

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comment
April 16, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

**Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

City Staff

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

Public Speaker(s)

**Roberta Neway
Leonel Ortiz
Mara Rodriguez Mena
Alexander Jimenez
Maria Cruz
Jay Spieler
Ian Sheldon
Mayra Joli**

Agenda Item C [10:22 a.m.]
Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker today, Mr. Mayor, is Roberta Neway.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Neway, good morning. Thank you for being here with us. Thank you.

Ms. Neway: Roberta Neway, 1236 South Alhambra Circle, 33146. It's a pleasure to be here. I know you have a long day ahead of you, you'll be talking about the Allen Morris project later

tonight. I think it's a lovely project and I think everyone, future residents, the current residents, future workers, current workers, everyone who travels through our city deserves safety. We're a great city to live in, but we would be much better if we had the freedom to walk, bicycle, and drive safely. Right now, we don't. This lack of freedom discourages people from walking and biking when they want to, so it furthers traffic congestion, which is one of the main complaints that residents have. It also can make driving a huge vehicle – people feel like they have to drive huge vehicles, this is more wear and tear on our streets, more wear and tear on our parking garages. It's worse for the environment. We can make safety on our streets and our roads a reality. So, I'm asking you to please be proactive and make a commitment to valuing everyone's life and adopt Vision Zero with a target date of 2030, and furthermore, most importantly, have the wherewithal to work with residents, the county, the State of Florida, and the federal government to make it a reality. Thank you for your time and have a great day.

Mayor Lago: Thank you so much.

City Clerk Urquia: Leonel Ortiz.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir, how are you. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Ortiz: Good morning. Thank you very much. My name is Leonel Ortiz and I'm a resident of Coral Gables since 1998. But today, you're going to be asked to approve a measure that Maite has been backing about the eight pickleball courts that we need right now, but beyond that, I wanted to get to a more personal level. I grew up in Chicago and I was a Cuban refugee, moved up to Chicago. Later on, I grew up in Hialeah; and in Hialeah they have a very good extensive park system which is not just parks, it's part of recreation, and recreation is different than having a park. Coral Gables has beautiful parks, but one of the things that you don't see at a lot of these parks is a lot of recreation going on. The Youth Center is a great place for a lot of this recreation that takes place. If you gentlemen go there or ladies go there at night, you'll see that there's a lot of kids. I grew up in the park system. I went to the park system in Hialeah, not only that, but when I got out of high school, I worked for the City of Hialeah Recreation Department while I was going to Miami-Dade North. So, you're not just voting on eight pickleball courts, you're also voting on recreation and also employment for some of the people here in Coral Gables. But in addition to that, I want to share with you one of the superintendents of recreation for the City of Hialeah for almost 40 years, his name was Ed Hall, and Mr. Hall was a great proponent of spending a lot of money in parks and convincing Mayor Mylander and also Mayor Martinez for many, many years, to invest money in parks, because it reduces the crime rate. It gives a place for the kids to go, and not only that, but meet other people and stay off the streets and stay out of crime. So, it's not just eight pickleball courts that you're voting on today and approving, it's more than that. It's creating recreation for the people of Coral Gables. So, I urge you to give a positive approval to the proposal in front of you today. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Mara Rodriguez Mena.

Mayor Lago: Good morning. Thank you for being here.

Ms. Mena: Good morning, Commissioners, Mayor. My name is Mara Rodriguez Mena and I'm a 30-year resident of Coral Gables. Not only do I live in Coral Gables, I also work in Coral Gables, dine, shop in Coral Gables, however, I am unable to get play time to play pickleball in Coral Gables. Bloomberg just named the City of Coral Gables the ritziest home market in the US, topping Beverly Hills, if you can believe that, and there's approximately 50,000 residents in Coral Gables. However, we are unable to provide adequate areas of the fastest growing sport in the country for its residents. We have two pickleball courts in Salvadore Park, which is a pay and play, good luck if you get to play, because by the time that you wake up early in the morning to get a court, it's not available. We have one pickleball court in the Adult Center for residents over 50, and we have four courts in the Youth Center, part-time only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and if you're so lucky enough to be able to go after 5 o'clock, you will see anywhere from 30 to 50 residents waiting their turn to play pickleball. This effort has been going on for a long time. I'll ask you, please, stop kicking the can and let's get this resolved. Listen to your residents. We pay taxes here and we vote here. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Alexander Jimenez.

Mayor Lago: Good morning. Thank you for being here with us.

