

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-2
September 13, 2023
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, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Human Resources Director, Raquel Elejabarrieta

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-2 [2:25 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission with attachments, ratifying the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the City of Coral Gables and the International Association of Fire Fighters, Local 1210, for the period of October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2026.

Mayor Lago: Let's commence the second part of the meeting with Item H-2, City Manager items.

City Attorney Suárez: H-2 is a resolution of the City Commission, with attachments, ratifying the collective bargaining agreement between the City of Coral Gables and the International Association of Firefighters, Local 1210, for the period of October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2026. I think we need the director of...

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(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Lago: No, no, we're just starting. We're waiting for the director. Well, while she gets here, maybe we can go -- she's coming? Okay.

City Attorney Suárez: We're waiting for the director. There she is.

Mayor Lago: Sorry about that. Caught you off guard.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: I apologize for that, Mayor and Commissioners. Good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: I know you're in the hallway.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: So, as you know, the City, we've been negotiating with the International Association of Firefighters, Local 1210. Let me catch my breath. We've been negotiating for a successor collective bargaining agreement for the last two years, and we recently reached a tentative agreement. The tentative agreement covers the period of October 1, 2020, through September 30th of 2026. There's really one main economic impact of the collective bargaining agreement, which is found in Article VI, Wages. And so the six-year wage increases or across-the-board wage increases for our firefighters are a zero percent for fiscal year '21, 2 percent for fiscal year '22, a 2 percent for fiscal year '23, a 3.5 percent for fiscal years '24 and '25, and a 3 percent for fiscal year '26. We're also providing a one-time lump sum pensionable wage payment that's equal to \$550 per year of service for each year of service that the employee has completed up to 10 years. We also agreed to some other minor changes that don't have a significant impact for the life of this collective bargaining agreement. The resolution before you would ratify the collective bargaining agreement through 2026 with the terms that were tentatively agreed to by the parties and the bargaining unit members have already ratified the collective bargaining agreement. So, if you have any questions, I can certainly answer them.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Raquel. Does the Commission have any questions you'd like to talk about?

Commissioner Castro: No.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The -- Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The question I have is with regard to the last three years and the percentage of increase there. Was that with staff recommendation?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Yes, this would be staff recommendation. This was tentatively agreed to at the table.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, I'm talking about during the presentation. Were those the numbers that staff recommended?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: So, the first three years of the collective bargaining agreement are your fiscal years '21, '22, and '23, which is a 0-2-2, yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm talking about the last three.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: The last three years are fiscal year '24, '25, and '26. We provided a 3.5-3.5-3, and that was tentatively agreed to at the table.

Mayor Lago: That's not the question, though. Because during negotiations, staff first came with a different number...

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Yes.

Mayor Lago: And we went back and forth multiple...

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Yeah, so this was back and forth. Originally, we had received other direction. It wasn't a 3.5-3.5, but then at the table, we agreed to increase a little bit the proposal from the direction that we had originally received.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so that was not with staff recommendation. Is that not correct? That last piece of increase?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Originally, no.

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Mayor Lago: What was the vote of the Commission -- of the majority?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: So, we had received direction to go -- you know, we have some directions as to what percentage increases we were going to go across the board for each of the fiscal years. So, the direction we originally got right before we reached this tentative agreement was a little bit less. I think it was instead of a 3.5-3.5, I believe it was a 3-3 and a 3.5 and something else.

Mayor Lago: Which I voted no on.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Correct. And so that's the direction we originally received, a little bit less than the actual tentative agreement. When we went to -- when we had a collective bargaining negotiation, which was open to the public, we presented that proposal, it was denied. They denied it and then we felt that we were close enough. And so we reached a tentative agreement by providing them a little bit more than what was originally presented.

