

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-7
January 28, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

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

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Senior Sustainability Analyst, Matt Anderson

Public Speaker(s)

Emily Gonzalez
Maria Magdalena Estupinán
Deborah Swain
Roberta Neway
Robert Ruano

Agenda Item G-7 [9:50 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Coral Gables, Florida, declaring a Climate Emergency, and urging the State of Florida and the United States Government to provide for resilient and sustainable communities and proper stewardship of the environment.

(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

(Sponsored by Mayor Valdes-Fauli)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: All right. The next item is time certain 9:45, G-7, a resolution of the City Commission declaring a climate emergency and urging the State of Florida and the United States Government to provide for resilient and sustainable communities and proper stewardship of the environment. That's Vice Mayor Lago and my item.

Vice Mayor Lago: Good morning. So, before you started, I wanted to welcome this young lady, who has made it her mantra or, you know, she's made it her calling over the last few months to come and visit the City of Coral Gables during my off -- during my open office hours, which are usually on Fridays. Well, they are always on Fridays, but it's every other Friday, and she's been coming and she's been very active, and she's also been involved in the City of Coral Gables. So, this is an individual that has taken an interest not only in the City of Coral Gables, but also the whole future of our community, especially the sensitive community environment that we live in. So, I just wanted -- before she started, I wanted to commend her because she deserves, you know, not only our recognition but our support because she is the future of this community and she's doing an exceptional job. So, thank you for being here.

(APPLAUSE)

Emily Gonzalez: So, thank you for introducing the resolution of declared climate emergency. My name is Emily Gonzalez. I'm a student at Coral Gables Senior High School. And I'm representing Friday's for Future and a bunch of other climate activists that are here that are wanting to make Coral Gables a more ecofriendly city. So, I'm very thankful for all of you being very ecofriendly, such as having very nice recycling and that you eliminated plastics and that you have ecofriendly cars and things like that. But I'm sorry to say that this is not the only way to solve the climate emergency that is happening now in Miami. We thank all of you for your leadership and everything that you've done, but this is something that will not help our future generation and kid -- like your kids, grandkids and everyone's grandkids here. So, it calls for a different measure that sets -- it calls for a different set of measures. The only way to save the City of Coral Gables is by

having the chance of staying below 1.5 degrees, which is, which science says it is necessary in order to avoid the worst effects of the climate -- of the global warming. Our carbon budget would be exhausted by -- at a current emission rate in seven years and 11 months. The best and only way to where the Coral Gables City Hall crisis that we striked in front of Coral Gables City Hall for five -- for four months, and we were there for the four months and there was nothing until finally today, in January. We -- it is the time for the City of Coral Gables to the science and declare climate emergency, to save our city by reducing and eliminating carbon emissions to have a livable planet. There are currently 1,250 local governments and 25 counties that have already declared climate emergency such as Miami Beach, the City of Miami, and Surfside. You guys could follow their footsteps and could be an amazing influence and actually save Miami from the climate sea level rise. The youth and the constituents of Miami ask you, our elected leaders and the people in the power, to act for the future generation, such as your kids and grandkids. As Peter Carter experts review for an intergovernmental panel on climate change said last month, we are on this absolutely critical crux of emissions, an atmospheric greenhouse gas concentration whereby every year matters. All three major greenhouse gases; carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide are the levels not seen in the millions of years and on accelerating trend. This means that we are on the trend of biosphere collapse. To have the reasonable chance of staying below 1.5 degrees, like I stated before, we have to take action. This is something that we cannot just continue recycling. This is not just have -- I know, Ms. Keon, that you stated that there are issues such as recycling and the batteries and the boxes, that it's something very difficult and I understand because it's very hard recycling. But we still have to act on this. We only have eight years left for our future generation to have a great and safe future for all of us. And...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Ms. Gonzalez: Yes, thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much for a great presentation.

(APPLAUSE)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Now I have cards here. People who do not wish to speak -- and I will recognize them -- Andrea England, Kenneth Garcia, and John Swain do not wish to speak. But I have other people who wish to speak, so thank you very much. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I will call Maria Magdalena Estupinán. This is not a controversial issue, so Ms. Estupinán, if you can limit your comments to two minutes, we would very much appreciate it. It's a long meeting, as you can see.

Maria Magdalena Estupinán: Morning.

Vice Mayor Lago: Morning.

Ms. Estupinán: I apologize for not being here the last month, so I am sure that you have missed me greatly. Today, I would like...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Two minutes. Sir, Mr. City Clerk, will you keep the time? Go ahead.