Mr. Jimenez: Good morning. Obviously, I'm not Alexander Jimenez, but he did have to leave and asked me to read his statement. My name is Alexander Jimenez, and I was born and raised in Miami, a long-time resident of Coral Gables. I'm advocating on behalf of pickleball, joined by a few others in the community all throughout the second and third row. We are requesting the addition of eight dedicated pickleball courts to the City of Coral Gables. I believe pickleball is extremely beneficial to the community for so many reasons, but one that I love is that it's so approachable, offering people of all ages and backgrounds an opportunity to stay active. For those who want to be more physically active and healthy, but haven't found a workout plan they enjoy, pickleball probably fills that void. You don't need to be an athlete, just show up and a group of friendly people will teach you how to play. All skill levels are welcome. I've made more friends in the last few months playing pickleball than I have in years, despite being fairly sociable. Friends from all ages that I most likely would not have ever fostered a connection with, without our Coral Gables Youth Center courts, which are only open on Tuesday and Thursday. The sport has experienced tremendous growth and popularity over the past year. Adding more pickleball courts to our community infrastructure can help alleviate the strain on existing facilities and reduce wait times for players, is an investment in the well-being and enjoyment of our residents offering them more opportunities to stay active and engaged in recreational activities. So, we are urging the city to add eight dedicated pickleball courts. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: If I may, I love the enthusiasm, but if we could refrain from clapping after every single one of the items, I'd just appreciate that. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, good morning, sir.

Mr. Holmes: So, for me this is really a happy day. I think that the people have finally reclaimed City Hall and I credit, there are so many people to credit, but the most important two people to me are Kirk Menendez and our new City Manager Amos Rojas. The people are back. So, I have a limited time and I want to then shift subjects to something that is not that commonly spoken of. Are you able to do the slides. So, the first one will be – do you know that there are now 100 cities that have called formerly for a cease fire in Gaza, 100 cities. The one I think that impressed me most – so you've got Chicago, you've got San Francisco, Detroit, Atlanta, if Atlanta, Georgia can do it, we could do it, right, St. Louis, I mean what's more Americana and if we can go to slide number two. I think we're on the brink of World War III. Two days ago, Russia warned at the United Nations, they had an emergency meeting over the thing developing between Israel and Iran, Russia said at the emergency meeting two days ago that if the United States bombs Iran, Russia will enter. That's World War III. Then at the same meeting the United States threatened to bomb Iran, so how much closer could we be. We're on the brink and that's why a cease fire – why don't we become the 101st city too – we say to ourselves, who are we, we can do nothing, but we can do what we can do, right. Thanks for listening.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, my friend. Have a nice day.

City Clerk Urquia: Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. This is not such a good day in Coral Gables. A few days ago, I got home and found an urgent letter in my mailbox. As most elderly people would have done, I tore the envelope. I couldn't wait to see what was happening, what was so urgent. Could it be that there was a pedophile living near me, you know I have granddaughters. Could it be that there were gas leaks; could it be that there were animals with rabies, and then I found the letter. Mayor, what a poorly written letter. One sentence does not make a paragraph, any teacher would tell you that. Minimum three to five sentences. So, as a teacher, I tell you, this would not have been a passing grade. You actually have six sentences' paragraphs. Next time, please get somebody to help you. As to your funding and supporting the first reporters, the first responders, I guess you did not get their letter. I guess you did not read it, if you got it, because both unions very clearly told you to stop lying to the residents, because we're trying to figure out when you supported the police and when you supported the first responders. Have you apologized to them? Do you plan to every do it? You also mentioned out-of-town developers. You have been fighting out of town developers. Do we have different kinds of developers in this city? Do we have local developers and out of town developers? Are developers from Miami, Hialeah, Miami Beach considered out of town? Are they treated differently? Do they pay more or less than the local ones? I'm very confused. You know I'm old, I get confused. Can somebody explain the difference. Since you fought out of town developers, Mayor, I'd like to remind you that you voted for the Paseo de la Riviera, that was a company from Baltimore, okay, you voted for it. Maybe because you were doing the built outs through your company BDI, that could have been the reason. I am very concerned about the fact that almost every time I see you cutting ribbons and talking in public, you make sure to remember and remind people that you, you and

your company do the work. I remember when you told me that you wouldn't do any work in the City of Coral Gables. Boy, that has changed. It definitely has changed. I just wonder again, the locals get expedited permits, do they get better deals. Is there a condition that they hire your company to do that? Well, all I have to say, Mayor, is now that you made national news, you know what, maybe you are going to run for President.

