

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C
December 12, 2023
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 Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz
Michael Maxwell

Agenda Item C [Start: 9:30 a.m.]
Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Public Comment, Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, we have our first speaker today in Public Comment is Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning, Maria Cruz, Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Here we go. I think all of us, everyone who lives in this community, knows that we're in the midst of a holiday season. Holiday season that includes Christmas, Hanukkah, Quanza, several holidays, I'm sure I missed some. I'm very happy, as you know, that I mentioned several times how I was involved because I worked in Miami Beach, I taught at Miami Beach High for many, many years, very conscious of the plight of our Jewish brothers and sisters. So, I'm very happy that we had a lighting that we lit the Menorah. We called it Menorah. We did not call it candelabra like some people that have no idea what we're talking about would do. So, we lit the Menorah, very good, but we light the Holiday Tree, but we have a Holiday Park. Why are we afraid to call it Christmas Tree and

City Commission Meeting
December 12, 2023

Christmas Park. Why do we need to tell people have a very happy season, have a very happy holiday, but we're afraid to say Merry Christmas. We say happy Hanukkah and I'm glad we do, but you know what, it is Merry Christmas and soon at the end of the year it will be Happy Quanza. We should not be afraid to hide what we trust, what we care for, what we believe in, and I'm ashamed that we still are doing that. I was wondering while I was sitting here, do we need to take up a collection, maybe have some residents come up with money so we can call it Merry Christmas Tree, Christmas Park. If we need to do that, we can call it our Christmas Tree, our Christmas Park, not my, ours, because this is a community that represents people from all creeds, all religions, and we need to do that and we should not be afraid to call it the way it is. Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: Mrs. Cruz, just to let you know, yesterday I had a conversation with the City Manager and the discussion was for 2024 to definitely move in the direction of naming the tree Christmas Tree.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Michael Maxwell.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Maxwell: Good morning, I'm Michael Maxwell, 2845 Granada Boulevard. It's wonderful to see you, Mr. Mayor, Ms. Vice Mayor, Commissioners, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. I'm here to talk to you about streetlights. This is a very mundane issue, of course, you know, everybody takes advantage of our streetlights, but one of the things that's most important about our community is that we are a community, and I because I cannot be here this afternoon when this item is on the agenda. I have another commitment that I cannot cancel, so I apologize. However, I wanted to bring to you the history of these streetlights that we have the silver streetlights that are there now and talk to you and also about process. The streetlights were put in as a result of an initiative by Sarah Anderson, the Historic Preservation Board, Sallye Jude, Arva Parks and multitudes of people, beginning back in the 80s. These streetlights went through a very lengthy period of assessment and testing and working with FPL. Everybody knows FPL says no the very first time but having worked in real estate and government for many, many years, I can tell you it is just like McDonalds. McDonalds when they come to your community will tell you no, and then when you tell them no, they'll come back and say, well how about this. And then when you say no, I want this. They'll give it to you. And the same in this case, and that's exactly what happened. The first streetlights went down Segovia and they were metal. The historic streetlights were really a multi-multi-year process. Mayor Hartnett was then followed by Mayor Thomson and then subsequent Commissions, all to move these as the city standard streetlight. Why? – Because these are the streetlights that most appear throughout the city installed by Mr. Merrick. Now, the Mayor has gone and done a wonderful job restoring some of the White Way lights. His efforts and the wonderful article in the Gables Magazine this month is fantastic. I brought this to the attention of the city many years ago, and also wrote an article in Jeannett's Journal in 2018, talking about these streetlights, and I'm really glad that my colleague, Tucker Gibbs called somebody and said, hey, we have these over here in Ft. Lauderdale, because I always wondered how orphan they could be. In a city that sells itself, its pride and its heritage is really

*City Commission Meeting
December 12, 2023*

important that we maintain that heritage. It's not about what individuals like. It's about doing what is right and what it is that we say is right in our community. For example, the new streetlights have been put in all around the golf course, which is a historic district. The historic district has not ruled on this, has not looked at this, the Historic Preservation Board, excuse me, has not looked at this, or even considered it. We didn't know about it. To most of the residents in the community and many hundreds have talked to me about this, this is a huge surprise, and so, while I understand processes, one of the things we have to do about the process today is stop it. Stop what we're doing and reconsider. Take a look at it. Send this to the proper boards and move it forward, so that it's in keeping with the historic character of our city and what it is that we say we are as a group of people. We sell our history. That's what brings people here. What brought me back – the trees. The fact that we all care is that this is probably the most caring community in all of Miami-Dade County. So, I'm asking you today to work with the Manager, stop FPL from installing any more lights at this time, not saying stop the entire process forever. Saying stop now. Don't get in any further because this is a commitment of money. Let's look and see to do what is correct, historically proper and also to follow the process that we have. If we have a historic district, I can tell you that if your house is in there, as a member of the Historic Board, I'm going to be looking at your roof tile. I'm going to be looking at how you restore your house, and I'm going to tell you what you can and cannot do. The same goes for our streetscapes and our historic landscapes. These lights are the city standard streetlights, and you'll note in the materials that I sent to you, particularly regarding Ms. Anderson, she spent many, many years working to do this and took the lead on it. There is a plaque for her there at the Granada and Coral Way Circle. It's very important. I sent each one of you, her obituary. We don't need to honor Ms. Anderson any further. What we need to do is work together to do what is right for our community, not what perhaps what FPL said, well, this is what I've got in the catalog. We are a unique community. Let us honor that. Let us follow the process that we have, send this to the Preservation Board, send this to the Landmarks Committee, ask the Manager and ask the Public Works Department to come and work with all of us. Let us come up with a solution that is positive, that is not about blaming anybody, but is right for our community. I thank you for listening to me. I'm available to any of you to discuss this issue further and would very much like to. I also thank all of you for doing the right thing for our community. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate your insight and guidance. Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: Okay.