

Robert Ruano, 1544 Murcia Avenue

Good morning Mayor, Vice-Mayor, and members of the city commission. I am an 18 year resident of Coral Gables and I am here today representing many residents who support safer streets for our children, pedestrians, elderly using walkers, mothers walking with their babies in strollers, and cyclists of all ages.

Can everyone who supports safer streets for our children and families please stand up?

I'm going to pass out pictures to illustrate my next points.

Every day, residents are taking their lives into their hands because they have no choice but to walk on city streets, competing with cars for space.

We need the sidewalks and bike lanes the city's forward thinking leadership voted for and approved in 2004, 2010, and again in 2014.

The Alhambra Complete Streets Project, which has been supported by voters in the neighborhood and around the city, is the latest to benefit from the city's bike and pedestrian plan. The project area, from Alhambra Circle at Coral Way south to San Amaro Boulevard at the University of Miami, is just south of a 2 mile bike lane segment and continuous sidewalk network all the way to Le Jeune road.

I support this project, as do the majority of the area's voters because it not only makes the neighborhood safer for pedestrians and cyclists, but it also keeps our trees safe. It is a fact that city arborists have said that only three trees would be removed and that is because they are dying. Otherwise the tree canopy will be protected. Let me say that again – the plan protects the trees.

It's important to understand the rich history that got us here today.

In 2004, the Gables commission adopted, through a public and transparent process, the City's Bike Plan for improving safety in this section, so that it would be safe and accessible to cyclists and pedestrians.

In 2010, the City's, State-approved Comprehensive Plan reinforced the focus on safety by requiring public development projects to adhere to the 2004 plan – which showed Alhambra Circle getting a bike lane in both directions.

Then again in 2013, the city embarked on another public and transparent planning process for improving bike and pedestrian safety. They hired consultants, had a series of public meetings where the community had an opportunity to speak and ultimately sent the item to the City Commission – a year later – where it passed unanimously.

Let me say that again – IT PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AND VOTERS SUPPORTED IT BY PARTICIPATING IN A PUBLIC AND TRANSPARENT PROCESS.

There were four public meetings. FOUR PUBLIC MEETINGS. – Two were with the Transportation Advisory Board, one with residents at the Youth Center and a fourth before the city commission. The transcripts of those meetings along with other backup information, I have attached to my email this morning. It will show that one of the major opponents of the plan, who claimed that residents were never informed, was signed in at the first two public meetings.

The truth is that the proposed improvements to the street, which include reducing the travel lane to 10 feet, and adding a few feet for a bike lane, have been proven to help in vehicle safety. In a study conducted in 2015, researchers found that

while safety increased when you reduced the travel lane, the reduced lane did not slow traffic. Additionally, researchers in Colorado - analyzing data from 13 cities - found that when cities implement bike lanes, ALL road users are safer – that means that cyclists, walkers, and even people in cars are less likely to be injured or in a fatal crash. A study in Canada found similar results – noting that streets with some sort of bike infrastructure cut down the chance of injury by 50 percent.

Being that Alhambra is a collector road that carries upwards of 8,000 cars a day, which you yourselves have said is critical for a continuous sidewalk network, I urge you today to take the sidewalk out of the discussion and commit to a 5 foot sidewalk – at the least on one side of this stretch of road. Any other amenities can be discussed, but to not build this basic infrastructure for people in wheelchairs, parents with strollers, or elderly that have trouble getting around, like my neighbor **Sofia** in this picture here, would be negligent and possibly illegal.

The truth is that many opposing this project are not thinking about the current and next generation of residents and taxpayers who will hopefully be calling Coral Gables home.

From opponents I hear comments like:

“We don’t want outsiders to use our street”.

“Look at my yard and how much of it will be cut up by the sidewalk”

“I pay three times in property taxes what my neighbor pays across the street, let them get a sidewalk.”

And my favorite, which shows an obvious Not in My Backyard Mentality – “I’m in favor of this project, it should just be on Granada instead.”

We need to look beyond this type of shortsightedness and build on the forward-thinking vision that has made us the City Beautiful and the model for others.

In closing, I want to thank the City Administration – and especially the City Manager – for continuing this transparent process towards a safer city. He has inherited a number of policies that this commission has passed over the years, policies that aim to provide a safe place to walk or cycle for all residents, and he is doing a great job of getting them done.

The fact that the city is providing a vote at the end of the month, where affected residents on Alhambra and side streets can vote on the project is indicative of the transparency with which the city is working.

Thank you and thank you for your service to our city.