

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
August 26, 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)

Marlin Ebbert
Brenda Moe

Agenda Item F-3 [12:55 p.m.]

Update regarding Art Cinema expansion
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to time certain agenda item F3. This is my item. This is an update regarding the Art Cinema expansion. I've been working on this project for well over five years and I think this is something that again it's going to bode very well in regard to culture and our downtown and I'm looking forward to this finally coming to fruition. So, if you can, give us a quick, quick update. I'd like to know where we're at because I want to move this forward as quickly as possible.

Ms. Ebbert: Well, I can skip with my first line, which was good morning again.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

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Ms. Ebbert: So, good afternoon. I'm delighted to be here. Before I start, I wanted Joanne Marr was here this morning and gave the Merrick Moment. If you notice the T-shirt she had on it was the Coconut Grove food crisis food pantry. Anyways. They operate a lot of the churches here, the Garden Club. We've participated with food drives. It's in Coconut Grove. Anyway, I just want to say that we are trying to do our part with feeding South Florida. This time I'm here before you on a much happier note. I'm here with my good friend and colleague Brenda Moe to give you an update on the Art Cinema. We are just about to celebrate our 15th anniversary. I've opened our doors in mid-October of 2010. During those 15 years we have grown into a real cultural gem of South Florida, and I personally feel very fortunate to be involved from the very beginning. I was excited when there was first conversation about a new building going up, a new parking garage going up on Aragon and that they were going to try to fit a tiny little theater into the first floor. I was there on opening night. It's just been a wonderful relationship. I started as a volunteer and taking tickets and now I'm still a volunteer as Chair of the Cinema Board. We are most fortunate to have an excellent executive director and an extremely talented staff who selects some of the most wonderful films offerings that are available. Things that I've never heard of that I go, and I learn so much every time I go to the cinema. So much of this success could not have happened without the support of the city and the support of all the many ticket holders who fill our seats. So much of our growth, I want to tell you, mirrors the growth of the downtown. So many of the people that are living in the apartments, and the condos love to come to the cinema because they can walk. But that's not to say we don't get residents from all over South Florida. I'm always surprised. Aventura, Key Biscayne, Miami Beach. And as you all know, I saw many of you yesterday morning at the opening of the new Tax Collector's office. As I was walking back to my car, two women stopped me on the street, and this often happens, and they said, you're from the cinema. Because I often thank people for coming and so they know my face. And they just told me how much they love going to the theater. And as they were walking away, one looked over her shoulder and said, "I already have my tickets for Downton Abbey. So, I will turn the rest of this over to Brenda. You all, I have given you all our update from last year, our impact report from 2024.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Hi, good morning or good afternoon. Sorry. Good morning. Good afternoon. Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, City Manager, City Attorney, it's an honor as always to present in front of you. I do want to just say thank you to our Board Chair, Marlin, and the woman I rely on daily to help us really move this cinema forward. We had a presentation, and it will be really brief. I really just want to cover some key topics, which is a thank you to Mr. Mayor for helping us move the expansion, progress forward, City Manager, also. We had been stuck in some issues with our construction documents and those were finally worked out with the various city departments. Our documents have been submitted, reviewed and approved by the various departments. And the feedback that we received is being addressed item by item. And as that moves forward right now, we're waiting to be able to get access to the new space so that we can conduct an asbestos

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inspection as is required. And so, we have some documents for you that we'll be delivering as these inspections are taken care of. What I would like to highlight, a couple of things. You do have a save the date. Something that's important about this save the date is that we will be honoring Don Slesnick, former Mayor Don Slesnick. He is going to be receiving the inaugural Don Slesnick Civic Vision Award. And this award will be given in the future to other leaders who really embody civic vision in this community. And our cinema is a result of his work. And so, 15 years ago, I just want to touch on some of these topics. 15 years ago, we were founded with a clear vision and this marks 15 years of delivering on it. We would love – we'll be sending out our invitations for October 29. We would love to see you all there. It's going to be a milestone important event. And it's Don Slesnick, the cinema and Don all deserve to be acknowledged. So, the Civic Vision Award. One thing I wanted to really highlight on is the necessity for a second location for a single screen cinema like ours is the economic impact that we are already creating in the downtown corridor. So, things that are important is the parking revenue impact that we see from August 24 to August 25. Almost 18,000 patrons use the parking validation machine that is in our lobby. That's generating an estimated 53,000 in city revenue through the parking garage. A conservative estimate of attendees that aren't using the validator, we can put at 16,000, which adds another 48,000 in parking revenue. So, we're looking at 100 to \$130,000 in parking revenue from our patrons currently. So, the expansion of our patronage will only expand that city revenue. Our total economic impact operating currently is \$2.82 million. Our membership impact, we have hit 2,500 members, and, you know, which is an incredible, incredible milestone for a small organization like ours. I would like to acknowledge one of our newest members, Commissioner Lara and his wife, thank you so much for joining. It really is incredibly meaningful to see your name. I have at my desk a little, every time somebody joins as a member, the little, it sends a notification to me. So, when I saw your name, I immediately texted Marlin and let her know. So, thank you so much. So, 2,500 members. These are people that are investing in the cinema. 1,425 of those are Coral Gables residents, which we, you know, 18 to 99 years old, let's say. The residents contribute almost \$140,000 in membership dues. That's an incredible financial commitment from Coral Gables residents, and an estimated one in every 35 residents who are dues-paying members of our cinema. This is a significant impact. So not only are the residents making an impact in the cinema and the economy of the downtown through their patronage of the cinema, but the visitor impact that we see from August 24 to August 25, almost 23,000 tickets were purchased by customers outside of Coral Gables. If we put a conservative \$20 in local spending to every one of those customers, we're seeing outside dollars coming into the downtown corridor of almost half of a million dollars. That's real impact that our cultural center is having on the downtown corridor, and that's the value that we bring. It's not only culture. It's not only community. It's not only Coral Gables. It's economic, and we just wanted to really highlight that and highlight the value of the economic impact that we have and the greater economic impact we can have with our expansion.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may. We're all big supporters of the cinema. I've been working on this project for many years now.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Many.

