

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-13
July 1, 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)

Mr. Prescott, Representing the Biltmore Hotel

Agenda Item F-13 [5:21 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing the City Manager and City Attorney to negotiate and prepare all necessary documentation, including certain key terms, to authorize the operators of the Biltmore Hotel to charge for parking at the west parking lot. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-13.

City Attorney Suarez: F-13 is a Resolution of the City Commission authorizing the City Manager and City Attorney to negotiate and prepare all necessary documentation, including certain key terms, to authorize the operators of the Biltmore Hotel to charge for parking at the west parking lot.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

City Commission Meeting

[Date]

1

July 1, 2025

*Agenda Item F-13 – Resolution authorizing the City Manager and City Attorney to negotiate
And prepare all necessary documents, authorize the operators of the Biltmore Hotel to charge for parking*

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: This item is something that we've been looking at for some time. It's parking in the west parking lot, its free parking now. A hotel like the Biltmore normally does not have free parking and it's being abused by a lot of people, a lot of non-residents. So, we view this as a large potential source of income for restoration of the parking lot and restoration of the Biltmore Hotel. We've had some prior discussions so that all the money generated by the parking lot would be initially to redo the parking lot and after that 100 percent for restoration of the Biltmore Hotel. What we need to do is come up with the final percentages and so forth, as far as where the monies are going. However, from a percentage point of view, not for where they are actually going to go which is restoration of the Biltmore Hotel and the parking. So, we have some rates to negotiate and a number of contractual issues to negotiate and we'd like to bring this back in August with a final document.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Good afternoon, sir. How are you. Thank you for being here with us. It's a long time coming.

Mr. Prescott: Since 2022, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Long time coming. One of the issues that I've been facing and I know that my colleagues on the Commission have also is the amount of people that are again, illegally parking on the facility, and you notice it really at night when it's the same cars that are parked in a location where they shouldn't be parked and there are certain things that again, are infuriating, we won't speak about here, but that shouldn't be occurring on that parking lot and they do. So, at the end of the day, we need to put certain parameters, in my opinion, to make sure that we safeguard this city asset, while you run it, again, at the end of the day, it's a city asset and we need to do everything in our power to make sure it runs the right way. And also, I think to be able to draw financially from it, I think is a benefit, because all that money through the leadership of the Commission will be used to be reinvested into the asset. I think one of the biggest things that the asset needs is a refresh of the parking lot. I know it's costly, but there are a lot of things that again need to be refreshed. I think it will benefit the asset significantly. So, moving forward, we are bringing this forward today, because I want to hear a little bit about what you need and how we can be of assistance and a good partner. It's been too long since we brought this forward.

Mr. Prescott: Well, I thank you, but I think the Manager and yourself summed it up best. I know that I've had discussions with everybody for several years on this matter. There is not much more that I could add to that. Unfortunately, last night when we were actually sold out, which is a good thing at the hotel, we actually had to give back credits and discounts and refunds due to the fact

that some people who drove actually were unable to do so, because there's a number of cars that are in there that we've been working with the city to try to identify. So, everything you said is, I couldn't really expand on that any further. I agree that the investment needs to be done. We have actually, as the Biltmore itself independent of the city continue to try to do so and we'll continue to do that. Working in partnership with the city, that is what we absolutely hope to do.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: How can we expedite this. Need a motion.

City Attorney Suarez: Yes. It's a resolution directing us, so it's a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'll move it.

Commissioner Lara: Second.

Mayor Lago: So, Mr. Manager, we'll have this in August.

City Manager Iglesias: August.

Mayor Lago: Ready to go. Okay. And you are going to designate what, obviously the investment and the breakdown.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, and the breakdown. All the investment, to be clear, is going to the Biltmore restoration. Initially to the parking lot restoration, once that is paid, it goes to the Biltmore restoration 100 percent, that's not an issue, we are just working out the parameters of that.

Mayor Lago: One of the things that we also need there is, and I know it will be, to your benefit, cameras. There's a lot more kinds of visual presents, because again, at night it gets dark there. There are a lot of events, there are a lot of people coming in and out and I want to make sure that.

Mr. Prescott: We have a number of PGZ, but we've also talked with Chief Hudak about other cameras as well for the purposes that you're sighting. We improved the lighting.

Mayor Lago: It looks much better.

Mr. Prescott: But we have more to do, so we don't have a problem with that.

