

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item I-5
December 13, 2022
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant City Attorney, Naomi Levi-Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item I-5 [11:31 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving the City's 2023 Legislative Priorities in substantially the attached form.

Vice Mayor Mena: Move onto I-5.

City Attorney Ramos: I-5 is A Resolution of the City Commission approving the City's 2023 Legislative Priorities in substantially the attached form. Ms. Levi-Garcia.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, can I vote yes on I-4?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Thank you – and thank you Vice Mayor for running the meeting.

Vice Mayor Mena: Of course.

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Ms. Levi-Garcia: Hello again. So, this is the resolution, our annual resolution adopting the city's legislative priorities. I've attached a few different versions of the priorities and I would like to get some feedback and your direction as to which one you'd like to move forward with this year. My recommendation is that we go with a short form. We've talked about this, I think a few times in the past where I think our priorities, although all of them are very important, I believe it would be beneficial to kind of hone in on the ones that are most important to the city, and that way our printed materials are also more succinct, easier to digest, and we know our audience. We are not going to our elected officials in Tallahassee with things that might not be well received.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes. I couldn't agree more. We had this conversation last year and I spoke to Naomi again this year, let's really focus on the things that are real priorities and that are non-controversial, non-partisan issues. Tallahassee is a tricky place to navigate, you know, you have people on both sides of the fence that have different passionate feelings about topics, like subject matter-based issues that are just sort of trying to make a statement, I think, not that they are not important, even if I agree with it. At the end of the day, I think our real goal needs to be to bring back funds, like we did this last year very effectively and we should prioritize whatever our highest priority budget items are first and foremost.

Mayor Lago: Just like the Vice Mayor said, we have that same conversation. We struck many, many issues that are personally very important to me, like solar and a litany of different things that I think are critically important that are not priorities. Not that they are not priorities to the administration, again, the Governor has been a staunch advocate of the environment and has done great things, but what we've really got to drill down on public safety issues, resiliency, issues of hardening and really focus and that's how I think we've been successful. For those who don't know, I want to say thank you to the Governor. We just got another \$2 million dollars in water projects. I think this is by far the most successful year we've ever gotten from the State Legislature, and we've put together an incredible list of projects that I think are going to hopefully bear fruit. I leave today to Tallahassee, to spend two days in pre-season with our team in an effort to again, we want to bring down more money this year and make even a bigger splash. So, we're going up there to remind our new state leaders, the Governor that we're front and center. Spend time with the Governor on Sunday. I met with him at 5 o'clock when he was here in Miami. Again, just reiterating, first off, our gratitude for his trust in the City of Coral Gables, that we're doing the right thing and that he really gave us almost a \$5 million dollar windfall this year, it's incredible. All the projects that were allocated, and we're coming back for more, and that we need his help and that he plays a major part in the city. Just wanted to put that on the record.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: And I just want to be clear. If things arise in Tallahassee during session that I know the city has taken a position on in the past, or that are consistent with statements or the sentiment of the Commission, we monitor those items, we advocate for those items. I guess the discretion I'm really looking for here is to be able to be more selective with what gets printed and what gets pushed when we have those in-person meetings. So, it's not that we are foregoing, necessarily foregoing our priorities, I just would like to be a little more selective. That's why I would like the Commission to grant that authority.

City Manager Iglesias: As we discussed, a little more focused on our initiatives so that also our lobbyist can work better on those particular issues, so I think we all concur.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm happy to see that we have a few things roll over from this past session to the next session, which I think is important, because those are still important issues. I've been up there, and I've noticed that things don't pass the first time, don't pass the second time, and just be persistent and you eventually get to where you want to be. So, I'm happy to think the Venetian Pool is still on the list, I'll be more than happy to invite whoever I need to for a swim so they can enjoy it, but it's those little things. You're very good at the detail, you have a great sense as to what we want and what the community needs, so just kudos to you for your work.

Commissioner Anderson: If you're done, I just had one question of my colleagues. Did I cut you off? – I'm sorry. You were leaning back, you know.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm old. I'm old.

Commissioner Anderson: You're going to do the back swim.

Commissioner Menendez: More or less (laughter)

Commissioner Anderson: I sent you all – I sent Naomi a pink highlighted version of the long form and I understand we're just going to print the short one. If there's a thought of you all addressing septic to sewer conversion funding, having a grant program to include that in the short form and if you all are going to add something about the mandatory septic tank inspection, I'd ask also that we include inspection of existing residential sewer lines on sale of homes as well.

