

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-6
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

Greenspace Management Director, Deena Bell-Llewelyn

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-6 [Start: 1:33 p.m.]

Discussion regarding the tree canopy replacement
(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: F-6.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I had the opportunity to be at the Rotary Club meeting, I think it was in November, and they had a presentation by Dr. Feely from the University of Miami, who talked about the potential changes to our tree canopy if we continue to have a higher temperature in South Florida, this summer being a perfect example.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The same guy that talked about the oak trees and the tolerance to heat.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

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Commissioner Fernandez: Oak trees and Mahoganies as well, and the impact that they had to heat, and it was interesting. I think live oaks; he was talking about the two-degree temperature change would probably kill off most of our live oak trees. So, I just wanted to put that on everybody's radar and maybe have the city have a conversation with Dr. Feely and make sure that if we are changing and doing a tree succession that we do take into account potential changes to temperature to make sure that five or ten years down the road if we do have an impact of a couple of years of two-degree or three-degree change to our temperature, we don't lose a lot of our tree canopy.

Mayor Lago: Before you respond, could you give us a little bit of background in regard to the existing tree replacement program that we've had going on for the last, I don't know, almost a decade.

Greenspace Director Bell-Llewelyn: Absolutely. Hello Commission, Mayor, I'm Deena Bell-Llewelyn, Greenspace Management from Public Works, for the record. Our current tree succession project we launch every year, we have a Commission-fed budget of \$200,000 per year for that tree succession project every year. Right now, there's 2023 project is coming out of Procurement. We intend to award it to the contractor, hopefully within the next week or two to start replanting 111 total trees, as part of this year's project, and as soon as we finish this one, we roll right into next year where we already have hopefully 90 to 100 trees ready to plan. We put this out to bid with contractors, because the size of the project is large. So, it buys about 100 trees a year on average.

Mayor Lago: And if you go right now to, I was there last week, if you go to our Public Works Department where the actual yard, you'll get to see a lot of the oak trees that are basically ready to be transplanted from that office to the area where they are going to be relocated forever in the city. So, you can see all the trees are basically ready there for the contractor to take them to plant them somewhere in the neighborhoods.

Greenspace Director Bell-Llewelyn: Right. And in our Public Works yard we have about 40 oaks. We're trying to green them up with more water before we plant them. They dropped all their leaves, and they are a little brown for our taste, so we're waiting for them to green up.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I used to do that by sinking them in six inches of water or more, because they can tolerate about six weeks' worth of being in standing water, any of the ones that went into shock and then I would see the growth, but right now they are dropping their leaves anyway. So, a lot of yellowing there. Where we have the most heat, generally, is in our Central Business District. I've seen some plantings that when they were put in, depending on where the location is, the ones that are more isolated with more asphalt around them and reflection are the ones of course that suffer the most and then some of the others of the same variety of tree have no problem making it. So, its planting, location, and conditions, and soils, and all those things that go into whether or not they will survive. So, I did see live oaks out in El Paso when I was there, so I don't know if its really necessarily the heat level or the lack of a freeze, I guess some research that someone would

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have to do on whether or not they need a freeze, but I know that that's true with many other varieties of trees and why we can't grow Sycamores down here and so forth. It's not because it doesn't get hot elsewhere. It was 102 degrees in Chicago one year. It's not the heat so much, it does that tree require a freeze and where is it planted. So, it was a brutal summer. My kids wanted to go shopping. Is it air-conditioned was the only question I kept asking them. So, yes, looking forward to the trees getting planted.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, what I would like to see done is just have a conversation with Dr. Feely and report back to us on what recommendations he would have.

Greenspace Director Bell-Llewelyn: Absolutely. I'm familiar with Dr. Feely's research. Our arborist, our senior arborist and I have looked into it. We've read his articles.

Mayor Lago: You've already incorporated some of his guidance, right.

Greenspace Director Bell-Llewelyn: Yes. So basically, just in a nutshell, I don't want to take too much time, but this concern is due to climate change. Any tropical tree species migrating up to different areas and as we have a heat change in temperature, he was concerned live oaks might migrate further north, because they are not a tropical species. But in our tree succession planning and here's our list, and also, we had zoning code changes this year, it encourages more tree diversity and we're following a lot more tree diversity and here's the list if anyone's interested, but you can see a big variety of different natives, flowering trees with a few oaks, because oaks are still very viable today. They are the most sustainable tree. Our senior arborist stands by them. They are so resilient in hurricanes. You can see the longevity of them in urban areas. Look at Coral Way, they've been here 80-100 years. Today, they are still viable and so, the concept of what's going to happen in the future because of unknown climate change is good research to be familiar with, there are so many different opinions on it. So that's where we are.

Commissioner Fernandez: I appreciate it.

Greenspace Director Bell-Llewelyn: Sure.