

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D – Mayor’s Comments
October 25, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro

Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item D [9:30 a.m.]

Mayor’s Comment

Mayor Lago: I’m going to move onto Mayor’s Comments and since we just discussed Venetia Avenue, this is the first item that I will address. Sidewalk issues on Venetia Terrace and Columbus Boulevard at the next meeting directing our City Manager with the assistance of the Commission to instruct our Public Works Director to move forward with planning for it to be in the next budget cycle. Anybody who has any questions on that front, please feel free to ask right now. I’d like to get your support and a motion, maybe Commissioner Anderson can make a motion.

Commissioner Anderson: I will absolutely move that forward.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

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Commissioner Anderson: I think it's a life-safety issue on that street.

Commissioner Fors: I travel down that street almost daily and completely agree as well.

Vice Mayor Mena: Second.

City Clerk Urquia: All in favor.

All: Aye.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: So, I ask the Manager, please to have the director move forward. I'd like to see something potentially in the next two months, in the sense of just scheduling, how we're moving forward with planning, design. It is not in this budget cycle. It will be in the next budget cycle, obviously, depending on the cost. We need to move it to the county. I want to be intimately engaged in this discussion with the county. I already had a conversation with Mr. Cueto on the matter. I'd like to see, after visiting this site, as many of my colleagues are aware what's going on, this is a very, in my opinion, dangerous situation for pedestrians. That street, when you put two cars next to each is so tight that they are already on the swale; and we had, Commissioner, one or two parents who showed up with strollers and they gave examples of how they take their children on the grass, how difficult it is. And we also need to address the backs of the homes on Venetia; the overgrown trees are pushing people onto the street. You need to cut back on the shrubs and the amount of garbage that's there is unacceptable. Commissioner Anderson, am I speaking out of turn?

Commissioner Anderson: Well, you also have the amount of garbage and so forth, gives no place for refuge if a pedestrian needs a place to go, plus you have Bougainvillea. Not only is it not refuge, it's dangerous, absolutely dangerous.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Moving onto the next item, the Harvest Market. These past weeks, as the weather is cooling off, it's been great to see so many residents and visitors in our city. It's been a busy couple of weeks with the Pumpkin Patch at Ponce Circle Park, which I had the pleasure of attending and the past weekend we hosted Adventure Day at Salvadore Park and the first installation of this year's Harvest Market. I want to salute Nicolas Cabrera and his team. He brought the idea to the city last year and we had breakfast one day and this year in partnership with the city, he is running the market. Not only is it a great event, but this event also activates our north Ponce neighborhood and businesses. I think a great model of a public/private partnership and one we should continue to explore for other events. This coming weekend on Saturday, in addition to the Harvest Market, there are several Halloween themed events, including the "Trick or Treat" on the Mile, which our Economic Development Department is organizing, thank you Belkys, and which I'm sure will be a huge success. In addition to trick or treating, at more than 50 of our businesses, there will be other activities for all others to enjoy like face painting, a haunted graveyard, and a magician. And as part of my plan to work with local consultants, Consulates, excuse me, to host cultural events in our city, I'm proud to say that the "Day of the Dead"

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celebration returns this Saturday, bigger and better than the event with a new location just outside of City Hall. A big thanks to the Mexican Consulate for working with us. It should be a fun event that brings people to our downtown. Also, on Saturday, a Doggie Halloween Costume Contest at the Coral Gables Museum. Commissioner Menendez will host one of his monthly movie events at the Art Cinema with the Omen. Thank you for continuing to do that tradition, people love it. And the Pumpkin Float takes place at the Venetian Pool. The Actor's Playhouse and Miracle Theater is also getting in on the fun with a costume parade and Charlotte's Webb matinee on both Saturday and Sunday. Our friends at the Rotary Club will host Chilly Chillin' Cook-Off at Ponce Circle Park on Sunday, and on Monday the Haunted House Nightmare at 405 returns to the Youth Center. We hope our residents enjoy these family-friendly events. I know that they are also important to our business community, as we activate, and we continue to push forward in our downtown. I mention these because Fred and his team are incredibly busy, our staff is incredibly busy, but this is the type of quality of life that we offer here in the city, and as we get into the season, I'm excited about all the things that we are doing here, and I commend the Manager and his team and my colleagues on the Commission for doing a great job. I also want to mention, and if the Manager can give us a quick update on Burger Bob's, because I've gotten a few e-mails on that. Where are we in the process and when are we going to finally showcase what we've been working on in regard to design.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we plan to do a resident outreach in December, beginning of December, the design is just about complete, and ready to be...

