

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C
January 9, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Communications Director, Martha Pantin

Public Speaker(s)

Michael Maxwell
Tom Wells

Agenda Item C [Start: 9:46 a.m.]
Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker today is Michael Maxwell.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir. Thank you for being here with us.

Mr. Maxwell: Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. Manager, Mr. Clerk and Ms. Attorney. I'd like to speak to you today about the issue of streetlights. I know I have spoken with most of you regarding this issue, but I'd like to bring up a little something here just to share with you to continue that conversation. I'll also be back to you later this morning for a resolution, an item by the Historic Preservation Board. I've put together just a simple citizens presentation here for you, just to go through for a few minutes. Regarding the streetlights – streetlights as all of

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us know are more than just lighting. It's urban design. It's decoration. Its branding. It's what our community is. And so, Coral Gables began installing streetlights in the early 1920s as part of its master suburb and the streetlighting was always unique to Miami-Dade County. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mr. Maxwell: Thank you. There's a 1923 photo of the Country Club all of us go to and enjoy and this is outside of Le Parc right now, and you can see that those are two streetlights that are not only representative of what we had, but they were the majority lights throughout the community as Merrick developed it and into the 20s, and even after the city sold the lighting system to FPL in 1926. You can see here in the commercial district, there's a representative streetlight. All of the streetlights that were put in were called White Way Lights at that time. So, streetlight was not a term that was generally used. It was called a White Way Light. And it didn't matter what kind of light it was. It was a White Way Light because we had white ways. Most of the streets were dark ways. Next please. Thank you. There's an advertisement in the January 4, 1923, Miami Metropolis, and you can see in the picture there, Dammers and Gillette, are advertising the beautiful streets of this city. And what kind of streetlights do they show? – they show the standard city silver streetlight that we have today. Next please. At the time that the city was developed and really into the 30s, these were the three standard streetlights that the city seemed to have. I'm sure that there were others mounted on a wood pole or something, but this is what we can see mostly in pictures and in correspondence. You can see the Fink light, which surrounds the Douglas Entrance, and those lights were used at some of the most important places in the city. They weren't on Coral Way, they weren't at DeSoto Fountain, but they were at places like the Douglas Entrance. You can see the standard metal and then you can also see what I call this transit line fixture. You know, we had a wonderful trolley that went through here, and those lights are attached to the electric lines that the trolley went to. The fountains and all of the monuments and entrances that we have all had the same type of what we call luminaire. So, you can see that the fixtures in there all match what was there. Everything was silver. Everything had a look so that when you came into Coral Gables you knew that you were in a special place. Thank you. You can see the transit light after the war over here on Miracle Mile, and then how that Fink light is there at the Douglas Entrance. The history of the lights is really interesting. In the 1980s, right now I had the opportunity to go through the city archives and dig out a bunch of things, because you know, we've been working on this for ever and ever and ever, and in 1980, the city and the Historic Preservation Board identified 21 different types of streetlights in our city. I'm going to show you in just a few minutes almost a dozen. The City Commission received a report and then discussed, and I can't find an action item where they actually adopted it but sought to standardize the streetlights in 1980 and begin working diligently with not only the Historic Preservation Board, and the Board of Architects and other advisors, but with the Florida Power and Light Company and Public Works Department. After a while, about a year, it was an Arcadian fixture, which you can see right here, was selected and it's actually in the catalog of this company and it's called a Coral Gables Light Fixture, and this is the one that's been in use really since that time. So, they provided this to FPL, told FPL and FPL came back and said the following, company owned fixtures will normally be mounted on poles of the company's existing distribution system and serve from overhead wires on request by the customer, of the customer, the company will provide special poles and underground wires that charges specified below. In other words, this is their rate base. We all know that FPL has a rate base. They

