

City of Coral Gables
Special City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item B-2
May 6, 2025
City Hall Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro (Absent)

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Alberto Parjus

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Jackson Rip Holmes

Claudia Miro

Agenda Item B-2 [9:37 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending City Code Chapter 2, "Administration," Article III "Boards, Commissions, Committees," Section 2-79 "Order of Business," to clarify and amend public comment and Commission sponsorship procedures; providing for severability clause, repealer provision, and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item B-2.

City Attorney Suarez: B-2 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending City Code Chapter 2, "Administration," Article III "Boards, Commissions, Committees," Section 2-79 "Order of Business," to clarify and amend public comment and Commission sponsorship procedures; providing for severability clause, repealer provision, and providing for an effective date.

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*Agenda Item B-2 – Ordinance amending City Code Chapter 2-Administration
Article III-Boards Commissions Committees*

[Date]

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

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Let's proceed.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: I'm sorry, you first, I apologize, excuse me.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: That's alright. Thank you, Mayor, Vice Mayor and Commissioners. Again, Stephanie Throckmorton, Deputy City Attorney. Just to quickly summarize what this ordinance does. It amends Section 2-79 of the City Code, to clarify a few procedures related to sponsorship of items and to expedite the work of the city and the Commission by clarifying that public comment shall only be received during the open public comment portion of the agenda, which we had earlier today, during scheduled public hearings, like this one, and whenever else required by law. The City Code currently does not outline any procedures for sponsorship of agenda items. This revision would note that the Commissioner who initially requested the placement of an item on the agenda will be identified as the sponsoring Commissioner, and then during the public meeting when that item is considered, the sponsoring Commissioner may add co-sponsors.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Once again, Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. This is almost déjà vu, because when I read this, I remember vividly how this came about, and at the point that this came about there was only one person sitting in the Commission who pushed for the ability to residents to speak whenever they wanted to speak, that was what was requested, that's what went through, and its interesting because it was done for transparency, because we wanted to hear what the people had to say, and now, what some people are calling the Maria Cruz Resolution or Ordinance or whatever you call it, is to keep the people from saying what they think and only apply what the law requires. So, if the law doesn't require it, the residents would not be able to speak. Good job Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Holmes.

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Mr. Holmes: Thank you. You know, I'm going to use the term mayor generically. It's really unfortunate that our Mayor spearheaded robust public comment and advanced the cause of democracy and yet, I think the Mayor is sponsoring this limitation of public comment, which is, I really actually don't understand. There is a 3-2 majority – by the way, I think the 3-2 majority, was bought, okay. It was bought with some of you are lawyers – Citizens United was what enabled developers essentially to buy City Hall. It's been proven by Pro Publica and by Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, see his YouTube channel, that the US Supreme Court was bribed, criminally bribed by the Federalist Society; and they bribed their way into the Citizens United decision. The very guy who bribed those Supreme Court Justices won the Citizens United decision. So, this idea that we just had a fair election that was a voice of the people is wrong. It was a product of criminal bribery of the US Supreme Court in the Citizens United decision. So, the election was bought by developers and that's why we had the election outcome that we had. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Claudia Miro.

City Clerk Urquia: Good morning.

Ms. Miro: I'm sure you're tired of seeing my face right now, but I have a lot to say this morning it seems, and so, as someone who ran for office here just recently and knocked on doors again, my vote was not bought nor was any of those votes of the folks that voted for me or voted for any of you. Again, I'm happy that this is happening because I'm sick and tired, as a resident for the last couple of years, our meetings have become the butt of all jokes, because of a lack of civility and the lack of order, lack of Robert's Rules of Order and everybody doing whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted. So, I think this is a step in the direction of having order while still allowing people to speak just at a certain time. Just get everything you have to say out, so that I don't have to keep coming up here three and four times to speak on everything, and I'm glad that today it's that way so that I'm able to say the things that I want to say. So, I thank you for moving this item so that we can have peace and order and more civility, just brought back now, we need that. We need to have that restored as a city. We need it for our city's reputation so that we can continue to have the respect that we've always had as the City Beautiful. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: I'll entertain a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Mayor Lago: I'll take a second.

Commissioner Lara: Second.

