

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
September 26, 2023
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 Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Assistant City Attorney, Naomi Levi-Garcia
Finance Director, Diana Gomez

Public Speaker(s)

Doug Mayer
Maria Cruz

Agenda Item F-4 [2:22 p.m.]
Discussion regarding annexation.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: F-4.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay, F-4. Last week, we had the annexation Sunshine meeting at High Pines and Ponce Davis, and there were several concerns that were raised by those in the area. For me, it was an eye-opening experience to see the overwhelming lack of interest in annexation

from those who were present. Out of the 24 people who spoke, 21 were against annexation, 3 were in favor. However, there were specific allegations made about the reasons the City wants to annex these areas, and I wanted to start by giving us all an opportunity to clear the doubts presented. So, I've taken the liberty of bringing copies of an affidavit signed by the Mayor in 2022 and just made two minor changes. One, I've added High Pines and Ponce Davis, the original one just said Little Gables, and second is to include the County's updated definition of relatives. This signed affidavit would make it clear that we, as individuals, have no personal benefit to annexation of Little Gables, High Pines, or Ponce Davis using Miami-Dade's definition. The affidavit reads as follows: City of Coral Gables, Florida, Affidavit of Commissioner Ariel Fernandez. Before me, the undersigned authority personally appeared Commissioner Ariel Fernandez who, after being duly sworn and under penalty of perjury, deposes and states as follows: I am Ariel Fernandez. I am the Commissioner of the City of Coral Gables. The facts set forth herein are within my personal knowledge and are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. I am over the age of majority. Neither I nor any member of my immediate family -- number one, which is defined, immediate family is defined in accordance with the Miami-Dade County Ethics Code, Section 2-11.1(b)(9) as spouse, domestic partner, parents, step-parents, siblings, half-siblings, step-siblings, children and stepchildren of the person involved -- have any property or business interest in any property or business located within the boundaries of the areas commonly referred to as Little Gables, High Pines, and Ponce Davis. Pursuant to Section 11705.13(a) of Florida Statutes, the following notarial certificate is sufficient for an acknowledgement of an individual capacity. So, I took the liberty of making a copy for each one of us so that we can all sign the affidavit and then we can move on with the discussion.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suárez: Mayor, I just want to state that I have not had an opportunity to review this affidavit. I know that the Commissioner read it out loud, but I just -- you know, to be candid on the record, I have not had an opportunity to review this, so I cannot give you any advice as to what you should do or not do.

Commissioner Fernandez: Can we take a 15-minute recess so you can review it?

Mayor Lago: I don't need a 15 minute break.

City Attorney Suárez: Sorry.

Mayor Lago: I don't -- let the firefighters.

City Attorney Suárez: There is no requirement that these affidavits be signed by any member of the Commission.

Mayor Lago: Of course. I understand that. And I understand what we're doing here. It's okay. It's perfectly fine. I'll sign it. Listen, just to put some things on the record, like I told you. Madam

City Attorney, you and I had a conversation in regards to the affidavit that I signed. You were here along with then City Attorney Miriam Ramos. And I think I spoke to you, I think it was a few months ago, right? Yeah, I spoke to you a few months ago because this continues. Because if we're going to have a candid conversation, I think we should have a candid conversation about this issue. And I perfectly welcome it. If you like, we can do it here. As a result of our Miami-Dade County firefighters and the extensive amount of effort that they've made in lobbying the county and hiring blogs and all kinds of things. They've written articles stating that I have a conflict of interest in Little Gables, High Pines, and Ponce Davis. All those articles made their way to the Ethics Commission and they swamped the Ethics Commission stating that I had a conflict of interest, costing me having me to hire an Attorney along with my brother and a litany of other people in High Pines and Ponce Davis, from what I've heard. The cost has been exorbitant. At the end of the day, this is the way that politics is. People want to go down this route in an effort to derail the process of annexation, which I believe, and I firmly believe, that we're in the process right now of petition gathering and that the process should continue because it's a democratic process. I met with the Ethics Commission, and I presented to the Ethics Commission another affidavit. And that affidavit was given to them by Miriam Ramos. And that affidavit was created by Miriam Ramos saying that she was the individual that created the affidavit that I signed. At the end of the day, the explanation for siblings and for everything else was taken directly from the Ethics Commission Board. Everybody knows very clearly that my brother moved into Ponce Davis three years ago. He's entitled to live anywhere he likes and he lives in that area. Would that give me a conflict? With my brother living in an area in this community?

