

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item E-8**  
**June 10, 2025**  
**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 Richard D. Lara**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**  
**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**

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Agenda Item E-8 [11:38 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending City Code Chapter 2, “Administration” Article V “Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics,” to create Section 2-308 “Prohibition on City Commissioners serving as Campaign/Political Consultants,” to prohibit City Commissioners from serving as campaign/political consultants for candidates for elected office in the city; providing severability clause, repealer provision, codification, providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item E-8.

City Attorney Suarez: E-8 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending City Code Chapter 2, “Administration” Article V “Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics,” to create Section 2-308 “Prohibition on City Commissioners serving as Campaign/Political Consultants,” to prohibit City Commissioners from serving as campaign/political consultants for candidates for elected office in

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the city; providing severability clause, repealer provision, codification, providing for an effective date. Ms. Throckmorton.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you again, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. As some of you may recall in 2021, the City Commission adopted Ordinance 2021-27, which prohibited certain campaigns and political consultants from lobbying the City Commission or contracting with the city for a period of time after completion of that paid campaign or political consulting work. That definition of campaign and political consultant is used in this ordinance which creates a prohibition on City Commissioners serving as campaign political consultants for any candidate for elected office in the city and complete legally sufficient complaints alleging violations of that prohibition would be referred to the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor. Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I don't think this goes far enough. I think that we should have something that prohibits sitting elected officials from getting involved in campaign period. I think that when you have a sitting official going door-to-door supporting somebody who is running for office and this has nothing to do with you, it's been done before, and when you have a sitting elected official who makes public comments in official meetings, official gatherings, official celebrations about who he supports, that is wrong. I think people need to go on the value, on the face value of the people that are running, and I think that the elected officials send their own message when they do pick sides, because then they have to work with the people that they didn't support and that creates an issue. I think we owe the residents to go a little further. I think we should say, when you are a sitting official, stay out of it. Let the people decide. Let the residents come to a decision about who they want, whether you like it or not, because later on it avoids what we've seen here. If a sitting official does not support somebody who gets elected, then we have the issues that we do not take pictures, we talk badly about them, we continue the bullying, the harassment, the whatever, the whatever. I think it's time for us to be, perhaps the first municipality to say, if you are a sitting official, you've been elected, stay out of it, let the people decide who they want.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: We'll close the public comment. Do we have a motion and a second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Lara: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, anything for the record or would you like for me to go first as the sponsor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Why don't you go first as the sponsor.

Mayor Lago: Just want to make sure. One of the items that the City Attorney, when she came up here, Ms. Throckmorton, that was mentioned, or she failed to mention, she didn't do it intentionally was that I was the sponsor of that item in 2021. So that item in 2021 was intentional and that was to ensure a prohibition on political consultants that run campaigns, that run campaigns to become lobbyists. If they want to lobby the elected official, they want to lobby the elected official. They can do that, but they have to stop being a political consultant, they have to wait two years. I wrote that legislation four years ago. I think it was important, and I used the word of the day -- transparency. But what our friend forgot to mention, which was spoken in public comment, that there is an issue called compensation. I have no issues if somebody wants to support somebody in a campaign. I think it's beautiful. Go out there, walk door-to-door, make sure you support that person. If you think that they are the best person to do the job to represent the City of Coral Gables and if you look at the last election, it was pretty clear, it was a landslide victory. People spoke, the community wanted change and that's why we're here today. You can deny it any which way you want, even one of my colleagues on the Commission the next day sent out an email retracting everything he had been working on for two years. It's clear. It's clear as day. You can't deny the fact. So, the issue here is about compensation. If you are an elected official and I wanted to now take this position and just tweak it a little bit, if you're an elected official and you hold office, you should not be compensated to run someone's campaign which later would be sitting on this dais. If you want to work as a volunteer, you want to walk door-to-door, you want to offer your services as a friend, I don't have a problem with that. But nobody should be compensated and then have that person, I think that would be, in my opinion, a sense of impropriety and obligation. Just like the previous person who spoke during public, there would be a sense of obligation. Just because you support somebody doesn't mean you are obligated. You can vote whichever way you like. So that's my tweak to the legislation. It's very simple and I think again, it's an effort to be transparent. It's an effort to offer the best governance that we possibly can and ensure that we are representing the people. Remember we are here for the residents first. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I welcome anything that helps control a little better the type of activities in campaigns. I've expressed my frustration to the Commission on Ethics, being a sworn lawyer with an active license imposes upon people a much higher standard than what our ethics code as far as elected officials are concerned. Once you are a retired attorney it doesn't apply anymore. Once you don't have an active license it doesn't apply anymore, but the ability of people to influence an election and get paid for it at the same time while sitting on a Commission is something that shouldn't be done, make that their business. So, I'm fully supportive of anything that helps bring our ethical standards to a higher level. I wish there was more we could do.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I want to just give it to the person, just standard protocol the person who makes the second motion.

