

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item I-8
January 25, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Asset Manager, Zeida Sardinas

Public Speaker(s)

Jack Miller

Lourdes (Unknown)

Unidentified Speaker

Agenda Item I-8 [10:00 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing the City Manager to evaluate and negotiate lease terms regarding the Coral Gables Country Club, the city -owned property located at 997 North Greenway Drive, Coral Gables, FL 33134 with BTW Investments, LLC pursuant to Division 12 (Purchase, Sale, and Lease of Public Property) of the City's Procurement Code. (Provided that a Lease is negotiated, the proposed Lease will be subject to the Advisory Board approval process pursuant to Division 12, Section 2-1094 and will ultimately be presented to the City Commission for their consideration and final approval.)

Mayor Lago: Alright, well, it's 10 o'clock. I know that we have an item at 10:30 also, and I'll hold the rest of my Mayor's comments. So, can we move on to the time certain 10 am, which is Item I-8?

City Attorney Ramos: Yes, Mayor. So, I-8, I'll read it into the record, but it's not going to be heard today for the reasons you explained earlier. It's a resolution of the City Commission authorizing the City Manager to evaluate and negotiate lease terms regarding the Coral Gables Country Club, the city-owned property located at 997 North Greenway Drive, with BTW Investments, LLC pursuant to Division 12 of the City's Procurement Code. As you mentioned, Mayor, the BTW Investments has withdrawn their bid for this property, and so I believe the City Manager has a different recommendation for you today.

Mayor Lago: Yes. And what I would also like to make it clear, very, very -- be very clear on this issue. I also have my own ideas in regards to what I think we should do here in regards to the country club. I align with what's going to be presented here, and I know my colleagues in the Commission also think it's a good idea. And the reason why we're doing this instead of just scratching I-8 because, obviously, there's nothing to ratify today because the proposal has been rescinded, I said, "Let's do this on the record. Let's have a sunshine discussion. Let's have a time certain. Let's allow for public comment," in an effort to make sure, as always, that the City is clear and is transparent in its efforts and is listening to the residents. Mr. Director, how are you?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, if I may say, that item initially was to ask for -- to allow us to start negotiations with BTW Investments. Let me say that it was an interesting proposal, a proposal that really required us to dig deeper. We have never -- we did not negotiate with BTW Investments. We were seeking the Commission's approval to start negotiations. Their proposal, we asked for a few clarifications so that we could better review it and discuss it with the Commission prior to this. So, with that deal falling through, then certainly our backup plan has always been to -- for the Parks and Recreation Department to take this facility over. With that, I have -- and it's something

that I have been discussing with the Parks and Recreation Director for some time now in case this did not work out. So, we -- this is -- we have here our Parks and Recreation Director that can explain anything that the Commission...

Mayor Lago: Before...

City Manager Iglesias: Between him and I, I think we can explain whatever...

Mayor Lago: Before we get into this, we were looking at potentially having an investment through a partnership of 4 to \$5 million upfront in regards to the country club. The country club has sorely needed for some time a serious injection of investment. Just for the record, how much has the City of Coral Gables spent on the roof and the air conditioning currently to date?

City Manager Iglesias: We are almost two -- it's going to be almost \$2.4 million. The initial proposal by BTW Investments was \$4.5 million of hard cost.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Not including engineering software and so forth, so it was about \$5 million initial injection into Coral Gables Country Club.

Mayor Lago: And just for the record, again, I met with the current leaseholders until April. I met with them for I think it's the sixth time on Friday for about an hour discussion. And every time that I meet with them, I meet with them with staff, my staff, or City staff to ensure that -- just like I met with Mr. Fernandez for close to an hour and a half -- I think it was about a month ago -- with our team, our City Attorney, I think Ms. Cabrera was there, and I think maybe -- I'm not sure who else was at the meeting. I can't remember. But we always try to make sure that we have the opportunity to sit down and have a conversation in regards to this. We're moving forward, like I clearly said to Mr. Di Donato, we're moving forward on the country club. And what we're doing

today has always been, in my opinion, probably the best option for the City. Yes, we do not get the 4 to \$5 million upfront. We'll have to budget for it now over the next few years, but I think it's a great opportunity to ensure that we can deliver the best product for the community. And like we said before, and I will reiterate again, there will not be a restaurant, 500 seats. There will not be a restaurant of 250 seats, even though there was a restaurant there before. We will not invade the neighborhood. We will not build a parking garage on the surface parking lot. These are all things that I've said on the record, but I will say it again. We're going to have a family atmosphere establishment. We're going to continue serving ice cream at Liberty Café. It's interesting how I pushed to have seats outside, which were denied before, but COVID came around, and now it's worked out perfectly fine. One of the restrictions that I even said, we will not serve beer or wine or any alcohol outside, but we should allow seats for people who are maybe disabled, or have a dog, or have screaming children, like I do sometimes, that want to sit outside, and they don't want to disturb somebody inside, but that ended up working out. What we will have is an establishment that people will be proud of, and the City will run it. Another issue that I've heard that I want to be very clear -- because there's a lot of rumors out there, a lot of comments that are being made to scare people -- if you have an event that is planned with the existing leaseholder, it will be honored. I spoke to Mr. Bob Dickinson from Camillus House in regards to this issue. I sent it over to the Manager and to staff and to Mr. Couceyro. We will honor it. If I have to wash dishes with my Commission -- not the first time; I've done it many times at Culver Military School -- I will wash dishes with Commissioner Anderson, Fors, Menendez, and the Vice Mayor, along with any of my colleagues and our staff, which is incredible, to make sure that we have the adequate staffing level because the fear is that people will leave. There's no need to leave. There will be a smooth transition with somebody who I have incredible faith and confidence in his department, as you can see by the work that they're doing at the parks lately over the last few years and the upgrades and everything they've done with the Literacy Festival, the farmer's market, the extension of the farmer's market. I can only say good things about your department and the good things that you're doing. So, I have extreme faith and confidence, along with this Commission, that the transition will be smooth. It may be a little bumpy, but you know, we're going to get it -- no one is going to lose an event. We're going to try to hire as many people as possible. We're going to find a way to

make sure that the gym -- that everybody who's enjoying the gym continues to enjoy the gym. All we want to do is we want to build upon the Coral Gables community. So, with no further ado, I apologize, but I wanted to clarify a few things on the record because I'm hearing a lot of things -- and so are my colleagues -- and concerns. And I want to make sure that everybody's aware that we're handling this, but we're moving forward. Mr. Couceyro.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, the idea was to go back to the country club concept.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

City Manager Iglesias: Right now what we have is an event center with a gym.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: And the idea is to go back to that country club concept. And the -- that proposal that we -- that's off the table now, did provide for that four -- clearly, 4.5 to a \$5 million injection, immediate injection into the country club. As you know, we can't do that right now, but we will -- I am working with the Finance Director to budget as much as we can for that. But the idea of the Parks Department's option now is to go back to that country club atmosphere, where it's not going to be a 450-seat restaurant. No, it won't be. Country clubs have restaurants, have events, reestablish the pool, reestablish the tennis courts, the -- maintain the gym, maintain the café outside, and all these issues we are dealing with. The reason we brought it to this Commission meeting is because we have to do this by April 30th.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: And we wanted to have enough time to minimize the interruptions to any -- to our residents in the area.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, in reference to -- just because I know what's going to come now -- a country club, you know, when you say "country club," they think Riviera, they think Palm Beach. We're not thinking about Riviera. We're not thinking about Palm Beach. That's not what we're thinking about. And I -- even though I put these things in the record, I sometimes feel that maybe we -- maybe I have to write it down in my own blood and put it on the wall outside. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about an opportunity for people who want to have a membership to golf or want to have a membership to tennis, who want to have a membership to the pool. We're going to continue to run the halls for events. We're going to continue to have Liberty Café for anybody that would like to use Liberty Café. It's a great amenity for the neighborhood. And hopefully, we can find a nice little restaurant tenant...

Unidentified Speaker: Right.

Mayor Lago: That would like to do something -- it doesn't have to be to the standards of the Bernstein crew, which are world class, but it can be something nice...

Unidentified Speaker: Right.

Mayor Lago: That draws people in the community. It has to be based around the community. We have enough restaurants in the downtown. That's not the point of having a restaurant in the facility. So, Fred, go ahead.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I've lived in the City for a long time.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

City Manager Iglesias: Before it burned down, it was a country club.

Mayor Lago: I know.

City Manager Iglesias: And then it burned down...

Mayor Lago: Of course.

