

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item C – Public Comments**  
**January 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 Manager, Peter Iglesias**  
**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Marlin Ebbert**  
**Roy Black**  
**Joanne Mar**  
**Dabney (Bud) Park**  
**Hank Langston**  
**Manuel Fernandez**

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Agenda Item C [Start: 9:20 a.m.]  
Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Public Comment. Before we open it up to Public Comment, I just want to give a few comments in regard to what I mentioned in our last meeting. To establish a clear and effective process, beginning today and moving forward, we will begin by having prescribed time limits for members of the public to address the Commission. This will encourage for well organized and equitable opportunities for all who wish to speak on matters that affect the City Beautiful. We welcome members of the public to address the Commission on any individual item on the agenda when it pertains to the item, or during Public Comment. As many of you recall, on May 12<sup>th</sup> of 2020, for the first time in Coral Gables history, the Commission enacted legislation that I sponsored to allow for public comment. The so intention of this legislation was to encourage

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democracy and make for an open, transparent form of government where anyone can voice their concerns at the beginning of Commission meetings. Please know that my colleagues and I encourage all to express their opinions, but an agenda with time limits helps meetings run smoothly and be more productive. It is also a way to provide a more equitable way to hear everyone that wishes to speak. The goal is to have our meetings be as productive as possible, while remaining respectful and transparent. The opportunity for members of the public to address the Commission is not only legally required, but most importantly essential to our deliberations. My goal is to continue to provide ample opportunity for public involvement, while protecting the rights of all. We understand that people need to provide input to the Commission on how proposed actions affect them. We remain sensitive to the purpose of public comments and commit to remain flexible and adapt. It is important and I clearly articulate the timeframe of public input. During Public Comments at the beginning of our Commission meeting, speakers will be limited to three minutes. I ask my colleagues to please join me in respecting our speaker's time and allowing them the full three minutes without interruption. Following their comments, we are welcome to comment or ask questions. Our City Clerk will use the time keeping device; when a speaker begins the green light will turn on, when one minute is left, the yellow light will come on. The red light indicates when a speaker's time is up. And as always, I encourage that all speakers, whether sitting on this dais or members of the public remain civil and respectful. I know that we all have the best interest of the City of Coral Gables at heart. And I want to also remind everyone, this past Friday, which was incredibly fruitful. We had over 40 people join us for open door Fridays. We've been this for seven years. I don't know of any other elected body that has not one elected official, but three or four elected officials that are holding open door Fridays, starting at 2 o'clock and sometimes going on to almost 7 o'clock at night, like this past Friday. So, I welcome you to join us. There is always an opportunity to engage. It doesn't have to be at the Commission meeting. It can be every single Friday when you can meet with your elected officials and address your concerns and provide your guidance. So, thank you and God bless. Moving onto the Public Comment. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker is Ms. Marlin Ebbert.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, ma'am, the floor is yours. Thank you for being here once again.

Ms. Ebbert: Good morning. Happy New Year to everybody.

Mayor Lago: Happy New Year.

