

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items C-1, C-2 and C-3
May 14, 2019
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Items C-1, C-2 and C-3 [9:30:54 a.m.]
Mayor's Comments

C-1: A Resolution accepting the recommendation of the International Affairs Coordinating Council to designate the City of Andorra La Vella, Andorra, a Friendship City of the City of Coral Gables.

C-2: A discussion regarding election precincts and polling places.

C-3: A discussion related to the City Manager to negotiate the disposition of certain public parking lots in the area of LeJeune and Greco for possible inclusion in a development agreement Zom, Inc. or its affiliates, that provide economic development and public benefits in favor of the City of Coral Gables.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mayor's Comments. The first is a Resolution accepting the recommendation of the International Affairs Coordinating Council to designate the City of Andorra La Vella, Andorra, a Friendship City of the City of Coral Gables. Commissioner Keon you want to say a few words. You are the one that initiated this initiative.

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Commissioner Keon: Yes. I'm not sure if we notified the people that had come to us and asked us to help them with this. It was an interesting learning process, with our Sister Cities generally have a major university associated with them. I became very impressed with the criteria naming our Sister Cities Andorra is a small country in the northern part of Spain that I think has many of the same attributes as far as the close, beautiful, well cared for city and is developing their trading partnerships around the world. So, we were able to have them as a Friendship City because they don't quite rise to the level of the Sister City, because they don't have the universities and some of the other things. So, thank you for the work on doing that. Thank you very much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The next item is a discussion regarding election precincts and polling places.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, it's a resolution.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: A resolution – make a motion.

Commissioner Keon: I'll move it please.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Second? Will you call the roll please?

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes

Commissioner Mena: Yes

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The second item is a discussion regarding the election precincts and polling places. And we've just been through an election a month ago, and I noticed that many, many times in the precincts, the polling places are very, very inconvenient. Coral Gables High School, for example, you had to park between LeJeune, south on LeJeune and then walk something like a block to the polling place and handicap people or people with kids, it was very inconvenient for them. And I talked to our City Clerk about discussing with the election's bureau making it more convenient. We also had precincts, polling places where very few people, if any, voted in North Gables, and try to consolidate in order to make it more friendly for our residents to go vote and not impede this or our handicapped from voting. Billy you want to say a few words.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you Mr. Mayor. It relates to Coral Gables High School. We are more than welcome, I mean, we are more than happy to visit the site and promote a different location. However, it can only be done for Coral Gables elections. Meaning when you have a Presidential
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election or a countywide election, it will go back to Coral Gables High School. The reason we didn't want to do it so close to our election was not to create confusion amongst the voters. My recommendation to the Commission would be not to close down any polling precincts, because once again, it can only be done for Coral Gables election. My recommendation would be to open up for early voting ten days before the General Election and if there is a Run-Off Election to do, perhaps the weekend before the Run-Off Election. Open up for early voting. Do it at the Coral Gables Library where voters are accustomed to going and hopefully, we'll see a larger turnout. Once again, I don't recommend closing of election polling locations even if you have a low turnout of those locations.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. And I'm also working on a plan to attract more voters to our elections. Our elections are enough date that they don't coincide with the Presidential Elections. I'm very happy for that because in a Presidential Election we would be number 572 on the ballot and nobody would pay attention to Coral Gables issues; and a lot of that destiny, or a lot of our decisions would be in the hands of a lot of people who don't live in Coral Gables and on top of that the University of Miami students do vote in Presidential Elections couldn't care less about our issues. Having it in April we limit the vote to those people who are care about Coral Gables and who care...and also, they pay attention to our issues and I'm very much for Charter Review Committee. I was very much for having it in April as opposed to November. I am working on an initiative to have simultaneous election for kids having in the polling place, having a separate voting station for kids with issues that concern kids and getting them involved in voting, getting them...in the voting process – more trees, more parks, fewer trees, different things, whatever it is that would get kids involved and we are working on that. They would be getting used to voting and possibly it will increase voter participation working under them...

Commissioner Mena: Mayor if I may. I received a few complaints about, I think it was a similar issue, particularly like Gables High. I also happen to vote at a school. I vote at Ponce Middle. And the good news about this is, we worked, I think, really hard last year to try to make sure that security at our schools is A-plus; and so, I think part of the sort of inconvenience to voters here was because, in schools now you really only have one point of ingress and egress, which I think is a good thing overall, and while it may cause some inconvenience for a voter here or there. I think all-in-all when you weigh the two, I think I'd rather err on the side of security and safety at our schools. So, I'm all for, I think Billy working with the County to see what can be done at these locations to make it as clear where you need to go, where you need to park, and how you can go vote, but I otherwise agree with our Clerk that I wouldn't be in favor of changing the precinct where in one election you vote in one place and in another you vote in another, because I think that would just cause more confusion; and then I also think that our Clerk's idea about looking into and possibly implementing early voting would be a great thing. I think it would be a no-brainer.