City Clerk Urquia: Jay Spieler

Mayor Lago: Have a wonderful day. Thank you.

Commissioner Fernandez: Before that, I do think that I was planning on bringing this up later, but since it's already been brought up. I personally took offense to the letter that you sent out, which is another violation of the city's civility code, which was your civility code. The civility code that you brought forward four years ago, and you presented it to the Commission to ensure that there was respect in this community and that residents were not lied to. And yet, over the last two weeks, you sent out a letter attacking and disparaging the members of this Commission. Is Ms. Garcia here, our Planning Director, because I do have a question. The letter specifically states that Commissioner Castro, Menendez and myself are working to upzone Miracle Mile. I have yet to find a single project proposed on Miracle Mile that's proposing to change the zoning code. But if Ms. Garcia is here and she can tell us, maybe there's something that has been proposed over the last few days, but that was a letter signed with your name and you're saying that we are working to upzone Miracle Mile, yet as far as I know, not a single project has been proposed in Miracle Mile. And this weekend, a text message went out stating that the three Commissioners are behind a recall effort that took place in the city over the last month. So now, you are making assertions, baseless assertions about your colleagues. Once again, a violation of the civility code. You've been censured for this before. I don't understand. What can we do as a Commission to help you stop yourself, because obviously you no longer have control over your actions. You're signing a letter attacking your colleagues with false information. The police and fire union had to come out and correct the record on your support, alleged support, for police and fire. In the history of this city, there has never been a letter written by both unions replying to an elected official over the disparaging, quote/unquote, facts that were put out there attacking colleagues. If you want to wait while you're busy on your phone.

Mayor Lago: I'm just waiting for you to finish.

Commissioner Fernandez: Ms. Garcia is here.

Mayor Lago: How are you. Good morning.

Commissioner Fernandez: Are there any projects proposed right now considering upzoning Miracle Mile.

Zoning Official Garcia: Nothing that I know of - no.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay. Alright.

Mayor Lago: You tell me when you're done and I'll respond, out of respect.

Commissioner Fernandez: I've asked you a lot of questions, so go ahead.

Mayor Lago: First off, I'm not on trial here today, that's the first thing, that's number one, and as always, the effort here is very clear and that is to bring politics onto the dais so that tomorrow the blogs that you control, which are paid to smear me, will write insane articles with innuendo and lies. Case in point which we will address later, the P-Card issue that you brought up and the Herald wrote an article, but the Herald would not write an article stating later that nothing was found to be inappropriate, that's one thing. Everything here is on a daily basis, throw as much mud against the wall against me in an effort to bring me down, that's number one. Number two, you are, all three of you, assisting in the effort to tear me down, to spread rumors about me, to spread lies about me. It's clear. There is an out-of-town developer that is working, not for the first time, but for the second time, you remember four years ago when I ran, and they ran all that racism campaign against me, and they still lost. It is the same person that wants an upzoning on Miracle Mile and I stopped that person. They wanted to upzone Miracle Mile from three floors to nine floors and I stopped, and they are back, and by the way, the Herald who is in the back room will mention to you, they wrote an article about a PAC, at least I put my name on text messages and letters and that letter is factually correct. That letter talks about the raises that you gave yourselves, you voted against a tax reduction, you fired a competent manager, and you hired a manager without due process or transparency. Those are facts. You can't get away from that. Those are the facts. You may not like them, but those are the facts. Let's go back to the Herald article. The Herald article is very simple. I provided them with a statement in regard to issues that they did not publish the full statement. I had to put it on social media so that my statement could get out there. That's the facts. Okay. In regard to the P-Cards, the same situation that will be addressed later. Nothing was found on the P-Cards. I'll be asking for a full forensic audit of the city, and I'll be asking for an Inspector General to be brought in and they can start with my office, that's critical, because here it's the continued innuendo and lies. This was never an issue until all of a sudden, a year ago. We didn't have problems for ten years. The bottom line is that you want to shine the light away from yourself and bring it onto me. It's gotten to the point where I'm not going to allow this position as Mayor and the Commission to be tarnished by the continued attacks and attacks and attacks, unfounded attacks. What I put down was clear and if you look at the PAC discussion, the Herald article that was written, the people that are funding this didn't even have the common decency to put their name on it. They lied to the residents by going from one PAC to a PAC, to a PAC, to a PAC and saying intimidation, we're afraid to be intimidated. There hasn't been one person that's gone to the police and our Police Chief is here, that can clearly say that they've written a report, because they're intimidated by me in one form or another. But you have Maria Cruz that stands up here, who sits on the board, the Code Enforcement Board and who goes and attacks one of my friends sitting on that board, and basically does everything in their power to get them fined over some orchids that that individual installed on a tree on the city swale when he was just trying to beautify the neighborhood. So, we can go back and forth all day and we can do this, but at the end of the day, I don't want to tarnish the reputation of the city. I'm not going to allow you to attack me or attack, more importantly the position as Mayor and I say that we move on, because we have a lot of items on the agenda, from my understanding it's close to 16 pages, excuse me, 15 pages, correct, and I'd like to see that we get through every single day because we have a 6 o'clock time certain to address an important

