

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-6
August 26, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez (Absent)
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Economic Development Director, Belkys Perez

Public Speaker(s)

Elvira Marcos, Chancellor and Director of the
Office of Tourism of Spain

Agenda Item F-6 [1:10 p.m.]

Discussion regarding the gifted murals from the Spanish Consulate celebrating the City's Centennial Year and the influence of Spanish culture (New Murals on McBride Plaza) (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to item F6. F6 is another item that I sponsored. It's a discussion regarding the gifted murals from the Spanish Consulate celebrating the city's centennial year and the influence of Spanish culture. New murals on McBride Plaza. First and foremost, I apologize for making you wait. Belkys and staff, thank you so much for your hard work, and we've had multiple meetings in regard to this issue, and I think this is a great opportunity to continue collaborating, again, with probably our greatest international partner, Spain. Welcome to the City Beautiful. Welcome to your home. I want to tell my colleagues on the Commission that this is something that we've been working on for a few months. I want your input and your guidance, and I think it just

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is another opportunity to continue collaborating with the Spanish government and just highlight that we have a lot more in common than most people think. Belkys.

Economic Development Director Perez: Good afternoon, Mayor, Commissioners. I want to first let you know who's in the room with us. We have Maria Dolores Fernandez Gomez. She's a Commercial Attaché for the Trade Commission. We've got Elvira Marcos. She's the Chancellor and Director of the Tourism Office of Spain, and we have Jordi Boada, Director of Andalusia Trade, and Jose Rafael Fernandez-Linares, who's the Chancellor of the Consulate of Spain. So, I first want them to give you a little bit of background on how we got to this point. Elvira.

Elvira Marcos: Good morning, Mayor, Commissioners. First of all, I would like to say it's an honor for me to be here with you today and present this project that I believe will strengthen the cultural and artistic ties between Spain and the City of Coral Gables, and to do so, the idea of this project is to bring an artist from the City of Malaga, born in the City of Malaga, and create a mural here in Coral Gables that will become a bridge between the two cities. Coral Gables, the City of Malaga, sharing art and creativity between both sides of the Atlantic. Where does this idea come from? Well, three years ago, we celebrated, and we commemorated the 50th anniversary of Pablo Picasso's death. From there, there was a collaboration that was born between the Ministry of Industry and Tourism, the City Council of Malaga, and Pablo Picasso's Foundation. We wanted to create a project that would be known worldwide, not something that would end and stop in the same year of Picasso's commemorative death, but something that would stay, that would become a landmark. And this was throughout transforming the urban landscapes throughout the world through the art of Eduardo Luque, who's called Lalón, who's an artist, rewarded, awarded, and very known in Spain and in Malaga, and who has an artistic vision that creates a dialogue between the cities where he paints, the host cities, the City of Malaga, and Picasso's art. So, it is an artistic and a cultural exchange. The artist has to be born in Malaga, obviously, to bring the art from the city and from Picasso. And the concept is to bring, transform the city with this urban transformation that creates this dialogue between Spain, Malaga, and the city where he works. So, every work he does is completely different. It's an international project that has traveled to Asia, to Europe, but has never come to America. So, we think it's a great opportunity to be the first city that hosts this artist and these murals. They are designed to become city landmarks, blend the local history, the host city symbols with the artistic legacy of Malaga. And this year is a very special year for the consulate, too, because Malaga is the guest city in the commemoration of the Hispanic Day on the 12th of October. So, the authorities of Malaga will come here, and there will be different celebrations, commemorations, and we really believe that it would be great to have these murals created for those events. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Belkys.

Economic Development Director Perez: So, as Elvira said, the Mayor of Malaga has been very gracious to offer to paint two murals. We're talking about the murals that are currently at the McBride Plaza. So, it's at 150 Miracle Mile. So, there will be two, the east, this would be, so the top wall, let me go through this one. So, the east wall is the one that is of Coral Gables, and it has our founder, George Merrick, and then the west wall would be the wall of Malaga with Picasso. And there's going to be a dialogue between those two artists, those two founders and leaders of those cities talking to each other. And as you can see from the two murals, there are some dynamics that are very similar, the Biltmore and the Cathedral from Malaga. So, there's a lot of similarities, and I think through art, there's a lot of things that we can change here. Still, we're working with the artist. He's very, very gracious and is open to whatever our interpretation and what we want to represent Coral Gables as. So, we're open to your ideas as well.

