

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items E-8 and E-9 are related
August 22, 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

Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton

Public Speaker(s)

Gordon Sokoloff

Annie Betancourt

Thomas Korge

Maria Cruz

Robert Ruano

Saralane Conde

Karelia Carbonell

Agenda Items E-8 and E-9 are related [0:00:00 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending Section 1- “Creation, Composition, Election, Terms, Vacancies, Qualifications” and Section 1.1 “Run-Off Election” of Article 1 “City Commission and Mayor” of the City Charter to change the date of the General Election from April 08, 2025 to November 05, 2024

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Agenda Items E-8 and E-9 are related - Ordinance of the City Commission amending Section 1 “Creation, Composition, Election, Terms, Vacancies, Qualifications” and Section 1.1 “Run-Off Election” of Article 1 “City Commission and Mayor” of the City Charter to change the date of the General Election from April 08, 2025 to November 05, 2024 and to change the date of all subsequent elections; providing for a four-month reduction of existing terms of office; moving the Run-Off Election to four weeks after the General Election.

and to change the date of all subsequent elections; providing for a four (4) month reduction of existing terms of office; moving the Run-Off Election to four (4) weeks after the General Election and moving the Swearing-In date to five (5) weeks after the General Election; amending Section 3 “Election to Office; Commission As Judge of Qualifications, Requirements, Ballots, Canvassing, and Qualifying Periods” amending the qualifying period; adopting such Charter Amendments pursuant to Section 100.3605, 101.75, and 166.021(4), Florida Statutes; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date.

(Sponsored By Vice Mayor Anderson)

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending Section 1- “Creation, Composition, Election, Terms, Vacancies, Qualifications” and Section 1.1 “Run-Off Election” of Article 1 “City Commission and Mayor” of the City Charter to change the date of the General Election from April 08, 2025 to November 03, 2026 and to change the date of all subsequent elections; providing for a twenty (20) month extension of existing terms of office; moving the Run-Off Election to four (4) weeks after the General Election and moving the Swearing-In date to five (5) weeks after the General Election; amending Section 3 “Election to Office; Commission As Judge of Qualifications, Requirements, Ballots, Canvassing, and Qualifying Periods” amending the qualifying period; adopting such Charter Amendments pursuant to Section 100.3605, 101.75, and 166.021(4), Florida Statutes; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored By Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to E-8 and E-9.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Good afternoon, Mayor, Commissioner, Stephanie Throckmorton, Deputy City Attorney. I apologize, I got the back-to-school germs already but...

City Attorney Suárez: Stephanie, let me just read them into the record.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yeah.

City Attorney Suárez: So, Mayor, E-8 and E-9 are related, and we’ll have the public hearing on these items together. E-8 is in ordinance to the City Commission amending Section 1, “Creation, Composition, Election Terms, Vacancies, Qualifications,” and Section 1.1, “Runoff Election” of

Article 1, "City Commission and Mayor" of the City Charter, to change the date of the general election from April 8, 2025 to November 5, 2024, and to change the date of all subsequent elections, providing for a four-month reduction of existing terms of office, moving the runoff election to four weeks after the general election, and moving the swearing-in date to five weeks after the general election, amending Section 3, "Election to Office; Commission as Judge of Qualifications, Requirements, Ballots, Canvassing, and Qualifying Periods," amending the qualifying period, adopting such Charter amendments pursuant to Section 100.3605, 101.75, and 166.021(4), Florida Statutes; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. E-9 is an ordinance of the City Commission amending Section 1, "Creation, Composition, Election, terms, Vacancies, and Qualifications," and Section 1.1, "Run-Off Election," of Article 1, "City Commission and Mayor," of the City Charter to change the date of the general election from April 8, 2025 to November 3, 2026, and to change the date of all subsequent elections; providing for a 20-month extension of existing terms of office, moving the runoff election to four weeks after the general election and moving the swearing-in date to five weeks after the general election, amending Section 3, "Election to Office; Commission as Judge of Qualifications, Requirements, Ballots, Canvassing, and Qualifying Periods," amending the qualifying period; adopting such Charter amendments pursuant to Section 100.3605, 101.75, and 166.021(4), Florida Statutes, providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you. We have a brief presentation. As a reminder, we met with you all in May and went over different options for amending our election date via Charter, referendum via ordinance, and looking at those different combinations of dates, November, April, August, et cetera. We were directed at that time to come back with an ordinance moving to a November date. We also had a sponsor suggest another item tweaking that November date. So, I'm going to go over the two items before you. They are in their alternatives in the final version. So, today on first reading, it's not final, but they would be -- we could not adopt both of them finally. As a reminder, we are authorized via statute to amend our election date via ordinance, even if that election day is in our charter. That is permissible and we are allowed to do so. Our charter currently provides that the runoff date may be changed to be an ordinance as well. So, two items before you today, E-8 moves our election from April of 2025 to November of 2024. As we discussed in May, this would result in savings of approximately \$100,000 every two years. And that's the difference in costs between a standalone April general election and piggybacking on a November general election. The sponsor of this item requested that the qualification period mirror one in state law, which has to do with County qualification period, which would end up being, I think it's 68 to 71 days prior to the August general election. So, that puts us, for 2024, in June 10th to June 14th. That would be the qualification period. It's the same number of days as our current qualification period run through the City Clerk. The runoff, as we discussed, would need to be four weeks after the general election, which is the first week of December, rather than the two that it currently is. As a reminder, that has to do with the amount of time needed for the County to process the November general ballots, and the fact that Thanksgiving is often that third week of November. So, this would allow sufficient time to get our canvassing board to certify the

