

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item C – Public Comment**  
**October 25, 2022**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Michael Mena**

**Commissioner Rhonda Anderson**

**Commissioner Jorge Fors**

**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**

**Jessica Keller**

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Agenda Item C [9:15 a.m.]

Public Comment

Mayor Lago: We move onto Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: We have one member of the public requesting to speak, Mr. Mayor, Ms. Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, good morning, we are blessed to have you here. The floor is yours.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning. Well, another day in the big city. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, Coral Gables, FL 33146. Some of you may be surprised. I'm not going to talk about salaries; I'm not talking about vacancies; I'm not talking about solid waste, but I'm talking about something that's concerning. In exactly two weeks, we will have an open seat on this dais. Some of us have been wondering how is it going to be filled. I sent something around hoping to get an answer. I didn't

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get any answer. I've been reading the paper how other cities are doing it. We do not know how we are going to do it here. For some people, this may not be a big deal. There're only just a few months from November to April. Actually, from almost the end of November to April, but do you know how many issues, how many important issues will be discussed in those short months, even though they are short months because there's not two meetings every month. Serious issues will come before you and it is important that the decisions be made, and that we know how its going to be made. The person who you will be selecting will not be chosen by us, will not be chosen by people that will be most affected, which are the residents. I'm sure you all have the right or you wouldn't do it, to appoint whoever you want. I'm not denying that, but wouldn't it be right to get some ideas from the residents. What about asking interested parties to step up to the plate and show their desire to be considered. We are known, this city in some places they make fun of us, because we have Sunshine meetings for anything that's of interest to the residents. Well, this is an important issue. Why not allow us to have some input before you make the decision. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Ms. Cruz. I'd like to have our City Attorney quickly address that and I'm going to make a comment in regard to your questions.

City Attorney Ramos: Of course, Mayor. Various members of the Commission have asked me how, in fact we go forward with doing so. It is in our Charter, within 30 days after the vacancy occurs, the Commission appoints a member to serve until the next election, which we all know is April. The vacancy technically occurs November 22, because under state law that is the date, its two weeks after the date of the election. So, when Commissioner Fors submitted his irrevocable resignation, it had that date on it, in accordance again with state law, and so November 22<sup>nd</sup> is the date, 30 days from that is December 22<sup>nd</sup>. So, the anticipated date for appointing someone is the December meeting, which is scheduled for December 13<sup>th</sup>, thank you Solanch, for December 13<sup>th</sup>.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Madam City Attorney. Now that we have the framework in regard to how to appoint somebody, I have no issues and I know that my colleagues accepting recommendations, resumes, of whoever will be interested in that position. That can be submitted to the Clerk and that can be disseminated to the Commissioners, the Manager, the City Clerk and the City Attorney. I just want to make sure that the City Attorney has a hand in ensuring that its transparent, that everything is done properly. Okay.

City Attorney Ramos: Yes Mayor. There is no process for which that's established for who gets considered, right, its up to the City Commission, a resident of the City of Coral Gables, obviously, but other than that, you all want to accept resumes or just...

Mayor Lago: I have no issues with that at all. That's perfectly fine. Mr. Clerk, do you need some sort of direction on that?

City Clerk Urquia: No sir. I just want to let you know, I have one more speaker, its Ms. Jessica Keller.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Keller, good morning. The floor is yours.

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Ms. Keller: Good morning, everyone. My name is Jessica Keller and my 12-year-old son, and I have been members of this community for over ten years. One note, who won the pumpkin decoration?

Mayor Lago: We haven't found out yet.

Commissioner Menendez: We're following the Charter.