City Manager Iglesias: And then we have the current tenant, and it became this facility that we have now.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

City Manager Iglesias: So, it was always a country club. It was never in competition with Riviera. That's a whole different level, and we don't intend to have...

Mayor Lago: I understand.

City Manager Iglesias: To do that now either.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Menendez, you wanted to say something before for the presentation? I apologize.

Commissioner Menendez: I apologize to Fred. He must be cramping up. I think this is exactly what the community needs to -- for us as a city to go in that direction. Clearly, the country club is a community jewel, just like the Youth Center, just like the Venetian Pool. I so trust our Community Recreation team. They really are doing a great job, like the Mayor said, but their heart's in the right place, and they're going to protect and preserve what was mentioned earlier by a gentleman, the importance of community. I also want to -- I want to thank former Mayor Dorothy Thompson and former Vice Mayor Bill Kerdyk. They co-authored a letter, an op-ed that I wrote with them that was published yesterday in the Community Newspaper about the history of the

country club. And it's exactly what we're talking about today. It was a place where families came together to meet, make new friends, to experience kids, grandkids. There was always programming, luaus. The Rotary Club had their meetings there. The Garden Club had their meetings there. It was the centerpiece of what our community was. And I think one thing that was said in this letter is something old that is new again. We can recapture, like the Manager said, the essence of what the Country club was and should always be, the heart and soul of our community. And it's in -- I think it's going to be in the best possible hands to protect and preserve what is important to all of us. And I think it's a great day for the City Commission, City government, to have this opportunity to do something special that will outlive us all, and something that we can give to future generations as well.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mr. Mayor, if I may say something. We've talked about the City a lot, but if you look at a city that has the number-one rated Police Department, the City has a number-one rated Fire Department, a city that has a number-one rated Parks and Recreation Department, and a city that has a triple triple A bond rating and is under 50,000, we're it. There's nobody else. So...

Mayor Lago: That's why -- Mr. Manager, that's why I wanted to make sure that I reiterated on the record my strong support for your administration. While we disagree -- well, we agree more on many issues than we disagree. When we talk about the issues that we're facing, they're nominal in comparison to what other cities are facing and what other communities are facing. So -- but I also really appreciate the fact that we have a group of individuals in this community that are so, you know, interested and are so willing to come to the Commission, are willing to engage on open office hours, and are willing to have a discussion on issues that are important to them, and we welcome them. Fred, you have a presentation you want to go over?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: No, I don't.

Mayor Lago: No?

Commissioner Fors: Can I --? Fred, before you go on, can I just say one thing?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, sure.

Commissioner Fors: Because I don't want to come back to this again. But I want to say from my personal perspective, certain allegations were made against the City Manager. I think everybody here would be hard-pressed to find another government official who has -- who is less political and operates on zero agenda than the City Manager. He's here -- he was here today to ask us for permission to negotiate with BTW Investments because they were the only folks to negotiate with. Now, there's zero folks to negotiate with. But one thing that -- and I feel like I'm beating a dead horse here because I've said it before, is so often we -- the City is criticized, and my colleagues up here are as well, for votes that we have not yet even taken and for discussions that we have not yet even had. Today was the day where we were going to discuss that BTW Investment proposal. There were no negotiations between the City Manager regarding that proposal before then. He was here for permission to ask to do it, and today was the day where we were going to do that in the sunshine. That's not going to happen now. But just when you're out there and you're having conversations at the water cooler, or reading things online, remember to stop and ask yourself whether we've even acted on something yet, and to give us an opportunity to govern and to discuss things like we will today in the sunshine and make decisions then. If you don't like the decision after that, then feel free to criticize us, but so often we put the cart before the horse. So with that being said, I'm looking forward -- not today -- but to hearing Fred's vision on the country club. I have my concerns, of course. I think it's going to be a challenge and an undertaking, but it seems that that's -- really, we have no choice at this point. That's what we're looking at.

City Manager Iglesias: We received the letter from BTW Investments on Friday. We have been in discussion with our Parks Department because they were our back-up plan, and we have a number of ideas that we would like to -- we will set up a meeting for this week with all the directors to consolidate all our ideas and present them at the next Commission meeting. And I think it's

critical that we act now with this so we can proceed forward and get this done by April 30 and have as smooth transition as possible.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, I -- just a couple of minor words. For some of those who doubted whether or not we had any discussions prior to -- I think it's pretty clear that we didn't have discussions prior to. And I just wanted to mention, since we're here in the sunshine now, that some of my concerns were to make sure that we have this facility open to everybody, that it's just not something that someone that has a lot of money can afford to go to. And that was some of my commentary on any proposal that was going to come here, that we have a range of prices for people that are frequent flyers in there versus those that are -- just want to come in a few times a year. I'm looking forward to you...

City Manager Iglesias: And Commissioner, that is our intent. That is our intent.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay, well, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Okay. And just -- I also want to put something on the record if I may. I -- when I met with Mr. Di Donato on Friday -- I think it was around 3 o'clock -- he didn't know about the letter. I shared with him the letter. Sitting with him, I said, "Listen, there's nothing up for discussion. This letter just came in right now. Here's the letter. You can ask for it as a public record. This is a nonissue moving forward. But we will move forward with the City taking over the property and offering a much better product than what is currently offered there for the residents and for people who want to engage in different events." So, I'm looking forward to hearing what you're proposing. And I -- you know, any way that we can support you, any way that we can support you, you know, please feel free.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: Let me say we've done a lot of work with Parks already.

Mayor Lago: I know you have.

City Manager Iglesias: But I think we need to sit down and consolidate everything before we present it to the Commission.

Mayor Lago: And by the way -- and I want to have public comment/discussion, like we're doing today in the sunshine. I want to have -- you know, I want to have everyone's input. I want everybody to give an idea of what they want to see at the country club, obviously, within reason.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Right.

Mayor Lago: You know, within reason.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right, but can we hear from Fred?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: So...

Commissioner Menendez: Actually, Fred, before...

Mayor Lago: That's a good point, Mr. Vice Mayor.

Commissioner Menendez: A quick question.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Mena: No.

Mayor Lago: No.

Commissioner Menendez: The issue of the repairs and a lot of the work that needs to be done, there's the parks referendum that we're working on. Is that something that the country club could benefit from in terms of funding source to make those repairs happen?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Absolutely. If that's the will of the Commission to include that in there, that's definitely something that would help. And you know, you'd be able to -- instead of doing it gradually, you might be able to do it all in one fell swoop at whatever time you receive -- if -- but of course, as you know, the bond is based on voter referendum. So, it would be -- the people would have to decide.

Commissioner Menendez: The people have spoken clearly about their love for the country club.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Sure.

Commissioner Menendez: So, I think it'd be a great opportunity, just like the Youth Center and the amazing parks that we have for the community to be directly involved in making those repairs possible.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, if the Commission is in agreement with this, then the country club would now fall under Parks and Recreation.

Mayor Lago: So I think that we'll have that discussion in the future. But another opportunity -- and I know that Naomi's here -- maybe we can potentially add this to our legislative items for next year, like we did with the property in the Biltmore, the historic property that's in disrepair.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: We've added that to our legislative list and we're going to address it in Tallahassee in the first week in February, so maybe this is some -- an item that we can plan...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Sure.

Mayor Lago: To hopefully go to Tallahassee and explain the importance of this building and see if we can possibly...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Great.

Mayor Lago: Get some funding from the state. So, the floor is yours.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: So, real quick...

Mayor Lago: Please.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: There's been a lot said already of, you know, what our goal is, as the Manager mentioned. We did have a discussion because we were under the impression that, yes, we might be the backup plan. So, with staff, we did have discussions. We kind of conceptualized what we think the proper country club would be there for the City, and it's similar, if not exact to what you're saying. And I think we have some added advantages in some of our experiences that would lead us to do a good job there, especially, you know, our running our small (INAUDIBLE) events. One of the things that's been one of the big successes of us in the last few years is we've always been able to do the big events, the 40,000, Fourth of July. But you know, we've done a lot of smaller events which cater to a specific group, mostly our residents, if not all our residents, and those have been very successful. And we've seen that that's really something that is -- that we're able to do well and we're able to get a lot of gratitude from the residents when we do it. And I think that's what we want to focus on here is with that country club

atmosphere, there's got to be programming. There's got to be things, whether we're doing receptions -- you know, we started throwing out all kinds of ideas and we'll show them to you.

Mayor Lago: For instance, you could bring speakers, you know, on a monthly basis...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: All kinds of things.

Mayor Lago: To educate the community on a litany of different...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Right. You can do that.

