

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
March 11, 2025
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, 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, Alberto Parjus
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Arts and Cultural Coordinator, Catherine Cathers

Public Speaker(s)

Marc Fliss, Cultural Development Board Member
Marc Abrams
Rafi Maldonado Lopez
Maria Cruz

Agenda Item G-1 [12:15 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving updates to the annual Cultural Grant Guidelines and Process including adding a category for Coral Gables Youth Arts Programming (CGYAP) with dedicated funding of \$50,000, further maintaining funding at \$228,228 for Coral Gables Core Cultural Organizations and Cultural Programs (CGC and CGP respectively) for Fiscal Year 2026 (Recommended by the Cultural Development Board Approval/Denial vote: 6 to 0)

Mayor Lago: I apologize, I skipped item G-1, which is time certain.

City Attorney Suarez: G-1 is a Resolution of the City Commission approving updates to the annual Cultural Grant Guidelines and Process including adding a category for Coral Gables Youth Arts Programming (CGYAP) with dedicated funding of \$50,000, further maintaining funding at

City Commission Meeting
March 11, 2025

\$228,228 for Coral Gables Core Cultural Organizations and Cultural Programs (CGC and CGP respectively) for Fiscal Year 2026.

Arts and Cultural Coordinator: Good afternoon, Catherine Cathers. The Cultural Development Board annually assesses the cultural grant guidelines application and process from the previous year with the purpose of recommending updates which are then incorporated into the next grant cycle. So, this morning we have Eric Fliss, who is speaking on behalf of the Cultural Development Board.

Mayor Lago: How are you sir. First off, thank you for your service and thank you for being here with us.

Mr. Fliss: Thank you. It's always my pleasure. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, as Catherine said, I'm here to ask the Commission to approve the update the annual grants program guidelines and process, including the proposed category for the Coral Gables Youth Arts Program and dedicated funding of \$50,000. We would also request to maintain the additional funding of \$228,228 for our Coral Gables Cultural Organization and Cultural Grants Programs. These changes were reviewed and recommended by the entire board as a 6 to 0 vote. It creates a category with a distinct intent on addressing youth programming. It allows funding to projects that offer classes and after-school programs, if a performance or an event is open to the public as part of the programming. Previously classes instruction was not funded as part of the grants program, so this allows educational programs to bring top-notch instructors and to renumerate them through the grants program. It also modifies the criteria. Previously, the professional companies were battling with youth companies on the single criteria, and this allows the criteria for the educational program to concentrate on outcomes, excellent and outreach, and not necessarily focusing on Marketing and finance. It eliminates the connection, as I said, or the competition between the programs so they are not head-to-head, and so, I would ask that the Commission accept this program and the \$50,000 funding to go with it.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll second it, and I have a couple of comments, because this is one area that I think that our city can step up and provide a needed service that unfortunately the public school system is running short on at this time. The emphasis on scoring on tests and so forth has taken away time and needed resources from very important things that we need to maintain youth creativity, as well as their performance in school, mental health, all these things are paired together. We are not just books that can produce test score results without some balance in our life. So, I appreciate your thoughtful evaluation in bringing this to us. Thank you.

Mr. Fliss: Thank you.

*City Commission Meeting
March 11, 2025*

Commissioner Menendez: And I want to add, and I echo Vice Mayor's sentiments and thoughts. I think if I'm not mistaken there's an item on the agenda also for funding for the arts through our Community Recreation Department as well. This city for years, its history had a very vibrant arts and cultural offerings for young people. I think this is a fantastic step in the right direction. We've had conversations in the past about schools wanting to be part of the process and I'm glad that we're able to understand that there are different categories which people can participate in and shine, and I hope we can keep this momentum, because as the Vice Mayor said, there are schools that don't have the funding, but if the city can step in and provide young people opportunities to shine, those young people grow up and are the ones that we all go to clamor at the museums and the art galleries and we are preparing our youth to one day step into those roles. So, thank you for what you've done.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. I appreciate your efforts. We have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: I have members of the public requesting to speak on this item. First speaker is Marc Abrams.

Mayor Lago: How are you sir.

