

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
October 10, 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

Asset Manager, Zeida Sardinias

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-2 [11:30 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission waiving the competitive process of the Procurement Code and authorizing the City Manager and City Attorney to negotiate a 90-day license agreement, with a 90-day extension option, to engage a licensee for the operation of the cafe space at the Coral Gables Golf and Country Club.

Mayor Lago: I want to move to H-2 really quick. I want to get that out of the way – City Manager item.

City Attorney Suarez: H-2 A Resolution of the City Commission waiving the competitive process of the Procurement Code and authorizing the City Manager and City Attorney to negotiate a 90-day license agreement, with a 90-day extension option, to engage a licensee for the operation of the cafe space at the Coral Gables Golf and Country Club.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, Zeida, thank you for being here. Thank you.

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Asset Manager Sardinas: Good morning. Mayor, Commissioners, Zeida Sardinas, Asset Manager. So, as you're aware, during the last Commission meeting on September 26th, you authorized the 30-day extension to the Concession Agreement to allow the former operator Fresh AN additional time to provide the city with the documentation that we need to evaluate and negotiate the two-year extension. Unfortunately, on September 27th the city received confirmation from Fresh AN's Manager of record that they wish to end the negotiation process. Fresh AN ceased café operations on September 30th and removed all personal property from the café space by October 3rd. The next day Community Recreation placed a coffee vendor, Coffee Vibes, at the Country Club to provide coffee, baked goods, and other beverages between 9 and 4 p.m. in the afternoon. This morning Community Recreation reopened the café and began offering café patrons baked goods, grab and go delicacies, coffee and other beverages, using a combination of city employees and other temporary staff. In order to ensure that the Country Club café space continues to operate, provide food and beverage services to Country Club members, the surrounding neighborhood and Coral Gables residents as-a-whole. The proposed resolution waives the competitive process for the procurement code and authorizes the City Manager and the City Attorney to negotiate and execute a 90-day license agreement with additional extensions up to 90 days at the City Manager's discretion, for operation of the café at the Country Club, so that the City Manager may explore longer term options for engaging an experienced licensee with a viable business plan and business terms that will be mutually favorable to both the licensee and the city, for the operation of the café at the Country Club. The resolution also authorizes the Manager to negotiate with potential licensees for the longer-term operation of the Country Club space. Any subsequent license agreement would be presented to the City Commission for approval. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I believe that at this time we're moving forward in the next two weeks to potentially get a new licensee in for 90 days, with an additional 180 days. I do think that we need a little bit of time to look at the operations of the café. I believe that its changed completely today, as far as the overall operation and what we're providing the actual residents. I welcome all of you to see what's happening at the café as of now. I do believe that we have a potential licensee that we've looked at before, because there was a potential for the prior licensee to leave. And so, having that as a potential problem, we looked at the current company. So, this provides us with 90 days, and an additional 90 days to actually provide a thorough evaluation and then we bring it back to the City Commission,

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either with a new licensee or with an RFP requirement. I'd like to see if we can get this done as quickly as possible, get the café open as quickly as possible, for our residents there.

Mayor Lago: I think it's a great idea moving forward. I think we have to finally find something that's sustainable that puts the city in the best position financially and that provides a great atmosphere and great quality for the residents.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think this has become a staple of the community. A lot of residents who miss Burger Bob's and miss the prior establishment really enjoy coming out to Le Parc. Its unfortunate that we're here today, but I appreciate the fact that staff stepped in immediately, brought in somebody to at least start serving residents and make sure that the doors weren't closed for an extended period of time, and I think this Commission and the prior Commission have always said, the priorities to make sure that the service is being provided to residents and I think that's what we're all behind here.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to echo Commissioner Fernandez' thoughts as well. That area is, I think, the most active area for leisure activity in all of Coral Gables. I mean, between people who are walking, jogging, cycling, with their kids, tennis, golf, you name it, it all happens in that area and to have a place that they can go to, to relax after exercising or before, is vital, and to maintain operations ongoing, I think, is key, that's why I complement staff not allowing much down time. I wish it would have worked before, a lot of factors came into place, but the community definitely wants that to be an extension of their experience and their home in Coral Gables. So, I think at this point we need to move forward.