results of the general election and enough time to mail absentee ballots before a runoff election. Moving the election from April of 2025 to November of 2024 would result in Commission terms shortened by four months. For some of you, that would be in 2024, and some of you, that would be in 2026, but ultimately everybody would have their terms shortened by four months. One thing common to both of the options -- you'll hear the other one in a moment -- is that early voting's changed. Currently, as you recall, in the April election, we had a few days of early voting prior to the general and a few days of early voting prior to the runoff. If we piggyback on the November statewide election, we get two weeks of free early voting countywide. It's my understanding, and Billy, please correct me if I'm wrong, that generally in the past we have paid extra for those early voting dates.

City Clerk Urquia: That is correct.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yes. So, we would get two weeks at no extra charge of early voting countywide. So, if we have residents who work downtown, people who live in the South Gables, could go vote in Pinecrest, et cetera, two weeks of early voting. However, the supervisor of elections has noted they do not have the ability or the bandwidth to provide early voting for a runoff that first week of December. Whenever we had it -- would have that runoff, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, five weeks, six weeks after that November election, it doesn't appear that the supervisor of elections would be able to provide early voting. We had 800 people do early voting, 826, I believe, do early voting during the runoff this year. Something to keep in mind. We mentioned briefly the qualification date change. The supervisor of elections has given us a drop dead date for having our candidates qualified for November election, which is sometime in August, but other municipalities who have changed to a November election have used the same qualification deadline that's in here today. Another thing to know is currently our code provides that our canvassing board is composed either of you all or judges who you have appointed. It has been our general practice. That's what it has normally been. If we move to a November election, we would use the county's canvassing board as they're already there seated reviewing those ballots and are -- do a great job at what they do. So, they would be the canvassing board for our runoff as well as our general election. E-9 is a November 2026 election option. So, that moves the next election from April of 2025 to November of 2026. It's the same financial savings of \$100,000 every two years. As I said, that accounts for the change between the November election and the standalone April with those early voting costs. The qualification period would be the same, approximately 70 days before the August primary, which would end up about June of 2026. That August date is not set yet, but we know approximately when it would be in June. Same thing, the runoff would be four weeks after the general election to account for that time needed for the supervisor of elections and the holidays. One thing to note that would be different versus E-8 here is that term limits could be affected. Our charter reads that rather than terms, it's a number of consecutive years, eight consecutive years or 12 consecutive years. So, if this Commission and the -- if the will of the Commission was to change the term limits in any way that would need to go to charter referendum. So, as written, if it was extended, if everyone's terms were extended 20 months, you might lose the opportunity to run for a third or fourth term, unless there was a charter

amendment referendum. Again, the Commission terms would be lengthened by 20 months. That accounts for the swearing in in December of 2026, rather than removal from office in April of 2025 and swearing in in December 2028, rather than April of 2027. So, those are the barebone details. I know we discussed the other options in May. So, that's what presented to you before is November 2024 and November 2026 with -- those are the general outlines of the details. Again, state law allows us to do this via ordinance and the runoff is already contemplated to be changed by ordinance as well. So, happy to answer any questions.

Vice Chair Anderson: Thank you very much for the presentation. I've received a lot of input from residents who have provided comments, mostly on the shortening versus the lengthening of terms. Clearly, the voter turnout for a November election is so much better than at any other time, an 80 percent turnout versus less than 20 percent turnout. And more voter participation is clearly in the best interest of democracy so that we have individuals -- more individuals that can participate in our government. Mr. Nicholas Cabrera specifically wrote us. And I trust that most of you have read his letter today or email today, but I just wanted to highlight some of the closing comments that he made and questions us or challenges us as follows: "Will our Commissioners set their personal desires aside and possess the will, the courage, and the ethical stamina to reduce their terms in favor of improving voter turnout, reducing costs, and eliminating the need to re-evaluate our belief in them as our representatives. By no means do Commissioners have the right to extend their terms in office. Members of the Coral Gables Commission, I hope you look deep within your hearts to not make a decision that is self-serving. Instead, I encourage you to make a decision that is good for the betterment of our community. Your vote counts, as do the rest of ours." As I stated earlier today, I don't believe that extending our terms is proper under the democratic process. It's more like a dictatorship at that point. And I have no problem shortening my term by four months in order to improve democracy in our city. So, Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Listen, I couldn't have said it any better. I've been very clear on multiple occasions over the last few weeks as this became a discussion. I've been on live TV, live radio, like I said. I don't want to repeat myself, but this is about upholding democracy. It's very simple. I have no fear if I run for re-election in going before the voters. I don't think anybody should have a six-year term. In my opinion, the voters should have the final decision. And I am more than willing, and I think it's great to move it to November, it saves the City money, and you have a massive voter turnout. And then we can have, after that, a two-week runoff. And I think it's something that works beautifully, and it continues to send the message that Coral Gables does things the right way. We're not like other municipalities that -- or other elected officials who do things in a very self-serving manner. Commissioner Menendez, you have something you want to say?