Parks Director Couceyro: We have some concept designs that we've done that we are going to show the public and we are looking at the Thursday right after the Tree Lighting, so I think its December 8th is the one that we're planning on right now, and we'll get the hangers, the door-hangers out and we'll get all the publication out of the exact date.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. I don't know if the door-hangers are necessary, that's a lot of effort for staff, but I mean, I think, I'm just saying if my colleagues my disagree, people use Burger Bob's all over the community, so its not like you're going to be – maybe the neighboring community is fine, but I just think that more than anything just put it out there; put it out on social media, put it out there on ENEWS, two weeks in advance, and just tell people, we'll have some hors devours, we want you to come and check out what we're doing in regards to Burger Bob's. People are anxious, they really are looking forward to coming back.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, when I said the design was complete, I meant all preliminary bids to be reviewed by the residents.

Mayor Lago: Yes, we're not done with design, this is preliminary conceptual. Once the residents give their input, we miss something all the time in regard to construction. Somebody with a keener eye pointed out and we'll change it, or we'll move things around. Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: Just one thing. I was at LePark Café the other day, the food was great, the coffee was great, and I heard, I think in the next few days or weeks the menu is going to expand. I know your team with Carolina and everybody, they were working behind the scenes to get certain
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licensing and certain things for the benefit of the Country Club. Things that nobody knows that they are working diligently hard. I think I heard they picked up several in one day, so they're busy bees. So, if you could maybe talk a little bit about their moving forward to expand the menu.

Parks Director Couceyro: I know they're slowly starting to expand already. They've got some sandwiches; they've got some soups. They are going to get to that full menu, they've hired more staff. They have a new chef, they have a wait staff, so they'll be able to do the table service to the hallway, which would be good; and probably in terms of the licenses, the most important one is the beer and wine license. Once we got that set up and they have their product in place, they will look to expand their hours a little later. So that's all in the process. We meet with them every week and we discuss the different strategies till we get to a complete full operation with them.

Commissioner Menendez: I am sure, like everybody else, encourage residents to go there and experience family run, quality food, obviously the ambiance, the atmosphere, great family dining. So, I encourage folks to go there and have a wonderful lunch or breakfast.

Parks Director Couceyro: We did have a good tennis event for our members. Another one of our membership events that we are trying to do once a month, and we had it this past weekend and it went really well.

Commissioner Anderson: Couple of suggestions on notifying residents....great spot for them to sign up in front of a park, okay, nice, big full print. The people that are patronizing that is most likely to see that. And then we had a group of individuals that was in here, in favor of Burger Bob's, we have a very active list.

Parks Director Couceyro: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: We know who the interested parties are, so let's reach out to those folks.

Parks Director Couceyro: Will do. They've already been contacting us, actually. We are going to be able to get the word to them, because they are contacting me asking me when we are going to do it, so they are on top of it.

Commissioner Anderson: I know. They've contacted me, they'd like a little more retro on the furniture – the red seats.

Parks Director Couceyro: They'll be able to look at it and take a look.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Fred, thank you again. I know you're juggling a lot of things, so we appreciate you.

Commissioner Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you on that. I also would like the support of my colleagues. I have to amend the resolution in regard to the Mayor's Ball. All monetary contributions and the ultimate proceeds
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from the Mayor's Ball will be administered by La Lega Contra Cancer, instead of the Coral Gables Community Foundation. The monies that come from the event will go 100 percent to La Lega Contra Cancer, and also the Coral Gables Community Foundation. This was just a minor tweak in the resolution.

Commissioner Anderson: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: I have it here.

City Attorney Ramos: You need a motion if we are going to amend the resolution.

Commissioner Anderson: I want to move it.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: All in favor.

All: Aye.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. I have one final item that I want to bring to your attention. Again, just taking advantage of the fact that we're here together. So, I mentioned to you, I think before, I can't remember what day it was. We talked a little bit about homelessness in our community and some of the things that are going on, and the commitment that we have as a community where we're spending almost \$30,000 a year for Camillus House for three beds. That's a big commitment by the city and to say that Camillus House is short is an understatement. They are doing the best with what they can with limited resources. The massive influx of immigrants into this country, especially illegal immigrants as a result of the border, had serious implications in regard to the homeless population. This is not me speaking. The Manager was with me, along with our Police Chief, my staff where we had breakfast last week. I took Paul Lowenthal who is the Chairman of Camillus. Chief would you like to come up. We had a really good discussion, I think for probably about an hour and-a-half, talking about homelessness in our community. While it's not a major problem, I have personally seen a tiny uptick, which our Police Department has done an incredible job addressing certain issues with private property. But you're seeing certain people panhandling around the community and they are very careful, because they know that we have very strict panhandling laws. But I wanted to bring this to your attention because we are going to be working in concert in a more robust way with Camillus House, really pushing the agenda of trying to get these individuals help. It's not about arresting these individuals and taking them to jail. That doesn't work. It's a proven fact. It's a machine, it just keeps basically producing the same effect. But I had a very interesting encounter, because I spoke this Sunday to one of the individuals that I've seen, a new individual that I've seen walking through our city; a gentleman, very nice guy, short in stature on Miracle Mile, and I asked him, look, I engaged him in a conversation. I said, you know, I've seen you here around a few times, you're always in Miracle Mile walking. He said that everybody here is very complimentary, very nice, safe. Of course, it's safe. What's the

