

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-9
May 20, 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
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

Acting City Manager, Joe L. Gomez
City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item E-9 [3:30 p.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending City Code Chapter 2, "Administration," Article II "City Commission," Section 2-28 "Mayor; Duties and Powers," to clarify the Mayor's ability to designate City representatives for City Delegations; providing for severability provision, repealer clause, codification, and providing for effective date. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto E-9.

City Attorney Suarez: E-9 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending City Code Chapter 2, "Administration," Article II "City Commission," Section 2-28 "Mayor; Duties and Powers," to clarify the Mayor's ability to designate City representatives for City Delegations; providing for severability provision, repealer clause, codification, and providing for effective date. Ms. Throckmorton will present the item.

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Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. Currently, the code provides under Mayor's Duties, that the Mayor has the ability to represent the City Commission in negotiations, meetings and functions, and furthermore, to designate other Commissioners to represent the City Commission in negotiations, meetings and functions, except as otherwise designated by the City Commission. The item before you today clarify that those meetings, functions and negotiations also includes city delegations, including those delegations for lobbying at the state and federal level, and that when the Mayor designates Commissioners to represent the city in official city delegations, the Mayor shall designate those other Commissioners during a public meeting.

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

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Just a comment. I guess those of you that do not agree with the Mayor, don't expect to be appointed.

Mayor Lago: Can I have a motion and a second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Lara: Second.

Mayor Lago: Can I have some public comment from the Commission.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think this is appropriate for orderly delegation up to Tallahassee, in particular. Tallahassee appreciates us being more organized moving forward.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: What is the intent of this resolution of this ordinance.

Mayor Lago: The intent is simple. I've spoken to many State Representatives and many Senators. They are not interested in seeing 4-5 individuals in a room representing a city. They want to meet with one or two designees, and also the cost associated with this is pretty significant. I have all the costs associated here with travelling multiple times, and for example, last year we received zero in appropriations. When I went up to Tallahassee four times, we received almost \$4 million dollars two times. Last year I did not go to Tallahassee, and we received zero appropriations. So, the point is, number one, is to save money, and number one is to be a unified voice and get the work done. That should not be a social trip or a business trip. You are representing the city and we can do this and I've heard this from multiple, multiple elected officials, and its not only myself, it's the Vice

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Mayor who also heard it from State Representatives and Senators that said, that we are one of the few cities that brings an entire Commission up there, and it could be done a lot more efficiently.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. Well, I think that for you to go ahead and sponsor this legislation to increase your powers is inadequate, but it's done, okay. That's fine. I know that you're also trying to prevent me from going to Tallahassee. In that case, that being said, I will pay for it on my own. I'm still going to continue to go up there. And my vote that's going to be no.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: A question for the Assistant City Attorney. Does this ordinance add any authority or power to the Mayor or is this a clarification of existing.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: I would see it as a clarification – meetings, functions and I'm going to get the other word wrong – meetings, functions and negotiations are currently in there. Arguably, trips to Tallahassee or meetings with other legislative officials, so those have arguably always been meetings that the City Mayor could have delegated Commissioners to attend. So, its written as a clarification to the existing code and the existing authority and now it requires that that delegation happen at a public meeting.

Commissioner Lara: Thank you. As proposed, does this mean that if a Commissioner that was not so designated by the Mayor to go to Tallahassee wishes to do so, in any event, is that something that be for the Commissioner wanting to go but not designated outside of their authority to do so, representing the city in Tallahassee in an official capacity.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: The Commission as-a-whole can always designate somebody, if the Mayor chooses not to, the Commission as-a-whole can act as a body, can authorize the City Manager to expend funds for an individual Commissioner to make a trip, and a City Commissioner always retains their title and their ability to use their title, but the Commission as a legislative body adopts legislative priorities every year, particularly for Tallahassee and generally the Commissioners speaks to those priorities when attending city delegations in Tallahassee. I'm not sure if that answers exactly your question, but a Commissioner is always in their private life able to do exactly what they would like to do within the bounds of...

Commissioner Lara: Almost. What I'm asking is, when a Commissioner travels to lobby on behalf of the city in Tallahassee, can they do so without having been designated to do so under this proposed ordinance, or can you have lobbying efforts done ad hoc as one wishes?

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: On behalf of the city, its either the Mayor, as set forth in the code, or as otherwise designated, on behalf of the City Commission as-a-whole, a City
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Commissioner can always lobby on their own behalf or their own interest, but when representing the interest of the city or the City Commission as-a-whole they should be designated by the Mayor or the Commission as-a-whole.

Commissioner Lara: That's clarifying for me. Thanks.

