

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item D – Public Comment**  
**February 14, 2023**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Michael Mena**

**Commissioner Rhonda Anderson**

**Commissioner Jim Cason**

**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suarez**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**

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Agenda Item D [ a.m.]  
Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Moving onto public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: We only have one member of the public requesting to speak Mr. Mayor is, Ms. Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: I told you it was not going to be a very good day. Last week or a little over a week, I guess, I lost track of time, I had the opportunity to, oh, Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, and I did complete a card. I had the opportunity to attend the annual development, I don't remember the full name, meeting of the university and the city. It was impressive. The spread of food was very good, attendance was very good. I was the only resident, non-staff, non-university related present. It was a kum-by-ya moment. It was lots of love. It should have been done on Valentine's Day. It shows great relationship between the university and the city; and I am sure if I were representing the university, I would be very pleased with all the stuff that the university enjoys, thanks to the city.

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And we do enjoy some things from the university. Don't get me wrong. I love football, I love tennis, I love basketball, but you know what, the relationship between the university and the city fails to include the third part, the third leg of the stool. There are residents also involved, and residents that may or may not be appreciative of the tickets, the free tickets we get, because when you think of the number of tickets considering all the benefits is minimal, okay. At a certain point in time, the residents around that area, we suggested maybe the university could have consideration of the residents by offering maybe a special discount for the use of the health center. Of course, that didn't wash. We get tickets to games that may or may not have a full attendance, okay, but that's okay. I heard things like, the university has taken care of the parking issue. Well, I guess I live on the wrong side of the railroad, because you know what, on my side, we have parking problems. I live across from the church that I attend. They've had to hire a parking attendant, because otherwise university students and employees working at the construction site were taking the parking for the church. The neighbors behind the church have a resident only area. University students and construction workers park there. The parking in front of the church is for two hours limit. University students come in at 6 o'clock in the morning and they are there till the rest of the day. The side that there is no parking full of university students. Whoever tells you that the university has taken care of the parking issue does not see reality, smoking mirrors, that's number one. Parking is also related to construction. When there are construction sites at the university and there is no staging plans, we get hit, because guess what, 5:45 a.m. last week, I had to call the police because there was a humongous 18-wheeler parked in the middle of the street in front of my house trying to figure out where he was parking, because he had to wait for whatever place he was delivering to, to get in, 5:45. Well, lo and behold, I was coming out to figure out what the noise was on my way to pick up my granddaughters and I told them you cannot stay there. So, he found parking by the curb in front of the university right before the circle, blocking part of the road, because he was humongous. I called the police, and the police came out. You know what I was told, there was nothing they could do. He was just parked, that's it. That's a commercial vehicle. We don't have commercial vehicles in the residential areas, okay, but he stayed there most of the day, at least till noon when I came back, okay.

Vice Mayor Mena: You're a couple of minutes over, if you could just, please wind.

Ms. Cruz: What was that?

Vice Mayor Mena: You're over by two minutes already. If you could just bring it to a conclusion.

Ms. Cruz: I know, but you know what, we've taken a lot of comments about things that were way longer than now. Please.

Vice Mayor Mena: Its your fifth time up here today. Please, we need to move on with the agenda.

Ms. Cruz: I think Mr. Lago is running the meeting.

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Vice Mayor Mena: Mr. Lago, would you ask Ms. Cruz to please wind up the conversation.

Ms. Cruz: He's still here. Okay.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, will you do me a favor, let's wrap it up so we can.

Ms. Cruz: No, I'm going to wrap it up, but I have a few things. You know why we have a problem with the construction, because they get extended permit, extended hour permits. Its rare the evening, its rare the late hours that we do not see construction trucks going to the university and when we question, because we talked to some people there, they showed us extended hour permits. They can build 24/7, even in the early hours of the morning. That is wrong. We are entitled to have a quality of life and I'm sorry, the fact that the City Manager approves it, you know what, we live there, we pay taxes. Actually we pay more taxes, the university is a not-for-profit and most of the employees don't live in the city. That's the comment about that. Very fast. So, you see why there's anger in the air. Last week there was a Board of Architects meeting – Board of Architects meeting where neighbors took time.

