

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-4
July 1, 2025
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez (Absent)

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Fire Chief, Marcos de la Rosa

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-4 [3:46 p.m.]

Discussion regarding the CFAI deferred reaccreditation for the Coral Gables Fire Department.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: F-4.

Commissioner Castro: F-4 is mine. I was waiting for you, Chief de la Rosa. This discussion is about the CFAI deferred reaccreditation for the Coral Gables Fire Department. There was a news article and then I started getting, I don't know, how many calls regarding this, and I think it's good to clear the air and to put the facts on the table. Thank you, Chief.

Chief de la Rosa: Thank you. So, if you'll bear with me, the sole mission of the Coral Gables Fire Department is the safety and security of our residents. And that mission is accomplished and the public trust that this community places on us is relied on by the men and women of the Coral Gables Fire Department. Their dedication, their professionalism, their effectiveness is the cornerstone of what we refer to as the Coral Gables brand. That brand that is emblematic with the

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service that we provide. So, it is unfortunate that the very process that we use to push ourselves to be the best, to self-analyze ourselves in our effectiveness is misrepresented with a political rhetoric of unsubstantiated allegations that have been presented time and time again in various venues that call into question the effectiveness of our firefighters of our department and that of our position in this community. So, to be clear, the Coral Gables Fire Department remains an accredited agency. In this reaccreditation process, we were afforded an administrative deferral which gave us more time to meet some of the documentation requirements that were asked of us, specifically, an internal department strategic plan and an enhanced community risk assessment. As stated by the CFAI Accreditation Manager that I forwarded to all of you, and the lead evaluator, this administrative deferral refers to documentation and that we were a high-performing organization. To address some of the allegations that were made in the post that frankly were made to create political, excuse me, community concern and outcry. CFAI accreditation process impacts ISO. That is not factual. ISO is an independent evaluation tool that we use to evaluate the effectiveness of our fire suppression program. We were evaluated in August of 2024 by ISO. At that time, we were awarded a score of 101.5 out of 105 possible points. Incidentally, a department needs 90 or better to be a Class 1. The CFAI process, another allegation that was made is that the CFAI process could possibly impact insurance rates of our businesses and our residents. That is not factual. Only ISO classification has that impact and we are a Class 1, which is the highest or best classification that you can achieve through ISO. That the CFAI process could impact our ability to obtain grants. That is not factual. An ISO or CFAI accreditation does not preclude a department from applying or being awarded any grants. That the issue was due to staffing shortages. We have 155 budgeted sworn positions. Currently, our department has 153, that includes the six that are in our eight-week academy, and they graduate at the end of July. One of our current vacancies is a result of one individual that was hired and could not meet the requirements of the academy. So that was the seventh position that was hired. One vacancy occurred this past week from a firefighter that has resigned and is moving on. To be clear, between the end of July and October, we will have three vacancies as a result of retirement. We are already in the process with the Human Resources Department to open for applications and continue the hiring process to fill those vacancies and any other subsequent vacancy as a result. Allegations were made that the current reaccreditation process was a result of lack of internal planning or succession plans. So, I'd like to highlight some of the accomplishments of my command staff and our firefighters in the last five years. First and foremost, the department led in the response and recovery of Covid, including testing, vaccination, elderly support, providing direction for the reopening of our businesses, and internal policies. We have processed and hired a total of 66 firefighters. We have equipped, trained and implemented a technical response team that already has had two significant victim rescues in complex incidents. Staff have coordinated the building of two Fire Stations; Fire Station 2 and Fire Station 1, which includes our EOC and our headquarters. We have provided a risk analysis and justification and have led to the approval and the current building of Fire House 4. That Fire House results also in

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15 new firefighters and an additional fifth rescue added to the response. This is the greatest service enhancement since 1993. We were the first in the nation in 2020 to beta test a then remote accreditation process to meet Covid restrictions of the time. We developed a risk, community risk reduction division that consolidated all fire prevention and fire plans review and new construction processes into one division. That has streamlined our construction inspection and plans review process where no plan sits for more than five days, with the average being two to three days of being processed. These are just some of the handful of accomplishments that have a direct impact on our community that were accomplished by our firefighters and my command staff in the last five years. Throughout my tenure as Fire Chief, I've remained committed to work with past and present Managers, Mayor and Commissioners, to achieve our sole mission of protecting our residents and our visitors. Concurrently with that, I have worked with everyone involved to make sure that my firefighters are the best trained, equipped, and supported. They are the cornerstone of our effectiveness of what we call the Coral Gables brand. So, it is unfortunate that in our process of self-improvement that gets mischaracterized and placed on posts as what we saw this week. Professionally and personally, I tell you that our firefighters, our brand and our community deserve better than that.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you, Chief, and I think this is why it's so important that you came up here and spoke the truth, put the facts out there.

Chief de la Rosa: Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: I appreciate each and every one in your department.

Chief de la Rosa: Appreciate that.

Mayor Lago: So Chief, quick question. Where was this article, where was this post?

