

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-7
January 13, 2026
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 Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz
Jackson Rip Holmes

Agenda Item F-7

A Resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution No. 2025-161 to change the date of the Special Election and calling for a Special Election on the proposed ballot question and City Charter Amendment to be held on April 21, 2026; providing for submission to the electors for approval or disapproval of a ballot question asking whether the City Charter should incorporate the City's Fund Balance and Reserve Policy adopted in Ordinance No. 2025-05 and be amended to require approval of the electors prior to amendment of that Fund Balance and Reserve Policy or the expenditure of funds from the General Reserve, except for those funds authorized to be spent pursuant to the Emergency Powers authorized by the Charter, City Code, Declaration of Emergency, or other applicable law; providing for a mail ballot; providing for notice; providing for inclusion in the City Charter; providing for related matters; and providing for an effective date.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

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Mayor Lago: Moving on to item F-7.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: F-7 is a Resolution of the City Commission amending Resolution number 2025-161 to change the date of the Special Election, calling for a Special Election on the proposed ballot question and City Charter Amendment to be held on April 21, 2026, providing for submission to the electors for approval or disapproval of a ballot question asking whether the City Charter should incorporate the city's fund balance and reserve policy adopted in Ordinance number 2025-05 and be amended to require approval of the electors prior to the amendment of that fund balance and reserve policy or the expenditure of funds from the General Reserve, except for those funds authorized to be spent pursuant to the emergency powers authorized by the Charter, City Code, Declaration of Emergency, or other applicable law, providing for a mail ballot, providing for notice, providing for inclusion in the City Charter, providing for related matters, and providing for an effective date.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you, Mayor. If you recall, in May of 2025, the City Commission adopted an ordinance that codified the city's fund balance and reserve policy, that's the 25 percent requirement, and also adopted a requirement that any changes to that policy or any expenditures of those funds beyond those certain emergency situations require a four-fifths vote of the Commission. This question puts that into the Charter but also requires that any changes to that policy and our expenditure of those funds not only requires a four-fifths vote but also requires a vote of the electors. There have been a few small changes to the title and the question, as mentioned, only to comply with the title requirement. If you'll notice, it had a much lengthier title before. It's still a long one. It's a hard title to fit in there. But we had to move some words around to comply with those requirements. And most importantly, this resolution changes it from the November 3, 2026, General Election to the April 21st Special Mail Ballot Election and provides for that Special Mail Ballot Election.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. May I have a motion?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Mayor Lago: May I have a second?

Commissioner Lara: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

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City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz?

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. For the same reasons that I said before, I object to the mail ballot and I believe that we should accept the reasoning from the Charter Review as presented by Mayor Slesnick and Jane Moskowitz.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Holmes.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you all. Jackson Rip Holmes, 35 Sedonia, Coral Gables. I am grateful to the Charter Review Committee, former Mayor Slesnick, for pointing out this rather startling information that Governor DeSantis may actually lower or abolish the residential property tax, which would be a radical factor in the city's income. And let's assume for a second that such happens and maybe they cut it in half, let's say. Well, guess who suffers then? The commercial owners, of which I am a mom-and-pop owner. So, I am worried about that, and I urge you to take this off the vote because if we set this in stone, then the city's hands are tied. And if we get saddled with losing half of or even all of the property tax from residences, I don't want to be the one that gets taxed beyond measure. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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

Mayor Lago: All right, we'll close with a comment. We have a motion and a second. Commissioner Castro?

Commissioner Castro: Yes. So, the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee, if you could please reiterate that, I believe that there are a lot of changes happening at the state level and that they trust this Commission and they don't believe that it's in our best interest as a city to go ahead and pass this. Is that accurate?

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: The Charter Review Committee's recommendation was that the City Commission not present this question to the voters at this time with a discussion about waiting to see what happens at the state legislature.

Commissioner Castro: I believe there's already a motion and a second on the table, but after that, I will be moving to go ahead and accept the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So that may be inconsistent with the motion that's adopted. I'm not sure if it's a motion to amend.

Mayor Lago: Yes, so, Madam City Attorney, will you clarify that request?

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City Attorney Christina Suarez: So, I'm sorry, Mayor, can you say that again?

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro is making a request. I'd like for you to clarify as our City Attorney.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: So yeah, I think there's not -- right now there is a motion and a second, and that's the motion that's being considered and it's under debate currently.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. So then if that gets voted on, I'm going to have to ask to amend it, right?

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: You should amend a motion while it's pending, not after it's been voted on, if you want to make an amendment to the motion.

Commissioner Castro: After it's been voted on.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Okay. Understood.

Commissioner Castro: I'm amending the motion.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: You're making a request to amend the motion.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: So, you're making a motion to amend?

Commissioner Castro: Correct.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: So, Mayor, I think we're hearing that there's a motion to amend. We would need a second for that.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Do we have a second?

Commissioner Fernandez: Would we be able to have two concurring motions?

Mayor Lago: Excuse me. Through the Mayor, please. Through the Mayor.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor, I've asked the question already.

Mayor Lago: No, you have not. We're going to follow Robert's Rules, and we're going to do it the right way. I think it's key.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: I believe we need a second for discussion.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Would you like a second?

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I'll second for discussion.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. All right.

Commissioner Castro: So, my motion was to go ahead and-

Mayor Lago: Through the Mayor.

Commissioner Castro: Through the wonderful Mayor sitting right next to my left that I cannot adore anymore, Commissioner Fernandez, the way I'm amending this motion is to consider the recommendation of the Charter Review Committee. Since they put in so much work, and I mean, we have great representation, Mayor Don Slesnick, Fauli, Mayor Fauli, Jane Moskowitz. I mean, the amount of experience and representation in that Charter Review Committee really merits that we put or at least acknowledge all the work they put into this. So it would be to my best recommendation that we at least consider their recommendation.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: So, can you clarify your motion? Amending the motion to do what?

