

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
January 28, 2025
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, 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, Alberto Parjus

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-1 [10:25 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving a salary and benefits package for City Manager Alberto N. Parjus.

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-1.

City Attorney Suarez: F-1 is a resolution of the City Commission approving a salary and benefits package for City Manager Alberto N. Parjus.

Mayor Lago: Would anyone like to make a comment for the Commission. Anybody like to make a comment. I would entertain a motion.

Commissioner Castro: I'll move it.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry, I missed it. Who made the motion?

Commissioner Castro: I did.

City Commission Meeting

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*Agenda Item F-1 – Resolution of the City Commission approving a salary and benefits package
For City Manager Alberto N. Parjus*

[Date]

1

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. Thank you, ma'am.

Mayor Lago: Any public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: I believe Mr. Holmes wants to make a comment on this.

Mr. Holmes: I appreciate you squeezing me in. I just want to celebrate your assuming this role and I think, I hate to say this, but we have a struggle when our city who runs it, is it developers, or is it the voters, and I'm really surprised that anyone would have opposed his being named to this position. I mean this is one of the most mild-mannered people I've seen in city government and so, he wants to be neutral, and people oppose this. He's got great experience, so thank God, you're here.

Commissioner Castro: Congratulations.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to repeat the comments I made previously; process is important. You know we have best practices manuals for a reason and business usually has an application process, a vetting process, giving other people an opportunity to fulfill the position, that wasn't done here, and based upon these circumstances when we are so close to an election time, I felt that an interim position would have been the appropriate manner to do it, and pro-rata you know, compensation if the future Commission decides not to proceed with Mr. Parjus would have been more appropriate than what was the result here today. For that reason, my vote is no. Nothing against you, Mr. Parjus, just process.

Commissioner Castro: We are voting on approving the salary and benefits package, that's what we are voting on, to make it clear.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, that's why I made the prorata comment.

Commissioner Menendez: And by the way, if I may, sorry, just for clarification, is the package is basically the same that was before and the severance for Mr. Parjus is prorated, so if by chance the Commission changes its not winner take all, it's a prorated. Just want to put that on the record.

Vice Mayor Anderson: My comment was on pro-rata because 50 percent proration is different than dividing it by 12, okay, that's what I meant by prorata.

Commissioner Menendez: I just wanted to clarify on my end.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Certainly.

Commissioner Castro: And just to be a little clear. If it's terminated before May 21st its ten weeks and after May 21st which is the first Commission meeting it will be 20 weeks. To put that on the record, my vote is yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, this was voted on last week and yet, our esteemed colleague is politicizing it once again. When she was the one who appointed the City Attorney the exact same meeting prior to last election without a process. She was promoted as the Deputy who assumed the position when the former City Attorney took the position. So, it's a little political to be making that comment now when you had no issue with a proration or with an appointment prior to an election two years ago, at the exact same meeting three months prior to the election. My vote is yes and City Manager Parjus you have my full support. You have over 40 years of dedication to our South Florida community. You have more experience than any of your last five predecessors, that speaks to the volume of experience that this city is having in the City Manager. You've been in the role of Deputy for three years now, you understand this city, you helped our former City Manager and his predecessor in the running of our city. I have full confidence in you, and I appreciate you taking this position in this toxic political environment that are colleagues are putting together.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to quickly add when I did meet with Mr. Parjus, not only was he a professional, he was a gentleman, and he was very aware of the sensibilities that some people have in the room and outside the room, and for that reason the discussions on his package contract went very smoothly, because he's not here to divide the community, he's here to unite the community, and the contract if it had gone in a different direction, but he voluntarily said, I want to do what's right because I want the city to be able to move forward without the political attacks. So, I want to thank Mr. Parjus for not only being an amazing professional, but an amazing human being and for caring about our community.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Fernandez, not sure if I got your vote.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Before I vote, since everybody has engaged. Do we have any more public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: We do sir.