Mayor Lago: And it's also, by the way, the lighting is catchy, it's a touchy, not catchy, it's a touchy issue because you have to find a balancing act. The residents want more lighting, but then it's too much lighting, it bothers the neighborhood. I get it and I understand.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor. But you raise a very important point, right. So, I've been seeing this trend lately. Private businesses, if patrons, invited guests are injured or worse, one of

City Commission Meeting

the number one plans of attack when litigation ensues, is to go through the negligence security theory and what they have is a playbook of, did you request a crime grid, have you done a study regarding the lighting, have you listened to anybody from police regarding adequate video or guard presence. So, free advice, you know. I know you said that you spoke with Chief Hudak, but make sure that you take this opportunity to kind of have a conversation with him once again to ensure that your plan is comprehensive and that it's backed by them, because it's an ounce of prevention scenario.

Mayor Lago: I concur. Yes ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The ounce of prevention could include cameras to prevent false claims.

Mr. Prescott: Thankfully it's not a [Inaudible] situation.

Vice Mayor Anderson: What?

Mr. Prescott: I understand it's not a joint [Inaudible] situation, but I understand exactly what you're saying.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, I know. It's unfortunately necessary.

Mr. Prescott: It's a different world. I understand.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's a different world and we have to protect ourselves.

Mayor Lago: So, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: I have a member of the public requesting to speak on this item, Mr. Mayor, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. This item goes back several years, but I find it very interesting to begin with that we just talked about, I guess it was an item, oh I forgot, the Miracle Theater. We talked about how they asked for money, we shouldn't have given them the money, because they had a contract to take care of that facility and we all agreed on that, but now, we are going officially give the Biltmore the way to do this. There's a problem. This was discussed many years ago. Many years ago, when the Biltmore put signs up and was charging without getting permission to do so, that's how it all began. And then, there was an argument that the U.S. Parks Department, I think, whatever, whoever gave us the Biltmore, there is an issue that that could not be done. Okay. So, I suggest, and I've already requested the minutes involving the discussion, because we had a long discussion and the end result was that the city could take over the parking when Mr. Kinney was here, he offered to run that as a city parking lot, okay. That was the decision at that point, he could do that, but that parking lot didn't belong to the Biltmore. It was a separate

thing. That's okay. By the time you all think about it, I'll have the minutes, because I know it was a very long discussion because it came about from the fact that the Biltmore was charging and signs were up and then when the city said, no you cannot do it, they would cover them and then they would remove them to be able to collect. Peter must remember that. It was a big discussion on that. So, I have requested the minutes, everything that was discussed because I think there were some legal issues about it.

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

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Close the public comment. So, in an answer, in an effort to once again clarify the record, because we have no choice, because the whole thing is to confuse as much as possible. We don't need to wait for public records. If you'd like to see the public records, ask for Billy, he'll get them for you. Madam City Attorney, will you address the legality of our ability to...

City Attorney Suarez: So, Mayor, we've been going through the process with the National Parks Service to convert that designation from Parks to the Historic Monument and we believe that will be done by the time the documentation is all finalized.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Thank you very much. So again, there is no reason to conflate, there is no reason to mislead, there's no reason to scare, there is no reason to continued effort to stall, hinder, stop, there's no need. We've been working on things for a long time. It's already in the works. And by the way, the issue of the Miracle Theater, like was just mentioned right now, we gave them this, we gave them that. Yes, but the Miracle Theater does not give us a dollar. We give them, Mr. Manager, how much do we charge for rent there?

City Manager Iglesias: Minimal – minimal amount.

Mayor Lago: A dollar a year.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, considering the property is a token amount.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Mr. Prescott, how much do you pay in rent?

Mr. Prescott: Over \$2 million dollars a year.

Mayor Lago: And if we charge for parking here, which by the way, I think I'm going to go on a limb here, okay, 99.9 percent of hotels charge for parking, correct.

Mr. Prescott: There's no place we found that doesn't charge for parking in some way, shape or form.

Mayor Lago: So, there has to be law and order. It cannot be a free-for-all where people are parking in our parking lot and then catching an Uber to the airport so that they can save \$50 a day at the

City Commission Meeting

airport. I see this happen all day and you know who tells me this all the time, Willie Bermello, who lives in front of the building, which we all heard from Willie saying, Vince, the amount of people parking in and driving with an Uber to the airport to save a few hundred dollars in parking is absurd and it's an insult to the city. It's the same situation we are dealing with are trash pits in regard to their green matter. Everybody in town dumps in the City of Coral Gables and it costs us millions of dollars a year, but we don't want to face it. It's the same situation we are having with you, but guess what, we're facing it today. We are dealing with the issue. So, for the record, because you've heard back-to-back-to-back-to-back issues to try to confuse, stop processes moving forward, laughing, giggling, the whole nine yards in the back. How much are we going to make from the parking, not a number, a breakdown.