Mayor Lago: Issues that interest the community.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: You can do all kinds of things with kids, you know. We see the pool. We're like, oh, dive and movie time, you know, things like that. We started looking at things that we can do for our club members. And you know, we're looking at -- we'll look at the pricing points and make sure that it's not something -- we're not going to compete with Riviera. As we said, we don't want to do that. We want to have something that is -- does connote some quality, but also is an attainable thing for people if they want to be part of the club. And we will look at the café and how we're going to do that. We're already starting to discuss how we would work that. There will be a transition. We do have a lot of capital that we're going to have to do, so there are certain parts that we're going to be able to address quicker than others. So, we've started to look at all this, and we've kind of divided the country club with all the different levels that we need to do, and especially, looking at those improvements. So, you know, within my staff, what I'll do -- and I've already talked about this, and I'm not going to surprise you because I've already discussed it with her -- but our Assistant Director, Carolina Vester, will be my point person on this project. I'm going to move her out of everything else, have her do this for the -- you know, the foreseeable future until we get all of our staff in place, and we roll. And I think that's the best way. We'll -- I'll work on the other stuff. I want her to concentrate on this, obviously, with my

oversight and us looking at it as we go. But I think that will be the best way for us to succeed here, and I think we can do a good job. And thank you for the vote of confidence.

Mayor Lago: Please.

City Manager Iglesias: So, we will have -- be meeting this week to initiate everything.

Mayor Lago: Okay, perfect. I'm looking forward to it.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Alright, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: Before we move on to our...

City Attorney Ramos: Mayor, I think it's important to have a vote directing the City Manager...

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, please.

City Attorney Ramos: To make a plan and bring it back to you for the City to take over the Coral Gables Country Club.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll make a motion on that.

Commissioner Anderson: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Before we vote on this -- just one second, Mr. Clerk. You've raised your hand multiple times. Did you sign in to speak?

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Lago: Would you like to speak on this issue?

Jack Miller: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Please sign in or sign in after. Just give us your information. Go ahead.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, so, one of the things -- my name is Jack Miller, professor over at University of Miami. One of the things that I had done is I was able to do a little bit of research on the Coral Gables Country Club, and I was able to do that before this had transpired. And one of the things we found out as we were trying to find out who the primary publics are, what are people interested in and what are the people in Coral Gables want. So, my question to all of you is have you guys done research to find out what the people of Coral Gables want? Because I think that's important. There's only -- as you said, there's only -- sir, you said there's only -- you know, we have 50 to 55,000 people in the City of Coral Gables that live here.

Mayor Lago: 51,000.

Mr. Miller: And you know, I -- in our research, you know, we researched for a plus or minus 3 percent variability -- or accuracy. We interviewed about 1,200 people. And we found that people -- we found out what people liked, what people didn't like, and what they wanted. So, it's not my place; I'm just an observer here. So, I'm not here to tell anybody what they should do, but I would recommend that, you know, it's a small city, so maybe we should find out what people want. I can tell you what some of the people did want is they didn't want change. They wanted a place where people could go. They were, in fact, looking at changing the name of the Coral Gables Country

Club because a country club didn't necessarily fit the name of the service that it gets because country clubs are exclusive. They're a high-dollar item where people pay a fee to go in. As you said, Mr. Mayor, the Riviera Country Club, we're not that. So people did enjoy the status quo. I will say that. So people were very happy with the status quo. They liked the fact that it was accessible by people that walked by, that if people did want to spend a small amount for a gym membership, they could. So all I would ask is if we're willing to spend \$5 million on a new roof or what it's going to be, maybe we should spend some time and some money to do some research and find out what people really truly want.

City Manager Iglesias: May I ask who funded your research so far?

Mr. Miller: I did myself with the students at the University of Miami. There was actually a class and they put over 3,000 hours of effort into it.

Mayor Lago: So -- go ahead.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, listen, what I would say to you -- I appreciate what you're saying. What I would say to you is -- I mean, we've received hundreds -- I mean, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of emails from community members, many of whom are here today.

Mr. Miller: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm happy to hear the results of your study because they're perfectly consistent, I think, with what we've heard, which is -- and I've responded to many of those emails. And what I assured people is that even though the lease with the existing leaseholder was not continuing, the promise was the nature of what is currently there will not change. So, we'll still have a café. Maybe it won't be called Liberty Café, maybe it'll be called something else, but it'll still be the same type of, you know, service and amenity, that we won't price people out that -- you know, I've told the Manager several times, you know, we need to be able to look residents in the eye and say,

"If you currently pay X for your gym membership or Y for your golf membership, we need to maintain it at more or less that level," because we don't want to price people out. You know, the worst thing I've heard this morning is the notion that anybody up here wants to change sort of the demographic of these locations from an older crowd to a younger crowd. That couldn't be farther from the truth. To the contrary, I'm extremely sensitive to the fact that a lot of the people who use these venues are either already retired or on some sort of fixed income, and you know, nobody in the neighborhood that I've heard from wants it to be...

Mayor Lago: A ritzy...

Vice Mayor Mena: An expensive exclusive country club. And nobody up here...

Mr. Miller: Absolutely, yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Wants it to be that either. So, to your point, I think we have a pretty good sense of what people want, and I think we'll continue as we proceed with whatever the City's going to do. We'll have sunshine meetings and get input in that way. Spending money and resources on a study in advance, I appreciate that notion, but we already have a lot of things that we're going to need to spend money on on this facility. And if I -- I'd rather put good money towards infrastructure and things that sorely are needed in this facility than in studying and really getting results that I feel like we already have a lot of input from the community on. So, your point's well taken. I just think the methodology in which we seek feedback will likely be via sunshine meetings, community outreach, engagement with residents, et cetera, as opposed to a formal study. I will also say we have a Parks Master Plan, which we did spend a lot of money on, and it took years to -- and so there's a lot in there of sort of services that -- in our park system that we know residents are looking for. Now, whether or not some of those services are appropriate for the country club location or not, we'll have to talk that through with the community and understand, you know, what they do or don't want there as far as, you know, swimming lessons in the pool for kids, you know, things like that. We know those are things we need in the City. Now, whether or

not we want to do that in this location, we're going to have to work through that and get feedback on. That's just an example. So I just wanted to address that point.

Mr. Miller: You know, I appreciate that, Mr. Vice Mayor. And there are many ways -- you know, research is not necessarily the only way, but I guess at the end of the day, we just want to make sure that we do take full consideration of what the people of Coral Gables want.

Mayor Lago: So why don't we do this? Why don't you send us an email and address it to the City Manager, copy the Commission with your ideas and possibly what you're offering, and we consider it from that moving now, okay?

Mr. Miller: And also...

Mayor Lago: But we have 10:30 time certain item that I want to get to.

Mr. Miller: Right. Thank you for your time. I appreciate ...

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, I'm...

Mr. Miller: You allowing me to speak. I'll sign in.

City Manager Iglesias: Friends with the dean of the UM business school -- and I'm assuming the business school -- you're part of the business school?

Mr. Miller: Over in School of Communication.

City Manager Iglesias: School of Communication.

Mayor Lago: Okay, we can -- please send us that email. Before we move on, I know that Commissioner Mean -- go ahead, Commissioner.

Commissioner Menendez: No, no, and the key is programming. That's Fred and Carolina. The history of, you know, the country club, it was a second home for folks. And it's interesting, a lot of folks who are concerned about the country club, to them country club or community center is gelato and coffee, when there's so much more we can do, so much more we can offer, and we have in the past. And Fred and Carolina have an amazing track record. Programming is what will activate the facility and programming for everyone. To have an abuela show up with the grandkids and the grandmother can be doing some activity while the kids are doing the other, to spend more than an hour, more than just a gelato and coffee. They spend the afternoon. Long weekends, there used to be swimming races for kids on the long weekends. And they were swimming classes. Ocaquatics used to do swimming classes for toddlers. It's the programming that'll bring life to the facility.

Commissioner Fors: Commissioner Menendez, I just wanted to emphasize that point, so I was about to say the same thing. It always get lost. We talk about we want it to be a place that's accessible to the public. The biggest example of a venue that was not accessible to the public and extremely exclusive to the point where you couldn't even buy a membership if you wanted to was the country club as it was currently being operated. The country club is not supposed to be a gelato and a slice of pizza on the 75 square foot yard in front of Liberty Café. That's what it's been for years. Our residents should be able to access the rest of the country club. At this point, or in recent years, they have not been able to unless they were part of a venue organized by an organization, most of which were not from Coral Gables. So, essentially, the residents of Coral Gables have been locked out of the country club for many years. And what this move has been about is to expand that accessibility and truly open up the rest of the country club for the residents.