Commissioner Menendez: Just one comment and I'll comment again at the end. So, we have two choices, 2024, 2026 for the first group. So, Madam City Attorney, obviously both pieces of legislation have your legal approval.

City Attorney Suárez: Correct, that's correct. We can -- pursuant to state law, we can change our election dates via ordinance and provide for the orderly transition of office.

Commissioner Menendez: So, I would be misguided if I assumed that extending it because it was legally approved, that would basically, we'd be voting on a dictatorship?

City Attorney Suárez: I don't think you're voting on a dictatorship.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay.

City Attorney Suárez: Because...

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to make sure both options are legal, and I don't want to be voting for a dictatorship in case that's what you're proposing. Okay, so I just want to make sure.

Vice Chair Anderson: No, I did not put the word dictatorship in there. That's my opinion of what it would be.

Commissioner Menendez: No, I just...

Vice Chair Anderson: You know, voting myself in for an extended 20 months, I think extending my entire term in office to six years when voters only voted for me for four years, I think wouldn't be...

Commissioner Menendez: Totally understand.

Vice Chair Anderson: The proper thing to do. So, yeah.

Commissioner Menendez: Just dictatorships are out of vogue. They're not, you know, in vogue these days, especially in South Florida.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: We do think...

Commissioner Menendez: And hopefully in Coral Gables.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: The ordinance is legally sufficient and is proper in that manner.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay, no...

Vice Chair Anderson: Do you have a movie reference for that?

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah, but I'll keep that to myself.

Commissioner Fernandez: I do have a couple of questions. I still favor an August election, which would shorten the terms eight months, not four, just because I do believe that the November election can be very partisan. In Coral Gables, we've been very successful at keeping partisanship out of the elections for many years. I know many have tried to infiltrate partisan politics into the election, and we've still been able to stay away from that because I think it does become a toxic environment. August does have the ability to remain a little less partisan and it would follow the same model of Miami-Dade County. So, my suggestion would still be to have the general election in August with a potential primary in November because another concern that I have is we are having the runoff four weeks later, we don't have the option for early voting at all. So, we would be eliminating an option for people to turn out for the runoff.

Mayor Lago: So, to answer that, if I may, Madam City Attorney, where would you have the most -- since we don't want dictatorships, we want democracy. So, where would you have the most voter turnout, August or November?

City Attorney Suárez: So, I'm going to have to defer to the Clerk on that one...

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yeah.

City Attorney Suárez: Mayor.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So, we...

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner, we have the numbers. August 2022, turnout for the City was 28.56 percent. Early voting in August would take place in the middle of the summer. Campaigning will take place between June 4th. If we keep the same qualifying dates, the election would -- you know, campaigning would happen between June 14th and August 23rd, which is the next -- the date of the next election in 2020. You're talking about early voting will be two weeks before, but again, it would be beginning -- at the beginning of August in the middle of the summer. So, it's up to you.

Mayor Lago: How many people would vote in November?

City Clerk Urquia: Close to 82 percent last time voted in the City. However, there was a drop off in under votes when it came down to our questions by about 3,000 votes less.

Mayor Lago: But I think when you talk about 28 percent...

Commissioner Fernandez: So what percentage was at the end?

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So (INAUDIBLE)...

City Clerk Urquia: I would say low 70s.

Vice Chair Anderson: Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, you're talking about 28 percent versus 70.

Vice Chair Anderson: So...

Mayor Lago: I believe in having more people come out and vote and having the voters make that decision. Why do I want to -- I'm not afraid of seeing -- having voters come out and make a decision and basically judge whether we have served this community. We shouldn't try to seek less voter turnout. We should ask the voters who are going to be there, whether it's partisan -- by the way, there's partisan politics at every level. It doesn't matter. My point is go and seek out the voters where you're going to get the most turnout. Don't be afraid of that. You know, that's what you get in August. Let's go to November and get 70 plus percent in a presidential. I'll go in a presidential and in a governor's race any day of the week where you get 90 percent. You win, you win. If you don't, you don't. So, I'm not afraid of that.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So, Mayor, just to be clear, the midterm in November 2022, our turnout was 63 percent. Again, that was 2022. And then in presidential of 2020 was the one that was closer to 80 percent.

