

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
January 14, 2025
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, 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, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Police Chief, Ed Hudak
Assistant Finance Director, Paula Rodriguez

Public Speaker(s)

Lieutenant Clause Renoso, FOP
Maria Cruz

Agenda Item F-4 [12:41p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission amending the procedure for the selection of the Robert DeKorte Memorial Award recipient and increasing the associated award. (Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: Moving unto agenda item F-4.

City Attorney Suarez: F-4 is a resolution of the City Commission amending the procedure for the selection of the Robert DeKorte Memorial Award recipient and increasing the associated award.

Commissioner Castro: I have Lieutenant Renoso here, if you could please come up and talk a little bit about this award. Welcome.

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Lieutenant Renoso: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, attendees all. Clause Renoso representing the Coral Gables Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #7, 265 Sevilla Avenue. I stand before you today in support of an initiative to correct the matter that has been forgotten about for some time. On January 21, 1972, Officer Robert DeKorte was murdered responding to a hold-up alarm at a liquor store. Officer DeKorte was confronted by two subjects that were robbing the store and during the apprehension effort, Officer DeKorte was shot and killed. On March 14, 1972, the Coral Gables Commission unanimously adopted Resolution 17598, which established an award to be presented annually every January 21st to the deserving member of the Coral Gables Police Department who best exemplifies courage, dedication and devotion to duty. While the recognition in memory of Officer DeKorte is the spirit of the award, we should not overlook the financial significance of the award. The Commission unanimously adopted the recommendation of the Citizens Security Advisory Board in Resolution 17750, to present the recipient of the DeKorte award, a plaque, 40 hours of additional annual leave, and \$500.00. In 1972, \$500 was a significant amount. In 1972, the budgeted salary for a Coral Gables Police Officer was \$10,466. In 1972, you could buy a new Ford Mustang Mock 1 for \$3,053. The 1972 Commission led by Mayor Keith Phillips understood the significance of the \$500 award. Not only to the cost to the city, but also in the value to the recipient. Standing before you today, feeling embarrassed, because nobody ever feels comfortable asking for money, but it seems that this matter has been forgotten for the last half century, and I feel that by bringing it before you, it will get the attention it deserves. Both to honor the memory of Officer DeKorte and to continue to fulfil the intent of the Citizens Advisory Board and the Commission of 1972. There have been many Commissions before you that annually managed the DeKorte award, none have taken the opportunity to address the matter. Let it be said that the Commission here today led by Mayor Vince Lago addressed the long-forgotten matter that provides direct benefit to the officer espousing courage, dedication and devotion to duty. The most critical service of any city is to provide public safety. The officers that work for the Coral Gables Police Department do that every day. Let's provide them the recognition and the award that they deserve, by again, unanimously after 52 years adopting a new resolution. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Castro: So, after 50 years, I mean inflation, we don't even have to talk about that, but I would move this, any of my colleagues.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I asked the, and money is not the issue here, but we do have to find the money somewhere. I asked the City Manager from whence the money would come and he said it would come from the police budget itself. So, some time has passed since my pre-agenda because you weren't sure where the money was going to come from. I'm going to ask you to update the response on that, because inflation, we're way past \$5,000 on what this award should be, and

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\$5,000 is certainly deserving of the police officers that put their life on the line, the bottom line is we've got to find the money to fund it though, because otherwise it doesn't happen. You are the budget man.

Chief Hudak: It's my budget.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Its your budget that I was told would pay for it.

Chief Hudak: Well, it's the citizens' budget, I'm just the keeper of it. My wife will tell you, I'm more frugal with your tax dollars than I am with the allowance she gives me. More importantly, I did have a conversation with Commissioner Castro about this when the item was coming up. You know we honor our employees three different ways here in the City of Coral Gables. I think in the spirit of the Robert DeKorte award, one of which I've had the honor of winning in my career is to remember his fallen sacrifice, his family sacrifices, that is picked by the FOP Executive Board. At one point it was the FOP and the PBA. It was by resolution as Lieutenant Renoso talked about by this body, the formal body. I do believe now that we should also recognize the Officer of the Year, which is selected by the Police Department, as well as the Firefighter of the Year, which is selected by the Fire Department. That being said, myself and the Fire Chief who has also had conversations, now we have the LEAF Foundation, of which it had its inaugural. We also have the Coral Gables Police Foundation, which is separate and apart from the LEAF Foundation. So, I'm not concerned about funding all three of those, if that is in fact the motion as I understand it. Where we would give \$5,000 to the DeKorte award winner for the officer sacrifice, \$5,000 for the Firefighter of the Year, and \$5,000 for the Officer of the Year. That money will be, obviously, donated from in-kind, from foundations and then brought to the respective budgets and forwarded to the employee.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, let me ask you a few more questions, because you had mentioned the money would come from the foundation, as opposed to from the city's budget. I haven't had a conversation with the foundation to be able to know that they are willing to fund something that is, we don't have jurisdiction over the foundation. We cannot force them to do that. So, unless it's a budget line item on the city's budget, I don't see how we can pass something that's not going to be funded, because it has to be something that they agree to. The LEAF Foundation had a magnificent showing in its first year. The purpose of that award was to take care of individuals who become disabled and those, who unfortunately, are lost in the line of duty. I've worked with agents before. I've seen one that's gotten lost, the devastation to their family, tuition, etc., that has to be taken care of. This award is different than that though. So, unless they are saying that they are going to fund this too, I don't see how this Commission can require a private foundation to fund a city resolution.

