

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-2
June 9, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item D-2 [9:45 a.m.]

Report on the City's response to the Protest Miami Demonstration.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Chief, stay on. The next is report on the City's response to protest demonstrations in the City and in Miami. I know that we have an item later on about conduct of the police and our training, but this -- Chief, I'd like for you to report on the events of two Saturdays ago. I was here, so was the Vice Mayor. And it was a very, very orderly demonstration, a very orderly -- I'm very proud that this -- and we got publicity. The way it happened, it was fantastically respectful of people's right to protest and orderly at the same time. Chief, would you like to report?

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Police Chief Hudak: Thank you, Mayor. Again, I believe the marks or the marching orders or the direction that come from you, Mayor, and the rest of the Commissioners on how inclusive and understanding the Police Department needs to be to all people that want to express opposing views as well as the rest of the City departments that were involved in this. And we are every day in our issues of inclusion, kind of led and was the guiding force of what we've done for the first time ever we've had something of this size in our city. There were some nuances that we had never done before. You were all very familiar with the fine running of our emergency managers in the Emergency Operations Center for hurricanes, storms and other public works types of issues that we have to start up that position with. This was the first time in my history, being here over 30 years, where the Emergency Operations Center was activated for a possible civil unrest that could have included violence that we saw throughout the country. I -- the rest of my command staff is on this call. They're here today, not just to answer these questions. But I can tell you, you know, from the moment that we put up -- and I'll give you a quick timeline. There's been a lot of disinformation throughout the country, and in fact, throughout the world about, you know, the Coral Gables Police Department organized this. That is not the case. There is documented proof that the City Manager and I received an email from the organizers. The people that were responsible to respond to this from the Police Department was Assistant Chief (INAUDIBLE) was the incident commander. Major Adderley, who was on the ground, so to speak, in the floor command post, handled the movement of the troops, if you will. And the -- personally handled how we were going to try and control the crowd, and what we were trying to accomplish was a safe, peaceful protest. Major Lawrence was in charge of the traffic also because of his expertise and how we handled contingency plans was responsible for that. Major Medina, who started before we even contacted on the intelligence side from the criminal investigations and our undercover detectives, worked on that as soon as we saw the flyers posting around the City of this intended protest. I need to remind everybody or at least inform everybody that the date that this came to us, this was the only scheduled protest in the Miami-Dade County area at that time, so there was great concern for us about what exactly was going to or who was going to show up. So, it was incumbent upon us to get involved with the organizers quickly. They did reach out to us. I

did have conversations with them. I explained to them what the rules, if you will, of the protest should be as far as the protection of property and lives, including their own. I made it very later, as did my staff, that we're dealing with the protesters directly, that any sign of violence and any kind of disruption, we would use the necessary force to end the protest. They agreed to this... The secondary part that came above was my fellow colleagues in the Chiefs of Police Association agreed to be at City Hall, and if everything stayed peaceful, to hear their demands. We saw that unfold on a national level, the first ones, if you will, where the chiefs from all of Miami-Dade County met with the individuals to hear their concerns. The follow-up meeting did take place on Friday. As far as the actual operation, as I said, this is the first time the Emergency Operations Center was kind of run by the Police Department in what could be a potentially riotous situation. We had assistance that morning from the FBI. I really received phone calls from our Congresspersons, the FBI, the US Attorney's Office, the Attorney General's Office United States, FDLE, the Miami-Dade Police Department, obviously was in the planning, the Miami Beach Police Department, City of Miami Police Department, as well as our Fire Department, you know, for our initial support. Major Raul Pedrosa was in charge of our logistics, and this was the first time that the Community Information Center, the CCTV system was used proactively to continue to monitor the situation. But one group that I really have to take my hat off to, which was extremely impressive, was our IT Department. I know they do wonderful work, but for the first time really ever we were able to see real-time from an aerial drone exactly what was going on out front of City Hall. You hear the term "situational awareness." This was an impressive feat since we had never even tested it before, but we were able to see back in the Emergency Operations Center our live feeds from the air if we needed to. This was also commented by the US Attorney's Office and the FBI personnel that were in the EOC that we could actually see that real time, so we were never blind. The Fire Department, as we have worked with tirelessly, was with us and stood by in case any other kind of disruption had taken place. It was a very proud day from an operational standpoint, and obviously, it was a very good day for us to hear the issues that are being raised across this country in a peaceful way on the racism that this police department has to address to anybody who comes into our city. We will continue along those lines to address anybody who wants to peacefully assemble within our city. I would be remiss if I didn't talk about our City