project that for four years I've worked diligently with staff, the developer, and my colleagues on the Commission then and now to make sure that we bring it to a position which is accepted by the residents. So, let's move on, let's address the issues and let's not bring politics onto this dais.

Commissioner Fernandez: This has nothing to do with politics.

Mayor Lago: We're moving on.

Commissioner Fernandez: For staff, you can move on as much as you want.

Mayor Lago: Move on. I'm asking you out of respect....

Commissioner Fernandez: You said a lot of false information.

Speaker in the audience: You all should be ashamed of yourselves...[inaudible]...honestly and that's why nothing gets done. To see this here going on, it doesn't look good.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. So, I'm asking you to move on, as the resident is asking. Let's not make a mockery of the process please.

Commissioner Castro: If we're going to address somebody from the public or a resident that is currently here, we're going to talk about them, you have to give them the opportunity to at least talk to defend themselves.

Mayor Lago: I am responding to assertions that she made towards me, it's just a response. The conversation ends, we move onto the next speaker, Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Castro: I have a question.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Castro: I have a question. Who is the out-of-town developer, because I don't know who it is.

Mayor Lago: Moving on. It's very clear. It's very clear what's happening here and who's funding the process and why they're hiding the money from one PAC to the next PAC, to the next PAC. This is under investigation by the FDLE. This is under investigation...

Commissioner Fernandez: At your request.

Mayor Lago: I did not request it. As a matter of fact, the Manager was the one that briefed me and it's in an email to the Manager, as the Manager can attest to it. The Manager briefed me on the issue, and I asked the Manager, am I under investigation, he said no, and I said, perfect. Can you write me an email, he said no. So, what I did, I took the liberty to write the email myself to the Manager so I can memorialize the situation. I need to protect my integrity and what I've done in this community for eleven years and I'm not going to allow anybody to tear me down. For

example, very interesting, my colleagues are not involved in this process, when they are handing out pamphlet's door-to-door, who is the quote that they use. They use Commissioner Menendez' quote that this is a "cesspool of corruption." Well, the cesspool of corruption ends today. You want to know why, because the P-Cards were found to not have any issues here and next we move onto a full forensic audit that I've called for as an item I have here on the Commission. I don't care what it cost. We're going to clear up that because it had demoralized and disrespected the employees who have contacted me over and over and over to say how demoralizing and disrespected, they feel by comments that were made by this Commission in regard to, this is a "cesspool of corruption."

Commissioner Fernandez: But I think that's a false statement because...

Mayor Lago: You made assertions, I responded. This will not take the meeting over. I'm not going to allow it. We're moving on.

Commissioner Fernandez: I will make a motion to continue the discussion.

Commissioner Castro: I'll second it.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Simply because there's some unanswered questions and I think the community is entitled to hear what's been said so that they can make an assessment of the situation, so yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Because the community has asked us to stop, and this is not on the agenda as a separate item. If you want to hold a separate meeting on a separate day where the folks that want to listen to this, going back and forth can be here, my vote is no on this. We should stop making the circus, Commissioner Fernandez and deal with this in a diplomatic way. I could go on and respond to false allegations that were placed in that same letter about me, but my vote is to do the job that we're supposed to be here for and stop this circus. No.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Mayor Lago: I vote no.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I think there are a lot of questions and...

City Attorney Suarez: We are in the middle of Public Comment, Commissioner, so perhaps we can decide to continue discussion following Public Comment because we do have an order of business and our code does address it. So that's my only concern.

Commissioner Fernandez: That's where I was going to go. I think that the Vice Mayor's suggestion, I think we should schedule a special meeting in order to thoroughly discuss this. When will my colleagues be available for a special meeting to have this conversation, because I think there's a lot out there that has been put out by you and your team disparaging your

colleagues and I agree with the Vice Mayor. There's been disparaging comments about her as well. You are trying to link her to you.

