

**City of Coral Gables
Special City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item A
May 6, 2025
City Hall Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro (Absent)

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Alberto Parjus

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Jackson Rip Holmes

Maria Cruz

Claudia Miro

Agenda Item A [9:06 a.m.]

Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, you have a statement that you'd like to place on the public record.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Castro...[Inaudible – off mic]...Despite the seriousness of my condition, I've made a formal request to postpone this meeting by just a few days, enough time to recover and attend in person. That request was denied by the Mayor, even though this meeting was not part of our originally scheduled calendar and there is no real urgency that justified moving forward without full Commission participation. My first responsibility is to safeguard my health so I can continue serving this community effectively, but it is equally important that the residents who elected me have a voice at the table. By proceeding today, this body is depriving Coral Gables of a complete discussion and a balanced deliberation our constituents deserve. Every decision I make is guided by what is in the city's best interest. Preventing an elected Commissioner from

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attending does the opposite. Mayor Lago, I hope this statement serves as a reminder that transparency, respect and inclusion are not optional. They are the foundation of good governance. I remain committed to returning as soon as I'm medically able and to ensuring that the people of Coral Gables are represented with integrity and vigor in every decision that affects their lives. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. I'd like to send our best wishes to the Commissioner, but also remind her, the same situation happened in August of 2024, when I requested to move a meeting that was not on our schedule, which was an additional budget hearing that was required. I was out of town. I made a request. This Commission did not grant me the ability to be here. The first time I had missed a meeting in 12 years. Moving forward. Thank you very much. God speed. I wish her health, and we look forward to having her back.

Commissioner Fernandez: [Inaudible]

Mayor Lago: If I may. If I may. If I may. Let me just continue with the meeting and then we'll address the issue.

Commissioner Fernandez: Point of order. Has to be addressed first, correct Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suarez: Yes Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, the August meeting – the reason that there was no time to move it is, we had a deadline that we had to set a ceiling for the mileage rate. The change request came in at the last minute and there was a meeting that you had asked to put on the calendar. It wasn't a meeting that anybody else on the Commission asked for. You had asked to schedule that meeting. Members of staff had been asked to change their schedules, cancel their family trips in order to be present for that meeting and that was the reason that at that point there weren't additional dates available to change that meeting date. That being said, I would make a motion to recess this meeting until Commissioner Castro is available so that the voice of every resident can be heard on all these important topics that, I agree with you, should be addressed. I would just ask for a recess until Commissioner Castro is not under a knife in an operating room and is available to be here in person, voicing the residents' concerns.

Mayor Lago: Do we have a second. The motion dies. Now, I'd like to respond. We had multiple days and opportunities where that meeting could have been changed, that I requested. Again, the change was not granted to ensure that I would not be at the meeting, because that would force me to relinquish the gavel and not be at the meeting, even though I did attend the meeting via Zoom, it was a difficult situation. Moving on. For the record, welcome. I'd like to thank everyone for being here and welcome Commissioner Lara for being at his first Commission meeting. I'm going to ask everyone before we commence in regard to public comment, to come up and state their

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name and address for the record. You have three minutes to share your thoughts with the Commission and this community. As a reminder, these comments are limited to those items on the agenda or within the scope of the city's Commission's jurisdiction. If you wish to speak on an item that is on the agenda right now, please remember that you will not be given an additional opportunity to speak again once the item is called. All comments should be directed to the Commission as-a-whole, that's the key. All comments should be directed to the Commission as-a-whole, not to an individual Commissioner or staff member. When the three minutes are up, the timer will beep. I will ask you to please wrap up your sentence and leave the podium when you are done speaking. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Let's commence with public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker is Jackson Rip Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, good morning.

Mr. Holmes: Good morning. Can you load the slides please.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Holmes, I received an email from you with something to share, that's what I have from you. Is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Holmes: Correct. Yes. The pictures and the email, yes.

City Clerk Urquia: If Cable TV could put up my screen. Just confirming that's what you are referring to.

Mr. Holmes: Yes, it is. Yes. So, firstly.

City Clerk Urquia: State your name and address sir. Can you please state your name and address for the record.

Mr. Holmes: Jackson Rip Holmes, 35 Sedonia Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida. I join Commissioner Fernandez in objecting to the timing of this meeting. These votes are critical. I took the opportunity to say to new Commissioner Lara today that he will be the swing vote. Guess what, because you would not let Commissioner Castro attend, he can't be a swing vote, because you are not letting her cast a vote. Alright, moving on. You gave me three minutes. We have a recession coming, unless we all try to stop it.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, if I may.

Mr. Holmes: And this is within the purview of the Commission because the Commission can pass resolutions supporting and resisting a recession. True or false. True or false. The Commission can
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pass resolutions and can direct the City Attorney or other staff to explore joining cause with other cities that are resisting, let's say, the Trump tariffs. True or false.

Mayor Lago: Please engage in conversation with the Commission as-a-whole, not one person on the Commission and make sure that it's on items that we are facing today on the agenda, not outside of the scope, please.

