

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comment
September 26, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro (On Zoom)

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Fernando Naranjo

Ed Santamaria

Agenda Item C [9:39 a.m.]

Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Public Comment section.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, we have a couple of speakers today.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker is Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Maria Cruz, Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I'm very confused as usual.

Why do we keep saying winter is coming. Winter is not coming. Winter is not coming. In

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reality winter is not coming. Fall is here. I'm happy to announce that fall is here. Actually, free-fall is here. Our city is in free-fall mode and what this is a "bochorno." For those of you who do not know Spanish, you can ask the Mayor what that means, that's one of his favorite words and if he doesn't want to tell you, I'll tell you. It's a shame. We are going through shameful times in the City of Coral Gables, very shameful times. I wanted to make sure that you all have a memory of today, so would you give them out, or you want me to give them out. Okay. Please make sure that everybody gets, so they remember that September and October are not winter. Now, while this is being given, and before anybody complains, when attorneys come here, they have exhibits, those are my exhibits today. I was impressed to hear the Mayor this morning say that even though we have public comments, everybody can speak on anything that's here, but I asked. I went to Mr. Urquia, I turned in my card for F-3; F-3 is an item presented by the Mayor and he was asked, and even though everybody can talk about anything here, he said no, that was his item, so I was not going to be allowed. Guess what, there is time during public comments. It's very interesting how the Mayor is proposing to spend money on a median on Ponce, but we don't have money and we're proposing not to have money to do any of the stuff that the people really want. So, don't speak on two sides of your mouth, Mayor. If you say everybody can talk, then everybody should be able to talk on every item regardless of who presents it. And have a wonderful fall.

City Clerk Urquia: Fernando Naranjo.

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

Mr. Naranjo: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, good morning, Commissioners, thank you very much for hearing us this morning. My name is Fernando Naranjo. I'm the manager of Santa Maria Real Estate. We own property at 178 Giralda here in Coral Gables. Next to me is Mr. Fernando Janis. He's the owner of 77 Sports Bar, which is a business down the street, and when we purchased this property, what I'm saying, we purchased the Santa Maria purchased this property in 2016, we did it with the intention of investing over \$3 million dollars in the restaurant and entertainment row of Coral Gables, that's why we invested and we acquired that property, with the intention that it was going to be different. It was part of an overlay district, but it was different. It was entertainment, it was a restaurant and that was the vision for the street. Through the pandemic we suffered like every business, but we did everything in our hands to keep the businesses alive. Mr. Janis, he travels, he put all his savings into his business and he's the owner again of 77 Sports Bar, which is currently the official club of Barcelona Football Club, all over Miami-Dade County. It is also the official club of La Liga from Spain. He hosts all kinds of events for the Miami Dolphins and the Miami Heat, and it brings a lot of life to the street. He has some TVs on

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the street that he's been having since he opened it, and those TVs are essential for his business, not only for the patrons that goes there to watch all the other games that I was mentioning, but also for all the employees that he has in his business. Unfortunately, about two months ago, a month and-a-half ago, we received a ticket from code violation for something that they elect that it was a violation, but it wasn't before. And again, his business has been open for more than five years, we never had an issue with his business, and suddenly about a month and-a-half ago, we received this citation that currently is generating \$200 per day in fines. The property owners are really concerned with this, because they want to follow all the rules from the city, but at the same time, want to work with the business, because if we force him to take out the TV's, unfortunately he's going to lose the business, he's going to lose all his savings, and all the employees from his business are going to be left out of work. So, we came, met with the Mayor during the public hours on Friday, one of the Fridays. He was very generous on his time, and he helped us to propose legislation that is being brought to you today. So, we wanted to thank you for doing that. It is very important. That is one of the things that you have right now under discussion. So, we appreciate Mr. Mayor, your help and wanted to give you a brief of what is going on, what is the situation that we're experiencing, that we really appreciate your help, not only with helping us with this legislation, but also with helping us with these fines that we don't think are fair. We want to follow the rules, but at the same time if there is no adjustment, his business is going to have to close, and we really need your help. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: So very quickly. First off, thank you for being here. I didn't know that you were going to be here today. The legislation presented today, if it gets the support of the Commission, is a step in the right direction, in my opinion, especially in this area of Giralda, I think is important. I think is appropriate in this area of Giralda, that's number one. Number two, in regard to the fines, I don't control the fines, neither does anybody on this Commission. The Manager, who has control over all the employees here in the city will address that. I think it's appropriate. We always try to mitigate the fines as much as possible. The point is to try to be proactive and push entities, individuals or businesses that are in compliance to get their act together, but our goal is to not fine people. Our goal is to get people into compliance, and this was basically a hold, a legal hold that needed to be addressed and that's what we're doing today.

Mr. Naranjo: Thank you Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I want to commend you. You took a huge risk as a business owner, I have a lot of value and respect for people who own their own businesses, people who are willing to take that leap of faith, especially in our community and whether a storm like Covid that

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was for business owners, we knew how hard it was to not miss a paycheck, to make sure that we didn't pay ourselves so that our employees could get paid. I know that's something that you did, along with a lot of other business owners, to make sure that we could survive those difficult times, and then you made it, you made it through the other side. So, our goal here today is to try to find common ground. It may not be four TV's, but maybe its two TV's and I think it will be, and that's what we're working on, because we need you, not only to survive, but to thrive in the City of Coral Gables and continue to bring great sporting events to the city, continue to keep Giralda alive and moving in the right direction, because you're an anchor, you're an anchor on that corner which again, it's a gateway to the entire street and we want people to continue visiting that, maybe having a drink at your establishment or eating and then going to the restaurant next door and making it a focal point of our community. I also want to commend you on how clean you keep your facility. You're always trying to clean the floor, you're always cleaning your façade, you're always painting, you're always touching up, and I drove by there and I walked by there this past week and I want to take the time, time to tell you that, because a lot of individuals they don't take the care that you do, and you are doing business in the City of Coral Gables and you're the property owner, and you're the property owner, so I just want to say thank you for really working and continuing to maintain the appearance of your project and your facility in your building. So, thank you very much.

Mr. Naranjo: Thank you Mr. Mayor, thank you Commissioners.

Mayor Lago: We're looking forward to much success.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker, Ed Santamaria.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Santamaria: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, Ed Santamaria. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on something that's very, very important. First of all, I have no association to Santamaria Real Estate, just wanted to put that out there; and secondly, I want to apologize for not being able to get my polar bear fur suit out of storage for this event, but as a resident who is a former city employee, involved in a handful of budget cycles, I must say that I do not support a millage rate reduction. I also oppose the raiding of the reserves, as well as any reduction to the yearly pension contribution, but above all, I object to how politicized we have become as a city. I have never seen this level of politicization in our city. I implore you all, for the good of our community, let's not play games with our city's future. Let's base our votes on what is good for the city and not make it politics. Thank you all.

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Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: So, we'll close the public hearing, the public comment portion of our agenda. I want to remind everybody that we have one full hour opportunity to speak, one full hour, and if more people show up and speak, we'll listen to everyone. That's the reason why I instituted public comment a few years ago and it's a great opportunity to make sure that everyone's voice is heard. It's very easy to say that we're not transparent and that we're not giving the opportunity to speak, but I just want to make sure that everybody understands this is on the agenda and it continues to be on the agenda.