Mayor Lago: I think you missed the point. She's talking about the fire...

Vice Mayor Anderson: I was talking about the firefighter's letter.

Commissioner Fernandez: And that's why I think it merits a thorough discussion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We can circulate dates.

Mayor Lago: That letter is unequivocally false on so many points, in regard to the voting record that was on that letter, and it talks about things that don't make any sense. It's just the continued pile and effort by the three of you to continue in an effort to try to destroy my reputation and spread falsehoods about me not supporting police. I have voted for Police on numerous occasions. I have supported Fire on countless occasions in regard to infrastructure, in regard to man count, in regard to additional bodies, in regard to four brand new fire stations. They even mentioned in the letter the most insane thing I've ever heard that I did not take a picture, I did not take a picture the day of the fire cutting, of the fire ribbon-cutting for the new facility for the simple reason that, I brought up Naomi and the Vice Mayor, who did you bring up?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Another staff member.

Mayor Lago: We brought another staff member in an effort to show gratitude for their effort, for their effort over the last three years, four years, five years, six years, to make sure that station could be delivered. In my case, Naomi had helped out in Tallahassee get over \$1.5 million dollars to that fire station. That letter says that I intentionally did not want to take a photo. It's getting tiresome. The people in this community see it. It's constant and everybody knows that you're at the head of it and that these two poor individuals to my left and to my right are just following your lead. So, what I'm telling you is, let's let it go. If you want to have a meeting to tarnish me in public and continue to hit me, schedule another time, but let's get away from doing this on the dais, because you are disrupting, like the residents have said, the process of doing business up here and the many things. We have a 12 o'clock meeting today to talk about a pending police union negotiation that we have. Those are things that we should be addressing. Those are things that are critically important because at the last meeting that I was not able to be at, putting it on the record, I was in the hospital, that's why I didn't vote on the last one, that I would have supported the union, what we proffered to the union. I was in the hospital in Doctors Hospital. So, let's move on, let's address the business at hand, get to 12 o'clock and then we have another meeting at 6 o'clock. If you want to have a meeting in the public to say whatever you want to say, I don't have a problem, but let's not do it during Commission meeting.

Commissioner Fernandez: So again, I go back to what I was trying to say. I would like to schedule a meeting so that we can have this conversation, because it's very easy to say that everybody is disparaging you, but the only PAC that's actively sending out text messages and letters on a regular basis attacking people up here is yours.

Mayor Lago: It's not attacking. It's the truth.

Commissioner Fernandez: It is not.

Mayor Lago: The text messages...

Commissioner Fernandez: You're interrupting me. You had the Zoning Director come up here...

Mayor Lago: I'm speaking the truth.

Commissioner Fernandez: Did you not just come up here and say there's no project coming up for upzoning of Miracle Mile.

Mayor Lago: I will correct you.

Commissioner Fernandez: Did you not?

Mayor Lago: Let me correct you.

Commissioner Fernandez: Let the record reflect that she has said yes.

Mayor Lago: Let me correct me because you mislead again. The key is very simple. It's the same individuals who are on Miracle Mile, who four years ago made an effort to derail me with a multi-hundred-thousand-dollar campaign, are the same gentlemen that are back again, because they have an agenda. They want to upzone Miracle Mile from three stories to nine stories and you're aiding and abetting on that front, because you are willing to accept the aid in an effort to tear me down so that you can build a narrative, it's called narrative building and that's what you're doing here, you are narrative building and you continue to attack and attack and attack. So, why is it that you scream intimidation, but when you look at the issues at hand, no resident on your side has come forth and proffered not one police report. If I call up the Police Chief here, you look at over five residents, five residents that supported Richard Lara at an event, their faces were tared and feathered and put on a moving vehicle van down the downtown. They felt intimidated and what they did was they put together a police record which is a public record. Why is that? Why is it that you continue to spin this narrative over and over and over again, but the other side doesn't get the same play, because what you do is, you use the Herald, you use your pay for play blogs and all you do is pound and pound and pound and pound false narratives that again, once a story is out there, when a story is corrected like the P-Cards, which is a perfect example, it's never corrected in the public eye. You've done the damage. You said that there was malfeasance and the great part about it is that you talk about the police and the firefighters, you guys have been here for a year.

Mr. Lowell: Mr. Mayor, Mr. Mayor, I'm here for a 10:30 appointment.

Mayor Lago: I agree.

Mr. Lowell: I'd like to get to my agenda item.