Mr. Holmes: Its within the scope, its within the jurisdiction, to use your own words about public comments, the City Commission has jurisdiction to pass resolutions to try to resist a Trump recession, Trump tariff recession. Now, the proof that we're facing a recession or even a depression is if you can kind of scroll down as we go. So, we've got the Canada tariffs, its absolute baloney. Canada – Donald Trump has driven Canada into the arms of our enemy China. Canada has done a trade deal for oil to China, that completely counter-productive. The idea that tariffs can be used to coerce Canada to become the 51st state is absolute lunacy. Moving down. We're also – President Trump is tariffing our friends and we're alienating people as if we're embargoing – these are our allies – keep going please. This is a very important point I want to make here. This is eroding, its as if Donald Trump is trying to destroy the United States economy with the various measures he's taking. Bricks is the alternative to the dollar in the monetary system. He is catapulting that into...he's driving people to support the alternative currency of Bricks and that is going to hit the bond market. People are going to stop investing in our economy. We cannot print our way out of a recession the way we did in 2008, because we no longer have people propping up our position at the top to be able to print money and get away with it. Keep going please. Donald Trump is hurting the developers. It's unbelievable. It's his own profession. He wants to privatize Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac which he knows, because he's a developer. You don't do developments without loans and he's saying, we're tanking the loans. If we privatize Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, no one will be able to rely on their mortgage because the US Treasury won't stand behind it. This could throw us alone into a depression.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, please finish your sentence.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: You have ten seconds.

Mr. Holmes: The city has an interest in this. The city depends on a lot of grants that are given. I think you would affirm that the people that have been here, and these grants are now all in doubt because of this. The city needs to protect us from a recession.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Next speaker please.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

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Mrs. Cruz: By the way, what was stated before about Commissioner Melissa being out is not the same as going on vacation as to having surgery. There's a big difference. Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road since 1976. This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for using this same psalm during your swearing in. Today's not a good day for the City of Coral Gables. That day the Mayor spoke about not only words but actions. We heard a Priest and a Rabi, even the electeds speak about respect, collegiality, civility, extending your hands and working for the common good. And here we are to discuss the Mayor's actions, his continued bullying, harassing, humiliating and disrespecting of women. Yes, his actions speak louder than his words. In our city, we have many women in all levels of government, from the top to the bottom and many have witnessed your reprehensive behavior but are afraid to speak up. All of you, young and old, know that what he is doing is wrong but choose mostly out of fear for your jobs to let it be and accepted as the way it is. When you do that, you allow it to continue. Please don't.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

Mrs. Cruz: Think of your mothers, sisters, daughters, even yourselves, know that you are not alone, that all of us together can and will put an end to this. Enough is enough. Let's make it happen. Let today be the first day in our quest to bring back respect, civility, collegiality and goodwill to all, especially to those who are seen as weak and vulnerable, our women. And I'm going to close with the quote, forgive me if I misspell his last name, Martin Nemouller. This was a German that spoke during the Holocaust, and this is what he said, "First they came for the socialist and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionist, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me". Ladies that work for the City of Coral Gables, think about it, you could be next.

Mayor Lago: Before we move onto the next item, the next speaker, remember there are rules of procedure. Address the Commission as-a-whole, do not address one individual on the Commission. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Claudia Miro.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Miro: Good morning, Mayor Lago, Commissioners and fellow residents. For the record, my name is Claudia Miro. I've had the honor of running for office in this city twice and while I did not win, I had the privilege of knocking on thousands of doors and firsthand speaking to thousands of neighbors across Coral Gables. What I heard time and time again was outrage. Outrage over the raises that this body voted to give itself, over the erosion of transparency and trust in our local government. Let me be clear, just because you can do something with a three-fifths majority, does not mean you should. That is still true today. Power used without principle is an abuse and that is

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exactly how many in our community view the decision to increase Commission salaries, not through public input or careful deliberation, but through a rushed and self-serving vote. That action and others like it, including the lack of process in hiring and firing a City Manager and the increasing disregard for Robert's Rules of Order even today have damaged public confidence. Any action that erodes public trust is by definition bad governance. The voters made their voices heard. Mayor Lago was reelected with nearly 56 percent of the vote. Vice Mayor Anderson with nearly 59 percent of the vote. And then Commissioner Lara with nearly 56 percent of the vote. As a woman, I'm proud that you received the most amount of votes, Vice Mayor. These numbers are not close. They are a clear mandate, a message from the people demanding accountability, civility and a return to order. And let me tell you what else I heard from residents. They are tired; tired of in-fighting; tired of leaders playing the victim; tired of cheap shots and political theater. People don't want drama. They want dignified leadership. They want results. And that's why I stand here today hopeful; hopeful that under Mayor Lago's leadership, this Commission will course-correct, hopeful that new voices will learn quickly from past mistakes, whether made from inexperience or misplaced ambition, and that we can focus on restoring integrity to this Chamber. Just last night, I received an email from the Coral Gables Neighborhood Association, CGNA, entitled, "Let the games begin". Let me be clear, returning salaries to prior levels is not a game. It is not a punishment. It is a necessary step to correct a decision made in disregard of the public will. Registering salaries to \$1 is a just measure, because Commissioners have already consumed in just two years the full salary or close to it amount that they would have expected over a four-year term. That is a salary they signed up for when they chose to run, and anything more violates the trust of the electorate.

Mayor Lago: If I may, finish your sentence please.

Ms. Miro: Yes. Thank you. Labeling a game is exactly the kind of divisiveness our city does not need and the voters are watching, they've already spoken once and they will do it again, and anyone who speaks who chooses discourse, division and divert from the will of the people will be held accountable at the polls. And lastly, as budget season approaches, I look forward to seeing what this Commission and hopefully a new responsible majority will do to bring Coral Gables back on track. Please, let's move forward with civility, integrity and inclusion. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.