

**City of Coral Gables City Second Budget Hearing
September 25, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Budget Director, Paula Rodriguez

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Items [5:01 p.m.]

1. Second Budget Hearing 2025-2026 Presentation
2. Public Hearing for obtaining comments relative to Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026
3. An Ordinance of the City Commission providing for the levy of taxes for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026; fixing the rate of such levy; providing for the segregation and the application of the proceeds of such levy; providing for the separability of the provisions hereof; and providing that this ordinance shall become effective October 1, 2025.
4. An Ordinance of the City Commission adopting the Annual Budget of estimated revenues and expenditures for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026; providing for the separability of the provisions hereof; and providing that this Ordinance shall become effective October 1, 2025.
5. A Resolution of the City Commission adopting the Capital Improvement Program for the Fiscal Years 2026 to 2030.

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Mayor Lago: Well good afternoon. I'd like to welcome everyone to the Second Budget Hearing for September 25, 2025, at 5pm. It is currently 5pm. Before we get started, I want to thank staff for all your hard work. Thank you for for making it to the finish line. I wouldn't worry about it closes out as quickly as possible. Thank you for your hard work. We don't get here without you. I want to thank our Manager and his team, the DCM, the ACM. Thank you for all your hard work. Thank you for producing a great budget that we try to meet as many of our obligations and as many of our needs. Sometimes we fall short, but we try to do the best we possibly can, balancing fiscal responsibility and ensuring that we meet the needs of this community. So, getting started, Paula, let's get this going.

Budget Director Rodriguez: Thank you. Paula Rodriguez, Assistant Finance Director for Management, Budget, and Compliance. Just to echo the Mayor, I'd like to thank my staff as well and our department directors. This is not just my effort. This is a culmination of all of our department directors and my staff who make this happen each year, and of course, the support of the Commission and the City Manager's Office. So just for the record, Pedro Garcia, Senior Management Budget Analyst, Chris Garcia, Ivan Baez, Management and Budget Analyst, and Anami Garcia, our Internal Audit and Grants Coordinator. And so, thank you for all of your support and for making me look good every day. So today is our second hearing for our Fiscal 2025-2026 Budget. As you know, this is a culmination of many months of coordination. And so, I'm going to go ahead and share our presentation today. The purpose of today is we will be setting the final millage for Fiscal Year 2026 and adopting the 2026 Operating and Capital Budget. So, the first slide is a quick recap of our calendar, everything that leads up into our budget process. And so, we've seen this now a couple of times. And so today, we are at the final day, September 25, our Second Budget Hearing. So, thank you all.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Budget Director Rodriguez: This next slide demonstrates any changes from the first hearing. There are no changes in revenue or expenditures from the first hearing. So, our total revenues are \$313,573,494. And our total expenditures are \$313,573,494 for a balanced Fiscal Year 26 Budget. The budget summary also has not changed. And so, you'll see here our operating revenues are just over \$281 million dollars. Our transfers in from reserve are \$32,361,411 for a total revenue of \$313,573,494. Our operating expenditures are \$245,748,007. Our capital expenditure budget for next year is \$53,021,235. And our debt service is \$10,582,190 for a total expenditure budget of \$309 million dollars. And then our transfers to reserve, expected transfers at the end of fiscal year, total \$4.2 million dollars, including \$4.2 million dollars that we will transfer from parking for the training of debt service in that fund for a total budget of \$313,573,494. No changes to our capital from the last presentation. And so, you can see here on our screen the totals by category. I'll go through the screen very quickly. Excuse me. For the total capital budget of \$57,096,897. And that includes the automotive budget, which is also part of the operating. The next screen shows our total millage, which includes the City's millage, the County millage, the School Board millage,

