

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items A-2, F-15 and F-16
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

Public Speaker(s)

Skylar Rubido, Summer Intern Mayor's Office

Agenda Item A-2, F-15, F-16 and F-30 [11:30 a.m.]

A-2: Presentation of a Proclamation declaring August 26, 2025, as "Skylar Rubido Day" in Coral Gables.

F-15: Presentation on FPL and Telecommunications System Undergrounding.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

F-16: Presentation on Revised Litigation Costs and Fiscal Responsibility.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

F-30: A Resolution of the City Commission reaffirming the City's authority and intent to fully enforce Ordinance No. 2022-69 requiring the undergrounding of communications infrastructure; declaring the ordinance consistent with Florida Law, including Section 366.97, Florida Statutes; directing the City Manager and City Attorney to take all necessary actions to pursue enforcement; urging the Florida Legislature to amend Section 366.97 to require co-locating entities to underground facilities contemporaneously with electric undergrounding projects; and directing that such legislative amendment be included among the City's legislative priorities for the upcoming session. (Sponsored By Mayor Lago)

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Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm going to take items A-2, A-4, then A-8, A-2, A-4, A8. I'd like to call Skylar Rubido up, please. We'll be hearing items F15 and F16 along with A2. So, as Skylar comes up, I'd like to give you a little bit of background. Skylar was my intern this summer. And to say that I was impressed is an understatement. This is probably one of the most competent individuals I've ever had the privilege of working with and most hardworking. With all due respect to all the interns who give up of their hardworking time and of their summer, Skylar worked from eight o'clock to five o'clock, six o'clock, seven o'clock. By the way, she wasn't paid. She was doing this out of the interest to learn. She is a Junior at SMU. She is interested in going to law school. We see other, we see several women attorneys here like my sister, who I would hope maybe speak to Skylar after, ladies. She is impressive beyond belief. Her work ethic is unparalleled. And I had her work on two memos that are important. Ms. Maria Cruz said before, the important thing is to educate the community, to spread the word. This is a memo that I wrote, and I've handed it off to the entire city. And today we hope you will memorialize it here in the city. It's two memos. One is of our importance of financial responsibility and fiscal stewardship. And the second one is of our current situation with FP&L. First and foremost, I want to thank FP&L. It's one of the projects that I worked on for 10 years and we are undergrounding the power lines in the City of Coral Gables. We're going to have about 70% of the city undergrounded. It's going to take about 10 years. We've been doing it for about two years and I'm very grateful that we're one of the first cities in the State of Florida to do that. And that's the second memo that she wrote about. And the reason why I bring that up is because as the FP&L power lines come down, from the poles, we're going to have to address the issue of low voltage Comcast and AT&T. Who's going to maintain these poles? So, we need to ask assistance from the state legislature to ensure that there's cooperation. Skylar, please join us. Good morning.

Ms. Skylar Rubido: Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Madam City Attorney, Mr. Manager and Mr. Clerk. I'd like to start off by saying, this is too close, wait, sorry.

Mayor Lago: Take control. You took control of my office. I'll take control, don't worry.

Ms. Skylar Rubido: I'd like to start off by saying thank you to everybody here for the incredible experience and how amazing it truly has been to work here and serve under you and serve the residents and citizens of the City Beautiful. As the Mayor was just saying, the most pressing financial concerns and issues that we spoke about needed to be addressed and therefore we comprised a memo. The first memorandum I distributed was titled Litigation Costs, Fiscal Responsibility and Retirement System Liabilities, a call for accountable financial management and a critical examination of self-serving decisions. The purpose of this memo was not to narrowly focus on one financial issue, but it was to provide a comprehensive review of all recent budgetary decisions, taking into consideration as well as the city expenditures, retirement system liabilities and several other factors that are impacting the long-term financial health of the city. The process of preparing this memo involved coordinating with multiple department heads. I met with the