Mayor Lago: When are we opening?

Ms. Brenda Moe: So let me just.

Mayor Lago: I was quick. I was literally five seconds. When are we opening?

Ms. Brenda Moe: Some of the challenges that we have is in response to submitting our construction documents, we need to do an asbestos survey. To get into 240 Aragon, we need the approval of the current tenants. Page is working with the current tenants, but we've been trying to do this for a month now just to get access for under an hour.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may.

Ms. Brenda Moe: So those are challenges that are real.

Mayor Lago: But let me address it for you. Mr. Manager, would you be so kind to deal with your staff and make sure that we can get into the building to perform the asbestos report?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Please.

Ms. Brenda Moe: So that's just the challenges that we face, and we have no control over them. So, once we can get through that, we are, we'll go to the permitting process. We've talked at length with the City Manager about the permitting process and hopefully how that can be expedited. And then the procuring the general contractor. So once that process is over, we're looking at nine months of buildout to open.

Mayor Lago: Do you have the capital necessary?

Ms. Brenda Moe: Yes, we do.

Mayor Lago: For the construction.

Ms. Brenda Moe: And we have that...

Mayor Lago: Have you provided that letter already to the Manager?

Ms. Brenda Moe: We will be sending it. We're trying to get, we're trying to move forward with our, with responding to the department's notes on our construction documents.

Mayor Lago: Okay, let's do this. We can do both.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Yes.

Mayor Lago: We'll get the asbestos testing done.

Ms. Brenda Moe: I have the letter that I'm sending to the City Attorney for review, because when we had asked for an example letter of the attestation that's been requested, we were told that there wasn't a sample letter. So, we're going to send a draft. Page had suggested we send the draft to the City Attorney, just make sure that's okay. And then I have a board meeting in two weeks, and the board members are going to sign the letter as requested.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Please, if you could be so kind to copy myself, the Manager, the City Attorney, City Clerk, I want it to be a public record. I want to start moving forward.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Yeah. We need to get that letter. I asked the Manager what we're pending. He said we're pending a letter proving that the funds were in place. I will get the asbestos test completed with the Manager, and we'll move forward in getting your construction documents reviewed.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Amazing.

Mayor Lago: That is a priority. Yes sir.

Commissioner Lara: If you're done. So, I just wanted to say, this is great that we're moving quickly to the other phase, but in the meantime, right, where you have currently the single theater, I just want everybody to know that it is such an experience that everyone needs to do. I challenge everybody here should be a member of the cinema. The truth is that when you watch a movie there, it's everything you said. But the sense of community is something that I walk away with, you go to the movie, and you see your neighbors, you see your residents, of course, we see people from outside Coral Gables, but you really see the people who live in Coral Gables. And you go there with a single purpose to be transported somewhere else. So, the engagement to watch what's on the screen, suspend disbelief, allow the magic to happen. When we went to see *Les Misérables*, which is the last one I went to see, I'm telling you, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. If I were watching that at home, I would be very critical about, oh, that was very good cinematography,

good lighting, nice editing, but watching it in the theater, I got emotional. So, everyone should experience that. I highly recommend it. So, two thumbs up, as they say.

Mayor Lago: So, we have an action plan.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Yes.

Mayor Lago: In two weeks, we'll have the letter that's required by the city.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Yes.

Mayor Lago: We will get the asbestos studied.

Ms. Brenda Moe: We have everything lined up. We have our vendor, our service provider, just...

Mayor Lago: I just want to cross items off the list.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: I want to get done with this.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Yes, I agree.

Mayor Lago: So, this is what I'm going to request, okay? I'm going to request in one month, Mr. Clerk, when is our next commission meeting?

City Clerk Urquia: September 10th.

Mayor Lago: When's the following.

City Clerk Urquia: September 26th.

Mayor Lago: September 26th, please put on the agenda a follow-up. I would like to see a copy of the letter that was submitted to the city, please. And I would also like to see that the asbestos was tested.

City Clerk Urquia: It'll be the 23rd. I apologize.

Mayor Lago: That's fine, 23rd. I just want to make sure that they were able to procure the sample of asbestos, if there is asbestos, the asbestos testing. I don't need the results just yet. I know it takes time, but I want to see the letter in the city's hands, and I want to see that you were able to get into the building to make sure that if you're testing the air ducts, the mastic and the flooring, whatever it is that you're looking for in regards to asbestos, that you're able to do that testing so that the ball can be rolling and moving forward, okay?

Ms. Brenda Moe: And I'll check with our architect and engineers to see if there are any other requirements that need access to 240 Aragon so that I can share that with both of you, because that's really the biggest challenge.

Mayor Lago: But it's on the Commission agenda for the end of September, so I would like to see those two items checked off so we can move on to the next one.

Ms. Brenda Moe: Wonderful. I'll send the letter this week. We've just been really focusing on trying to get this next step.

Mayor Lago: Of course. That's fine, but we have it on the agenda, okay?

Ms. Brenda Moe: Thank you. Thank you for everything that you always do for us.

Mayor Lago: Not at all, please.

Ms. Ebbert: I'd like to just add that Tony Silio has been great.

Mayor Lago: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Ebbert: Please, let him know. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.