

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-5
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)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item H-5 [2:52 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 annual budget to add twenty full-time positions and recognize a transfer of \$1,300,000 from the Building Reserve Fund and to appropriate such funds to the Building Division in the General Fund for the cost of the added positions and the replacement of existing vehicles and equipment.

Mayor Lago: H-5.

City Attorney Suarez: H-5 is A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 annual budget to add twenty full-time positions and recognize a transfer of \$1,300,000 from the Building Reserve Fund and to appropriate such funds to the Building Division in the General Fund for the cost of the added positions and the replacement of existing vehicles and equipment.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Excuse me, Mayor, I was just getting a text from Ernesto Pino.

Mayor Lago: Don't worry. I get it.

City Manager Iglesias: About the windows. I'm sorry, Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suarez: Mr. Manager, its H-5, which is the resolution authorizing the 20 full-time positions.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, of course. These are positions that will come through the Enterprise Funds, instead of waiting for October 1st, we would like to get them on the budget now and start soliciting these positions. Some of them will probably be very difficult to hire, so we would like to start now, and this has no impact on the General Fund.

Mayor Lago: So, I would like to just put up a quick comment. This is the effort of revamping the entire permitting process organically from within to provide the gold standard in regard to permitting. I've asked the Manager and I hope my Commission will give some input that the George Duos study be completed by September 31st, some time in September, it be completed, because I want to – that's why we are moving forward quickly with hiring these individuals now, so that we can hopefully by January 1st already have a permitting process that, again, elevates the quality, the standards, that we are providing the best in Miami-Dade County and that we have a way of tracking wait times; a process where we understand why someone is taking three or four reviews; why is that person taking three or four reviews? – what is the reasoning behind it? – is there a design flaw? – did they follow the code? – is there a misunderstanding? – what is the reasoning behind it? Something as simple as painting, as roofing, something should be moving through the system expeditiously. So at the end of the day, this is part of that revamping process, which I think will make everyone on the Commission, in the city, very, very happy in regards to finally addressing this process from within organically, not depending on any outside consultants but doing things the right way through our trusted staff and providing this worldclass service to everyone, not just a pay service where if you can afford an extra 15 or 20 percent, you get a fast lane. No, everybody should get exceptional service, worldclass service.

City Manager Iglesias: May I.

Mayor Lago: Yes, Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: This was done in consultation with Mr. Duos. We've had various meetings on this org chart change, and it will be part of his presentation also. So, this was not done without a lot of input from Mr. Duos.

Mayor Lago: And I recommend that Commissioner Fernandez, Commissioner Castro, Commissioner Lara and the Vice Mayor, since we don't speak, they may have already. I've had the pleasure of sitting down with the ACM, the DCM, I've had Mr. Duos, have conversations, give your input, this is coming forward by September and we hope that with the leadership of staff and the Manager and the DCM and the ACM and all the individuals who are involved, we can really deliver on something worldclass, something that we can hold our head up high and say we are

doing something exceptional, that we are the envy of every other city in Miami-Dade County. Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The comments that I have to add to that is, not only is this critically important for the residents, but its critically important for the future of Coral Gables. Unfortunately, the route that some developers have chosen to take is to bypass our city and use other means, whether it be the county, going through an RTZ process, or Live Local Act, and the reality is we need to really tighten things down and be able to get people to a site plan much, much quicker and how the Deputy City Manager unfortunately was the victim of the walking and knocking that I was doing because every single time I identified an issue that someone hadn't felt comfortable, I guess, or hadn't reached out to the city on, I was passing it on. So that was more data in the hopper for making decisions on where we had existing problems and where we need to resolve it. So, I'm fully supportive of using the Enterprise Funds, that's not taxpayer dollars, but this is applying that money to where it needs to improve services. Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

City Manager Iglesias: I'm sorry Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. So, I think this is a good idea. The only thing with this is that it gives me a little bit of heartburn because hiring 20 – I'm contradicting myself a little bit, but hiring 20 is a reoccurring expense. These 20 employees – I think it's going to make a great difference with the type of service that we are giving, but I'm just worried about moving forward with 20 more employees. How many employees does that department have?

City Manager Iglesias: Probably 20 employees will put us at 120, something like that.

Commissioner Castro: 120?

City Manager Iglesias: 110. However, we've looked at how much we have in the Enterprise Fund, and we've looked at what those permit fees are. This was worked out with the input of George Duos and so we don't feel that that's going to be an issue, as far as maintaining that high level of service.

Commissioner Castro: So, we do have a recession, right, and let's say 5-10 years in, you expect for us to have enough revenue to go ahead and cover all these employees?

City Manager Iglesias: The way that we establish our permitting fees are not based on large projects or based on small projects. Our projects are viewed as additional projects that may or may not come in. So, we've already looked at that when we originally did the existing permit fees. We have a lot of smaller projects, and our permit fees are based on that. Larger projects provide additional income into the Enterprise Fund. In addition to that, if you look at, let's say we have a major recession, and our permit fees go down to 50 percent. One year of maintenance of the overall cost will provide two years that we can sustain Development Services. So, two years of that will provide four and if you look at most recessions, by two to three years we are out of it in getting back into another boom. If you look at the 2008-2009 recession, by 2011 we were out of it, and I can tell you that in Miami we were booming. So, the idea is that in two years we are actually dealing with four years because of the fact that even though permits again, even though permits are reduced by 50 percent, we have two years of operating capital. If our recession is not over in five years, we will have really big problems.