Mayor Lago: I'll take it now.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I, once again, have to say that politics, politics, politics, running for office, running for office, running for office, this is the issue. I am tired of all the accusations, all the negative comments. We are here talking about a gentleman who has more,

City Commission Meeting

more experience in government than previous people that have been appointed here without any public notice, any vetting, any national search, because if you remember last time, I was here and I told you, I read from the minutes of September 25, 2018 where on agenda item, Peter Iglesias was appointed City Manager without letting the people know that that was going to come up without any notice that we could say anything about it, but yet, we chose to do this again and again because elections are coming and we have to threaten and try to bully the people from taking the job. Enough is enough. We have done this for the City Attorney. We have done this for the City Clerk. I don't remember ever anyone being appointed and said, well, you know you have to be careful because you know, when I get elected, I may vote to fire you. This is disgraceful, its shameful for all of you that say, this is not the Coral Gables way. Exactly. This is not the Coral Gables way. Maybe some people need to move to Miami and fit their very well or maybe Hialeah. This is not the way we do things here. This is a man that has worked here under the perfect Peter Iglesias that didn't know City Hall was important, that didn't know this building should have been perfect, that didn't know 427 should be perfect, that didn't know Miracle Mile should have been done differently. He worked under him and was great when he was working under Peter and was very experienced and everybody appreciated what he did, but lo and behold, we get rid of Peter Iglesias, so anybody who follows is no good, we need to try to bully them, we don't want him here, because we want Peter Iglesias back. Well, let me tell you, like I said last time, I'm surprised that nobody has filed a complaint about his license because the list of stuff that he handled in this city that haven't been proven not to be right, is shameful, and I support Mr. Parjus, and I apologize for being put through this.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Just want a point of clarification.

Mayor Lago: If I may, Madam Vice Mayor, I apologize for interrupting.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I never said he wasn't qualified.

Mayor Lago: Can we close the public comment. Thank you. Madam Vice Mayor, I apologize for interrupting. Would you like to make a comment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I just said, I talked about the process, and I never said that Mr. Parjus was not qualified. This is the same recommendation I made to Mr. Amos when he took the role that he would have the respect of the community more if the process was followed for a normal hiring.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, I have to vote.

City Clerk Urquia: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Okay. You haven't asked me for my vote.

City Clerk Urquia: Mayor Lago.

City Commission Meeting

Mayor Lago: So, I don't want to relitigate this. I'm just going to put some points on the record. I don't want to debate it with my colleagues, this is very simple. My vote is no. I echo all the sentiments of the Vice Mayor. I've met with half a dozen directors and more than a dozen employees over the last two weeks who have all told me that, again, we should have taken another route, that they would have liked to have been considered for this position and they had the qualifications. In regard to the previous comments about the way things were handled with the attorney and the City Clerk in the past. There's a big difference, there is consensus, it was 5-0. You can look up the public record. And also, in regard to what Commissioner Menendez stated, in regards to the prorata. The job could be ten weeks. I've never in the private sector given somebody who's been on the job ten weeks of severance. This is not a good look. It doesn't happen in the private sector, and it shouldn't happen in the public sector. In closing, one of the things that I've done when I've interviewed easily over 100 people in the private and public sector. I always ask them a simple question and I found it very interesting when I watched Zeida Sardinias being interviewed for the position of City Manager of Doral, an amazing employee here in the city, who we miss her greatly. One of the questions they asked her was, why do you want this job. I've used that before in the private sector many, many, many times. I've asked people, why do you want to come work at our firm. They asked her that same question. In the last two weeks the Manager, which I respect has not reached out to me. Everyone knows that the Manager, the previous Manager would not deal with me. This Manager has not called me. We had two incidents here in the city; one, 31 migrants were found here in the city, I was notified by Channel 7 who interviewed me, wanted to interview me, but I didn't have the information. I was in office hours. And the second issue was a shooting, gun shots that happened in the Coco Plum Circle where I found out about it from residents the next day and I called the Police Chief to get information. I called Mr. Parjus, the Manager, and asked him, I haven't spoken to you in five days, I'm reaching out to you since you were named the Manager. He said he was busy, that he had a lot of things he was taking care of. I respect that, but a phone call takes two minutes, and I asked him a simple question. I said, why are you taking this job under these current circumstances. And his response to me was, its none of your business. That's why I'm voting no. Moving onto item F-2, unless the Manager would like to say a few words.