Mayor Lago: So double.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: I think the -- yeah. I think the Clerk is referring to in 2016...

City Clerk Urquia: 16.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: We had charter referendum questions on the November ballot, and that's where those undervotes were counted.

City Clerk Urquia: Correct. And that's something to keep in mind as well.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yeah.

City Clerk Urquia: That November 2016, there wasn't a race for mayor or commissioner on the ballot. It was a question. So, you can say, you know, if the mayor would have been on the ballot or a commissioner would have been on the ballot, you wouldn't have had as many undervotes.

Mayor Lago: Would you like to make further comment, or would you like to hear from the residents?

Vice Chair Anderson: Well, I have a couple of comments...

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Vice Chair Anderson: Before they can...

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Vice Chair Anderson: Make comments on our comments and -- so we have more to work with. Number one, when you're talking about charter amendments, things that are complex like that that a lot of voters don't understand, yes, you're going to have undervotes. Number two, we purposely suspended all sunshine meetings during the summer for the exact reason why voting in August is not a good idea.

Mayor Lago: That's a good point.

Vice Chair Anderson: People are on vacation, and that's part of the problem we have in April is because people are on vacation again because it's during their spring break period. We're trying to get away from that. If we're going to make this exercise work, we need to get the most voter turnout.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: If you don't have any further questions, I'll let the Clerk bring up the public comment.

Mayor Lago: Let's hear public comment.

City Attorney Suárez: Thank you, Stephanie.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker, Mr. Mayor, is James Berlin.

Mayor Lago: Next speaker.

City Clerk Urquia: Gordon Sokoloff.

Mayor Lago: Dr. Sokoloff.

Commissioner Menendez: You definitely need more coffee, right?

Gordon Sokoloff: Thank you. Hi. I'm speaking today on behalf of the Coral Gables Neighborhood Association Board, which all the way around, they want -- we would like to keep the elections right where they are. The reasons were touched upon here. Part of it is by linking them to the presidential election, you are ensuring that partisan politics fully emerges into the community. And even though it is, you know, trickling down, it will trickle down at a greater force. If, in the spirit of Rip Holmes, he would be here talking about Citizens United and the infiltration of financial input that comes from those partisan politics. Having our own election on our own timeline is something that we have done for many, many, many years. And when you do that, our election remains focused on our issues, our agendas, and our politics. It makes our elections purely Coral Gables and not an attachment to any other election. It makes our issues cogent, and our debates are kind of unique at a separate time that's segregated from the federal and state elections. If we're on the federal voting calendar, our election will be placed in the back pages of any ballot. Many of those people that vote on those elections kind of come to vote for the President, and then they leave. Overall voting, or attaching it to the federal agenda, will dilute the essence of what is Coral Gables, what we have traditionally had. And it doesn't exclude us from voting in the federal elections, of course, but the CGNA advocates all of us to stick to the existing calendar. Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Vice Chair Anderson: Dr. Sokoloff, I had a quick question. How many people are on the board that voted?

Mr. Sokoloff: About a dozen of us.

Vice Chair Anderson: One dozen?

Mr. Sokoloff: I think.

Vice Chair Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Sokoloff: Yeah.

Vice Chair Anderson: All right, thank you.

Mr. Sokoloff: And it was unanimous at that time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Vice Chair Anderson: Thank you.

Mr. Sokoloff: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Annie Betancourt.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Betancourt, good morning.

Annie Betancourt: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon, excuse me.

Ms. Betancourt: Good afternoon.

Vice Chair Anderson: Thank you for coming.

Ms. Betancourt: Almost happy hour time. Mr. Mayor, Mayor Vince Lago, Vice Mayor, good afternoon, City Commissioners. Annie Betancourt, a long-time resident of Coral Gables. In fact, I became a registered voter here in 1972 when I lived not far from here. I'm here today to speak in favor of moving the City elections to November to coincide with the general election. Casting a ballot is the hallmark of our democracy. Apathy and indifference can take over the spirit of voters who are not aware of the awkward month of April for holding an election. No wonder voter turnout is so low. Besides the financial impact of having an election in April, the voices of many voters are not heard, again, because their mindset is not on the political cycle of an election. In our form of government, participatory democracy, voting is a sacred point. It is a powerful tool, and it's often said that your vote is your voice. I trust that free elections, free and fair elections are possible and that each ballot be counted. I urge you to give serious consideration to moving the election, the City elections, to November in tandem with the general election. I do have a very brief comment to the previous speaker and to some of the discussion that I heard. The key here is voter education. When you have voter education, you resolve the issue of the partisanship. And there's also another item that I'm sure you know; it's called crossover votes. So, when you're good, you're good. And if you're bad, you're even better. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you so much, Ms. Betancourt.