Ms. Estupinán: Okay. I totally oppose to the emergency of climate change. I believe that we should have a debate on climate change at some point. There was a town hall and Ms. Shalala was there and she said yes, she would be willing to do that. That would be wonderful. I'm not saying that there's not change in the climate. There has been going on for ages and it has nothing to do with CO2. So, what we -- let me quote Mr. John Kerry when he said, it doesn't matter whether we bike to the work. It doesn't matter if we don't have any cars, we don't have any airplanes. We will only be able to lower it to 0.1. So, in other words, what he's saying is we're going to destroy capitalism because this is not ecology people. It has nothing to do with

ecosystems. This is a political tool for control. And that is what I'm opposing. And I have liberal friends. I'm very conservative, but I have liberal friends. So, I think it's a moral responsibility of each one of us to just look it up, do research, because they say it's the science. Well, it's not the science. Science is not based on the consensus. And then they quote so many scientists that are saying it is true. Well, I could tell you that there are thousands of scientists that are saying it's not true. So, I would love to have Coral Gables do a debate and I'm proposing that, and I'm telling all my friends that are liberals, go to Democrats Against Agenda 21 and start getting to know what is going on.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much, ma'am.

Ms. Estupinán: And I thank you, sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please, hey, come on. No clapping, come on. We're not going to have clapping and booing and -- we're not going to do that. Deborah Spain, please -- Deborah Swain, I'm sorry. Deborah Swain.

Deborah Swain: Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Mayor and Commissioners. My name is Deborah Swain. I live at 4015 University Drive, which is on the Gables waterway. The Gables waterway where I live is not in a flood zone. However, my yard has flooded numerous times and a more increasing rate in the nearly 20 years that I've lived there. I'm an environmentalist. I've been an environmental educator with an organization for a little over 30 years and we've been talking about climate change with more and more urgency over those years. I urge you to pass this item, but I want to also remind you the EPA is identified and, you know, thank you all for all that you're doing for climate change and sustainability. But EPA has indicated that transportation

is the leading cost or one of the top two with electrical production of greenhouse gas emissions, which is causing climate change and that passenger vehicles generate half of that greenhouse gas emission of the transportation combined. So, I ask that you take action also on alternative transportation measures, those that don't use fossil fuel, those that don't require electric generation and unless they're solar panels, like Commissioner Lago, and certainly, by supporting bicycles and walking as alternatives to transportation issues. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, ma'am.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Roberta Neway. Good morning, ma'am.

Roberta Neway: Good morning. I'm Roberta Neway. I live at 1236 South Alhambra Circle. I urge you to pass this resolution. Australia, California, Venice, The Bahamas, Miami Beach, Matheson Hammock, all of these are evidence of our worsening climate. We all need to do what we can on a city level and on a personal level, and we need to encourage people to bike, walk, use less plastic, eat less meat, et cetera, et cetera, as often as we can. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, ma'am. Robert Ruano.

Robert Ruano: Robert Ruano, 1544 Mercia Avenue. Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor...

Vice Mayor Lago: Morning.

Mr. Ruano: And Commissioners. I agree with some folks over here. I agree with Debbie and Roberta that this is an important issue. Climate emergency is very important, but I urge you to deny this. Pass it down. Pass it down the road. You're not ready. Read your own -- read the own -- the resolution that's put before you today sponsored by Mayor Valdes-Fauli and Vice Mayor

Lago. It says, "Whereas the City of Coral Gables is also focused on reducing emissions from the transportation sector, which is the largest contributor, the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Coral Gables and across the country by implementing alternative transportation strategies, such as the free trolley service, Freebee, electric scooters, bike infrastructure, sidewalks, and crosswalks." Now I am an environmentalist like Debbie. I've been working on it for a long time and a lot of -- in a lot of different ways. But if the City is going to pass things just to pass it, just to get people here and say the City's done these great things and then when issues come up, when they asked you to kind of walk the walk and you don't or...

Commissioner Mena: When your issue comes up.

Mr. Ruano: Or you're -- or you have to question yourselves, whether one side is more important than the other and you're declaring a climate emergency, an urgency. I mean, wait 'til you're ready. I don't think this Commission is ready and I urge you to pass it down the road.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you sir.

Mr. Ruano: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Any comments from the City Commission?

Vice Mayor Lago: I would like to -- I have a few comments, but I'd like to hear from...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, but let's...

Vice Mayor Lago: Matt Anderson, if possible.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Go ahead.

Vice Mayor Lago: I mean, I think Matt -- Matt is our sustainability person here at the City. So, I'd like to hear...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We have a very long agenda.

