

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-2**  
**May 20, 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**  
**Commissioner Richard D. Lara**

**City Staff**

**Acting City Manager, Joe L. Gomez**  
**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Assistant Finance Director, Paula Rodriguez**  
**Community Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro**  
**Assistant City Manager, Carolina Vester**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**  
**Ruben Acosta**

---

**Agenda Item F-2 [5:11 p.m.]**

A Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to reallocate funds in the amount of \$7,126,444 from the Phillips Park Project to the City Hall Complex project and amend the Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2025 to 2029.  
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

**Mayor Lago: Moving on to F-2.**

---

City Commission Meeting  
May 20, 2025

Agenda Item F-2 - Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to reallocate funds in the amount of \$7,126,444 from the Phillips Park Project to the City Hall Complex project and amend the Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2025 to 2029.

City Attorney Suárez: F-2 is a resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to reallocate funds in the amount of \$7,126,444 from the Phillips Park project to City Hall Complex project and amend the Capital Improvement Program for fiscal years 2025 to 2029.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. This is an item that I placed on the agenda, and I'm asking for staff, through the Manager, to please join us so we can discuss the points, the finer points. Yes, our director, come on up to talk a little bit about what -- how we're trying to split the baby here in Phillips Park and what is the exact funding that we have. I'd like to see if we can just recap it in a quick two minutes, if possible.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Okay. So, the information that you would like is the available funding within Phillips Park currently, correct?

Mayor Lago: Yes, and what our intention is, because this number, when it was printed, it was correct, but it is a different number now.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, the Phillips Park project currently has about \$9 million of funding. I'm getting that document in front of me. Of that \$9 million, \$7 million of those dollars is unrestricted. The remaining dollars are restricted. They're either parks impact fees, like we spoke about earlier today. So, \$7.1 million -- just over \$7.1 million is general capital funds, which are unrestricted and can be used towards any project. 300 and just under 60 million -- so \$359,767 are service impact fees, which is another type of impact fees restricted not just to parks, but to be used for capacity increase. Park impact fees, just over \$1 million, \$1,025,835 are park impact fees, so they're restricted and can only be used towards the enhancement of parks. \$200,000 is a grant. So, we have a -- I can never say the -- I can never say the acronym, so FDRPA grant. We have a deadline to use those funds of April 30th.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Thank you, Siri. So, \$200,000 are a grant for that park specific, and they require a \$200,000 match. So, a 50-50 grant of \$200,000. And then there's \$300,000 that were brought in from Public Works to be used by drainage for a total of \$9,012,000 which are unencumbered funds. More funding has been allocated, but it's been used for design.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Okay, thank you. I'd like to get a motion and a second so we can get into public comment, and then we can get into discussion, and I'll tell you a little bit more about what I'm planning. I'll entertain a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll make a motion, and then we'll get into the nitty-gritty.

Commissioner Lara: And I'll second so we can continue with the nitty-gritty.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Maria Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I would have liked to hear the discussion before, but since you called me now, the only concern I have it says here that the money to go to the City Hall Complex. I thought that it should be going to the City Hall building and not diluted by something else in this area so we can get the City Hall building taken care of. That's my comment. I don't know why complex is included when we really should be raising money for this building. That's my comment.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Ruben Acosta.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir. How are you? Good afternoon.

Ruben Acosta: My name is Ruben Acosta, 20 Calabria Avenue, Apartment 402; been a resident in the City of Coral Gables for 22 years. And I just want to make a comment, Mayor, with all due respect to you. A few days prior to the runoff election, I asked you about the Phillips Park, and you told me that it would start on June and July. So, to hear that now this is going to be postponed, I feel misled.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Well, I could respond to you if you like.

Mr. Acosta: No, I was expecting that the...

Mayor Lago: It will be. It will...

Mr. Acosta: That the project will commence as discussed.

Mayor Lago: It will commence.

Mr. Acosta: All right.

Mayor Lago: But we're discussing the amount of scope that's going to be included in the project.

Mr. Acosta: All right.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Am I correct? Okay.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, the next speaker is on Zoom. I don't know if they're still able to join. Her name is Amalia Ramos.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Ramos?

Amalia Ramos: Yes, hi, can you see me?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, yes ma'am.

Ms. Ramos: Hi, everyone. Thank you for the moment to speak. I'll be brief. I just wanted to say my name is Amalia. My family and I reside at Puerta de Palmas at 888 South Douglas Road, and I just wanted to comment also on Phillips Park. Parks are where children play, communities gather, and wellness begins. I think once we start valuing our buildings over our people, especially our youngest residents, we risk losing the soul of what makes Coral Gables a livable beautiful city. This North Ponce community in Coral Gables is an incredible group of families and children and fellow neighbors. I have been welcomed into this community over the past couple of years, and I really value this space.