Chief de la Rosa: This was posted in the Gables Gazette.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, I want people to remember, this is what you call politics. Politics at its finest. This is David Perez, the head of the union, the same guy who goes out there and goes scorched earth on people, on their family. He went home by home spreading rumors about me, handing out ridiculous flyers with the help of many other people in this community, some that are here sitting in this room, and they failed miserably. They lost by almost 20 percent. Remember, we have amazing firefighters in this community. They are not represented by David Perez. David Perez did a disservice to the city. He's not a professional. He's a service to the fire union; he's a service to the fire brand and all he does is hurt himself and hurt this community. He thinks that by attacking and attacking and attacking he's going to achieve some sort of goal for the Fire Department, all he does is embarrass the Fire Department and himself. So, at the end of the day, what you see before you, Chief, is a Commission that supports the fire men and women. While we

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may not always agree, maybe union contracts may be issues, but at the end of the day, there has to be respect. And a person like David Perez who is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve a goal, hiding in the shadows, in my opinion it is what it is. He's shown time and time again that he is nothing but a mere pathetic individual who is desperate for attention and who'll never be taken seriously. So, I want to commend you on your leadership. I want to commend these two gentlemen here, who work day and night to uphold the brand, that is the City of Coral Gables Fire Department. I want to say thank you to the men and women that I run into when I was getting ice cream this weekend on their break after having four calls in the middle of the night, and we spent a good 15 minutes having a conversation. We can be professional in disagreement. You don't have to destroy people. You don't have to even potentially destroy your own department, think about that. You're out there mischaracterizing and hurting your own brand, which we spend so much time and effort building up. So, don't take this personally. I know you don't. I know you are very serious about your job. You've been doing this for almost what, 35 years, 40 years, spent your entire life, professional life being a firefighter, helping people, saving people, along with these gentlemen who are here. I hate to say it, but after twelve years of public service, this is the cost of doing business, but we have to know who's behind all this and that's why I call it out the way I call it out, and we can't be afraid to do that, because this individual does not represent the fire union, does not represent the City of Coral Gables. I want to thank the firefighters, the men and women of your department for always shining and always being true leaders and putting the politics aside and never, never mixing it with their day-to-day job. Thank you.

Chief de la Rosa: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. Maybe I missed this part or maybe I just read it – I barely even understood what they were talking about in the article, but is David Perez quoted in there or was he the one. How is there a relationship to that.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, if you're going to try to hide and you are going to play the games that its not David Perez, then you are being as you've always been disingenuous with this community. This is David Perez through and through. It's been David Perez in every election. He fails over and over and over again to sow rhetoric and all these lies. This is David in his own efforts to try to push forward a narrative at all costs. So, if you want to sit here and say, I don't know if it's David Perez, you want to stick up for your friend, that's perfectly fine. I don't have any allegiance to David Perez. The allegiance that I have is to the men and women of the Fire Department and to the employees of the city. Even in disagreement I respect them. So, I'm not going to pull punches here whether it was David Perez or not, when everybody knows that the union should wise up and get rid of David Perez and move on and be smart and conduct themselves like professionals, instead of going out there and doing things in the shadows and destroying

people's reputations and spread false lies and all the kinds of things that they do. That's up to you; that's your decision if you want to do that. I won't play that game.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. I mean I find it very hard to believe that it's him, because he loves this department as much as you do. Now again, I can attest for him. I have no idea anything that the Mayor is talking about, but I will find it heartbreaking to even think that he has something to do with this.

Mayor Lago: I'll address the issue. Okay. Mr. Perez, show up at the next Commission meeting and show me that it wasn't you. Okay. And we'll address it there.

Commissioner Lara: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Commissioner Lara: Commissioner, I agree with you. Do you agree with me that if David Perez was associated in any way with any of these disparaging remarks that it's reprehensible. You agree?

Commissioner Castro: Of course.

Commissioner Lara: Do you agree that if he promulgates that pushes out falsehoods regarding our bravest, it is dishonorable.

Commissioner Castro: I agree.

Commissioner Lara: And if that's the case, should resign from the force, right, and not ever be associated with the fire men and fire women of Coral Gables in any way, you agree with me, right.

Commissioner Castro: That wouldn't be up to me. That's a very hard decision to make. I don't even know what the legal boundaries are behind that.

Commissioner Lara: It would be really easy for me to say that, yes, he should resign. If it's tough for you, that's your opinion, right, but I want to now direct it now to the Chief. You've worked a lifetime on your professional and your personal reputation and I commend you for steadfast adherence to the highest standard, as it reflects on you personally, professionally and the men and women that you lead in the greatest Fire Department that I have ever seen. You cannot undo decades of your commitment to excellence with one false story or someone's attempt to divert through misinformation. I know you know that. I'm speaking to the residents as well. So we wouldn't want anyone to give another moment's thought to that story or to any of those false allegations, because all we'll be doing is just adding energy and sort of, as they say, giving some importance to something that deserves none of our attention and we just keep carrying on and

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doing the very best that you do and that we do every single day. So, I thank you for all that you do and thank you for coming today and amplifying and reiterating the excellence of the team.

Chief de la Rosa: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, one final comment on this. Chief, you've seen this time and time again is the fear-mongering tactics to try to create a problem that doesn't exist, to try to move an agenda that cause certain people to get elected that will listen to you or encourage them, give them the idea that they are going to be supported in their next election. I was approached as well, to take certain positions, you know, and we'll support you in your election. I'm not about to do that. I know you're not about to do stuff like that either. You are going to stand by your values, and I commend you for doing so.

Chief de la Rosa: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Chief. I appreciate you being here. Thank you, gentlemen.