Mayor Lago: If I may.

Ms. Cruz: This is short. This is very short Mayor.

Mayor Lago: The problem is that you're weaving so many discussions.

Ms. Cruz: I know. Well, do you know...

Mayor Lago: We give three minutes, you're at seven minutes over. So, we're trying – they're other people that potentially want to speak. You've been up four times already.

Ms. Cruz: Yes, but different items. I signed my cards. There are people that get up and don't even get cards.

Mayor Lago: But let's be respectful, but let's be respectful.

Ms. Cruz: Very respectful – which brings me to the point. The residents deserve respect. That's exactly I have it written right here; residents deserve respect. Its bad enough the Board of Architects happens in the morning when people have to work, but its worse when we show up there the time that we're expected to deal with the item and at the point that the meeting is called to order, somebody comes in with a mention, the City Manager has requested this item to be 11 a.m. time certain. That is wrong. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Don't move. Don't move. I'm going to address some of your comments. With all due respect. First comment, its within the purview of the Manager to make that decision, number one. Number two, the BOA, the individuals who serve on the BOA are volunteers. They come to

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the city every single week. These architects give up an entire day to see the issues that are affecting our city in regards to design and construction. They give up an entire day for every week, correct.

City Manager Iglesias: Every Thursday, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Every Thursday, excuse me. I just want to make sure, I don't want to speak out of turn. So you're talking about individuals who are professionals, who have careers and they give up an entire day to make sure that they come to work here on behalf of the city for free, okay. Now, we can't have those meetings after hours because these meetings probably take, in some instances maybe four hours, five hours, six hours, depending on the length, they would be here till 12 o'clock at night. So, we have to be considerate of these individuals who are giving up of their time. So let's also be honest with ourselves, we're not having a meeting once a month, we're having a meeting every single week, and these individuals are giving up time of their own professional careers where they make bread and butter and they provide for their families by this service. These people are not gigantic architects from New York. These are architects, local architects who live in our community, who work in our community, who are building homes, who are building buildings, who are doing remodels, who is giving up of their time, because it's a prestigious appointment to a board here in the City Beautiful. So, I just want to make sure we put it on the record that I say thank you very much and I'd be very careful when we talk about this, because its hard to find people to serve on that board. Mr. Manager, am I correct, yes or no.

City Manager Iglesias: You are correct, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: And we've talked about this a dozen times about the BOA, and its very difficult to find people to serve on that board. So, I don't want to talk about whether we issue after 6 o'clock or 5 o'clock or 9 o'clock. I just want to give gratitude for their service, because we have to be. So, that's number one; number two, I live in front of the University of Miami for the last ten years, so I have a really good experience. Nobody can sell me and tell me what's happening in the University of Miami, because guess what, while you live close to the University of Miami, I live in front of the University of Miami. Nobody is closer to the University of Miami than Vince Lago. I am the closest house to University of Miami. There is nobody closer, nobody. I have all the traffic on San Amaro. I have the Law School. I have the parking. I have the generators. I have the construction. I have everything. And while everything is not perfect, everything is much more in line than it was 10, 12, 15 years ago. Nobody parks illegally on my swale. Those days are over. There is no illegal parking on the swale. There is not students all over the neighborhoods, that has been put in check. Yes, 18-wheelers make mistakes once in a while and they drive down San Amaro. It happens. Sometimes a worker from a construction site sits on the curb on San Amaro and Rubino and sits there for 15 minutes or an hour while he gets picked up. Yes, it happens, once a month, twice a month, it may happen. But to say that there is 18-wheelers and construction vehicles traveling in front of the property is just not correct, because its not the truth. That used to be an issue before