I think redirecting previously approved funds from Phillips Park to City Hall renovations is a serious misstep that I think overlooks the needs of our children, who we all rely on this vital green space. The park is a long-needed restoration and pulling nearly 75 percent of its funding sends the wrong message about our City's priorities, quite frankly. I'm a huge fan of Coral Gables mostly because we do value restoring all of our historic buildings and City Hall does need repairs and restoration is important. But I think those needs must be met through thoughtful, transparent funding strategies, not at the expense of our parks. I think this money was promised. We've all been waiting for the restoration of this park and planning around it. And this money really should stay where it belongs, invested in our children, our neighborhoods and the future of Phillips Park. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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

Mayor Lago: Anything else? Okay, perfect. We'll close the public comment. Madam Vice Mayor, you made the motion?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, I am going to start off by a few comments to address some of the concerns. Number one, we cannot get grant funding for City Hall. We can't get appropriations for City Hall, but we can get grants and funding for parks improvements. And in fact, there are some private entities that have peripherally started discussions on providing additional funding for park-related items, specifically at Phillips Park. City Commission has attempted and although we've had a success at raising funds for other projects in Tallahassee and other locations, this particular asset that we're sitting in right here today is something that Tallahassee feels that we need to take care of our own house. Now, when I first got in office, my opinion was that we should phase Phillips Park, rather than tear up the entire thing and make the entire park unusable for a period of time. In the meantime, we've heard many concerns about City Hall being neglected by administrations, and by virtue of that, I would say that prioritizing complete funding for a massive project, Phillips Park, instead of phasing it, neglects our historic asset and that we need to be sensitive to that. In addition, I would suggest that there are certain aspects of this project that people, some folks in a residential area have expressed concern about, in particular, the splash pad. There was one in another area of our city. It immediately became dysfunctional because they're high maintenance and it draws in an inordinate amount of traffic from individuals outside of our city in an area where we have deficient parking to begin with. So, I do believe we can proceed with the project in a phased approach and

prioritize which areas we need to work on first and work on the most important ones first, and then in the meantime, take the remainder of the money and prioritize the restoration of this building, which everybody can see the shoring poles on now. The windows haven't proceeded in the past couple of years, so we need to move forward on City Hall. That's my two cents.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. So, a couple of thoughts. I'm trying to speak as plainly as I can. So, everybody loves parks. You know, I'm a lover of parks. Fortunately, our city is blessed with many parks and many more to soon come online. I believe we have several in the pipeline and ready to break ground soon. However, it appears to me to be pretty clear that this Commission has been, it seems perpetually stuck with either, you know, City Hall being accused of being neglected, it's in limbo, it's been willfully neglected, even I've heard those terms being thrown around. If we don't prioritize City Hall, which I agree is a historic, a very important piece of the history of the City. By the way, we are celebrating 100 years of the City's founding with City Hall, with scaffolding around it and in need of repair. So, at one point, I think a decision was made to take unrestricted funds and put it towards, I believe, you know, Phillips Park, while during the same period, accusations have been hurled that the City Hall has been neglected. Indeed, that's been used as one of the reasons for why the previous city manager, after he was ousted, was justified in being ousted. I think the time has come, at least my position, right, is to prioritize so we can get out of this gear, go forward, plan prudently for executing on the repair and the renovations of City Hall. And I think it's a tough decision in general to take money from one place to another, but it seems to me that whether it's 5 or \$7 million of the amount that's right now allocated for Phillips, it was moved out of another pile in the first place. We're just putting it back and trying to prioritize an important project. So, that's my view. I'd be supportive of this.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: Commissioner Lara, I echo your sentiment when it comes to City Hall. I do think it's something that we really need to prioritize. We did have another option. I think we can do both at the same time, and it was an intent resolution to go ahead and go for a bond for City Hall. I think that really would have been a healthy balance between both. I don't think this Commission is in favor of that right now, but there is a solution out of here, out of -- to being able to do both. The -- first, City Hall, I think it was

over \$25 million to be able to restore or whatever the language would be to be able to fix City Hall. We have a matching grant of \$200,000 and right now what's being proposed is redlining the splash pad and the building, which I personally believe is not in the best interest of the City. This -- the resident that was there, I'm actually her neighbor. I haven't met her, but we live in the same building. And me personally, my child has been waiting for this park. I think since he can really express himself that he's been waiting for this, the most exciting part, the splash pad for children. But that's a personal story. I would like to ask some questions to Fred and Carolina if they can come to the podium, please. We don't have a substantial park for recreation in that neighborhood, right?

Assistant City Manager Vester: So, we're in the north area. We do have Rotary Park. It's also identified as a renovation project that's coming up. So, there is an existing park, but not of the size. This is a three-acre park.

Commissioner Castro: Is it recreational park?

Assistant City Manager Vester: Yes, it has a smaller playground, but it doesn't have any - like you have there, a field. So, there's a small playground there.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. So, was the plan to have for this park serve as a satellite recreational facility at -- of the Youth Center?

Assistant City Manager Vester: In the master plan conversation? And Fred, I'll let you reiterate on the master plan.

Community Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, I think -- I think that was -- when the project came forward, that was one of the highlights to look at. And it was -- it was looked at through our master plan that something in the northeast quadrant to serve as a -- as a satellite, as an indoor space. We don't have anything that's a recreational indoor space in that area, so that was the discussion.

Commissioner Castro: So, eliminating the building, that wouldn't be the plan anymore?