Ms. Ebbert: For the record, my name is Marlin Ebbert, I live at 65 San Vicente Street, and I am here to talk about Burger Bob's and Rita Tenneson. I asked permission, we have a few people here to speak this morning. We put this together rather quickly. We didn't realize that there wasn't going to be a meeting in early February, that we couldn't talk again until the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, and by that time a decision might be made. I've lived here since 1988, so almost 34 years, and in that time, I've seen many, many restaurants come and go. I did a little research last night and Christies, 1978; Bugatti, 1987; Café Abracci, early 90's; Burger Bob's, 1995. It's been there for 27 years. Anyway, I attended the Chamber of Commerce breakfast at the Biltmore in September where they gave out this book that goes all over the country, all over the world, only to woe people to come and bring their businesses to Coral Gables. Mayor, you have the first letter in it, then Mark  
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Trowbridge, and then the woman who is this year's Chair of the Board of the Chamber, Ana Chaoui, too many vowels right there. She talks about raising her family in Coral Gables for the last 17 years, being at Salvadore Park, riding their bikes through Matheson, going to the fireworks. She mentions one restaurant in this letter, getting a good hamburger at Burger Bob's. All over the world this has gone. This past summer when we became aware, people that frequent Burger Bob's, that an RFP had gone out or when Bob retired and when the building was redone, a group of citizens got together, very loosely I met some of the most wonderful people. One Saturday afternoon, I called some people and said, come on over tomorrow, let's make a plan. Cross my threshold came Diane Wells. I've never met her before, she said, I'm an attorney, let me help. An architect, Don Wolf said, what can I do? That RFP was submitted on time with everyone's as much guidance as we could give. As we were waiting, people kept saying, what can I do? – can we give money? We started a pledge campaign. We have raised over \$50,000 in pledges. We have 19, one-thousand-dollar pledges; one \$10,000 pledge. These are people that came up to me, also on Sunday at Bob's going away party and said, can I up my pledge. People are so eager to do this. One of you said to me, I know I'm going over time, that everybody that goes to Burger Bob's is old. Let me tell you about those old people. Past Mayors, past Commissioners, past heads of the museum, past heads of every single board that this city has had. The time, the talent, and the treasure that sits in that restaurant on a daily basis has made Coral Gables what it is today. Many of you have just been active for a short time, 10, 12 years maybe a the most, some of you less than that. I ask your permission to speak at the end of the speakers briefly. I promise.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Roy Black.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Black, please join us.

Mr. Black: Morning members of the Commission. In 1819, when Daniel Webster's stood up to speak on behalf of Dartmouth College. He told the Supreme Court, it may be a small school, but there are those who love it. Burger Bob's sits in the middle of the Greenway neighborhood. It may be small. It may be insignificant when it comes to the economics of this community, but its an important and integral part of this community. It is the keystone of the Greenway. I know you know how important this neighborhood is. Shaped like an oval, people walking, jogging, on their bicycles, walking their dogs. I spent 40 years walking or travelling around that oval saying hello to everybody I meet in there. It is a great part of this neighborhood of this great city. It reminds me of these places like Savannah, where you walk in with the town square that are beautiful to walk through and sit in and talk to people, or even the alleyways of Venice, which was George Merrick's, I think inspiration, where life would slow down, people would talk to each other. There was a community. There is a place we need where we can get away from modern life. I was just at Starbucks. Everybody there is on their cell phone, or looking into the computer screen, nobody was talking at all. But if you walk into Bob's, nobody is a stranger. Everybody is talking from one table to another, where we all reconnect right in there. It's a wonderful experience. And if we have learned anything about this pandemic, we have learned that we are starved for human connection, to be able to talk to people, to get out of our homes, get out of our apartments, to actually once again go on the streets and connect. My son goes to the University of Miami and he's in a dorm

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room, which he never leaves, and goes to his classes by remote, and he loses that whole experience of talking to a teacher, of communicating with people that is really the educational process. And that's what I think we need to preserve here in Bob's. And I am not arrogant enough to tell you how to run this modern, complex city. I know you don't get enough credit for what you have to do to keep this infrastructure running. I wouldn't even want to think about working on that on a daily basis to serve the citizens of this community. But the one thing I can tell you, that if we allow this institution of Bob's to die, we will all lament it. It is a great place to go to connect, to get that human connection, to open up and to be able to talk to people, and it may be small, it may be insignificant, its not a big restaurant, its not important in the scheme of things, but there are those who love it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Mr. Black.

(Applause)

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Joanne Mar.