Mayor Lago: That's something that has been a priority for me, but I know that we were preempted at the state. I want to consider that legislation, I wanted to bring it here to the city, because I think it would be very beneficial for somebody who's buying a property and know the state of the septic. We've heard from Commissioners, we've heard from residents where they've purchased a property and later, they found out that they were in the whole \$15 or \$20,000, because they had to replace the septic tank. I'm all in favor of that, Commissioner.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, what Commissioner Anderson is suggesting is – you'll probably recall the document I circulated a few days ago, it had Commissioner Anderson's feedback on what she would like to see in the legislative priorities. So, I do think adding a priority that that request of the state establish a grant program for low-income residents to achieve septic to sewer conversion makes sense and that's kind of in line with all the recent...funding that we've seen come out of the state in the last three years. And then the other suggestion is, expanding the Mayor's initiative where we require septic tank inspections associated with real estate transactions, mandatory inspections for residential sewer lines, in addition to septic tanks.

Mayor Lago: And my goal here is simple. Obviously, we're trying to tackle the septic tank issue conversion, but while it's going to take decades potentially, unless we get some sort of federal funding, let's at least stop the leaking, if we can, at least in our community. We need to be

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responsible; we need to be responsible to maintain our septic tank and we need to be responsible that we are not leaking into the aquifer. Again, you saw what happened in the Keys, the moment they addressed the septic tanks, you've seen the water quality in the canals actually be much more improved. That's the whole goal behind it. Just to have accountability.

Commissioner Anderson: The rest of my edits were only if we were going to print the long form, to language changes and cross-outs of some legislation that's not going to move forward in Tallahassee. So that's it.

Mayor Lago: My big issue is just – I want to focus in on the money. I want to focus in on appropriations. I want to give our Manager and his team all the resources they can to attack as many projects as possible. Case in point, one of the items that I requested to add to the list was the windows for City Hall. We just did the roof, let's finish the windows, let's seal this building, so then we can start working on the interior of this building. I think that that would be something that would be very well received as a historic building and everybody drives by in this community and our city representatives, and our Senators come here consistently, so they are well aware of the current state of the windows in this building. Those are the types of things that I really want to drill down, so that when I go up there in a few hours, I can say look, these are our priorities, I need your help.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, besides water infiltration, air infiltration, we all have sustainability of this building by having impact, by helping our envelope be impact resistant.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, Mayor, I think we pivoted to the annex. Are we doing windows too.

Mayor Lago: I would like to do windows for the building.

City Manager Iglesias: We would like to do windows, start the window program in the annex.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: Looking at what windows – something we would use appropriate windows. I know that the Biltmore has very, very, high-end wood windows that are very impact resistant. Also, as the Commissioner said.... We put shutters on this building, but we are anchoring to coral rock.

Mayor Lago: It really doesn't do it.

City Manager Iglesias: It really doesn't. They are not effective. We don't even have loads for that.

Mayor Lago: But you only want to do the annex for now, you don't want to do the entire building?

City Manager Iglesias: I would like to do the entire building, yes. Yes, for sure.

Mayor Lago: Let's ask.
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Ms. Levi-Garcia: Let's talk about that, right, because there is tightening associated with any of these grants. So, we'd have to be able to start the project within 12 to 18 months, are we ready to start windows in City Hall between 12 to 18 months of award?

City Manager Iglesias: Windows is something that we can start very quickly, something that we can do very, very quickly if we have to. We are very versed in envelope work and actually on the annex it's something that I wanted to bring up. Thank you to the Commission, Mayor, and the Commission for bringing that up, because I do think that we need to look at sustainability, and unfortunately, I know they are original windows, but there is no sustainability there. The wind loading is minimal, water infiltration is minimal, air has a tremendous amount of infiltration. We are putting tape to help with the exfiltration, with the infiltration issues and the exfiltration issues. So, I welcome that Mayor, and Commissioners and this is something that we can do very, very quickly.

Mayor Lago: Just being in the industry, I know that we could hire a window contractor who would do shop drawings, submit them to the city, it's a standalone permit. We may have to do some structural work, which obviously with our City Manager, Suramy Cabrera, and the team that we have, I have full faith and confidence that we could turn that around in maybe two or three months, the shop drawings, any structural documents that would be required, and can embark on actually finally finishing the envelope of this building, which I think would pay significant dividends, and I think that you'll see a lot of support from the state on that, because this is again, a historic building with significant magnitude in this community, a lot of history here. And when you come to my office and come to everyone else's office, I don't want to say my office, everybody's office is basically, the windows are falling apart, and they are held together by blue tape. So, one of the things I want to mention since we say that. There is a common misconception that I spoke to the Governor about and I spoke to the Senate President and all the state representatives, we are very, very rich, ritzy community. I want to make sure we highlight that we are very thoughtful in how we spend our money, we've invested probably more money than any other city in the state in regard to shoring up our pensions. We have the second lowest milage rate for full-service city in Miami-Dade County. We have a triple, triple bond rating, we are one of two cities in the State of Florida that I'm aware of, I don't know if it's gone up to three, two cities in the State of Florida, and that we have a sea level rise mitigation fund that we are putting away millions of dollars a year and that we're investing in sustainability, we are investing in infrastructure, with our police and our fire and we're putting our money where our mouth is and we haven't raised taxes in ten years. So don't penalize us because we are very thoughtful, and we put together a plan and a schedule to attack the issues that our residents need here to address quality of life and public safety issues. That's basically going to be my discussion like it was last year with every elected official, and they all look at us, as you guys were there, they are all like, oh my God, I never knew that about Coral Gables.