Commissioner Castro: So given the statement you just told me and trusting that you said you formulated this and it's well formulated, just in case things don't go as well, I will be a yes vote on this but just based on the statement you said.

Mayor Lago: So, let's go back for one second. So, one year is \$1.3 million dollars, correct, \$1.3, right. There is \$30 million dollars in cash in the bank account. I know staff trembles a little bit when I say that. Stop looking for excuses to shoot this down and just say, we found a better option than doing it in the private sector. We are not going to go single source with a person who wants to control our Building Department. We are going to do it in-house with competent staff and we are going to get this done. We want worldclass service, we are going to get worldclass service. We are finishing a study; it will be done in September. It's okay to say, hey, we have competent people who are at the helm, who actually study this, who actually led a building department in the City of Miami, who had led a building department in the City of Coral Gables, who know what they are doing and look at this incredible staff that we have. Look at this. They are amazing. And we are listening to our consultant, George Duos, who was brought in, not under you, correct, that was brought in before.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, before.

Mayor Lago: I want to be clear. He's a person who lives in this community, has an exceptional reputation. He's done this in other places, in other cities, and at the end of the day, he understands through the meetings that I've had. I recommend that you meet with him, and you have a conversation. He knows like the ACM, which I sat down, and we had a conversation. I think it was what, a week and a half ago, right in front of the City Manager's office with George Duos and said, "I want excellence. If we are going to spend this money and we are going to hire these

individuals and we are going to do the study, I want excellence. I don't want excuses. I want by January 1st to be humming on all cylinders. I'm more than willing to give you the time, let's get this done. Let's hire people. Let's not wait for the study to be done. The study was supposed to be done in December, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes.

Mayor Lago: I said, we're getting it done by September 31st. I want to take October, November, December to roll out, let's start hiring people. Let's get this done.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me, I'm not done. You don't need to be a permit expediter to figure this out. I'm in this industry. I do this every day. Okay. This is about efficiencies. This is about getting things done and accountability. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Commissioner Castro: Stop politicizing everything. Okay. If you didn't hear me, I said I was going to be a yes vote.

Mayor Lago: Then vote yes.

Commissioner Castro: I just said I was going to be a yes vote. You have selective hearing sometimes. It's a yes vote. I am in all my right to ask questions when it comes to fiscal responsibility, that's one of my duties. As I said, I was going to be a yes vote.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, you lost that right when you raised your salary without having the input of a Commission or the residents.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. Stop interrupting me.

Mayor Lago: I didn't. That's it. The conversation is over. Nothing more. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have members of the public requesting to speak on this item.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Oh my God. So now, not only can you shut the residents down, now you can tell the Commissioner, she lost her right to ask questions. Wow.

What power. Alright. I'm looking at H-5 and I'm really very concerned because we had a budget meeting about two weeks ago, and we were concerned about spending money, because the year 2027 was going to be tough. We needed to hold onto the money. That's what I heard that day, maybe things have changed, and we were also concerned about adding positions, but today, oh my God, this is the Enterprise money. We have \$30 million dollars in the Enterprise account, I believe that's what it's called and now we are going to move money so we can have 20 positions. You know what, maybe, it may be a good idea because I think this Enterprise money, this is what Surami Cabrera was talking about money from permits and so forth and so on, and we've been holding it, \$30 million dollars and we have people, we have Code Enforcement Officers that knock on doors and they don't have uniforms, because we haven't been able to buy them uniforms. You know it's interesting. We have money when we want to use it. When we don't want it, we don't have it. We say one thing – two weeks ago the first budget meeting. I'm telling you; I get a text from somebody who said, Maria, get some rubber boots because you're going to be wading in a lot of stuff. Okay. So, today we are going to take money from the Building Reserve Fund to fund 20 full-time positions, even though a few days ago we didn't want positions, but now we do even though we were worried about what would happen in 2027. I guess we are not worried about 2027 anymore. We have plenty money.

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

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Manager, quick question.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Are you aware that Code Enforcement Officers do not have uniforms.

City Manager Iglesias: No.

Mayor Lago: Can we use Enterprise money to buy uniforms.

City Manager Iglesias: No Mayor. Code Enforcement, we will use our General Fund to buy uniforms.

Mayor Lago: So, this is why I tell you constantly. This is the constant misinformation, the efforts to mislead, misguide, statements that are made. It's the same repetitive nature over and over and over again. It's an effort to mislead the community, the business community, but again, it didn't work at the election and it's not working now. Any further statements or any further public comments.

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Do we have a motion?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir, we do.

Mayor Lago: Let's move forward. Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 4-0)

(Commissioner Fernandez: Absent)

Mayor Lago: Wow – unanimous. Beautiful. I love it. Excited about the future for the Building Department. We are going to get it done together with our wonderful employees. Great work.