Assistant City Manager Vester: Well, I think right now what's being conversed here is a phased approach. So, our hope would be that this design as is, the conceptual site plan that was vetted by the community with extensive input, would remain and our hope would be that there be a phased opportunity so certain things and depending on the funds available

would have to go and be shelved for later. One of the two things that we had previously discussed is there's the building and splash pad and because the splash pad is tied to the building, if one goes, the other one goes. And they're of the project the most substantial in cost right now.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. And was the purpose of the proposed structure at Phillips Park in part to have staff onsite to oversee programming?

Assistant City Manager Vester: That was the concept, and going back to the master plan, there was actually two. So, there was the north and the south identified in the master plan for future expansion on population increase, density, et cetera, et cetera. And part of that was having a staffed park, especially of a park that size for programming. Correct.

Commissioner Castro: So, removing the building will now change those plans too?

Assistant City Manager Vester: It would push them back. But again, the park right now, as is, it's not programmed, it's not staffed. It was something that in some of the community meetings came up as conversation to assist in the programming of that park. Correct.

Commissioner Castro: Has the City been in discussions with Tom Abraham with the USA Blind Soccer to have soccer programming for the visually impaired?

Assistant City Manager Vester: I will defer to Fred there. I know you...

Community Recreation Director Couceyro: We have had meetings. There were discussions as to whether if the artificial turf field was built to specifications, whether it would be a site for blind soccer. We had -- we have had several meetings, no agreements had been signed, of course, where the project hasn't begun, but there was some discussion and planning.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. And was the proposed structure going to house the panels for the soccer programming for the visually impaired?

Community Recreation Director Couceyro: The -- there was -- in the building, there was storage that would house the panels for the blind soccer, yes. It had the proper size for it.

Assistant City Manager Vester: It's storage.

Commissioner Castro: So, removing the building would mean none of this would come about, correct? For now.

Assistant City Manager Vester: I wouldn't say wouldn't. The idea -- what Fred was saying is you would have storage; doesn't mean you couldn't store something offsite.

Community Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, you'd have to work out operations...

Commissioner Castro: Okay.

Community Recreation Director Couceyro: Differently.

Commissioner Castro: We don't have a recreational park in that neighborhood of that size, and I think this is really -- we were going to use it as a satellite for the Youth Center and I think for programming for different things that we can engage our community with so that our residents are more -- engaged in more activity, right. Currently, there's two tennis courts. The transition was going to be -- and correct me if I'm wrong. It was going to be one tennis court and two pickleball courts, correct?

Assistant City Manager Vester: That was proposed, correct.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. Is that what -- is that staying?

Assistant City Manager Vester: It's proposed right now. We can't tell you what's going to stay or not. It all depends on the funding. In the -- just to go back to the grant language, there is specific requirements for that matching grant. So, if we want to pursue the grant as a minimum, you have to renovate the playground, which is at its end of life right now. You have the walkway and the fencing as well as some ADA components and furnishings, such as picnic tables. So, those were specified in the grant language.

Commissioner Castro: Okay, Coral Gables Preparatory Academy was going to use the park for their physical education curriculum. I want to put that on the record. This is what we're undoing, guys. This held various community meetings where residents went out of their way to go ahead and make this park the park that neighborhood wanted, which they have been waiting for a very, very long time. They approved it. We're finally at the end of the stretch. We have other options to cover City Hall, but we're going against what the

neighborhood wants with so much anticipation because we want to move funds into City Hall, which I don't disagree. I think City Hall needs them, but I also know that we could do both at the same time. Now, I've gotten numerous emails from residents, numerous. Not only did I get emails, but there's a petition. Can you go ahead and put that on the screen, please?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, ma'am. If Cable TV could please share my screen.

Commissioner Castro: There's a petition going on from residents. It was forwarded to me. I probably forwarded it to the rest of the Commission; I'm not sure, to save Phillips Park. And when I mean save Phillips Park, if you go ahead and read the whole resolution, which is not there, but I'm pretty sure my colleagues probably received it, but it's to save the whole park and which was approved and what the community wanted. Colleagues are here to represent the residents and their best interests. And this park is very, very important to them. We have to separate elected officials. And if we can make two things happen at the same time, why not consider it?

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: That is all. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I too have received those concerns. And we actually tabled Phillips Park my first budget because we were taking care of other historic preservation projects, and we decided to fund it last year, because at that point, we would be ready to begin the renovation work. So, it's disconcerting to be at this point now, when we have promised this community, when they were ready for this, the money was set aside, then it was, no, we're going to have to wait an extra year. They get the money, they believe their park is coming, and now we're going to say, what, three, four more years? Realistically, from what I saw, 2029 was the year that I saw on the resolution. So, we're now delaying this project even more. We are the City Beautiful. Phillips Park is far from beautiful. It's a park that has been falling apart for years because the renovation is coming, and we know we've not perhaps done what we needed to do as far as maintenance to make sure that it was maintained to a Coral Gables standard. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it's also, after the Youth Center, the largest park that we own?

Assistant City Manager Vester: It's a three-acre parcel, yes. One of the biggest.