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have to go to the Public Service Commission. They have to take everything that everybody asks them for and then have it approved, and what we're asking for is to come back and take a look at that. In 1986 FPL purchased these lights and installed them for us. We don't have the capability to do it. They first went in on Segovia. They are still there. They look great, haven't been taken out. And so, this is what we have. The light I'm showing you right now though isn't on Segovia, but it's exactly like the one there. This is over by the Douglas Entrance, and it was just installed; and if you look at the ground plan, you'll see that there's a new base and there's the markings out for the new wire. So, they put this in and yet, they are taking out poles exactly like this and putting in black poles which are really not appropriate and haven't been here. If you would please. Thank you. Being a guy that's been involved in cities for over 45 years, I have to have a map, and so I went around town and the red lines that you see on the map that's where the silver standard White Way Lights are. Now they are intermixed with some of the Denman Fink lights and I'm thrilled to have those back. That's just the best thing. I've been advocating that for years. And Mayor and all of you here on the Commission, I really applaud your efforts for this. It's so unique and I hope that we take advantage of that and continue to use those lights in even more special places, but the whole idea here about this is to say look, we have a lot of these things already. Let's not change them, let's re-enforce it. Let's also look at and see what we can do to, if you would please go to the next one, to change these streetlights, because these are the most common streetlights that we have in Coral Gables. The wood pole that you can see. The one mounted on a concrete pole or the...concrete pole. Show the next one please. And then we have other streetlights. And these other streetlights are generally with the exception of the one in the middle, and that also happens there too, are generally a private development, but they are on city right-of-way. Why doesn't the city say hey, we've got a brand here, use our streetlights. You get to put it in, you get to pay for it, but please use ours, and you can use our great Denman Fink lights if you wish. Go to the next one please. We have the one in the middle is about four of them and they are over at the French Village on Hardee. The one here, let's see, on your right is all throughout the northeastern apartment district, and they've been there since close to dirt, because I remember them there over 40 years ago. And then the one over here that you see on the far left, that's the Highway Department and that's on 8th, Calle Ocho. And then if you go to Bird Road, the Highway Department has another one entirely which we don't have a picture. I could go on and on and on. We've got lots of these things. But the really cool thing is, when you walk it, when you cross that line from wherever it is, from Dade County or the City of Miami or South Miami, and you come here to this special place, its street jewelry embraces you. If you would go to the next, please. We have a new monument that we've put in. We've put in the black lights, nobody really thought about that. And then we have these other kind of street poles I really like. Those are the ones that should be fixed and there's quite a few like those ones without hats or ones that are broken, or they are severely tilted over. So, if you would please. So really, this is not just about history, it's about brand and urban design. It's about how we want our city to be and we're going to talk about this a little bit further, and I highly recommend to the board and I will do it again when I read the resolution that we take a look at this and we do it in a deliberate way, that we take this opportunity to not only continue to brand and make our city great, but also to come up with standards that make it easy for us to not only identify where we are in the community. No other city, no other area in South Florida has streetlights like we do, nor the color that we have. We are unique. So, with that I'd really recommend considering this and I look forward to speaking with you again about this issue shortly.

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Thank you very much for your attention and thank you for anything. If you have a question, I'm happy to answer.

Mayor Lago: I just wanted to say thank you for putting that together. It took a lot of work. I know you take your time to really make sure you drove home the point of the importance of restoring and reviving our history. I think we are going to go over it a few times. I think there are two items on the Commission that we'll hear together that address this issue and I welcome you to come back again.

Mr. Maxwell: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I think you'll notice also from the Commission; I think we are all on the same page in regard to what we want to see. I just think that we need to bring FPL, which is my understanding that FPL will be attending the next Commission meeting to have a conversation in regard to what can we do to get a little bit of uniformity as we address lights moving forward. You brought up something that I hadn't thought about, I think is a great idea is the issue, as developers continue to build throughout this community in one form or another or we invest in this community, there should be uniformity on that front, even if it's something that's existing, we should like we're doing with the White Way Lights. We just got back ten, I was there the other day when they brought them in, and we're going to get about another eight that are in really good shape that are actually working. So those again will be refurbished, and they'll be put somewhere prominently wherever the Historic Preservation and the Manager deem appropriate, and I think that's something in the works that shows our commitment. Now the issue is the standard lights that we really need to focus on and see how we can achieve the goal because the costs are pretty significant.

Mr. Maxwell: Mayor, one of the things that I really enjoy about FPL and I do enjoy FPL, I think it's a wonderful company and they've really proven that they are good community citizens, but you know I want to bring your attention back to a few years ago when FPL said that it was going to cost \$30,000 a house to underground, and how in recent past, not too long ago, its now not going to cost anything. So, you know, these things have a way of not only working themselves out, but to the benefit of the entire community making it better.

