

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-9
January 13, 2026
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
Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton

Public Speaker(s)

Jackson Rip Holmes

Agenda Item F-9 [Start: 5:41 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution No. 2025-160 to change the date of the Special Election and calling for a Special Election on the proposed ballot question and City Charter Amendment to be held on April 21, 2026; providing for submission to the electors for approval or disapproval of a ballot question asking whether the City Charter should be amended to include a requirement that any changes to the compensation of the elected officials, beyond that regular consumer price index increase detailed in the City Code be submitted to a vote of the electors; providing for a mail ballot; providing for notice; providing for inclusion in the City Charter; providing for related matters; and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Let's go through the agenda. Moving on to F-9. Thank you, Madam City Attorney.

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Agenda Item F-9 – Resolution amending Resolution No. 2025-160 to change the date of the Special Election – Compensation of elected officials

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City Attorney Christina Suarez: So, F-8, I'm sorry. F-9 is a resolution of the City Commission amending resolution number 2025-160 to change the date of the special election and calling for a special...

Mayor Lago: Can I, Madam City Attorney? Again, we just got off an IG, and we have one Commissioner to my right sending a note to another Commissioner to my left and it's right here. I think it's ridiculous. There should be a little more respect. I think there should be a little more respect on the Commission and I'm asking you to please don't do that because at the end of the day, you're only disrespecting the position and the city. Let's take this seriously, okay? I apologize for interrupting you. Excuse me.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: F-9 is a resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution number 2025-160 to change the date of the Special Election calling for a Special Election on the proposed ballot question and City Charter Amendment to be held on April 21, 2026 providing for submission to the electors for approval or disapproval of a ballot question asking whether the City Charter should be amended to include a requirement that any changes to the compensation of the elected officials beyond that regular consumer price index increase detailed in the city code be submitted to a vote of the electors providing for a mail ballot, providing for notice, providing for inclusion in the City Charter, providing for related matters and providing for an effective date.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Madam City Attorney.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Mayor, again, I think there have been a few small tweaks to the title of this, not to the question itself which just requires that any change to the compensation of the elected officials beyond the annual adjustment to CPI that's set forth in the code requires an affirmative vote of the electors prior to adoption. Mainly this resolution is here today to move that question from the November 3rd, 2026, General Election to the Special Mail Ballot Election set for April 21, 2026, and providing for that mail ballot.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. May I have a motion?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Move it.

Mayor Lago: May I have a second?

Commissioner Lara: Second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you. So, my name is Jackson Holmes. I live at 35 Sedona Avenue. I want to mention something about... I wonder, I'm 74 years old. So maybe you all do, I'll bet you do. Remember public financing of presidential campaigns? They may still have that even now. And I think that the spirit, I'm very confident that the spirit of the Commissioner, raising the Commissioner's salaries is that of getting independence from developer money. And I think Mayor Slesnick even mentioned it this morning that the reason they kept pushing for greater salaries for the County Commissioners is to make them independent. It's the same thing as the public financing of presidential elections. So, I don't really appreciate people disparaging that undertaking. It's interesting to me, I haven't studied it that closely, but I believe that the increase in the salaries that was passed in the last Commission was really basically COLA. I don't know the answer. Somebody wants to answer that time, please do. And I actually oppose then this thing going on the ballot because I think that the biggest issue in the electorate is that they oppose overdevelopment. And I think that if the language stated honestly, people would reject this. If they said you want to give Commissioners enough money so they're independent of developer influence, then they would say, yes, let them vote themselves raises because we hate developers. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

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

Mayor Lago: Alright, Mr. Clerk. If you may, I don't want to touch the paper. I think you should be part of the public records as you have a Commissioner passing another Commissioner a note. Would you like to please make that part of the public record? Thank you. All right, so we have a motion and a second. Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: Just so everybody knows what was on that paper was from Robert's Rules. I have the book right here. Since the City Attorney did not go ahead and advise the Commissioner what the correction of what he had to say was, I was actually offering him some help. And that's what the paper said, right? Since I'm not allowed to talk, but moving forward, you were the one who gave me this book. I think we need to, maybe the whole Commission can read it a little better because I think some of us are oblivious to what Robert's Rules are. I don't have anything else to say.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fernandez.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, through the Mayor, point of personal privilege is a formal parliamentary procedure used in legislatures and formal meetings allowing a member to address

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the body about matters affecting their integrity, rights, and reputation. I was correct in the motion that I made, Madam City Attorney.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, will you explain to the Commissioner?