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till we really worked on addressing issues. Are we perfect? – we'll never be perfect. We can always continue to work on things. Do we need to potentially send parking enforcement to address those parking spaces in front of Ms. Cruz' home, we should. Yes. Yes. But the idea that it's a free-for-all in front of the University of Miami, I don't want to take shots at one of our community partners like that, because its unnecessary, its unnecessary. And by the way, we did address very important issues in that meeting. We addressed issues that I think are important to me, like lee-linking, very important to me, something that I've been working on with the Manager and the city and bringing that into the city as one of the largest parks and it's a point of pride for this Commission. We talked about that. We talked about the importance of starting those negotiations that the Manager is working on, and with the help of the Commission and our team here, our legal team here. We talked about a litany of things that doesn't come to mind right now, because you caught me kind of off-guard on this issue, but that's one thing that comes to mind. So, can we get better? – yes; can we address the issue parking enforcement? – yes, we can, but we also have to be honest with ourselves. The University of Miami did not sprout up yesterday. I bought that house knowing the University of Miami was in front, bought it.

Ms. Cruz: But there were no extended hours.

Mayor Lago: But I bought it. I bought it. I live in front of the University of Miami. Is there emergency construction? – yes. It happened five months there was a broken meter, main line, excuse me, and at 4 in the morning they were working on it. Yes, it woke me up. It happens. It happens. But is there construction, is there work, after hours, barely never, barely never. Its not happening. I'm there in front of it, trust me. I'm in the construction industry, this is how I make my living.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, all permits are subject to noise. If there is noise, they are removed immediately.

Mayor Lago: Immediately.

Ms. Cruz: Mayor, I've been here many times, nobody has ever said what I said is not true, that's okay. I'm going to get a video between now and the next meeting and I'll show you the concrete mixers driving there. I'm going to show you.

Mayor Lago: They are allowed to.

Ms. Cruz: No. Mr. Manager told me that the construction vehicles will come through Ponce and San Amaro directly to the university. I have it on him. And the extended hours...

Mayor Lago: I can address that for you. Let me address that for you. Certain times people make mistakes. They come down San Amaro. I've had it happen. I've had it where an 18-wheeler stopped in front of my house, I went to speak to the gentleman. Hey, I made a mistake. Now, I've

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got to figure out how to get this massive vehicle out through San Amaro. What am I going to do at that point. It's not every day, it's not every week that its happening. They are working with their contractors and being very clear on ingress and egress inside the university. Do mistakes happen? – yes. Do people miss exits? – they do, and it happens, but its not like they are pushing traffic down San Amaro or they are pushing traffic down Miller, that's not happening; and by the way, you know very well that 15 years ago, 10 years ago it was a completely different scenario in regards to traffic and parking. Let's at least be honest with ourselves and admit that things have gotten much better. Can we be honest with that or no.

Ms. Cruz: Yes, but I'm talking about specific cases. I'm not talking about generalities.

Mayor Lago: The problem there is that there are four parking spaces that are in front of the church that have to be maintained by parking enforcement.

Ms. Cruz: Mr. Mayor, its not just four parking spaces. It's the whole area, okay, and my big issue is the extended time. And you know what, that doesn't happen, that's okay, only emergencies. As of now, I'm going to request all the extended – and I'll show you how its not emergencies. They work as many hours as they can, because the City Manager allows it to happen. That's okay.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, if you have a project that's on the other side of the field and I've been through there at night, you can't perceive the noise, its so far away. That's a huge campus and if you work in the middle you have certain latitudes that if you work on the perimeter and its understood that all construction vehicles are coming through San Amaro, I'm sorry, through Ponce, down San Amaro. They must have a project manager and if there is any noise they get shut down.

Mayor Lago: And that just makes good business. At the end of the day, it's a good business practice. Do not allow construction to be happening after hours on the outskirts of the university. Just make sure that if its an interior project that it has an emergency that has to be done at night or that has an issue. For example, you have to shut off the electricity, you have to do something, you have to connect a main line of some sort, a sewer line, a water line, you can do those things at night when you are in the interior of the university.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, we requested to have a project manager at all times when they are doing work after hours, and if there is noise they mainly get shut down. So, I think the terms of working after hours are interior, project manager, if there is noise you get shut down. I've walked through that area to make sure, and you can't really perceive it. So, it's a large campus and it depends where the project is how we address the after-hours permitting which as you know, from a construction point of view, I think we have a little latitude because of the size of that campus.