Attorney's Office and the way we had our legal positions ready to go. Make no mistake, we had over 220 assets readily available if in fact the issues turned violent or the protest became unmanageable. Because of the police officers' work, the men and women who work for us, as well as the other bike patrol officers that came to join us from Miami, Miami Beach and their training, we were able to diffuse a lot of other people that were coming into the group, not just to attack the group, but also to attack anybody else that was perceived as part of the establishment. It was a very good day for our police department. Our Communications Section was unbelievable in handling the phone calls from across the country that day and since then. And with our resources and as is the case in the Coral Gables Police Department, everybody came together in a very short amount of time. When I tell you the command staff and Chief (INAUDIBLE) worked on the operations plan until 3 o'clock in the morning the day before. That is an impressive sight and it's an impressive feeling. Once we went for that peaceful demonstration, I believe the Commissioners, you need to know that we moved on to assist the other agencies. So, the officers that sat on our streets that night as the other teams left, we had a group of officers, including Major Adderley, that stayed in downtown Miami that first night and helped protect the Miami Police Department while they continued to address the violence that was erupting in their streets. That was followed up by another night when spot protests were handling and another group of Coral Gables police officers and SWAT personnel responded to Miami Beach, Wynwood and other areas to continue to make sure that we can assist our fellow agencies when the need arose. Since then, this past weekend, as we continue to vet information through our intelligence people, we did have a group that responded to the Doral Police Department, as well as to the Miami Springs department, to assist them were any other protest to come up. The good part of all this is the protests have been manageable; they have not been violent. The one thing that I think law enforcement is trying to address now and face is the fact that police officers are being killed not because of the color of their skin but because of the uniforms that they wear. No one is immune to that, not the Coral Gables Police Department or any others. So, the conversation needs to take place. The one thing that I believe we are most proud of in the police department is of our City leadership for allowing us to do what we have to do and giving us guidance. However, I believe the men and women have served us all very, very well from the top to the bottom, from the call takers to the officers that

responded to the midnight officers that worked around the clock in some cases to make sure that everyone's constitutional freedoms were kept. The one last thing I'll address is there was a misconception throughout the country that the police chiefs that were there, not the Coral Gables Police Department, took a knee. Let me be very, very clear. The idea to pray was my idea when Reverend Richardson asked me if he could help. The reason why everyone was asked to take a knee was from Reverend Richardson to pray because he was being heckled by the people there assembled. That is it. There was no subliminal message. There was no endorsement of one side or the other. It was two groups of people praying for peace. That was pretty much the prayer that went on. Since then, as I said, the police chiefs that we have helped sponsor through our IT Department, I've continued to meet with this group. I believe this is a time for action and we are going to be a part of it. People are looking to us on the way we handled it. But again, it was the investment that you all have dictated or instructed us to do to meet with all of those people. I can't be prouder of the way that was handled. I know the officers, you know -- we've never had to deal with things like this. I will talk to you later about the historical perspective of what it means to be a Coral Gables police officer and how we've led these discussions in the past. But operationally, when you see our SWAT team members high above protecting us -- and I saw this afterwards in our debrief. When I walked into the crowd, even though I knew we had assets in the crowd, to have them watch me walk in from purchase and video was something that gives me the chills to this day. We were safe; we were protected. We had information from all across the country at our fingertips. This was a cohesive group for a first time Emergency Operations Center activation for the Police Department. Although we learned a lot, we're always going to continue to do better. But I thank you all for your leadership and your abilities that you've allowed us to explore these areas and make us one of the best police departments in the country. Thank you. I'm available for questions.