City Clerk Urquia: Thomas Korge.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Korge, it's been a long time, my friend.

Thomas Korge: Good afternoon, Tom Korge. I was on the Charter Review Commission, or Committee, 2015 and '16 when this issue came up. I don't think anybody was on the Commission -- this Commission was there then. It was discussed at length. The -- I've read the two proposals and the points made in the two proposal in favor of moving the election were discussed at length. We had similar numbers. I don't know if they were exactly the same with respect to the voter participation and the cost savings. But the consensus of the committee was not to recommend a

change to the Commission. And the reason is, the reason that I think was stated by the gentleman who represented the Neighborhoods Association, that the committee as a whole had a consensus that it would detract from Coral Gable's issues. There's so much going on in the November election, presidential, you know, Congress, sometimes, you know, all the state and county issues. And they just -- that was the consensus. I don't know if the Commission addressed it. It was in our minutes, the discussion and the decision not to recommend it. So, I just wanted to let you know about that, for whatever it's worth. Obviously, it's a different Commission, you can do differently. And certainly, the two reasons for approving it are compelling. I mean, that alone should be enough. But I think you got to ask yourself, you know, 20 percent show up for an April election, while 70 or 80 percent show up for a November election. Why aren't they showing up in April? I mean, what's the inconvenience? You can vote by mail. I think probably mostly it reflects the fact that of the 80 percent, only 20 really have any interest in local government and voting with respect to local government. It doesn't mean they shouldn't, or they shouldn't have that opportunity in November when they're going to go anyways. But for whatever that's worth, I just -- was we couldn't get a consensus on that particular issue. And one final point, if you're going to recommend put this on the ballot, I would strongly encourage you not to extend the commission -- commissioners terms by 20 months. Take the one that's only a four-month negative reduction because I don't think it'll sell well to the community if they see you're extending your terms by 20 months in the process. That might be misconstrued as sort of self-serving. So, for whatever that's worth, anyway, that's all I have.

Vice Chair Anderson: So, Mayor, if I may.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Vice Chair Anderson: Give him a little feedback from my knocking of doors. And I did it, you know, during a very partisan period of time right after the presidential election. People were tired of hearing from politicians. And the reaction was, oh, my God, didn't we just have an election? You know, because you're knocking doors during that election and it overlaps into the next election. It's voter fatigue. So, if with that information available to you now, you know, and having knocked well in excess of 6,000 doors, because I, you know, between that and my volunteers, we hit 8,000 doors, I think we had pretty good feedback from the community that they're a little tired of elections. It'd be better for us to consolidate them so people can get out and vote once. And then when you look at the numbers that decreased to the runoff election, there's voter fatigue. So, let's get it over with. We have a highly educated electorate in our city. We are blessed. So, it's not going to be that hard for them to look up to see what their Commission has been up to and the qualifications of the people running for office, just like we do for judges. I mean...

Mr. Korge: I don't disagree. I don't think it's hard at all to figure it out. I don't know how many people are really that interested. I mean, I don't -- whatever you decide, I'm good with. I don't really care. But I would vote against it if you extend the terms 20 months. I just...

Vice Chair Anderson: I wouldn't do that myself. So, I'm a no vote on extending terms. I will shorten my term and work to get more voters to the polls, make it easy for them, not drag them out in August while they're trying to vacation, on summer vacation, not trying to make them come out in April. And then when you try to get the runoff ballot in, you're on your way for spring break for your kids. There's such a short period of time between the actual election and the other election. I had to go ask if I could go down to the Miami-Dade County voting place to see if I could pick up an absentee ballot and vote before I had to get on a plane because there's not enough time to get that absentee ballot in the mail. You had to physically drop it. So, all these problems with the April election period exist and make it a horrible period of time and a horrible experience for voters trying to get those ballots in. So...

Mayor Lago: Vice Mayor, thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Korge. I appreciate you being here.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, next speaker is on Zoom is Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz.

Maria Cruz: I'm here. Can you hear me?

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

Ms. Cruz: All right, two things. Number one, when people voted, they voted for four-year terms and two-year terms. If you're going to change the date and talking about general election when you have 550 pages to vote on, most people will not get to the -- to our election because it's so far down on the ballot. That's number one. Number two, if you really want to get people involved, let's do a referendum, like South Miami did. Ask the people, do you want the election to be moved? And if the people say yes, then come up with the next election and tell the people that are running, your term will only be so many months because the people voted to move it to November. That would be getting the people involved and listening to the people, not to what any of you decide, but what the people want. Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you, Maria.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Robert Ruano.

Robert Ruano: Good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir, the floor is yours.