Ms. Cruz: And my last comment is, the employees that go to work after hours, they drop by helicopter or balloon, they do not drive in front. Those trucks that make noise, they don't drive in front of our homes, that's okay.

Vice Mayor Mena: Is that what you're suggesting that they drop in by balloon.

Ms. Cruz: Because...

Vice Mayor Mena: I'm asking...is that your suggestion.

Ms. Cruz: They either come by helicopter and drop...

Vice Mayor Mena: That's not going to happen.

Ms. Cruz: Of course not.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, what are we talking about.

Ms. Cruz: He said that we don't hear it. We hear the noise, we're sleeping, and we hear the big truck. You know construction workers drive humongous trucks that make noises and when they back you can hear the beep, beep, beep, okay, and that's what affects our quality of life, but that's okay. I'm dreaming, I'm hallucinating. You know what, I'll bring you the videos.

Vice Mayor Mena: Please do.

Ms. Cruz: And then you'll see how after hours affects our area. Okay.

Mayor Lago: Please do me a favor, even though I'm in front of the university and I'm on San Amaro, I don't have that issue, again, on a regular basis. I have maybe once a month I'll see, he took a wrong turn and the cement truck.

Ms. Cruz: That's not what we're talking about.

Mayor Lago: But hold on, hold on, what I'm saying, especially on weekends when I'm home outside landscaping by myself, after the gym, 8:30, 9 o'clock you can find me landscaping for three or four hours. I don't hear the construction vehicles. I know how construction vehicles sound. I do this every day. I don't see it. I don't see it. You know what I do see a lot though, which it can be misconstrued is, a lot of FedEx truck vehicles, a lot of DHL, a lot of UPS vehicles that make a lot of noise, that stop traffic, and I think by preemption as per our City Attorney says, we can't really do anything about it. They can stop in the middle of the street and they can do as they please, jump in and jump out, stopping traffic. They make a lot of noise, they hit our canopy, they do a lot of things like that, but I don't see the massive amount. So, I'm asking you, please help me. If you can record the vehicles with film and you can see them, please send them my way, because I would like to see and put it to the attention of University of Miami, if this is really happening. I don't see

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it. I don't see it. I walk that neighborhood on a constant basis. I take my daughters to the Arboretum, I'm on San Amaro constantly with my neighbors, with my friends, outside on bicycles with my kids. I don't see it. I welcome the video, so we can address it.

Ms. Cruz: You know what I think the difference is, they come the Palmetto and the Palmetto, the Ways or whatever throws them to Miller and that's how they come down our way, they don't come down your way.

Mayor Lago: I'm a block away from that. I would hear them, and I walk down that area constantly up and down San Amaro to the university to visit friends and to visit colleagues who are in that area. We walk all the way to Titanic in certain instances, we walk to the Metrorail. I don't see that amount. What I do see is a lot of vehicles on Ponce, but then you have that rogue vehicle that is a new driver that they forgot to educate in regards to ingress and egress and it happens. But send me the video, I'll bring it to the attention of the University of Miami and we'll address it if its an issue. But I'm happy that at least we did acknowledge on the record that traffic and parking illegally is no longer really an issue in that area, because I face it. We have those issues with those spaces in front of Maria Cruz' residence which are public spaces which we need to in more frequency, please send Kevin Kinney a note that he needs to have somebody go over there and ticket those vehicles, make sure they are not parking there all day for free, because those are public parking spaces, but to say that people are parking illegally throughout the neighborhood is not the case.

Vice Mayor Mena: Can we move on to the next item please. Please. Please. Its disrespectful.

Mayor Lago: Come on.

Vice Mayor Mena: Its now 20 minutes. We haven't gotten to the first agenda item after Consent.