the hospital, and we've been working with Baptist to expand our stroke telemedicine program to include assessment of patients that involve COVID-19. Our department, and as well as the City, has participated from national, state and local meetings every week, daily County meetings, and daily briefings of department heads. We've had biweekly meetings with our area hospitals, medical facilities and our suppliers. With that, I'll give it to Chief Hudak to give you a briefing on the law enforcement functions. Chief Hudak.

Police Chief Hudak: Good morning, Mayor and Commissioners, Mr. Manager, if you will. As we continue to work through the situation of the state of emergency within the City of Coral Gables, we have seen, as the Fire Chief has said, a reduction in our calls for service as far as it goes for what we usually see when we are not in a state of emergency. However, our calls to the neighborhoods continue to increase with the added responsibilities that we have for the social

distancing. We've been working with several of the supermarkets. Again, I can't stress enough exactly what the Fire Chief said, the City Manager. I believe the executive team and the policy team, we meet probably four or five times a week. And this changes as does the discussions from CDC as well as the Governor and we adapt and modify our response plan. Most of you know, the Mayor signed the order for a curfew and this is not intended and it was never the intention to keep people in their homes as far as the virus. However, it does give us the added benefit to find out who's in your neighborhoods at night after 11 o'clock at night until 5 o'clock in the morning. We are handling that with our current staffing levels. We do have an operation plan in place if in fact we were to, A, lose a bunch of communications operators or police officers, the isolation part of it. The other issue is if we were to be overrun by calls for service. I do not see the need for any of that at this time. As far as business as usual and our staffing issues, yesterday we hired another additional five officers, so our hiring efforts continue, are not daunted by the current state of emergency. We had changed our protocols, as I said. Officers have been tested and screened every day, including the ones outside. The officers are wrist-banded. We've also adjusted our protocols that we -- what we usually don't do, is take reports by the phone. However, at this point, I am authorizing them to take certain reports over the phone as to limit the exposure...

(INAUDIBLE)

Police Chief Hudak: To limit our exposure to the officers as well as our civilians, our citizens as well. We do -- as I said, the Publix -- we've addressed the Vice President for Publix security. They have now instituted their staging processes of allowing people in. The two officers that were mentioned, both publicly and in the media, are doing fine. We're looking forward to them coming back. Some of their family members were also tested positive as well. So, at this point, we continue to monitor and to adjust what's going on. Again, with our traffic patterns, the way they are now, which is a lot less, I've repurposed those officers to help us in other areas so we have not had the staffing problems, I would say, for lack of a better term, that we have anticipated and we're moving forward. I'll be available for your questions. I'll turn it back to Chief De La Rosa.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Chief De La Rosa.

Fire Chief De La Rosa: I'm waiting for the go ahead. So, folks, to give you a snapshot of where we are as of this morning reportings, at the state level, we have 5,489 cases with 71 deaths. County, we are 1,675 with 4 deaths. And at the City, there are 28 residents that are being reported as having a positive COVID-19. The average age of those that are being -- tested positive is anywhere between 45 and 55 years old. To this point, the State has tested 9,829, of which 1,676 have tested positive. Wrapping up, emergency management in our City is a citywide action. That means that it's not department specific. All departments have participated in this, and in a lot of cases, we've either developed or learned as we went along with a pandemic experience. So, our creativity ingenuity, and willingness to work together towards a common objective is commendable. If you look at the fact that within one week IT deployed 113 computers and made us a city that often was very city-centric and to now decentralized with regards to how we're functioning and keeping our departments functioning. We'll continue to monitor the situation and adjust accordingly. I'm open for any questions.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes. Chief, can you repeat Coral Gables' figures?

Fire Chief De La Rosa: We have currently 28 cases.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And deaths? Any deaths?

Fire Chief De La Rosa: No reported deaths as we know, but I believe the deaths are reported by the County, not by city specific.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. We have 28 sick people in Coral Gables.

