

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

--MEMORANDUM--



The City Beautiful

TO: Members of the City Commission

FROM: Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

DATE: January 10th, 2025

SUBJECT: Newsletter sent to residents **“2024: A Year of Milestones and Challenges Ahead”**

Please see the newsletter I shared with residents below:

Keeping Coral Gables residents up to date with commission updates and community interactions is a priority in my office.

2024: A Year of Milestones and Challenges Ahead

New Businesses

As we bring 2024 to a close, it is important to highlight the progress our city has made attracting new businesses. Through the hard work of the Coral Gables Economic Development Department, Coral Gables Chamber and the Mayor’s Office, many businesses opened their doors or announced they are moving to Coral Gables. These new businesses help keep the Coral Gables community vibrant. Some examples are listed below:

- **Apple** announced in April that it will open a 45,000 square foot office at The Plaza Coral Gables.
- **Birdie's Bistro**, the former home of Burger Bob's on the Granada Golf Course, opened its doors on November 14th after a major renovation updating all the electrical and plumbing, including adding a restroom facility that was lacking in the former restaurant. Rita Tennyson, a long-time chef of Burger Bob's, is operating the restaurant.
- **FIFA** opened a 60,000-square-foot office at 396 Alhambra Circle in September to prepare for the 2026 World Cup. Roughly 100 staff members relocated from FIFA headquarters in Zurich to Coral Gables. Miami is one of 11 American host cities for the World Cup.
- **Francesco**, a Peruvian restaurant at 278 Miracle Mile, next to the Miracle Theatre/Actors Playhouse, opened its doors on May 8th.
- **Maman**, a French bakery/café restaurant at 136 Miracle Mile, opened its doors on August 5th.
- **UBS**, a global wealth manager, announced in November that it will occupy two floors at 4225 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, an 8-story office building that is currently under construction.
- **Ryder** relocated its headquarters from Doral to Coral Gables and celebrated its grand opening on November 19th.
- **Sra. Martinez**, a high-end restaurant serving original European- and South Florida-influenced Spanish cuisine by James Beard Award winning chef, Michelle Bernstein, open its doors at 2325 Galiano Street, opened its doors on December 13th.

Commission Actions

For over three years, I have had the privilege of serving as a Coral Gables Commissioner and Vice Mayor. During the past year, I have strived to complete the goals set before my election. Outlined below are a few highlights of the legislation and actions taken since May 2021. Over-development, traffic calming,

pedestrian safety, public safety, rising homeowners insurance premiums, the need for sidewalks and sidewalk replacement, road repaving, septic-to-sewer conversion, the need for shade trees in the Central Business District (CBD) and in residential areas, preservation of the city's historic properties, rising property taxes and high garbage and sanitation fees are some of the issues residents wanted addressed. Significant progress has been made over the past 44 months moving these projects forward. A summary of the key points is outlined below:

CURBED OVER-DEVELOPMENT:

1. **Increased Side Setbacks** of townhomes built next to existing buildings.
2. **Limited Building Lengths** to 300 feet in the North Ponce Residential Infill District.
3. **Increased Tree Canopy and Green Space & Reduced Building Density.** Required reductions of unit density in buildings and significant increases in shaded green space to make our city streets more walkable and beautiful. Adjacent residents welcomed the projects. When these projects are completed, close to two (2) acres of green space will be added in and next to the Central Business and Design and Innovation Districts that otherwise would have been covered with concrete or asphalt parking lots. Additionally, I encouraged developers to save healthy, non-invasive specimen trees that State laws preempt the city from requiring the developer to move or maintain:
 - *20,000 square foot tree lined public park on Salzedo behind a future new Publix on LeJeune plus a shaded 45-foot-wide dedicated pedestrian corridor area next to the LeJeune road sidewalk rather than setting the building at the LeJeune Road property line. Although the zoning for the parcel allows a 150- to 190.5-foot-tall building on Salzedo with over 300 residential units in addition to the store, the building approved is only 36 feet tall and has no residential units. The plans include pedestrian safety improvements and a bike lane east of LeJeune Road on Andalusia and Salzedo. The combined green spaces will reduce the asphalt and cement footprint by thirty percent (30%). This park combined with the next two*

canopied parks on Salzedo will create a green corridor in our Central Business District totaling $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre that never existed before.