Mayor Lago: Which was approved through negotiations through the Commission, correct?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, do you have any further questions?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Or you have no...?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, I mean, the June 2nd figures, what were they?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: I don't have June 2nd. Actually, I'll tell you right now. So, the June 2nd was a 0-0-4 percent. That's what was on the table by the City on June 2nd. So, it's a 0-0-4 for fiscal year '21, '22, and '23. And then it was a 3 percent for fiscal year '24, with a half a percent for about 88 firefighters for different specialties. Then a 3 percent for fiscal year '25, and a 3 percent for fiscal year '2026. That's what was on the table on June 2nd from the City's perspective, or what was -- what the City proposed.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. And that was when I voted in favor of?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Correct. And that was presented to the union, and it was rejected by the union during negotiations. And then we went back and provided a little bit more in terms of raises to try to get a tentative agreement.

Vice Mayor Anderson: But it wasn't voted on by the union at that point?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: It was voted -- so what we do is you reach a tentative agreement at the table, then you draft the language for the collective bargaining agreement, and it was ratified by the union members last week.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so going back to June 2nd, that was not voted upon by the union members.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: It was not.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, no more questions.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Does anyone else have any other questions on the Commission? Commissioner Menendez, any questions? Commissioner Fernandez?

Commissioner Fernandez: No. I just want to thank staff for working on this. I know this has been a long and hard process and thank the union as well. I think this was a compromise that was reached at the table in order to secure the safety of our city for the next three years and to satisfy the last three years where we had kind of been in limbo as far as this contract. And this places us again at the top when it comes to hiring the best firefighters in South Florida to ensure that our residents have the best available to them. So thank you.

Mayor Lago: So Raquel, if I could talk to you about a few things that I think are important that I want to put on the record. I voted no multiple times during session and I'll be voting no today. And I'm going to tell you why I'm going to be voting no. So, Commissioner Fernandez said this will make sure that we can hire the best. These are facts. This is not political. These are not emotional. This is a transaction on a business transaction, okay? When we have an opening for a firefighter, how many people apply for that position?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: So, last time we opened it up was in June of 2022. We opened it up for a little bit less than four weeks and we had approximately 250 applications.

Mayor Lago: For one position, correct?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: For the position of firefighter. So, the way we...

Mayor Lago: We stopped it because there was so many people who were applying.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Right. So, the way we recruit for firefighters is we recruit in classes or in groups. So, we tentatively hire five to ten...

Mayor Lago: So, say five people, six people, whatever it was.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: We received over 250 applications.

Mayor Lago: But we stopped it because so many people want to...

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Become Coral Gables -- Can I say that with all certainty?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Not an embellishment, not my own opinion. Everybody wants to become a City of Coral Gables firefighter. So, let's talk about why they want to become a City of Coral Gables firefighter. When I started 10 years ago, we didn't have a public safety building. We hadn't renovated the fire station on US-1. We hadn't renovated the fire station on Old Cutler, and we didn't even have a dream of potentially having a fire station on Sunset, which we worked on and we got funded, thanks to the previous commissions. When you add up all that infrastructure and all that quality work that was done, most of it, if not all, was seen by the Manager -- overseen by the Manager and his team, who did an incredible job. It's \$93.3 million worth of you invested in this community and some of the best facilities in South Florida. Is that opinion or is that?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: I know, but it's factual.

Mayor Lago: Factual, okay. Another thing that I remember about when I got here and I have the actual data here that you provided and I appreciate that. I remember when we had our -- and I wasn't elected -- but I remember when we were in the middle of a recession and how hard that hit this community. And I remember when Pat Salerno -- I was on the Planning and Zoning Board back then -- when they started eliminating wage increases and they started addressing wage reductions and a litany of things that the firefighters for the following six, seven, eight years came to me and told me, when are you going to make us whole again? Because they had been given pretty large -- correct? -- pretty large benefit packages, and that then City Manager removed them when we hit a recession.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so that's, again, not hyperbole, those are facts, correct?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Correct.