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and the Regional millage. So, the total millage compared to the other 34 municipalities in the county. And the blue highlighted columns are the full-service cities that we compare ourselves to. You can see that we are second lowest in the full service when you consider Key Biscayne. And we are the 10th of all municipalities throughout the county. Municipal millage rate for full-service cities by tax year. You saw this in the last presentation. Nothing has changed here. And so, our millage has also been maintained now for the 11th year at 5.559, which is the millage that we are presenting today. Excuse me. This is the chart, which also has gone unchanged, that shows the comparison of the cents per dollar that each of our taxpayers pay to the City compared to the County, compared to the School Board, and compared to Regional. And so, you note that our residents, every \$0.31 of the dollar paid for taxes by our residents goes to the City of Coral Gables. \$0.36 goes to the School Board, \$0.32 to the County, and about \$0.01 to the Regional. Our annual pension contributions, we've discussed this at length over the last couple of months. And so, our pension contribution is remaining at just about \$31 million. The extra payment is being reduced from \$9.5 million to \$7.6 million. That reduction is due to the retiree COLA that was granted. And our required contribution has increased since last year. Our funded ratio has also changed. So, from 23 to 24, we've gone from 75 percent funded to 74.5 percent funded. And the last chart is an analysis of our general fund reserve. And so, at the end of fiscal year 25, we are funded at just over \$59 million, which is our 25 percent required reserve policy. So that is the extent of my presentation. In addition, the City Attorney is going to read into the record the ordinance first, levying our millage. So, levying our taxes, our proposed millage rate of 5.559 is 6.5 percent over the rollback millage rate of 5.1951. If there's any other questions.

Mayor Lago: Before we go into this really quickly. I just want to mention a few things and I just want to have hopefully some support from my colleagues on the Commission. I know that Mr. Manager that we may have a little bit of income that may come in. We may see some, a little bit of fluidity kind of in the money. Not a lot, but maybe there's something that may come in. I'm hoping, or maybe we don't have to spend something. These are things that I would like for us to consider. And I mentioned to you before; I think our ACM and our DCM wrote a lot of them down. I just want to remind you. The improvements to the Youth Center baseball cages. I know it's about \$50,000 to \$100,000 amount. It's sorely needed. We've been getting a lot of calls for that. I want to make sure that we allocate funds for traffic calming study for Country Club Prado. You know, we're going to study there. We may need some stop signs, some traffic calming. I just want to – these are small amounts. I mean, it's just for real, just kind of real to study, to understand what we need for next year's budget. I just want to make sure that we really look in regard to the Granada pedestrian and bicycle accessibility and safety, what we talked about. But what Commissioner Fernandez said, maybe look into doing a one-way, yes Greenway. It's going to take a lot of public input. I understand that we're just looking at things and opportunities. I mean, what could a study cost or \$25,000, \$20,000, you know, something bringing in an engineering study to kind of look and get us ready for next year. These are big projects that potentially, and maybe big or maybe small, but I want to really focus and get that allocated. We have the Flagler Section here, correct?

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Budget Director Rodriguez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: I want to make sure it's taken care of for the North Gables traffic calming. We talked about Country Club Prado. Oh, I need a little, I really want to see if we can spend a few dollars for the study of the Cocoplum area, like I mentioned, and the Cocoplum circle, cameras, cameras, please, and the camera. Again, these are things, these are not huge ticket numbers. And if we have extra money, these are wish items that I hope that I think it will make it easier for staff. It'll make it easier for police, fire. It'll make us a little bit, have some eyes and ears in places that we really don't have them. That's pretty much it. I also want to recognize Commissioner Orbus. She sent her staff here to be with us again for the second and final hearing. I appreciate and thank our best to our Commissioner. So, these are just things that I would like, aspirational, to consider. If my colleagues have anything, these are small ticket items, more study in preparation for next year. Yes, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'll start first by just adding that, and I probably should have mentioned that during the Commission meeting, we did our preliminary, I'm going to call it a feasibility study by staff before we spend money on doing the ADA compliance for under the walkway under Cocoplum Circle. And yes, it did, at least from drawing out the tape measure, look like it was going to be feasible to take the next step. The other thing I'd ask to be, have some money set aside in the budget if we have the opportunity is that mobility update on the trolley service program? And the Manager can tell us a figure as to what we should have in a way of contribution for a TMA agreement together with all the stakeholders. We need to get it all around the table and determine a contribution amount to be able to get it up and running. Because the sooner we do it, and the sooner we determine a route, and the sooner we have our grant specialist to help us find some money for at least a demonstration project on part of it, we'll be able to start building the ridership. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: You have anything Commissioner?