Mayor Lago: That's well said, Commissioner. Well said.

Commissioner Anderson: And just -- and while we're in the sunshine, just to let you all know, I agree with you all.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, perfect.

Commissioner Anderson: Every one of your comments; I won't repeat.

Mayor Lago: So, I don't want to close this item out because I want to talk Burger Bob's, but I want to give the respect to our 10:30, which is going to be a very brief presentation on the restaurant. And I will ask you -- I ask my friends and the residents to please stay. Give me five minutes and we'll pick this back up and talk about Burger Bob's because I have a few issues that I want to bring about Burger Bob's.

Commissioner Menendez: We have a first and a second, I think, a motion?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, you do.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

City Clerk Urquia: And before a vote being taken...

Mayor Lago: Yeah, I just don't want to lose the residents who think that we're ending this discussion here.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. I also have a member of the public who wants to speak. Do you want to take the roll call before?

Mayor Lago: Let's have this person speak, and then please close the public comment in regards to this item.

City Clerk Urquia: So, it's on Zoom. I only show a first name as Lourdes.

Unidentified Speaker: That's correct.

City Clerk Urquia: Go ahead, ma'am.

Mayor Lago: Lourdes, the floor is yours.

Unidentified Speaker: Yes, hi. Hi there. Thank you for allowing me to speak. I'm a regular client of Liberty Café. I love -- I absolutely love what they've done with it. I don't remember -- I've been in Miami all my life. I don't remember there ever being anything there like that. I'm not saying that there wasn't, but at least in my life, I don't remember there being anything like that. It's such a gem. Honestly, I couldn't believe it when I discovered it. I lived away for a long time, and I came back, and I thought, "Oh my gosh, this place is wonderful." I'm just wondering, is there any way at all -- I think one of the great things about Liberty Café is that there's individuals behind it, it's personal. It's not a government facility, you know. It's not -- it's their -- that's what makes it really, really special. And once it's taken away from people who've poured their heart and soul in it, it's just -- it's -- I'm not saying it's going to be awful, I'm not. I think you guys have some wonderful ideas, and I'm not necessarily against what you're talking about. It sounds great, but it would be wonderful if there were a way for the current operators to remain there. They -- it can't -- personally -- me, personally, the way it is right now, I think it can't hardly be improved. Everyone I know who -- people that are residents who live very near Liberty Café, people throughout Coral -- everybody loves it the way it is. So, I'm just hoping that there's a way that maybe you can negotiate something with the current operators to keep them there. And I'm not saying -- I don't know if that's possible. I understand it's -- but it's just an idea to consider. It's already what it should be, I think, at least that corner of the whole operation. So, I'm just saying this as somebody who loves Coral Gables, who's a regular there, and I love that area, to just consider the possibility of keeping them in the space. Thank you very much for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Lourdes. I had a meeting with Mr. Di Donato on Friday, like I mentioned, around 3 o'clock, where I was very clear to him, we're moving on. He signed, along with wrote, the separation agreement. It's not like the City wrote the separation. They worked together to write the separation agreement. He signed the document and is moving forward. Now he wants to stay. We're moving forward. I already spoke to the Manager. The Commission has been very, very, very clear. Like the Vice Mayor said, it may not be Liberty Café. It may be the Constitution Café, or it may be the Coral Gables Café, or it may be something beautiful named after someone who has done some great things. Maybe it's the Garden Club Café, whatever it may be. But the point is that we're moving forward. We are going to keep it open. We're going -- just like the gym. I will not allow for the gym to close. I will not allow for people who have paid monies to have a venue to have that venue and use it for great things, like Camillus House, miss out on their event, and the same thing for the Liberty Café. I promise you, it will stay open, and we will do everything in our power to make sure that the quality of service is not only as good as it's been, but it's even better. So, moving on, I want to make sure we address 10:30. And please, I ask the residents not to leave so we can talk about Burger Bob's. Excuse me?

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Lago: Just stay, please.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor...

Mayor Lago: I just want to be respectful for the 10:30.

City Clerk Urquia: To take a vote on the...

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Direction to the City Manager. Commissioner Anderson...

Mayor Lago: You have a first and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: Yep.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

[Later...]

Mayor Lago: Moving back to Item I-8. So, the reason why I want to continue this conversation is because I'd like for the Manager on the record to talk about the prescribed improvements that are going to be done to the facility. What are we looking at, how much are we spending, and what is the timeframe in regards to the entire facility itself?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we're looking at the Pro Shop -- at renovating the Pro Shop. The roof has been replaced. And what we're looking at is slightly expanding Burger Bob's so that they can have handicapped bathrooms and connecting the two areas with glass so that there's a continuity, yet both areas can work independently. We are completely remodeling the Pro Shop, and we are also...

Mayor Lago: The drainage, the drainage.

City Manager Iglesias: Putting impact windows throughout the entire facility. We're also looking at replacing the sanitary sewer for Burger Bob's and the grease trap so that work in the future will be limited to that particular area. We've also looked at the storefront with the restroom aspect as far as multiple doors, et cetera. So, we have -- so we are looking at that space that it has -- it will have quite a bit of potential. I think when we have our Parks and Recreation Department take over the country club, and when we remodel this Pro Shop, I think the space will be quite an interesting space.

Mayor Lago: What are we looking at, a timeframe, in regards to the remodeling to start?

City Manager Iglesias: We are...

Mayor Lago: Since the City's handling this themselves, can we cut this up into different scopes? For example, can we pull a permit for the windows and get that already going through some shop drawing? Can we start working...

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, the...

Mayor Lago: On the bathrooms?

City Manager Iglesias: The plans are already in place. We plan on starting construction in the second quarter of this year.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Now, with Burger Bob's closing early, after we had extended their lease, by the way, can we start that construction before?

City Manager Iglesias: We extended their lease for the first quarter...

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: So that they could be operational until we started construction in the...

Mayor Lago: Yeah, but now that they're...

City Manager Iglesias: We have it -- we -- our plans are to start construction at the beginning of the second quarter.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so I'd like to expedite that as quickly as possible with my colleague's support. So, if we could start that process March 1st, it will be wonderful.

City Manager Iglesias: Remember that we have to go through the procurement process, and that's...

Mayor Lago: I understand. But I mean, again, we're talking about getting three window prices, four window prices. We can -- I think we can do that.

City Manager Iglesias: We are dealing with it as one component, as...

Mayor Lago: That's what I want to try to avoid because I think that we can handle it ourselves and do those, you know, different scopes quickly and expedite the process. But if you want to wait, it's fine. I just want to get it going as quickly as possible. Let me tell you why.

City Manager Iglesias: We have a -- quite a bit of interior work, Mayor, in the Pro Shop, so we're -- so since we have to completely remodel that and we're taking care of the entire building at one time.

Mayor Lago: That's fine, but let me tell you what I want to do, okay? And I want to take the opportunity that we're in the sunshine to have this conversation. I would like to see, once that

facility is complete in its vanilla -- you know, it's vanilla box -- it's a white box. As I mentioned to you yesterday -- excuse me, on Friday -- was it yesterday or Friday when we had our pre-agenda?

City Manager Iglesias: Yesterday.

Mayor Lago: It was yesterday, excuse me. The end result, in my opinion, for that facility has always been some sort of community restaurant, something that is not a Hillstone's, a Redfish, an Abbracci, where you have a lot of turnover and you have a lot of tables, and the only way to make money is by, obviously, having people come through the doors. I think what we're looking at here is a very simple breakfast and lunch place, where it can be like a family diner. I'll give you an example. In Palm Beach yesterday, when we were having our discussion about the diner that they have there, which is a community hit, it's very simple in nature. It doesn't require a lot of investment. It's booths. You've seen the layout. I showed you the website. It's inviting, and it reminds -- and it harkens back to old times. I'm of the belief that we could potentially run that place with one person at the helm who could -- it could remain in the City's control, and we could put one person to run it who has experience already running that type of restaurant, and we don't have to engage in a different restaurateur or a larger restaurateur. But we've already gone to the market, and we've had trouble -- just like we did with the country club -- in getting people to be engaged in that establishment. And I think there's multiple reasons why. Number one, the investment is significant. That was one of the participant's concerns. Number two, the fact that it's located in a residential neighborhood, so there's not much parking there. And if a Burger Bob's and the country club were going to be run by the same entity, you could potentially have parking in the country club if you were going to be able to make it like a symbiotic relationship where they could park and use each other's facilities for one reason or another. That's out the door now. So, what I'd like to have is my colleagues consider and have conversations with the Manager and staff to say, I don't want to see this place closed for two years, for a year and a half. I want to see this place open as quickly as possible. Make it a simple establishment, similar to what you can look up is that Palm Beach diner, which I frequent when I go to Palm Beach with my kids. And I think

it will be something tastefully done that will serve this residential community and really serve its true intention of what that restaurant is there for. It's for the golfers, and it's for the people that live in the community. It's for somebody who wants to have a nice breakfast experience or a nice lunch. It's not, in my opinion -- and I apologize -- it's not fine, ultra-dining. It's not going to work there. We don't have the space and we don't have a capacity. And I think that, at the end of the day, it will just be somebody who will fail...