Ms. Mar: Good morning, Commissioners, Joanne Mar, 1225 Valencia Avenue, nice to see you here this morning. About a month ago, during the holiday season, I like many of you, take a look at It's a Wonderful Life, got to watch it every year. And I'm struck by the community that George Bailey supported by being his quality self, humble, helpful, devoted to others, and how that community recognized his respect for each and every one of them, and paid him back in spades. I take a break here just to mention that I saw my Neighborhood Safety Aide today, Dave Smith, one of my favorite people in this community, and he actually told me that on more than one occasion, several occasions, all of the time, people who are visiting the Biltmore ask him how to get to Burger Bob's. So, it goes to Marlin's comment about us being known, Burger Bob's being known far beyond this community. Now going back to It's a Wonderful Life, of course wouldn't it be wonderful to live in Bedford Falls, and of course that's fiction, but its fiction that resonates with us, because we are social animals, and countless studies have shown that those who are deprived of community wither and die. As I consider Bob McGuire, the Marine veteran who showed up for work every blessed day, whether they were closed or not, even on Christmas, and Rita Tenneson and the family who were so devoted and continue to be so devoted to this place, I can't help but feel sorry for those who didn't take the opportunity to really get to know Bob and that family, who didn't sit down and have a burger and a cup of chili, and get to know the people, the staff and the family who daily demonstrated a love and loyalty and exemplary work ethic. You missed an opportunity to truly understand what all the fuss is about. Why a couple thousand people signed the petition to keep this small neighborhood place. I know there are members of the Commission can feel that it is incredibly important to make Coral Gables young and vibrant and move forward. Its all about being young and vibrant. Well, Rita can deliver on that as well, because she is incredibly creative and has ideas for how to carry this place forward without alienating those of us who are getting up there in years, and we've got to remind ourselves what other cultures value, people who have a bit of history in a community, people who can speak to that, and those people need to continue to be valued. Now, I'm not asking you to award the contract to Rita because she's a good person. She is an amazing person. You should have gotten to know her. But because, one could even say she's the George Bailey of our town, but I'm asking because she is an excellent

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businesswoman who will update the place without losing the character that we so value. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

City Clerk Urquia: Dabney Park.

Mr. Park: Thank you Mayor and Commissioners. My name is Dabney Park, most people know me as Bud Park. I resided in Coral Gables at 3920 Durango since 1976. I'm a former executive search consultant and actually helped some of you, at least, with the search for your previous City Manager. I have one word for you – community. Don't miss it. Don't ignore it. We said goodbye to Bob McGuire on Sunday. So, I'm here to ask you a question, what do you want? What do you want to happen with that restaurant facility there at the Pro Shop at Coral Gables, at the Granada Golf Course? A month or so ago, I distributed by hand a one-page piece which is also printed in the Coral Gables Magazine, called the Heart of Coral Gables that describes in some detail the kind of community that exists at Burger Bob's and that Burger Bob's facilitates and encourages. And so, I won't repeat that, I will leave copies behind, but I will ask you again, to pay attention to community, and without wanting to be critical, I will have to say that as a citizen assess all of your work as a Commission, City Manager, Mayor, the whole totality, I will have to give you high marks for many things, but its hard to give you high marks for supporting community. Wawa is another example. Please take this issue of community to heart, because it is the heart and soul of Coral Gables. Thank you.

(Applause)

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Hank Langston.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Langston: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here.

Mr. Langston: Good morning, Mayor and Commissioners, my name is Hank Langston. I'm a native Miamian. I was born in 1939 and spent 50 years as Dean of Faculty and instructor of math at Gulliver Schools, so Coral Gables has been a very important part of my life. I live in Coconut Grove at 3523 Lowcuod Avenue. I want to speak just briefly. Someone mentioned some time ago, what did Burger Bob's mean to me, and I said, I can sum it up, its like coming home, and they said, can you explain that. And I said, yes, its like after working all night and you are looking for a very comfortable breakfast, you go to Burger Bob's. If you worked a hard day during the day and you want to take a break at lunch rather than go into a five-star restaurant, you want to gather

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with your friends and have a nice comfortable lunch at Burger Bob's. And said, what is coming home like, and I said, briefly, it's like coming home and having breakfast with you or getting up in the morning and having breakfast with your family at the table. And at lunch its coming together with your friends and family and having a lunch together. So, to sum it up, that's my comment about how important this is. Its like coming home. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Langston, thank you for being here.

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

Mayor Lago: Marlin you wanted to close out. Thank you for reminding me.

