

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item C – Public Comment**  
**October 24, 2023**  
**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**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Magdalena Estupinan**

**Maria Cruz**

**Jackson Holmes**

**Fernando Yanes**

**Saralane Conde**

---

Agenda Item C [10:40 a.m.]

Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Sure. We have four speakers today, Mr. Mayor. First speaker is Maria Magdalena Estupinan.

*City Commission Meeting*  
*October 24, 2023*

Mayor Lago: Good morning. Thank you for your patience.

Ms. Estupinan: Good morning, all. So last May, I sent an email to Miami-Dade County, the City of Miami of Miami and all of you, requesting a public climate change debate. I'm here today to request it once more. The city and the world for that matter, keep spending money on the implementation of the so called, sustainable development, which is based on the United Nations Agenda 21, repackaged in 2015 as Agenda 2030, Climate change has nothing to do with saving the planet. As a matter of fact, they are destroying it with their so-called sustainable solutions. Their mantra is net-zero, and our mantra is, where is the science behind 40-plus years of failed predictions. Again, where is the science; and again, 40-plus years of failed predictions. Why a man like Dr. John Clawser who won the Nobel Prize on Physics in 2022, is being consulted for his statement that there isn't a climate crisis. How many like him have had their choices drowned and their careers ruined. Both sides need to be heard on this issue. This is not about politics, but the future of our planet and civilization as we know it. So, I would like to know what is your position on this, and would you be able to endorse it. We need to have both sides heard on the issue.

Mayor Lago: Have you had a chance to meet with my colleagues on the Commission?

Ms. Estupinan: Pardon me?

Mayor Lago: Have you had a chance to meet with everyone on the Commission?

Ms. Estupinan: The other Commission, Miami-Dade, oh yes.

Mayor Lago: No, no, here on the Coral Gables Commission.

Ms. Estupinan: On the Coral Gables Commission, I sent every one of you an email and I have sat down with you in your office a couple of times, Mr. Mayor, and I have sent you this email requesting this, and not only that, it had nine pages of study on why we need to have a debate.

Mayor Lago: And my response was, the reason why I'm asking, I'm one out of five here. So, I'm asking you, I'm more than willing to have a debate. I met with you several times.

Ms. Estupinan: But it's not saying, I want a debate. It's saying doing something about it. I've been waiting since May.

Mayor Lago: I don't have an issue with it.

*City Commission Meeting  
October 24, 2023*

Ms. Estupinan: Okay. So –

Mayor Lago: My point is, my point is that if we're going to do something, it has to be done appropriately. I think the best thing to do is, like I said, speak to my colleagues on the Commission.

Ms. Estupinan: I have.

Mayor Lago: Get their input and then we can have a conversation with Matt Anderson, the City Manager.

Ms. Estupinan: I have sat down with Vice Mayor also. So, I mean, what else do you want me to do. I mean...

Mayor Lago: What I thought was appropriate was to have a conversation with every single member of the Commissioners. You want to have a debate between scientists and any individuals who oppose a certain view, in one form or another.

Ms. Estupinan: Okay.

Mayor Lago: And I said, I don't have a problem with that. You would have to find a venue; you would have to find a lot of the speakers that will be speaking at it, that would be debating on both sides of the issue. I don't think the city is going to get behind a conference without having support from the Commission as-a-whole and giving direction to the Manager on how to move forward. That's why I said, you speak to the entire Commission. I don't have – I welcome it. I welcome any debate, any conversation you would like to have.

Ms. Estupinan: Okay. So here they are. I mean, are you okay. Would you endorse a debate. I'm not saying you say, you know, climate change is a hoax or it's not true. I'm saying, let's have the debate. I have the scientists that I can provide. You provide your scientist, I provide mine. The county will pay for the whole thing, and we are going to have a public debate. We need it. So here I am. I want an answer from you. Don't send me to talk to all of them, because I sent the email already. I have spoken to the Vice Mayor. I haven't spoken to you. I haven't spoken to Fernandez. So, I sat down with her, and I asked her if she had gotten my email. So, what else do you want me to do and how long do you want me to wait? This is very simple. I have you right here in front of me. Say yes.

*City Commission Meeting  
October 24, 2023*

[Date]

3

Commissioner Menendez: I think having opportunities to exchange ideas regardless of the issue, I think is important, valuable to our community, I think to the nation at large. So, I think any opportunity that we have to present information, exchange ideas, even if we agree or disagree, I think it's something worth...