Commissioner Fernandez: Just a couple of points. I want to make sure we talked about it earlier and I was reminded of it. Alhambra Water Tower, do we have that project fully funded? Because I know we thought we fully funded it two years ago. We were expecting it to be completed by this year. It still hasn't been done. I just want to make sure that we're not falling short on the financials, because I'm sure the cost continues to rise.

Budget Director Rodriguez: So, we currently have it funded at the estimate that we expected based on the plans. If the estimate comes in greater than what we have funded, we'll work through the Manager's office to identify funding. Similar to all of these discussions here throughout the year, some of the items that we have for design or for construction are estimates. And so, where we come below the estimate, hopefully the market's changing a little bit and our estimates, maybe we're coming a little below this year. It has not been true for the last couple of years. We work through the Manager's office to identify either any funds that are available within projects to

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redirect to things of this nature, whether it's within traffic calming or within sidewalk repairs, sidewalk expansions. But we'll evaluate that as we come closer to bidding out the project. And we'll come to you if there's an additional need that we identify. We also may have additional mobility fees or impact fees or park impact fees that come in. And so, throughout the year where those become available, we can always come back, amend the budget and bring those in to fund some of these projects as needed.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right, and then the other thing. I had spoken to the Fire Chief about during the last storm that we had here when I visited the Emergency Operations Center during the storm. If there's a way to find funding for additional weather stations to place in those coastal neighborhoods with cameras, that way we can see as the water is rising, and we can be ready to address it as soon as the storm has passed. It shouldn't be an extraordinary cost, but it is something that we can, it can help us with the disaster relief following a storm, especially in those coastal areas.

Mayor Lago: May I just add something to that? So, can we have a memo to the Commission on items that I talked about at the end of the Commission meeting? I mean, I've forgotten some and what the Commission is talking about now is this final little piece that we hope we can find funding. We hope we know that we got to see. If we're lucky, for example, Phillips Park came in \$1.2 million under, maybe we have more than enough funding. The Water Tower discussion. I'm going out on a limb here. I'm pretty sure it's going to be really expensive. The type of construction is, in my opinion and the opinion of a lot of people who are in the business, it's a recipe for disaster. It's a every 10-year project. We need to find, I know that this is going to be against historic, I know they want to stay true, but every two years, it's not going to be \$2 million. The next time it's going to be \$3 million and \$4 million and \$5 million. And we really have to get an understanding, Mr. Manager, and I would love for you to speak to the Commission and give us different options of how maybe we can use products that do not deteriorate as fast as what's happening with the Water Tower now. I know it's laugh, and I know that obviously that doesn't hold up well in the environment, but there's got to be something better.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor. We're looking into that right now because I think we need to use products that have more longevity, especially if you're looking at 100 feet, you can't see whether that's a composite or whether that's wood once it's painted white. We also use a chalky paint, which is great for historical but has no protection. So, we're looking into products right now that would provide that historical look, but that would generate a longer life between these major repairs that we have to do.

Mayor Lago: And the comments of Commissioner Fernandez in regard to the Fire Chief statement, I wholeheartedly agree. I've always wondered why we don't have cameras that give us a bird's eye view of what's coming and what happened. I mean, you can imagine, we have an amazing facility, Public Safety Building, and we don't have cameras on the water, which will

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give us an immediate idea of what we're facing. So, I think it's a great idea. We're going to have a memo just kind of with an idea of what, for example, what will it cost for the cameras at Cocoplum? Maybe it's \$10,000. You just put a \$10,000 budget item or \$5,000 budget item. So, we can see, okay, these are 15 items that the Commission said are small items that we want to study or things that we want to do now, cameras on the waterway, cameras at Cocoplum. Let me tell you why I think Cocoplum was a big issue. I don't know how to deal with the Ubers anymore, and I'm literally getting calls every day. We had a walkthrough at Cocoplum. The residents are saying that it's really bad. They're defecating, they're hanging out. It's a nightmare in regard to traffic. I need to build a case because I'm speaking to the people at Uber and they're giving us a geofence. But if I don't have a camera there to be able to provide them with data, I'm going off a cell phone and I can't be there or the residents can't be there saying, they drive by and they just call me and say, hey, listen, this continues to be an issue. And also, safety, traffic, we want to monitor traffic, we want to monitor safety, we want to understand there's an accident, all those kinds of things.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think that intersection or that circle in particular has been an issue with the crosswalk in front of Cocoplum because folks are trying to make that left turn into Cocoplum. The traffic that's coming up Old Cutler is the one that they're focused on and similar to the issue that we were speaking about the other day on that crosswalk, their focus is on the cars, not on the pedestrians. And by the time they see the pedestrians in front of their car. So, cameras could help us maybe find solutions to those issues as well and get creative. We're going to need the county's assistance on that. And I think, correct me if I'm wrong, is that there's also a state component to that circle, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor. When the county is, it's a county road at that point, it's FDOT until US-1. And when the county does the bridge, they'll also be redoing Cocoplum Circle. So, a lot of things will be taken care of at that time.