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Finance Department to obtain budget projections and city expenditures from the Human Resources Department. I gathered information and records with the hiring and the salary of former City Manager Amos Rojas. From the City Attorney's office, we received accurate litigation costs and from the City Clerk's office, we received records of ordinances and resolutions from previous Commission meetings. Each department not only provided data, but feedback. The purpose of this process was yes, to obtain the most accurate findings, but also to ensure that we were operating in the most transparent way possible to be able to retain an accurate picture of the city's finances. The first financial concern our memo highlights is the \$556,068.87 in taxpayer funded legal fees that the city has said to have irresponsibly amassed in the July 16th, 2025, memo concerning the same. The figure itself is correct, but unfortunately the timeframe in which these three pieces of legislation were listed was left out. This memo references three different pieces of litigation that span over a period of 10 years. The city's 2016 ban on polystyrene, which is officially ruled on in 2019. The city's 2018 addition to collective lawsuit against the State of Florida over local firemen regulations, which officially ruled in 2018. And most notably, the Gables Accountability Project, 2021's lawsuit against the city of Coral Gables over the lease of the Wawa gas station, which culminated in 2023. In this case, the city was sued and as a result compelled to respond. This was not a voluntary matter. This focus on litigation costs provided only a partial look into the city's finances. As a result, the following information serves as a data summary of the additional financial challenges that our city faces and has faced over the last two years. To begin the hiring of former City Manager, Amos Rojas. Mr. Rojas was hired in the middle of a Commission meeting without a resume or without a basic meeting of all members of the Commission. His total compensation package, including benefits, was \$368,000 annually, the highest salary ever paid to a City Manager in Coral Gables. And this represents a substantial commitment on behalf of the city. Next, increase in personal costs. In fiscal year 2025, the city added 26 new positions, which included five police officers, five firefighters, two civilian police positions and 14 positions in other departments. The cost of the 14 departmental positions alone is projected at \$685,000 in fiscal year 2025, increasing to \$939,000 in fiscal year 2026. Over 10 years, the total cost is estimated to be at more than \$11.5 million dollars, not including retirement expenses. Next, the Miracle Theater allocation. The city allocated \$41,000 for an ADA ramp at the Miracle Theater in fiscal year of 2024. The theater already benefits from a lease that requires only insurance payments and no rent. Given those terms, there are questions as to whether it was appropriate to use taxpayers' money. Next is the salary increases of elected officials. In fiscal year 2024, Commissioner salaries increased from \$41,000 to \$83,000, which is an increase of 101%. Ordinance 2025-06 later reversed this increase, reducing allowances and capping travel expenses. Nonetheless, the temporary salary increase represented a significant additional cost to the city budget. Next is the 4% COLA and retirement system. The retirement system was also impacted by the approval of a 4% cost of living adjustment, or COLA. This adjustment was granted despite a cumulative experience loss of \$169 million dollars as of October 2024. The immediate result is an additional \$2.2 million dollars in required city contributions for Fiscal Year 2026 and an increase of more than \$14 million dollars in unfunded

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actual liability. The cumulative effect of these financial decisions and broader fiscal context. These financial decisions are expected to cost the city approximately \$27 million dollars over the next 10 years and is necessary to compare our current financial situation and its upward trend to the past 12 years. The city's reserves have increased from \$21 million dollars in 2013 to \$59 million dollars in 2024. Pension liabilities have decreased from 243 million in 2013 to 157 million in 2023. After the COLA, liabilities rose again to 170 million. The funded ratio of the pension system improved from 51% in 2013 to 75% in 2023 before falling slightly to 74.5% following the COLA. It is also important to note the recent trend in property values. After double-digit increases in 2022, 11.28% and 20, I'm sorry, in 2023, 12.46%, we have seen a significant downturn with 8.5% in 2024 and 5.8% in 2025. This slowdown reduces the city's ability to rely on rising property values to offset budgetary pressures. This memo recommends a full audit review of all budgetary policy decisions. It also exacerbates a need for greater transparency in reporting financial impacts to residents. As a result of these financial trends, it is imperative that as a Commission, we adopt a renewed focus on fiscal discipline by protecting reserves, managing liabilities and limiting the burden on taxpayers. The memo was developed to present facts, clarify misconceptions and provide Coral Gables residents with a complete picture of our city's financial issues and our position. Moving forward, the emphasis must remain on responsible fiscal management to safeguard the long-term stability of our community.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Skyler. Can we discuss the memo, the FP&L memo? So, we can, thank you, Commissioner, I appreciate that. Can you proceed to the FPNL memo and provide a synopsis so that residents in this community can get a better understanding of what we're facing outside of the undergrounding and why we need their help in lobbying their state representatives and Senators to finish the job over a 10-year period as we underground FP&L?