Community Recreation Director Couceyro: That one and Kerdyk are the -- are close to...

Commissioner Fernandez: Right. And Kerdyk looks beautiful. You know, we've done great work there. It has really enhanced the community. And that actually has come up in conversation with residents in the area saying, the folks in South Gables, they get it done. The money goes there. But when it's North Gables, the money doesn't come here. And it shouldn't be that way. We shouldn't have an area of the city that has a park that we have set aside the funding for, and instead of finding other options for renovations of City Hall, which by the way, \$25 million is a rough estimate. Realistically, we're probably looking at over \$60 million to restore this building once they start opening the walls, just using the other buildings that we have restored in this city and what has come once we've started peeling back the onion. So, I think the money should remain in Phillips Park. The community has been asking for this for years. They've been waiting for this for years, and we need to just be more creative and find different ways to do it. We just -- this Commission just approved \$3.1 million to buy another plot of land when we had \$3.2 million there that could have gone towards Phillips Park and would have made this move a little bit easier. But instead, we decided by more land, which will just remain vacant and unused, and we're just setting things aside, setting things aside, and we're growing our need for spending funding. The Youth Center, how long we've been kicking the can down the road on the Youth Center? For years. The Youth Center is in dire need of renovations or just completely being gutted and building a new one. The field. I was out there with Stephen last weekend on a Saturday. The condition of the field is horrible. And this is Coral Gables. We should be doing better. We should be doing better. So, I'm a no on moving this money. I believe the residents of this neighborhood have waited long enough to get this project completed. I think we need to find other ways to get the funding for City Hall and making sure that we get this project done and delivered on time.

Mayor Lago: You done? All right, so just to correct the record on a few things that Commissioner Fernandez says that are grotesquely wrong and misleading. Number one, the \$3.1 million that we just did for land, which we did it an hour ago, we did it an hour ago, and our Finance Director stood up here and said 65/35 split. And the \$3.1 million can be used for land, but then you can't use more than 35 percent for renovations. Correct, Paula? Am I correct, or no? Yes, okay. So, that's -- Ariel, just grotesquely incorrect. That was an hour ago. You can't say things on the record like that that are wrong. They're misleading. So, that's number one. Number two, not my numbers, your numbers. Give

me a raw number to fix -- excuse me, to fix the Youth Center right now. Gut it to the studs, build a brand-new building, demolish the whole thing. What do you think? 100 million?

Community Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, between 15 and \$60 million.

Mayor Lago: Okay. I will not take out debt on the City. We talked about it one time for \$150 million. I have a fiduciary responsibility. I will not take out debt for beautification. I will take out debt for infrastructure and I will take out debt for emergency services like Police and Fire. We have to be able to pay our bills. Again, I will not do it. That's debt. Okay. So, two issues that are just -- you throw them out there and you hope that -- mislead people. It's just -- we can do better. Let's go to Phillips Park, incredibly important, huge proponent. You and I sat down. How many times this week did we talk about it?

Assistant City Manager Vester: Once -- twice now, twice.

Mayor Lago: Twice.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: And we were back and forth, with Paula in the room. We sat down, my staff. We sat down, we worked on things, we looked at the numbers, how could we grind this number down. We're not taking \$7 million. We're looking to split the baby and figure out how we can phase the projects. My intent is use that money to do the windows for City Hall, which if you look at the numbers, they're estimating about \$5 million. Once you harden the building -- I think it's going to be less, but once you harden the building, then you've done the roof, you've done the windows, and now you've protected the asset. Right now, the windows are in horrific shape. It's got to get done, okay. That's incredibly important. But I'm going to tell you the most important thing. Commissioner Fernandez has stood here and blamed Peter Iglesias, has blamed me, and said that this building is on my -- in my -- on my legacy. What's on my legacy? Well, guess what? I got elected, and we're going to change that right now. This is a priority. This is going to be on you, not me. You're the ACM. Tell me this is true or not. Did we not, Paula, did we not decide to fund Phillips Park over City Hall? Yes or no?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: I can say yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, we decided to fund Phillips Park over City Hall. That decision was made, why? Why was that decision made? Because the Commission pushed for it, right?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, I can tell you the history is, in '23, we established a five-year -- at the time, it was a five-year priority list of projects. Phillips Park and City Hall were both included in those projects. In fiscal year '24, we had planned to fund Phillips Park, and it was agreed by this Commission to move funding from Phillips Park into City Hall, and we left about \$1.3 million in Phillips Park. And in '25, we had said that we would fund the remaining of Phillips Park, and so that's how the remaining 4.3 plus some impact fees went into the park, and we only funded 1.3 into City Hall of those priority projects that we had established in that plan.