Mayor Lago: I was going to say on a brighter note, we're going to be in a much better position. I think we're going to control our destiny on this front. I have full faith and confidence in the Manager and our employees, especially the individuals that are running the Country Club, they are doing a wonderful job, wonderful job. On a brighter note, I want to mention that I had a meeting with the Manager yesterday in regard to Burger Bob's. We've already provided the notice of commencement to the contractor. We had a meeting with the contractor last week. His contract was signed and will be starting construction probably, what would you say Mr. Manager?

City Manager Iglesias: We are negotiating a couple of aspects of that contract and as soon as that's done, we will...

Mayor Lago: Release the second notice of commencement.

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City Manager Iglesias: The second notice to proceed.

Mayor Lago: So, I think that it should, in my opinion, I don't think it should be longer than two weeks before we get started. The demolition has already happened; the windows have been replaced, so it's moving forward, it's funded, and it's something that I think is going to be a bright spot when that comes back at some point in the near future.

City Manager Iglesias: If I may say Mayor, we're also looking forward to a licensee that can also handle smaller functions and I believe that we're working up to that. I think that's a big issue as far as the Country Club is concerned, it will be a great asset if we can, it will make us more competitive with other venues.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm sorry, I have a real quick piggyback on the Mayor's comments. With regards to Burger Bob's, what is the timeline in terms of settling or identifying – I know we've had prior discussions, who would be running Burger Bob's in terms of, are we in discussions with anyone in particular, or it's a matter of allowing the construction to move forward a little bit further.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, I'd like the construction to move forward a little bit further. We are in discussions; we started discussions. We want to make sure that what we do at Burger Bob's is compatible with Le Parc. We don't want competition from one versus the other. So, we're looking at, to make sure there is synergy between both venues, and so, I'd like to move construction on. We do have about nine to ten months of construction time that we can negotiate a proper contract.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, if I may just reiterate and I hope I speak for the Commission, if I don't, please speak up. We asked to have Rita engaged in one form or another with Burger Bob's. I know you've been having conversations. What I would ask you to do, please, because I think the Commission still stands by that, I would like for you to please, if you can, have a conversation with each one of the Commissioners, to give them an update in regards to Rita's position and what we're looking for and how we can, hopefully meet in the middle or bridge that gap, to see what are things that we can do to hopefully bring her back in one form or another. Obviously, I'm a believer, I said it before, that the city should remain in control of both of these businesses. We should not relinquish control. I think it benefits the community and I think financially its better for the city, but I would like to hear a little bit more, not now, and my colleagues, so that we can kind of be up to

date in regards to where Rita stands, what were her requests, and what are we negotiating to see if we can meet in the middle.

City Manager Iglesias: I understand that Mayor and I know what the Commission authorized us to do. We will be looking at that, however, we are putting \$1.2 million dollars into tenant improvements there, so I do believe that that is quite a substantial amount, and that the city needs to also try to recoup some of that. I have to run this as a business.

Mayor Lago: I agree.

City Manager Iglesias: And as a fiduciary to our city.

Mayor Lago: One hundred percent. Again, like I told you, I agree with you wholeheartedly, I wasn't willing to accept and neither was anybody on the Commission to accept \$5 a square foot for Le Parc, that was unacceptable and it would not happen, and I'm telling you the same thing in regards to Burger Bob's, but I think there's a way to bring her back in one form or another. I don't know what that form is and what she feels comfortable with. Maybe she's moved unto brighter and bigger things, I don't know. But I would like just an update in the near future, if you can, to see where she stands and what her interests are and what she's proposing.