Mayor Lago: I think to your point, and you bring a very good point. I worked with the Manager for years meeting with the President of FPL on multiple occasions, to see how we can bridge the gap that we wouldn't have to go to a referendum vote and have to spend close to, I think it was \$275 million dollars to underground here in the city, and we found a way, a compromise and we got that project started last year, and its something that hopefully over the next 10 or 15 years we'll significantly revamp our infrastructure here in the city. Not only revamp it, but also make it more redundant and beautify the city, especially our tree canopy which in some areas is killed or destroyed as a result of power lines that run through them. So, I agree with you. I just think that this is a process that we have to be honest with ourselves. It's going to take time. For example, the White Way Lights that we're refurbishing now, we had to take out, I think it was a little over \$2 million dollars from Art in Public Places, which again, was something that I didn't want to do, I didn't want to do, but I pushed that forward because I think its something important and we can see these lights as, not only historic, but also as art and we're able to bridge that gap with the help

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of our City Attorney to find a solution for that. But this is a multi-million-dollar situation that we're in and we have to have real conversations with FPL and see how we can bridge that gap, and maybe somebody on this Commission needs to be named. I welcome any of my colleagues, whoever they'd like to name, so that we can have someone dedicated to work on this issue with FPL to find a solution. It may take six months, it may take a year, or it may be resolved in two weeks, who knows. But I think that once we have further conversations with FPL, I think we can find uniformity, but I agree with you. Future developments need to come online and find that uniform color that uniform look, so we have something a little bit more standard across the board.

Mr. Maxwell: And if we go back to even replacing some of the lights that have been in, that's not a problem, because these lights are reusable, the wiring is reusable, everything. We've been through lots and lots of hurricanes on these things and the lights have all been there and they are still there. So, we are having an enjoyable time and our record shows that we've had a wonderful conversation as just as you said Mayor, with leadership by the Mayor, by the Manager, and by the Commission to do this and this was a multi-year process that previous Commissions, previous Managers, and all went through to come up with what we've got, and you know it takes a long time to evolve you know, and we've evolved into the best city in South Florida, if not the best city in Florida.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for putting that together. Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we have a complete presentation ready for the next Commission meeting.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: And we've also asked FPL to join us at the next Commission meeting.

Mayor Lago: What I would like to do when we have that presentation for the next Commission meeting, I know Commissioner Fernandez put the item on the agenda, I'd like for you to be here, obviously and anyone you'd like to bring that's part of the board. That's one of the reasons why I sponsored the Landmark Advisory Board, I pushed that forward, to bridge that gap and to find an opportunity to make sure that we are addressing our landmarks and that they are not falling behind, because I'd rather, I'd like to have the Landmark making noise, advisory board making noise that these landmarks are falling behind, we need to address these issues, and there's a lot of people on that board that are very, very well versed on issues of historic preservation, landmark, we have a great team here. So, I'd like to have you here at the next meeting to make sure that you're part of the conversation and it should be a conversation that's had by everybody in this community.

Mr. Maxwell: And it is a conversation, Mr. Mayor. There're no accusations of anything. This is a positive direction for our community that will only make it better.

Mayor Lago: This was started before, this was started like in, when was the time that this was approved, this rate.

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City Manager Iglesias: Five or six years ago.

Mayor Lago: But before that, it was like 20 years ago, wasn't there a discussion on it, on the light poles? Maybe I'm confused.

City Manager Iglesias: The new rate started about five or six years ago.

Mayor Lago: Again, the point is that we've got to figure out a solution and find something that's appropriate and we'd love to have you and everybody else in regard to that conversation.

Mr. Maxwell: Mayor, thank you. Its an honor. Its an honor to be with you and I thank you all for your consideration and your time. Thank you all.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to take the moment just for a short advertisement. My Landmark Advisory Board appointee sent me an email indicating that she needs to step down, so if you know of anybody that is interested in serving, I'd like to have a reappointment for the next Commission meeting, so that slot is filled. It's an important board. This Commission is insistent that we, this is an important issue, we talked about it during our joint meeting with South Miami about branding, so I'm happy we're moving forward on this.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think Marlin Ebbert is seeking to be appointed to a board. I think that's something that might be right in her wheelhouse.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, probably is. I just got the email yesterday, so I've been reaching out to various members who are also interested in historic preservation, and Marlin I've known for years. So, I know she would probably fit well.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Tom Wells.

Mayor Lago: Sir, good morning.