Mayor Lago: So, there's two options here -- three options. You raise taxes, you go to bond, or you have to move money around. You just approved a two -- a COLA for ten years is going to cost the City \$2 million a year. We just appraised -- we just approved the largest -- the largest contracts for our unions that are going to cost the City about \$5 million a year. I've gone through every number with Paula, every single number we've got, looking for the money. I'm not doing this arbitrarily and just deciding I'm taking money from Phillips Park. We've looked everywhere. So, if you tell me that City Hall is on my watch, well, guess what? I got reelected two weeks ago. Under my watch, we're going to do City Hall. We're going to start it, and we're going to do it right. Because I'm not taking out debt on the City. That would be irresponsible of us. I'm not going to do a bond. You're not going to tell me that it's my fault or the previous manager's fault, which is now the new manager, because we neglected City Hall. That's not going to be the case. Phillips Park is a priority. We're going to spend -- like what are the numbers that we discussed?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, we discussed if it's the will of the Commission to not take the full \$7 million out over the last two years. Just over \$5 million, about \$5.6 million was brought into the project. We had talked about potentially reducing that \$7 million to \$5 million and only reducing the park -- the general fund funds in the park by \$5 million, which would leave just over \$2 million, \$2.1 million of general funds. It would leave the \$1.8 million, almost \$1.9 million in other funds including the grant, and then what I respectfully had requested was we have collected some additional park impact fees in the amount of \$364,396, and I would ask to amend...

Mayor Lago: But hold on, before you say that, what was my response when you asked me that?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, you said that you would be willing to consider reducing the removal.

Mayor Lago: But also giving you the park impact fees and everything we request to get the number of Phillips Park as high as possible so we can fund Phillips Park to a good amount to do a lot of work right now in a phase one and handle the windows here in City Hall, which are critically important because we can't do any interior work, we can't do any exterior work until the windows are installed. So, this is simple. We can keep blaming other people, or we can take control of the issue and get it addressed. I'm not going to accept anybody telling me that I'm to blame for City Hall being in the position it's in. Because, as you heard from staff, number one, we didn't take \$3.1 million just to buy land that could have been used for this project. Those are the type of misleading statements that are blatant lies, okay, that are said here, and that there's no repercussions and then later become truths, and they'd be repeated over and over and over and over again. So, that's a lie. We bought that land with money that was used from a completely different source of money that could not be used for the parks. That's number one. Staff is nodding their head. Correct?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Um-hmm, correct.

Mayor Lago: Correct, thank you. So, that is wrong, number one. Number two, I'm not going to take out a bond, put that on the City. We're going to be fiscally sound. We're going to be thoughtful. We're going to be methodical. We're going to be careful, and we're going to be fiduciaries on behalf of the residents of this community. We're not going to be impulsive and just start spending money, like we've talked about in the past. If we would have had those \$2 million for the COLA, we would have had more money in the bank account, correct? Yes or no?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: We'll spend it, we'll have more, yeah.

Mayor Lago: No, but if we would have had those \$2 million from the COLA every year, we would have had \$2 million to spend, correct?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so we gave \$2 million to ex-employees that they thank God they worked here in the City, but now we don't have that money. So, you can't just create money without creating debt. That's the importance of understanding how to run a business. And you can't pander to people and tell people lies, like, hey, we just spent \$3.1 million, and that money, you know, we could have spent it for this. No, you can't. It's allocated for a reason. It's allocated to purchase parks. That's the purpose of the money. So, it's very clear. I would like for you to please read what I'm offering and what I'm proffering my colleagues in the Commission. See if it's -- see if we're willing to get a vote on this.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, as I -- I'm going to kind of repeat what we said at the beginning.

Mayor Lago: Can you give me totals? Can you give me totals...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Just on both sides of the ledger? So, Phillips Park and City Hall.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Okay, I'm going to start with what's in Phillips Park, what we're proposing to remove from Phillips Park. So, like we talked about, in Phillips Park right now, unencumbered is \$9 million, 7.1 general funds and then \$1.8 million in those other restricted funds that I had mentioned before, service impact, park impact, \$200,000 of grant and \$300,000 of drainage. Removing \$5 million, as the Mayor has proposed to amend his resolution on, would leave just over \$2.1 million in the project of general fund money, an additional \$1.885 million, and then we would bring in \$364,396 from the park impact fees that we collected this year, and that would leave the park a total of \$4,376,442. The park project -- the preliminary estimate from the consultant used by the designer, the park estimate in the way that it stands now with the design was \$9.1 million. Of course, that hasn't gone out to bid, et cetera, so that would require them to reduce the scope to a \$4.4 million project, okay.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, I'm willing to go up to \$5 million and swing the rest of the money over to the windows.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Okay, so City Hall.

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: City Hall currently has \$5.1 million in unencumbered funds. That is broken out by about \$820,000 that is in a section of our project because we categorize it for City Hall structural and assessment renovation. There's 3.378 -- \$3,378,000 that we have dedicated towards the windows, so the initial 2.5, an additional million that was given to it last year, this is the remaining available balance; \$750,000 that was dedicated to the tower, which is part of the full renovation, but we had them (INAUDIBLE) phases...