City Manager Iglesias: Right. And that was never our intent, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, I know it was, but I want to take advantage of this conversation to say-- if we have -- if we have had -- if we've had success with other establishments, let's kind of replicate that. What can we do? I don't want to maybe go to an RFP again. I want to figure out how we run this establishment and we make it into something that is simple. I don't want something very complex. And I'd like to hear from my colleagues because since we can't talk about it, I'd like to talk about it on the record here.

Commissioner Menendez: I'd like to chime in. I too would like to see it remain neighborhood focused. I don't want to see a chain or a chain restaurant. I want something that it's more about the people that run it. There are other places here in South Florida, just outside of Coral Gables, one I can think of that the people love the folks that run it. They go there young and old alike. And make it special and make it part of the history, but obviously, we want quality; quality food, quality service. And we've got people like that. And so, I support your idea, Mayor. On the other hand, also, I'd like to find out as a body what authority -- what power do we have to expedite --? If the City is the one handling the construction, the changes, the repairs, are we able to vote to expedite certain aspects, let's say, eliminate some of the red tape? That's something that I think we should...

City Attorney Ramos: You can direct the City Manager to do things by a certain date or in a certain order, but I would implore you to take his guidance on that because it may not be doable.

Commissioner Menendez: I just know that -- I mean, there are certain hoops that everybody jumps through. Just because the hoops are there...

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, we -- what we've done is we have looked at the Pro Shop and we have -- the area that we're not doing is the interior, and I've added additional work. I've added the sanitary sewer. I've added also the grease trap and so forth on the restaurant. Now, we have left that restaurant area out figuring that somebody would come in and provide that interior work -- right? -- the tenant work. Now -- and we are through -- we are going now through Procurement to do the entire project, except for that interior tenant work on the restaurant. The actual outside impact-resistant glazing that we're doing, we've even incorporated the doors for that restaurant there, so that's where we're at now. We've added additional work. Now, we can also -
- I think we should proceed with what we have.

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

City Manager Iglesias: And then we can also add a second contract in there is to do the interior restaurant -- if we wish to do that -- to then lease the restaurant out, right? But right now, we've left that out and have allowed that to be a TI issue, tenant improvement issue.

Commissioner Menendez: What...

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm sorry. My point is, if there's anything procedurally that we as a Commission can vote on to streamline whatever steps, hoops that you have to run through, through Procurement, through our Code, if we have authority at some point where we can streamline the steps for you and your team, then please let us know. I'm sure there'd be support here to help streamline the red tape that...

City Manager Iglesias: We are going very quickly on the Pro Shop work. The issue that we've left out is the restaurant -- and we've added that sanitary sewer and that exterior work -- is that TI work, that tenant improvement work inside the restaurant. Now, that's something that we would have to design, but it doesn't mean that since we've already incorporated it in the overall design, we can add that as -- we can do that as a second contract. And that could be done -- we can get the drawings, and everything done for that. We did not incorporate that in the current plan because we thought that was going to be a tenant improvement.

Vice Mayor Mena: You know...

Commissioner Menendez: Well...

Mayor Lago: Go ahead, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sorry. Can we --? So let's discuss that.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Mena: You know, and for purposes of discussion, let's kind of bifurcate the issue for a second. We heard from a lot of residents this morning and over the course of many months now about the restaurant. So let's talk about that. Where does that stand? What has been submitted by Ms. Tennyson? Because here's -- because I'd just like to say something about this whole discussion, and I think it's important for the residents. I agree -- and I'm sure my colleagues agree -- with the importance of the establishment, the obvious compassion and sense of community that -- and love that the community has for the establishment, and obviously, for Bob himself, and for Ms. Tennyson as well. So, that to me has not -- that to me is well taken and understood. The -- this -- and this is the first time we really get a chance to discuss, you know, outside of the context of the lease extensions and sort of why they went through this process, that the challenge here is

not about that. That's all well taken. If the bid or the proposal being submitted was at, you know, whatever the market rate is and all that type of stuff, we wouldn't be having a conversation. This would be an easy conversation. So, where the sticking point or the challenge that needs to be addressed is, it's my understanding that the proposals that have been received have not been at a level of what you would consider, you know, an appropriate market rate for such a location, et cetera. So what we need to understand is, if that's the case, how far off is it? You know, because is what we're really talking about here sort of basically, you know -- I don't know what word I would use -- but sort of subsidizing the establishment, the City subsidizing the establishment because of the nature of the establishment and the importance of the establishment to the surrounding community, which we've heard loud and clear. But I think it's important for you and your office, or whoever it is, to really walk through what are they proposing, why doesn't it work, how does it compare to what you would expect to see if you went out for bid because that's -- isn't that really, at the end of the day, what we're talking about? I mean, in my mind, there's no question that if the financial part was a non-issue, we probably wouldn't be having a conversation.

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct, Vice Mayor.

Mayor Lago: And if I may...

Vice Mayor Mena: So...

Mayor Lago: And if I could answer.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, you need to really address that with clarity, what is the financial proposal, what are the shortcomings to the extent there are -- and my understanding is there are -- so that we can understand whether we can bridge that gap or not.

City Manager Iglesias: Well, we have -- and let me clarify. We have two options, right? We can go ahead and go with the option that we have now, which is redo the building, leave that for tenant

improvements, which will be anywhere from 400 to \$600,000, somewhere in that neighborhood. Or we can do those tenant improvements ourselves and then lease out the restaurant, hopefully, to try to recover some of those tenant improvements. So, we're talking about anywhere from 400 to \$600,000. We currently do not have a proposal. We currently have active -- we had three proposals, and now we have two that do not meet that right now.

Vice Mayor Mena: So...

City Manager Iglesias: So...

Vice Mayor Mena: So, but -- okay, so again, let's work through that a little bit. I don't want to operate in a universe where I just assume that there is somebody out there who's willing to spend 4 to \$600,000 on tenant improvements for this space.

City Manager Iglesias: Not anymore.

Mayor Lago: And if I may...

Vice Mayor Mena: Well...

Mayor Lago: Mr...

Vice Mayor Mena: Anymore or before, but...

Mayor Lago: But if I could add...

Vice Mayor Mena: Moving forward...

Mayor Lago: If I could just add to one thing.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, please.

Mayor Lago: Just one thing to this. I want to put it on the record. How many RFPs have we gone through already? How many bites of the apple have we tried?

City Manager Iglesias: We have our Asset Manager here. We've gone through a lot.

Mayor Lago: Zeida, how many times have we gone to market in an effort to attract a tenant?

Asset Manager Sardinias: Well, there have -- those -- there are different processes. The country club had two processes; this has had three, I believe.

City Manager Iglesias: Three.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Vice Mayor Mena: Let's limit this discussion...

Asset Manager Sardinias: Three processes.

Vice Mayor Mena: To Burger Bob's.

Mayor Lago: To Burger Bob's.

Asset Manager Sardinias: Yes, sir. So, we -- well, we've had two -- actually, two whole processes. One was unsolicited, but we have had two whole processes.

City Manager Iglesias: And extensions.

Asset Manager Sardinas: Again...

City Manager Iglesias: And extensions.

Asset Manager Sardinas: We have -- yes, and extensions. We've had -- we have had the two proposals. And I would just caution us now of what to discuss. We're still in the 30-day mark of when the proposals were submitted and when the proposals -- so, we closed on the 10th of January, and so we have 30 days, to the 10th of February, to review those proposals. The Manager and I have not had a minute to sit and go through everything with details.

Unidentified Speaker: Okay.

Asset Manager Sardinas: We've discussed a few things, but you know -- and we do not meet the kind of investment that it is that we're looking for, that those are the components that we look at, right? We look at the level of investment that's necessary for the space to be built out and operated, and then we look at the other side, which is, what is -- going forward, what is going to be paid in rent, et cetera, et cetera, okay. So, the Manager and I discussed what he wanted to do, which was to have the grease trap do the sewer system outside, do all of that, and that can fluctuate with what we do.