Commissioner Menendez: Well, I just have one more thing to say and I didn't want to bring it up, but I guess I need to. I want to apologize to Mr. Parjus that when you were sworn in by the City Clerk, out of respect for you as a person, as a human being, everyone in this room stood up and unfortunately on the dais only three elected officials stood up, two decided to stay seated, and we've had differences in the past and we've had people come and go and sometimes we get along with them, sometimes we don't get along with them. We have difference of opinions on policy, procedure, politics, you name it, but at the end of the day, regardless of whether you like a person or you are happy with the appointment, we show respect, we show civility, and I apologize that

not only in a vote for 3-2, just to show respect for you and our staff and our community, only three of us stood up to show the proper Coral Gables type of respect.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm glad that you bring that up because I was criticized by one resident when we voted to remove Peter Iglesias, because when Peter Iglesias stood up from the dais, and everybody got up and gave him a standing ovation, I did too, because even though Peter Iglesias and I didn't agree politically, as a person, I thought it was my duty and my responsibility to thank him for his years of service, not just to Coral Gables, but to our South Florida community, and it shows the poor measure of a person when they can't put politics aside and recognize the fact that you were somebody who has worked tirelessly for this community. You didn't want this job. Two years ago, you said you didn't want it, but you have shown a dedication to the residents of Coral Gables, because you want to move this city forward, because you want to make sure that this city is stable, but there are those out there who are trying to divide our community and seek instability because when you are losing politically, what you need is instability to show that you have a different equation that's going to make things better. Well, let me tell you, bringing Peter Iglesias back, like you've been promising residents if Rhonda Anderson and Richard Lara get elected, is not the path forward, and I've heard that from several residents. I don't know what communications you and the Vice Mayor have had about it, but let's just be clear, going backwards to an administration that has allowed City Hall to fall apart the way that it has is not a path forward, and to those members of the administration and the directors who's claimed to be interested in the position, there is an Assistant City Manager position that is opening up, and that position will be open once again. The Assistant City Manager position in this city was open for prior to the hiring of Joe Gomez for about three years. I don't know how many of those directors applied for the position, but that is the natural step forward to assume the position of City Manager, happens in every position. The private sector is the same thing. The secretary becomes the assistant, moves forward and you move step by step, just like we do in the police department and the fire department. Mr. Parjus has put in countless hours to this city and to try to besmirch his name for political purposes, shame on you Mr. Mayor.

Commissioner Castro: Sometimes in life when people talk to you in a disgraceful manner, the best thing to do is look at them in the eyes and just smile. Sometimes its better not even to say anything.

Mayor Lago: So, before we move on. Again...

City Manager Parjus: I want to have a point of privilege, if I may.

Mayor Lago: Sir, just one second. Just want to respond to the Commissioner and just put it on the record. He made a very, very good point Commissioner Fernandez and that was that the natural progression, I guess we didn't consider that when we hired Amos Rojas. Mr. Manager, would you like to say a few words in this moment.

City Commission Meeting

City Manager Parjus: Mayor, it's a privilege, if there is anything that I can never be accused of being is disrespectful and if I may clarify, you may have heard wrong. You asked me the question, why did you change your mind when you said that you didn't want it, dear City Manager, to which I responded, for personal reasons, Mr. Mayor. I just want to clarify that.

Mayor Lago: If I may. I asked you, I asked you very clearly on the record, I said, why would you take this job in the current circumstances and not be an interim, and then move forward after the elections. You said, its none of your business. That's what you told me.

City Manager Parjus: I never said that to you.

Mayor Lago: We are moving onto item F-2.

Commissioner Fernandez: This is a man who made up a lot of things, so don't worry about it.

Mayor Lago: Obviously, we are not going to agree. We are going to agree to disagree and that's fine.

Commissioner Castro: If you heard that, that's fine, but he's clarifying now he didn't, so if you could please take that it would be nice.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, moving onto F-2.