

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
January 10, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jim Cason

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Assistant City Attorney, Naomi Levi-Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-2 [12:12 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Attorney and City Manager to reinstate the annexation process for High Pines/Ponce Davis. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto G-2.

City Attorney Ramos: Yes Mayor. G-2 is a Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Attorney and City Manager to reinstate the annexation process for High Pines/Ponce Davis. Ms. Levi-Garcia will present the item.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Garcia, good to see you again.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Likewise, Mayor. So, this resolution simply directs the City Manager and the City Attorney to reinstate the annexation process for High Pines and Ponce Davis. If you would like to adopt a similar resolution to the one you adopted for Little Gables, it

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would direct us, city staff, to engage in certain due diligence and to bring back our findings to the City Commission for further direction.

Mayor Lago: Listen, this is pretty self-explanatory. I put this on the agenda. We've all been getting a lot of phone calls from residents who are saying they are being left behind, people who want to be engaged in Ponce Dave and High Pines. And at the end of the day, we live in the greatest country in the world. We shouldn't be afraid of a vote, that's what I believe in.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, I think what you just said there at the end is important. The idea here is basically what we already did for Little Gables, which is to just do the initial due diligence.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: That's a question that I'm posing, right. So, this resolution is just reinstate the process, no additional detail.

Vice Mayor Mena: Sure.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: The resolution that was adopted for Little Gables was a little more step-by-step. It directed staff to engage in certain due diligence, high consultants, appropriated a budget.

Vice Mayor Mena: Have we done that?

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: All the consultants are on board. They are performing their due diligence now, and as soon as we have something to share with you, to garner additional direction, we will do so.

Vice Mayor Mena: You're the sponsors, is that what you have in mind, to basically track the...

Mayor Lago: I just want to have this residence dovetail what we already set forth and what we approved and to move forward in the same direction.

Commissioner Menendez: Did we designate somebody on the dais to...

Vice Mayor Mena: The Mayor.

Commissioner Menendez: The Mayor – so can we do that again?

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: So, I can amend this resolution, so it basically does the same exact thing as the Little Gables resolution, which is take these steps, the Mayor is the designated individual, come back to the City Commission with your findings, and at that point get additional direction.

Commissioner Anderson: I'll be in favor of that.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: And then the other question would also be, timing-wise. Is the idea for these things to kind of travel in tandem.

Commissioner Menendez: I like uniformity.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Okay.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes. I think it should travel tandem. People deserve a vote.

Vice Mayor Mena: If you're okay with that, then...

Commissioner Menendez: The only thing I want to add and just a comment. I think both avenues are important and we should pursue, see where we end up, but at the end of the day, once we know where we're headed, I think we need to make sure that when the time comes that we have enough resources with regards to safety, fire, police, so that if we do bring any of those areas on board, we can provide the same quality service we provide now, and at the same time, to make sure those areas that get our best continue to get our best. I'm not going into specifics just in general, I think it's a balancing act, but like my colleagues, I'm ready to support this and move forward.

Vice Mayor Mena: I have no doubt we can do that. We went through the whole process last time on our side of things and we talked a lot about that. I'm sure things have changed, so you'll update us on that. My thing continues to be setting aside what the Mayor thinks, my colleagues, any of us think about annexation or not, what I don't want is what I felt happen last time on the county side of things which is, they weren't really on board. And so, I think the goal here, when we talked about this last time, and again with this, since we're going to mirror it is, and we talked about the Mayor being the perfect person to do it, because he has really good relationships with people at the county and we have a lot of new Commissioners now at the county. So, with the help of really good consultants that are experts in this area is, get the information and come back and tell us, hey look, we feel good about the possibility that they are going to be supportive this time or not, so that we can make a decision.