Mr. Prescott: Well, I personally think that it will make a sizeable amount just in the period that it was charging which back immediately to the lighting that enhanced, of course, the parking lot. You're looking at potentially millions of dollars. To tell you the truth, if you look at it over the course of a period. I have another property on the west coast of Florida where we charge for parking, and we average about \$85-\$90,000 a month that goes directly back into restoration purposes.

Mayor Lago: And what is the breakdown in regard to the percentage that the city would receive, which wouldn't come to the city, it would go into restoration of the asset that we own.

Mr. Prescott: 100 percent.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, we are leaving a lot of money on the table, correct, just to give you free parking.

Mr. Prescott: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Another question because we don't want to scare people, laughing and giggling, taking photos and doing all these things that are happening in the back. Okay. Do you think the parking lot and that area will be safer by controlling parking?

Mr. Prescott: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay. If the city asset is going to benefit and then we are going to reinvest that into the facility, it's going to be safer, I can't find a reason why not to support this.

Mr. Prescott: Thank you. I agree. As you know, for several years.

Mayor Lago: Alright. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second, correct.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

City Commission Meeting

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Mayor, just to clarify. The Miracle Theater, the token amount is zero.

Mayor Lago: So, the Miracle Theater pays zero dollars, and we are giving them \$41,000. How do you argue with that. I'd like to know how you argue with that. You know how many times I've gone there to receive a plaque or the last time I was there I paid. I paid \$10,000 for a table for the centennial for June Morris' event, personally paid for it. I don't go there for free. I don't go there for photo-ops to post, and you're telling me, hold on right now, that we gave them \$41,000 and by the way, just so you know, they sub-lease that property to churches, to other entities so they make money on our free lease and now we don't want to give you the opportunity to charge and 100 percent of it comes to us. By the way, Madam City Attorney, would this process be handled audited, would this be audited financials?

City Attorney Suarez: The process with – oh, we can negotiate all those points and its one of the things that we'll leave to the details of the accountability, we can negotiate.

Mayor Lago: But my point is, everything we do with the Biltmore is already audited financials.

Mr. Prescott: Correct. Everything is audited on an annual basis. So, you will see that every single year.

Mayor Lago: This is a standard operating procedure, just like the entity attached to the Youth Center should be audited financials. Okay. So, you're seeing a trend here. Let's not charge the Miracle Theater, let's not follow through on entities that are attached to the city. They go inactive, who cares, we'll deal with it later, it doesn't matter, if it has money, it doesn't matter, but at the end of the day, let's give you a hard time when you are telling me it's going to be safer, and the asset is going to benefit. Sorry about the diatribe. It's just extremely frustrating dealing with some of the stuff that we have to deal with. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir, we do.

Mayor Lago: Alright. And by the way, the point of me asking about the zero dollars is because I want people to see online every single rent. I want people to see what Starbucks is paying. I want people to see everything transparently, every single dollar. I think it's incredibly important. Yes sir.

City Manager Iglesias: Mr. Mayor, it's online right now.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Perfect.

Commissioner Lara: Yes

City Commission Meeting

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 4-0)

(Commissioner Fernandez: Absent)

Mr. Prescott: Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: We have a ball rolling. We are unanimous. Two votes in a row. This is amazing. God is good. God is good. I've dealt with this for two years man. I got my but kicked in for two years here.

Mr. Prescott: If I may, just one thing on an earlier subject. I was going to mention it to the Manager about the pavers that you mentioned. I don't know if it's something of enhanced stamped concrete with the thermoplastic covering and things that people are looking at that I've noticed recently. I'm not saying that's the solution, but it's something I had heard recently by a couple of people. If it helps. Just like I offered to Mr. Gomez to go to Carmel, Indiana and see the roundabouts. They have 150 there, I think.

Mayor Lago: And I know what you're talking about. The problem with stamp concrete it just doesn't...

Mr. Prescott: No, no, no. I'm just saying I've heard about it more. We don't deal with that, but I'm just saying.

Mayor Lago: But it's a great idea, but it just doesn't look...

Mr. Prescott: I understand.

Mayor Lago: Up to snuff for quality.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It wears very...

Mr. Prescott: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: No. Thank you.