Ms. Ebbert: On another note, I came to see the Mayor one Friday afternoon and I'm Chair of the city's Sustainability Board, and I came to pitch the idea that I would like to see the Granada Snack Shop be a real example of sustainability in the City of Coral Gables. You are about to do massive work on it. Its probably the smallest building, is it, in your stable of buildings, I don't know, is it?

City Manager Iglesias: One of the smallest.

Ms. Ebbert: One of the smallest. I see no trees around it. I see solar panels on the roof, solar benches, gardens, pollinator patches, rain change, rain barrows, compost. Think of all the eggshells, the coffee grounds, the grass clippings, that are right there, using gray water in the bathrooms, trex-flooring and other recycled materials for the building out, low flush toilets, hand dryers, automatic lights, timed air-conditioners, thermometers. And I do have probably the most, the greenest citizen in Coral Gables, she's 95. She has pledged, the check is written, its sitting in the Villagers treasury for \$20,000 to put solar panels on the roof of Burger Bob's. So that's Salley Jude.

Mayor Lago: May I, because I don't want to interrupt you. We are working on that. I think its critically important, it's a great opportunity, obviously to continue to send a message. We both have solar on our house and anyway that the city can send a message that we are pro solar, like we have in removing all permit fees associated with solar installation for residents in the community, we are moving forward with that idea, and it's a great opportunity for you to speak in front of the Commission to also garner support in this Sunshine meeting.

Ms. Ebbert: If you put the solar panels on, this \$20,000 will pay for two Tesla power walls, I know, I just installed them. So that's my sustainability pitch. The thoughts of what we can do and what the citizens will do. Now I want to talk a little bit about Rita. I was sitting over there in the corner last September, late September when Mr. Perez talked about the Comcast Rise grant. Rita applied for it and received a Comcast; she was a grant winner. She's been at Burger Bob's for 27 years. Think back, especially some of you 27 years ago, you were still in high school. She went to work every day while you were in college, while you were in law school, graduate school, getting married, starting a family, starting a job, she's been going to work there every day, and somewhere

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along there a dream came to her that maybe someday when Bob retired, she can take over that place. Carl Samberg once said, nothing happens unless first a dream and that is her dream. My mother used to say to me, think of three adjectives that would describe a person and think to yourself what three adjectives would describe you on any given day? You better be proud of those three adjectives. I thought about Rita Tenneson and the three adjectives I would use are humble, hard working and kind. Wouldn't we all be so lucky to have those adjectives describing us. I rest my case. Thank you.

(Applause)

Mayor Lago: I just want to respond. I would like for you, for the Commission, since we have this opportunity and its fresh and I'm going to address the issue of Rita Tenneson and Burger Bob's in a few moments at 10 o'clock, because I'm the one that called for a time certain meeting at 10 o'clock to make sure that everyone was here and that we could speak about this and that everybody could listen to what we are going to talk about today. Because I have ideas in regard to moving forward as per certain things that have happened in the last few days, and I've spoken on that with the Manager. But before we discuss that, I'd like for everybody to please follow up with the Manager on the solar panel issue. It's a great opportunity to not only offer the residents, but also show that we are leading, which we are on the sustainability front, but this is I think an easy win, because like Marlin mentioned, the location, there are no trees in the way and it's a small footprint. So, please follow up and I'd like to see if we can have that on the next agenda to really discuss in further detail, now that we have this opportunity of a community grant from a resident. So, Mr. Fernandez is here. I've had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Fernandez on multiple occasions. We did close the public comment, but I will make an exception for you, please.

Mr. Fernandez: Thank you Mr. Mayor, that's very kind of you.

Mr. Lago: Always a pleasure to see you.

