

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-5**  
**January 14, 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, Amos Rojas, Jr.**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton**

**Public Speaker(s)**

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Agenda Item F-5 [12:58 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission increasing the award amounts for the City's Police and Firefighter of the Year, the increase which would be funded by donations from LEAF at the Coral Gables Community Foundation. (Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: You want to take F-5 now, before we go to lunch, and I want to take H-1 too before we go to lunch.

Commissioner Castro: Absolutely.

City Attorney Suarez: So, F-5 is a Resolution of the City Commission increasing the award amounts for the City's Police and Firefighter of the Year, the increase which would be funded by donations from LEAF at the Coral Gables Community Foundation.

Mayor Lago: Why don't we do this, if you don't mind, this item seems like its going to be a back and forth and there may be people who want to come and speak. Why don't we give it 30 minutes,

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*Agenda Item F-5 – Resolution of the City Commission increasing the award amounts for the City Police and Firefighter of the Year*

we come back, we take it as the first item when we come back from lunch, and then we take item H-1, they've been here patiently all day, it's a procurement issue and I think its pretty straightforward. So can we jump we'll take H-1 and then we'll come back and then take H-5, F-5, is that fine Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a question. Other than the people that are here, who else is going to show up to talk about it. Mr. Manager, did you call for somebody to come and talk about F-5 that's not here.

City Manager Rojas: F-5.

City Attorney Suarez: Increasing the award for Police and Firefighter of the Year.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes. I think folks are here ready.

Mayor Lago: I can answer you. You can ask me the question; I can answer for you.

Commissioner Menendez: I was asking if he had somebody on his staff that needed to be here.

Mayor Lago: I don't need anybody to be here, but Willy Bermello told me he may want to stop by, but if not, we can take the item right now, it's no problem. I'm just giving him the respect that he deserves.

Commissioner Castro: So, Willy was going to go ahead and send Mary from the foundation and Tom, but I don't think they are going to be here. Willy is going to be here, but on a different item. So, if we want to go ahead and take it.

Mayor Lago: We'll take H-1, please, then we'll come back to F-5 after lunch. I think this is something simple we can just pass now.

Commissioner Castro: You know what, actually let's just go ahead and take F-5. I think its going to be really quick. Its nothing really to ponder a lot about. Its pretty common sense. F-5.

Mayor Lago: F-5.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. Just very briefly, its already explained. This amount, this changes the award amounts for the city's Police Officer and Firefighter of the Year awards. The increased amount from \$1,000 to \$5,000 or could be coming from donations from the LEAF Foundation, the city's budgeted amount of \$1,000 for the awards will not be changing. The City Commissioner has expressed that Mr. Bermello and the LEAF Foundation have committed themselves to this amount, and then to address any concerns,

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the resolution itself says that that increase of \$4,000 donation will be subject to available funds from the LEAF Foundation, and if they have any concerns about the appropriateness of that donation, I would defer to them and their decision-making on that.

Commissioner Castro: So first, I want to thank the Mayor for bringing the LEAF Foundation to the Commission. I did offer the Mayor the opportunity to go ahead and co-sponsor this item with me, since it was his initiative to bring the LEAF Foundation here. I also want to thank Tom Prescott and Mary from the foundation, for making this possible. I spoke with Willy during the LEAF lunch, and he committed to paying for, to contributing \$4,000 to each of these awards, so there will be no additional contributions from the city to these awards. I'm very thankful for them and I will move it.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: So, before we vote on it, just really quickly. I'm going to vote in favor of this. I bought a table with my own personal funds for \$2,500 for this event. I asked my brother to also buy a table for \$2,500 and he bought one for this personal event. When I was brought the LEAF project by Mr. Bermello and Mary and Tom, we had multiple meetings to discuss the issue. I viewed it and they were very clear with me that this was for Police Officers, who are injured on the job and who were, God forbid, deceased as a result of being on the job. That's what they told me, but at the end of the day, it's a donation for the police. I think we should be very wise, and this should be funded, personally it should be funded by the city and that money should be kept in its place for those families of those police officers that have to horrifically deal with the issue of losing a loved one in the line of duty. But at the end of the day, I don't have the votes, it is what it is. This was changed and we move on. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm going to offer a friendly amendment that in future years it be funded by the city. The city should show its commitment, and I bought my own seat too at the LEAF Foundation. I've experienced someone that I worked with for years who died in the line of duty. The DeKorte award is a very important award, as is the awards that are given to the firefighters. This is an obligation of the city. I do think that we should not deplete funds that are meant to take care of folks and their families that have gone through the ultimate sacrifice and are disabled through life. Yes, I will vote in favor of this, but I think we need to put this as a budget line item for the city and for the city to show the honor for our firefighters and our police officers.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to just add. I think Willy Bermello, the LEAF Foundation, everybody involved, Mary, Tom, we should encourage the private sector foundations to be further involved. Coral Gables is known for our community involvement. So, I am grateful for the Coral Gables Community Foundation, but every opportunity we get to bring them closer to what we do and closer to our employees and closer to our residents, I think it's a win-win for our city. I mean