City Attorney Suárez: I don't believe that would be a conflict, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I do not own any business in High Pines, Ponce Davis, or Little Gables. Neither does anybody in my family. Neither does anybody that I'm aware of. I've asked everybody in my family. Again, we can do this all day. I'm trying to do the best that I can to lead and be as straight up, forthcoming, and kind and thoughtful as I possibly can. If you want me to sign this and this is another got you moment, I don't have a problem. I'll sign. Here you go.

Commissioner Fernandez: This is not a got you moment.

Mayor Lago: No, it's fine.

Commissioner Fernandez: This is...

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, if you don't...

Commissioner Fernandez: A conversation that we...

Mayor Lago: If you don't...

Commissioner Fernandez: Let me finish. I'm just answering your point. You signed this same affidavit. It just listed Little Gables. I'm asking for all of us to sign because there were specific allegations going after every member of the Commission, and I think most of us were there. And there were -- we need to clear up any doubt that the community has about what is driving the annexation discussion. And that will tone down the conversation and make it about annexation. Because at the end of the day, that's what these discussions should be about. And I think a good hour of that meeting revolved around other things that had nothing to do with annexation.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I think we should have a conversation about annexation openly, showing that we have no specific interest in these areas.

Mayor Lago: Let me respond to you. That is why I signed the affidavit in public when I signed it and Miriam Ramos produced it. And when that was dragged back into the Ethics Commission, again, because of what's occurring with Miami-Dade County firefighters, Billy McAllister, and all the blogs that are writing these things that are propped up and then sent out, it has resulted in now waiting for a clearance letter from the Ethics Commission. As you're aware -- because you were on a radio station before you got elected -- you said that I was under investigation and so was my brother. I have a clearance letter saying that I was not under investigation. But I don't have a problem signing this because I have a very clear conscience in my efforts in regards to annexation and in my -- and in what I'm doing here in the City. I will do my best to lead and I don't have a problem signing this at all. I just think -- I wish we would try to tackle the issues at hand and move forward with a litany of things that are happening here in the City, from the budget to good legislation. And I feel that sometimes we fall short and we're getting caught in just the political back and forth that serves nobody. It doesn't serve this community. It doesn't serve any of our efforts to move forward. So...

Commissioner Fernandez: And this was yours. This was your affidavit that you brought -- you signed in 2022. The only difference is I've added High Pines and Ponce Davis, which was excluded from that affidavit, and I've updated the definition as given by Miami-Dade County four months before you signed that affidavit.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right. Now, the change in the definition is a significant change, and not that it bothers me because it doesn't affect me, but I do think, Mayor, take the time and read it.

Mayor Lago: Of course. The only...

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think -- I...

Mayor Lago: But as long as -- excuse me, Madam Vice Mayor. The only issue that I would have here with this would be issue that my brother lives in Ponce Davis. That's the only issue because I don't own anything else.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm saying so you amend the language accordingly. So, as far as the allegation that there was something about the rest of the Commission, there was nothing about the rest of the Commission in the meeting. And you're always going to have certain individuals with their own agendas talking about things during a meeting, some of them half-truths, some of them exaggerations. But that doesn't mean it is something that we should devolve in as a basically embracing them as being the truth, because that doesn't make them true. Just because something is said a thousand times by one person that's the loudest person in the room doesn't make it true. I was in the back of the room just -- you know, I didn't care to listen. And what happened is you have people that went on one side and one -- people that went on the other side. And a lot of folks that were putting their cards in the box to vote, you know, not vote, but you know, the petition process, one way or another, said they were unwilling to get up and talk because of the fear of being harassed by the others.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, a lot of people left.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, you know, we do need to let this process go out and finish so it can be finished and so it's not half done.