Mayor Lago: All here, everything's documented, everything when it happened, and how all these benefits had to be clawed back. That affected morale in the City immensely. Because I remember when I ran for office, the firefighters were very clear. They told me, look, Vince, you know, that guy crushed us because we got all these benefits, and then we had them all taken away, especially in some of the most difficult times in this country's history as a result of the recession. So, when you talk about that, the reason why I'm voting no, it's not because I don't love the firefighters. It's not because over the last 10 years before anybody got on this Commission, I didn't walk those stations, make sure that the money was allocated, that we went to Tallahassee, that we budgeted for it, that we made sure it got done. The entire Commission supported it. It wasn't my work, it was the entire Commission's -- the past Commission's, it was the Manager. We invested in our employees, the best equipment, the best training, and the best opportunity for them to come home to their families. And we're blessed to have them working in our community. But this is too rich

for my blood, and I'll tell you why. In your words, in the last 10 years, when you put this COLA and you stack this COLA against all the other COLAs that we've given, where does this rank?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: At least since I've been here with the City, this has been the highest across-the-board increase that we've given.

Mayor Lago: So, the number is, this is the highest almost in 10...

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: The 3.5.

Mayor Lago: This is the highest almost in 10 years we've given.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Correct.

Mayor Lago: So, when you compound it, you know, 3.5-3.5-3, you have to understand it's not just 3.5 one year. It's the following year, you're giving another 3.5. You're compounding on top of the 3.5.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: On top of the 3.5.

Mayor Lago: And when you give the 3, you're compounding again. I was comfortable with 2-2-2, especially knowing that we have to go now and negotiate with the police, which is a major issue, which the police are really deficient in regards to their salaries, correct, Mr. Manager?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, the firefighters at the time of negotiation were ranked what sixth or seventh in the county in regards to starting pay?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: They're in the top third.

Mayor Lago: Okay, in the top third. So, it's not like they were all the way in the bottom, they were in the top third already. This will put them probably what top three maybe?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Still keeps them in the top third.

Mayor Lago: But it would -- in that range right?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: They do move up a little bit, yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay, they move up. So, my point is simple. This is too rich for my blood. This is a situation where we have to be very careful. And why am I saying we have to be very careful? It's not me. Again, it's not me. If you just look at some of the articles that I printed from reputable

entities, you know, this is Fortune Magazine. A recession in 2023 is inevitable. Layoffs in tech and finance will spread to other sectors. This is Fortune. A recession forecast still right for late 2023 or early 2024. You have it here. Very, very clear. Very clear. This is not being -- again, not an emotional transaction. Excuse me. Why economists believe a recession is likely in 2023. It's another one here. And I won't bore you with all the reasonings and all the points that are stated here through the graphs and through professional analysis. I'm telling you this because we have to be very, very careful. We have to be very careful because I was here not when they made the cuts, but when they clawed back the benefits, but when that already transpired and I got elected and I saw what it did to the morale here. So, you -- just because you give a benefit, you may have to deal with that later. And the more that you give takes away from a litany of other things that are happening here in the City. What do I mean by that? Insurance continues to go up. How much did our insurance go up this year? 1.4, 1.3 million?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: It was over 1.2 million.

Mayor Lago: 1.2 million?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Just on the property side.

Mayor Lago: How much did we see parts and gas and everything go up this year?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Significantly.

Mayor Lago: 50, 60 percent, right? Right, Mr. Manager?

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, while we want to protect and give the best to our residents -- excuse me, to our employees, we just took care of our general employees. We did a study for that.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: We did.

Mayor Lago: I think we gave too much here. And it's very clearly detailed in the fact that this is the largest COLA given in almost 10 years. I would have been a yes vote with 6 percent over three years, but we're literally getting to almost 11 percent. And that to me is just a little too rich for my blood, and that's why I'll be voting no.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, if I have a...