Fire Chief De La Rosa: That's correct, as of today.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Are there any questions from members of the Commission? Alright. Thank you very much for a wonderful report, Chief. And public comments through Zoom? Public comments through the phone?

Commissioner Fors: We have somebody, Jack, indicating via Post-it that he would like to speak but he's muted.

Commissioner Mena: He's not muted now.

Jack Thompson: Thank you. I want to thank the Commission and the City officials for their vigorous efforts to protect us, especially given the mixed messages coming out of the executive branch at the federal level. So, I appreciate that as a long-time resident of Coral Gables. And before I comment on the curfew order, I want to point out that I do not have an objection to social distancing. In fact, I vigorously encourage it. And in fact, the Commission will remember that I was urging the cancellation of the Carnival on the Mile, but the City decided to go forward. And with that, and of course, hindsight is always 20/20, but I wanted to set that premise that I might be opposed to social distancing aside because I've been in favor of it. The problem with the curfew order, which is illegal, and frankly, unconstitutional, is on -- found on the face of the curfew itself. In the fifth whereas clause, it states that we need a curfew order in order to protect the resources of our first responders. Let me read from a Channel 10 WPLG story of two days ago, in which Miami-Dade Mayor Gimenez addressed the issue of whether or not the County needed a curfew. And the story reports that despite the fact that the City of Miami and Miami Beach are under a curfew, Gimenez said that after consultation with Miami-Dade County League of Cities, he's not issuing a countywide curfew. Why? He said because it would put an unnecessary burden on the Miami-Dade Police Department in order to enforce the curfew. Secondly, we go to the second whereas clause of the curfew that the Mayor signed the order, signed on March 27. And here's the City trying to come up with some basis for issuing a curfew. And respectfully, they came up with a reason that doesn't exist. It says the City of Coral Gables, in order to protect the safety, health and welfare of the public, due to the propensity of COVID-19 to spread person to person, and also

because it is physically causing property damage due to its proclivity to attach to surfaces for prolonged periods of time -- so here's this fanciful notion that we need a curfew in order to protect public and private property when, in fact, the science tells us that the Coronavirus actually dissipates and disintegrates, leaving no mark that it was ever there on the surface. So...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: In answer to what you're saying and you can...

Mr. Thompson: Well, I wasn't done, but go ahead.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, no, no. But we thought that in order preserve our health, we thought it was necessary with Miami having declared a curfew, they forced us to declare a curfew so that we would not have people coming over from Miami to Coral Gables. That was our opinion and our considerate opinion in order to preserve our health of our residents. Please continue.

Mr. Thompson: Well, coming over from Miami to do what? Under the "Safer at Home" order, you're not allowed to be out for any unnecessary reason.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please concluded. We decided that we needed it for -- to preserve the health of our residents.

Mr. Thompson: But you don't have a...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And the Commission...

Mr. Thompson: Okay, Mayor. Look, let me just say this and then I'll stop. The right to move about is a constitutional right. And the State has to have a compelling state interest our its divisions thereof in order to limit that moving about. You've got a "Safer at Home" order. The curfew order is duplicative. It's counterproductive, as the Mayor of Miami-Dade has pointed out. And Mayor, this notion that it damages physical property is a contrivance in order that you might have some basis, fanciful though it is, in order to issue a curfew order. The problem with government going too far is that when it goes too far and doesn't have a basis to do something, it then feels it has an entree to do it again further down the road. And finally, as Benjamin Franklin said, any republic that opts for safety over liberty will have neither. So, you guys have got to be more careful in issuing orders. And I think the "Safer at Home" order is fine. There's some flaws in that, but the curfew, Mr. Mayor, quite respectfully, is way over the line and the Miami-Dade Mayor Gimenez saw that and didn't do it. So, I'd encourage you to rescind the curfew order.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We will not rescind the curfew order while this is going on.

Mr. Thompson: Well...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And if two or three years from now we have a bubonic plague or something, we will again issue another curfew.

