

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-12
February 27, 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

Interim City Manager, Alberto Parjus

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz

Sr. Traffic Engineer, Melissa DeZayas

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-12 [4:55 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission in support of the one-way conversion of Venetia Terrace between Columbus and Granada Boulevards to facilitate construction of pedestrian facilities for improved pedestrian safety. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago) (Co-sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item F-12.

City Attorney Suarez: F-12 is a Resolution of the City Commission in support of the one-way conversion of Venetia Terrace between Columbus and Granada Boulevards to facilitate construction of pedestrian facilities for improved pedestrian safety.

Mayor Lago: So, I sponsored this item and I've been working on this with our team across from me, because we had a public meeting there, probably about a year and change ago.

Public Works Director Diaz: We actually have a couple of slides where that's detailed.

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Mayor Lago: How long it's been. This has been something that was brought to my attention by several residents who live in this area and it's a great opportunity potentially to finally get some sidewalks in a very, very tight area without having to cut down any trees. So, this is something that again, is a long time coming and the residents are really behind, so it would be something really special. We just need to move forward with a resolution of support so that the county can take the next step and do what we need to be able to make this a one-way street.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think it's a wonderful idea, Mayor. I'd be happy to move it. Any comments or thoughts from anyone?

Commissioner Fernandez: I do. I've actually had a lot of complaints over the last 24 hours about this from residents in the area, because they didn't know that this was the option the city was going with. The thought at that meeting and I was at that meeting was, we were going to try to find different options and see what would actually work, but I don't think we ever went back to the neighbors to figure out a solution. So, what I found is that the county requires the consensus of the neighbors in the area or a resolution by the Commission. What I would like to see is maybe another community meeting where we can present this to the residents in the area, because of the amount of traffic that you have cutting through there. The traffic study that I saw was done only takes into account Venetia Trail and Venetia Terrace, but that traffic also affects Mariana and the streets to the south, because about 3 o'clock in the afternoon traffic starts getting backed up on Granada and S.W. 8th Street, blocking Mariana and sometimes coming all the way up to Venetia. So, if you now make that a one-way street, one-way or the other, traffic is going to have to find another way to get through to the north either direction, to the east and to the west.

Public Works Director Diaz: We'll be more than happy to follow the will of the Commission as to have another public meeting, do a ballot.

Mayor Lago: I've been working on this for some time now. All I've heard are positive things from the residents, from staff. Again, have you heard negative things from the residents in regard to this?

Public Works Director Diaz: We haven't really heard since that meeting. We went ahead and got to work on it.

Mayor Lago: All I've heard is positive things that people would say, we need to do something about traffic, and we need a sidewalk and the only way to really address the issue of traffic and the issue of sidewalks is to make it one-way, because we can't encroach on somebody's property both to the north and to the south. There's no room to make a lane, another lane or potentially make it even wider. It just doesn't work. This is one of the most treacherous areas in the city because of how tight it is on the road, but if it's not the will of the Commission, it's perfectly fine. I'm trying to find options to address issues that we're facing as a community here in regard to pedestrian accessibility, there's no sidewalks there. I don't want to cut those trees down. You know the other option is we cut those trees down and we're good.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct. So, the issue is that the swale is too narrow, and you don't have sufficient space to have the minimum clearance, so the only alternative would be to remove the trees, put the sidewalk in the back. You could potentially plant, like skinny palms in whatever space you have left, but that would be about the bulk of it. The thought process behind turning one-way is that it will allow us to reduce the pavement width, it will allow us to do a little bit of a more...

Transportation Engineer DeZayas: Of a bigger swale.

Public Works Director Diaz: Right, with a bigger swale you could find a way around it, but we'll listen to the will of the Commission and whatever direction you want to give us we'll proceed with.

Mayor Lago: The issue here is that our hands are tied, but I mean again, if we don't have three votes for it then we move on. It's okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, I'm going to make this suggestion because I mean, like I said before when we had other contentious items here and I try to urge people to get around a table on March 20th. We educate folks and we lay out the options whether it be through mediation process with the folks on Giralda, we end up with a better result, because everybody understands what the options are, everybody understands what the restrictions are. We sometimes wish for things that are not possible. If they understand the impossibility of doing anything else here, there's some hard choices that have to be made. I don't think anybody in that area wants to see palm trees as opposed to shade trees. The area needs more shade trees throughout it, because you have a very special condition there, you have septic tanks all over the place, people want these trees, but they are restricted from having the trees because they have septic tanks. This is extremely narrow.

Mayor Lago: If I may add something to it. Visited that site over a dozen times. As you know, on the south side, you can't go onto that green area because that is where you have the trash pits, that is where people have their trash pits, some of them are even entering from the rear there, so it's basically impossible. There's no way of putting a sidewalk on the south, say oh, put the sidewalk on the other side. You can't. Then you will get rid of everybody's trash pits and when you mention that to them, obviously certain people have no issues with that, but certain people do. So, we're trying to find an opportunity to make it more pedestrian friendly and safer and this is the only real way that we can do it. Making it one-way and saving the trees at the same time, not taking away people's trash pits, adding a sidewalk, and making it a one-way will make it a lot safer.

Vice Mayor Anderson: How much time would it take to notice a Sunshine meeting for the residents in the evening when they can attend, when they are not in school.