Mayor Lago: And if...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let the people vote. And I understand, and I understand what the intent of this is. The intent is for me not to sign it, to make me look guilty, so they can run another story and continue running the story. You know how it is, my friend in the back. I see you smirking. You know how this is. And it's a fun thing to continue playing back and forth and hitting and hitting and hitting and hitting. My brother lives in Ponce Davis. That's the only conflict that I could see. And if you tell me it's not a conflict, I welcome it.

City Attorney Suárez: I think it's important that I emphasize once again, there's no legal requirement or obligation that any of you sign this affidavit.

Mayor Lago: Tell me.

City Attorney Suárez: You're not required to sign it, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay, but what is --? What will be a conflict?

City Attorney Suárez: As you know, that has -- conflicts have to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis because the specific facts always matter. I do not believe that your brother living in this area, in an area that could potentially be annexed or owning, you know, his residence there would be a conflict.

Mayor Lago: Okay, perfect. There you go. Done. Moving on, now, can we get into actual issues here? What else do you have? Tell me.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right. First question that came about was regarding the vote and the petition. The process of the petition. Residents of High Pines and Ponce Davis have stated on numerous occasions that there's a difference in opinions on whether they should be part of Coral Gables or not. High Pines has more residents against it than in favor. Ponce Davis has more of a tendency towards leaning towards annexation. The question that was posed was regarding splitting the vote and ensuring that the voters of High Pines have an ability to vote on this issue separate from Ponce Davis. The answer that we got was that the County is trying to do away with, what was the word?

City Attorney Suárez: Enclaves.

City Manager Iglesias: Enclaves.

Commissioner Fernandez: Enclaves. But do we have that anywhere in writing from the County where the County says it cannot be separated?

City Manager Iglesias: No, Commissioner, but it's highly unlikely that they would separate something to create a secondary enclave. And so, they're bordered on three sides by Coral Gables, and that would remain the same. So, one of the reasons that the County -- that we want to remove that is so -- is to make services and public safety more efficient and better. But if we -- two is we don't really know where Ponce Davis and High Pines is. We've looked in -- I remember in a prior annexation, we looked to see what the definition was. It's not clear. And also we would be creating an enclave from an enclave.

Commissioner Fernandez: That answer maybe should have been presented there, which brings my concern about the consultant that we hired. The gentleman said that they're an engineering firm. Why did we hire an engineering firm to handle annexation?

City Manager Iglesias: He is an engineer, but he does this kind of work.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right, but they asked him if they were a public relations firm, and he said specifically, no, we're an engineering firm.

City Manager Iglesias: He's an industrial engineer, so he does this kind of work.

Commissioner Fernandez: How much have we spent of taxpayer dollars on this annexation process? Is our Finance Director here?

City Manager Iglesias: She's downstairs, she'll be coming up.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. Regarding the website, there was a question asked by a gentleman about whether there was going to be a Q&A section on the website regarding the questions that were asked at the town hall meeting. Are we going to be adding a section to the website to answer some of the questions that were left open-ended?

City Manager Iglesias: We have an email address where questions can be asked and they'll be answered.

Commissioner Fernandez: But they won't be made public? So, they won't be listed on the website?

City Manager Iglesias: We would have a substantial number of questions on the website. That's not what that website is for, but we do have that -- I believe it's the annexation email address, which all the questions will be answered there. Excuse me.

Commissioner Fernandez: Madam Director.

