

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
May 7, 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, Amos Rojas, Jr.

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-1 [3:42 p.m.]

Discussion to require door hangers in the Zoning Code as additional notification for required neighborhood meetings of proposed mixed-use and multi-family projects. (Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-1.

Commissioner Castro: Discussion to require door hangers in the Zoning Code. Thank you, Jennifer.

Planning Official Garcia: Good afternoon, Jennifer Garcia, Planning Official. So, we've been discussing ways to increase our engagement with residents. So, we were talking about maybe having door hangers be required for neighborhood meetings, for just multi-family and mixed-use buildings. So, if it's within a certain square footage or if they are requesting conditional use, it would be required to have a neighborhood meeting before the Planning and Zoning Board, at that

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point they would have door hangers within 1,000 feet. So, we're looking for feedback from the Commission.

Commissioner Castro: Perfect. I think there's been a cultural change by Peck Advances and it's evident that people – the culture of how you're receiving mail has changed quite a bit. You're receiving things online, you're receiving things through email, maybe prior we were giving to the postal service is not as high, especially for the younger generation. So, I believe that the door hangers would increase awareness, community input, enhance engagement, transparency.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So let me help you out there.

Commissioner Castro: Help me. Go.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Was it Friday we met?

Planning Official Garacia: I think so.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You brought me in a tray of envelopes like this big returned, and these were to businesses that were existing, like Metro PCS on the Mile, and the postal service returned it – no such owner, to occupant. So yes. You move it and I'll second.

Mayor Lago: I want to put on the record, I only received two emails and I think, I imagine the residents, excuse me, my fellow colleagues on the Commission also received it. I don't have an issue with this, but they were adamant about putting door hangers and people out of town and sending the wrong message, potentially someone is not home, and the door hanger is there. I told that resident that I would bring it up for fruitful conversation they were concerned about. We're starting to do door hangers now for everything and someone takes a vacation for one reason or another, that it's out there and potentially it could be an issue of hazard. Just wanted to put it out there and I promised I would say it.

Commissioner Castro: The Parks Department is putting door hangers. That's one of the concerns that the City Manager did bring up to me, but the city is already doing it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I know we're not allowed to put them in the mailbox.

Commissioner Castro: No.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Legally we can't do that. When I was knocking door-to-door and hanging door hangers, there are some very alert residents that with their Ring Door Bell would say, hey, what do you need, because I was ringing their door bell as well. And then when I realized they were out of town. I took the door hanger off. I don't want your house to be noted as being something that's going to be broken into. But by the same token, I think when we travel to, we need to have somebody, a neighbor picking up stuff, because stuff does get – you don't want your

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postal box overstuffed and newspapers hanging out there. I pick up my neighbor's newspapers all the time and tuck them behind hedges and pots and so forth, so it doesn't appear as if they are not home.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think our Police Department offers a watch service for when we're out of town. Maybe there's a way to cross-reference the list whenever they are going to put outdoor hangers. I don't know if that's even possible, so that they don't knock on a door where the resident is out of town or leave a door hanger. If we know they are going to be out of town that should somewhat avoid that issue. But you're right. And I think this has been something that the prior Commission had been talking about in the past. How do we adequately communicate with residents. I know Commissioner Fors was trying to get something where you would have a text message, depending on the area you were living in. I talked to Raimundo about this on Friday and he told me they are still working on a few things to enhance our communication, but as much as their technology has improved, we're still in a day and age where the information isn't getting to people. One of the people who came for Public Comment who stopped me outside and said, "I wish I would have known about the agenda prior to Friday and the fact is, we do send out the agenda. The city sends out the agenda on Tuesday. It sends it out again on Thursday, if there are any changes, but it's still not getting out to people. So, the question is, how do we improve on that and what can we do, other than sending smoke signals at this point, I don't think people – You're sending text messages, you're sending emails, and a lot of times people just are bombarded with things. They are getting so much on a regular basis. Just last week, I saw a text message I hadn't responded to in three weeks because I didn't notice it had come in. Too many things are coming in on a regular basis. This is something that's right there on your door handle and you're sure to see it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So.