Mayor Lago: And when you walk underneath the Cocoplum Bridge, we should have cameras there. When you're there at night and you realize how dark it is, you know, and you go around the Cocoplum Circle, those cameras are an immediate deterrent. Case in point, Hermes will tell you, the Manager will tell you we used to have a lot of illegal dumping in North Gables. We put up those cameras. Guess what happened?-- 95 percent reduction in illegal dumping. Cameras work because nobody wants to get caught on camera breaking into somebody's car or, you know, going to the bathroom. I know people got to go to the bathroom, but you can't go to the bathroom in front of Cocoplum. That's not the place to go. Or God forbid something even worse, commit a horrible crime.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

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City Manager Iglesias: The county is projecting a start date on those two projects now on the summer of 26.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Budget Director Rodriguez: So certainly, Mayor, we can, I'm sorry.

Commissioner Fernandez: No. There was something you had brought up last budget hearing about the funding for Underline. Was that finally included in the budget?

Budget Director Rodriguez: So that is not included, that is currently not included in the budget, but we have that, and I was going to get to that. So, we can prepare a memo with all of the items that you've mentioned. You mentioned the crosswalk, the pavers on Miracle Mile and Giralda. So, we'll respond to you regarding that.

Mayor Lago: But that saves us money.

Budget Director Rodriguez: Once we have a plan for the crosswalks, we'll determine the cost, but some of that money is for Giralda and Miracle Mile. So, we'll address it in the memo. Everything that you've mentioned, the peafowl funding, Flagler, we've talked about. You mentioned the Underline. So, we'll work through the Manager's office, we'll work with you on the right numbers.

City Manager Iglesias: So, Mayor, let me recall if I was 27, the summer of 27 for Cocoplum Circle and the bridge. We were asked for \$180,000 for this year and it is \$300,000 a mile for next year for \$900,000.

Mayor Lago: So let me tell you about the Underline. While it pains me to say this, I'm going to do the same thing I did with the Whiteway Lights. The mechanism, the legislation that I wrote that puts a percentage of permit fees that go into the parks, that I think the spread is 65, 35; 65 for acquiring, 35 for maintenance. Big portion that's going to have to be used for the Underline for this. We are right now -- South Miami's committed and the City of Miami are committed. We're going to have to put that \$180,000. Imagine we're the only city that doesn't put it in for maintenance. We talked about this. It's not what we agreed upon. It's not what we agreed upon, I understand, but that train has left the station already. We're beyond that.

Budget Director Rodriguez: And through the Manager's office, we'll have the conversation of whether those funds are sufficient for the requests that we have.

Mayor Lago: No, no, but I understand that, but the first request is 180. I know it's only going to go up. And I know, and I think the Manager and you should have a conversation with my colleagues in the Commission. When I sponsored that legislation, along with everybody else, we were not aware that it was going to be for overhead and maintenance. This was going to be one time and then the county was going to address it, or they were going to raise sufficient funds to

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have an endowment. That's no longer the case. So, I will not, and I know my colleagues in the Commission are not going to allow for a three-mile stretch of park here in the city to not be properly maintained, to have graffiti, to have, may I say, an issue with homelessness, an issue with crime. We need to maintain it up to our standards. Our back is against the wall. I don't know how else to do it. And I'm giving you a revenue stream that doesn't come out of the General Fund. It comes from the permit fees that we use that we use to acquire parks, which we've used in different areas. If it's allowed. Is that allowed?

City Attorney Suarez: So that's, those are park impact fees, and they cannot be used for maintenance.

Mayor Lago: No, they're not.