Mayor Lago: Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Another minute. Explain how I evaluate, you know, what is the appropriate raise for folks. And as most of you already know, but I'd like to share with them, I

pushed hard before the election to make sure the Teamsters got their raises in, because those are some of the lowest paid employees that we have in our City, and they needed a raise. We know that the police are below level, below where we would like to have them. And there's a comparison, and you do a very excellent job of presenting that to us, where we do comparisons to other municipalities to make sure that we are being comparable enough so that our firefighters are being well paid and we're competitive in the wages, but we're not being too rich so that we end up sacrificing it on other employees that really need the raises. It was a stretch for me on June 2nd to vote for that one because of the economic situation and the needs of other employees here to receive raises. So, I love the firefighters. I love our police. You guys do an amazing, fantastic job. But I'm not willing to vote yes on this because we need to follow sound economic principles, least we have history repeat again. So, my vote will be no as well.

Mayor Lago: Anything else on the Commission floor, for the good of the order? Will you do me a favor, if you can? Will you send an email making a public record so that we can share -- because you shared it with me before, but I want to share it broken down. Give an example to my colleagues, the last 10 retirees, when you talk about the DROP payment plus the 175 money, and also what they're receiving in regards to salaries for the rest of their lives. Again, well-deserved, negotiated, they do an incredible job. I just want to make sure people are really understanding what we're paying and that this City is providing exceptional, exceptional pay, quality of life, and also, a working environment which is conducive for them, you know, not being exposed to what other municipalities are exposed to. Because we are very, very thoughtful and these working -- this working environment is nothing like it was 10 years ago. So, if you could do me that favor and be so kind, through the Manager, if you could send that to my colleagues.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: I have the information.

Mayor Lago: So, provide like the last 10 -- like put maybe like a spreadsheet. You've given it to me, but a little bit less.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: I think I've given it to you, and I can like...

Mayor Lago: I have it here, but I want it more condensed so that it's not so many. I just want to show the last 10 retirees and what it actually represents in regards to the DROP, the 175 money, and also, the pension -- excuse me, their salaries for the rest of their lives.

City Manager Iglesias: We can provide that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Fernandez: If I may, I'll save you the time. I don't need to see it. I've already seen the information which you have shown me. I trust your advice and your recommendation to approve this. We hear winter is coming, we hear a recession is coming, and yet the Mayor is

talking about cutting the millage rate and putting our City in very tough financial straits for the future. At this point, I will make a motion to ratify this contract.

Commissioner Castro: I second it. Second.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, may I add something? Before we take the vote, just one quick second.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think, Mr. Mayor, you've gone above and beyond what's allowed in Robert's Rules to this point.

Mayor Lago: So, I just wanted to...

Commissioner Fernandez: While I...

Mayor Lago: I just wanted to ask what you -- what we've -- excuse me, Mr. Clerk, quick question.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes.

Mayor Lago: When we have a motion and a second, it's usually for discussion, correct? Or do you want to take the vote on it? Tell me, what would you like to do?

City Attorney Suárez: You can have discussion after a motion and a second.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, I know you can. So, that's what Robert's Rules are. Thank you. I just have one simple question, one simple question. Do you recommend this contract? Because it -- does Mr. Comm -- the Commissioner -- Commissioner Fernandez says that you recommend this contract.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: For statute, yes, we recommend. Staff recommends the approval of this contract. I mean, it was a -- we reached a tentative agreement at the table, so I have to recommend it.

Mayor Lago: Okay. You have -- why do you have to recommend?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: We've reached a tentative agreement, so I -- a tentative agreement that...

Mayor Lago: Based on -- based on the -- based on the negotiation with the Commission, based on the Commission's recommendation...

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Based on the direction that we received from the Commission, not -- you know, the majority, not everyone. I mean, it wasn't unanimous, but we did reach a tentative agreement based on these terms.

Mayor Lago: I just want to put that on the record. I think it's important to be clear.

Commissioner Fernandez: And let's put also on the record that your chief of staff is getting a 17 percent raise on this upcoming budget. So, we're talking about 11 percent for our firefighters is too much, but your chief of staff, 17 percent. From \$85,000 to over \$99,000.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, will you do me a favor? Will you explain to the Commissioner...?