Mayor Lago: Which if I may, that only gets us halfway because the tower budget is \$1.5 million.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: And then we had the third floor renovation, so this project had begun in phases, and we started with the third floor, so we've done significant renovation of the third floor, and the funds available at this time are just under \$200,000, so that leaves us with a 5.1 -- \$5,141,632 available in City Hall.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may, you said there's \$200,000 for the third floor, that means that we're short on the third floor \$1.3 million.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Potentially. And so, right now, right, so a very, very preliminary estimate for City Hall that I've spoken to the City Manager about is about \$26.5 million. I will say I think that it'll be a little bit more, but \$26.5 million is a number that we're talking about today. That would mean that the project would need about an additional \$19.8 million, \$19,784,000. And the way that I've broken that out is \$18.2 million would be needed for the overall project, and an additional \$1.5 million would be needed to bring up the budget to \$5 million, which is what we're estimating that the full renovation of the windows would cost, including, you know, the structural needs to install the windows. So, that \$26.5 million is what would be our target today. As of today, we have funded -- I'll get some pieces of information. We have funded \$6.7 million -- \$6,764,437 into the project. Our plan, and I spoke to the Mayor, and I believe I spoke to the Vice Mayor, right? This conversation for me is a little preliminary, because in a couple of weeks, we're going to be talking about capital, and I'm going to be presenting to you some of these ideas and some of these numbers. So, I believe that I will be able to present

to you in our June 11th meeting that we will be able to fund \$6 million into City Hall for next fiscal year.

Mayor Lago: If I may, if I may, I just want to put on the record and be clear because I want to say this before we get into the budget season. You're hearing what's happening in the State, and you already heard from the -- from the County that they're \$400 million in the red. So, I don't think we're going to do much better than the County or than the State, because again, there's a shortfall of money. And we have made serious, serious commitments to the unions. We've given a \$2 million COLA that's with us for the next 10 years, has a lagging tail for the next 10 years. And if at the State they do increase homestead exemption, you potentially, the numbers that we're looking at are something between 4 to \$5 million potential effect to the City, to the coffers. So, don't expect to see another 10-year -- a 10 percent increase in regards to property values. Will there be one? Yeah, maybe 3 or 4 percent. But that's still going to give us a shortfall. If we do have those issues at the state, and as a result of our pension agreements, so there's not going to be that much money for capital improvement. So, we have to be very thoughtful and very methodical how we spend the money. That's why I'm making this decision here in Phillips Park, which is a very difficult decision for me to make, and that's why I'm saying let's go \$5 million for Phillips Park, and the remaining balance, we swing it over to the -- to City Hall so we can at least get started on City Hall. Change the windows. Start moving in a way where at least the cost doesn't continue to go up on a building like this, which has exploded in price. Okay?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, the \$6.7 million that we funded to date and the \$6 million that I believe that I will be able to bring to you on June 11th as a funding for fiscal year '26 based on the \$26.5 million estimate leaves us with a funding need of \$13.7 million. That's before any action is taken on Phillips Park today. And then I believe, because the funding that we're bringing in is recurring funding into this program, so I believe that '27 will be a more difficult year. The Mayor and I have had this discussion. I have a little bit different perspective on fiscal year '26, but we'll see how it pans out. And so...

Mayor Lago: But, you do agree? Excuse me, you do agree?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: I do agree that...

Mayor Lago: You do agree that if the County comes out and says they're \$400 million in the red, obviously, when revenue is going to be an issue, I mean, we can talk to the tax collector and find out, you know, the property appraiser, and find out where we're at right now, you understand? It's pretty simple.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: I agree, but I think -- I feel like we're -- we have to be very diligent about the decisions that we make in fiscal year '26 to plan for fiscal year '27.

Mayor Lago: Why? What do you think is going to happen in '27?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, I believe that the uncertainties at the State, I do not see them coming to fruition to affect our '26 budget, because the property values that we deal with for our '26 budget are based on property values from a year ago, right? And so, property values, while we have seen real estate stagnant, we have not seen significant decreases in property values. The property appraiser can by all means decide to slash property values. I don't see that happening. I could be absolutely wrong. I will buy any of you lunch -- limited restaurant options -- if I'm wrong, but -- caveat. So -- but I believe that for '26 we will need to be very careful about our planning, but I believe that any impact that we see from the State or from rolls out of the County will affect us in '27. That said, City Hall funding, I believe that I will be able to commit to another \$6 million to City Hall in fiscal year '27. And so, if that's the case and the estimate remains at \$26.5 million, we would have a funding need of 7.7 -- almost \$7.8 million. And so, I understand the action that you're taking here on Phillips Park. I would encourage that, you know, staff be able to plan a park, whatever phase, with a good amount of money. And so, I appreciate that there was some commitment to consider something less than the \$7 million.

Mayor Lago: So, like I said, my number is \$5 million for Phillips Park, leave it the way it is, the remaining balance goes to City Hall. We have a motion and a second.

City Attorney Suárez: Do you have the details you would need on that motion and what the Mayor just said?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: I can work out the dollars that would reduce the amount to get you to \$5 million, and also, amending the budget to bring in the -- to recognize the impact fees and so forth so I can get you the language on that.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Lara: As described and amended, as proposed by the Mayor, and as Paula said, City Manager, you exchange -- City Attorney, you've exchanged as proposed. I move.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I second.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

Commissioner Castro: When will the Phillips Park be completed in full if we say we're phasing it?