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issue? He said, well, you know I'm just trying to get back to Texas and I want to buy a plane ticket out of here. So, I told him, why don't you come by City Hall, and I'll help you with inquiring if that's what you want to do. But its interesting, because we are seeing a lot of new faces, not a lot, you are seeing a few new faces here in the city, that they are coming down and I guess, as winter comes, they leave, or they stay. I'm not sure what was happening. That was the purpose of our meeting with Paul last week, to have a real discussion on the homeless issue.

Chief Hudak: Yes sir, I think to your point and throughout the discussion, again, homeless people are not problems, they are people with problems.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Chief Hudak: And that's how the police department addresses them. I think what we have increased is our interaction with the individuals of offering assistance on a regular basis. To your point and what we discussed, the safety that our citizens feel, also the homeless population feels as well. They feel safe in sleeping in certain areas. There are certain business owners that are okay with that. Again, that's private property, however, in the mornings they get up and they kind of go to different parts of other cities, because they know that they cannot ask, they can't aggressively panhandle, they can't go up to people on the sidewalks because they realize that we do not allow that. That's where our interaction goes. We have addressed all the issues that come up, to your point. I think we have in the past, along with Public Works and working with our team here in the city, we've been able to people with mental challenges that create shopping carts that are almost a story high worth of things. Once that's in there, we get help for the individual and Public Works has worked primarily under the Metrorail to continue to do that. Its an educational process for those who come from different parts of the country. They do ask for those. We have re-extended our bed space that came for years, Vice Mayor Quesada, actually brought that up, I think in 2014 or 15. We have a longstanding relationship with them. I'm trying to get the funding, as everything else, those costs have gone up as well, for those beds. If we can increase it, right now, we have three beds, we constantly have two of those. We have one person that's been that bed for a year, and we've continued to fund that. We are working on reappropriating some funds to make sure we can continue, because those numbers are also from Camillus House has gone up. As we continue to come up with a plan that locate, identify, and render services, there are certain issues that we've had to address as well legally, with when we are receiving calls of people, to try and address through the Communications Operator you met today, addressing that. Being homeless and sitting on a park bench is not illegal. We can render aid, but we cannot move people along. There is a lot of case laws that other cities have been subjected to because of that. So, in a nutshell, we continue to work with Camillus House and other entities. The officers understand that it's a priority for the city to render assistance to those individuals that are residentially challenged, if you will, and living in our city amongst our streets. So, we continue to go forward with that and again, once we are notified of somebody, we will respond, that's what we want. We are working with the Manager's office to come up with a hotline for homeless assistance, not to necessarily provide that or refer them off, but for us to get involved and not tie up some of our 911 or non-emergency numbers. Again, its not just us, its everywhere. I think all the other municipalities and other chiefs have the same challenges.

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Mayor Lago: Thank you Chief, and by the way, I also met with the Manager last week, with the Commissioner for City of South Miami, and they are also facing some of the similar issues, and they are just trying to get ahead of it, and they are going to work collegially with – they are trying to get five or six municipalities to find real options from the county. If you are interested in getting involved, please speak with the Manager. Any ideas, I welcome them, but we've got to face this issue, especially with the Underline that's forthcoming and a lot of other amenities that are potential opportunities here in the city. Under Mayor's Comments, I have nothing else. I know that we're pulling, as per Commissioner Anderson's request, item G-1, correct.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes. I think we have resolved that problem.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Oh, yes, Ms. Cruz would like to say a few words.

Ms. Cruz: Some of you do know that at Church we have coffee and donuts after Masses and this Sunday it broke my heart to see this lady, barely dressed for Church. I mean, she looked professional, except that she had a backpack and several packages with her. So, she approached me, and she said, are you selling, how much are they, and I said, no, we have them for people to stay after Mass, and she said, may I have a donut. So, she ate a donut. Then I offered her coffee. She was early for the next Mass, so she hung around with me and then when I was picking up, I said, you know we do have a pantry, I can make things, whatever you want, and she says, but I wouldn't accept it unless I can do something to help you. So, she went into the kitchen, and she helped me clean up. It was very, very heartbreaking, to see somebody like that. But now, also, in case you all do not know, bakeries, restaurants, supermarkets, throw away a lot of food. My husband and I have been doing for years; we go down south, and we pick up a bagel place at a bakery. Some people know it because I talk to them on the phone while I'm driving, and then we take it to Camillus House. If you could set something up, so instead of throwing out the stuff, we could have volunteers pick up, take it to Camillus House, that would really help.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: A great idea.