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Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Would be a great thing.

Commissioner Mena: And I hope that we can support it moving forward.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Lago: I also agree with the Clerk's comments, along with Commissioner Mena's. The last thing I'd like to see is consolidation of any of the precincts which then could be misconstrued to voter suppression of some sort. I mean again, sometimes there is an issue where we are spending all this time and effort. Its not about the money. I think we have one precinct which I think had one-person vote, it's difficult. You want to have as many people come out and vote as possible. I'd like to see potentially early voting, if there is a run-off. The run-off was my legislation, I thought it would be a good idea for the City to obviously be as transparent.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That was part of our Charter Review Committee and we approved it.

Vice Mayor Lago: I recommended it. So, at the end of the day, its something that I think is a benefit for the City. I think its good. As many opportunities as people have to vote. So, I agree with the comments completely. I think its an opportunity to really move in a direction where we offer as many opportunities for people to come out and vote. I don't want to take a step back. Even if there are complaints, like Commissioner Mena mentioned, we can really just do as much as possible to lay the groundwork, so that before the vote happens people are aware, as much aware as possible what their responsibilities are.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: My concern is that it's not necessarily eliminating polling places. My concern was the accessibility of the polling place to handicap people.

Vice Mayor Lago: I agree a hundred percent.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's my concern.

Vice Mayor Lago: I agree. I think you are a hundred percent right.

Commissioner Keon: I think in some of those polling places where there was such a low turnout, we need to look at number of absentee ballots, maybe that came in from those sites, because I think this is the first time in my memory that the absentee ballots really outnumbered the number of people that voted at the polls. So, people are changing the way they vote, so we need to ensure that those polling places are there, because there are still people that are not comfortable with absentee

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votes and are concerned with vote will be counted and all those things. But I think we are going to see it decreasing the number of people at the polls and increase in the number of absentee votes as we go along. So, it's not that they are not voting at all, maybe they are voting in a different way.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Keon as part of your agenda packet, there was a chart that details who voted out on election day and also absentee ballots.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. Right. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Fors: Mr. Mayor, if I can ask the Clerk a quick question. Regarding the concept of early voting ten days before the General Election. Would it be one day, two days before General Election or more.

City Clerk Urquia: It would be ten continuous days.

Commissioner Fors: Ten consecutive days. OK.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The next item – and this should not have been here under Mayor's Comments, but it is. A discussion related to the instructions to the City Manager to negotiate the disposition of certain public parking lots in the area of LeJeune and Greco for possible inclusion in a development agreement Zom, or its affiliates, that provide economic development benefits. Mr. City Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I'm looking at this piece of property with two developers, one to the east and one to the south; and we have not received any design proposals or any kind of offer yet, but we are looking to see which offer and which design is best for the City. We are looking at this area potentially becoming a design district and we will look at the best monetary offer and also in line with what we see for the industrial section between Bird Road and U.S.-1.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That is very much in the industrial area, the western end of the industrial area and I think its excellent. But you have not received a specific proposal from anybody.

City Manager Iglesias: Not yet Mayor and there are a number of issues. We have...potentially vacate depending on how things are done, creating a park. So, there are a number of ideas that we

internally have to discuss with both developers to see which idea is best monetarily and from a project perspective.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's a wonderful idea and I'm glad that you are doing that. Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: So, would it be appropriate, Mayor, to have a resolution to direct the Manager to negotiate with those property owners.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes. Do you want to make that motion?

Commissioner Keon: Yes. If we can have a resolution for the Manager to negotiate with the adjacent property owners for the development of that site, and also, for the internal staff review as to if there is a particular use for the City for that site as we go forward.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: The property owners and the developers.

Commissioner Keon: Yes, and future developers of that site.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Is there a second?

Commissioner Mena: I'll make a second for discussion. I would just add, you know, I think this is a situation where our City Manager really needs to use his discretion at some level. And I would just say that I would focus more on the development aspect of it than just necessarily the monetary. I think what we would all want to see, I don't want to speak for anybody else, but the best project possible there that's in line with what we want to see; and so, I don't necessarily, I don't think its appropriate to tell them who or who not to negotiate with as he can use his discretion, negotiate with whoever he thinks is the best project for the City in this location, if there is such a project.

Commissioner Keon: If they decide that if in their judgement City staff to come back with their recommendation for those properties.

Commissioner Mena: And if in that discussion he thinks there isn't a project that makes sense, then so be it. He could come back to us and report that to us, but I think he should use his discretion here. That's my opinion.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll please?

Commissioner Keon: Yes
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Vice Mayor Lago: Yes
Commissioner Mena: Yes
Commissioner Fors: Yes
Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes
(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

[End: 9:44:00 a.m.]