City Manager Iglesias: The idea was to limit the work to TI, to tenant improvements. Now, if we wish to do the tenant improvements, we're talking about 400 to \$600,000, somewhere in that range, depending on what the restaurant is going to be. But we -- but that is the decision that we have. Do we do the tenant improvements and lease it, or do we allow...

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, but...

Mayor Lago: I got it, but that's my...

City Manager Iglesias: The leasee to come in and...

Mayor Lago: That's my...

City Manager Iglesias: Do the tenant improvements?

Mayor Lago: That's my point why I brought this up. So, let me bring this back to my core reasoning why I'm here bringing this up. I don't want to step on any toes for the next 30 days. I know they're reviewing the two remaining proposals. But obviously, as you said, we won't sign a proposal where we lose money, at least not under this Administration. We've done it before and we've signed some pretty bad deals, and we're not going to do that again. But we're clear, as a Commission -- and I don't want to speak for all my colleagues, but I think I am -- that we do not want to see like what Commissioner Menendez said, is a chain. We don't want to see an entity there that has extremely high expectations that needs to make a gigantic investment. And how do they recoup that investment? They recoup that investment by having a lot of seats. Where are they going to put those seats? What type of food are they going to offer? You understand? What's the price point? So, we're kind of in a situation where I would like the City, after these 30 days, if my colleagues support, to consider making it a neighborhood restaurant. To look at, for example, the names that I gave to the Manager and to the City Attorney as examples. The one in Palm Beach is a great example of a very small diner. There's no frills. The food is pretty good, though, by the way, and I recommend that anybody go visit it if you can. And potentially consider finding an operator. We don't have to lease it to anybody. We can hire somebody. I don't want to name that person today, but there is somebody that has a lot of experience. So, I want to be very careful what I say on the record. There could be an opportunity to bring somebody in who knows the community, who's been there for over 20-plus years, who understands the community, who understands the City of Coral Gables. We retain control and we make more than \$1,000 a month, like we're making now in the rent. You understand? That's what I'm thinking about. And if anybody has any other names, just like we're bringing in, you know, Fred and his team to

potentially run the country club, and we're now going to see what he's going to present before us as a proposal, and we're going to vet that proposal, I'd like to see the City -- because I don't find -- and I'm not a restaurateur. We've taken almost three bites of the apple here, and we haven't found the interest that we're looking for. And I just don't see that interest coming because it's just...

Vice Mayor Mena: Well...

Mayor Lago: In between the investment and the tiny -- the size of the property, the parking, there's just -- who's going to make money on that situation?

Vice Mayor Mena: Right, and you...

Mayor Lago: and I'll give you one last -- and I'll give you an example. At the gym that I go to -- it's a wonderful gym -- but they have a little restaurant inside the gym. That restaurant has turned over five, six, seven times because there's not enough movement in that restaurant to substantiate the rent that they have to pay there and the cost of having a person manning that station and of the litany of other -- and the litany of other costs that I imagine. I'm not a restaurateur, but it just comes to the point where there's just not enough bodies coming into the front door to make that restaurant viable.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think -- you know, part of the issue -- and I think it dovetails both with what the Mayor just said, but also what you -- my question about what you're looking for and what limitations you're putting on it because there's somewhat of a competing interest there. Because if we're telling you -- and the community has been clear -- we don't want a chain, we don't want a high-priced restaurant, et cetera, you know, that's -- you're already eliminating a sector of the market that would otherwise potentially be interested in the location. So now, you're saying, I want, you know, a simple approachable community restaurant like what's there now. I don't know that there's somebody out there that is going to pay 4 or \$600,000 to improve this thing for that

because I don't know that they can realistically recoup that investment at that point charging reasonable prices on food, et cetera. So, that brings me full circle.

Asset Manager Sardinias: Okay.

Vice Mayor Mena: I understand -- and I don't want to get into -- I have no idea what has been submitted, so I'm just asking and I'm highlighting what my thoughts are having heard from residents and trying to work through the issue. If it's my understanding that Ms. Tennyson, at some point or another in this process, maybe more than once, had submitted a proposal, but it doesn't meet the upfront investment that you're looking for, okay. But is there another bid that does? And if there's not, what are we talking about? What are we looking at? What do we --? So, we need -- I need clarity on this. I rely on you and the Man -- through the Manager to -- and obviously, you know, Procurement to get back to us on what sort of interest there is in this thing, what we're looking for, and are these improvements a necessity or a luxury? You know, do we have to invest 400 and 6 -- or \$600,000? Do we have to? Or maybe could you get by with investing 200,000? I don't -- you know, I'm using round numbers for purposes of discussion. But we need to really understand all of that with tremendous clarity to make an informed decision here. Because again, if the existing -- and look, I want to be careful. I understand Mr. McGuire submitted a letter, you know, and wasn't interested in the final extension that was offered. I understand why, you know. And I appreciate the situation and the uncertainty that he had, and that's a very difficult situation for any business, let alone a restaurant, to operate under. So, you know, I don't put a lot of weight on that. If the current leaseholder is close to what's necessary and meets -- otherwise meets the requests of the residents, let's try to figure that out. And I don't have enough information sitting here today because this whole process of procurement is very, you know, structured and for good reason. And we try not to get involved until it goes through its process, and it gets to us. To Commissioner Fors' point, you know, at no point in time have we opined on any of the bids that have come in at this point. We were supposed to have talked about that a bit today, but that was pulled off the table. So, that's where I am. I would love nothing more than to give the community and agree to what they would like to see there. I hope they understand the challenges, the financial

side of it, because I'm also a fiduciary of the City and the tax dollars that our residents pay, and I have to be mindful of how we spend them. And we do the best we can; sometimes we do well and sometimes we do less than well, but we always strive to do well with that. And I need clarity on that. I hope my colleagues -- I know my colleagues would love nothing more than to give the residents what they would like to see there, so we need to figure out if that's possible or not.

Mayor Lago: You know what's interesting though? And I want to put it on the record because we've been listening, you know -- we've been listening, certain people that have been text messaging right now, they say that we hear, but we don't listen. I've been listening for a long time. This Commission has been listening for a long time, but we can't talk because then we would violate the sunshine law.

Commissioner Anderson: I see that a couple (INAUDIBLE)...

Mayor Lago: So...

Commissioner Anderson: Want to make a point, and I want to add a few points in too so...

Mayor Lago: And I mean, we've been listening.

Commissioner Anderson: Who wants to go next?

City Attorney Ramos: I have a few procedural points when everybody's...

Mayor Lago: Yeah, we...

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

Mayor Lago: We've been listening.

Commissioner Anderson: We're all going to take our turn (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: We've been listening for a long, long time. And for example, today we were supposed to have a conversation about the country club. And I think the country club would have potentially work with Burger Bob's if it would have had been together because you could have been able to really push resources. That's lost now. That's neither here nor there.

Vice Mayor Mena: And one last -- if I may.

Mayor Lago: You know, we...

Vice Mayor Mena: One last point on...

Mayor Lago: We are listening. We are listening.

Vice Mayor Mena: Absolutely, absolutely, yeah.

City Attorney Ramos: I'm not done.

Vice Mayor Mena: I want to be careful -- and I've said this before. These are -- while there was a bid submitted or discussions about it being maybe one, these are two different issues. Burger Bob's and the gentleman who operated it are not the country club. The operators of the country club entered into an agreement. The Mayor already discussed it. And therefore, it's to me a very different situation than Burger Bob's, who has simply gone about his business and the lease is coming to its term and we have to deal with it. I cannot -- whatever -- I've committed to the residents that I will do whatever I can to keep -- and we already talked about the country club -- to keep the same nature, feel, et cetera, services that we have there. I cannot enter into business with somebody -- and now I'm talking about the leaseholder of the country club -- that signed an

agreement with the City represented by competent counsel, agreed to walk away by a certain date, and after doing that and after the parties reaching an agreement, started a public campaign that went against what they signed and put in writing. That's the difference. That's why it's two different situations.

Mayor Lago: And then conflated the issue.

Vice Mayor Mena: And that campaign started...