City Attorney Christina Suarez: Yes. So, a point of personal privilege. First of all, as you all know, it's not addressed in our code. So of course, when something's not addressed in our code, we do revert to Robert's Rules. And I will tell you that it's the first time that I've ever heard anyone raise a point of personal privilege here in the Commission in that fashion. And so, it really addresses something that affects the member's ability to conduct the business that they're doing here. We typically learn about it in the sense of point of personal privilege. It's very cold in the room. Can someone adjust the temperature? Point of personal privilege. Can we take a five-minute break to use the restroom? I think it can also be used to correct misstatements on the record or something about the member's conduct. So that is the case. But I think the Mayor, as the Chair, can also kind of have the authority to rule on that and say not now, later, et cetera.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Moving on.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I think we continue to bring up these items and put them on a ballot that is going to be mailed out to people. And I think that's the biggest concern that I have about all of these items that we continue to bring up. And this is the last one. We are mailing out a ballot which follows different rules in your regular vote-by-mail ballot. We have problems with the mail service in our city. We've discussed it here before. So, we're placing items on a ballot in April and instead of doing a real election, we're just mailing out ballots and hoping that people get them and are able to return them in time without any errors so that their votes count. I think we're doing a disservice to our residents. I'm ready to vote.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: Right. So let me just address that briefly. You may be right, but I believe you're wrong. And what I predict is that we're going to have a much larger number of participants via the mail-in this April than we do in the normal course of an in-person, April-odd-year election. But the voters will decide. With respect to this item, this one is easy for me because one of the bases for why I decided to run is that I thought that it was fundamentally wrong and in need of change for the Commissioners themselves to award themselves raises. Even though that's permissible, I believe that what occurred was abusive in the last go-round, in abuse of the authority. I firmly believe that we as the Commissioners are not our own bosses. We are servants of the public. The residents of Coral Gables are our bosses. And I believe that the boss determines how much our compensation should be fairly tied to the work that we do and the service that we provide.

Part-time as it is, it is a full-time commitment from all of us here, I'm sure, on the dais. So, it's a campaign promise I ran on. I'm not going to turn my back on that promise, so my vote is yes.

Mayor Lago: Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to second your comments and add a little more context. Our state legislators dedicate themselves full-time to their job, yet get paid \$25,000, \$26,000 per year. And I've always felt that it is improper for an elected official to give themselves raises, especially with the way it was done by this Commission, this prior Commission. We lost a lot of respect in Tallahassee. We regained it by lowering it. And putting in these safeguards, unfortunately, are necessary now, although it was not necessary in past decades. So, I'm a yes.

Mayor Lago: In regard to the comments that were made, I just want to put on the record how we got here. We got here because there was a raise that was put into the budget by three members of the Commission. I spoke to the Manager when we found this, and he said the following three colleagues of yours wanted this on the budget, and it was put there. I have no choice. That's not the way that we lead. In Miami-Dade County, if you're going to receive a raise as an elected official, it has to go before the voters, whether you like it or not. I'm not against the raise. I've said that. But there's a way of doing things, ethically, not in the cover of darkness, hidden in a budget. That's why I was forced, along with the Vice Mayor, to vote against the budget. And later, it was used politically, saying that I opposed and did not support police and fire. Again, there's no perfect tool, but to say that our mail service doesn't work, I mean, we live in a first-class country. I mean, this is not a third-world country. The mail may be delayed one day, but to say it doesn't work is pretty ridiculous as an excuse. But what I think is truly disingenuous is to stand up here and say, after raising your salary 101 percent, giving yourself an almost \$1,000 car allowance and almost \$1,000 expense account, and say that the residents shouldn't be in control to decide whether we deserve to raise our own salary. Just think about that. That, to me, is the ultimate disrespect to the residents. And I was on the ballot last election, along with the Vice Mayor and Commissioner Lara. I walked door-to-door. I polled these facts. Two things that were over 70 percent, two things that were over 70 percent on those polls were number one, changing the elections in November, and number two was that the residents should be in control to make the decision on whether we deserve to raise our salaries. Do I believe that this Commission deserves a salary increase? Wholeheartedly. But that's not the way to deliver a salary increase. To me, I think that's unethical. And as I said before, and I stand by my statement, that was a basic quid-pro-quo between multiple Commissioners on the dais. One wanted one thing, and another wanted another. And that's how you ended up having that deal be cut. In regard to the residents not coming out to vote and not understanding on how to vote and not figuring out how to vote on an absentee ballot at home, which is nothing new, it's been done for decades, I have full faith and confidence in the intellect and the capability of our community. And that's why we're going to spend the amount of money

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that we're going to spend and time on a full-fledged education campaign, whether it's in writing, whether it's in email, whether it's on TV. And we're going to be incorporating Alina Garcia to ensure that she properly provides on video instructions on how to handle these absentee ballots. So, I have full faith and confidence in our residents. We have one of the most educated resident bases in Miami-Dade County, if not the most educated. And when I went door-to-door, thousands of doors, they all told me, Vince, we got to move elections and we got to make sure that we control, because these salaries, 101 percent increase, is absolutely a slap in the face to the residents. So, Mr. Clerk, my vote is yes.

City Clerk Urquia: We haven't called the roll yet, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Go ahead, call the roll.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes. I'd love to have my colleagues with me. Five-0, we got it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I do have a personal point of privilege. I need three minutes to make a call.