Mayor Lago: And I appreciate you, my friend.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, when can we schedule this for?

Mayor Lago: We will discuss it after.

Commissioner Fernandez: When can we schedule this for?

Vice Mayor Anderson: We will circulate dates like we normally circulate dates, and I will look at my calendar for both my law firm and this and we will select a date in normal course. Let's move forward.

Commissioner Castro: I will ask Gabby as soon as I have available.

Mayor Lago: Moving on. Sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Jay Spieler.

Commissioner Castro: Excuse me.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me, one second. First off, I'd like to apologize to everyone here. This is distasteful, it's not correct. This is not the way that we do business here in the City of Coral Gables. We should have more restraint and we should be addressing city business issues. We should continue to address city business issues and not allow personal vendettas and as you know, this was all brought up by Commissioner Ariel Fernandez, all of it.

Commissioner Fernandez: It was brought up by you...

Commissioner Castro: I have to say that you haven't let me speak.

Mayor Lago: In an effort to continue to attack...Sir, the floor is yours.

Mr. Spieler: So, Mr. Mayor...

City Clerk Urquia: This is a different agenda item. This is not public comments. He is speaking on a different agenda item that is time certain.

Mayor Lago: Do you want to speak on the agenda item during the agenda item or do you want to speak now.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, he is the board member presenting the agenda item.

Mayor Lago: I apologize. Can you do me a favor. Can you let us finish with the public comments and then we'll come back.

Speaker: May take a long time.

Mayor Lago: I know, my friend, I apologize, but we have protocol that we have to address. Ms. Cruz, could you please sit down please. I'm asking you to please...

Ms. Cruz: You talked about me...

Mayor Lago: I'm asking you to please allow me to run the meeting.

Ms. Cruz: I need somebody to move the...

Commissioner Castro: I move, yes.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, I need your help here, if you're not going to help me. I need to put some order here in the room, please.

City Attorney Suarez: So, open public comment allows each resident to speak for three minutes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Suarez: Ms. Cruz has spoken. I know we have other speakers waiting, and so we should finish the open public comment and then the will of the Commission...

Commissioner Castro: Sorry. When the Mayor addresses somebody in public, it is only decent to let them defend themselves and say something.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to respond. I am responding to the inuendo, the constant comments that are made and she made several addressing me before and I responded. There is no need for further comment on that front.

Commissioner Castro: I think we can give her one minute. I will move to give Maria Cruz...

Mayor Lago: Let me finish with public comment, please, I ask you to please let me finish.

Commissioner Castro: No, I'm not. I will move to give Maria one minute. You addressed her, let her talk back.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suarez: There's been a motion and a second, sir.

Mayor Lago: Go ahead Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Menendez: One minute, right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Its now five minutes of eleven, okay. This can be dealt with at another time. Let's move forward with the rest of the people here, they've been waiting to do public comment and stop disrupting the order of business, so no.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes, one minute.

Mayor Lago: No.

Ms. Cruz: This is Maria Cruz, the Maria Cruz that used to sit in your living room, that used to talk with you when you were planning all the stuff that you wanted to have happen. You talked about the Code Enforcement Board, there is an open complaint from your person against me and you shouldn't be talking about something that's being investigated. You know the rules and you just broke them. Okay. I have filed the answer to why I recused. I explained why it was done and there's no discussion whatsoever when you have an open investigation. When you call my name, sir, you open it to my answer. You need to – try to remember all the times that you told us to do what now you're complaining about. Okay. Try to remember that.

Mayor Lago: May I respond, and I'll take the last ten seconds. I'm getting older, I'm forgetting things, but trust me, trust me, under no circumstances have I forgotten and you were the one that initiated the Code Enforcement complaint and you did not recuse yourself, because if you look at the video and I remind you to look at the video, you spoke for three minutes before you left the room and stated your case and basically indicted that individual for putting some orchids on a tree and make that gentleman's a nightmare, his life a nightmare for over a week or a month. Excuse me, Mr. Clerk, moving on.

City Clerk Urquia: Jay Spieler.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Spieler, good morning and as I said before, I apologize for the circus.