Mr. Abrams: Thank you. Good morning or I guess good afternoon. Honorable Mayor and City Commissioners, I'm Marc Abrams, I'm Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of Gables Stage, which is located at the Biltmore Theater in Coral Gables and personally a resident of the City of Miami on Bayshore Drive in Coconut Grove, but many of our directors and staff members are residents of this great city. I'm here for two reasons; one, to thank you all for your continuous and generous support for cultural affairs and performing arts institutions. As a not-for-profit institution operating in Coral Gables, we are 100 percent dependent on grants and donations and the largest of the city is no small contribution to our ability to deliver amazing theatrical productions, but just as importantly and relevant to today's proceeding, we run a very robust arts education program throughout Miami-Dade County and would welcome the opportunity to contribute what we offer to the school system of the city. I want to also emphasize that this is a win-win situation, program such as this because of the massive economic input that performing arts use and the cultural arts provides to municipalities. There are statistics and studies that abound and things like the American for the Arts. I'm sure you are all familiar with those statistics. So, on behalf of the theater, and the entire organization. I just wanted to thank you for this initiative. It's extremely important and educating children and the inherent values that one can glean from theatrical productions and exposure to theater is critical today. These are values, human values that go back to ancient Greece and have been continued in the tradition of American Theater now for generations and I applaud you all for this proposed legislation and I hope that it passes. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

*City Commission Meeting
March 11, 2025*

City Clerk Urquia: Rafi Maldonado Lopez.

Mayor Lago: Sir, as always, thank you for being here.

Mr. Lopez: Hi there, my name is Rafi Maldonado Lopez and a lot of you know me as your neighbor next door. Just to segway, yesterday I had a meeting with teachers from Carver who are asking for help with the arts. So, two years ago, we came together, and you guys were phenomenal. You all supported the resolution to include arts and Marceting in the strategic plan for cultural development and business. So, we promised as the cultural community we would meet that with our emphasis to create a cultural Camelot out of Coral Gables. Yesterday, I was having a conversation with one of the program managers at the county who is the person who supports our programs, and she stopped me and said, Rafi, I have to tell you that every other grant now talks about performing in Coral Gables, because of the opportunities that you gave us, you kept the budget. A lot of people were able to come and on top of that we've secured for Coral Gables things that are really impressive. The Cleveland Orchestra has a commitment now to perform in Coral Gables. New World Symphony started last year during the holiday concert that you guys started with the tree lighting and over 700 people, the Vice Mayor was there, its been extraordinary. We did last year about 77 shows. We calculated 80 percent of our attendees and just in parking fees alone, we contributed over \$150,000 to the city, which is more than half of the entire cultural budget. So that's one organization. So, on behalf of all the cultural organizations, I think somebody said a little while ago, you know, what is it doing for our city, so that investment that you made has multiplied incredibly. So, next year we are up for about 100 shows and segway into youth opportunities, we just had the South Florida Youth Symphony perform on Sunday. All of you guys who are parents, who have raised any sort of child who have taught – I was a teacher for 20 years, the people categorized performance or youth art, and they think it all ends up with another sticker on the refrigerator or another little show for grandma. Let me tell you, arts education for kids is critical as you develop to a contributing adult. One, it is their first introduction to non-linear learning, their first introduction to multi-disciplinary learning. Kinetic energy means when a person starts in a dance class and they get comfortable in their body they become confident, they become socially engaged, they get motivated. So, as we are building a new contributing citizen, the arts is where it starts. I'm stressed out by that timer, but I promise that it would be short. Thank you, guys, very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I support this, but I'm a little confused with what resolution says, so I need an explanation. It says, dedicated funding of \$50,000, maintaining the

*City Commission Meeting
March 11, 2025*

funding at \$228,228. Does that mean that the \$50,000 is part of the 228 or additional to the 228, because maintaining means leave it alone. If this the 50 is going to be part of the whole thing, then it has to be up \$50,000. I don't have a problem doing it. I just want to make sure that the resolution says what you mean to say.

City Attorney Suarez: Right. It's dedicated funding for the Coral Gables Youth Arts Programming in the amount of \$50,000 and then funding for the Coral Gables Core Cultural Organization and Cultural Programs at \$228,228.

Mrs. Cruz: Okay. So, the \$50,000 is extra. That's what I wanted to make sure. Alright. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: We have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)