Mr. Fernandez: Likewise. Good morning, Commissioner Mena, former partner. The reason I'm here is to express some concerns regarding just the tone and the rhetoric. I would say that I have definitely been very passionate in terms of my positions with respect to both Burger Bob's and the Country Club, but I really want to speak as a citizen in terms of the way that things have been transpiring, and in that regard what I wanted to talk about was, you know I'm pleased that I have the opportunity to sit down with you, Mr. Mayor, and discuss with you what my concerns were regarding Rita Tenneson and Burger Bob's; and I understand its Burger Bob's lease, but I think now that we're here in a public setting, we just heard a comment about solar panels. We should also consider the importance of creating opportunities for others in our community. And we've had a country where racial issues have been a major focus of discussion. The city has the opportunity to do the right thing and to encourage the establishment of a black minority owned business by a woman, which I think would be the only or one of the very few black minority woman owned business in Coral Gables, and as one of the malcontents that Mr. Barreto spoke about, I want to be very clear in both my praise for the Commission for taking the time to talk to people like me, but also to express my concerns as a citizen regarding the way that I think that emergencies have been sometimes taken advantage of. And what I mean by that is, if you harken

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back to the days of ancient Rome, the governor controlled the police force or controlled firefighters. So, when there was a fire you either sold your property to the governor for pennies on the dollar or the governor let it burn down to the ground. And I think that with Covid there's been a little bit of that going on in the sense that we had the Coral Gables Country Club that was only delinquent on its lease for one month. I've never seen an instance where somebody that was delinquent on their lease for one month, especially at a time when they were discussing, from what I understand, the application of payments owed by the city to them or events scheduled by the city, I've never seen a circumstance where that would result in, okay, we are going to agree not to terminate your lease, which is something that requires a legal eviction process, expression of claims and defenses, etc., and in the middle of Covid, they just lost the ability to renew their lease. That does not make any sense to me at all. And from the perspective of Rita Tenneson and Burger Bob's, look, I'm not casting aspersions here, but when there are confluences of events, they cannot be disregarded, okay. And the fact of the matter is that there have been a lot of deals that are getting done and a lot of things that are getting done and we voted for you. I think I voted for all of you, but we didn't vote for the City Manager. He may be very competent at what he does, but we need to hold you accountable for doing your jobs and controlling what the City Manager does, because he's not the Mayor of the city, and we need to have responsible government that reigns in the types of politics that exist in the City of Miami. Some of the stuff that has been going on in the City of Miami is suddenly migrating here. We are having the situation with Wawa. We are having the situation with the Coral Gables Country Club, and then all of a sudden, I'm not casting aspersions, but I'm talking about confluences of events, okay. You can't ignore reality. So, while Mr. Barreto can call me or whoever else he wants of malcontent, the truth of the matter is that the city was asking for permission as of last Friday to cut a deal without public comment, maybe not without public comment, but for the City Manager to have the authority to negotiate solely with an influential lobbyist whose on the, I forget what it is, the Board of Governor De Santis' Florida Water Game Commission, very influential politician, who has a more than checkered history. We are talking about an individual that there were issues with the concessions at the airport and then there were complaints about the, I think it was the Dade County Public Housing Trust. Now, I don't know Mr. Barreto. I'm not saying that those allegations are true or not true, but what I am saying is that I'm used to seeing politics as usual where people that have a lot of power get what they want done wherever they want it done, but I'm used to seeing that in tyrannical regimes like Canada or San Francisco or New York or Chicago. I'm not used to seeing that here in the City of Coral Gables, and we do not want this city, our City Beautiful to turn into the City of Miami, and I think that, frankly, we are in danger of doing that with what happened with Wawa, with Rita. Why is somebody that's that beloved, why would anybody risk their moral or political capital on something like that. And the last comment I'll make is that, that I've been told that the city doesn't want to cut any bad deals, okay. We're not encouraging you to cut bad deals but encouraging black entrepreneurship in the city is not a bad deal, that's a good deal. Encouraging woman entrepreneurship in the city, that's not a bad deal, that's a good deal. And after all the bad cities, all the bad deals that the city has done, I mean, I look out at Miracle Mile, okay, a beautiful, beautiful, inner Central Business District that is in a Mediterranean style of architecture, we shut down the traffic on that street for three years to have mix-match black and white tile. It looks like it fell off the back of somebody's truck, in a Mediterranean community. It makes absolutely no sense. So if you are going to make bad deals with respect to that, but whatever those flowers are that frankly, they look like body parts in the medians over here, and from what I understood cost