[Laughter]

Ms. Keller: If Public Works made a submission, give Public Works. I came today to speak on two items. First, I wanted to communicate my disappointment in the four-day notice of a Sunshine meeting held regarding sidewalks and traffic calming on Venetia Terrace. You have every right to hold a Sunshine meeting with four days' notice. I understand that. It was 8:30 in the morning on a Friday. You also know very well that this is not the best method to engage residents. The residents that could attend did, and they shared feedback with those who could not attend. Unfortunately, there are some of my neighbors close to Vince Lago who wants this advanced, so likely will. Please consider holding a traditional community meeting about a potential project, where everyone has the ability to speak directly to staff and elected officials. Where everyone has the ability to share their ideas and possible solutions. In the absence of continuous accessible information, I've noticed that project websites are no longer on the new website. In the absence of continuous successful information, a rumor-mill has a potential to be generated. We all know very well how quickly misinformation spreads in this town. A misinformation campaign can shut a project down more quickly than facts and data used to justify a project. I want to point out, I did communicate my disappointment to one of the Commissioners. I did not throw a tantrum and demand a Sunshine meeting be shut down. This frequently seems to happen as of late and happened quite a bit when I worked for the city. One particular project comes to mind – UM Neighborhood Improvements meeting was shut down simply because resident Maria Cruz didn't like the area that was notified. There were too many people. The cancellation of this one meeting cost taxpayers nearly \$3,000, it took five employees from their responsibilities. If that wasn't bad enough, the meeting was cancelled again for the same reason a different year. I don't know why some residents receive special treatment as opposed to all of us being treated the same. How much taxpayer money was spent on removing a semi-deciduous silk...tree with a semi-deciduous Royal Poinciana tree for the same resident. It wasn't replaced once, but twice, because she didn't like the way it looked. She even asked staff to drive her to the nursery to choose the tree herself. Staff aren't supposed to have anyone in vehicles besides other employees. Add to that, Royal Poincianas in roundabouts at the time were against city policy, because only frangula species should be placed in roundabouts due to potential crash severity. The other item I came to discuss today was related to the policy of felons being hired and/or appointed to advisory boards. When I was terminated from the city and the city subsequently settled with me for \$100,000, I could never have anticipated the number of residents who began reaching out to me. Prominent residents, but probably not prominent enough to get special treatment. So, the concern was brought to me about felons be placed in positions of authority. I made public records request last week for some of the policies and nothing has been returned. I'm not complaining about that. I know it will come, but if no policy exists related to

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felons being on boards or being hired by the city, I think its something that we should talk about. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Keller, before you step away. You invoke my name saying that you are giving somebody special privilege in regard to the Venetia meeting that we had. I don't know what you're talking about. Are you in favor – I'm in favor of sidewalks on Venetia. I'm in favor of traffic calming.

Ms. Keller: Yes, I'm grateful that the project – yes.

Mayor Lago: If I just may. I thought that you were also in favor of that.

Ms. Keller: I absolutely am in favor of it. My concern is that without a proper community engagement process that a rumor-mill will be initiated, because it already has.

Mayor Lago: May I answer – but let me answer you. And Commissioner Anderson, please step in whenever you'd like.

Commissioner Anderson: I will.

Mayor Lago: So, my understanding was that its public record, we were having a meeting. I brought up, along with my colleagues your neighborhood three or four times, just like I've brought up other neighborhoods in regard to sidewalks and certain things that Public Works is working on. Our Public Works Director said that there were some issues, some concerns in regard to the width of the street and whether a sidewalk could fit, because of the trees that were currently in place there. We got into a robust discussion about that. I asked the director, will you do me a favor and will you meet me on site so that we can go over, and he's here, we can go over how to fit this sidewalk onto the street. He said, not a problem, Vince, we'll do it on Friday. Commissioner Anderson, I don't want to put words in your mouth, she said, I'd like to join the meeting. So, we leaned over to the City Clerk, how can we have two Commissioners talking about an item that may become before the Commission? – I said, we'll have a Sunshine meeting. So, this was not a public – we had about 20, would you say about 20 residents that showed up.

Commissioner Anderson: At least.

Mayor Lago: We welcome them. We welcome all the residents showing up, but what came out, and I'm going to be talking about it as number 5 on Mayor's Comments, because we have to give direction to the Director of Public Works through the Manager, and I have it here ready to go, and hopefully my colleagues will support me on that, on a proper way to address Venetia and its going to take, what did the Public Works Director say in time, how long?

Commissioner Anderson: We are talking about a total of about two years. This is the beginning of the process.