Mr. Thompson: Yeah, if we...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson: If we have a republic left, yeah.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Right, if we have a republic left. Thank you very much, Mr. Thompson. Anybody else wishes to speak? Nobody else. Mr. City Clerk, any comments? Mr. City Clerk? Mr. Urquia?

Maria Nancheta: Hi. My name is Maria Nancheta. I have a question.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Nancheta: When I went to the Publix last week, they had just that day apparently started implementing a rule limiting the number of customers allowed in one at a time, so I had to wait outside for quite a bit of time, even though I arrived before opening hours. I know other counties are doing that based on a square footage and only allowing a certain number of customers per square footage. I was curious if this was a City requirement or if Publix instituted that and if it's going to continue; if you have any information about what that rule looks like and how many residents would be allowed in.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Chief Hudak. I don't think it's a City ordinance that they have spacing. But if the store is responsible -- and I've heard and experienced the same problem with Publix that they are not enforcing these stay at a safe distance. I think they are now. I hope they are now. But no, we did not issue an order requiring them to do so, but I hope they do so.

Police Chief Hudak: Sir, to answer the question, as late as last night, I had conversations with the Vice President for Publix of Northern Florida. They have improved their social distancing within the store, which would lead to people staying outside. They put the appropriate markings on. Again, this did not come from us. This is the orders from the Governor's office, as well as the countywide safe distancing, "Safer at Home" models. We are monitoring it, and we continue to work -- and we do have a direct line to Publix and to the stores here in our city limits. So, we're continuing to work with them. They, by their own admission, said that it took them a while to catch up to exactly what was going on as far as the changes from the different orders. But we believe in what we've seen yesterday that they are getting into a rhythm of allowing people in. The square footage and things like that really kind of changes from day to day. But they are practicing a safe distancing now and putting up additional safety precautions for their customers.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Chief. Any other comments by phone?

Ms. Nancheta: Thank you, Chief Hudak. I just wanted to add to that. When I went inside the store, they -- it seemed totally empty in there. So, I think whatever the number is, which was unclear, the manager said it was 45, then some other employee said that they were limiting it to 30 people inside the store. The line outside was not marked and everyone was just gathered, you know, back to back in the queue, so they were not respecting the six-foot rule. And people depend on the grocery stores. You know, we're trying to limit ourselves to only go out maybe once every two weeks to buy our groceries. So, if they could make this more streamlined, then that would actually help residents not have to go more frequently to the stores. The shelves are also very empty, so I wasn't able to get everything I needed, even though I went first thing in the morning. So, perhaps, I don't know if maybe through social media or Twitter, the City can provide some information. Publix's website does not have any information on these rules that they're implementing on admission to the stores, and I haven't seen it from the City either.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, we will not provide information on what stores have and don't have. That's not our function.

Ms. Nancheta: Not on -- I'm sorry, not -- with all due respect, Mayor, not with regard to the inventory on the shelves, certainly, but with regard to what -- how many -- what limitations are being imposed with regard to coming in because it ends up being a public safety issue when there's a crowd gathered outside the store.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, ma'am. Alright. Any other comments?

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I did receive two comments in writing.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, please read them.

City Clerk Urquia: The first one is from Maria Cruz. She would like to know about the -- what is the City doing to enforce the keeping of social distances in the public places? This past week, the area around the Granada Country Club was at times extremely crowded and there appeared to be no enforcement in the area. And the second comment, from Rhonda Anderson, she did say she sent an email regarding making options available for family members who have tested positive to have the option of staying at specified hotels for the purpose of avoiding infecting other family members. As Italy's experience has shown, if an infected family member is quarantined with healthy family members, it'll be more difficult to stop the spread. I would appreciate a robust discussion of this issue.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The problem with making hotels available is that then you're going to contaminate everybody in the hotel, including workers, et cetera, et cetera. It's easier for family members or for a person who is ill to self-isolate in a room and not contaminate other people.