Ms. Skylar Rubido: So, this FP&L memo was titled Telecommunication System Undergrounding, Benefits and Considerations. The purpose of this memo was to highlight the benefits of the lateral hardening project under the Storm Secure Program with Florida Power & Light, as well as the current and future impacts of aspects outside of FPL and the city's control, the undergrounding of third-party lines such as AT&T and Comcast. In 2023, the Mayor's office prepared and passed the legislation allowing for FPL's lateral hardening program to take effect within the city. The approved legislation, Resolution No. 2023-126, grants FPL the right-of-way to access private and public land to facilitate the undergrounding of utilities within the city. This is based on the procedure outlined in FPL's Storm Secure Program. So, there are many benefits to undergrounding, but three of the most substantial ones would be durability, reliability, and aesthetics and economics. So, due to the process of undergrounding previously overhead power lines, the process ensures that utilities are less susceptible to damage from natural disasters or accidental damages. According to FPL, underground lines performed up to 14 times better than the overhead lines during the 2024 hurricane season. Reliability, due to the decreased risk of damage during a weather emergency, this undergrounding process is extremely beneficial to emergency response teams who

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need constant coverage. And lastly, aesthetics and economics. Underground lines contribute to a cleaner, more attractive cityscape, which has the potential of increasing property values and economic development. And it also makes the city more appealing to residents and visitors. FPL's involvement. Per FPL, their lateral hardening program follows a specific communication process with third-party telecommunication companies such as AT&T and Comcast. After vetting a site for undergrounding, FPL follows these steps. First, they provide advanced notice to all communication companies regarding facilities scheduled for undergrounding. Communication companies advise whether they will remove their facilities or purchase the pole itself. FPL then removes the poles after project completion once communications companies have removed their facilities or transfers pole ownership if companies elect to purchase them. Unfortunately, neither FPL nor the city has the power to simply remove the remaining utility poles. FPL must receive notice from the telecommunication companies that still service these poles, and the city must be protected by state law in these instances before we are able to act.

Often, these companies are uncooperative in a bilaterally transferring services. As a result, the benefits of streamlining power lines simply systems fall short. Remaining utility poles can impact access to utility services, and especially during South Florida's lengthy hurricane season, this is concern for residents who have had their power lines installed underground already. It is for these reasons that the Office of the Mayor fully supports efforts to collaborate with state legislators to require the Florida Public Service Commission to enforce these undergrounding initiatives for entities such as AT&T and Comcast. To ensure that the city's concerns are effectively addressed, the Mayor plans to attend the upcoming September 4th, 2025, PSC meeting in Tallahassee, Florida. Alongside the Mayor's plan to attend the upcoming PSC meeting, a resolution is presented before the Commission reaffirming the city's authority, including the intent to enforce ordinance number 2022-69. This ordinance requires the undergrounding of communication infrastructure and is in accordance with Florida legislature, which mandates the removal and redundant pole attachments. Additionally, this would seek to pressure the Florida legislature to amend section 366.97 to require entities to comply with the bilateral transfer of services in similar projects moving forward. To conclude, as we continue to improve our infrastructure, it is crucial to understand the complexities of transformative projects, such as the one, as well as the kind of work the city will face moving forward to mitigate resident concern and ensure our community's growth and safety. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, Mr. Manager, I think you should be worried. She's ready to be the Manager, I'm telling you. Skyler, great job.