- 10,000 square foot tree lined public park on Salzedo/Valencia corner required for Regency Parc Residences project. The conditions of approval required approx. a sixty-two percent (62%) reduction of allowed density, resulting in a building with 126 actual units rather than 330 units allowed as of right. The park converts an asphalt parking lot into public green space. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the park must be green space with shade trees.
- 5,000 square foot park shaded with two specimen trees on Catalonia/Salzedo and moving of a third specimen tree into a public park from another development site that State law permitted to be cut down. The conditions of approval required installation of traffic calming in adjacent neighborhoods, extending the sewer line beyond the project so residents nearby could connect to sewer, and installation of street trees on both sides of two streets that never had any shade trees.
- 12,500 square foot shaded public park on Galiano/Almeria corner adjacent to a single-family residential area that strongly supports using the parcel for a children's playground with ample tree canopy. The parcel currently has a surface parking lot. The conditions of approval require the developer to construct the park, convey it to the city and install shade trees on both sides of the street in sidewalks that have never had shade trees.

- *5,000 square foot public park shaded with three large specimen trees located on a site next to the Shoppes of Merrick Park. A prior permitted project provided no public park with green space and shade canopy.*
 - *22,712 well landscaped open space with large shade trees at Ponce Park Residences with 7,644 right of way improvements adding green space and full restoration and enhancement of Ponce Circle Park with amenities and shade trees. The improvements at Ponce Circle Park are estimated to be worth at least \$2MD and require Ponce Park Residences to maintain all landscaped open space and Ponce Circle Park in perpetuity. The Commission rejected a prior, modern, denser and taller version of the project on July 25, 2022. The rejected proposed project was 149 foot-tall with 80 residential units. After two years of meetings with nearby residents, on March 1, 2024, the same residents that opposed the first project actively supported the revised plans for a high-quality Mediterranean Revival style building 33 feet shorter with 23 fewer residential units and a commitment to make all improvements needed for Ponce Circle Park, including pedestrian safety and traffic calming.*
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Restricted Mediterranean Bonuses & Increased Architectural Requirements:



Sponsored amendments after receiving input in 2021 from a Blue-Ribbon Committee of architects residing Coral Gables in two phases. Between 2004 and 2021, bonuses were awarded to all architectural styles. The first phase I sponsored removed the ability of “other styles of architecture” from receiving

bonuses and added a pre-submission conceptual review process to discourage submission of inadequate designs. The second phase, which passed on first reading, will become effective if passed on second reading in early 2025. The key impacts of the second phase will:

- *Require high quality Mediterranean Revival style architecture and removed items from “check list” to qualify for the bonus that are required for all commercial projects (i.e., bike racks, LEED certification).*
- *Require Conceptual Review drawings for all projects seeking a bonus so the Board of Architects can inform applicants when proposals fail to meet the Code’s high standards before a full set of preliminary drawings are submitted. Residents must be noticed in writing and may submit comments to the Board. Early resident input assists the Board to assess compatibility of projects to the surrounding neighborhood.*
- *Require proposed increases in Zoning seeking a bonus to be reviewed by the Planning and Zoning Board before the Board of Architects reviews and approves Mediterranean bonuses.*
- *Residents must be noticed and can provide comments regarding the compatibility of the proposed zoning change to the neighborhood. To learn more about purpose and history of the Mediterranean bonus, a Memo dated December 9, 2024 is available on my city web page or by [clicking here](#).*

TRAFFIC CALMING & PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ENHANCEMENTS:

Throughout the year, I have reported on the efforts that have been made to advance traffic calming and pedestrian safety. A recap of those efforts and the progress of projects is summarized below:

- **State Roads:** Engaged FDOT to make pedestrian and traffic safety improvements at all intersections on FDOT roads in Coral Gables, lower

speed limits and install a sidewalk on the South Side of Bird Road from the High School to Red Road. See all [requested changes here](#).