Budget Director Rodriguez: They're intended -- So the park impact fees are intended for purchase of land and enhancement of parks for expansion. So, we can only use those funds for the enhancement of a park, that is because of increased demand. So, a one-time use of an enhancement, but the ongoing maintenance is probably not within that legislation.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Commissioner Fernandez: There may be a solution to this.

Budget Director Rodriguez: But there may be a solutions...

Commissioner Fernandez: \$180,000 could be appropriated to a park that we currently haven't appropriated from there. And that \$180,000 could be appropriated to the Underline from the General Fund.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor. We already do that type of switch, Commissioner. We could, however, the RTZ issues on US-1, we have a potential \$4 million loss...

Mayor Lago: No, but we, you and I are going to sit down with Commissioner Regalado and Commissioner Orbus and talk about that separately. You're going to schedule a meeting in the next two weeks because listen, the RTZ is here, it's not going anywhere, but we can't have a \$4 million impact fee loss. We can't maintain a city like that.

City Manager Iglesias: However, we can take that money, our impact money, use it on the park and take that money and put it in the General Fund and switch it around, Commissioner Fernandez, as you mentioned, and we do that effectively now. However, it is almost a million dollars a year.

Mayor Lago: What I would like to see, if possible, is just a memo a week, two weeks from now, there's not a hurry for this. Very simple, just with line items, Commissioner Lara may have two items that he wants, three items that he may be, as important items that we want to start reviewing, just start reviewing, maybe you want to do a little study or you want to add a camera,
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you want to do something, and that really satisfies residents. Like for example, they've been asking for this Cocoplum, a camera for a long time. Then you have the issue of, for example, when we met with the residents last week on Country Club Prado. We told them, listen, we don't have the funding today, we may have the funding in a year, but let's start at least do a small study to understand what are we facing? And that gives us enough time to be able to come back with the residents and say, look, this is what we're facing. Are you happy with this type of option to address your concerns in the neighborhood? Okay.

Budget Director Rodriguez: So, give us a couple of weeks to work through the Manager's office and with the departments and we'll draft a memo for you as follow-up. I have all of the notes from this meeting and from last meeting as well.

Mayor Lago: And also, from the end of the Commission meeting we had today. I had some items too that we talked about.

Budget Director Rodriguez: I'm sure we have notes on that as well.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: We have those notes.

Mayor Lago: Okay, thank you, I appreciate that. That's it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's it. Great notetaking. Anything else to add?

Commissioner Fernandez: Just a Venetia Trail, which came up earlier today. We were supposed to have had a meeting October of last year with the residents, that never happened. It's been a year since we were supposed to have that meeting. If we could get that meeting organized, so that, I think we had a potential plan or maybe two potential plans, if we can have a sit down with the residents in that area. Cause that's still a nightmare. I drive through there every day and the number of people on bicycles that are heading morning, afternoon and night through that area at night, it's impossible to see people cause there's very inadequate lighting and it is a very narrow roadway. It's barely wide enough to fit two cars. And if you have a large car like mine, it's extremely difficult to get through because people drive on the center lane or in the center of the lane because of cars that are also parked on the side of the road. That's a new issue that we seem to be having. We have cars that are parking on the side of the road there blocking the triangle of visibility. So, you get to the corner of Alberca and Venetia to make a left, you cannot see the cars that are coming, much less the bicycles and the pedestrians.

Mayor Lago: And then you don't have a sidewalk there. And then you think you're going to put a sidewalk on the back of the houses on Alberca, but you can't because that's where they have their trash pits and that's where they have a rear entrance to the back of the property. Very

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complicated. Hermes and Melissa will tell you, very complicated. But we need to, like the Commissioner said, we need to go back and address this because at the end of the day, we made a promise and that we have to have, this has to be part of the memo, at least a study to start the plans, to do the plans. If we could, I mean, this is a problem we have to tackle in 2026. We have to get this one done. And I think it's an easy opportunity because it's not such a big piece of property. It's just a bottleneck that meets right there. We can handle that. I'm telling you; I think we'll win a lot of fans.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I mean, historically, for those who weren't aware, and I know everybody in this room here is aware that it used to be just an alley. So, you can't turn an alley into a two-way street and have a safe condition. And once we get the improvements in, you know, we may need to do things. Sometimes you have to put curbing around the corners to keep people away or have that sidewalk there and have some trees put in to keep people from blocking and narrowing the road unnecessarily, looking forward to trying to get that problem solved because it is very dangerous.