City Manager Iglesias: That was a promotion.

Commissioner Fernandez: A promotion to Chief of Staff in the Mayor's Office?

City Manager Iglesias: Promotion to -- also, she's part of the Governmental Liaison group.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think we need to have a discussion regarding this staffing issue. Because I don't understand how somebody is getting promoted to another office, yet they're still the Mayor's chief of staff. This is not a strong mayor form of government. The two have to work independent of each other. So, I go back to my motion and then...

Mayor Lago: I want to answer because you put -- I know one thing -- one thing has nothing to do with the other, but I'll answer you on the record. The Manager -- the Manager is looking to fill positions in regards to the work that was being done outside of my office. She's interested in doing that work. She's more than capable of doing that work, and at the end of the day, I don't know why we would bring up another employee in the middle -- make somebody feel so uncomfortable with bringing them up in the middle of a Commission meeting that has nothing to do with the union negotiation.

Commissioner Fernandez: Because you're saying that 11 percent compounded over the next three years is an issue for you, but you're still proposing a 17 percent raise for somebody who's working in your office. I mean, if she's being promoted to another department and taken out of your office, I would understand that, but she's still line itemed under the Commissioner.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, may I?

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Because I know you weren't with us last year when we went to Tallahassee, and the rest of the Commission believe that Chelsea would be the appropriate person

to handle that while Naomi was out. And you know, the City Manager has to continue on with that position until we have other individuals available.

City Manager Iglesias: It was an additional duty. We are -- we're in the process of hiring a governmental liaison, and the Commission has been very active and has obtained a lot of funding from the state. So, it is -- there are additional duties, and that's why that was done.

Mayor Lago: So, the bottom line...

Commissioner Fernandez: But again, the two should not be together.

Mayor Lago: The bottom line, Commissioner, is instead of hiring another body, there was more value in just giving more work to one individual. But again, if you're concerned -- if you're concerned about this situation, I ask you to speak to the Manager, and if you'd like to remove her from my office, you can do so. Perfectly fine. If you would like to have that employee removed, speak with the Manager and you can have that conversation. But we're here to talk about the fire union contract. I just want to put some facts because I think it's interesting and it's important that we have a conversation. There's no need to like attack an employee in my office over something that has nothing to do with the fire union contract.

Commissioner Fernandez: This is not an attack. These are facts on the record, which is facts on the record.

Commissioner Castro: You know -- yeah, I don't think this has anything to do with an attack. I think this -- he's just comparing. 11, 17, let's not complain about the 11 if you're already doing very close to it with 17. Nothing to do with the person at all.

Mayor Lago: Not a problem.

Commissioner Castro: It compares.

Mayor Lago: Let me explain to you. One thing that you can't compare is one employee versus - - 160 employees?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: It was 144 firefighters.

Mayor Lago: 144 firefighters. It's a pretty significant jump when you consider it's 11.5 percent versus one employee. Again, I get -- it's neither here nor there, Mr. Manager. There's a motion on the floor, there's a second. Let's move on. We have a long agenda.

Commissioner Fernandez: I would like to hear from the Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Well, you can have an employee that has a 10 percent -- a move -- a promotion that is 10 percent, and there could be a COLA right after that and another benefit. So, you could have -- an employee could have 15 percent, but that's due to raises, COLAs, and promotion applying at the same time. And that has happened before.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Might've been a loyalty too, so you get a 5 percent or a 3 percent loyalty...

City Manager Iglesias: And loyalty also.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Depending on the years of service.

City Manager Iglesias: You get essentially at the same time, and that looks like an out of place number, but it's because multiple things coincide.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mr. Manager. Mr. Clerk, you have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Castro: We have somebody missing.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: No.

(Vote: 3-2)

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Raquel. Listen, I appreciate you.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: I appreciate you and your team for all the hard work they've done.