- **County Roads:** Engaged County Commissioners to improve timing of traffic lights, improve pedestrian crosswalks, repave roads and fill potholes on County roads, such as Coral Way, Old Cutler, Maynada, Blue Road, Kendall Drive and LeJeune south of US 1). Coral Way is currently being repaved and traffic circle on Coral Way and Anderson will improve safety and traffic flow. In the summer of 2025, the Cocoplum bridge is scheduled for replacement.
- **City Roads:**
 - **Speed Tables & Raised Intersections:** The city has completed close to half of the planned traffic calming devices and temporary speed tables are being installed for approved areas awaiting construction:
 - Calming planning and design will commence in 2025. To view a map of recommended locations for speed tables all zones, [click here](#). To request traffic calming in an area *not* identified on the maps, [click here](#).
 - 58 speed tables/cushions and raised intersections have been installed in Zones 1 & 2.
- **New Traffic Calming Devices:** I sponsored an amendment to the County's Memorandum of Understanding with the City that will allow the City to install Speed Detection signs in areas where speed tables are not allowed or desired and smaller speed tables for streets with insufficient space between driveways for standard speed tables.

- **Handicap Access:** I sponsored a resolution requiring all ADA remediation



(i.e., installation of _____ curb cuts) to be added to the Capital Improvement Budget to ensure it is an item that is prioritized infrastructure project. Additionally, ADA remediation has been included in this year's State and Federal appropriation requests.

- **Repaving:** The city has \$1.78 million budgeted from grants and revenues for resurfacing city streets. In 2025, intersection improvements and repaving will occur on Ponce de Leon, and at the complex Granada Boulevard DeSoto fountain intersection, Coral Way and Anderson Road, Coral Way and Granada. Additional roads will be repaved in conjunction traffic calming with sewer main replacements throughout the city.
- **Sidewalks:** Since 2022, over 137,000 linear feet of sidewalks have been replaced and 5,303 linear feet of new sidewalks installed. Weather permitting, 27,037 linear feet are currently scheduled to be replaced and installed in 2025. Additionally, after seeking input from residents, I have sought grants to install new sidewalks between Bird Road, US 1, the Underline and the University of Miami to provide safe routes for residents and students.

UP-DATED LIGHTING ORDINANCE

- Require that fixtures with multiple **bulbs to be appropriately spaced** to maintain low ambience;
- **Limit redundant light** on private property adjacent to existing street lighting;
- Limit the light color temperature to **3000 Kelvin** within or adjacent to residential neighborhoods;



In response to resident complaints of sleep disturbed from bright LED lights, I sponsored an ordinance updating the city’s lighting ordinance. The prior ordinance did not address the new issues LED lighting colors can cause for outdoor lighting. Residents whose sleep is disturbed by bright lights can now find relief.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Two years ago, I sponsored legislation that ensures that residents can timely view and appeal properties denied historic preservation on the city website, and a historic designation study of the North Ponce and Flagler Districts. Three years ago, I sponsored an ordinance creating the Landmark Advisory Board to help preserve our existing monuments and fountains, statues and entrances. Additionally, I supported legislation and appropriations that provided new funding for historic preservation of City Hall, Venetian Pool, Coral Gables Museum, the Gondola Building and the Alhambra Water Tower. During the past four years I have prioritized funding of reroofing of City Hall, the Museum and the Coral Gables Country Club, and new windows and repairs at City Hall.

BOARD OF ARCHITECTS APPEALS PROCESS MODIFIED

To ensure transparency, fairness and impartiality of the Board of Architects appeal process for residents challenging large commercial projects, I sponsored an ordinance modifying the process. Now, notice to residents is required, three (3) special masters must review resident's appeals of proposed commercial projects and the Special Masters may not approve substantial changes that the Board of Architects has not reviewed.

DOG PARKS



Salvatore Dog Park Ribbon Cutting

Four years ago, the city did not have any dog parks. The city now has two dog parks. The Salvatore Park dog park was constructed after I met with the adjacent neighbors seeking their opinion on the park and input on the design. The second dog park opened after I requested a developer to include a dog park in a project close to Phillips Park.