Mayor Lago: Excuse me.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Yeah, sorry.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: Okay, Mayor. So right now, the motion and the second that's on the floor. There's a motion to approve the resolution, which is on the agenda, which is a resolution as approving the resolution as drafted. If I'm understanding correctly, it's a motion to amend the motion to approve the resolution to consider the Charter Review Committee's recommendation. I don't know that those two are in sync.

Mayor Lago: They're not.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: And so, I, you know, I just, you all can decide, you know, when you vote on the motion to amend, but...

Mayor Lago: They're not in sync. Okay, so moving forward. Commissioner Fernandez, the floor is yours.

Commissioner Fernandez: So where do we stand on the motions? Because now, my understanding is there can only be one motion on the floor at a time.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: Mayor, do you want me to answer? What do you?

Mayor Lago: Of course, you're following Robert's Rules, and I'm grateful for that.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: So, there is a motion to amend that has been seconded. So, we should address that first.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: It's a secondary motion. It's a secondary to be considered before we can rule on the primary motion.

Mayor Lago: As a sponsor of the item, I think we should move forward. Do we take a vote on it?

City Attorney Christina Suarez: We should take a vote, yes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Attorney Christina Suarez: Mayor, I'm sorry to interrupt. This is on the motion to amend.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Cristina Suarez: The motion to approve the resolution.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second to amend.

Commissioner Lara: This is a motion to amend.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: No.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: No.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fernandez, back to you. You have the floor in regard to the motion F-17, which I'm the sponsor of.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think that we should adhere to the recommendation made by the Charter Review Committee. I'm ready to vote.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: I'm ready to vote.

Mayor Lago: Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Ready to vote.

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Mayor Lago: Okay. So, before we vote, I'd like to put on the record just a little bit of history. The word trust was used by my colleagues to the left and to the right. The reason why I proposed this piece of legislation was because when I started as an elected official here, we had \$15 million in restricted reserves. Over the last 13 years, we have done extensive belt tightening with our Finance Director, her team, and the City Manager. And we've taken it close to about \$60 million, correct? From \$15 million. Let me tell you why that's important. Because when we had a hurricane and we were one of the first out of the gate to be able to address our needs, like cleaning up the streets, it took us, and if I may get a correct answer from our City Finance Director, it took us close to seven or eight years to get paid back by the state. Is that correct? She's waving her head as yes.

City Manager Iglesias: That's correct, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, this is why you need to have a robust, a robust restricted reserve. That's number one. Number two, when I started here, we had a double A rated, we were a double A rated city. After installing legislation that requires 25 percent of our budget to be in restricted reserves, we climbed and we continue to climb through belt tightening. That allowed us to get a triple, triple bond rating. We're one of three cities currently, if I'm still correct, in the State of Florida that have that. That is a point of distinction, that is a point of respect, and that sets us apart from everyone else. But the real reason why I brought this up was because Commissioner Fernandez, one day said, when Amos Rojas was here, let's move forward and start accessing our restricted reserves. For sidewalks, for other issues that we can do right now, we shouldn't wait. We should take care of those issues right now. And I think that that is, again, shooting ourselves in the foot, and it is incredibly treacherous, and it shows a lack of fiscal restraint and responsibility. So that's why this is brought forward. After speaking with many, many residents, they all told me, Vince, we got to protect our restricted reserve. It's a sense of pride for the city. And at the end of the day, it allows us to borrow, if we were to borrow cheaper, and as our city should maintain the highest standards in regard to fiscal responsibility. So, moving forward, this is critically important to setting a benchmark and making sure that we adhere to our fiscal responsibility. The Manager, during states of emergency, has access to our restricted reserves. Don't let them tell you that he does not. It has to be an emergency, like a hurricane, to be able to tip into it. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor. If I may.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Question to maybe the City Manager. If the worst case of worst cases with respect to what may happen coming out of Tallahassee occurs, and all property tax is rescinded, and the city should find itself in a shortfall of a magnitude that we've never seen before, would that constitute an emergency?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, it would. Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you, Mayor. Yes, it would. However, I think, and furthermore, it certainly would constitute an emergency. But our fund is at \$64 million right now. That fund is not a reoccurring fund, and sometimes people think it is. Whereas, if we lose real estate taxes, it would be a reoccurring cost. So, we would be taking money for something that we could not replace. And that is a real problem, because if we have a hurricane, then how could we replace that money and act appropriately for our residents? So, it makes it even a bigger issue.

Commissioner Lara: Right. And through the Mayor. I guess the point, and you're helping me get to it, is that we don't know what Tallahassee is going to do. But if Tallahassee were to do something insane and cut off, in a radical move, all property tax, you would be able, at least, to access reserves should this get carried in April's referendum, right? You still have the ability to access, on an emergency basis, the money, as we then navigate going forward that new scenario, which is, as I described it, the worst-case scenario. And we don't know what Tallahassee is going to do. But let's assume that we will have an appropriate roll-in period, appropriate time to adapt, and whatever that comes from Tallahassee. This would ensure that under only, at this point, the highest level of obstacles before we dip into the reserves. That's the point.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Commissioner.

Mayor Lago: So, moving forward, it's pretty simple. This is a safety net and ensuring that we protect the hard work of our employees and past Commissions and our triple-triple bond rating. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second. I can have a vote.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: No, for the reasons stated below, that we should be following the Charter Review Committee's recommendation. That's what they're there for.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, for the reasons prior stated.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Thank you.

(Vote: 3-2)