Mr. Ruano: Good afternoon, Mayor, Commissioners. Vice Mayor Anderson, I'd like to applaud you first for bringing up this item. I think it takes a lot of courage as an elected official to reduce your term. I agree with you, and I agree -- and I cannot disagree with the numbers. If you have an election where 20 percent of the electorate is coming out, and you have one that 62 or 80 percent is coming out, it makes more sense to have more people vote than less, especially if it's going to save you money. I appreciate the opposing side, which says that these are purely Coral Gables elections, but I think it's more important to get more people to vote than just get a small group that always comes out. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Vice Chair Anderson: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Saralane Conde.

Saralane Conde: Hello, hi. I just wanted to mention that I would prefer not to change the voting (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Castro: We can't hear her.

Ms. Conde: Among the other (INAUDIBLE).

City Clerk Urquia: We can't hear you, ma'am.

Ms. Conde: Can you hear me now?

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Ms. Conde: Hello?

Commissioner Menendez: Sí.

City Clerk Urquia: Better.

Ms. Conde: Okay, I am opposed to the change. And the reason being is that, you know, a lot of us that are involved with the Coral Gables elections, we also get involved with the national elections. So, I think it would be very hard to go door-to-door and talk to people about the Gables issues and the Gables elections and also work with the national elections because most of us who do go door-to-door and talk to people about Gables issues for the elections, we're also involved in the national. So, you know, that would be -- that would be a bit of a problem. So, yeah, I think that our Gables issues would really be obscured by the -- by the national race. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Karelia Carbonell.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Carbonell.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm asking her to unmute. Ms. Carbonell?

Karelia Carbonell: Yes, hi. I was muted, so I couldn't speak. Hi, everyone, again. I have a few points. First, I'm listening to everyone in terms of the pros and cons of changing the election date. And number one, you know, when the time is to really protect our home rule, we're giving up our home rule, our home rule, which really protects our city. So, just -- the speaker right beforehand where she says that it does impact the national election and it will become very partisan, our elections are very nonpartisan, and basically, we're disenfranchising the voters. Because if we do change now, whether we extend or we deduct, people voted for your term. And to me, that's really disenfranchising. With -- I don't know what even prompted this. You know, is it money? Well, you know, there's always a money issue. So, and there's no deference to our city founders. They founded this city almost 100 years ago. Our first election was in April, and it has been in April since. And that's the way that has worked. Why tinker with something that isn't broken? So, personally, I am not in favor of changing the date. I believe in historical heritage, which is priceless. Coral Gables has always taken pride in its historical uniqueness. We should keep our elections in April as per the City's 100-year-old legacy. And I have also heard that this should not be voted on. I know it's by charter, but it should not be voted on by you, the Commissioners. I think if it's going to go, let's go to the public, let's go to our residents and basically hear from them, hear from us what we want to do. So, you're voting on your own terms, which again, I think it's disenfranchising the people that voted for all of you. So, thank you for listening.

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

Mayor Lago: All right. So, I think we've had some pretty good discussion on this. Is there anything else that the Commissioners would like to mention on this?

Vice Chair Anderson: Well, I want to highlight, too, that other cities around us have been doing this.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yes. So, as we discussed in May, there's a Florida-wide, South Florida-wide, nationwide trend towards moving elections in sync with national elections. In fact, I think a few years ago, there was an attempt at the legislature to make us move our elections in sync with those statewide and countywide elections. So, yes, generally there's a trend towards doing this. We've had many neighboring municipalities do it, North Miami, South Miami, Pinecrest is in November now. So, yes, we would not be alone in doing this.

Commissioner Menendez: Why would --? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

Vice Chair Anderson: No, I was reviewing the numbers again with the Clerk, and I do think that any time that you can improve voter turnout is actually what you want to do. The system is broken, absolutely is broken, when all your -- when you're spending this much money and you only get less than 20 percent turnout. There is a critical problem here, and we should accommodate people to make it easier for them to vote and not assume that they are just going to get tired and not be able to get to the last item. They showed up there to vote in order to make a determination who's going to lead their city in the future. They'll reach that last item and be able to vote on it. So, it would be doing a disservice to our residents if we don't fix this broken system, much like other municipalities have been doing over time to improve voter turnout. So, that's what I have on it. And does anybody else have any other comments?

Commissioner Menendez: I just have a real quick question. Well, two questions. One is, if the state was considering, I guess, mandating, like you said?

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yeah. That's my recollection. I'd have to pull the exact bill, but yes, that was my recollection.

Commissioner Menendez: Probably for the same -- for turnout reasons, I guess, I would imagine or...?

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: I would have to pull the...

Commissioner Menendez: Okay.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: The legislative history, but that was my recollection at least.

Commissioner Menendez: My question then, I guess it's for the Clerk, if we voted to extend or we voted to shorten -- because, obviously, if we keep things the same, it doesn't matter -- is there --? What's the latest we can vote...

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So, we have some...

Commissioner Menendez: On this?

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: We have some deadlines from the County for as far as drop dead dates for a November 2024 election. That would be end of August. We'd have to have everything finalized. If there're charter referendum questions, normally earlier in July, so there's time to clarify...