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hundreds of thousands of dollars, if we are going to talk about Frank Lloyd Wright type golf huts on the golf course, you guys can spare the \$450,000 to encourage a black entrepreneur and you guys can reopen the discussions with the Coral Gables Country Club, because I don't know – I can't speak to the allegations that their bookkeeping wasn't correct, or the way that business was being done, that the city wasn't capturing enough income because they were subleasing or whatever, but these are beloved businesses, and we're telling you as the citizens that I've got a ton of things to do. I was working on a bond issuance with Israel till 3 o'clock in the morning, I'm still here in the morning. So, if we're here and we think its that important, we really need you to listen to us. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Fernandez don't go too far please. Please sit down. Thank you. If I may. Have we closed the public comment?

City Clerk Urquja: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: I want to put for the record. We gave Mr. Fernandez 8 minutes to speak on this issue. This is just my opinion; my opinion and I think we need to be very careful, especially when we are speaking about other people who are not here to defend themselves and we portray people in a light that is not positive. In regard to the issues of the Country Club, we have to be very, very clear and be very careful and be very thoughtful about how we make the comments that we make on the record. We have left out the simple fact that a separation agreement was drafted by the leaseholder of the Country Club. Its not about the fact that they missed payments, its an issue, but the willfully came to the city, their attorney sat down with our attorneys, Madam City Attorney, please correct me if I'm wrong, and they willfully separated from the city, signed a document. We no longer want to have this lease. The city accepted that document and we are moving forward. Mr. Barreto submitted a document, a letter this week saying he no longer wanted to do business with the city, just like the current leaseholders of the Country Club. He was the only applicant. Let us not forget that ten years ago when we granted the DiDonato Group the rights to run the Country Club, he was the only applicant. Mr. Manager how many times did we try and go to the public in regard to the RFP for the Country Club to try to garner more interest in the Country Club?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we extended the original one for weeks longer and then we came back again.

Mayor Lago: We searched high and far to try to find people who would be interested in running the Country Club. So, when you talk about corruption, when you talk about smearing somebody's name, does anybody in this room here want to run the Country Club? – does anybody? We tried, we looked for somebody. We can do better than standing up here and smearing somebody because you don't agree with him or her or their politics. But I don't want to reprimand anybody. Mr. Fernandez with all due respect, you've made some comments here that don't shed a good picture on the City of Coral Gables, in my opinion. In regard to the Burger Bob's RFP, we will be discussing that at 10 o'clock. I have a few other housekeeping items that I want to take care of. Is there anything else, Mr. Clerk that we need to discuss here?

City Clerk Urquja: No sir.  
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Mayor Lago: There are new rules and policies. This is no longer like it was before having to go back to the way that other administrations handled this, because I would allow as the person who runs the meeting, I would allow unfathered discussion in the Commission meetings. The last few meetings have gone out of control – personal attacks, insults on the Commission, insults on the Manager, excuse me, that’s one of the items that I wanted to mention right now. I want to be very clear. I have the utmost respect and I support wholeheartedly, not only our Manager, but our City Attorney and our City Clerk. This is a thankless job. We have a wonderful city. We have wonderful employees that do the best they can, and when you talk about there is corruption and there are problems. You mentioned two issues. The Wawa issue is an issue that we are dealing with as a city. The issue has been going on for 19 years before anybody was on this Commission, and we will deal with that issue. I give you my word. We’ve already had, Mr. Vice Mayor how do you call it, we had a what?

Vice Mayor Mena: I’ll let the City Attorney.

Mayor Lago: We had a meeting here the other day, what is it?

City Attorney Ramos: A Shade Session.

Mayor Lago: A Shade meeting, excuse me. We had a Shade meeting; I’m surrounded by attorneys that’s why I take that to my advantage. We had a Shade meeting to discuss what we are going to do moving forward, but to say that this Commission is corrupt and that there are a litany of problems moving forward, none of these people were here for the decision on Miracle Mile, except for myself. None of them were here for the artwork but we have to be a little bit more careful when we talk about other people. Mr. Barreto is no longer engaged with the city in regard to the Country Club or Burger Bob’s and we are moving forward, and we are going to talk about that now in five minutes.