

MIAMIBEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

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LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Dan Gelber and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Raul J. Aguila, Interim City Manager

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Raul Aguila

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2/6/2021 | 10:39 AM EST

DATE: February 3, 2021

SUBJECT: **First Street Neighborhood Improvement Project**

The City of Miami Beach, as part of its Capital Improvements Program (CIP), implements projects that improve the infrastructure and quality of life within neighborhoods. These Neighborhood Improvement Projects (NIPs) comprehensively address critical infrastructure, such as the water, sewer, and stormwater systems, while improving the overall aesthetics of the neighborhood and encouraging placemaking.

Wholistic projects are essential, not only to reduce impacts to stakeholders, but also to ensure that the City's professional staff is able to implement the appropriate improvements, as opposed to piecemealed band aids. NIPs serve as an opportunity for City staff and the community to engage in productive discussions on how to enhance neighborhoods and build the foundation necessary to foster growth for years to come.

One such project that endeavors to improve the South of Fifth neighborhood, is the First Street NIP. This project includes critical life safety and property protection improvements to the area along First St, as well as cultural and aesthetic benefits. The project upsizes water mains along Alton Rd. to meet fire flow demands and builds drainage infrastructure to attenuate severe flooding on First St. The project also improves street lighting and sidewalks to beautify the neighborhood, elevates roads to eliminate tidal flooding, changes the roadway design along First St. to promote pedestrian mobility, adds landscaping to beautify the neighborhood, and accommodates cultural and placemaking features for the neighborhood.

The project originally received Commission approval in 2016 and, after developing the initial procurement documents, was awarded to the design firm Wade Trim in 2017. Immediately after executing the contract with the design consultant, stake holder engagement began. As is commonplace for all City projects, the public engagement effort garnered feedback on how to improve the overall project and how to include features that augment the neighborhood's quality of life.

To that end, the City embarked on the most expansive stakeholder engagement effort to-date for a single project. Over the course of four years, the City's professional staff held 40 public engagement meetings – four in 2017, three in 2018, 17 in 2019, and 16 in 2020. The meetings involved discussions with the stakeholders on all important aspects of the project. Reaching consensus on even some relatively benign issues required the utmost creativity of project staff, revisiting designs that were once unacceptable to the neighborhood and redesigning the project to fit new stakeholder opinions.

Nonetheless, the location of the water treatment system and outfall pipe were by far the most elusive issues. Originally designed at the triangular site near Alton Rd. and First St., stakeholder consensus proved fleeting whenever the outfall pipe was discussed. Residents of

the nearby condominium associations strongly opposed the installation of the outfall within the area due to the impacts. While many other alternatives were considered, including siting the water treatment system at the nearby school, none was more feasible than a version where the outfall pipe would be granted an easement by the Marina, but this option was strongly opposed by the Marina operators.

Absent property rights for other alternatives, the City's staff began to entertain siting the water treatment system and outfall at South Pointe Park – an option that at the commencement of the project was not within the realm of possible alternatives for the neighborhood to consider, given the fact that portions of the Park were recently constructed.

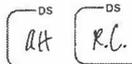
This alternative required a complete redesign of the project. It moved the water treatment system near South Pointe Park, away from private residences; moved the outfall to government cut, not impacting any of the condominiums South of Fifth; and kept the triangular park (Alton Road) intact, preserving the coveted greenspace in the neighborhood, and received the approval of the South of Fifth Neighborhood Association (SOFNA).

The South Pointe Park alternative was recommended by the Land Use and Sustainability Committee in May 2020, for approval at the following Commission meeting. During the June 2020 Commission meeting, it was resolved that the City's Administration continue to engage with the public to finalize the option and gain consensus.

Unfortunately, these consensus seeking meetings have been plagued with concerns about the siting of the water treatment system. While the stakeholders near the originally proposed triangular site seem to support the new location, the stakeholders near the South Pointe Park location are concerned about the water treatment system's impact to the area and its overall aesthetics. Some residents expressed concerns about the City's legal right to site the water treatment system within the Park. This concern was addressed when adjustments were made to the plan locating all above ground components outside of the park and only below ground components would pass through the park. The National Parks Service reviewed the proposed design and concluded that they had no objection to the water treatment system's siting.

While the driving factor behind the project was to address the recurrent and severe flooding exhibited along First St., there were many other critical improvements that not only protected the lives of residents but also enhanced neighborhood aesthetics. Those project components that address the safety and welfare of the public will need to be built, independent of this project – namely the water and sewer projects that protect life and health. However, the stakeholder engagement effort has demonstrated that the neighborhood is conflicted in the overall NIP.

It is evident that consensus has not been reached for the water treatment system siting. No matter the alternative, there will always be an impacted stakeholder. Therefore, the project cannot be executed at this time. Thus, the Administration recommends postponing the First St. project until a future date where consensus can be reached. The administration further recommends beginning the approved Neighborhood Project Priority List developed and recommended by Jacobs Engineering, and approved by the Commission. This project is prioritized at number 10 on that list.


RJA/AH/RWC