Commissioner Menendez: I'm saying us to vote on changing it.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: No.

City Attorney Suárez: So...

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: For us to vote on changing it doesn't have a deadline from the supervisor of elections, but I would note that the closer we get to a deadline of our internal April deadlines or November deadlines, the more likely we would be to get pushback or legal challenges at closer in time. You know, the only challenges we're aware of happened when there -- or recent challenges we're aware of happened when there was like two months before an election a change in the election date. So, I think the earlier the better is just the general consensus, but we don't have a strict deadline as it were to make this decision.

City Clerk Urquia: And Commissioner, also between first and second reading, I would like to go to the supervisor of elections...

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: And ask for permission to move our elections.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Exactly.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So, we would -- there's a process we would have to request and we'd also have to work closely with the County between first and second reading to make sure that they're all right with all of the changes that we've proposed.

Commissioner Menendez: So, I'm going to tell you where I -- where I'm -- my position in terms of, you know -- I agree...

Vice Chair Anderson: (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Menendez: I agree with the Vice Mayor. When I was knocking on doors with you, especially the runoff in April after a presidential election, people just -- actually they just didn't want to vote anymore. They were burned out. That -- I witnessed that. I think in April, I saw this election and I wasn't a candidate. People were on spring break, private schools were on Easter break. There was always a wave of people out of town. I would call, hey, where are you going? No, no, we're skiing or we're somewhere else. So, that's definitely an impact. The fact that historically Coral Gables, maybe many, many years ago started with April, I would imagine the

world was a lot different back then. You know, it was a very -- smaller town and it was easier to get people to come out to vote. People I guess weren't taking trips to wherever.

Vice Chair Anderson: No.

Commissioner Menendez: Times have changed. Times have changed.

Vice Chair Anderson: Pony Express.

Commissioner Menendez: The fact that there's a trend among our neighboring cities to go in that direction, I mean it's comforting that we wouldn't be the only one. I just wanted to give, you know -- I know where I'm headed, but I just want to give us time between first and second reading so you all get whatever you need cleared up. And I still want to get input from the community. I mean, I'm getting emails. I know which way I'm headed, but I just want to have a little bit, a little bit of time in between so we can make sure we do the things the right way. That's all. It's not an extended delay.

Mayor Lago: So, I think we -- is there any other further conversation that we need to have?

Commissioner Fernandez: I do have a con -- I do believe we need more community input. I believe, at this point, I am not ready to make a decision to move it to November, just based on the comments we've heard today. We've heard from people from all walks of life who have said they believe we should keep it in April. Others have said they wanted to move it to November. So, we obviously still have a division in the community about two separate options. So, what I would like to see is maybe hold the community meeting to discuss before we take this vote. That way, we know exactly where the community stands on this issue. The other thing we can consider is whether we put this up for a vote and let voters decide what they want. I think that's the best way. We're talking about increasing voter turnout. Best way to increase the input on this issue is by putting it on the ballot.

Vice Chair Anderson: I would agree if we had 80 percent turnout for an item. I guess, unfortunately, we don't. And legally, we're allowed to do it if we want to shorten our terms. I have no -- absolutely no problem doing that. We have time between first and second reading. We can have whatever sunshine meetings. I've gotten lots of input from people I walk and talk with and see in the community. I've gotten emails in from people, phone calls in from people. It was absolutely unanimous, okay, including at Jeannett's wake and stuff. It was absolutely -- except for what, 9 or 12 board members from the CGNA, who didn't take a survey of the membership, okay.

Mayor Lago: What I think we could do is I'd love to have another survey sent out by the City in regards to that.

Vice Chair Anderson: No, we can.

Mayor Lago: In between first and second reading, I think it'd be great.

Vice Chair Anderson: Excellent idea.

Mayor Lago: I think it's going to be overwhelming support to move it to November and trim back four months. So, what I'm going to do, if I may, Madam Vice Mayor...

Vice Chair Anderson: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to move the gavel to you. I'm going to make a motion to accept E-8 and move forward with E-8, which is moving the elections to November, trimming back four months my term and the terms of my colleagues. Pretty simple. Mr. Clerk, do I have a second?

Vice Chair Anderson: You have a second.

Mayor Lago: Okay, can I get a vote?

Commissioner Menendez: Before we vote, can we bring it back no later than the first meeting in October? Can we --?

Unidentified Speaker: Or later.

Vice Chair Anderson: Yeah.

Commissioner Menendez: Or the second.

Vice Chair Anderson: We would.

Commissioner Menendez: I would prefer it come --

Commissioner Fernandez: Does that mean...?

Commissioner Menendez: Not in September but bring it in October.

City Clerk Urquia: You mean after the first meeting in October.

Commissioner Menendez: Second reading, second reading.

City Clerk Urquia: After the first meeting in October or no earlier than the first meeting in October.

Commissioner Menendez: No earlier than the first meeting in October.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: I think that gives enough time.