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Mena: When the nice residents who are fighting for Burger Bob's establishment started doing so, and the operator of the club saw a path forward with that group to latch on to the goodwill that exists around Burger Bob's, and I understand that. And if that had happened before they signed an agreement, maybe it would have been a different discussion, but that's not what happened. And so, I want to just be careful that we keep it as two separate issues. I understand they're across the street from each other. Is there a universe where it could all be somehow operated together that, you know, might make sense? Sure. But that's been the issue with the country club. Nobody wants to change the country club. I don't want a high-priced club. I don't want to fundamentally change the aesthetic and nature of this neighborhood. But I can't do business -- I can't -- I won't support the City doing business with somebody who entered a contract with us and then went back on their word on that agreement publicly. That's the difference. So I just...

Mayor Lago: So...

Vice Mayor Mena: Want to be clear about that.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fors, you had something you want to say? Then Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Fors: Yeah, two points. Taking advantage of sunshine, I think, Mayor, that it's a very interesting concept, speaking of it very generally, one that I've thought about myself in the past of a approach which doesn't necessarily go to an RFP and a lease, but operates more of -- the way I thought about it was a license, which I think a good point you made, which I had not really thought about, was that to some degree, it gives the City more control who will now be running the country club, and perhaps that will lead to more synergy between both buildings. And I think that's a very interesting idea, which we can discuss after bids are in and seeing what some of those people are offering. But I'm very interested in that idea. I wanted to say it in sunshine so everybody hears it. For me, it would even be ideal, a world where perhaps the person who operates this for the City is someone who has the blessing to keep on calling it Burger Bob's maybe even. It would be an ideal world for me. I think with respect to the tenant build-outs in that scenario where there is no tenant, I think there's still a contribution that could be made by the licensee in the form of key money for the license, which money could go straight to a lease, offsetting some of the cost of the -- of what we were expecting to be eventual tenant improvements. And finally, I think a lot of that approach depends on what -- exactly what Vice Mayor was saying -- on what really needs to be imminently done there and what doesn't. For me, it kind of ruins the whole potential harmonious transition to have a place go offline for several months at a time. People are forced to do other things during that time to make a living. So, I really would like to also hear what that entails at a later date in terms of what is imminently necessary. My wife has a very long list of things that I'm supposed to fix around the house, and a lot of them I haven't fixed yet. And the roof is still over our heads and the doors still lock and we're able to sleep there well at night. So, you know, maybe we're prepared at least for a short time period to do the bare necessities in order to at least continue on -- but we all know nothing is forever -- continue on with a certain approach for at least the near future.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Anderson: I have a long list for my husband too. After 34 years of marriage, it's still going. So when I look at businesses, and I'll just -- since we're in the sunshine -- communicate this to you all, I always look for what's doable and viable because I want a business to succeed. So, I look at what's capable of being done by the gross margin, limitations on the customer base, the type of product that they're looking for. And there's only so much we can get out of a burger. That's the practical end of it. So I don't want our demands to be a recipe for failure. I do want it to be successful because it'll be a win-win situation for the City to have a continual operator in there rather than something that's more of a revolving door situation where they try as they might, they try to reach our demands, and when they reach our demands, have actually handicapped themselves to be able to succeed further. So I look at gross margin, the customer base, the viability of the business long-term, whether it's being a licensee type arrangement or otherwise. But we are limited there; we're somewhat handcuffed. This is not the Central Business District, and we don't want it to be the Central Business District. So high on my priority list of things I think we must take care of, whether it's a licensee situation or somebody else building it out, because it is a fixture, is the restroom, not just the four-inch pipe. But I mean the complete build-out of an ADA accessible restroom because that's going to stay with the facility. Someone can take their cooking equipment out and their tables and chairs, but the restroom stays. So I would like that to be a priority. Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: When are the recommendations regarding the current proposals that's come to us in February?

Asset Manager Sardinas: The Manager and I have to meet to review the two proposals. I did want to remind everyone that that space hasn't been touched in 30 years, so the Manager had...

City Manager Iglesias: The space has not been touched in over 30 years, so we do need to go in and update everything because of the condition that it's in. And it's something that we can certainly take a look at. We have -- now we've -- we have direction now on the country club, and we have

two options. We can either -- I mean, it's pretty clear that we can either try to work the TI issues into our program and then go through some type of lease or some type of -- as Commissioner Fors said -- agreement where somebody else runs it or whether -- or they could run it through us, okay. The alternative is to go the more standard route that we've done, where we have the tenant do the tenant improvements. I think after we evaluate that, we can also look at -- and come back and look at that scenario and see whether it's a franchisee or whether it's a tenant improvement, or we can do something similar. But that investment, we have to provide an investment in that -- in the restaurant because of the age of the restaurant and the need for it.

Commissioner Menendez: Since we only have, I believe, one meeting in February now, is there a way in February to have presented to the City Commission the different options sort of like a buffet?

City Manager Iglesias: We have to get...

Commissioner Menendez: So that we can sort of -- it gives us flexibility to work with the Administration and work with the community to find the best path forward. So, if we're given at least one or two I think phenomenal ideas for my colleagues on the table, then that gives us an opportunity in the sunshine to see which path forward is the best.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, I would like to bring it the first meeting in March to allow us to get the proper estimates, look at what we need to do, and also look at what interior work -- as the Vice Mayor said, what we can minimize.

Mayor Lago: Can we hear from our City Attorney one second?

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

City Attorney Ramos: Yeah, this is probably a good time to chime in. So, currently, there is a request for proposals out there -- for lack of a better word. There's a...

Asset Manager Sardinias: It's closed.

City Attorney Ramos: I'm sorry.

Commissioner Menendez: (INAUDIBLE) closed.

Asset Manager Sardinias: It's closed on January 10th.

City Attorney Ramos: Okay, that's been closed and that had certain requirements.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Attorney Ramos: So, it may not be exactly what we're hearing today.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

City Attorney Ramos: So, the Commission can, at any time, throw everything out and start over. But I do think that what you're going to see when Ms. Sardinias and the Manager meet may not be what you think you're going to see. And I just want to tell you that because what went out was for somebody who would come in and do the improvements and then have a certain amount of rent every month and...

Asset Manager Sardinias: Correct.

City Attorney Ramos: Which may not be possible.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Ramos: So, if you're looking at going a different route, this licensing idea, not having a major investment on the front end, or having the City do it, then it's kind of starting over. It's a different process.

Mayor Lago: So...

Commissioner Menendez: But that's what we need on the table.

Mayor Lago: I have an idea, and it's what we've all stated amongst us collectively. We obviously understand that we're not going to meet the goals of the RFP. But the purpose of me putting this conversation at 10 o'clock today was not only to address the issues of the country club. It was to also address the issues of the hundreds, if not thousands, of emails and phone calls that we've gotten that are just -- this is the first time we talk about it. And to put that on the record, this is the first time that we collectively talk about -- because we've had nothing to talk about in regards to the country club. But we have something to talk about, and that is right now, there's nothing. And we got to move forward, and we're moving forward with the City. Now, in regards to Burger Bob's, we still haven't been shown -- at least I haven't, and I know my colleagues haven't either -- because the Manager has always been very courteous and has always shown the Commission at the same time all the documents, starting with the Mayor and moving his way down. And if I haven't seen it, trust me, my colleagues haven't seen it, the final RFPs that were submitted in regards to Burger Bob's. So -- because we haven't had a decision, a decision hasn't been rendered because they're still reviewing those RFPs. They were just submitted. And I'm answering that question now because Marlin Ebbert had asked me why haven't we reviewed it. Because they haven't been finalized yet, that's why. So -- in regards to Burger Bob's. I haven't seen one document. I haven't been -- had anything brought to me. And I'm going to ask my colleagues, has anybody here seen one document in regards to an RFP for Burger Bob's?

Commissioner Anderson: No.