Ms. Estupinan: That's right. Let it be two scientists, not us, we don't know. We're not scientists.

Commissioner Menendez: I think what the Mayor said, I agree. We'd have to identify the venue and perhaps a partner that would help create...

Ms. Estupinan: It could be the University of Miami, it could be, one venue. I would like to have a timeframe to really know that this is going ahead.

Mayor Lago: Like I told you. I don't think this is the right venue to have this conversation. I gave you my word that I told you I would help you. I've already helped you in the past with other issues before when you wanted to have conferences and I've helped you with conferences in the past. I don't have an issue with it. I don't have any problem with it, but we have a long agenda today. If you'd like, you have my support, but I can't force the University of Miami or another entity to engage in a debate whether something is correct or not. I'm more than willing, I'm more than willing to help you.

Ms. Estupinan: Okay. So don't wait for Miami-Dade County. I think that by the way when I requested that and I reminded them that I had sent them that, they took the microphone away from me. Sometimes I wonder if I live in the United States of America. Okay. The problem that we have right now is that the Constitution is for most people tissue paper, and besides that, we have no voice, not anymore. So, the words, God, Family and Country have become offensive.

Mayor Lago: They are not offensive here.

Ms. Estupinan: But I'm telling you that we are heading that way. It's a very bad situation that we're in right now. People do not realize the danger that we're living in. Okay. So, I would like to say, rather ask you, are you okay with this and are you going to push it forward, yes or no. I don't want to waste my time. I've been at it since ---

Mayor Lago: Go ahead Vice Mayor.

Ms. Estupinan: Wait, wait. I have been at it since, let's see, the time of Valdes-Fauli, that I sat down with Mr. Anderson. He sent me to Mr. Anderson, and unfortunately, Covid 19 hit. You know who I was going to bring, Dr. Tim Bohl. He was huge. Okay. So go ahead, Vice Mayor. How are you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: In most debates you have to have two willing participants at least two willing participants. We can reach out, we can see if there's someone on the opposing view to be able to have the debate, okay.

Ms. Estupinan: I'm sure that you can reach out and get somebody. It's easy.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's also an investment of time for them, okay. So, someone qualified and the other one is someone with the time to do so, because they all have busy lives. So, we can reach out, we can try to facilitate, but I can't force somebody to engage in the debate. So, you can't push.

Ms. Estupinan: It's just a matter of saying, setting up. You know how many meetings on things that Miami-Dade has had here, has spent millions of dollars and has invited only one side of the issue. I mean, many, many, many millions they have invested. Our voice has never been heard. That's why I'm saying, if they have done that, I'm sure that they can do it this time, they can do something with both sides, you know.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We can ask.

Ms. Estupinan: It's not a matter of asking. It's a matter of wanting to do it and say, okay, we are going to do it. As a matter of fact, we're going to sponsor it. Coral Gables can do it. Okay.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Commission.

Commissioner Fernandez: We've had several conversations about this subject, and I think what you've gotten here today is that there is an appetite from the Commission to at least engage in this conversation. I think the Mayor has told you he's working on it, so I guess, work through his office and maybe we can get the University of Miami involved, which is the same recommendation I had made before. I thought this would be something that should be done in an educational venue...

Ms. Estupinan: Yes.

*City Commission Meeting  
October 24, 2023*

Commissioner Fernandez: Since it is an educational form. The Mayor has my support on this, so we're more than happy to follow his lead.

Mayor Lago: Again, you and I will speak again after the Commission meeting and we'll see how we can find a way moving forward, now that the Commission is in support, but we've also got to find institutions that are willing to have this debate. This can't be us debating against each other.

Ms. Estupinan: No, of course not. We need scientists and we can get them.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Estupinan: I thank you so much. Do I get a picture with you, a photo. I'm very serious.

Mayor Lago: You never want to take a picture when you come to my office, so why do you want a picture now.

Ms. Estupinan: No, no, I mean I should.

Mayor Lago: After the debate, after the debate.

Ms.: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Maria Cruz.

Ms. Estupinan: Thank you so much.

