

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-11
July 1, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez (Absent)

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-11[4:43 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing that the rent report for City -owned properties be made available on the City's website and requiring a four-fifths (4/5) vote of the City Commission to approve grants to tenants for improvements of City -owned properties that are the obligation of the tenant under the applicable lease agreement. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: F-11. A Resolution of the City Commission directing that the rent report for City -owned properties be made available on the City's website and requiring a four-fifths (4/5) vote of the City Commission to approve grants to tenants for improvements of City -owned properties that are the obligation of the tenant under the applicable lease agreement. Madam City Attorney, will you please provide clarity in regard to this legislation that I am sponsoring.

City Attorney Suarez: So, this is a two-part resolution. The first part is directing that the rent report for the city-owned properties that are leased be made available on the city's website. It's my understanding that the Manager has already directed that and its already been done, once he was made aware of this resolution on the agenda; and then the second part would require a four-fifths

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Be made available on the city's website*

vote if the City Commission wants to approve a grant or reimbursement to one of our tenants to make improvements to the leased property, that under the lease agreement are the obligation of the tenant not the city.

Mayor Lago: So, two reasons why I've done this, and I'll use the Miracle Theater as an example. I think that everyone should be able to see how much rent is paid on the Miracle Theater, on the Cinema, on any city-owned property; the Starbucks, you should be able to see what is the rent that is being paid front and center. That's transparency. You all know what it is, what the escalations are, how much the rent is going. I think that is appropriate. It's taxpayer money and I think that you should be able to know. Number two, I think the Commission should not arbitrarily break the lease. I don't do it at any properties that I own and just give away money like we did to the theater in regard to \$40-plus thousand dollars. I think that, to me, again is in poor taste, poor judgement, and sets a bad precedent and shows a lack of true understanding of how to run a business. I hate to say this, but the city is a business, it's not welfare. If you run it like welfare, we will go broke. That's what happens when you hand out \$20 million dollar COLAs and you raise your salary, and you give out \$40,000 here. Every business that rents from us believes that they can come and ask for money. Oh, you gave it to the theater, I deserve the same thing. It's a bad precedent. All these things happen during election season in an effort to sway support. It doesn't work. It only sets a bad precedent. Okay. So that is why I'm requiring a four-fifth vote, and we are protecting these assets and protecting the city budget.

Commissioner Lara: I'll move.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Second.

Mayor Lago: Any comment from the Commission.

Commissioner Lara: I have a comment.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Commissioner Lara: If I may.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Commissioner Lara: So, very interesting that you bring this up and I think it's very much needed piece of legislation. I remember and those who were here in 2024, know that I came during Public Comment, and I was absolutely outraged at what I witnessed which was a request by the former Commissioner to award \$41,000, calling it a reimbursement to the tenant of the Miracle Theater, The Actor's Playhouse for the construction of a ramp. It was very little, if any basis for granting, what would be a gift when there was a lease which had an obligation for the tenant to pay, if there was any ADA required improvement, or repair, or upgrade needed to the rented space. In fact,

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there was no evidence given, nothing proffered to show that there was a problem with ADA compliance, and if there was, the solution was one that was expensive, not backed up, and it wasn't multiple bids truly given in a way that could be backed up. It wasn't in compliance with the city's procurement process, because it wasn't in fact a city procurement scenario. So, it was a unique one where a simple majority of the Commission, in my view, parted with \$41,000 in what appeared to be at the time a play for political pandering. I'm not besmirching the tenant, if the Commission gave that money away under what was the scenario back then and there, they were the recipient and the beneficiary of it. I would, if I could just be given one more moment, to say that at the time I went through a very difficult period of being accused of being against the disabled, against the disabled rights, which I took personal offense to, but of course it was a political season. I had a spirited conversation with Commissioner Castro during that time and all I was asking for was an explanation for why that was being done, and I wanted nothing more than transparency and accountability, not ever attacking anybody. In the end, I just want everybody here to know that I personally am an advocate for the disabled rights. I sit, and for years have sat as the Chair of Development for Easter Seals South Florida and with respect to the Miracle Theater, the company that I serve as Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Counsel to is amongst the diamond sponsors for years of the Actor's Playhouse. So, this was further political theater to try and besmirch my name and I'm very pleased that we are considering right now a safeguard against this ever happening again by moving to a four-fifths composition to grant such a departure from lease requirements.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm pleased as well. I went and looked at the facility, Commissioner, I know you did as well. We are only talking about a ramp of a few steps. This was not a significant ramp. It screamed at me because the cost was so exorbitant. There was no evidence of competitive bidding, and I know plywood was expensive, but it wasn't that expensive, and there were other alternatives. There definitely were other alternatives on how to handle this matter, as opposed to something that appeared to be political pandering. People that I know that were donors to the Miracle Theater, shared that they never received a call to action to make the donations, they would have been happy to do so for that ramp. So, wonderful piece of legislation. Thank you for bringing it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. You know this is the type of legislation that you know what I'd love to have is for the entire Commission to co-sponsor with me. Would anybody like to co-sponsor.

Commissioner Castro: I would co-sponsor it with you.

Mayor Lago: Great.

Commissioner Lara: I'll co-sponsor it with you.

Mayor Lago: Love it. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And I'll co-sponsor it.

Mayor Lago: There we go. So, after giving away \$40,000, we now have complete consensus from the Commission. How the wind turns, which is beautiful. Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. Sorry. The fact that I am co-sponsoring this is because I think it's good legislation, but I am not agreeing with my colleagues' remarks regarding the Actor's Playhouse. Just wanted to put that on the record.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: I'll be very brief. But the transcript is clear, the video is clear, if anybody wants to review it concerning...when I asked you if you had spoken to the tenant regarding your vote in support of this gift to the Actor's Playhouse. I believe your response was, I don't want to refer to facts that may not in fact be facts. And I think I did you a much recitation than the one you gave, but I don't mean to insult, I'm just saying that we gave, or I should say, I gave you an opportunity to provide the basis for why you voted, and you diverted and didn't respond. So, I haven't made any accusations that aren't in fact supported by the facts and again, I applaud you for joining in the co-sponsoring of this resolution.

Mayor Lago: If I may. It's not an insult, Commissioner, it's just the facts. It's the facts. Its \$40,000 that used to be in the coffers of the city that were just given away. That anybody who knows how to run a business will never in their right mind do that, when you have a portfolio of businesses that could come and ask you with their hand out and say, hey, I want to do the following, give me money. We have one of our employees here for the city who has run property for a long time, and I've actually have had conversations with the previous individual and if you'd like, I can bring her up here and ask her if this is commonplace where cities just break leases and give away money based on the Commission's need. It sends a deadly precedent and it shows a real lack of an understanding of real estate and how to run a business, because at the end of the day, the problem that we have here in the city is, every year we have a reset and there's another \$250 million dollars that comes in, in property taxes and we just kind of lose site of the fact that its not our money and just because there's a reset every year, we just can't spend it. So, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There's one more fact, just to make the record complete. Those funds came out of the ADA transition line item for the budget, that's where it came from, the Capital Improvement Budget.

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Mayor Lago: That's painful.

Vice Mayor Anderson: \$41,000 less to be able to apply to all the many things that we need to do in our city.

Mayor Lago: Alright. So can I have a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think we're already there.

Mayor Lago: Oh, we do. We have a motion and a second. Perfect.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Lara: For the reasons stated, yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 4-0)

(Commissioner Fernandez: Absent)