City Attorney Ramos: Mayor, if I may. The County order that closed hotels to essentially vacationers or for leisure does allow hotel stays for patients. So, if someone wanted to stay at a hotel, if they could afford to do so, they could stay at a hotel if they were infected.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Alright, any other comments?

Unidentified Speaker: Well, I'm trying to like see what's wrong with my internet. Like my...

Unidentified Speaker: (INAUDIBLE) polo.

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah, it's a cool polo.

Unidentified Speaker: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Hello. Let's stay on subject, please. Hello.

Commissioner Keon: You know, I'd like to express my gratitude to all of the staff, the firefighters, the Chief, the police, Chief Hudak, the Manager and all of the staff for all of their work and for keeping us so well informed about what's happening in the community and going on because we are at home also. And although you may go out and drive around the City to see what's happening, they really are the ones that are keeping us informed like every day what is happening. So, I have gratitude to them and applause to them for all of their work, so thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner. That's very appropriate and you speak for the whole Commission. Thank you very, very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I believe we have one more comment.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Go ahead.

Mark Trowbridge: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. It's Mark Trowbridge from our Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Good morning, Mark.

Mr. Trowbridge: It's good to see you and all of our elected leaders and City officials. I just want to echo Commissioner Keon's comment and say thank you to each of you for your leadership. And most importantly, I want to make sure those that are listening in or will view this later, to please continue to support our restaurants. Many of them are incredibly challenged right now. And I want to thank the City for their creativity in creating pick-up zones via the City Manager, as well as Julian Perez, from Economic Development, and his team. These are times that require that type of creativity, and it is something that we applaud. I know many of our restaurants have continued to use their front-of-house staff now in delivery mode. We want to encourage and continue to

order and pick up in a safe way and to do so as we continue through this. We'll be working closely with the City already on recovery efforts for when we are able to reopen our essential -- non-essential businesses and regather once again. So, I just want to thank everybody on behalf of the Chamber. And we are here; we are working remotely but most appreciative of the collaboration. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much, Mark. Thank you very much to you and for the Chamber and what they're doing. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: And Mr. Mayor, the Chief did not get an opportunity to answer the question about what steps the City is taking to stop people from gathering in public places.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Chief.

Police Chief Hudak: Commissioners, as you know, we are trying to practice and inform people about social distancing. Short of actually citing somebody for social distancing, which is -- my intention is not to go that route. We have been dealing with the Granada golf course throughout this. I know we're trying to stay away from all public areas to try and cut down on the social distancing. I was literally out at that golf course over the weekend and again yesterday. We are trying very sensitively to tell people to do the social distancing. We have stopped anything around the perimeter that looks like it's any kind of formalized training. We are allowing people to walk. There's always the sidewalks around that area. However, the golf course, as ordered, is closed, just for walking as well. And if we let one, we let them all, so that has really been the biggest issue that we've had. As far as at night, you know, the -- we have gotten a few calls from other people. I think we've had actually 14 curfew violations. Nobody was cited. However, some of these people that were in the area touching cars or anything else like that, there is always that risk for an exposure, so that's all part of that as well. So, we constantly address this evolving issue as far as where we see the social distancing needs to be reinforced, whether it be on the prados or around the greenways, around that area. So, again, this is a moving thing, just like it is outside our Publix

stores. We're trying to get people to distance themselves outside. The stores can actually handle once they get inside the store. We're responsible for outside. So, this is an ongoing educational movement on the Police Department about the distancing and enforcing the countywide distance yourself.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And also, we decided to be a little creative and instead of watering the golf course in the morning, we're doing it at five or six in the afternoon and setting the sprinklers to go, which will discourage people without umbrellas to sit in the golf course, so that's also very effective. Thank you, Chief. Anything else? Billy?

City Clerk Urquia: No, sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Thank you very much. No further comments. I will at this point, if there are no other comments, adjourn the meeting. Thank you very, very much.

Commissioner Fors: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Stay safe.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.