Vice Mayor Lago: What your opinion is in regards to this because the last thing I want to do is pass anything that's aspirational in the sense where, what are we doing this for? What is the point? These young individuals keep coming every single Friday. They keep coming sitting before City Hall. They keep coming to my office hours. Again, we want to support these individuals so they get involved because they're the future of this community. But I want to do something that, again, makes sense. And I think a little bit of offense to Mr. Ruano's comments and I have to be honest with you because you know this Commission has taken significant strides and those strides are, in my opinion, more impactful than any other city in Miami-Dade County. And I would -- on the verge of saying more impactful than any other city in the state of Florida. And this Commission as a whole, not only do we talk, but we also walk the walk because before Commissioner Fors was here, Vice Mayor Quesada had solar panels on his house. I have solar panels on my house. I drive a hundred percent electric car. You know, this Commission, as a whole, has advocated on behalf of environmental stewardship. We -- this is a marathon. This is not a sprint. We're trying to catch up after years and years and years of inaction. So, I want to be very careful, you know, that we say we're not ready. What constitutes being ready? So, we can separate different agendas that may be happening today, the bicycles and the sidewalks along with what we're discussing today. So, I want your opinion and I want your honest opinion, like you always give it, in reference to what you believe in reference to this climate emergency, which we're hearing about today.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Go ahead, please.

Senior Sustainability Analyst Anderson: I mean, I believe, you know, looking at what we've done as a city, we have been on a leadership role when it comes to resiliency. I mean, our responsibility I think as a government is to make sure that our city is resilient, whether it be against climate

change or whether it be preparing for the next hurricane. I think our city has really been at the forefront of that in taking a leadership role. Again, Commissioner Lago, I agree with you not only at a local level but at a state level. We've been the first in a lot of things, whether it be something as simple as limiting plastic to setting aside and creating a sea level rise mitigation fund.

Vice Mayor Lago: To having the largest 100 percent fully electric fleet.

Senior Sustainability Analyst Anderson: We've been leading the effort on that as well.

Vice Mayor Lago: Of any municipality in the state of Florida, this small, 51,000 resident enclave, so that's something to be very proud of.

Senior Sustainability Analyst Anderson: Yeah, so we've been at the forefront. Now, again, as some of the speakers have alluded to, we do have our challenges as well. Transportation is our biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, not only locally but nationally as well. So, our challenges are really no different than a lot of other places are dealing with and trying to -- how we focus on transportation and it's something we do need to focus on to have a really big impact. And that is, you know, some of the stuff we already have implemented and had been the first at a lot, like the free trolley service and Freebee and those sorts of things. And also, focusing on alternative transportation is a key focus. And I think, you know, what we can do in passing this resolution is continue that leadership role not only in Miami-Dade County, but across the state and really in the country on putting the environment at the forefront of our issues. And you know, I agree with the Commission in looking at this issue.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you very much. All right. Do I hear a motion here?

Commissioner Mena: I'm not -- Matt, I apologize if you could come --

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Mena: I'm not entirely sure that you answered the Vice Mayor's question as far as...

Senior Sustainability Analyst Anderson: Okay.

Commissioner Mena: I think you've covered a lot of important topics, but I just want to be honest about this. It is aspirational. It is...

Senior Sustainability Analyst Anderson: No, no. It is...

Commissioner Mena: That is what it is. It's not -- as far as I can tell, and I apologize if I missed something in it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It is aspirational.

Vice Mayor Lago: There are no targets.

Commissioner Mena: There's no -- correct.

Vice Mayor Lago: There are no quotas, targets.

Senior Sustainability Analyst Anderson: I will add, we do have targets within our sustainability management plan...

Commissioner Mena: Right.

Senior Sustainability Analyst Anderson: That we've set, goals that we created in 2015 and goals by 2025 to reduce our fossil fuel use, our greenhouse gas emissions, energy use, water use by 20

percent. And as part of this declaration is as we're moving toward those goals, we want to reevaluate those goals and continue setting aggressive, meaningful goals. Because, you know, I don't -- I know this Commission, you know, when we set -- when we pass resolutions and so on and so forth, we want to take action on that. It isn't just to pass to pass things. And I think, you know, we've been kind of walking that walk as a city and want to continue that leadership role.

Commissioner Mena: Okay. And...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It is aspirational. But you know, you do start with aspirations in order to get anywhere.