Commissioner Menendez: It was very powerful.

Mayor Lago: I never knew that about Coral Gables. So, when you go up there and you ask for money, like we did this year and we got almost \$5 million dollars for water projects and
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appropriation projects, the argument is more substantial and I think we have a lot more legs when we explain how thoughtful and how we budget, how methodical we are in regard to the public's dollar. We are fiduciaries and we're very careful when we embark on a project and we budget for years, like how much we have in restrictive reserves and unrestricted, those are the kinds of conversations that they like to hear because they want to know that we're not like any other city that just basically spends themselves into debt and then goes back to the state asking to be bailed out. No, we're very thoughtful and we have limited debt and very methodical. That's key. I don't know how to put that together in a one-page document, but I think that should be included, it should be included.

Commissioner Anderson: We said in that message that we should not be penalized for doing good planning. If you want to encourage other cities to do the same, you have to show them they reward those who are conservative in their spending and plan properly and escrow the monies necessary for these projects.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Do you need anything else from us Naomi?

Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, I need to know what we're voting on, if we are going to vote on the short form of the priorities and I heard the message that you'd like to add a priority related to septic to sewer conversion and possibly also discuss the health of sewer lines or potentially mandatory inspections. I don't know how mandatory inspections of sewer lines are going to go over, honestly but we can definitely message the wording and add it as a priority if that's the will of the Commission.

Commissioner Anderson: I looked up what it cost to do it. You basically, go through the clean-out or you can take the toilet off, put a camera down, it's about a \$200 dollar job. That's all it does to be able to inspect those. The other thing that I mentioned was, on the septic to sewer conversion funding, we previously had language in there to amend Section 163 08 of the Florida Statutes to expand the PACE Program. The PACE Program is out of money...

Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, the initial form that's been stricken altogether.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes. So, I struck that, and I instead put in there a grant program which was done historically in the past with the other counties when the push was made for those counties with great springs, to be able to do it. A grant program was established for low-income residents. So, we should be able to get the same in fairness.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. So, we're going to go with the short form.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, what I'm hearing is short form plus a priority related to septic to sewer conversion, including grants for low-income residents, including mandatory inspections of sewer lines, that's what I'm hearing.

Mayor Lago: Massage.

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Commissioner Anderson: Massage.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: I would like to massage that, yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes, you can massage the language, but also aren't we adding the windows.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a legislative question, well not Tallahassee legislative, but this resolution. Can we vote and approve it but in a form that if there are any additions, as long as we get notified about what the additions are, you have the flexibility going forward.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, the way the resolution is currently written, I do have a certain amount of flexibility which is very important for me to preserve and in order to be effective. I don't circle back with every little thing unless I think it deviates in some way from the position has taken in the past.

Commissioner Menendez: Well, I'm saying if the Mayor or Commissioner Anderson or one of us, there is something that's important we need to add.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: You can always do that.

Commissioner Menendez: And in my opinion, as long as we get notified of what was added, I have no issue moving forward with whatever was suggested now and you have the flexibility to do what you need to do.

City Manager Iglesias: Does the Commission wish to add the window issue?

Mayor Lago: Yes, as a project.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Okay. So, we'll have to identify matching funds, we'll have to figure out how much we're asking for, we'll have to do all those things.

City Manager Iglesias: I will work with you on that, but Mayor that can be done quickly, we've done this type of work before in other historical buildings. It's expensive but we have all the technical expertise to get it done.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: May I also add just for consideration. There are grant funds in the Department of State that comes through a different process in the State Appropriation process. It may make sense to look at that as a source of funding.

City Manager Iglesias: Let's look at that as well. If we can look at that as well.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, if we just have the flexibility to evaluate what's the best source funding for that, I think that would be helpful.

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City Manager Iglesias: I think its important to add to our legislative agenda that we are looking for funding for City Hall. Its on the National Historical Register and its highly vulnerable right now because of our window issue.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Okay. Can I get a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: Motion.

Commissioner Anderson: Second.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 4-0)

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Naomi. I'll see you later.