Mayor Lago: And I hate to do this on the record because we have to put this on the record because then we'll get bombarded tomorrow with -- that we're breaking the sunshine, or that we're pushing this one way or another, and then we'll have all of these questions which call into question our City Manager, our City Attorney, and our City Clerk, which are the end of the day, they're doing the best that they can along with their staff. I will leave this with -- I will leave you with this, okay. This is very simple. I do not see a future in Burger Bob's where there is a restaurateur that is willing to come in here and make a significant capital investment without having an ancillary business like the neighboring business to help cover some of those costs. There is not enough business. The diner that I mentioned is by name -- it's called Surfside Diner. If you go to Surfside Diner, it's right off of Worth Avenue. What is feeding it? It's on the side streets but Worth Avenue is feeding it, okay? This is in the middle of a neighborhood, where it's a destination where people enjoy -- there's maybe what, 30 parking spaces, 40 parking spaces? There's no way you can put something significant there to be able to repay us in a timely manner the investment that is required. We're talking 4 to \$600,000. So, we have to come to grips with what is the final opportunity that we have before us, and that is to have a City-run establishment, kind of like the Pro Shop, and put something that's nice, like a Surfside Diner scenario, where we can grab somebody who has the expertise, knows the community, and is interested in either a salary -- and we can iron out those details later -- or a key, like Commissioner Fors was mentioning, over a five-year period, 10-year period. We can come together with some sort of lease, but I think the City should remain in complete control. This is not a situation like the Bernstein group -- Bernstein-Martinez group, where they're coming in and spending a million point three on an investment on a City property, and they're asking for a lease, and we're granting them that lease. It's a massive -- probably the largest TI we've ever seen in the City. They're taking -- but they have an area which will feed that business. There isn't an area that's going to feed that business. And I don't want to put the neighborhood at jeopardy with saying, hey, let's put together like all -- some of the crazy ideas that we've heard, where we're building a parking garage, or we're building, you know, a restaurant for 500 people. That's the way -- that started off as a little snowflake, and it ended up being a snowball

that ran many of us over on the Commission. So, all I'm asking is that -- we've had this conversation over and over. I would like for the Manager and for your team to present to us once you're done with the RFPs and you make the decisions, you're going to present it to the Commission in February. If you're not going to present it to the Commission, I would like for you to sit down with my colleagues, sit down with me, and find a solution where we as a City potentially control that asset.

City Attorney Ramos: So, Mayor, that's a complete departure from what's out there now so...

Mayor Lago: But that's why I'm the Mayor and I'm asking for that.

City Attorney Ramos: So -- right. I'm just asking, do you want the City staff to come back with their recommendation...

Mayor Lago: I'll do...

City Attorney Ramos: Based...

Commissioner Menendez: I'll make a motion.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to do...

Commissioner Fors: I think the question is, Mayor...

Mayor Lago: I'm going to do it very simple.

Commissioner Fors: Do you want it to finish?

Mayor Lago: I'm going to do it very simple, very simple. Here you go. Ready? I'm going to move this over. I'm going to make a motion. This is not working out, okay? And I'm going to be honest with you. I love this position, but I'm getting tired of just the misinformation. The Herald's article yesterday was completely misinformed. And I literally have -- I have a text here from Mr. Di Donato basically saying -- refuting everything that the Herald wrote about it. Okay, that's why I don't give comments. That's why I don't give comments, and I'm very careful about giving comments. And as I tell the residents, we're still negotiating this deal. Give it time. Let it come to the point where there's -- where we can actually have a conversation on the dais. I want staff to end -- not to end, excuse me -- to continue with the RFP, finalize the RFP, render a decision through the Manager's office, tell us what is it that they recommend in regards to the two remaining proposals that are there. Yea, nay, this is what we recommend. And at the same time, at the same time, provide us with an opportunity. And I'm doing this to ensure that we don't have this facility closed for two years and three years. I don't want that done. Like I don't want that. We've already taken three swings at this already and we've missed, not because of staff. Staff has done an incredible job. Actually, I apologize for all the emails and for all the confrontations that you've had to deal with. A lot of them have been because of me because we've met with residents, we've met with other people that are misinformed. Okay, you've heard a Commission here that's willing to move in a direction. I've even -- I've said the person -- I've almost said the person's name without saying the person's name. So, I would like for staff, through the Manager, to run two paths. Path number one, finish the RFPs. Tell us what they recommend, or they don't recommend, and move in a direction where we potentially do the tenant build-out ourselves, and we find someone that we hire to run that facility, or somebody like Commissioner Fors said, some sort of key opportunity or a lease. But I do not want to be in a position where we let that place sit for a year idle. I don't think it's good for the community. And I think, again, especially like the gentleman mentioned, Mr. Roy Black said something very -- that stuck with me. And that was, especially during COVID, we've learned the importance of the human touch, the human affection. And now it's more important than ever. So that's what I'm asking for and my...

City Manager Iglesias: Chair, if we could bring this back, exactly what you said.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: We'll bring it back in the first meeting in March so we could look at both paths. We can evaluate one path and then take a look at the second path, which is going the second route, which was for us to do a TI and then either going with franchise or some type of internal control.

Mayor Lago: Tailored -- a TI tailored after Surfside Diner, something very simple, something that just updates what we have there now.

City Manager Iglesias: Understood.

Mayor Lago: And keeps intact the community feel of this diner. And once you go to the internet, you see Surfside Diner, you will see what I'm talking about.

City Manager Iglesias: It also would allow us to coordinate with our Parks Department who are now...

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Taking over the Coral Gables Country Club, so that gives us this ability to be cohesive and come back in the first meeting in March looking at both alternatives.

Mayor Lago: And remember, if we manage both facilities, we have a lot more buying power. We're literally across the street. If one facility needs ice, if one facility's machine breaks down, if one's going to buy burgers, if one's going to buy hot dogs, we can buy -- we have more buying power. We can do things that, again, are -- they cross-pollinate. And I think that's beneficial and gives more life to both these organizations.

City Manager Iglesias: We also have to look at the fact that we have Liberty Café across from Burger Bob, so there's a number of issues that we need to really assess at this time, and we can really provide that in the first meeting in March.

Mayor Lago: I made a motion, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second. I have a quick question...

Mayor Lago: Yep.

Commissioner Menendez: For the Administration. Who oversees the Pro Shop? What department is that?

City Manager Iglesias: Parks.

Asset Manager Sardinas: It's Parks.

Commissioner Menendez: That's Community Recreation?

City Manager Iglesias: Community Recreation.

Asset Manager Sardinas: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: And the Burger Bob's side of the facility as well?

Mayor Lago: Nope.

Vice Mayor Mena: No.

Commissioner Menendez: That's what I want to get a clarification.

Mayor Lago: That's why it makes sense, Commissioner. We're bringing it -- we can just add the...

Commissioner Menendez: Right.

Mayor Lago: It's three pieces.

Commissioner Menendez: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: Three pieces.

Commissioner Menendez: Go ahead, Fred.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, the Pro Shop is part of the golf course operations, which is managed by Community Recreation. Also, we utilize the Biltmore's staff as a contractor for the daily operation of the Pro Shop. The -- Burger Bob's is a lease, and it is managed through our leasing (INAUDIBLE).

City Manager Iglesias: Economic Development.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, Mr. -- Commissioner, just for -- going -- like dovetailing off your comment, remember, if we control it, we control the maintenance.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: We assure the level of quality. We ensure that things are kept up. I think that's important because if you want things to survive, in my industry, it's all about maintenance. It's all

about buying the right products and ensuring that you may spend a little bit of more money upfront, but the lifespan...

Commissioner Menendez: Right.

Mayor Lago: Will be much longer.

Commissioner Menendez: I think it also helps the likelihood of success.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Because they're not out -- no operator's out there on a limb. It's all part -- connected branches, and they support, feed off each other. And we do have situations within Community Recreation where there are individual or individuals that run certain programs that get -- we have ways where they are incentivized...

Vice Mayor Mena: Yep.

Commissioner Menendez: To succeed. So, that's something -- if we do go in that route for whoever ends up running, I want to see them have incentives to -- you know, in whatever arrangement we set up.

Vice Mayor Mena: Alright. So we have a first and a second. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: We have a member of the public requesting to speak, Mr. Mayor.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure.

City Clerk Urquia: Just so you know, this person also acknowledges that they bid on the current process.

City Attorney Ramos: So, if the person is a bidder -- this item was not on the agenda today. Other bidders did not have an opportunity to be here. So, I would ask that they not be able to speak because if the item had been on, then other people would have been on notice.

Commissioner Menendez: We don't need to jeopardize everything that I think collectively we're working towards, so I think -- it's just better for the City, better for the community, better for that individual, in my opinion. I'm sorry. I'm not (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Fors: Ms. Wells, I think you'll understand. It's like an ex parte communication. It's almost like having a hearing with one lawyer there and not the other lawyer there.

Unidentified Speaker: No, no, no. I appreciate (INAUDIBLE). I just wanted to talk (INAUDIBLE) that's all. (INAUDIBLE) no problem.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you.

City Attorney Ramos: Sorry about that.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Mr. Chair, thank you.

Vice Mayor Mena: Can I do this?

Mayor Lago: Of course. Yeah, enjoy. You do it well.

Commissioner Menendez: Can we all get one?

Mayor Lago: Alright, so thank you very much. I think it was very fruitful, the conversation. And I hope that everybody enjoyed seeing how the sausage was made. Sometimes it's not pretty, but I think today was -- I think it looked pretty today.