Mayor Lago: If I may add some color to your statement, Commissioner. Before I became Mayor, we had never received over a million dollars in appropriations. For two years straight we reached well over \$3 million, \$3.5, \$4 million dollars. That took a unified front. That took a real methodical approach. We had to be very thoughtful and be very careful on how we did things. I've never gone to Dade Days. I've never been up there and done that type of experience. It's always been to go and work on behalf of the city and accomplish a goal of bringing appropriations down here. We failed miserably last year. We fell on our face. The Vice Mayor and myself did not attend last year, as a result of politics that were being played. So, my point is this, we can either lead or we can go in 50 different directions. I'm a believer that we should attack it one person, two people, sit down with the Senators, sit down with the State Reps, get the business at hand that's done, shore up our appropriation needs and move on. That's what I think is critically important, and that's why I'm putting this forward. It's a clarification. Its very simple. It shouldn't be taken as a personal jab or attack. It should be just move forward, keep moving forward. Keep progressing in the city and hopefully bringing back money for, example the Gondola Building where we brought back over \$900,000 for the renovation of the Gondola Building. I think that's a good thing that's going to help us out in the near future when we commence that project.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. I was only one of the Commission to go ahead and represent the city this whole session, and those appropriations still haven't been approved. Okay. For the previous session, where Commissioner Ariel Fernandez and Kirk Menendez did go with me, I just want to go ahead and let Commissioner Lara know that our Mayor was making phone calls so that elected officials would not see us. I saw with my own eyes. Its not a fable. Its true. And some of them got confused and actually cancelled the meetings for the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce instead of two of the elected officials. So that was definitely not in the best interest of the city, and somebody was working against us. Politics. Instead of working for what's in the best interest of the city, which is really sad, really, really sad.

Mayor Lago: So, now that we've heard, like she said, a fable, now we can move on to the business at hand. So, we have a motion and a second. Please call the roll.

Commissioner Fernandez: I have some comments.

Mayor Lago: Through the Mayor.

Commissioner Fernandez: I was letting you finish. The approach that we've taken over the last two years has been an approach that was set forth by our in-house Government Affairs team and our three lobbying teams in Tallahassee. That approach was changed this year at their recommendation. We changed their policies. We, in fact, I had numerous conversations with two of our lobbying teams about what the right approach would be moving forward in Tallahassee. Their recommendation was that every member of the Commission should make at least one trip, which is the trip that I made this year. They went as far as saying, the Mayor and Vice Mayor should also come up. You guys did not come up this past year, because its important for the legislators to see every member of the Commission is on board with these principles and these policies and that we are a united front up there. So, that was part of the approach. We made it through the House and the Senate with \$1.8 million dollars last year. The Governor vetoed that as part of a restructuring within the Governor's Office of Infrastructure Projects that he believes should go through a grant process, which has now been set up for this year. So, its not it wasn't successful. We were able to get it through the Legislature; the Governor's Office was the one that did not move forward our project, like it didn't in South Miami's, like it didn't in West Miami's and other neighboring municipalities who also were on the chopping block because they were infrastructure projects. So, its not about who went. Its about what was presented and what the final projects were that he was or was not on board. We had very productive meetings with the Historic Preservation Department in Tallahassee who gave us ideas that we pitched to our Historic Preservation Director on different ways that we can utilize their department, grants that we would be able to apply for that in the past the city has not applied for. I had conversations with our federal lobbyist. Never made a trip up there, but I did have conversations with our federal lobbyist about ways that we can start tapping into additional resources in Washington as well. They are working on potential ways to do it. Having been in Tallahassee for many years lobbying, I can tell you there is no perfect, there is no magic sauce. Every session is different. Every session's priorities are different by the Legislature, and by the Governor. Right now, we have a very interesting dynamic. They don't even have a budget going forward. They are so far apart on what they are going to pitch. So, I will be voting against this because I do not believe we should be delegating more responsibilities to the Office of Mayor. I believe this is something that's up to the Commission and we have done so very well. Even last year, voting on delegations who went, who did not, whoever was available would make the trips, whoever was not, did not make the trips. So, I don't see this as necessary.

Mayor Lago: So, I'm going to respond and then we'll take the roll call. The proof is in the pudding. The first two years that I was Mayor, we hit record numbers. Last year, you can ask for a public record, Commissioner Fernandez said, don't worry, the Mayor needs to go, I'm going to take care of it. I'm going to deliver. You delivered zero. I will tell you, the Vice Mayor heard it also, please correct me if I'm wrong. Multiple State Representatives and Senators said, you will get appropriations when you lower your salaries, when you remove your car allowances, when you

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make a November election. That was the stigma that you went up there with, and you had a goose egg. So, at the end of the day, you can shine it any way you want, the proof is in the number. You can blame it on the Governor. When I was up there, I had meetings with the Governor, in an effort to not get vetoed. The first two years we didn't get vetoed, but you got vetoed. I know its tough to swallow, but at the end of the day, why don't you let the professionals handle things and let things moving forward get addressed, as they need to be professionally handled, because I have a proven track record in Tallahassee of getting things done, and when I speak to my lobbyist, our lobbyists, the three different companies and the State Representatives and Senators, they say, less is more. You don't need to bring a whole bandwagon of people up here at the end of the day, and it cost the city more money. You've been ineffective. The proof is in the pudding as I said. Last year you got zero dollars. So, I think this is the way that it works. Its more concise, its more to the point. We are focused. Yesterday, I had breakfast with a State Representative dealing with these issues, preparing for this year, but if you think you can handle it again this year, then go ahead and handle it, and if you actually believe what Melissa Castro is telling you, that I went and worked against the city, I have some swamp land to sell you.

Commissioner Castro: I have proof.

Mayor Lago: You're interrupting me.

Commissioner Castro: Think about really good what you're saying because I have proof.

Mayor Lago: You're interrupting me. You're interrupting me. I have some swamp land to sell you in the Everglades. So, please call the roll Mr. Clerk.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: No

Commissioner Fernandez: No

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 3-2)