Finance Director Gomez: Good afternoon. So, the costs of the annexation incurred to date, as of a couple of days ago when I pulled the information, was \$144,878.

Commissioner Fernandez: How much of this came from having to resend the petitions?

Finance Director Gomez: So, the resend did not cost us anything extra. It was an -- if you're -- sorry, I ran up the stairs.

Commissioner Fernandez: No worries.

Finance Director Gomez: If you -- so as I understand, the resend was because there was not postage on the return envelope. That was an error by the printing company, the printing mailing company. They covered the cost of that. So, there's no additional cost because of that.

Commissioner Fernandez: And then we've also sent out text messages and possibly robocalls, I heard.

Finance Director Gomez: I don't...

City Manager Iglesias: We have not sent any text messages...

Finance Director Gomez: We have not.

City Manager Iglesias: Or robocalls, no.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. As far as timing, a question was asked regarding how often can this process be restarted? Because there were questions about, you know, this is the third time the City of Coral Gables is trying to do this and we haven't gotten there. The last one was less than four years ago. How often can we restart the process?

Finance Director Gomez: I don't have that.

City Attorney Suárez: So, as long as a commission decides to pursue it and gives that direction, it can be started. You cannot bind future commissions from not doing so.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right, so there is no County...?

City Attorney Suárez: Not that I'm aware of. There's no County restriction that would prohibit the City from pursuing annexation after, you know, it doesn't go through.

Commissioner Fernandez: I understand that what was sent out was a petition and that's why the answer was yes. Was there any text in that petition that stated, if you're in disagreement, do not send this back? No.

City Attorney Suárez: I don't believe so. I think it's -- it was sent it back if you are in support.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Correct. There was nothing on the petition that, you know, gave a "no" option or indicated to individuals that they were -- that if they felt negatively about the annexation, you know, they should withhold the petition. But it was, in my opinion, clear from the petition language that sending it in with your information was voicing your opinion in favor and giving the City the necessary vote it needed -- or not -- I shouldn't say vote, but the necessary expression of support that it needed to advance the process or really initiate the process.

Commissioner Fernandez: One of the things that was said there, some people were sending them back writing the word no. How are we tabulating those votes?

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: So, those don't really get tabulated. We do have them. We have to preserve them. They're a public record, but they don't get submitted to Miami-Dade County because Miami-Dade County only counts positive petitions. So, if we were to send them in, Miami-Dade County would disregard them. They're not required as part of the process enumerated in the County Code.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a quick question, but if there are people sending them back written no, that just is further proof that it's not clear for the regular person resident as to what to do or what not to do.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, this is the way we did last time.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: We could conclude that. I also think people just feel very -
- some people feel very strongly and want the City to know that they feel very strongly.

City Manager Iglesias: This is what we did last time. I think it was clear. I think, yes, I believe that people feel very strongly and want to express their opinion.

Commissioner Menendez: That was my question.

Commissioner Fernandez: There were specific references made to development that I thought were also very important. There was a concern by those in the room that Coral Gables doesn't listen to its own residents and the argument being made is that we will listen to them regarding annexation, whatever they want with their neighborhood. That was tied in with a bigger question, which is why is Coral Gables so interested in annexing us? And there was no clear answer. So I wanted to know what the clear answer is from staff's perspective on why Coral Gables is so interested in annexing High Pines, Ponce Davis and Little Gables.

City Manager Iglesias: It is an enclave. We -- from a policing perspective, I think our chief feels very comfortable that it would improve our policing efforts. And also, from a fire effort, that we can go through the entire area without going around it. So, we feel from a policing perspective that it's an enclave and that's why the County looks at enclaves in a negative way. They also mentioned that we were looking at that because we wanted them to fund our pension plan, which is completely untrue. We're funding our pension plan just fine. We don't need anybody's help. And we'll be through -- and if we do what we propose, we'll be through with that in eight years. I also think that that area, in my opinion, fits Coral Gables very well. It's a hole that we have in Coral Gables. And I think filling it would be good from a service perspective and from a public safety perspective.

