



International Affairs Coordinating Council (IACC)
Meeting Minutes
Monday, March 17th, 2025

Location: Fink Studio
2506 Ponce de León Blvd., Coral Gables, Florida

Members:	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Commissioners
Olga Ramudo	P	UA	P										Mayor Vince Lago
Vicky Rua	P	P	P										Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Vacancy	-	-	-										Comm. Kirk Menendez
Raoul Cantero	A	P	E										Comm. Ariel Fernandez
Richard Montes de Oca	P	UA	P										Comm. Melissa Castro
Ilsa Danielson	P	E	P										Alberto Parjus
Vacancy	-	-	-										Council-at-Large Appointment

A = Absent P = Present E = Excused UA = Unexcused Absence X = No Meeting F = Former Member

The International Affairs Coordinating Council (IACC) meeting was called to order at 4:10 p.m.
Chair Olga Ramudo welcomed everyone to the committee.

Approval of the Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes from January 21st, 2025, IACC meeting was made by Vice Chair Montes de Oca and Board member Rua seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.

- **Commissioner Ariel Fernandez** attended today's meeting as a special guest. He thanked Chairperson Ramudo and the board members for their work on the IACC committee, emphasizing that the Board has the potential to elevate Coral Gables globally by showcasing its offerings and strengthening ties with Sister Cities. He reiterated the importance of deeper engagement with these partnerships and expressed appreciation for the Board's structured approach. Commissioner Fernandez also highlighted the success of events like La Feria de Sevilla, noting that despite some challenges, the event attracted over 8,000 attendees, far exceeding expectations. He also complimented the Board and the Department on the programming associated with the Aix-en-Provence delegation. He inquired how he, as a commissioner, could support the Board's efforts and ensure continued success.

Chairperson Ramudo highlighted key areas for the Feria's improvement, such as crowd management, food distribution, and providing value for paid tickets. She suggested that future events should include a complimentary item like a drink or snack. Additionally, she emphasized the need for increased funding, better planning, and closing a larger section of the area to

accommodate the crowd. Despite the challenges, she remains optimistic about improving the event next year.

Vice Chair Montes de Oca stressed the importance of fostering international business ties in addition to cultural and artistic exchanges. He suggested engaging local corporations to attract international companies and investors to Coral Gables. Montes de Oca also advocated for sending delegations abroad and forming strategic partnerships with organizations such as the World Trade Center Miami and the Greater Miami Chamber to optimize resources. Leveraging international trade missions, he noted, could strengthen Coral Gables' global presence and economic opportunities.

OPEN DISCUSSION

- The meeting highlighted Coral Gables' limited participation in international delegations, with official representation occurring only in select instances. The Board emphasized the importance of increasing the city's presence in international matters. **Commissioner Fernandez** pointed out funding challenges due to the absence of a dedicated travel budget, which had been eliminated due to underuse. Currently, travel expenses are covered through limited alternative revenue sources.
- Board members raised concerns about the upcoming Buenos Aires delegation, noting the lack of response from San Isidro officials and stressing the importance of maintaining Sister City engagement. Discussions also pointed out Coral Gables' minimal benefit from Miami-Dade's tourism tax. Suggestions were made to improve the city's visibility on County platforms and apply for Tourism Development Council (TDC) funding.
- Board member Rua reported that Aix-en-Provence proposed a student exchange, a Miami-Marseille flight, and enhanced networking. Follow-up with the University of Miami is needed, and securing a flight route would require financial backing. Some action items include exploring a travel fund for city representation, increasing Coral Gables' tourism presence, securing TDC funding for local events, and following up on the student exchange.
- Discussions also focused on the importance of direct flights for economic growth, citing past efforts in the Florida Keys and the lengthy process required to secure airline routes. Establishing direct flights remains a priority, though it requires strategic planning and persistence. Additionally, an exchange program between the Paul Cézanne Society and the Coral Gables Museum was proposed to foster cultural ties, with a comprehensive action plan to be drafted.
- The significance of strengthening sister city relationships, particularly with Aix-en-Provence, was emphasized. Delegates noted differences in governance structures, highlighting both the challenges and benefits of collaboration. The delegation from Aix-en-Provence, which represented various sectors including arts, tourism, and business, was well-received.
- Board members discussed the limitations of having a 7-seat Board. To have a meaningful relationship with a Sister City, there should be one person assigned to each Sister City which limits the number of cities you can enter into a relationship with. Commissioner Fernandez explained that the Board makeup could be restructured. They discussed the logistics of increasing the number of seats on the International Affairs Coordinating Council to be able to attract more Sister Cities. **A motion was made by Vice-Chair Montes de Oca to increase the number of members of the**

International Affairs Coordinating Council to 9. Board member Ilsa Danielson seconded the motion which passed unanimously. A formal proposal is scheduled for the May 20th commission meeting. Challenges in reestablishing contact with San Isidro, Argentina, were addressed, and it was suggested that if contact is not made before the Buenos Aires delegation visit, further steps should be reconsidered.

- Board members also discussed leadership roles for various sister cities and adjustments needed based on availability. Some members expressed willingness to temporarily assume responsibilities until permanent assignments could be finalized.
- The Coral Gables Literacy Festival, set for May, was also discussed, with a call for more international participation to showcase books in various languages. The event, aimed at promoting summer reading, partners with organizations like Books & Books and local schools. Consulates were encouraged to contribute books for future years, though the tight timing for 2025 participation poses a challenge.
- Finally, discussions on public space improvements focused on shade and sidewalk cleanliness. Proposals included installing umbrellas or retractable shade structures to address heat during outdoor events and maintaining cleaner sidewalks. The city committed to setting an example by maintaining its own properties to encourage businesses to do the same.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Leticia Perez
International Business Development Representative
Economic Development Department
City of Coral Gables