

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-8
May 19, 2026
Public Safety Building, CMR
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Joanne
Chloe Chels

Agenda Item F-8 [Start: 2:45 p.m.]

Discussion regarding Pelican Harbor Seabird Station.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: All right. Let's move on to time certain item F-8 on the agenda. Give me one second. Hi, this is a discussion regarding Pelican Harbor Seabird Station. Thank you for being here with us. I put this on the agenda because I'd like to just have a quick presentation in regard to the great work that's being done in Pelican Harbor so we can potentially consider whether we can budget some money, if not, or somehow, some way offer them assistance in their efforts to protect our wildlife here in the community. So, the floor is yours. Take it away.

Joanne: Thank you. Coral Gables, 40-plus years and counting as a Tree City USA. With all this wonderful canopy, we are a bird sanctuary. And as such, we have a responsibility to sustain and support the bird populations that migrate through or call Coral Gables home. Now, you typically see me in my food pantry shirt here on Tuesdays or representing the Merrick House or the Miami
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Villagers or the Garden Club. But today, I have my Pelican Harbor Seabird Station swag on, my shirt, my bandana, and, of course, my possum earrings. I have been working in the outdoor rehab area for 10 years or so, and I'm continually amazed by the Herculean efforts of the staff and interns at this nonprofit rehab facility. And as they perform this good work on a miniscule budget, it is funded by donations from people like us. So Executive Director Chloe Chels, Assistant Director Julie Derrico, and our very special guest here are here to tell you about how we can partner with Pelican Harbor Seabird Station to rescue, rehab, and release native birds, mammals, and even tortoises and turtles.

Chloe Chels: Thank you, Joanne. Joanne's one of our star volunteers. My name is Chloe Chels. I'm Executive Director at Pelican Harbor, and Joanne was one of the first people I met about four years ago when I started. So, we brought Mowgli today. I have a presentation. I don't know if it's coming up or I can advance the slides. So, there we are. So, do I press this to advance? Oh, here. So, meet Mowgli. Mowgli is our Ambassador Eastern Screech Owl. She's about eight years old, and she's one of a number of ambassadors we have that go to schools, Commission meetings, et cetera, to sort of teach people about what we do. She's about, I said, eight years old. She came as a baby, and she signifies what we do, our mission, which is to rescue, rehabilitate, and release sick, injured, and orphaned native wildlife with the goal of releasing those animals back into our ecosystem. So many of you may have heard of us maybe for the first time recently when we were featured on a Nextdoor post about a barn owl that was actually caught in a palm tree. This was in February on Nextdoor. There's only five native owls in Florida, and we've only treated about 46. You can see that circle at the bottom. 210 people reacted to try to see what was going on and help that owl. And everything at Pelican Harbor starts with an act of compassion, right? We're caring about our native wildlife that we coexist with. So that was a very recent occurrence and very dramatic. When somebody finds an animal that needs help, of course, there's emotion involved. They panic. You go to our website, and right away on the upper right, you can see Get Help. So, we treat only native species, but people call us for all types of animals. We're open every single day of the year and will help identify an animal that's found, offer guidance. If you feel comfortable containing it, you can bring it to us. And we offer resources and referrals for both native and non-native animals alike. So, one of our main questions is if the City of Coral Gables would consider putting our website as a link on theirs to sort of help people, to help guide them to us as a resource. So, we've been around since 1980. And until 1996, we only treated brown pelicans, but some might be interested to hear we now treat over—

[Audio difficulties]

Chloe Chels: Last year, we did 51 public releases, 45 community events. We do tours every weekend. We do monthly seabird cruises in partnership with Miami-Dade County. And we do a lot of volunteer work, which Joanne can tell you more about. And again, a snapshot last year, we reached over 6 million people with all these avenues that we advocate for. Our operating expenses