Ms. Cruz: Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Actions speak louder than words. I read your letter, Let's Stay United, in the Herald. How I wished I could believe that you wrote it and that you really believe what was written. How can I believe that you'd like all of us to stand together. How can I believe that you really mean it when you continue to defame your colleagues. How can I believe that you really mean it when you keep allowing your PAC, yes, your PAC to keep sending dark, negative messages meant to hurt your colleagues, yes, your colleagues, even though you still haven't come to terms with the fact that they did win the election. Guess what, how can I believe, I think I'm going to stop because if we're not paying attention, I'm wasting my time. He's on the phone.

*City Commission Meeting  
October 24, 2023*

Mayor Lago: Clock's running.

Ms. Cruz: I know, but you're on the phone, you're not paying attention, so I'm not going to be speaking to the wall.

Mayor Lago: The clock is running.

Ms. Cruz: Okay and you're on the phone, that's disrespectful. Guess what, how can I believe your good intentions when even I was a target of your insults. Did you forget whispering in my ear attacking my face, or did you attack me because I'm a woman and I should be home being a little housewife. Did I miss your apology. Have your colleagues missed your apologies. Have you told your PAC and your henchmen to stop. As a woman of faith and I am a woman of faith, Sunday Father spoke about that very well. As a woman of faith, I stand by my Jewish brothers and sisters and condemn your failed attack on Mr. Corben. Some people may not remember when you speak off the cuff unscripted comments, things that were not planned, usually your true feelings come up. Psychologically that has been proven. When you have something written in front of you, you read what's there, you're okay, but when you say something that you weren't expected to say, sometimes your true feelings come up. Please remember, actions speak louder than words.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Holmes.

Mr. Holmes: Okay. I always feel lucky if I get to bring great news and I have great news. I've already reached out to you, so this is really to spread also throughout the city relating to the fact that we can end Citizens United, which has been a plague on our local democracy ever since it was enacted. Isn't that amazing. What would we be able to say in Coral Gables that really mean something. We can end Citizens United. What happened is that the people who did it, the federalist society, have now inculcated themselves. I'm not trying to get into Presidential politics here, but what I am trying to do is show how Citizens United is now got its head in a noose. It's going to be removed. Citizens United will be overturned, because the people who did it, the federalist society have come out in full support of ending democracy, I'm not trying to drag this into politics, but with President Trump. Its not about President Trump, its about Citizens United now has opened a door. The FBI has probable cause with them supporting the end of democracy to do a criminal investigation of the federalist society and once that door is open, goodbye federalist society, hello Leavenworth prison, end of Citizens United. Thank you.

*City Commission Meeting  
October 24, 2023*

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Fernando Yanes.

Mayor Lago: Sir.

Mr. Yanes: Good morning, everyone, Fernando Yanes, 77 Sports Bar on Giralda. It's a pleasure for me to be here. First of all, I would like to speak on behalf of Giralda businesses. We've been suffering very bad last season, as you know, I mentioned many times to you, and last week we had a meeting with City Development, Economic Development, Belkys and some stuff on the plate, but it's some stuff that is overdue. One of the things is about our exposure like the Umbrella Sky that brings a lot of people, a lot of customers in the area. I believe it was the most successful art exhibition in the area was that. Let's put it again. Let's try to get together and work it out, a way to bring more customers, bring more residents, bring more people in the area and she has been suffering a little bit troubles on that and I'm asking you for your full support to those kinds of opportunities for the city, because at the end its more opportunities to bring more people to the City Beautiful. I believe that's a good step forward to help other businesses here. I don't want to put a lot of ideas because it's not going to go anywhere. Right now, I'm just asking you to help to bring back at least the umbrellas which have been successful. After three or four years, the people are still asking where the umbrellas are. So that is a point I want to put to you guys and at least help with that one. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have one more speaker on Zoom, it's Saralane Conde.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, Ms. Conde. The floor is yours.

Ms. Conde: This is Sara Conde at 228 Alisio Avenue, and I wanted to comment on the proposed E-2 and E-3, and this is an increased height for the exchange of some park space. I have a couple of comments. I understand that currently it's 97 feet with 120 feet, with approval by the Commission, and I don't understand why we couldn't say, you'll get the 120 with the park space. I'm not at all sure why we need to increase to 137.5.

Mayor Lago: Go ahead.

Ms. Conde: The other item is the park space now, I'm not clear on this, but I don't see that there is a specification of the amount of park space that would be required in exchange. I don't know if you can clarify those two items.