City Attorney Suárez: You're saying to bring it back on second reading?

Commissioner Menendez: Second reading.

City Attorney Suárez: And a community meeting in between? Is that what was...?

Commissioner Menendez: You all figure out that part. I just want time to be able to reach out and communicate with folks.

Mayor Lago: The community meeting -- the community meeting, to me, is important for other things, but this is not about who has more support and who doesn't support. If you want to do a poll, do a poll, have the City run it. I've already done a poll. Over 80 percent support here in the City, literally. So, it's overwhelming, I feel comfortable moving forward because this is what the people want. Every single email I've gotten has said, move it to November, save the City money, and let's push forward on this issue. So, I think it's a great opportunity to do what the will of the people, and we'll move forward on it.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So, (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Fernandez: Actually, if I may, Mr. Mayor.

Commissioner Castro: I have a question.

Commissioner Fernandez: The actual -- I did a poll as well, and your poll only included two options. It did not include keeping the election in April.

Mayor Lago: You're wrong. My poll had four different options. You just didn't get it.

Commissioner Castro: Do you have it?

Mayor Lago: Because I don't send it to anybody in the Commission.

Commissioner Castro: Do you have it?

Commissioner Fernandez: I didn't get it myself.

Mayor Lago: I paid for it.

Commissioner Fernandez: I didn't get it myself.

Mayor Lago: So, at the end of the day, it's my poll.

Commissioner Fernandez: Exactly, so is mine.

Commissioner Castro: Can I have --? That's what I'm asking, if you're willing to, obviously.

Mayor Lago: My poll, I paid for it. If you're willing to share the cost, then you can help me and you can share in it. Let's be on here and out of here. We have a vote -- look, we have a vote...

Commissioner Castro: Okay, I'm willing to share the cost.

Mayor Lago: We have a move and a...

Commissioner Castro: I'm willing to share the cost.

Mayor Lago: We have a motion and a second on (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Castro: Let's split it.

Mayor Lago: Let's take a vote.

Commissioner Menendez: Do we have an agreement from the -- from whoever is the sponsor to have the second reading not come back before the -- before the first reading in October?

Vice Chair Anderson: No, we can do it...

Commissioner Menendez: You're comfortable with that?

Vice Chair Anderson: We can do it for the first meeting in October. In the meantime, the City can run a poll.

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

Vice Chair Anderson: Get public input that way.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm comfortable with that understanding.

City Attorney Suárez: So, that -- you know, Mr. Manager, is that something that the City could accomplish, a survey or a poll (INAUDIBLE)?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, I believe that we should be able to do that by the first meeting in October.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: A survey through e-news or something similar?

City Manager Iglesias: We'll work it out.

Commissioner Fernandez: And what's the survey -- what's the survey questions?

Mayor Lago: Those are things that, if we can, let's work on that with the Commission and the Manager, and we'll figure out what the survey questions should be.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: We can update you all at the next Commission meeting perhaps on some possible language so we can get that done.

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

Commissioner Menendez. Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson. Yes.

Commissioner Castro. No.

Commissioner Fernandez: No.

Mayor Lago. Yes.

(Vote: 3-2)

Mayor Lago: Okay, moving forward. Obviously, we don't need E-9, correct? Oh, we do, Madam...?

City Attorney Suárez: So, in -- conceptually, you could vote on first reading on E-9 if there is a motion to move it and have it come back as well. And then, obviously, only one of them would be able to be approved at second.

Commissioner Menendez: I don't mind having both out there, and then on -- with second reading, we pick one or the other or whatever.

Vice Chair Anderson: I'm not in favor of E-9. I wanted to get both pieces of language in front of the voters so they understood clearly what the options were for them to provide comment on. No one wants -- no one stood up and said extend your terms.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay.

Vice Chair Anderson: So, I think that's clear.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Defer the item as sponsor, if you'd like.

Mayor Lago: Or just eliminate it.

Commissioner Menendez: You want to pull it?

Mayor Lago: Eliminate it.

Commissioner Menendez: Or pull it, whatever.

Vice Chair Anderson: I'm withdrawing it.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Clerk Urquia: Quick question, Mr. Mayor. Previously, we had discussed the possibility of placing a question on the November ballot of 2024, basically removing runoff elections. Is that a will of the Commission to have that go before the voters?

Mayor Lago: I mean, I personally think that we're fine with E-9 -- with E-8, excuse me, and moving forward.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yeah, we can discuss that at a later date. We have...

Mayor Lago: Discuss at a later date.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: We have time.

Commissioner Menendez: We have time.

Commissioner Fernandez: Maybe that's something we could add to the poll or to the survey.

Mayor Lago: So, I think we're pretty clear.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: We'll return next meeting with some survey language. We'll work with the Manager's Office.

Mayor Lago: I appreciate you.

Vice Chair Anderson: I appreciate it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: Great job.

City Attorney Suárez: Thank you, Stephanie.