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since 2000 have grown from \$829,000 to now almost \$2 million a year. And as Joanne said, we're fully dependent on donations, grants, and we get some state money as well. Our two big fundraisers are GiveMiamiDay, which we didn't hit our financial goal, but we were number one in our size for number of donors. So, it really speaks to the community support. And in our recent Pelican Party Gala, we had both the city and county mayors come and reached a record of \$630,000 that evening. You may know that we've been working on an expansion project. We're currently on the 79th Street Causeway, but we, in 2019, purchased a 2.6-acre parcel of land on the Little River just south of El Portal. We've been hard at work on our new building, which is about to open. We're just waiting for a few more inspections for our TCO. So, these are a few slides showing our current facility and the new building, which should open very soon. Old and new. Our intake desk, we get over 50 calls every day for animals in need. Our clinic staff, right now we have one room, basically. The new hospital will have nine. The laundry room. And just, this is really going to allow us to deliver on our mission to a much greater degree. Our staff. So, this is that owl that I showed you at the beginning that was found in Coral Gables. We had over 90 people come to see its release. And it was incredible. And that's why we do the work that we do. So, there are a million ways to help. Of course, you can donate, volunteer, and attend a cruise. We had Wayne from Duffy's sponsor an owl box. You can donate and we'll come to your property with a box and put in one of our eastern screech owls, like Mowgli. And just a snapshot for Coral Gables. We have had about a 10 percent increase every year from our patients from Coral Gables. Last year, 100 patients. We have approximately 500 donors who call Coral Gables home. And our average patient cost is around \$548. So, the ask today is, would the City of Coral Gables consider an annual gift of \$5,000 to Pelican Harbor to offset those costs? And just a snapshot of what some of the other municipalities give, usually between one and \$5,000. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Chloe Chels: I'm happy to answer any questions.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So as a sponsor of this item, I wanted to bring this forward to the Commission for two purposes. Number one, to educate my colleagues on the importance of the work you're doing. And number two, to give you a platform here before all the residents and the business community. What I'd like to do is for my colleagues to get a copy of this presentation, review it, and to think about it over the next month or two and see if this is an interest that you have. I don't ask anybody to make a decision today. And I'd also like to see if we can potentially, I'm going to offer this on my newsletter to the residents. I'd like to see the city just put together a little bit of information in regard to what this great not-for-profit does. And giving people the opportunity to engage, learn a little bit more about it, and potentially, hopefully, donate. Okay.

Chloe Chels: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: That is a beautiful, beautiful owl.

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Chloe Chels: Isn't she incredible? She's a showstopper.

Mayor Lago: Most people think that that is a baby owl, correct?

Chloe Chels: Correct. She's full-grown. And they're pretty common here, but they're nocturnal, so you don't see them very often.

Mayor Lago: It's a beautiful, beautiful creature. Absolutely stunning.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Chloe Chels: Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: No, no. Thank you for being here. I think it's important. And we're going to share this with as many people, and then we'll get back to you. Yes, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I met Mowgli about five years ago. She was still a little bit younger. Incredible, incredible little bird. I see them up in my oaks at night. If you recognize their sound, their little cooing sound, you'll be able to see. Yeah, they are quite impressive. And they can get to know you, too, and get used to you. Mowgli, it's been a while. So, through the Manager, I would like you to look into, and I've got to get a picture of Mowgli. Mowgli. He is a star. You've got both eyes blinking this time. Before, it was just one. I'm impressed. The bird-safe glass.

Chloe Chels: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Which is something I think our Board of Architects needs to carefully look at, because I did the appliqué, and sometimes those get to be a difficult thing when it comes around to cleaning your glass. It doesn't matter whether you have a one-story home or a two-story home. Birds fly at many different levels, and they can't see the glass. What they see is they see the light inside your house, and they think that that's a through-way and a safe environment to go to. So, I'd like our Board of Architects to look at this, embrace it, and understand that this is something that should be done. It may help reduce the costs at Pelican Harbor Seabird Station and relieve you all to deal with, unfortunately, some of the other things when people put the rat poison out. There are other ways to control rats. In fact, if we have more of the raptors around, we'll be having more rat control. So, we need to help control their numbers as well.

Chloe Chels: I think an owl like that can eat about 1,000 rats a year. It's a natural predator.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Plus, we now have some gray foxes added to the red foxes, and they're very effective little hunters for things with four legs that climb up trees and on electrical wires. The web link should be an easy thing for staff to do. It's something, too, that I think we can send out to our yard folks, landscapers, tree trimmers, other licensed individuals. I've done it on an

individual basis because people don't understand. Not only do you offer the service, but you can answer this question. Do you still offer the free Uber ride?

Chloe Chels: Yes. Yes, we got a grant from Uber, and right now it's no cost to us to Uber a bird.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, so when people are busy doing their job, it's very hard to stop in the middle of your job and say, Oh, my God, I've got to save this bird. Or they fail to look out for the nest of squirrels or any other of the native species that are up there in the trees. So, it's complicated, but they can get an Uber ride to Pelican Harbor Seabird Station, and then the Manager can look at the budget and see what we can allocate because there are many needs. And if you've been around here for more than a few minutes today, you've probably heard about some of those needs. But thank you for taking the time and sharing some time with everybody here with Mowgli, because she's a rock star.

Chloe Chels: Thank you. We're open every day of the year and to the public, so come visit anytime.

Mayor Lago: All right. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Chloe Chels: Thank you for having us.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.