Commissioner Fernandez: There was also a question about sidewalks and it brings us to the question about finances. I think High Pines and Ponce Davis think they're going to be a donor community to Coral Gables. Can you run through the financial aspect of annexation, and I guess, over the next five years if we were to proceed with annexation, where would we be financially with the annexation of these areas? Are Coral Gables residents going to be subsidizing these areas, or is it going to be the other way around?

City Manager Iglesias: I don't think so. I think High Pines-Ponce Davis is a donor community. However, they will be getting enhanced benefits from that above, in my opinion, what the County provides. The County provides fine service. I think we provide a very premium service. And so -- and as far as Little Gables, I think in five years it will be absorbed into North Gables and will be just like North Gables.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, we're talking about five years. So, in these -- in the first five years, would the annexation of High Pines and Ponce Davis cover the expense of an annexation of Little Gables?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Or would we still be upside down?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Staffing-wise, what are we looking at as far as increased staffing with the annexation of High Pines and Ponce Davis?

City Manager Iglesias: I believe we had a meeting with you, Commissioner, and with Commissioner Castro, and we went over everything.

Commissioner Fernandez: Agreed.

City Manager Iglesias: I don't have that information here, but I'll be happy to give it to you again if you wish.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think this information needs to be public information. It should be placed as well on this website. If we're talking about what annexation's going to represent...

City Manager Iglesias: It is on our website.

Commissioner Fernandez: So the number of positions is on the site?

City Manager Iglesias: It is on the website, yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. Timeline, where are we right now as far as annexation? I know we're in the petition phase. What -- where does this end? What comes next? What are we looking at?

City Manager Iglesias: We plan on coming back either in the second meeting in October, first meeting in December with the petitions. If we have over 20 percent in those petitions, we come back to the Commission to move forward with the application.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. And then following that, what happens?

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: If the Commission adopts a resolution directing staff to submit the application and that would require the 20 percent threshold in each of the areas, we'd have to prepare the application. We do have a foundation of what the application would look like and we have to submit it to the Clerk of the BCC and then the ball's in their court. And so, you know, timing wise, we'd be working towards a 2024 general election in November, but much of the process is dictated by the County once those applications are submitted. And so we're kind of

at their mercy. Several hearings need to take place. There has to be mailed notice to both communities, you know, has to go to a -- the PAB. It has to go to a committee hearing. So, I outlined -- at our last Commission meeting, I provided, you know, each and every step that needs to take place in the annexation process. It's very difficult to give you an exact timeline, but you know, I can provide those slides again so you can kind of see all the steps that would have to take place.

Commissioner Fernandez: Being at that meeting, I do have concerns. I've also heard from many residents who do not believe we should be annexing additional areas if we already have deficiencies right now. We're obviously talking about continuing to kick the can down the road on some of our projects due to our City's finances. And I don't know if this is the time for us to bring in additional areas that we're going to have to invest into to bring to Coral Gable standards. Open it up for discussion from my colleagues.

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

City Attorney Suárez: Can I address two points, Mayor? First, I had an opportunity to just review some of the statements in the affidavit with the Mayor. And number two says neither I nor any member of my immediate family have any property or any business interests in the boundaries of these areas. As the Mayor just stated on the record, his brother does own property in that area, so he cannot sign the affidavit because it wouldn't be truthful.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, but what he's trying to do -- and I signed one for Little Gables. And what they're trying to do is also bring in High Pines and Ponce Davis knowing that my brother lives there. I've said it on the record multiple times. So, again, he has a residence there. He doesn't represent the annexation efforts. He doesn't represent any clients there. He just chose, I think, three years ago when he bought there, to buy a beautiful home and start his family there. He got married and he had a son. So, at the end of the day, if that is the result of me not being able to sign the document, I'll sign it for everything else. I don't own property. None of my family members own property. We don't own businesses. We have no conflicts. We're not representing anybody in the annexation effort, no legal clients, none of that. But I can't get away from the fact that he owns a property in Ponce Davis. I don't know how that's a conflict. I give it up to my City Attorney, but I'm willing to sign the document. But as long as it does not own one -- obviously, he does own a property there. But the previous document that I signed dealt with Little Gables because, as you remember very clearly, you stated on the record that I was under investigation by the Ethics Commission because my brother owned property or I owned property or represented clients and different things like that. That's water under the bridge. We're moving on from that. We'll deal with that another day after everything gets addressed. But to deal with the affidavit today, what is your recommendation, Madam City Attorney?