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Mayor Lago: The implementation – from the moment that we get the directive today, to the moment that we, I think we’ve already done a survey, and we move to planning. Actually, taking it to the county. I’ve told I would help out in the county, and then we are going to budget for next year, but my understanding is that we are trying to deliver on sidewalks for the residents who really want it in the neighborhood. So, I don’t know what rumor mills starting. You have my support. I think you have the support of the Commission in regard to Venetia, I think its critically important; and the sole point is that when we do bring this meeting up again and we do start in the planning process, there will probably be one, if not two community meetings where anybody can attend. But this was not meant to be a community meeting. The problem is that, like usual, the rumor mill starts with certain blogs, and they just start going crazy; and they start saying things that are not true. On the public record, in the last meeting where I have to meet with the director and then Commissioner Anderson said, I’d like to join you. I said, okay, then how can we do it, and what did the Clerk say? Mr. Clerk, I don’t want to put words in your mouth. What did you say?

City Clerk Urquia: We could have a Sunshine meeting.

Mayor Lago: It was not intended for the community, but we had a community meeting where everybody spoke freely and they had a conversation, and that’s what the meeting was all about.

Ms. Keller: I’m very well aware of process, I’m very well of what the outcomes were, but I also...

Mayor Lago: That’s why it was held in five days, was it five days?

Commissioner Anderson: We announced the date here during the Commission meeting.

City Clerk Urquia: Correct, but then it had to be rescheduled from that original date, and then that’s why it came in at the last minute.

Mayor Lago: But it was not a community gathering information moment. It was for two Commissioners to meet with the Public Works Director to say, we need to find a way to make this happen. We need to find a way to build sidewalks and also try to save these trees, and some good information came out of it, because everybody was of the same consensus that we could make it potentially a one-way street if the county allows us to do that.

Commissioner Anderson: Right.

Mayor Lago: It was a good meeting. It was a good meeting. We talked about a lot of things. People made their concerns about speeding, garbage pits, the actual essence of all the garbage and everything that’s located on Venetia Avenue. So, I thought it was a very productive meeting. It was in reference to collecting information from the residents, that will happen, as we move forward in the process, and I will be addressing it. If you wait a few moments, I’ll be talking about Venetia, and you can be here when we hopefully get the support, we need to give the direction to the director to move forward.

Commissioner Anderson: I have not received one negative comment from a resident.  
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Ms. Keller: Excellent. That's really good news for me. Like I've mentioned to you, we do have a street that had a lot of questions and concerns about funding and if it would be converted to a one-way, how difficult it would be able to get to the street, and that's why my concern lies, is that there was a whole street full of people that didn't make it, you're all talking about it.

Commissioner Anderson: It's the beginning of the process, and you know that I've gone through this long, long before I ever ran for office, getting the neighborhood in my area on board for improving Segovia Street and making it a much safer street. This is just the very beginning. I mean getting out there and doing a site visit, sometimes answers more questions than us just sitting up here talking about it, because you could see the traffic problems. I have a photo that I'm going to post later on in the meeting about traffic problems we have on Valencia, because everybody doesn't feel comfortable with three lanes there, on Bird we have two lanes, we've looked at Ponce we have two lanes. We have three lanes on Valencia and parking, so no one wants to get close to the cars, but while we were there on Valencia, I mean, Venetia, we could see what was happening with the traffic. We could see what was happening with the pedestrians, and the realistic problem that's there. The traffic studies will determine which way it needs to flow, assuming everybody agrees that we can make this a one-way street. Its too narrow, way too narrow.

Mayor Lago: So, with that being said, there will be multiple opportunities to speak, to engage with the community, to engage with your residents that live in your community, and you live in your block, and I look forward to it.

Ms. Keller: And my public records request will be filled at some point.

Mayor Lago: Your public records request along with every public records request is always filled, and I find it very interesting, because I've never had anybody call me about anybody who's a felon. If somebody's a felon, then we need to speak with our City Attorney and find out what is the proper procedure in regard to that. This is the first time I hear of it.

Ms. Keller: Okay. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Any further public comments?

Mayor Lago: No sir.

Mayor Lago: Alright.