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to have the public on one side, the public sector and the private sector on the other, that's not what Coral Gables is about. So, every opportunity we have to come together for a good cause, its \$4,500 a year, if its \$1,000 there, regardless of the dollar amount, that's what Coral Gables is about, coming together public sector-private sector for the benefit of the people that work here and for our residents.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I want to thank Mr. Bermello as well, Mary Snow and Mr. Prescott. It was a phenomenal event. All the folks who were there were very supportive of our police and firefighters, it was great to see. I don't question Mr. Bermello's commitment. I welcome it. I appreciate the fact that he has committed to funding part of these awards, and I think this is, like Commissioner Menendez was saying, working together as a community. This isn't, oh, the city should do this and the other should do that. No, we are a community. We should work together and if they are partners who are willing to contribute to these awards to recognize our officers, I don't think we should be diminishing our officers because they didn't die in the line of duty. I think we should be supporting our officers who are putting it all on the line every single day. So, I'll be voting in favor.

Mayor Lago: If I may, and I wasn't going to say anything. I've kept my mouth shut the entire meeting. We are not diminishing any officer and please that's very disingenuous. The point was that we sat down a year ago to have this conversation at the Biltmore with Tom, myself, Willy and Mary. It was sold as we are going to have an event to benefit these particular individuals. I said, I'm all in, count me in as a sponsor. I'll get other people to sponsor, which I did, other family members, but now to change the game. Again, I think if you are going to allocate the money, I don't have a problem allocating it. For the police, I put my money where my mouth is, personally, and I continue to do that. So, to say that we're diminishing police officers is just, its not correct, especially when I'm taking money from my own family to make sure that I put it for the police officers. That was the intent of my statement. I support the award being raised to \$5,000. I have no issues, but again, I'm just stating on the record what I was told the money was going to be used for and then it was changed. Mr. Chief.

Chief Hudak: Just want to put it into context for you. The Officer of the Month award that we award every month and the Officer of the Year award and what comes with it has been co-sponsored or was co-sponsored by the Kiwanis Club for years. They picked up the tab. They haven't been doing that for years. The reason why the police department does not have this money in its budget is because we are giving out the monthly awards to everybody. So, I don't have the money in my budget right now, which is another allocation. So, it is just another group that is chosen, we didn't ask, the police department didn't ask, that is sponsoring this award. Every month the police department's budget does sponsor the Officer of the Month and those heroic deeds that we represent. So, I imagine in time, this is why we have this shortfall that I couldn't say, I can pay

the \$4,000 for the Officer of the Month because we have had to pick up that cost for the last maybe five years, which comes out to be about that, buying the plaque. In honor of the Kiwanis, we still have them on the Officer of the Month plaques for up until, I think a couple of months ago. So, Vice Mayor to your point, we'll find a way to fund this. We'll come back and we'll ask whether it be donations from the LEAF Foundation or it be donations from the Coral Gables Police Foundation, which is a new entity, we'll be back in front of this body to accept the donation specifically for these costs like we would do equipment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I don't want it to go unfunded, which is why I felt it should be a city obligation, not necessarily the police department's obligation, it could be the City Manager's budget. It needs to be consistently funded and not have a situation again where, like the Kiwanis aren't doing it anymore. Willy Bermello, we don't live forever. That's why the better option is to have it as a city item for both Police and Fire.

Chief Hudak: Got it.

Mayor Lago: So, we have a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: Mayor, I have a member of the public requesting to speak on this item. Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Commissioner Castro: Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioner Menendez, Commissioner Fernandez, I really appreciate your support. This is going to do great things for the department. It raises morale and I'm pretty sure every officer and firefighter out there is going to be ecstatic to do their best job possible to get this award.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)