City Attorney Suárez: My recommendation, Mayor, is if you do intend to sign an affidavit, that you give me time to revise this and prepare it and review it carefully, including the provisions of the...

Mayor Lago: Not a problem.

City Attorney Suárez: The various provisions that are cited of the Florida Statutes and the ethics code, and then do it at a later date. I -- you know, I prefer not...

Mayor Lago: I'm willing to...

City Attorney Suárez: To rush this.

Mayor Lago: I'm willing to do it today. I don't have a problem.

City Attorney Suárez: Understood.

Mayor Lago: I would have...

City Attorney Suárez: It's my preference. If...

Mayor Lago: And I agree with you. And I agree with you. And I would have done it. I would have done it today. I would do it right now. If you'd like to prepare it before the meeting ends and you're ready to sign it and you include that my brother owns a property in High Pines, that could be the only exclusion on the affidavit. But if I would have known that this was coming and it wasn't gotcha politics, you know, with the Herald here and our friends, the firefighters, in the back, I would have been ready to sign this without a problem. I'm ready to sign it. I signed it. I just got to notarize it.

City Attorney Suárez: I would prefer an opportunity to review it carefully, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Not a problem. I'm more than willing, if my colleague who just gave me that, is willing to give me that.

Commissioner Fernandez: I have the opportunity to do so. I just used the affidavit you signed last time, which did not have High Pines in Ponce Davis, and I gave it to all of my colleagues so that we could all sign it. I signed mine. I submitted it to the Clerk. I have -- I want to make sure that moving forward on this issue, we have no question marks and no shadows over the City of Coral Gables when it comes to annexation. That we're moving forward, if we're moving forward with annexation, with no clouds over our heads.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I don't think we have any clouds over our heads at all. The record is very, very clear. I'll sign the affidavit. I think it's patently obvious I have no property in any of these areas. Okay, I may have some friends, you know, some residents, and I've talked to them. I have no clients whatsoever that do business there or do business with the City, none.

Commissioner Menendez: My thoughts is, Madam City Attorney, just, you know, get back to us what the -- what can or can't be signed and what can or can't be done, whatever the rules are, the law.

City Attorney Suárez: Can I address one more point, Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am, of course.

City Attorney Suárez: So, on the question of further creating enclaves, the County Code does say that at the conclusion of the public hearing, the Board of County Commissioners in evaluating the appropriateness of a petition for incorporation shall consider the following guidelines. One of those guidelines is have contiguity and not create any unincorporated enclave areas. And it defines what the unincorporated enclave area is, just so that we're all clear.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay, can we add that to the website as part of the answer to that question?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, we can. And I wanted to clarify what I mentioned about the website. We've added our presentation to the website so everything should be there. The presentation that you saw that day.

Commissioner Fernandez: And tomorrow we do have the annexation meeting for Little Gables, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: Tomorrow.

Commissioner Fernandez: At what time?

City Manager Iglesias: I'll see you tomorrow at 6:30.

Commissioner Fernandez: And that's at the police and fire headquarters.

City Manager Iglesias: Police and fire.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Do we have anything else for the good of the order on this item?