Mayor Lago: We have to be honest with ourselves, and I agree with you wholeheartedly, but there's a lot of special interest here, has their own agenda. And we have to be very candid about that, and you know, there's going to be a lot of stones that are going to be thrown, because people have their own interests. But the interesting thing about it, I know that everybody on the Commission has, how many times you've run into somebody and say hey, congratulations on getting a great piece of property on Sunset and now building a world-class facility, like the Manager has spearheaded with his team, that we're about to embark on. I'd like to go to that Fire Station which is within 30 feet from my front door of my house. Sorry, you can't. What do you mean I can't. No, you've got to depend on the county. But we'd love to get you involved. Next time come out and engage. I have probably about 30 names of very prominent people that live in High Pines and Ponce Davis who will tell me and say listen, I'm going to be engaged this time. And I'm going to make sure that I do everything in my power to bring those people to the table. Just like I did everything in my power to make sure that we elected the right people in the county,

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to make sure that the representation that we have here before us is people who care about the residents, who care about the interests, not about their own special interest, and that's what's key, and we want to make sure that's what prevails here, because at the end of the day, we work on behalf of the City of Coral Gables. We don't work on behalf of our own interests.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think on that point, because I agree, I think where things sort of – if there was a failure last time, right, its that the people that got involved, in terms of residents I'm talking about now, who are supportive, they were supportive at the city level, advocating to us, but really not at the county level at all, and ultimately, the county is the one that made the decision, right. So, I think what's important is as we engage, if this proceeds, depending on what gets reported back and whatever happens, that people get the message that hey, you need to advocate over there as well and let your representatives know what you think over there, because we did this once, we were supportive, and it still didn't happen.

Mayor Lago: I think also, we're putting together a team of the best and the brightest, where people who have been in this position before who will work with our great team here at the city, and understand the pitfalls, and understand how to address issues at the county; and the Commission is very different by the way. The Commission is a very different Commission and I think that this is incredibly beneficial. I think we're doing things in the right way, not that we didn't do them before, but we also have to be honest with the process, honest with the process which is marred sometimes with special interest and we have to consider every situation and every angle before we step into a room, and I hate to say this, we can't really trust the process. We have to really, really, really do our due diligence, really do our due diligence and be on our toes to understand that we have to go through the process and make sure we dot every I and cross every T, and never take anything for granted, never.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to add that historically the city, even when George Merrick was around was a city that was growing. The Mayor, as some of you may recall, came across the map, 1924, which he donated to the museum, and the interesting thing in that map 1924, and then you move one year later, 1925, there are sections of Coral Gables that weren't on that map. That was George Merrick's map. The Craft Section didn't exist in 1924. It popped up in the map in 1925. So, there was a constant growth, smart growth that has always been part of our DNA. So, I think moving forward, we consistently move forward in a smart way, and I think it benefits, at the end of the day, our residents.

Commissioner Cason: And the people, the communities that we've annexed over the years have been communities that have wanted to be part of the Gables because of what Gables represents, and I think this one is going to be very important that the residents understand what's in it for them, but our residents and the residents there, hopefully they have somebody there that we can negotiate with. I don't know if they have somebody that represents them.

Mayor Lago: I've been working already on both sides, but with High Pines and Ponce Davis and also with Little Gables, but you know the interesting thing is they also say the same thing. We took

things for granted, we took things for granted, now they are a lot more organized, and they understand the benefits and they understand what...

Vice Mayor Mena: Commissioner Cason, you weren't in office at the time that that happened, so I'm not sure how.

Commissioner Cason: We started this eleven years ago.

Vice Mayor Mena: I know.

Commissioner Cason: For annexation with Pat Salerno.

Vice Mayor Mena: Of course.

Commissioner Cason: Went to the county.

Vice Mayor Mena: But what I was going to say to you is, to the extent you don't already know this, when we did it last, we put out a survey/petition, I don't know what we called it, and the residents in these neighborhoods voted and it was...

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: It was over 20 percent.

Vice Mayor Mena: It was over what?

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: So, you needed 20 percent in order to initiate the process of the county, both areas voted over 20 percent.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right. Okay.

Mayor Lago: So, we're in good shape.

Commissioner Cason: Hopefully this time it will work.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Can I get a motion.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: I have a suggestion just for your consideration. If the idea is to have this resolution mirror your previous resolution, you can just amend the previous one to add High Pines and Ponce Davis and that was Resolution 2022-196.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay. I'll move to amend it to include High Pines-Ponce Davis.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Okay.

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Commissioner Cason: I'll second it.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do we have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: No sir.

Mayor Lago: Done. You're sure.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: No public comment. Mr. Clerk, we don't have any public comment, none.

City Clerk Urquia: We do not have public comment, sir.

Mayor Lago: I just couldn't hear you, I'm sorry. I want to make sure we have public comment.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Cason: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Naomi. Thank you for your hard work.