

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-10**  
**January 27, 2026**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**  
**Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson**  
**Commissioner Melissa Castro (Absent)**  
**Commissioner Ariel Fernandez**  
**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)**

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Agenda Item F-10 [Start: 2:54 p.m.]  
La Antigua, Guatemala Sister City visit recap.  
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to item F-10. First and foremost, Madam Director, I want to thank you for your hard work. It was a wonderful experience. These were wonderful, elected officials, a breath of fresh air. We truly had a good time. But you guys, you and your co-worker carried all the water throughout the weekend. And I want to commend you for all the hard work that you did. Thank you.

Economic Development Director Perez: Thank you so much, Mayor. Belkys Perez, Economic Development Director for the City of Coral Gables. So, the delegation, as you know, came from La Antigua, Guatemala, with the Mayor and some of his council people. And really, they were here to strengthen the ongoing international ties that we have. So, the delegation was led by Mayor of La Antigua, which is Juan Manuel de Asturias-Sueyras. And he was joined by several of his council members and the Municipal Legal Advisor, the Consul General of Guatemala, Rosa Maria Merida de Mora, and her trade consul, which is Lisa C. Fuentes, were also present. And thank you

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to them because they really helped us to organize the agenda and have that communication back and forth. So basically, we met with them at the beginning of their stay here. And initially, what we did is that we wanted to discuss what we wanted out of the relationship. And so that involved cultural programming, art exhibits, professional training, learning best practices. We scheduled all the meetings and the things that they were interested in based on that initial meeting that we had with them. And so, what came of that was that we had a lot of key departments that they had meetings with directly. We had the Police Department. We had the Police Chief, along with our IT Director, explain about Smart City technologies and how it supports safety and traffic management. Our Deputy and Assistant City Managers discussed the innovative waste disposal system that was actually presented at a Commission meeting a few months ago, I would say. And our Parking and Mobility Director and the Sustainability Assistant Director, which speaks a little bit of Spanish, if you guys did not know, discussed parking innovation, transportation alternatives, pricing structure, infrastructure management, and trolleys, which they were very interested in. And our Public Works Director took them on a tour of one of our sewer pump stations and how it was managed. And at the end, we had a Sister Cities agreement. So that was, and we needed to formalize the agreement with our Sister City. And many of the key items that we talked about made its way into that agreement. So, this is what Coral Gables wanted. Coral Gables is interested in cultural opportunities, one of them being Las Alfombras de Acerrin, which happens during Semana Santa. So that is a carpet of sawdust that is colored in different designs. And that happens during Holy Week. They are very adamant that they want to do the same thing here during Holy Week as well. That event and their Holy Week over there is on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity. So, it is an important, they take a lot of pride and it's their most important cultural event. And so, they want to bring it to Coral Gables. The Mayor also spoke with them about bringing some significant art pieces to Coral Gables. And so, they talked about perhaps a significant artist bringing some pieces there and also some other cultural exhibits and exchanges that we can have. La Antigua is interested in the trolley system. They want to know more about the trolleys. They want to improve their circulation. They talked to us about having a garage on the outskirts of the city and having trouble bringing people into the main downtown because of that. So that last mile is also something that they're looking for best practices on. They talked about medical emergency equipment and then the exploration of technology, so security cameras and systems that supplement their current inventory. So, these are things that we are now going through our departments and seeing what is it that we, that is at the end of its life or that has reached its end of its life and could be donated to La Antigua. They're open to anything that we can give them. And so that's where we stand.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. So, we had a beautiful dinner, as I mentioned. Thank you for coordinating that. I know it was also for the people who attended the signing ceremony here. Our staff did an amazing job. Also, I want to thank the Biltmore for hosting us.

Economic Development Director: Yes.  
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Mayor Lago: We had a great breakfast there and we had a good, probably about a three-hour roundtable discussion.

Economic Development Director: At least two hours, yeah.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, and Cueto was there. Alfonso Cueto was there and other members of the team. And it was really a breath of fresh air to deal with this Mayor. He's a mayor, young guy, probably his 40s.