Chief Hudak: Well, to that point, I think if the Commission were to allow the Police and Fire Departments to accept donations to fund up to this amount, that would be done. I mean the LEAF

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Foundation, its founder, Mr. Bermello, actually in emails have committed to that, again, until we go and fund the foundation. I can speak for the Coral Gables Police Foundation is that, that board has been put together. I know for a fact there's about \$20,000 in that fund right now, and I would be asking for that as well, and that does not have the limitations that the LEAF Foundation has. So, if in fact, if we are not comfortable with having the money in place, we can either defer this, until we have those monies and those donations, or you can give me the ability to, or give the Commission the ability to accept a donation up to the amount of \$15,000 for these three. Now right now, I would say we are funding \$1,000, so it would be \$4,000 each. I believe that's the number is right now.

City Attorney Suarez: But there are two different items on the Commission agenda. I just want to make sure that we are clear right now. F-4 is the item that we called up, which is specific to the DeKorte Memorial Award, that one doesn't specify that it would be funded by any private organization, but if that's what the Commission wants to specify, we can certainly realize that. And then F-5 is the one that would increase the amounts for the awards for the Firefighter of the Year and the Police Officer of the Year. That resolution does specify that it would be funded through donations from LEAF, and of course, if any given year LEAF does not have the available funds, then the award would not include those additional amounts.

Commissioner Castro: And it says it on the resolution. And I understand your concern, but I can guarantee that I've spoken to the foundation, and they've agreed and its on email that the Chief and de la Rosa were copied on.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Alright. But its not part of the record and they are not here today. I assumed that this was going to be funded through the city budget.

City Attorney Suarez: And I think that is how its drafted for F-4, is drafted that way.

Commissioner Castro: There are two different items.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I understand there are two different items, but I don't think that we – I have to wear my lawyer hat. We have limited jurisdiction. We do not have jurisdiction over private foundations, private donors, etc. The purpose of the LEAF Foundation was to take care of fallen officers, fallen firefighters, and those who are disabled. So, if you want to do something for them, its much better to not dip into their funds for those specific purposes and let's make this part of the budget process for the City of Coral Gables.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Vice Mayor, if I can. Stephan Throckmorton, Deputy City Attorney. The Robert DeKorte Award, as presented here today changes the procedure for selection, but it also increases the city contribution from \$500 to \$5,000. So that is a \$4,500 budget change, the source of which needs to be identified. The separate item, which we haven't called yet, which

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is F-5, has to do with the Police and Firefighter Award. The city is not increasing their contribution to those awards, its staying at \$1,000, but the Commissioner has expressed that the LEAF Foundation has made a commitment to issue an additional \$4,000 per award for those funds, which is contingent, of course, on available funding each year. So that's a separate item, but you are correct, the DeKorte Award, the additional \$4,500, the funding for which has not yet been identified by the Manager's office.

City Manager Rojas: We'll look at the current budget to see where we can find the \$4,500, and then we'll include it as a line item in future budgets. Is Diana here?

Vice Mayor Anderson: You want to bring it back to the next Commission meeting, so we can have that identified.

Commissioner Castro: I don't really think it's necessary.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think that question goes to the City Manager's Office.

City Manager Rojas: Well, I'm waiting for my Finance Director to ask her one question, but we will include it in future years as a budget line item for the award.

Commissioner Castro: Its for this year and the following years. I believe there's a motion and a second on the table.

Commissioner Menendez: We're on F-4 now.

Commissioner Castro: Yes, F-4.

Mayor Lago: That is going to be funded by the city, correct.

City Attorney Suarez: Correct.

Commissioner Castro: \$4,500.

Mayor Lago: Okay. I don't have a problem voting on that one. I don't have an issue with that.

Commissioner Menendez: Let's take care of that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I have no problem voting on one funded by the city.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: We have someone requesting to speak on the item, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. When we talk about First Responders, when we talk about what the Police and Fire do for us, we shouldn't be talking about nickels and dimes. We

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are talking about little money, from what I understood from the Chief and from the Commissioner, they have commitments that they will take care of it. Why do we keep arguing. To me, it's absolutely a slap in the face. I didn't even realize that we were giving the top award in the Police Department \$500. If that was not an insult, I don't know what I could call it. I believe that this is a wonderful opportunity for us to show that we really care for our First Responders, and I understood exactly what was being said, \$4,500 for this year we'll find it, and the next year we'll put it on the budget, and the second one, the commitment from foundations to do it. I do not need to delay this. I think our First Responders deserve this and more.

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

Mayor Lago: Go ahead.

City Manager Rojas: Well, I wanted to ask you a question. In our current budget, we are looking for \$4,500 as an award for the item under F-4. Where can I get that funding from and I prefer to take it out of my City Manager's budget, so I leave it up to you.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: We can certainly identify \$4,500 for this purpose, if that's the will of the Commission. We likely have some savings for some funding that we set aside within, technically the Manager gives us direction on it, but it's our non-departmental budget, so we can certainly identify \$4,500 from that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So, we have a motion and a second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We do.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'd like the same question asked for the next award too.

Mayor Lago: You mind if we vote on this one now.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, I don't mind.

Mayor Lago: This one is coming from appropriations of the city.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

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Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)