

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comment
July 11, 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

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz
Marlin Ebbert
Lisa Maroon

Agenda Item C [10:10 a.m.]
Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: We have a couple of public comments, Mr. Mayor. The first speaker is Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning. It is after all a great day in the City of Coral Gables. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, where I have lived for since 1976. As most of you know, I was a teacher for over 40 years. I finally realized why our city has so many employees leave. Some of them retiring without finishing DROP and leaving money behind. As much as this administration and some of the elected officials do not want to admit it, it has to do with the lowest employee morale. Based on my teaching experience, I believe I know why. When employees see some of the supervisors or co-workers getting glowing compliments from this dais, even though they know in their hearts that they are not deserved, they get discouraged. Some chose to keep doing their best and hope, others quit and some just follow the bad examples and do the least they can get away with. Some items

City Commission Meeting
July 11, 2023

come to mind. Development Services has been brought up many times, it doesn't need to be brought up anymore. So today, I'm talking about our Communications Department. In the last month, Juneteenth came. It was a national holiday. It came and went. Nothing from the city, not even to let residents know that the offices were going to be closed. Only the two newest Commissioners mentioned it. Yes, we did get an insert with our garbage bill, except that the insert under trash pit guidelines states, small household items must be placed in your trash pit after 6 p.m. the night before scheduled collection day – small household items. Garbage bags can only contain green matter. This is in the flyer that you all got the insert with. So, questions. Have the rules changed? Did the Mayor change his mind? Are those people following this going to be cited and fined, as we have heard many times. Great job Communications Director. Why am I preaching to the choir? Are they listening? – well, the Mayor is looking at his cell phone, so I guess he's not paying attention. Do they care? I have a message for our employees. Please do not despair, the reign of terror, the bullying, the smoking mirrors are not here to stay. At least two elected officials and the residents have your back. Please feel free to contact me if you are afraid or concerned. My phone is 305-323-2154. I have never outed anyone. I will not start now. If its okay to speak to me, it is okay to look me in the eye, don't listen when you're told not to look at me in the eye, not to be friendly with the residents. We want you to be friendly. After all, we do live in a free country and remember elections have consequences. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Marlin Ebbert.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Ebbert: Good morning. I have a handout for everybody. I'll give it to you later. Good morning. It was quite a morning to be here. We certainly saluted a lot of important people in this city, and for the record, my name is Marlin Ebbert, I live at 6510 San Vicente Street. And I am here this morning, hopefully to plant a seed. With all the people we saluted this morning, there's another one that I want to comment on again, and that is Sally Jude. She died on Christmas Eve and five days later, in the Miami Herald, her arbitrary was front page and continued on the second page. I have a copy of it here, and within the month, she was the cover story of Coral Gables Magazine. Sally was really a wonderful, outstanding resident, and she and her husband moved to Coral Gables in the mid-60's. He came to be head of Thoracic medicine at the University of Miami and at Jackson. A lot of people don't realize that Dr. Jude was as prominent as Sally was. Dr. Jude is one of three young residents that is sited as having invented CPR when they were at Johns Hopkins in the mid-50's and that's part of the reason that he was brought to UM. He was a very humble man and there were awards through the years, though a lot of people didn't know it, Sally really got the recognition. They lived on Edgewater Drive at 200 Edgewater Drive for 49 years. They had seven children, they bought a large, really an estate called Java Head, its on the Coral Gables Waterway, and they were on Edgewater. Anyway, right around the corner from Edgewater at the very end of Douglas Road is a tiny little park, its called Sunrise Harbor Park. Its one of our tiniest playgrounds and I am hoping that possibly we could rename that park in honor of Sally and Jim Jude. So that's why I'm here this morning just to plant that seed. It's wedged between Sunrise Boulevard and Morningside Boulevard. The address on the cornerstones is zero-zero at each one of them. It is really at the tiny little corner of the Gables. The only signage there is the size of a no parking meter, so it's a tiny little park. So, I've talked to Peter Jude last week and I said to him, do you remember

*City Commission Meeting
July 11, 2023*

playing there, and he said, oh yes, I remember playing there. He said its very likely my mother maybe even founded that park. He also remembers playing where the Gables club of buildings are before they were built. So, I brought everybody a magazine in case you don't know about Sally. So, I don't know what the procedure is from here on.