Commissioner Fernandez: 38.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, 40, 38. He's a general contractor. Funny how that works out. And then his colleagues are, for the first time ever, commissioners from the rural parts of that city. And they were talking about certain things that they've been able to experience as a result of the change in government in their city. So, one of them was that when they started to collect the parking revenue electronically, that they went, instead of going from cash and coins, that they saw a 300 percent increase in the revenue. What does that tell you? Okay, that's number one. And number two, he also told me a very interesting story. And he said that the first project that he collected, that they collected permit fees for, they analyzed it over the last 10 years of all the projects that they've collected. And I couldn't believe it when he told me, he goes, Vince, that one project, when we collected it, the permit fees, amounted to more permit fees recovered than the last 10 years combined. So, talk about corruption. And these young men, they're all young, they're talking about what their aspirations are for their community. And it was great to hear them explain police cars, you know, fire stations, hospitals, schools, roads, the things that they're working on that they can finally deliver for their community once they've been able to stop, you know, some of these self-serving elected officials that were there before them. But I also had a funny conversation with them. I was hoping I would have it here to show you, but I don't think we uploaded it in time. I'll have the manager send it to you. So, there's Antigua Gazette. And the Antigua Gazette, with like the Coral Gables Gazette, remember this? They wrote an article about when these four elected officials came to Miami, to Coral Gables, to be with us. And it's amazing how that type of just mudslinging is even happening in South America. And they said, you know, Mayor and his colleagues go to Coral Gables to learn how to do corruption or something like that. Spreading their corruption to other cities. And they were laughing because they had read our Gables Insider articles, and they had read our Coral Gables Gazette articles, and the coffee blog, and whatever, all that stuff. And they were laughing about it. They were like, I can't believe this happens here. It happens over there. So, I had the article, and I was going to show it here, but I, we didn't have time to upload it. But the intent of doing this recap was not to talk about that, but, you know, to really highlight the visit and how pleasant it was. It was to also talk about that I'd like to put together a list through the Manager's office of items that we have in excess, or that are being decommissioned. Whether it be a fire truck, whether it be an ambulance, whether it be an electric car, a vehicle, a

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truck that's 20 years old, anything that we may have over the next six months to a year and see if we can work with our Sister City. I think that we could do a lot of good things. It's an opportunity to, again, we get so much more out of giving than we do receiving that I think it's a beautiful thing to help out our brothers and sisters in another city that happened to be our sister city. So, if anybody has any ideas, I'm asking the Manager to work on a list of things that, again, are going to be decommissioned in the sense they're going to be scrapped, they're going to be thrown away. I'm not saying to take anything that has good viable value. I'm talking about, you know, I know the next thing. Mayor wants to give away the city. You know, you know how it is.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I had the opportunity to sit down with them. And, you know, it was very refreshing to see that with so little resources, because their annual budget is \$20 million, they're trying to really reform and do a lot of infrastructure projects in the city. And I did have a conversation with them about an item that we discussed last Commission meeting, which was the Sister City's room at the museum. And they are interested in being this first city to display in that room. And they talked about giving us a permanent rug that we can use in that room as well. So, I'm still waiting to hear back from Elvis on setting up a meeting. So, I'll be bringing that back up to the Commission soon. And as far as resources, the one thing they did tell me that they were in real need of right now was police cars. And that I had talked to briefly with Chief Hanlon about what we currently do with our police vehicles when they reach their end-of-life cycle here, which for them is not an end-of-life cycle. They have a population of 60,000 residents, and they have one municipal police car that they use to cover the entire city. So, they do rely on the national police, but the national police is limited on what they can patrol and what they can service. So, they told me that one of the current needs that they have is one or two police cars to be able to get their officers patrolling the streets. So, I told them I would definitely bring that up. And if there's any other vehicles, like you said, Mr. Mayor, I think they would definitely be able to benefit from that. And that's one thing that we can offer our sister city when things are at their end-of-life cycle.

Mayor Lago: I can see it tomorrow. You ready? Commissioner Fernandez gives away all police cars. We don't have a way to police the city.

Commissioner Fernandez: It'll be on Coral Gables First.

Mayor Lago: To our city. I will send that. I'll send that out. I'll send that out. I'll send that out. Done. I got them. I got them. We're giving away all our police vehicles tomorrow.

Commissioner Fernandez: Put the picture of the new Tahoes being shipped off.

Mayor Lago: Done. Done deal. Done deal.

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Commissioner Fernandez: I'll be in the driver's seat. I'm sure they can do it with AI.

Mayor Lago: Done deal. I can see it. Thank you, Belkys, again. And tell your colleagues, thank you so much. It was a beautiful, beautiful.

Economic Development Director: I appreciate it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: And thank you for allowing me to join you for dinner.

Economic Development Director: Thank you for paying.

Mayor Lago: No, it was my pleasure. My pleasure. It was truly a pleasure. And I learned a lot. Let me tell you, I learned a lot from these guys, a lot. So, so humble, sweet, kind, you know, just thoughtful. It was very, very nice.

Commissioner Lara: And also very positive, right? Very positive. The other representatives that came, as you say, from more, let's say rural areas of the area were the ones who were the more outgoing, gregarious, positive.

Mayor Lago: They're very jovial. They were joking about, they were making fun of each other, how much clothes they bought and all kinds of others. Having a great time. So, it was fun. It was fun. Thank you, Belkys.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor. I have to say our department director, Mr. Anderson over there. I was impressed with his Spanish. We had a great conversation about the trolleys and other vehicles as well. And the reality is, you know, we don't do the overhaul on engines here that we used to do many years ago. My husband used to do rebuild on engines before. So, they'll be very excited to extend the life or, or I would say the best recycling is reuse as opposed to melting them down. So, they'll be happy to drive them back. Just like the other country drove back one of our fire trucks.

Mayor Lago: That's a beautiful thing.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It is. Thank you for bringing this.