Mr. Spieler: What a show. My name is Jay Spieler, Mayor, Council members, lady and gentlemen. I'm a Miami native. I'm 36 years a resident of Coral Gables. I believe that words have meaning and when I see words misused it troubles me. Corruption has become a weaponized term that has led us to the brink of a spurious recall election. I say spurious because as yet no corruption has been established by any court or ethics commission. If we were to recall elected officials based on inuendo alone, the Mayor would not be the only member of this City Commission targeted. I won't use my brief time and regurgitating Internet rumors and accusations. Instead, I'll focus on two very public breaches of public trust committed by this Commission in open session. That the firing of City Manager Iglesias was abrupt, perfunctory, and without cause is crystal clear. The only justification given for it was petty and personal, but we can let that slide, except to note that one of those who voted him out had the temerity to complain of his toxicity. A curious choice of words since it so accurately describes our Commission today. And then lo, within weeks a singularly unqualified candidate was parachuted into replacing him. One of his backers had the nerve to call this gentleman lacking in any city administration experience, overqualified. My objection is the galling fact that a gang of supposed

reformers rammed it through without the semblance of good order and procedure. I've served on three charitable boards in Miami and have presided over two of them. Never would I nor my boards have dared to place a senior executive without an open search. I hope our new Manager is successful, but that won't change the fact that his hiring was steamrolled through this Commission without even a pretense of fiduciary oversight. Now let's get to the issue of last year's pay raises. Three Commissioners who ran for office knowing full well the pay levels attached to the offices they sought had epiphanies once they were in office that they were grossly underpaid. So, by a 3 to 2 vote, they more than doubled their compensation. Perhaps they were being too stingy and should have tripled their pay, but the problem is this, if they had any sense of decency and propriety, any salary increases would have gone into effect after their current terms expired. If their current pay was inadequate, they had the option of resigning and focusing on their day job and then running again for the bumped-up paycheck. May I complete my thoughts within 60 seconds. But for the supposed reformers that wasn't an option. This would be corruption if it had taken place behind closed doors, but since this money grab took place in broad daylight, it was merely greed and arrogance. I have voted religiously since I turned 18 many years ago, but my interest in local politics has waxed and waned up until now. The issues that initially fired my interest in Coral Gables City Hall are the two I've mentioned, the mishandling of the City Manager post and the self-enriching pay hikes. The final straw that has brought me here is the phony recall movement led by supposed good government reformers, reformers who cannot abide even a whiff of decent on this Commission. Bear in mind that this massively funded effort is directed and removing a Commission member with just a year left on his term. The actions of this Commission and of the recall movement will, I hope, inspire other previously oblivious Gables residents to resist actively the demise of good government in this city. We are finally paying attention. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir, for being here.

City Clerk Urquia: Maria Marin Sanchez. Mr. Mayor, I'm going to go to Zoom next. I only have one speaker on Zoom, his name is Ian Sheldon.

Mayor Lago: Sir, good morning. I apologize for the wait.

City Clerk Urquia: Give me one second, sir, it's on me.

Mr. Sheldon: Hello sir, I'm at work so my video is off. Mr. Clerk, would you mind playing the video first. I'm going to let it speak for itself.

City Clerk Urquia: Give me one second sir.

Mr. Sheldon: I'm happy to talk after it.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I'm going to be sharing a video on Zoom.

Mr. Sheldon: Thank you, Mr. Clerk, I appreciate you making this request.

[Video clip played]

Mr. Sheldon: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. I can talk plenty about what's been said before about the recall and all the political infighting. I think it's nice to focus on a small issue. I think students are not locusts. I think anyone who says that or makes that comparison should not be involved with the City of Coral Gables in any way. My thoughts about Merrick aside, the City of Coral Gables and Miami are hand-in-hand, and calling students locusts is reprehensible, in my opinion. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Sheldon, before you hang up, I apologize, I'm not familiar with this video. Can you provide a little bit of context in regard to what happened. Obviously, it's the Planning and Zoning Board, because I know some of those individuals that serve on that board. Can you give me some context in regard to what happened in that video.

Mr. Sheldon: Yes, gladly.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, just so we're aware, because this is something that probably said that I staged or that I know you. You and I have never met, have we, that I'm aware of?

Mr. Sheldon: Yes. Actually, you laughed in my face when I referred to increasing density along corridors.

Mayor Lago: When was that?

Mr. Sheldon: A meeting years ago. I don't really recall. I'm not holding that against you.

Mayor Lago: If I did, I apologize. I never intended to do that. But go ahead, I don't understand. Put some context so I can understand what's going on here.