Mayor Lago: Marlin, what I'm going to do is, I'm going to speak to the Manager, and I'll have the Manager have a conversation with the City Attorney to ensure and look back to see how did that park come to the City Beautiful. Was it purchased by the city? – was it bequeathed by some residents in the neighborhood, are there any strings attached to the naming. If there's none, I'll bring it before the Commission, I'll sponsor it, and I'd love to change the name to Sally Jude. I had the pleasure of spending a lot of time with her and she was an incredible individual. I see no more deserving person, especially in that neighborhood with her track record and her family's track record here in the City Beautiful.

Ms. Ebbert: And she was so active in the Garden Club and the Flowering Tree Society. She really ran the Royal Poinciana Festival. We need trees at that park. I don't think there's any question.

Mayor Lago: I want to make sure we find out if there's any strings attached to that naming. I don't know if the neighborhood association dedicated it. Let's just find out and look back at the history here in the city and make sure that there's a clear runway to achieve that goal.

Ms. Ebbert: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Ms. Ebbert: Does anybody want a magazine?

Mayor Lago: I have that in my office. Thank you so much. Mr. Clerk.

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

Ms. Maroon: [Inaudible – off mic]

Mayor Lago: Its okay. How about we do this. How about you sign it after. You are going to be able to speak. So why don't you come here to speak, just like when you came to see me on Friday, we spent close to an hour in my office having a conversation on open door Fridays. So please, in three minutes tell us how we can be of assistance.

Ms. Maroon: Thank you Mayor. Good morning, Mayor, Commissioners, city staff. My name is Lisa Maroon, I live at 608 Cadagua Avenue. I'm a lifelong resident and lived at my current home for 50 years. I'm here today to let the residents of Coral Gables know that we are all in danger of losing our due process rights here in Coral Gables. What is happening to me, I hope never happens to you. In my case, our governing body here in the City of Coral Gables is favoring our residents, one resident over another. I was not afforded my basic due process rights by the city. There's a major proposed house project that is planned for my neighborhood across the street from me at

*City Commission Meeting
July 11, 2023*

609 and 619 Cadagua Avenue. In this case, the architecture plans were denied by the Board of Architects. The city allowed a brand-new set of plans be approved by the City Architect and then signed off by the Special Master without a public hearing or notice. When in fact, by city code a whole new set of plans should have gone back in front of the full Board of Architects with public notice and allowance for public comment. Even though the city was aware that I was an affected neighbor and an objector of said project, the city took it upon themselves to approve the new set of plans at the administrative level without public notice or public neighborhood involvement. I live on a street that consists mostly of mid-century single-story smaller homes, approximately 1,700 square feet plus or minus. The projected house is over 6,100 square feet. It is very large and modern for a neighborhood. It is bad enough that it doesn't fit in aesthetically to our small street, but what is most upsetting is how the city trampled on my and my neighbor's due process rights. The city did not follow their own codes and ethics. They violated the Florida Sunshine Law. They violated their own procedures. The project was not made known to me or my neighbors by the city as per the code. The most unsettling and scary part is our governing body would show partiality to one resident over another. The only appropriate course of action by the city is to have the Board of Architects oversee the new plan. The reason this is important is because the Board of Architects is the gatekeeper of our neighborhoods. The Board of Architects is a design review administrative board, created to ensure the city's architecture meets the design review standards of the zoning code and consistent with the city's regulations and to preserve the traditional aesthetics, character of the community. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

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

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, may I.

Mayor Lago: Yes, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I have a few comments to add. We've had the opportunity to speak for some time on this topic and I did, number one, this is not a matter that came before the Commission, so the City Attorney can speak on this, but that's not a Sunshine violation. We didn't meet to discuss, we the Commission, didn't meet to discuss the matter for a Sunshine violation. Let me just go through the points. When we spoke, I told you that I would be revising the ordinance.