Commissioner Mena: That's okay. And I'm not, I don't mean that in a critical manner. I'm just being clear about what this is and what it isn't. I also want to echo the Vice Mayor's comments about the comments by Mr. Ruano. Robert, respectfully, I interpret your comments as if you don't bat a thousand, then you're not ready to even take a stab at things. We do a lot of things. We do -- if you let me finish, yeah. We do a lot of things and we do the best we can. We're also democratically elected officials in the city, and we have to be a reflection in some respects of our constituents and the people who live in the city. And we do our best to do that. It's not an easy task. There are a lot of issues where, you know, we'll call them 50-50 issues, if you will, that you have to make tough calls, and that's our job. And I'll echo Maria Cruz's comments earlier. People aren't satisfied with the job we do, they should absolutely vote us out of office. That's how democracy works and I'm okay with that. I signed up for that. So, I just want to be careful that just because you may not feel like you're getting your way on your issue, that you act in a fashion that makes it seem like nobody's doing anything about the broader issue because I think that's unfair. Well, I think that's what you conveyed. Whether you meant to say that or not, I think that's what came across to your audience to whom you were speaking. So, you know, I don't know what else to tell you about that. And when you say we're not ready, I don't know what that means. It feels like you're frustrated with another issue, as we all know, and you are taking that out on -- no, I'm not. I don't mean that to be funny. I really don't.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Commissioner Mena: And you're taking that out on this issue, which again is just a very aspirational topic. We have a sustainability program where we do a lot of good things. We don't bat a thousand. We don't, but we do the best we can. And we do what our constituents in our community will allow us to do and will give us a mandate to do, but not necessarily what they want. So, I think that's an important thing to get on the table here in response to your comments. With the Mayor's permission, I'm more than happy to let you respond.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Ruano, come on, please. You were very obvious in what you said.

Mr. Ruano: Mr. Mayor, first of all, I have a lot of respect for you. I have a lot of respect for the people on this dais. It's not out of frustration. It's out of reading the resolution and the resolution clearly says that we, the City Commission, are doing certain things that greenhouse gas emissions to the transportation are the most important that we need to do these things. And then it encourages other governments to follow our lead and do these things. All I'm saying is you can't tell other people to mow their own yard or cut their grass if you won't do it yourself. And if -- and all I was getting to is that we need to be comfortable -- and I think all of you should be comfortable when an issue comes up that directly affects the climate, like transportation. You're not...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Or like trees, trees that were going to be cut down, right?

Mr. Ruano: Like others -- knowing how many people show up, but to know that intrinsically you value the climate and you believe this is important and you will vote for it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And what do you think of cutting down trees, Mr. Ruano?

Mr. Ruano: Sir, what trees?

(APPLAUSE)

Mr. Ruano: No, no, no.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, I'm not going to get into an argument.

Mr. Ruano: Please, no, no. But you brought it up. What trees? Because your own staff has said that only three trees that are dying.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Twenty-two trees would have to be cut.

Mr. Ruano: No, sir. Sir, why don't you let your...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. That's for later on.

Mr. Ruano: Staff present.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Come on. Come on, Commissioner Mena.

Mr. Ruano: Why don't you let your staff present, Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Sit down, please, or we'll have you removed. Sit down.

Commissioner Keon: Mayor, I will move the item.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah, move the item, please.

Commissioner Keon: I will move the item. I think that...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Come on.

Commissioner Keon: It supports our belief that there is climate change and that we will do the things that we can...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Do you move it?

Commissioner Keon: At this local level to address those issues.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright.

Commissioner Keon: So I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Lago: I'll second it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Is there a second?

Vice Mayor Lago: Second.

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

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Vice Mayor Lago: Mayor, may I one -- just one last comment to Matt?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very brief.

Vice Mayor Lago: It's very -- Matt, will you come up, please? You mentioned something before and I take this opportunity being in the sunshine with my colleagues that I'd like for them to get a little more involved. Not that they're not, they were incredibly involved already, but I want to bring this to the forefront. We have goals set for 2025, in regards to our sustainability master plan. You and I have sat down a litany of times to discuss this and I know that we may be -- I don't want to say falling short, but we may need a little bit of a boost. And I think this is today, a boost, a statement basically saying that we are getting behind our sustainability master plan. I want for us to not only meet but I'd like to see a memo in the near future, probably in the next two weeks, if you could put it together, for the -- send it to the Commission and we can potentially address it at our next Commission meeting to see what we need to do to help you and your department, which is doing an incredible job across the board in reference to sustainability, but what do we need to do to make sure that 2025 comes around and that not only do we meet it but we surpass it. So just tell me what you need to do, okay? Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Do my colleagues support that or --?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We're going to take...

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, Matt. I appreciate it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me tell you how -- the next item is the resolution directing the City Manager and City staff to cease further consideration of bicycle lanes on Alhambra Circle. We are going to recognize two speakers from each side, pro and con, give them five minutes. They

can speak both at the beginning or one at the beginning, one at the end, or whatever. I will recognize everybody else that wishes to speak that has filled out a card. You have to fill the card or else you're not going to be recognized. And I will give them two minutes. So, it's five minutes each for beginning and end or two beginning. And then other speakers, two minutes. And please fill out a card. We're going to take a five-minute break for you to fill out cards and let's get -- and choose who you want to represent you in the first two five minutes and then we will continue. Thank you.