Mr. Sheldon: This was in regard to the marked developments across the street from University Station where the...strip mall is.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Sheldon: The Zoning Committee meeting, I believe was April 10th, and in my opinion, watching the meeting, unfortunately I couldn't go in person. It really felt like the board was looking for a reason to say no. When the project met the Mediterranean Bonus, they are going above and beyond. I believe the traffic study that was done even showed that a net increase of maybe two or three cars an hour on the back roads. Regardless of all the semantics though, I think that and even ignoring this specific development, I think any comparison of students to locusts is disgusting. So, I'm more than happy to provide, you know, I don't believe the minutes are up. I'm more than happy to provide the background. I don't even know if it's relevant. I think students are not locusts.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to ask on behalf of the Commission just to get further information from the City Attorney, if we can get the minutes for the Planning and Zoning Board meeting.

Obviously, we can't get them now, but maybe we can get them in the future to get a better understanding. This is a very short clip. I want to see the whole clip to get a better understanding.

Mr. Sheldon: Of course. I understand.

Mayor Lago: Just to reserve judgement. I think it's appropriate.

Mr. Sheldon: I didn't want to play the whole ten minutes. Of course, these meetings are very long and while you're at it, there was also a reference to Chinese students and developments being both for Chinese students and I thought those were a little bit...

Mayor Lago: What were the comments in regard to Chinese students?

Mr. Sheldon: It was talking about a developer pandering to Chinese parents. I don't remember the quote off the top of my head, but again, I could have given the Clerk so many clips. I don't want to take up all your time, especially with how many other things are on the agenda today.

Mayor Lago: No, but I think its important, because as you talk about individuals on boards, I think its important to get a little bit of understanding, especially when we are going to do a presentation like this in the Commission meeting, I want to have all the context and obviously for the person that we're talking about. I think it's appropriate, because when you start cutting and splicing clips like that, I think it could potentially, you know, present a situation that doesn't explain the whole context of the story. I haven't seen it yet, so I want to get a better understanding before we even have a full conversation about that. But I appreciate you bringing it to our attention. I'm going to ask the Clerk, the City Attorney and the City Manager to take a look at it and give all the information to the Commission, because I think we need to be very careful, especially when you are bringing up these issues about somebody who serves at the will of the city on a board.

City Attorney Suarez: So, Mayor, we'll make sure...

Mr. Sheldon: I understand. I'm sorry for only bringing 20 seconds.

Mayor Lago: No, no, no. You can talk as much as you like. I just want to be careful, just want to be careful.

City Attorney Suarez: So, Mayor, we'll make sure to coordinate with staff of the Planning and Zoning Board and when the transcript is ready, we can provide it to the Commission.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Sheldon, I appreciate you being here.

City Clerk Urquia: One more speaker on Zoom is Mayra Joli.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Joli, good morning.

Ms. Joli: Good morning. Can everybody hear me well.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am, we can hear you. One thing that I'm seeing, everybody is trying to portray that everybody is so polite. There's never been politeness on this dais since even remember when Valdes-Fauli was the Mayor. So now, Valdes-Fauli has the custom of being told like being condescending and insulting to the residents, and that's what I'm seeing. I see somebody all dressed up and manage to read from a paper insulting practically Maria Cruz. I'm telling you guys, all of you are putting yourself in this little container. Then comes somebody, and rightfully so Mayor Lago, taking clips from one whole context of a video is just putting everybody in a very – depending what light that they want to portray of the person. That video – if the students of the University of Miami think that they are insects, they are the ones who should check themselves why they feel like they are locusts. That was a comparison that was done and look how this guy takes the time to come and taken the time just to try to draw through the mud this lady Sue. The whole contents of that, if she would have been talking about black students instead of Chinese students, then we have a whole different realm. She was referring exactly what was the purpose of that house, luxury houses that was told was for Chinese students and the Chinese parents who has the money to stay in those luxury places. That was what the context was about. If you want to pick and choose about calling the students locusts, the students eat a lot, but the locusts, they are good for the eco system, so what's the problem. So, we keep saying, we have to go back, we have to go back to the agenda, but you are picking and choosing what part of the agenda we have to go back to. And no, we the residents, we need to see exactly how the morale inside the dais is bringing the city down. Don't come now, everybody...saying we have to move forward, and this is disrespectful for the residents. You've been disrespectful to the residents forever. So now you are going on the dais and try to bring this very nice vocabulary. No. We want to know what is happening and we want to clean it now, now. So, you can save all your beautiful rhetoric reading from a paper. Come from the heart. Stand at the mic and come from the heart telling it exactly how you feel it. And I hope everybody has a great day today.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Wishing you the best, Ms. Joli.

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

Mayor Lago: Alright. Public Comment is closed. We will move onto the time certain of 10:30, and I apologize for being almost 30 minutes late.