Mayor Lago: All right.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor, real quick.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Lara: So, I'm not sure I recall, Paula, but remember we used to have a \$50,000 budgeted amount for the renderings that were going to go to the Dover architecture? Right. And so, is that still there? Or what finally happened with that?

Vice Mayor Anderson: The high school money.

Budget Director Rodriguez: So, the funding is still in that project because there was not a necessarily decision to go away from finalizing that study. I don't know what the status of the study or the rendering was.

Commissioner Lara: I can say that the Manager and I did meet with the Chair of the School Board, and we've continued conversations. We are exploring ways that maybe perhaps we can still reach a joint agreement with the county, improve the school's track so that it can become something that the residents in that area can use. There is really no park space for them there. It may involve maybe a compromise from an ambitious plan that maybe was being discussed at one point. It may come down to just maybe some improvement through lighting, you know, and using some of the very latest techniques and technology. But this is an ongoing conversation, right? You know, the Manager and I have started going down that path. There's some very vocal

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and committed residents wanting to pursue that as well. And so, I'll keep that one kind of on the front burner as we go into discussions for next year.

Budget Director Rodriguez: If final cost for whatever is decided there ends up less than the \$50,000 then we can certainly reallocate those funds. The same way we do in any other project. If the final amount of a project ends up being less, we then have that available to reallocate to other needs. And so, we have that flexibility.

Commissioner Lara: So, by way of update, you know, I think what we're going to have done is we're going to go back to Dover Cole and ask them to redo renderings. Maybe they'll do it for nothing because really what we might be looking at realistically is just some sort of lighting for the track. And we can actually, you know, not spend the 50 in that regard. It might be actually de minimis, the amount that we would need for a new kind of rendering, you know, just to sort of get the ball rolling on that. And also, another thing, and I'm glad, Mayor, that you're going to give us all an opportunity to kind of comment on this, but I do want to address some of the, I think, some of the financial needs of the Coral Gables Museum. And the Manager and I have also met with the board, and we will meet with you as well separately to be able to sort of isolate some ways that maybe we can improve that historical building.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Lara: And further the mission.

Mayor Lago: I thought you were done, I apologize. Thank you.

Budget Director Rodriguez: Certainly. We'll include that in the memo.

Commissioner Lara: Thank you.

Budget Director Rodriguez: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I have a question. For the Coral Gables High School, assuming it's just lighting or something, is that something that park impact fees could be used for?

Budget Director Rodriguez: So...

Vice Mayor Anderson: You can answer it later if you don't know.

Budget Director Rodriguez: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I see that.

Budget Director Rodriguez: I'd have to understand the, I'd have to understand the project and how it would fit into the requirements of the revenue. So, depending on what the final product is, we can make that determination. But right now, I don't have park impact fees to apply to that

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project. We've applied it to other areas already. So right now, I don't have a balance available to do that.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor. Vice Mayor, if it's an enhancement, then maybe we can do it. What we can't do is maintenance.

Mayor Lago: Okay, moving on.

Budget Director Rodriguez: Okay. And so, the item before you is the ordinance to approve the millage of 5.559. And I look to our City Attorney.

City Attorney Suarez: Yes. So, item three is, and you'll indulge me, Mayor, because there's some required information I need to read. Item three is an ordinance providing for the levy of taxes for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026. Fixing the rate of such levy, providing for the segregation and the application of the proceeds of such levy, providing for the separability of the provisions hereof, and providing that this ordinance shall become effective October 1, 2025. Be it ordained by the Commission of the City of Coral Gables that in Section One, that in compliance with the Constitution and laws of the State of Florida as now written, taxation is hereby levied upon all real and personal property within the present corporate limits of the City of Coral Gables for tax year 2025, a tax of 5.5590 mills, which is a 6.5% increase over the rolled back rate of 5.1951. All proceeds of the collection of this levy to be recorded into the General Fund of the city and shall be reserved therein and dispersed transferred therefrom for the sole and express purpose of paying the necessary operating and capital expenditures of the City of Coral Gables, its departments, offices, and properties for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right. Close with public comment. I entertain a motion.