PICKLEBALL

The number of residents playing pickleball in Coral Gables has substantially grown in the past two years. I sponsored a resolution to commence the design of permanent pickleball courts next to the Biltmore Tennis Center and adding a few temporary courts during the design and construction phase.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- **Carbon Sequestered Cement Required for Large Commercial Projects:** I sponsored an ordinance requiring use of carbon sequestered cement in all multi-family and commercial projects where technically feasible. Concrete utilizing carbon sequestered cement is stronger and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. The first project that has used carbon sequestered cement is the city's new Fire Station on Sunset Drive, Fire Station 4, which will open in 2025.
- **Pet Waste Disposal:** Pet waste disposed of in trash pits pollutes waterways and groundwater. I sponsored an ordinance requiring all pet waste to be disposed of properly, in dog/pet waste containers or placed in the household garbage collected twice a week. Clean water is critical for our health, healthy waterways and beaches and our economy.
- **Increased Canopy:** The city is expanding its tree canopy and replacing unhealthy trees every year. I have advocated for the planting of trees on Biltmore Way, Valencia, in the Central Business District and areas lacking canopy. In addition, I have sponsored and assisted with tree plantings at the Coral Gables High School, Camp Mahachie, the University of Miami and Granada Golf Course perimeter. I have also required developers to

plant trees on both sides of the street, provide parks with shade trees and move healthy, non-invasive trees.



Camp Mahachee Tree Planting Dedication, March 2024

STATE LEGISLATION

For the 2024-2025 Florida legislative session, I have drafted and lobbied for several State statutory amendments, some of which are already filed.

- **School Bus Safety Requirements:** Current laws do not require privately owned school buses to have deployable stop signs, flashing lights and

“Transporting Children” markings that prohibit drivers from passing when children are being picked up or dropped off. Senator Garcia recently filed Senate Bill 52 using language I drafted. If passed, the Bill will also enable police to ticket drivers who illegally pass privately owned school buses.

- **Cyber and Vicarious Stalking:** Current laws do not prohibit vicarious stalking using a third party or drones to stalk a victim and places the burden on the victim to prove that the victim did not allow the perpetrator to have access to the victim’s electronic devices, security systems or other electronics. Senator Garcia recently filed Senate Bill 54 closing those loopholes using language I drafted.
- **Boating Safety Laws and Penalties for Operating a Vessel while Intoxicated, Reckless Boating and Leaving the Scene of Accident:** I lobbied our State representatives to enact amendments to the boating safety laws the State Attorney’s Office drafted. Senator Garcia utilized the draft language and filed Senate Bill 58 proposing proactive changes in the boating safety laws.
- **Homeowner’s Insurance Rates:** The South Florida Building Code requires higher windstorm ratings on structures than the Florida Building Code requires in areas north of South Florida. Enhancement of the Florida Building Code to adopt and implement the South Florida Building Code High Velocity Windstorm requirements will reduce catastrophic storm damage and the cost of future homeowner’s insurance rates throughout the State. I met with State leaders and the Insurance Commissioner, who are receptive to enhancing the Building Code statewide to bring down future windstorm insurance costs.
- **Tree Removal Statute:** Four years ago, a State law passed preempting the city’s ability to require permits for removal of all trees or to challenge an arborist’s report that falsely or fraudulently claims a tree is unhealthy. I have drafted proposed modifications to the State statute that prohibits arborists from using false and fraudulent statements in reports to justify removal of trees. The draft amendment also requires a permit for stump grinding to prevent damage to gas lines, water lines and electrical lines.

- **Yard Waste & Food Waste as Compostable Materials:** Rising costs of garbage and trash disposal and the environmental impacts of food waste, yard waste and incineration of garbage requires innovative steps to allow composting and re-use of materials for construction, nurseries and farming. I drafted and I am lobbying for expansion of the definition of “Recovered Materials” in Florida law that will allow municipalities to divert these materials from incineration or disposal in landfills.
- **Notice of Live Local Act Projects in Neighboring Cities:** Live Local Act projects in neighboring municipalities impact the traffic and use of our city’s trolleys and services. I proposed an amendment that will require neighboring municipalities to notify the city of nearby projects proposed so the City can request modifications to the projects that reduce the impact on Coral Gables.