Mayor Lago: Chief.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We have NSAs, so if that door hanger is hanging out there too long.

Chief Hudak: So, the recommendation, obviously has been from a security standpoint that we don't put door hangers up. Really the only thing that police and fire agree to is actually during an activation, in a hurricane where there is something that we're looking for, somebody needs special assistance in their house during a hurricane activation. The only recommendation we can really make we're kind of comfortable with is if it's a specific event or a specific notice. Once that notice passes we should remove those that are still left there, and I don't know if that's the NSA's getting out and going in, or if the Parks puts it up, or something else, after that event passes somebody has to do a sweep, which is obviously there is a cost to it, to make sure if there's any existing door hangers taken down. The other issue we have, and we know has happened is, squatters looking for a place to squat are looking for those hangers more so than to break into the house, but to take it

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over, especially if it's there for a while, as Vice Mayor Anderson said. We try and encourage everybody to get your neighbors to pick up your newspapers when that was it and this would be the same thing. We can't put them in the mailbox. If you hang them on the door and that event has passed, or that time has passed, as a city we should kind of go back and I think that would be the best solution to doing it completely of actually doing it. Absent of not doing it would be to make sure we take it down, if there are those one or two homes that have it still up there.

Commissioner Fernandez: I guess it's limited to about 1,000 or 1,500 square feet, so it's not a large area.

Commissioner Castro: No.

Commissioner Fernandez: Maybe we can put something in there where they are put out and 48 hours later, if they just do a drive through if they haven't been picked up just remove them.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a question. By the way, we've encountered, I had a meeting with Community Recreation at the Youth Center, because even in their athletics program, parents don't get messages, we don't get messages and I brought Raimundo into the meeting, we need a solution. So even in that aspect, in-house we're having those issues. Jennifer, how many times a year would you think would any given resident, property owner receive door hangers for mixed-use or multi-family. My guess is probably at most one project.

Planning Official Garcia: It depends on the area. So, if someone lives downtown or North Ponce, there's a lot of projects moving forward in that area versus maybe along U.S.-1 or along down south, you wouldn't get as many notifications, because there's not much development happening there.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a thought and we've discussed it before on another matter, could the door hangers be triggered if the project is asking for variances or additional height, as opposed to as of right.

Commissioner Castro: That's something that I had discussed with you and the City Attorney.

Commissioner Menendez: In terms of door hangers.

City Attorney Suarez: So currently, if your project is as of right, there is no need to put door hangers or any kind of mail notice because your project is as of right, so there is no public meeting. What the Commissioner has been discussing with staff is, propose legislation that would provide for the requirement of a door hanger for the neighborhood meeting for those projects that will ultimately come to the City Commission.

Commissioner Menendez: I think that's an important clarification going forward. So that even reduces the number of times that this may happen, because that's probably a minority of the projects as opposed to every project in the city.

Commissioner Castro: But another thing that I was also discussing with them was, maybe when – yes, it's as right, but when there is bonus that they are going to apply for, then we can provide notification, because at that point it won't be by right.

Commissioner Menendez: No, that's my point.

Commissioner Castro: That's something completely separate. This is because I've gotten emails and residents in my office tell me, I've never gotten any communication. We know the building is going up when we see the construction. So, to promote that involvement from the beginning, especially when it comes to the developer and the neighborhood, I think it's healthy not only for the residents, but for us when a project comes before us, it makes it a lot easier when there's harmony, you know, and there's community involvement.

Chief Hudak: So, I guess I don't have the answer to this. So, I'm asking. This is not going to be a city sponsored event.

City Attorney Suarez: Correct.