City Attorney Suárez: Mr. Manager, I just want to clarify, is tomorrow's meeting at 6 or 6:30?

City Manager Iglesias: It's at 6.

Mayor Lago: 6:30.

City Manager Iglesias: I believe it's 6:30, no?

Commissioner Fernandez: 6:30.

City Manager Iglesias: 6:30.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, this was...

Mayor Lago: If I may, just one last comment before -- before we move on. Madam City Attorney, will you do me a favor, like we did last time with the affidavit that I signed? Once you're done and you include my brother that he owns property in Ponce Davis, will you make sure I sign it, notarize it, and upload it on the computer so everyone can have a copy of it? Please.

City Attorney Suárez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, we have...

Mayor Lago: What were you saying, Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: We have a request of members of the public requesting to speak on this item.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

City Clerk Urquia: All speakers are through Zoom at the moment. First speaker is Doug Mayer. Doug Mayer.

Mayor Lago: Ma'am, the floor is yours.

City Clerk Urquia: Not responding. I also had Maria Cruz as a speaker on this item.

Doug Mayer: I'm sorry. I was trying to respond. Can you hear me?

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am. Please take your time.

Mr. Mayer: Again, my name...

Mayor Lago: Or sir, excuse me.

Mr. Mayer: My name is Doug Mayer. I live at 1101 Cortez Street in Little Gables. I wanted to address you today because the idea of annexation is something that my wife and I have been opposed to since we first moved into Little Gables about four years ago. And in fact, we moved into Little Gables because we did not want to be in Coral Gables. And after hearing that the City was trying again to annex Little Gables, I started talking to some of my neighbors and many of them were opposed to annexation. They didn't want the higher tax base. They didn't want the obtrusive rules and regulations that Coral Gables imposes. We were happy where we were and we didn't want to be part of Coral Gables. And to that end, we have formed an organization called Neighbors for the Preservation of Little Gables. And we are adamant that we do not want to be part of your City. And you're going to be hearing from us at Commission meetings. You're going to be hearing from us whenever there's an opportunity to speak in regard to this issue. And I just hope that many of -- and many of my neighbors have lived in Little Gables for 20, 30, 40 years. And some of them feel like they're being harassed by the City because this is like the third or fourth time in the last, I don't know, 10 years that they've tried to push the annexation issue. We just want you to leave us the hell alone and let us live in our enclave, as it's called. We're happy there, and we don't need or want to be part of Coral Gables. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Maria Cruz.

Maria Cruz: Good afternoon. Mrs. Maria Cruz. I think there has to come a time when we accept that we cannot get everything we want. And based on what's going on with our city today, based on the fact that we don't have money to do the things that our residents want, why is this insistence in annexing anybody? Frankly, they made it very clear, they're not interested. They're not interested. Why do we continue spending money, consultants, meetings, posters, printing, when we do not have money for our residents, the ones that pay our taxes. I think this is very ill-advised, talking about being very financially, I guess, conservative. We're not. We're throwing money down the drain at a point where we do not have the money to throw. I think enough is enough. Cut your losses while you're ahead and stop spending money because we do not have money to spend, according to all of you. We have -- we do not have money for what we, the residents, want and we're spending money for what may or may not happen. I think anybody who doesn't -- who lives in Coral Gables or doesn't live in Coral Gables reads the papers, listens to the radio, is aware of what's going on here. Why would anybody want to come and join now when we don't know whether we're coming or going, where we don't know what we're doing, where we still do not have money to pave our streets, where we don't have money for -- to do things that our residents are clamoring for. Enough. I know this is probably a legacy project, but you know what, there are no legacy projects in Coral Gables if the residents do not want it. Stop spending our money. Bye.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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

Mayor Lago: Alright. We'll close the public comment. Is there anything else for the good of the order before we move on? No, we're good?

Commissioner Fernandez: I guess we'll be here tomorrow.

Mayor Lago: Alright.

DRAFT