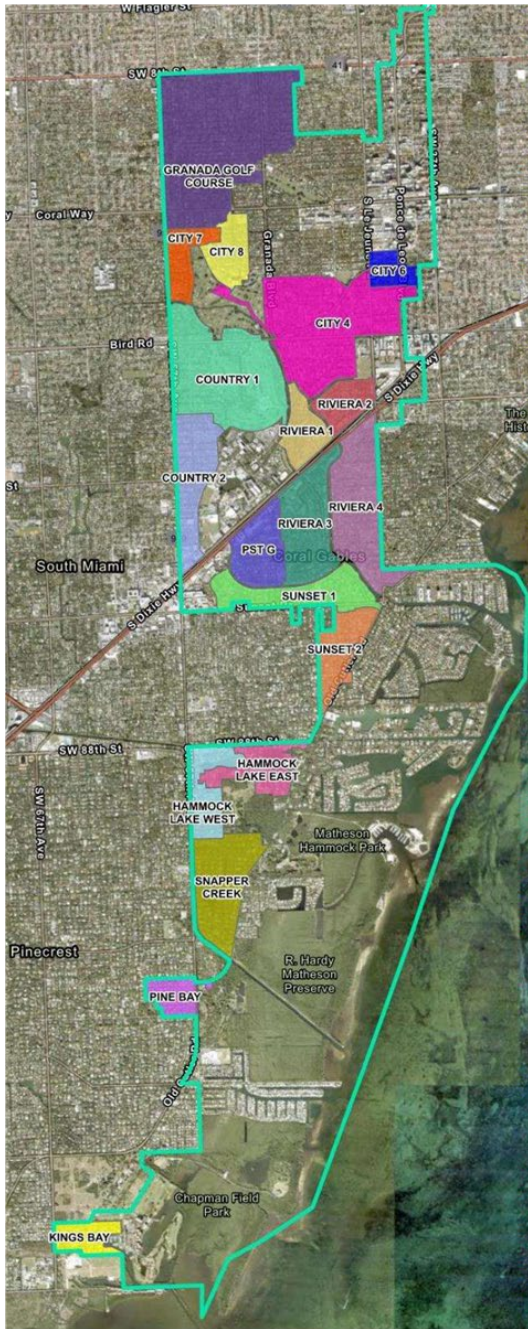


Florida Insurance Commissioner & South Florida State Representatives & Senators Meeting

FPL UNDERGROUNDING

After 7 years of planning between the city and FPL, the FPL Storm Secure program started in Coral Gables in March 2023. This program undergrounds all of the lateral lines behind homes in the North and South Gables at no cost to the city or residents. You can view updates regarding which areas where undergrounding construction will commence in 2025 by searching for “Undergrounding Project Construction Updates” on the city website or by [clicking here](#).

SEPTIC TO SEWER PLAN, ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION PROGRESS



Before I was elected, I advocated for our city to commence septic to sewer conversion and after I was elected, those efforts continued. In 2022 I traveled to Tallahassee with the Commission seeking State appropriations and the city received appropriations to engage a consultant to design a Septic to Sewer basin plan. The basin plan has been completed.

In 2025, the city is ready to take the following next steps:

1. Community meetings in each basin to discuss planning and funding options,
2. Funding the engineering, design and construction drawings, and
3. When the construction drawings are shovel ready, applying for Federal and State grants to help fund the construction, decreasing the costs for residents.

For residents whose income is limited, I sponsored a grant program that can be funded when a basin is ready for construction to begin. County grants and loan programs have also been established to assist qualified residents.



CITY BUDGET, RESERVES, DEBT AND BONDS:

For the past four years I have advocated for a conservative budget that will ensure that Coral Gables taxes remain low, and service levels and the City’s infrastructure are proactively maintained. In 2024, I moved to substantially reduce residential garbage fees; a motion the Mayor seconded and one commissioner voted to pass.

During the past two years, I opposed using the City’s Hurricane reserves or reducing payments against debts for ordinary capital improvement projects. The reserves enable the city to quickly clear streets and restore operations after a hurricane. I also opposed using bonds issued for infrastructure projects that are currently budgeted over time and which may be also funded through grant awards, saving residents millions of dollars of future bond interest costs. I also opposed a 101% increase in the Commission’s salary and benefits. The Commission should not give itself such pay raises or increases in benefits without voter approval.

Prior Newsletters

If you did not see my last newsletter covering Traffic & Pedestrian Safety Updates and other issues, you can view it and prior newsletters by clicking [here](#).

Happy Holidays



Enjoy this holiday season with your loved ones! **Office hours will resume on the first Friday of the new year.** If you need assistance, please email me at randerson@coralgables.com or call (305) 569-1824.