

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-6
May 25, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge L. Fors, Jr.

Commissioner Kirk R. Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-6 [Start: 12:26 p.m.]

Discussion regarding evening meetings for matters impacting residents to provide greater transparency and participation in meetings. (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson and Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Item G-6, Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Anderson: It's a discussion regarding having evening meetings on matters of, I would call great public importance, perhaps the queuing will help us determine which ones are of more concern to the public. I have no problem coming here in the evening and entertaining meetings to make it more publicly accessible. Does anybody else have any comments on this?

Mayor Lago: Yes, if I may. I've been a proponent of this for years. I actually asked Chelsea to pull the minutes. I actually brought this item before the Commission sponsored this item on November 15, 2016, on January 9, 2018, and on July 9, 2019. I failed to implement evening meetings. I don't have an issue with it myself, but I think we could use those meetings and I know this is your item,

City Commission Meeting
May 25, 2021

and I don't want to hijack your item, but I think what would be appropriate is to load up one meeting with the accolades and proclamations and any items that are not time sensitive, and then maybe have development projects or more, I don't want to say contentious items, but items that may garner more support or input from the community or from the business community, be held after 5 p.m. So, I'm a supporter. I just wouldn't like to see a meeting; I personally wouldn't like to see a meeting start at 5 and end like the City of Miami does at 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. I think that would be inappropriate for our staff and for some residents, but if we are going to have a meeting, we can either have our two existing meetings the way they are and call a special meeting for items that we think will have more support for public input after 5 p.m. Third meeting or take one of those meetings and make it after 5 p.m. Just putting ideas out there to see.

Commissioner Anderson: Planning and Zoning does something similar. You start at 6 o'clock, you can only run till 9 o'clock, without a motion to extend it beyond. I certainly don't want to be going beyond that, because I think the quality of our product will reduce. We can carry it on till another day, time certain, if the public discussion is not over with. So, we give it the time it deserves.

Vice Mayor Mena: I would just add a couple of things; one is, I don't necessarily think that you failed at that, because we've had many meetings actually start at 5 o'clock.

Mayor Lago: You're right. I take that back.

Vice Mayor Mena: ...On issues of importance. We certainly had many when it came to the zoning code update, where we were here, and so, I think I'm perfectly open to it, and we have been open to it on certain occasions when it's appropriate.

Mayor Lago: I think where I failed and I'll just correct my statement was, on having one meeting, a meeting that is constantly on the schedule in the afternoons reoccurring.

Vice Mayor Mena: But I also want to be careful about sort of accepting at face value the assumption that is more convenient for people at that time. I don't necessarily agree with that. I think for a lot of people with children or with family members actually after 5 o'clock is a more challenging time period to participate in something like this in some respects. You know, they are taking their kids to sports or getting dinner ready, or doing homework, or whatever it is. I'm all for accommodating it. My experience over the last four years has been, when there is an item that is of great public interest, people have typically found a way to show up. God knows, those items we've had, you know, sometimes triple digits speakers lined up for items at whatever time of day. So, I appreciate the sentiment. I'm open to doing it, if you guys want to do it on a regular basis like that, that's fine. I don't necessarily think its going to garner a lot more participation. I also think we have to factor in, I don't know what the costs are associated with it from a staff

*City Commission Meeting
May 25, 2021*

perspective, maybe the City Manager can address that. Staff is typically here, obviously we see for our Commission meetings, I don't know if you do them after hours if that now creates like overtime issues, it depends on probably the staff member.

City Manager Iglesias: Most of our staff is not on overtime, because it's generally the directors.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, we can take that off the table. If you guys want to do it on a regular basis, I'm open to it. Again, I think you have to try to structure it in a way that we are not doing things at that time that we don't need to be doing, that are not controversial, that are not really issues of major importance whether it's, obviously the proclamations we do, and the consent agenda items and all that kind of stuff. Maybe there is a way that you structure it where its only ordinances, maybe if something is coming back on a second reading, you do it at that time. I'm sure there are a hundred ways we could go about it. But again, I'm open to doing it on an ad hoc basis, as you guys want. If you want to do it on a more of a system, a structured system, let's just talk about what that would look like.

Commissioner Anderson: I think the highest concern for a lot of folks is certain development projects that are coming through, you are talking about some of the larger items. They want to be able to be here to speak and we can adjust to those as necessary. Someone who is only available during the day, we can have that discussion, but we'll never know if we don't try. I've heard overwhelming support for being able to do some of the stuff in the evenings, just as the Planning and Zoning Board does as well, and it makes it a lot more flexible because it doesn't take away time from their businesses, from their work, you can come in after hours. I fully intend to, I don't know how you all feel about it, but continue to have that access to Zoom, so if you are trying to take care of your kids or you are driving and you're watching a game, you can take out five minutes and see when you are going to be queued to be able to put your comments in on the record or ask the questions that you want to ask of the Commission. So, I think that Zoom has changed how we are going to do things here on out, and we'll make this Commission more accessible to our residents than it ever has been before.

Vice Mayor Mena: I agree with that on Zoom, I think. Again, regardless of the time of day, I think Zoom has made it much more accessible despite certain criticisms out there about doing it via Zoom, but our experience has been a lot more people have participated.

Mayor Lago: Well, listen, if you'd like to bring it back as an item, I'd be more than willing to co-sponsor with you.

Commissioner Anderson: Okay.

*City Commission Meeting
May 25, 2021*

Commissioner Menendez: And I would like, if you don't mind, just to add a note or two. I think we could – we are talking about efficiencies in our budget, efficiencies in our Commission meetings, I think is a theme, we may want to look at how we structure Commission meetings to provide ample opportunity for those items that will require a lot of public input. We can move things around; I think something we should look at. I think it was mentioned earlier, I think from the administration side, we should take great advantage of workshops that if we have the right number of workshops that are effective and efficient, by the time they come to the Commission meeting, perhaps a lot of those arguments, a lot of those concerns would have already been addressed, that's another thing. I do think we do need to, as Vice Mayor Mena said, maintain a balance, because there are folks that after 5 o'clock they are tied up just as much as the people are tied up during the day. So, I'm sort of inclined to go the ad hoc, especially with projects that have an impact of a large scale, that impact several neighborhoods, and things that the Commission has done in the past. So, I think we definitely should explore this, but use other resources to help address the needs of the people to be able to be heard at a certain hour. I'm here for support in whatever the Commission at the end decides to do.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Thank you. We'll bring something back, I guess, for consideration.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes. We'll bring it back.