Mr. Wells: Good morning. My name is Tom Wells, I live at 1310 Coral Way in Coral Gables, and my law firm offices is at 901 Ponce, which is in the American Airlines Building, also in the Gables. I spoke at the Commission meeting on December 12th and was told that the monthly construction schedule for John Bell Construction to complete the renovations of Burger Bob's be published and accessible to the residents to monitor the progress. Here's the page of the construction projects currently on the website. I'll give that to the City Clerk when I complete my discussion. It was last updated in May 2023. There is no reference for Burger Bob's on that construction page. In addition, I can monitor the permit. The current permit right now is 23-08-1877. Unfortunately, that only tells me about the inspections. It doesn't tell me about the construction schedule. On the John Bell construction contract, Section 9.13 requires monthly updates. And so, it would be good for the residents to understand the progress of Burger Bob's renovation. So, I'm just here to request what I requested at the last meeting. Please post the construction schedule for the residents. Thank you.

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Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Manager, please give us an update in regard to the schedule.

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Mayor, the scheduled completion is for July 29th of this year, substantial completion.

Mayor Lago: Okay. July 29th.

City Manager Iglesias: Of this year.

Mayor Lago: Okay. And a quick question, where are we right now? I haven't driven by in a few weeks, so I haven't really seen it. How's the progress coming along?

City Manager Iglesias: The progress is coming fine. It just started and the progress is fine.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Can you do me a favor and do the Commission a favor please. Can we have the construction schedule up online by the next Commission meeting?

City Manager Iglesias: I will check. I thought it was up already. We've been working on Fire House 4. Fire House 4, the contract was signed Friday.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: And so now we're going to jump on this. The project manager for this project has been out for two weeks on vacation, so we will take care of that.

Mayor Lago: So, if you may. Good morning.

Communications Director Pantin: Good morning, Martha Pantin, Communications. We did put the information up on the Parks page. I will send you all a link and if you would like me to put it in any other location, we're happy to do so, and we did include photos, as requested by the Commission at the last Commission meeting.

Mayor Lago: So, the schedule is up.

Communications Director Pantin: The information we have is up. I will send you the link shortly to all of you, so that you can see what we have up; and obviously, we are happy to make any changes that you would like, and if you would like us to put it in another location, we can do that as well.

Commissioner Fernandez: Can we put it on the Home Page?

Communications Director Pantin: Pardon me.

Commissioner Fernandez: Can we put it on the Home Page?

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Communications Director Pantin: On the Home Page, we can put it under News. We cannot put it as one of the five things, but we can put it definitely under the News section.

Mayor Lago: Do we have a Burger Bob's section right now?

Communications Director Pantin: No, we do not have.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to make it even easier. What I would like to see is, for example, we use a system in construction called Pro Core. We're not going to put a Pro Core for access. But what I would like to see is, there is going to be a link, drop box where people can go in there and see the schedule for the project, construction, and monthly update photos. Maybe we can put it on the first of every month, we can have an updated schedule and we can have updated photos. Maybe 10 or 15 and it can be just its own simple link and it says Burger Bob's. That way you don't need to have it on the Home Page, you don't need to have it on the Parks Page, you don't need to have it anywhere, except for just on Burger Bob's and it literally you'll be updated like we do the first of every month.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, Commissioners, the monthly update will be done very quickly, as I mentioned, the project manager is on vacation, just got back today, yesterday, and then it will be updated very soon.

Mayor Lago: So, can we have that, can we have that done?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And one more request. Just have them test it in the search bar. You put in Burger Bob's it can link right to it.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Commissioner Castro: You said that you were going to send us a link, right.

Communications Director Pantin: I will.

Commissioner Castro: Can you take a moment and sit with Mr. Wells and show him how to go into that link. You said there's already a schedule up.

Communications Director Pantin: Yes. It's under Parks Projects and Updates. So, I will definitely let Mr. Wells know and I will send it to all of you in case you get any other questions.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Pantin.

Commissioner Fernandez: There is a link on the city's Home Page for current projects, correct, general construction projects, there was.

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Communications Director Pantin: For general construction projects, but those are Planning Projects, these are not city projects.

Commissioner Fernandez: But I thought we had added city projects to that.

Communications Director Pantin: I think they are from – I don't want to speculate here, because I'm not exactly sure. I do believe that they are for sort of bigger projects, general projects, but we'll definitely look into it and see what we can do.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. If that already exists, if we could add it to that as well, I'll appreciate it.

Communications Director Pantin: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Pantin. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay.