

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-1**  
**September 10, 2024**  
**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, Amos Rojas, Jr.**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**

**John Collar**

---

Agenda Item F-1 [12:44 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission promoting fiscal resilience and directing the City Manager to include in the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025, certain revisions from the Budget Estimate, including allocating certain funding toward the assessment, drawings, and plans for structural repairs at City Hall. (Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto F-1. Thank you, staff, as always. Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Which one are you on?

Mayor Lago: F-1.

*City Commission Meeting*

---

*September 10, 2024*

*Agenda Item F-1 – Resolution promoting fiscal resilience and directing the City Manager  
To include in the proposed budget for FY 2024-2025 certain revisions*

[Date]

1

City Attorney Suarez: F-1 is a Resolution of the City Commission promoting fiscal resilience and directing the City Manager to include in the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025, certain revisions from the Budget Estimate, including allocating certain funding toward the assessment, drawings, and plans for structural repairs at City Hall.

Vice Mayor Anderson: This is one I deferred our vote on the last time around because I felt that the level of discussion had gone beyond the parameters what the intent was for the item itself. This is for fiscal resilience. I felt I owed it to you all to explain my position better, so that you can make a more informed decision. I had the pleasure of listening to Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson this past weekend. I had the opportunity to listen to Justice Jackson and she spoke to us this past Saturday morning about collective decision making and in order to be able to collectively make a decision you have to have a good understanding of the reasoning behind a position that's being taken. I'm going to encourage you all to try to work together and understand that when an item is brought there is some thought process that goes through it, and instead of going backwards and addressing opportunities that repairs to City Hall could have been done in the past, to move forward, because that's the only way we're going to be able to resolve problems together. I move for fiscal resilience to bring \$835,787 into City Hall's funds, to be able to get the architectural drawings done and the engineering drawings done. I know some folks had wanted to do financing on this option, I don't think that that's wise to do at this point, because first you have to understand the scope of the work. You don't go out and get a loan for a house to build it until you have your architectural drawings done, because you don't know the scope of the work that needs to be done. I'm going to walk you through the resolution and go one by one, so you understand that these decisions were not done in a vacuum. These decisions weren't done merely for the purpose of finding money, but these decisions would have been applicable even if we didn't have issues with City Hall that need to be addressed and have been kicked down the road and I don't want to have them kicked down the road any further. Spoke to the Chief about the necessity for two-fulltime versus one-fulltime and one-parttime CIC monitor individual for this first coming year. The Chief was in agreement that we could proceed with one and we can address whether or not we need two fulltime in the future. A person that sits in front of a computer screen can only do it for so long. You see that at TSA where you rotate people off, because your ability to detect things diminishes over a period of time after you've been staring at the screen, and he was in full agreement that we can go with one-fulltime and one-parttime for that position. As well, the same analysis was done on the Code Enforcement issue and some of the things that I looked at as far as Code Enforcement officers on parttime versus fulltime when some of the concerns were brought up that's hard to fill the position is, where have you advertised it, because I know when I was going to college, some of these jobs I would have died for. Publix has no problems filling their parttime positions and these are great opportunities for people to take that first step into our city on a parttime basis and that way we serve not only the employee that comes in on a parttime basis, with a fantastic opportunity to build a career here, but we do what's in the best interest of our residents in keeping down the cost of our budget. So, the Code Enforcement Manager, I put a lot of thought into that. I agree that we need a second position there. Let's see how well we do with having two Managers at the wheel and then next year, if we still need more Code Enforcement after we have this, I think would be a much better basis to analyze whether the needs are truly needed and let's do a better job of offering these parttime positions to students, to people that don't have time to work a fulltime job. Solid Waste has similar issues. We desperately need, I should say, definitely need a CDL

*City Commission Meeting*

[Date]

2

*September 10, 2024*

*Agenda Item F-1 – Resolution promoting fiscal resilience and directing the City Manager  
To include in the proposed budget for FY 2024-2025 certain revisions*

driver. Reason being is some people are not being able to take off for vacation and that's the position in which that is the most acute at. So, CDL drivers serve two purposes, its not just driving a truck, it's a management job as well and is responsible for looking after their other employees out there that are going door to door in the yards to get the bags of garbage. We can fulfill shortages with the temporary workers as we have for decades. We actually have fewer homes that we're servicing now than we've had in the past. If you take into account the single-family homes that are no longer single-family homes in the Craft Section in The Plaza alone, you can see that there's been a significant reduction there. That's all going to be Waste Management servicing there. So, for this year, we need to be watching the budget carefully, not growing our employee headcount too much, as far as the employees that have issues with heat stroke, being someone that had heat stroke when I was young, being someone that does endurance training and is out in the heat all day and I've had my bloodwork done the day after. I can tell you that its more than just hydration – sodium levels, other things like that, management can look at to improve how we utilize our employees, and the temporary workers are very effective, very cost-effective way to provide the same level of service for our residents in our city going forward. Parking Enforcement had similar analysis to other parttime positions that we need to be marketing better, and I'll touch upon, for instance, the sign shop. One of the questions I asked staff was, have you compared outsourcing this job to hiring the employee? – and the answer was, there wasn't sufficient time to do so. And this is something that has come up in the past with prior Commissions, I've learned and because of that they determined too that it was not necessary to have another employee there. Its an outsourceable position and we can save our residents some money. I also put in some cuts for some other things that while they would be beautiful to have, such as the laser show, I think it's something that together if someone wants to find sponsors for some of these events that we can bring to the city, but not burden the taxpayers with it, and put our priorities first on what we need to do with City Hall here and in getting the engineering and architectural drawings done and then evaluate how we're going to pay for it after we have an approximate price tag on that. I'm not going to go through the rest of them, because I think it's just blatantly obvious what the purpose of this is, but I am going to talk to you briefly about the structural integrity of City Hall. We spent a lot of time last time talking about the structural integrity of City Hall, and I took my husband down to Baptist Hospital and I take him down to Bascom Palmer and I'm going into the parking garage loaded with cars and they are shoring poles. It's not unusual to see shoring poles where construction and rehabilitation of structures that needs to be done, whether its 100-year-old building or buildings that are much younger that are down near Jackson Memorial Hospital or Baptist Hospital. So, I would suggest going forward that before we make a conclusion that something drastic needs to be done that we speak to staff and make decisions based upon the best advice that we can receive from the experts that we have on hand. I'm used to working with experts, because I have to do so in every single one of my cases. There is a different issue in every single case, because I just don't do one type of law, so I'm used to going from tape experts to structural experts, even drug testing down to patent law. So, I've done a wide range of things, and I am used to utilizing experts in order to make the best decision possible for my clients going forward. Our clients here are the residents, and I think that we can do what's in the best interest of the residents by moving forward on the architectural drawings, putting the funding into City Hall and then we have a figure that the total rehab of City Hall we can revisit how we pay for it at that

time. So, I'd like to move this forward. We need a vote on this. I deferred it last time. We all spoke a lot about it last time and I'd like to take a vote.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm ready to vote.

City Attorney Suarez: I think we need a motion and a second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Need a second. Are you willing to second it.

Mayor Lago: I have a second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Is there any public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir, Mr. Mayor, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I strongly object to the suggestions that what has been proposed during the Budget Estimate, are not necessary. I think this item should have been brought during the budget discussion, not at this time. I think that we, you all requested the directors to come back with their needs, they cut back all the fat, they came back with needs and I'm sorry, but we could have had the drawings, the assessment, the plans for the repairs of City Hall had this been done instead of moving money calling this the City Hall Complex, so that we could do our wonderful idea on 427 Building and spending all the money there and keep spending money there, because they are still not everything is fixed. I'm sorry, this is not the appropriate time to talk about this.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have a speaker on Zoom, but I'm not able to get their last name, so I'm going to go ahead and unmute them. I have John C. on Zoom.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Mr. Collar: Good afternoon. I have to unmute myself. Good afternoon, John Collar, 440 Sevilla Avenue. Mr. Mayor, Ms. Vice Mayor, Council Persons and staff. First, I want to compliment you for providing the comprehensive set of attachments for this item. As I went through it, I was impressed with the thoroughness and the explanations for the changes that Ms. Anderson has proposed. I would like to agree that this should be presented for vote for the Council, and you have our personal thanks to each and every one of you for all you do for our city. Thank you very much for the time.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you.

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

*City Commission Meeting*

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. So, we have a motion and a second, is there any other public comment, excuse me, any other comments from the Commission?

Commissioner Castro: Yes. Yes. I work very closely, or I'm informed because I talk to the employees of the departments. When Mr. Rojas or the City Manager got hired, I think maybe a month or two after, I wrote him an email which I'm going to go ahead and Billy, if you can put it up and I'm sorry, for not giving you a heads-up.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes ma'am.

Commissioner Castro: But...

City Clerk Urquia: If Cable TV could put up my Zoom, yes.

Commissioner Castro: This email was April 8<sup>th</sup>, and this was regarding solid waste and their new needs and why they were so crucial to them. At that moment, what was necessary for that department was four solid waste workers and four operators. There hadn't been an increase in ten years, meanwhile, our city kept on growing. If you keep on scrolling down a little more. There are also concerns about routes exceeding 800 houses being too large resulting in undue stress on our employees and potential risk on their health and safety. If you keep on going down, the next page, this is back in April. The next page of the email, there we go. Okay. Our workers are walking between 10 to 15 miles per day, while pushing carts, which has led to instances of exhaustion and medical emergencies in the past. That's something that now, what are we in, September, we're still facing, while Bal Harbor may be the closest in service with operational dynamics similar to ours, they have fewer than 5,000 homes. Last Friday, the absence of two sanitation workers and two operators overtime payments to existing staff, highlighting the urgency and increasing our workforce. Therefore, I kindly request an update on the status of solid waste new needs request. This is something that I've been addressing since April and now, I mean the suggestion is that we're only going to have one solid waste new employee. This doesn't meet the requirements. This is something that we've been addressing for quite a while. So, I think this is very detrimental when it comes to solid waste.

Vice Mayor Anderson: May I respond, Mayor. We have temporary workers which will come in fresher is one of the analyses. Now, when you're talking about pushing carts, there are some proposals, I've stated talking to staff about that would eliminate that strain. If any of you have ever had the opportunity to push a wheelbarrow or push a wheelchair with somebody in it and with their weight in it, you understand the dynamics of how difficult that is. There are ways that we can improve our service and reduce the injuries for employees, but that is something that's going to be a separate issue, as we look at how to improve our solid waste service and reduce the stress on the employees. Keeping in mind that we are servicing fewer homes than we did before. I think its time for us to look at ways to reduce the stress on the employees, not merely by hiring more employees and understanding the dynamic of what happens when, you know, and I've had experience with unions before, it is of course the desire of every employee to have parttime workers or the temporary workers come in fulltime for multiple reasons, you know their friends or union dues

*City Commission Meeting*

will be greater, but I think we have to take a methodical approach and not all of a sudden now we need six employees, four on the ground and two drivers. Let's add one, not saying zero. Let's move forward, let's look for a better way to do business. I'll just give you a hypothetical. You're not having to push the weight of the cart, and you have a cart that had, and they are out there on the market now, that are electric, battery assist, wheelbarrows, etc., that employee is going to have tremendous reduction and stress, but the feasibility of that is something we need to be discussing internally here before we move forward. How is it that for decades upon decades we've serviced more homes and now that we have reduced homes its now a greater issue. I know temperatures are up, but we can bring in more temporary workers to make it a fresh crew coming in to give these employees a break. I've looked at the truck logs. I noticed the number of hours they are working per day. They are in at 7, they are back by noon or one o'clock. They are being paid for ten hours every day. They work two days and then they're off and then they work two days, so there's a rest day in between. The city has functioned for a long period of time under these circumstances. I'm not against increasing headcount where we need to increase headcount, but it hasn't been shown to me that headcount increase is the answer to the question right now on heat exhaustion for folks, because as I've said before, there was a management issue to it and there are also things that we can do to make the job not as strenuous.

Commissioner Castro: So, as yourself, I've worked very closely as well with the Assistant Director for Solid Waste and I brought up the point that you said about temporary workers and parttime workers, that definitely will not work for that department and my original suggestion was for workers and...and after speaking to the Assistant City Manager, I know that we kind of came into agreement that it's a lot to increase eight employees. So, I think the recommendation from Mr. Parjus was two and two. Now, we keep on facing the same, addressing the same thing about the budget and now we're only down to one. I think we need to stay at two and two and that would be my suggestion for Paula and for Finance. Maybe you can consider the two and two that we were originally talking about for solid waste.

City Manager Rojas: Commissioner Castro, first of all, thank you very much for the support that you always give to our Public Works and Sanitation folks. Obviously, from my perspective, we would want 40 headcount increase, especially in sanitation where the work is hot and heavy, but at the end of the day, we have to look at the overall budget and we have to look at what can we live with and what are the areas that we need to research to make the work of sanitation more viable, easier for our employees. So, when we had a choice of in the discussion which position was most critical to us, we said it was the supervisor that we really needed. Could we use another sanitation worker? – absolutely, but one of the things that we've spoken about internally with my staff is to look at other cities, possibly do a pilot project in a particular area, changing the way we do sanitation pickup, how we do waste, how we do recycling, and try it as a test to see if, number one, we can be more efficient; number two, we can reduce our expenses. Clearly if the will of the Commission is to give us more people, great, we'll take them, because we could use them. But at the present, the recommendations that the Vice Mayor made are recommendations that we could put into place that will at least alleviate some of the backlog that we have in some of the work that we have. Again, I do appreciate the fact that you're always looking out for sanitation folks.

Mayor Lago: Anything else. Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Fernandez: No

Commissioner Menendez: No

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: No

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 2-3)