Chief Hudak: So, anybody can do it. So, we do have a littering ordinance with handbills in downtown that if a company, and they start putting them on cars or if they do Miracle Mile and they hang them, and we fine, I believe its five or ten, person who's on the handbill gets cited by the city. So, if different developers are going around putting these things up without any kind of authority to do so within this, we can get inundated with people putting door hangers up and then having to have Code Enforcement check to make sure they are the appropriate ones, because that would be the next unintended consequence when people start putting door hangers up as advertisement. For the most part, we don't allow door-to-door solicitations. So, if it's a pizza place and they start hanging door hangers, we could get a lot of them.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I think we need to start using Safer Watch better.

Chief Hudak: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think that if we get a call from somebody saying, I just got a door hanger, they can send us the picture through Safer Watch and it will relieve of the time of having to send somebody out there to start verifying, and it's a resource that we already have. I know we've done a good job of promoting it in the past. I don't know if we can continue promoting it through E-NEWS we can once again promote it, because it's even eyes on the ground that you don't have. When somebody reports a suspicious person, it's a lot better for the officer to have a

picture than to just have a random description which as we've talked about lighting issues, different things, the description is sometimes off.

Chief Hudak: And Commissioner, when people sign up for it, we can send them direct messages from Safer Watch.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Chief Hudak: Usually they are police/fire related, but we can put those messages out, but I'm just trying to think outside where, if we start getting those it's kind of like, what's authorized, what's not, and when people start seeing them and genius people may start putting door hangers up and then we're going to be chasing them around trying to reign it back in. So, if it's specific for the ordinance it has to be about something that's city, that they have to do by code, then we can exclude everything else before it even happens. Even though it's not going to be somebody from the city and then put it on the developer to make sure that they go back and remove them after the time and if not that they can be, then Code Enforcement could take action against that developer, similar to what you have on the books already with the anti-litter ordinance on handbills.

Commissioner Menendez: May I make a suggestion for the next meeting. If taking what Chief said into consideration working with the City Attorney's office to find wording that sort of, you thread the needle through the little pitfalls that we discussed and see if we can come up with the legislation that avoids the pitfalls and gets right to the point. That's a good idea.

Commissioner Castro: So, legislation is being presented to the Planning and Zoning Board, so let's make sure that it is the way that we want it.

Commissioner Menendez: Taking this into consideration.

City Attorney Suarez: So, I think it's tomorrow, isn't it Jennifer? So, I think there's a draft that staff has reviewed with you, Commissioner, and that's what you proposed, so these concerns can be discussed with the Planning and Zoning Board tomorrow, and perhaps they will have some suggestions. I'm sure they will have additional suggestions and ideas.

Commissioner Castro: And another thing. When it comes to condos, we're going to be leaving the hangers in the lobby, because we can't really – unless the apartment building is an open apartment building that there is no other way.

Chief Hudak: Commissioner, if this is approved, I think that the ideal way that the Police Department can get out the message on Safer Watch, is through a door hanger, to be honest with you. I mean one door hanger and we can put those out in certain areas, because right now, we're just doing it on our outreach through Crime Watch. But if I were able to make a door hanger and then hang that up and then go back and check again with the NSAs that people are going to see it

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when they get home and that may kind of increase our numbers, and we can quantify that if we start seeing an uptick in certain areas where we can attack the city in a more systematic way, if you would.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Manager is that something you'll be able to work on.

City Manager Rojas: Yes, absolutely. And I agree with what the Chief was saying. I think we need to when we do this ordinance, it needs to be a little more specific, so that we require the developer to not only place it within a certain distance, but also after three or four days go back and pick it up. The Parks have been doing it successfully. I think it will work. It's just going to take a little bit more resources to police that particular activity.

Commissioner Castro: Beautiful.

Mayor Lago: I guess we'll bring it up at the next Commission meeting.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, before you move on, and just for reference, we currently have a little over 3,800 email addresses that subscribe to get the Commission agenda every time we publish it.

Commissioner Fernandez: But we have 28,000 on E-NEWS, so that's about ten percent.