Mayor Lago: So, I wanted to put this before you because first and foremost, I want to thank you so much and thank Belkys and her team for doing an amazing job. We've had these murals up for five years now, correct? And they've served the city. And I thought it would be a good opportunity when you came. I was mesmerized by the opportunity to do something that highlights the most important painter probably ever, Picasso. When you talk about an artist that is world recognized, you put a work by Picasso, it's instantaneous. It's like a Warhol painting. Those are two of the most important artists, especially in the last 100 years, if not they are the two most important. So, to me, I think it's an opportunity to really highlight our Spanish culture. That again, like I said before, that we have a lot more in common than most people know. We've just talked about Mediterranean, Mediterranean, Mediterranean and that we speak Spanish. But at the end of the day, there's a lot more in your influence in the City of Coral Gables. So, I wanted to bring it before my colleagues. Like Belky said, there could still be some changes made. I thought it would be great to highlight Merrick. I think it's a very positive way to highlight George Merrick along with Picasso and highlight some of the beautiful things that the cities are very excited about and are very proud of.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: If I may. Number one, I think it's a – I love the concept. I love the ideas. I love the conversation that both of them are having. The only thing that I think we could probably work on a little bit is toning it down as far as I think it's very bright. But art's subjective. That's just my opinion.

Elvira Marcos: But the colors are too bright, you think?

Commissioner Castro: No, not all of them. Just toning it down just a tiny little bit. I think in my opinion, art is subjective. I think it's wonderful. I love it anywhere. I just think in Coral Gables,

toning it down just a tiny bit. I feel like it belongs more like in a more industrial, like a design district or like Wynwood. But besides that, I think it's exceptional.

Elvira Marcos: Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Elvira Marcos: I can understand that, but the thing is that it is on a nail that is not very visible on the street. So, it doesn't have this color. People will miss it. And I think that it tries to attract attention. And also, what reproduces are colors of the Mediterranean that maybe are missing in others, but this is a piece of art. It's like when you say in a very classic building or a very classic house, Picasso paintings won't be good because they are too colorful. However, that contrast is what brings everything to be seen by people. And the contrast between one thing that is so soft, so beige, cream, et cetera. And then in an aisle, the colors that are completely.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. So, what I was thinking, no, the colors obviously describe the artist. I completely understand that concept, but maybe we can add. I know there were some parts there that they were gray or black and white. Maybe we can add a little more of that to tone it down but keep the colors.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I did a rather unique and different type of thesis paper for my ending my law degree. And it was art in the law. And I chose to do a paper that examined viewpoints on art because what's beautiful in the eyes of the beholder, one person is not in the other. And the discussion was what is art? And I picked Picasso. I picked Picasso on purpose. And if you look at and you study Picasso's paintings, and this goes way back to 1987, before we had readily available color copiers, et cetera. And I went down to the City of Miami Museum to look at the various arts. And having done art myself as a young person when I had more time to do it, it is indeed the vibrancy is part of it. And somewhat the audaciousness of the way Picasso would portray certain things that made Picasso Picasso. Now, it wasn't the only type of art that he did. He did a magnificent plate with a bullfight in it. So, I wasn't aware until I did that paper about the contrasting personalities that he had within. I love it. I love the fact that he's sitting there. I can see the easel. I can tell its oil. I can tell the difference between oil painters and so forth. And we have some very famous artists now that have adopted many of the stylistic choices that Picasso made many, many years ago. We have sometimes some things that we bring into our city that are attractive, like the colorful umbrellas, which faded in the sun. I can see a piece of this on the Malaga wall where you have the pieces of cloth draped from side to side. Wow, that would be a very nice idea as well, too,

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to do in some of our corridors to attract people in and help, especially in the summer to cool things down. I think this is brilliant. So, I do think it'll bring people out. I think it will cause this conversation to happen. And it would show how the artist's view of not only our city, but also the conversation that happens between the architecture of Malaga, Spain, influenced the architecture in the City of Coral Gables. So, thank you for bringing this to us. I very much appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Lara: Thank you. So, I want to say thank you all very much for coming and participating and collaborating and bringing these two cultures. And as the Mayor said, not only together, but to emphasize and highlight the similarities that already exist, which is something you can lose with broad descriptors like just saying Mediterranean. I, for one, and everyone is entitled to their own opinion, right, and I'm not an art critic, but I know what I like, right. I would almost say I wish it had even more pop, you know, the opposite, right. And the reason for this is because I believe in another aspect of this is the almost like the economics behind it. Because I think that this is going to be a place where young people and elderly and everyone in between are going to want to go and to have one of those Instagram moments. They're going to want to go there. And it'll be marketing itself because I'm hoping and I'm predicting that people are going to go there. They're going to want to take their photos. And then the marketing goes when they send it out through their social media. And that goes around the planet. That's not just here in Coral Gables, right. So, and to see the little hidden gems, you know, I didn't know the Biltmore was similarly found in the architecture of Malaga. I didn't know, you know. So, this is, it's curious. It's interesting. It's entertaining. It's inspiring. And I think it's wonderful. I'm actually very, very excited about this. The McBride Plaza, you know, the park needs even more attention on a street. That's one of our signature streets. It's one of the most walkable places in Coral Gables. Let's give them something to really admire and enjoy. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: So, I wanted to dovetail off the comments of the Vice Mayor and Commissioner Lara. We're in a moment right now where the Mile needs pop. We need to be honest with ourselves. These are conversations I've been having with Belkys, the Manager, the DCM and the ECM. You know, we're at a crossroads on multiple different fronts. Rents are high. The cost of doing business is high. Disposable income is not as easy as it was before. So, people are eating out less. So, you're seeing a little bit of closures on Miracle Mile. But then you're seeing some very interesting products come in. For example, we did an opening for "Standy Candy" the other day, and it's been a huge success. Sold out. Sold out. Literally ran out of candy. Hundreds of people waiting in line. My daughters went nuts over it. They've already gone there a few times. Candy from Europe. And it's supposed to be healthy candy. I don't know how healthy it is, but it's pretty delicious. Why do I bring that up? Because you see all these kids taking pictures and Instagram and the whole thing, and you're only promoting Coral Gables. They said that they looked at, remember Belkys, they talked about, they mentioned Miami Beach, the dining industry, Wynwood. But we said, no, no,