Assistant City Manager Vester: We would have to go back and work with Public Works to look at the scope that is available within the funds. Our hope is to not have any more delays, so we're going to, hopefully, just be able to redline items so we can go out to bid as soon as possible, and that's why we brought up the building and the splash pad.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Right, but you're telling me that maybe in the future then we'll be able to do the whole park, including the splash pad and the building. What is the estimation of time?

Assistant City Manager Vester: There is no time. I can't guarantee you a time. But this is the best proposal that we have because we're preparing -- we're allowing the site plan as proposed conceptually to continue towards the future. So, if we phase out the project, leaving those areas available for future expansion, it meets the need and what the community really wanted. So, this this gives us the footprint to expand. While we don't have a timeline, that would be the objective.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Castro: So -- I'm not done, excuse me. Members of this Commission, what are we doing? There's other ways to be able to fund City Hall. We got elected by the

people to represent them. We promised them a park, and we aren't going to deliver. I already showed the petition. The same people who signed the petition are the same people that elected us. Are we not going to represent their needs, something we already promised them? I hope this Commission really votes in favor of what the community really needs. And you can put politics aside and fund City Hall, but there's other options. I know the Mayor is not in agreeance with the other options, but there is other options.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Before we move on to that, the key is, the key is, it's a pie in the sky. There's other options. There is other options. It's called a bond. I'm not in favor of that. I'm not in favor of bringing debt to the City. I have a responsibility. I don't believe that, for example, retirees should pay what was being proposed three or four years ago by Commissioner Menendez, which was \$150 million, \$160 million bond. Remember, we broke down the numbers, what the numbers were?

Assistant City Manager Vester: Yeah, that was for the entire park system.

Mayor Lago: I know, but it's still a huge number.

Assistant City Manager Vester: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Okay, I don't believe -- that's just too much money. To me, it doesn't work. We have a long agenda. Madam Vice Mayor, please.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll make this quick. Two things. I had direct email discussions with residents who thought that this petition to slash Phillips Park -- and that's the way that it was worded and the QR code, et cetera -- meant that no Phillips Park was going to be built. When I explained to them a phasing option so it can proceed, it's, oh, okay, we understand that. Number two, we just had an election. We've knocked a lot of doors. We talked about issuing a bond and putting the City in debt. It was an absolute no by folks. I think we -- our directions are clear.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, through the Chair, just to clarify the numbers for me, we are removing \$5 million, or we are leaving \$5 million?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: We are leaving a total of \$5 million...

Commissioner Fernandez: Understood.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Of -- across all funding. So, of the 7.1, I have to work out the specific number that will come out, but it'll be whatever amount that we're taking from the general funds plus the \$1,885,602, plus the \$364,396, so if I had my phone with me -- minus \$5 million. I'll do that math.

Commissioner Fernandez: We're leaving \$5 million...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: In the park.

Commissioner Fernandez: In Phillips Park. So, there will be \$5 million to continue with the renovation of Phillips Park. Whatever that ends up being, we will figure that out, and then we will phase whatever is to come next. Okay. Now, I have another question for you because...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: The Mayor said that I was lying about something and maybe I misunderstood you. You said in park impact -- impact fees, we had \$1.8 million restricted and \$3.2 million unrestricted.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: In the capital project for purchase of land, which has been adopted by this Commission as purchase of land for parks, we have 1.8 -- just over \$1.8 million of park impact fees, and we have another \$400,000 that we'll bring in, and then the remainder of those funds are funds that have been brought in over the years which we've matched the park impact fees. But that project has always been dedicated to the purchase of parks.

Commissioner Fernandez: Understood. But the \$3.2 million is unrestricted and would be able to be moved to something else?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: It could be, but it would have to be...

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. That's...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Elected by this body.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, but it's not -- it's park money, so it's not going to be moved anywhere.

Commissioner Fernandez: It would be moved to another park.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, again, we can go back and forth as much as you like about it. The bottom line is that I wrote the legislation. And you can try to mislead people and say that that money can be used for something else. That money has to be used, correct me if I'm wrong, 65 percent for park acquisition, 35 percent for park renovation, correct? In that fund, the legislation that I wrote.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: In the impact fee -- in the impact fee funds that are collected, 65 percent of it is for purchase of land and the 35 percent goes towards park enhancements. In what has been brought into the purchase of land, I would have to go back and see specifically what matching funds we've brought into that project to see where the restriction is and where it isn't.

Mayor Lago: So, you know what, you know what I think is a good thing? Let's put it together so that Commissioner Fernandez understands, and then focuses all that attention on putting together incredible pieces of legislation that bring money to the City like that. That would be a great thing, just like the Underline, just like acquiring parks, just like all the things that we do here in the City when we come up with legislation. Spend all that energy. Instead of arguing up here, we're moving forward on the agenda. This is the way -- like the Vice Mayor said, when we talked about bonds, when we talked about taking money, like Commissioner Fernandez was so ecstatic about from the reserves, and when we talked about underfunding the pensions, people's skin crawled at the doors. They said under no circumstances. Take care of our employees and make sure that you address the issue of the unfunded liability. So, we have a motion in a second. Please call the roll. Oh, you have another question?

Commissioner Lara: Mayor, may I?