Commissioner Lara: Move it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, for the reasons I previously stated, regarding the best way to help out individuals in our city is to start from the bottom up. We've done several things between last year and this year. Commissioner Fernandez's resolution today to give some money back to the veterans and individuals with limited income. We've had the reduction in the garbage fee, which helps everybody else, helps everybody at the bottom that is struggling and everybody equally. And the proposal that I brought forward for increasing Homestead Exemption. The initial proposal is just for individuals that are for caregivers and Alzheimer's and people that are blind

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to increase it to \$50,000. We certainly can broaden that conversation. That would put about \$819 in change back in people's pockets, as opposed to an amount that's, I think, \$13.50 if we do a reduction as previously discussed. So, for that reason, my answer is yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. My vote's going to be no. I completely agree with all the methods we are taking. I'm in support of the methods. However, I do believe that it is time that we take, that we show and demonstrate that we are serious about giving a tax cut. What I presented was a responsible, prudent, fiscally responsible tax cut, and I have to stand very firm in what I proposed. I believe it's the most responsible way. I'm sorry, I cannot be a yes on this one, but I do believe we are also helping our residents with the other methods we are taking.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, as I've mentioned before, I think we have taken, as the Vice Mayor was saying, measures to alleviate some of the tax burden on the residents who most need it in our community. We're still working with staff on finding ways to possibly continue reducing the garbage fee with a potential goal of eliminating it in the coming months. And I think right now we have a lot of capital projects that need to be addressed, including City Hall and other projects that we have mentioned already, sidewalk repairs. So, I believe we need the funding right now to address these issues that are resident-driven initiatives. So, for that reason, I'm voting yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes. So, this is the time to be prudent. Keeping the millage rate at 5.559 is the right thing to do. I'm echoing the sentiments of Commissioner Fernandez, Vice Mayor Anderson as well. I think that if we're going to be serious about addressing the concerns that we all know and from our finance team, as you've expressed it to us, revenue has declined significantly. Expenses continue to go up. Prudent thing is to remain steady and keep the millage rate exactly where it is. So, my vote is yes.

Mayor Lago: Well, if you indulge me. Right now, is not the time to play politics or have an Instagram post. Right now, is the time to be prudent, careful, and thoughtful. Again, it's not only the residents, it's you, the employees. Revenue is down. I offered a millage rate reduction when we had revenue increases of 11 and 10 percent in property values. Now we're in the fives this year. It's half of what it was before. Also, Commissioner Castro, as I detailed in my memo, almost \$30 million dollars of debt have been put onto the city over the next 10 years with COLAs, employees, salary increases for the Commission, a litany of other issues that I think are fiscally irresponsible and show a real lack of business acumen. I made a request to lower the millage rate when we had property value increases of 11 and 10 percent. My reduction was going to be \$200 to \$300. It's on video, I've shown it a few times. I will spare you the brain damage. Melissa Castro voted no. Now she is proffering a millage rate reduction that will give each resident \$13. After you've put \$30 million of the debt on this city, it doesn't make sense. Like Commissioner Lara said, now it's time to tighten our belt. Revenues are down and costs are up. If you told me that we were in the 12 or 13 percent property value increases, I would, \$13, I'm in

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favor of a millage rate reduction. I tried to do it for two years. But anybody who knows about business knows that you do not give yourself a salary increase when your revenues are going down. It's just common sense. That's how you sink a ship. So, my vote is yes. Moving on to item four.