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something about Coral Gables brought us here. Something about being on Miracle Mile. By the way, if you look at their shop, it literally looks like they maybe what, took a week to put it together. They just painted the walls, the same floor. I mean, it looks good, but again, it's not elaborate in nature. You understand it's just selling candy. Candy speaks for itself. What I see here is very different. This is why I was attracted to it when you brought this to me a few months ago, Belkys. I don't think I've ever seen a city build a partnership with Malaga like this, or any city, understand? Like saying, we're going to build, Coral Gables is going to build a relationship with Paris. Yes, we do have sister cities, but this is something tangible. Like, this shows a commitment and it's very impressive. Especially when you're talking about Picasso. I'm an art fanatic. When you look at a work like Guernica, and you stand there in a museum, and you look at Picasso's work, whether it's the Blue Period, or whether it's the Cubism, you're talking about a person who has transcended culture, not just art. This is a person that has had an impact across all of culture, whether it's design, whether it's furniture, whether it's clothing design, whether it's art, food, he's had an impact on everything. One of the most prolific artists in history across all landscapes, sculpture, painting, ceramics, conceptual work. He was across all spectrums, the entire spectrum, excuse me. So, you have the Instagram moment you have, which I think is more important than anything, is really the relationship with Malaga that you're building now. The idea that Malaga now will showcase Coral Gables, and we will showcase Malaga. If you've had the privilege of going to Spain, which I've been blessed to, you know, again, it's a homeland. It's a motherland, like they say, for everyone who speaks Spanish, for everybody who was born in Latin America, or has some sort of heritage. My parents are Cuban. My grandfather was born in Spain. So, you know, to me, what you're seeing here right now is an opportunity to bring people to Coral Gables, to enlighten our community a little bit more about who we are. I want people to know about Malaga, but I want people to know who we are. How did we get here? How did my parents end up in Cuba? My grandfather was from Spain. You know, how did we end up? We just didn't land on Cuba. You know, we came from abroad. And that's the way it was in most cases. So, I really see it as an educational opportunity. I see it as an Instagram moment. I see it as an economic driver. And I'm also excited about Art Basel. You have over 50,000 people that come to Art Basel from abroad. If we showcase this work, while it's, I don't want to use the word, street art or graffiti, it's art. But if you showcase this work and you showcase the magnitude of this work, I think it's an opportunity to draw people to the city and say we got to come and check this out. It's not just your standard work. So yes, there's an opportunity to tweak. I'm always very careful when I see things like this and leave the artwork up to the artists. You know, I love the fact that we're showcasing George Merrick. I'm a huge George Merrick fan. I think it's an opportunity to put him front and center next to the greatest artists of our time. So, moving forward, I want to thank our friends from the Spanish Consulate. I want to thank our staff. This has been a long process. Thank you. Thank you for your commitment. I want to thank the Mayor of Malaga, the Council. [Spoke in Spanish] It's truly a privilege and I hope my colleagues will support this. And moving forward, we can all come together on this item, which is a great item to come together.

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Elvira Marcos: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: It's not a public comment item.

Mayor Lago: I don't know. You never know. Okay. I need support from the Commission on this.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think you can tell from the public comment, our public comments, that the majority is in favor.

Mayor Lago: Okay, I need a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Castro: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: All right.

City Attorney Suarez: So, it's a motion to give direction to staff to proceed?

Mayor Lago: To proceed.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: We have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Commissioner Fernandez: Absent)

(Vote: 4-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your patience. Muchas gracias.

Elvira Marcos: Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: We're excited. And Belkys, you hit it out of the park. Thank you. Thank you, Belkys.

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