Mayor Lago: Go ahead.

Commissioner Lara: Just a real quick comment. That three of us on this dais, the Mayor, the Vice Mayor, and myself are the ones that ran for re-election and election, and I will

have to say that that was definitively, without exception, the way that any resident that I brought the issue up, that we were looking at a Commission that began the ball rolling down the lane to a \$60 million plus bond was jaw-dropping. An immediate visceral reaction of no, do not do that, when they knew that it was not going to be for infrastructure or disaster relief in the event of a hurricane to have funds available ahead of the insurance paying out coverage. They were definitively against it. And I know this because my knuckles are raw from knocking on the doors and listening to everybody say this. So, I'm also going to say that this is something I ran on, that I would stop that, and it'll be another promise delivered. Now, with respect to this project, Mr. Mayor, you've surprised me because it was difficult for me, as I said during initial comment, to support \$7 million going out of the allotted funds for Phillips Park, but it would have been the prudent way to go about it given our current financial situation and what looks like difficult financial waters likely ahead of us. Your new proposal is wonderful, it's brilliant, and I think that this is a no-brainer as proposed. And I'll finish by saying one thing more, a comment for my colleague that I know this was not your intent, but there was a reference to things get done in the south, implying that they don't get done in the north. If I'm not mistaken, it doesn't matter, but for optics, four out of the five of us Commissioners live in the north, but it doesn't matter where I live. I represent all the residents in the City Beautiful, but there is no south gets favored over the north, over the central. So, I know that was not your intention, but for purposes of being clear, that is not how this Commission thinks.

Mayor Lago: And if I may, before we take the roll call, just for the record, please, so that nobody can say later they had some sort of influence in changing my ways. This is what we talked about for the last two weeks, correct?

Assistant City Manager Vester: Yes, it's to find what whatever we can do...

Mayor Lago: But no petition, no online petition. This is what we talked about from the beginning, that we were going to move money...

Assistant City Manager Vester: (INAUDIBLE) scope and...

Mayor Lago: And that we're going to leave a huge amount of money in Phillips Park to make sure we can move forward, correct?

Assistant City Manager Vester: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Okay. All right, just want to make sure.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. Really quick, I received an email, and I think the resident wants some clarification. Ms. Collins from 22 Salamanca Avenue, she's stating that what is going on with Phillips Park. There's no transparency, and what is phasing out? I think -- so, the main question right there is what is phasing out? What does that mean?

Mayor Lago: If you'd like, phase is doing the project in one or two or three or four phases, depending on the project. We can answer that question for her. If you'd like, you can send it to the Manager. The Manager can respond or the ACM. Can we call -- can we call the vote, please?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: My question, when will we have a park? Because this is a question residents are going to ask me. Even if it's phased out...

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: When can I give them something?

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, we're going to start the park as soon as staff works on the phasing plan, and they analyze the funding. You have the response.

Commissioner Castro: No, no, I'm asking for a date.

Mayor Lago: There's no date.

Commissioner Castro: So, that's what I'm going to go ahead and tell my constituents.

Mayor Lago: You can have -- you can have -- you can meet with the City Manager after and the ACM and they can talk about -- and they can respond to the entire Commission as a whole and tell them where they're going to -- where they're going to be and what can they start on first. I imagine, having built many parks, that the first thing you do is you start working on ordering long lead items. You have to order the playground. So, in

actuality, the project starts when you actually order all these long lead items so that the ACM can tell you about that. Commissioner Lara, you have something else?

Commissioner Lara: Real quick, I just want to maybe offer some perspective to Commissioner Castro. We're voting right now on whether we're going to allow this type of funding. Once that's determined, then Parks can then begin, and Finance can begin mapping out what the red line would look like with the timeline associated with it. But step one is to decide how much money do they have to spend.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Castro: My answer is no.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm going to vote yes, but I want to make sure that we do have a commitment going forward to make sure we deliver a completed Phillips Park.

Commissioner Lara: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Before I say yes, Commissioner Fernandez was not an amendment to what we have here. No, it was not. You can't do that in the middle -- in the middle of a vote because people already voted. So, my answer is yes. You can bring that up with the Manager, and you can have a conversation in regards to what we have here. No, it's not. You can't do that in the middle of vote because people had already voted. So, my answer is yes, you can bring that up with a Manager and you can have a conversation in regards to what you believe is going to be the next phases of funding, and you can help us find that funding after we address -- after we address City Hall. Because again, at the end of the day, remember, City Hall is your responsibility also.

Commissioner Fernandez: Our responsibility.

Mayor Lago: Yours, you're here. You're on this dais.

Commissioner Lara: Mr. Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Lara: So, Commissioner Fernandez, if you've already voted, did you want to change it based on...?

Commissioner Fernandez: No, no, no. I'm just -- I just want to make sure I understood, and I think we did have a commitment up here to deliver Phillips Park in a phased plan. I'm not -- I'm not asking for an amendment. I'm just putting my thought on the record. And I will, as the Mayor stated, work towards finding funding solutions to make sure that we're able to deliver on this park as quickly as we can.

(Vote: 4-1)

Mayor Lago: Thank you.