City Attorney Suarez: Item four, and there's certain required information I need to read into the record, is an ordinance adopting the annual budget of estimated revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026, providing for the separability of the provisions hereof and providing that this ordinance shall become effective October 1, 2025. Whereas the City Manager prepared it on July 1, 2025, submitted to the Commission a Budget Estimate of the revenues and expenditures of all city departments, divisions, offices, and properties for the fiscal year commencing October 1, 2025, and copies of such estimate have been made available for public viewing at the Coral Gables Library and the Office of the City Clerk. And whereas the budget estimate submitted to the Commission on July 1, 2025, in the amount of \$312,552,038 has been revised by the City Manager to include revenue and expenditure increases in the amount of \$1,021,456, bringing the total budget amount to \$313,573,494. And that the following summary of estimated revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year commencing October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026, is hereby agreed upon and adopted along with the supporting data relating thereto on file with the Finance Department of the City of Coral Gables as the official 2025 to 2026 budget of the City of Coral Gables. Total operating revenues, \$281,212,083. Total transfers from reserves, \$32,361,411. Total revenues, \$313,573,494. Estimated expenditures for all operating departments, capital and debt service. Total operating expense, \$245,748,007. Capital projects, \$53,021,235. Total debt service appropriation, \$10,582,190. Total transfers to reserves, \$4,222,062. Total expenditures, \$313,573,494.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right. I'll entertain a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Lara: Second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, a vote.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. Before I vote on this, the Mayor went ahead and again, went on a political rant. So let me go ahead and rebuttal on that. And you say you back the Blue, right? However, you're the only vote to not vote for the COLA. Let me just put something in perspective that you have forgotten. That vote was a four-fifth vote. That means Commissioner Fernandez, Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson, myself, and Commissioner Kirk Menendez voted on

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it. So, when you're directing yourself to me, I think you should be talking to this whole body, except for yourself. So don't say you back the Blue when you cannot even support them. There was a reason we lost 30 police officers in a period of two years when we had zero vacancies. So, you could keep on saying I led this and whatever is it that you keep on saying, I'm over it. Take responsibility that the whole Commission made this and stop saying you back the Blue because you don't. No.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Before I respond. I'd like to respond to Commissioner Castro's comments about backing the Blue. First and foremost, the largest pension agreement that was given in the city's history to the police, I voted in favor of it. Our police officers are compensated appropriately, and we are beyond grateful for the work that they do. So yes, I do back the Blue. What I don't back is sinking the city in a COLA when, if I may correct Commissioner Castro, I think that she's forgetting, Madam Director, was staff in favor of that COLA? Yes, or no?

Budget Director Rodriguez: No. The staff's recommendation was not to approve the COLA.

Mayor Lago: But I'm happy that she brought this up because it gives me another opportunity to remind residents ahead of an election forthcoming why you cannot support Melissa Castro. When you raise your salary 101 percent and you hide it in a budget, you force me to vote against the budget, along with Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson. The reason why I keep mentioning Commissioner Castro is because she's politicking by trying to lower the millage rate and give residents \$13. Instead of being a team player and understanding, like the rest of the Commission, that revenues have gone down from 11 and 10 percent, down to 5 percent, and costs are continuing to go up. This is all a political move to put on Instagram and basically say, look at what I'm doing. What I would recommend is that you concentrate on passing legislation instead of having meet and greets. Because at the end of the day, your resume and your reputation and what you're remembered for is what you did, not what you aspired or said to. This is not a beauty contest. It's time to get to work. My statement is yes, move on. Number five.

City Attorney Suarez: Item five is a resolution of the City Commission adopting the Capital Improvement Program for the fiscal years 2026 to 2030.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right. I'll enter a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

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Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mayor Lago: In closing, thank you very much. All of the work, all of the congratulations goes to staff. Thank you for your hard work. We are here today because of you, because of your commitment to the residents and because of your commitment to the City Beautiful. Our standards are upheld with your hard work and hopefully we give you the tools necessary and the funding necessary to meet the standards that we request every single day. So, I want to thank the Finance Department for all of your hard work. Thank you for meeting with us dozens of times. Thank you for explaining over and over and over again what a millage rate reduction will do, a cut, an increase, all the work that you have to do. And I know that sometimes it's tedious, it's hard work, it's incredibly hard work, it's tiresome, but you never say no. So, I want to thank you. Mr. Manager, thank you for your hard work. Thank you for your dedication to the City Beautiful. It's not an easy job. That's why we're under the lights and we make all the big money. We used to make more when we had 101 percent pay increase but thank God, we cut that back. But at the end of the day, you deserve all the credit along with your incredible staff, the DCM, the ACM, all the directors, all the employees that are here today. Thank you very much. God bless all of you, and I look forward to seeing you all again. Meeting adjourned.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. I am going to say one more thing, and its respect is very important. And when you address me, respect me, because I'm trying my best attempt to respect you. If you want to debate me with facts, you do that, but don't attack me personally.