Ms. Maroon: [Inaudible – off mic]

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, no. Just putting a couple of points on the record, so that the rest of the community doesn't believe that there was a Sunshine violation, the rest of the community knows that I'm working on a revision of that code section to clear it up, so the process is better in the future. I understand that doesn't address your concerns right now, and our City Attorney has issued a memo to give you your due process right in front of the Special Master, will be issuing. So, you will – the rights – as an attorney I know that when I appeal matters where a hearing wasn't had,

*City Commission Meeting
July 11, 2023*

the due process right is to be able to have that hearing and the memo that will be issued by our City Attorney will indeed give you that.

Ms. Maroon: [Inaudible – off mic]

Mayor Lago: Just give me one second, please, give me one second. Madam City Attorney, would you like to add anything to this?

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, in this case, the process in our zoning code was followed. Given the particular factual circumstances here, as the Vice Mayor mentioned, I am going to make a determination that there should be a hearing on the settlement agreement that was achieved before the quasi-judicial Special Master for Board of Architects appeals, that hearing will provide notice and an opportunity for Ms. Maroon and any other affected parties to state their comments or their concerns and then she would have any other rights from there that she may like to avail herself of.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Maroon, just one second, please. This is a quasi-judicial matter.

City Attorney Suarez: Correct Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I do not want to litigate this issue here on the floor of the Commission, that's what council has advised. Ms. Maroon has had three minutes to speak here during public comment. She has met with every single one of the Commissioners. She met with me for an hour at my weekly office hours that we've been doing for years, this is nothing new. For your protection and for the board and for staff and for the city, let's not litigate this issue here before the Commission. You've had significant opportunity to speak to the Commission, you've spoken to the City Attorney, you've spoken to me, you had three minutes here. Let's wait for the City Attorney to provide further guidance, steps moving forward, and we will have another bite at the apple where we could potentially discuss this further in a quasi-judicial setting. Okay.

Ms. Maroon: [Inaudible – off-mic]

Mayor Lago: Her response is going to be given to you in writing by the city and I would like to protect the integrity of the process. So, I'm asking you to please, respectfully, you provided all the necessary information to each one of us over the last week. You met with me, like I said before, for an hour yesterday. I think that one of our City Attorneys was there, Gus Ceballos, was there with me. You've now had three minutes here. Let's do this appropriately and follow the procedures.

Ms. Maroon: Okay. I'm sorry.

Mayor Lago: Let's just follow the procedures. I'm trying to protect you. I'm trying to do my best to protect you. I'm trying to make sure that if this has to come back before the Commission that we do this the appropriate way. I'm just trying. I'm trying to be as thoughtful and as patient and again, please, I'm just asking you, I'm asking you for just a little bit of leeway, please. We will have this conversation; I promise again before the board. Let the City Attorney provide further

*City Commission Meeting
July 11, 2023*

documentation and guidance through a memo that is going to be forthcoming, and I promise you will have another bite of the apple in regard to your concerns. Okay. I'm just trying to protect you, please. Okay. Will you afford me that.

Ms. Maroon: Mayor, what she said was incorrect. Just for the record, what she said was incorrect about the Special Master. That's all I'm going to say, because it was already signed without a due process before without public notice. So, for her to come back and try to correct that now is improper. It needs to go back to the Board of Architects.

Mayor Lago: For the record, for the record, I've asked this individual, this resident for 50-plus years to please show a little self-restraint, because there is a process ongoing, and I don't want to jeopardize that process. I have also contacted the City Clerk and helped her get all the public records that she needs with the assistance of Gus Ceballos, everything from e-mails to the decisions that were rendered by the Board of Architecture, not once, not twice, but I think three times, all the things that she would need to be able to facilitate her opportunity to properly defend her position, and we've done that.

City Attorney Suarez: Thank you Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I want to be careful with this situation.

City Attorney Suarez: Thank you Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Moving on. Please close the public comment section. Moving on to Consent Agenda.