Ms. Skylar Rubido: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Skyler, great job. So F30 is on the agenda also, which is the resolution that you just put forward. I'd like to entertain a motion.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Lara: Second.

City Attorney Suarez: May I read it into the record?

Mayor Lago: Of course you can, yes.

City Attorney Suarez: The title of F-30 is a Resolution of the City Commission reaffirming the city's authority and intent to fully enforce Ordinance number 2022-69, requiring the undergrounding of communications infrastructure, declaring the ordinance consistent with Florida law, including section 366.97, Florida Statutes, directing the city manager and city attorney to take all necessary actions to pursue enforcement, urging the Florida legislature to amend section 366.97 to require co-locating entities to underground facilities contemporaneously with electric undergrounding projects, and directing that such legislative amendment be included among the city's legislative priorities for the upcoming session.

Mayor Lago: Yes. We have a motion and a second. Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Commissioner
(Vote 4-0)

Fernandez:

Absent)

Mayor Lago: Yes. So, in closing, I want to congratulate you. She did all the research. She met with the Finance Director, the Assistant Finance Director. She met with the ACM, the DCM, the City Manager, the City Attorney, the Assistant City Attorney, the City Clerk, not once, not twice, but in certain cases, three and four times prior to publishing these memos. Very complicated work. She spent two months here in the city and she was an incredible asset and got along with everyone, the consummate professional. This city, once you're finished, I was begging her to come back to Miami to go to school here because this city would be blessed to have someone like you working here. And I'd like for you to sit down because when you get a chance, after we're done, I'd like for you to meet with two attorneys that are in the back who have extensive knowledge, who I think could give you a little more guiding light in your future, hopefully as an attorney. But before you do that, one of the reasons why you came down is because I wanted to show you a small token of gratitude. So, if I may. And I want to thank, by the way, Chelsea, the Manager, the ACM, the DCM, Lora, Nicole, everyone for putting this together.

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Skylar Rubido, a college Junior at Southern Methodist University, SMU, double majoring in political science and corporate communications and public affairs, participated in a summer internship in Mayor Lago's office, two months. Whereas Skylar Rubido made a meaningful impact to the city this summer, helping with research, drafting communications, and supporting the day-to-day operations of the Mayor's office. And whereas Skylar Rubido brought enthusiasm, maturity, fresh perspectives, and most importantly, a genuine desire to learn to the Mayor's office.

And whereas Skylar Rubido has demonstrated a commitment to public service and interest in making a difference and a strong work ethic. And whereas Skylar Rubido's contributions have not gone unnoticed. And this proclamation is an expression, a simple expression of appreciation for all she has done and acknowledgement of her hard work and dedication.

Now, therefore, I, Vince Lago, as Mayor of the City of Coral Gables and the members of the City Commission do hereby proclaim August 26th, 2025, Skylar Rubido Day in Coral Gables.

[Applause]

Mayor Lago: You've got to speak. You've got to say a few words. You've got to say a few words.

Ms. Skylar Rubido: I don't have a speech prepared. I don't know. It's an honor. Thank you. I've learned so much working here. It has truly been the experience of a lifetime. I, you really opened my eyes to how much I love this stuff. So, thank you for being such an incredible mentor and teaching me and just always bringing me along instead of just leaving me on the sidelines. And just thank you. This means so much more than you'll know.

Mayor Lago: And I want to tell you one thing before we take a picture. Your parents are so proud of you. It's amazing. Like, I just want you to know how proud of you and, you know, how highly they talk about you. And I know it's a very high bar, but you're an amazing young lady. And I mean, the future's super bright, super bright. Just keep doing what you're doing.

Ms. Skylar Rubido: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Congratulations.

Ms. Skylar Rubido: Thank you, guys.

[Applause]

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, I think that we honestly surprised her because she told her parents, why am I having to come back after going up to school a week ago to present these memos? I can do it on Zoom. I said, “no, no, you’ve got to come back. You’ve got to come back. Congratulations.