Public Works Director Diaz: That would be a question for...

Vice Mayor Anderson: For the Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner, we tried to do everything seven to ten days prior to the meeting. Its not a matter, you know, if the Commission decides that they want to do it tomorrow we can.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's not the point. The point is to be able to get the information to the residents, give them adequate time to make plans accordingly or have someone from their family attend or can we assume so that they receive the information so that when it does go in, and I've done this traffic calming type of meetings. We are never going to come up with a consensus completely. There's always going to be an outlier that says, oh my God, the traffic is only going to be on my street, and it doesn't necessarily happen that way. The traffic will have to have a learning curve. It is going to be a different flow, but its still the same number of cars that transsect our community and the idea here is for public safety after all. We want a sidewalk, and it was never supposed to really be a two-way street to begin with. It just got kind of by default made into a two-way street, but it was really a one-way street, so we're trying to restore the condition.

Commissioner Fernandez: I was told it was a canal at one point.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I don't think it was a canal. It just doesn't have the appearance there that it was a canal.

Commissioner Fernandez: The reason that there is a larger impact – some of those roads only have access to Granada or to Venetia.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right.

Commissioner Fernandez: On both sides. On the Venetia Trail side and on the Venetia Terrace side.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right. I know and there is an area where there's a triangular piece that comes through.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You have a dog park between one side of Venetia, Venetia Street or Terrace, I don't remember which one's on the north side or the south side, but the effect is the same. One is too narrow to accomplish, to accommodate two-way traffic, so it would be best served as a one-way traffic. And the traffic study, I know that we discussed, would bear out whether it would be best to make it going east-west or west to east, and you have a large tree at the end of Granada that obstructs the visibility which further hampers our ability to make a choice. I noticed the arrows were going west, because that tree creates a visibility triangle issue, but I think if people are informed and I would really love to move this forward to for vote today, but I think if people are informed, they would understand the vote. Okay. Can we get a meeting done between now and the next Commission meeting?

Mayor Lago: I may not be here, but I welcome it to happen without me.

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Commissioner Fernandez: We have three weeks.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I understand. I know the issue. The point is to inform.

Mayor Lago: The Commission can handle it. Moving on.

Public Works Director Diaz: We'll like some direction as to what's the extent of the area that you would like to have included in this Sunshine meeting.

Mayor Lago: Again, just so the city knows. This is an item that I'm also working on to get it funded by the county. This is an opportunity to...

Vice Mayor Anderson: That would be great. We'll move on, we'll defer. I'll defer it to the next Commission meeting.

City Attorney Suarez: I think he needs direction though as to...

Vice Mayor Anderson: I would say the two Venetia Terraces would be the most impacted.

Traffic Engineer DeZayas: Venetia Terrace and Venetia Avenue.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Whatever it is. Ones with the same name. Ones Terrace, ones Court or Street, I don't remember.

Commissioner Fernandez: And any streets that connect there.

Public Works Director Diaz: From the north to 8th Street.

Traffic Engineer DeZayas: From Venetia Terrace – don't have access to 8th Street.

Mayor Lago: Let's go through the Chair, so we're collegial. Let's just do it over the next two weeks, whatever you deem appropriate, along with the Commission's schedule. You don't have to worry about me, make it about them. I may not be here, so let's make sure that we can get that meeting done before the next Commission meeting and it accommodates the residents. I want to make sure there's more residents than Commission. We can always tape it, people can watch it later, whatever that may be.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Chair. Back to your question. I would say Columbus, I think is where the triangle is, so I guess that's the largest level of impact would be and all the streets that end on Venetia.

Public Works Director Diaz: From the north.

Commissioner Fernandez: North and south.

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Public Works Director Diaz: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: Because the south ones also only connect to Venetia. A lot of those people use that road to go west in the morning. It's going to impact their pattern every day.

Traffic Engineer DeZayas: So, you have two parallel streets; you have Venetia Terrace, you have Venetia Avenue, and they are both connected at Columbus and Granada. So, the ones that would definitely be impacted by this would be the ones that are north of Venetia Terrace, because the streets are closed at 8th Street. The ones south that are connected to Venetia Avenue, which is the street that's running parallel to Venetia Terrace, those don't seem to be like they would be as impacted as the others, but if you want them included in the meeting, we can get them included.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'd like to hear your recommendation. We're not even looking at a map. When you go back to the office, make a recommendation.

City Clerk Urquia: Can cable TV put them back up.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's a little hard to see. Sorry.

Traffic Engineer DeZayas: The area that's highlighted in orange is Venetia Terrace. The one that's running parallel to it south of there is Venetia Avenue. So, our recommendation...

Public Works Director Diaz: So, what she's mentioning is that from the north you have the streets that dead-end on Venetia Terrace, from the south, Venetia Avenue is still there, so we could do both, but definitely the streets to the north would be the ones that are the most impacted.

Traffic Engineer DeZayas: Because they have to come down.

Public Works Director Diaz: They don't have a choice. If you're driving north, you can always make a right or left on Venetia Avenue and that's not going to change.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll follow your recommendation.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Public Works Director Diaz: So, we'll work with the City Clerk to...

Mayor Lago: Perfect. I appreciate that.