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TITLE: Striking a Balance between Aesthetics and Sustainability

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In response to the recent articles that have been published regarding the installation of roof top solar panels in the City of Coral Gables, I'd like to address some of the false information that has surfaced. Our commitment to adopting sustainable initiatives is more than "lip service," it is clearly evidenced by the legislation we have consistently enacted within the last several years. My office has spearheaded numerous sustainable initiatives such as: becoming the first city in the State of Florida to ban plastic bags and polystyrene, mandated that all future City public and private buildings over 20,000 square feet to be LEED Silver or equivalent, converted standard lighting in City facilities to LED lighting to become more efficient, expanded and maintained our tree canopy as a part of our tree succession plan by adding 3,000 more trees to our residential canopy, we have the largest fully electric car fleet in the state, installed electric vehicle charging stations in city parking garages and lots, installed solar charging benches in parks, host semi-annual hazardous waste and electronic recycling to educate residents on the importance of responsible disposal, waive solar permit fees for homeowners wanting to install solar panels, banned plastic straw usage during city events. These are just a few examples of the policies we have accomplished and added to our green portfolio.

It is true that Coral Gables has an extensive review process. I, myself, had to endure the review process when I installed solar panels in my home a few years ago. However, it is because of this that the City is one of the most beautiful and desirable places to live in the country.

Although we can always do better at streamlining the process, we take great pride in preserving our neighborhoods and have taken our Board of Architects (BOA) review process seriously for nearly 100 years. If for whatever reason a resident does not agree with any of the decisions made during the process, they have the right to appeal the decision and meet with our staff for guidance. The City tries its best to work with residents to find a middle ground while upholding its standards. Since 2009 over 40 solar installation permits have been issued. A spike in numbers occurred in 2013 when I sponsored legislation to waive solar permit fees for homeowners wanting to install solar panels. The City has never denied homeowners wanting to install solar panels without proffering viable options. In a Herald article published on December 21, 2018, a resident claimed to have been denied a permit but lacked factual information. The reality is that staff offered alternatives and the resident chose to ignore them. In the end, the resident decided to work with the City and accepted the options that were proffered.

To find a middle ground, residents should also do their diligence and work amicably with the City. Together we can work towards building a green city while taking our process into consideration, striking a balance between aesthetics and sustainability.