*City Commission Meeting  
October 24, 2023*



Mayor Lago: What is your next question?

Ms. Conde: And what I would say about, and I know that what's being proposed affects the area south of Bird, but you know the ultimate effects of the increase in height affects our area which is north of Bird. So, our skyline has changed, so that changes the residential nature of our area, and of course with all the concomitant increase in traffic and so on. And finally, I wanted to say that I know that the notices are given, the code requires that notices are given to residents within 1,000 feet, but now that the buildings are getting higher and higher, people more than 1,000 feet away from the structures are affected. So, I would like to propose that we increase the area of notification from 1,000 feet to say 1,500 feet or so. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Conde. Just for the record, you wrote me an email this week, I responded, and I welcomed you to come and visit my office to discuss these matters. I think the best way to address it is to have our Zoning Director respond to your questions in a one-on-one meeting, like I offered, in regard to your statement about notification. It is my understanding and maybe other cities have not gone above and beyond, but the City of Coral Gables, Mr. Clerk, in regard to our notifications is by far the most robust in regard to notifying residents in the neighborhoods in regard to any zoning matters or projects that are coming before the Commission or a board. Is that correct still?

City Clerk Urquia: That is correct Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: And my understanding in some cases its doubled, if not tripled what other municipalities notify in regard to the area. So again, if you have an idea that you want to extend it even more, I look forward to having that conversation with you. I just ask you to take me up on my offer, the email that I responded to today, excuse me, this week or last week, I don't remember, and we'll schedule a meeting with the Zoning Director for you to sit down and have a conversation, have every single one of your points addressed.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Ms. Conde, I sponsored this item after having a Sunshine meeting with the neighborhood over a year ago, about choices they had to make on development in their area, because they lacked any green space whatsoever unfortunately. Many years ago, no park property was purchased in that design district, which is the triangle between the

*City Commission Meeting  
October 24, 2023*

Bird Road, U.S.-1, and LeJeune Road, a very highly dense area with unlimited density permitted. A number of units could have gone in a piece of property like that were extreme and people were upset losing the last green patch that they had left, because it was already permitted to be built as a hotel from lot line to lot line. So, we met with the residents in the area and gave them two choices. Whether or not we take the amount of FAR that could have been on the ground floor level and put it on top of the building for a total of 17 ½ feet increased height and provide them a park space with at least 50 percent tree coverage from day one of shade, something they sorely wanted and complaints that I hear in that highly urban area, which is very distinct from the area that you live in. There are no single-family homes, there is not a single historic building in the area that the building would impact, and the addition of the 17 ½ feet is not even observable from the top, because that area is surrounded with tall buildings all the way around because that's the way it was designed. It was our industrial district after all, at one point. Happy to sit down with you. There is a calculation that shows that the additional, the FAR that was taken from the ground floor level and put on the top is now a green space. It's now going to be having a maximum of ten percent space. It's going to be used for open-air dining, leaving 90 percent of the park area for residents to use with the requirement that it be maintained by, not the city, but the site itself. So, there's no impact on our city for additional cost and resources to be put in the area. And very important for that area, there's a cap on the density that can be placed in there. There is a landscape rooftop. There is activation of the rooftop with pickleball courts and activities for people in the area. It's something that was sorely needed. It's something that the residents in that area wanted, and therefore, before pen was put to paper or the first drawing submitted to the Board of Architects, we did do the Sunshine meeting with the residents to make sure this is something that they wanted, and they do want it. And since then, we've had another Sunshine meeting and more recently we had a Sunshine meeting to accommodate the new members of our Commission so they could see the reception there was, the warm reception there was for this project and its making people happy. So that's why this is being done. We are handcuffed by the amount of density and FAR that exists in our zoning code. You asked the question as to why we couldn't do it with the existing rights that developers have of 120 feet. It's because we'll be taking away development rights and the City Attorney can speak with more authority than I can, but we can't take away development rights without paying developers for the loss of development rights. We would be risking having our city, our residents sued for that loss of development rights. So, this is a balance. This is all about balance. Giving the residents what they want in exchange for taking what we're essentially taking away at the ground floor level and allowing it with step-backs be placed on the top of the building.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Vice Mayor. Mr. Clerk.

*City Commission Meeting  
October 24, 2023*

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.