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Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, thank you again for bringing this item. I think that we do need to restore order in our Commission meetings. That was a resounding comment from so many residents that I knock doors of, that why can't we control the meetings, and after spending some time with them about this override procedure and why don't we stick to Robert's Rules of Order, we can get a lot more good business done if we stick to the issues and control the comment period. I've referenced this as much as many times as running like a federal court, because I'm used to the federal court structure. You are limited in the amount of time that you can speak, you focus on the salient points, and you deliver your message. So, thank you, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this. This is yet another one of those tenants' underline principle for why I ran two years ago almost exactly. I witnessed what was a decidedly material change in the course in which this body governed and decidedly in the wrong direction. I'm not one taken to be a person who speaks in strident tones or tries to grandstand, but I believe that we have been experiencing in the last two years exigent circumstances in terms of how this dais conducted itself and I believe it lost its way. I made this as a point when I decided to run to the residents. I took it to the people directly and more resoundingly than any other single issue, this is the one that came back with an emphasis from the residents. They want their Coral Gables back, to put it as simply as that, and it starts with the way it governs itself. This sacred disrespected body needs to find its way back, and so, I took it upon myself to support each and everyone of us here on the dais to do so. I believe, Mr. Mayor, that this particular item agenda is a major step in the right direction, to try and ensure that we not only give the residents an opportunity to be heard, because certainly that is not what is going on here, to curtail or limit the ability for the public to express its commentary, but rather to do so in an orderly, a respectful, efficient manner so that we can go about the business of the residents at the dais. So, as the Vice Mayor noted, she's been forged in the kiln of litigation, so have I as a lawyer for over 25 years litigating, and we've been trained, right, that in order to get our message across, we need to be supported with facts, we need to make the issues clear, and we need to state it within the time that the rules allow, and it has worked brilliantly for time immemorial. So, I don't think it's even close to being a controversial item today. I will end by saying, this is yet another one of those promises on the campaign that I made, and this will be another one that I deliver.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fernandez.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you. So, I think there are two parts to this. The Clerk had actually spoken to me about the sponsorship of items several times. His concern about co-sponsoring items and how that could be seen as a violation of the Sunshine Law because then we're sponsoring

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items that we technically haven't gotten information on. So, I absolutely have no issues with that portion of this legislation. I do believe that silencing residents or not allowing public comment on items of importance is not a direction that I can support. Last Commission, about two years ago now, we worked on legislation to allow that public comment with the Vice Mayor to ensure that residents had the opportunity to speak and that if members of the Commission will bring up an item that they believed public comment should be allowed for, it would be allowed by the sponsor of that item. I also believe you are absolutely correct, Commissioner Lara and Vice Mayor, I think time constraints are important to keep. We have had public comments that had gone on for 17 minutes, 10 minutes, and that definitely should not be taking place, but I think we should also consider going forward, time constraints also on the time that we as members of the Commission speak on these issues. A lot of times, you go back and watch Commission meetings, we are just going over and rehashing the same points over and over and over again. Municipalities like the Town of Miami Lakes have a three-minute limit on the sponsor of an item, two minutes for each member of the Council, and then one minute of rebuttal for the sponsor, that way the meetings flow. One of the biggest complaints that we've heard from residents, and we've heard it here at Commission meetings, we've heard it out on the campaign trail is, I have an item on the agenda and I'm watching the meeting for 5, 6, 8 hours waiting for my agenda item to come up. So that's something that we should also consider. So again, I'm 100 percent supportive of the sponsorship of items on the agenda, but I cannot support anything that would hinder the ability of residents to voice their opinions during Commission meetings.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Madam City Attorney, as our attorney, are we chilling public comment, are we doing anything different than the City of Miami, Miami-Dade County, Doral, Miami Beach and other municipalities in Miami-Dade County, which employ the same exact rules and procedures.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, the open public comment period remains, and so anyone who wishes to speak on any item on the agenda can do so during the public comment period, at the beginning of each meeting. So that opportunity to speak and be heard is always there.

Mayor Lago: We need to be very thoughtful and moving forward we will be, in one form or another, to stop the spread of misinformation. What I've heard from people walking through the door is, they come to meetings, and they have not been able to speak, as a result of the pontification that continues by certain members of the Commission and the community. We will not chill speech. We will be thorough and to the point. All other cities in Miami-Dade County employ the same rules. It should be done to ensure collegiality and respect for the body. When we talk about issues in regard to, for example, the elections were bought, there is no place for that in this body, whether its in April or November, that has been used as an excuse. The residents have spoken.

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They came out in droves, and this is one of the items that they told me was critically important for them. Mr. Clerk, I call a question.

Commissioner Fernandez: For the reasons stated, no.

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 3-1)

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.