City Manager Iglesias: What I can tell you, Mayor and Commissioners is that we will do our best to follow what the Commission has decided, try to bring her back, however again, this is a contract for a city facility and that would be my fiduciary responsibility to make sure that it works out as far as the city is concerned. We will bring this back to the Commission, but we will make every effort to work with her to make that work.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Madam Vice Mayor, excuse me, I apologize.

Vice Mayor Anderson: My suggestion to each one of you, each one of us here on the Commission is, let's set an outline of what we expect the hours to be at Burger Bob's, I'm just going to call it Burger Bob's, because it's a habit of calling it Burger Bob's. Do we want breakfast there, do we want lunch there, do we want an early dinner there. My understanding from the little bit of back and forth of conversations I've had is that our favorite preferred individual running is not going to be available to do breakfast. Maybe if she understands that's something we really want, I'm not suggesting that that's what we really want, but if we tell her that that's what we really want, perhaps that will become a possibility. Sometimes you have to ask in order to receive and seek if you can find, but I'm

looking forward to the doors opening there. I remember the warm environment that we had at Burger Bob's. I'm looking to both businesses to be compatible and competitive, because I know that it cost us a lot to put these facilities back together again, but we also need to be competitive with other places. I know the Rotary has reached out and they got a better deal with Hyatt. So, we've got to look carefully at our competitive with other industries.

Commissioner Menendez: And with regards to the service or what is offered at Burger Bob's, I mean, if there is a, I don't think there is a more compassionate group of residents than the Burger Bob's alums, and I think it's very important that, I know we will and I know we always have, take their wishes what they would like to see seriously into consideration. My hope is that we can continue that tradition because that tradition creates community and that's what makes that area and all of Coral Gables really special. So, I think let's do what the people want us to do bottom line.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, that is our concern, that's why we want to make sure that the menus are compatible, and we want to make sure that we don't compete against each other. That should be two different venues and one is compatible with the golf course and the other compatible with the Country Club. I want to make sure that those venues, those menus that we offer are compatible with that respect.

Commissioner Fernandez: The Vice Mayor is correct. I think we definitely need to hone in on the time. I've heard – I'm not a golfer, but when folks go to play golf, they like to have a place where they can go either have a coffee before, have a breakfast before. So, personally I think it should be open whatever times the golf course is open, so that that amenity is available to folks, but that's just my opinion on the matter.

City Manager Iglesias: And we agree with that. It's a golf course facility.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I agree with you too. I'm a big breakfast person. With the Mayor having stepped out, I'm going to ask you all if someone wants to make a motion.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll make a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

City Attorney Suarez: Just to be clear. The item is regarding the other facility, the Country Club café.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, I know. We kind of went around circles.

Commissioner Fernandez: We went around, we came back.

City Clerk Urquia: Before the vote is taken, we do have a member of the public requesting to speak on the item, Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Here we go again. Here we go again. We stretch Burger Bob's as far as we can, we make it difficult for the other side, and now we don't want to have competition. We have somebody who's interested so we're not going to have the competitive process that we normally do. I'm sorry. This is not what the people of Coral Gables want. This is one of the items that people presented before and I'm sorry they didn't think it was going to come up today, but it's here. This is not something for the administration to decide. This should be a competition. We should know who the people that are applying. We should know how they got selected. This is not a secret item. This is not acceptable. I have no issue with part of it, moving it forward, doing very well, now we're talking 90 days here, and 90 days there. There's time to have a competitive process. There should be no reason not to open for bids and see who wants to do it and we certainly do not want the previous secrecy when this major company was going to take over, because you know what, we can see it through. They can take Burger Bob's; they can take Le Parc, and then guess what, they can do the Country Club too. No. That's not what we want. We want separate entities. We want separate businesses and we do need a competitive process.

Mayor Lago: Alright. We have a first and a second.

Vice Mayor Andeson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)