Commissioner Lara: Thank you. There is not much more to add. I echo what Vice Mayor and what you said as well, Mayor, on this issue. It further strengthens the public trust in the elected officials to be above board and to make a priority of the elected position that they are in. So those are my comments.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: She requested first, just want to respect the order. Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: I appreciate that. So, when I first read this item the first thing I did was, I did a little research or a lot of research and I started looking to see if any other municipality, any other city in the country has the same policy, and to my surprise, no, nobody does. But there are other similar things that maybe we could adopt to make this a little stronger, and I'll go ahead, and I'll address them in a couple seconds. But the first thing that really, really worries me, and I mean, City Attorney could correct me if I'm wrong is that everybody has free speech of livelihood. This ordinance would bar Commissioners from serving as campaign consultants. It well recognizes a form of political expression of professional livelihood. The First Amendment protects that activity and risk legal challenge, is that correct or not.

City Attorney Suarez: So, it would implicate the First Amendment, and there's a potential for challenge and there is legal risk involved. Yes, as I've briefed each of you individually.

Commissioner Castro: So, I want to go ahead and put on the record that by passing this legislation we are channeling ourselves to legal repercussions and is it really in our best interest or maybe can we tweak this legislation to make it a little better so that we don't face legal challenges. Number two, there are big enforcement issues here. Terms like serving as a consultant are very vague. What constitutes advising or strategizing. Without clarity enforcement would be inconsistent and unconstitutional. At this point, I mean, we've all been in campaigns, we've all been elected, and anybody can say they are consultants. Is there a registration of consultants? I'm helping somebody and they are going to go ahead and pay me, and I'm going to say, I'm doing the banners, but I'm really giving them advice. This is not a licensed profession. Enforcement would be really, really hard. I think we need to really be a little more methodical and thoughtful when thinking that we are going to prohibit someone and they can either go through a third party. There's a lot of little loopholes here. I think we can go about this in a different way. Alternative models do exist. Miami-Beach doesn't prohibit consulting. It bans campaign consultants from lobbying the Commission for twelve months after election. San Francisco regulates campaign consultants through registration, ethics and reporting. They are not banned. And I think really that's the way we should really go. We should require maybe consultants to register here in the city so that we know who is consulting for compensation and then I think there are more clear boundaries to try to enforce, and I understand the concerns my colleagues are having. It makes more sense to adopt a transparent

and forceful measures like disclosure or post-election lobbying restrictions, instead of sweeping prohibitions that go way too far.

Mayor Lago: You're done.

Commissioner Castro: I am done. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: I want to respond. Madam City Attorney, three items I think that are critically important. Number one, this does not prohibit anyone on this dais to be a campaign consultant for someone who is off this dais or somebody who is in another city or is in another state, or at the federal level.

City Attorney Suarez: Correct.

Mayor Lago: We are only talking about people who are going to potentially serve on this Commission, that's number one. Let's get that straight. Let's not conflate issues. Okay. That's number one. Madam City Attorney, on every piece of ordinance and resolution that you pass, isn't there always an opportunity for a challenge, yes or no.

City Attorney Suarez: There is always an opportunity for a challenge. I think in this case there is perhaps a greater legal risk that would require litigation costs, if we were challenged.

Mayor Lago: At the end of the day, I have no issues with passing legislation that again, the key word of the day, increases transparency. Number two, loopholes. I'm happy you brought that up. You must be thinking about loopholes and opportunities to potentially not comply with the legislation that's in place. If you have any loopholes that you'd like to tighten up, you can bring it up on the second reading. Number three, I'm wholeheartedly in favor, if you are an elected official and your term is done, Madam City Attorney, I would like to make an amendment to my legislation and I would like to add a ban for twelve months after your term is done.

City Attorney Suarez: Can you clarify that, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Once you are done serving, we just had Commissioner Menendez just completed his term after serving four years, he would not be able to serve, he would not be able to lobby the Commission for twelve months.

City Attorney Suarez: So, we are regulating the lobbying conduct of formerly elected officials, just so I'm clear.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Once their term is over for twelve months. I have no issues with that at all.

City Attorney Suarez: That may already be the case, Mayor. We'll look into that.

Mayor Lago: I welcome it. I think it's a great thing. So, my point is that this is again, I did this in 2021, to ensure that if you are going to be a campaign consultant, political consultant and you are going to lobby, you are going to lobby, you have to make a decision, are you a lobbyist, or you are a political consultant. You cannot do both at the same time and if you are in political consulting, you need to extinguish your relationship for two years prior to you lobbying the elected official. I think that is appropriate, it is transparent and is in the best interest of the City of Coral Gables and puts the residents first. Commissioner Fernandez.

Commissioner Fernandez: I came in and I really wasn't sure how I was going to vote on this issue. I really wanted to hear the discussion. I'm supportive of it. I think that the argument you made, Mr. Mayor, about compensation and there being some sort of beholdenness when you compensate somebody for specific work, I think it exists, or it can exist. Could this subject the city to potential lawsuits, yes it can, but I think that it keeps things clean. I remember the many discussions that we had about your legislation prior to you presenting it, discussing ideas of how we can make it stronger, how we can make it better. I think this does make your legislation better, the one that was passed a few years back. I'm going to support this today.

Mayor Lago: Good. It's a good thing. With that being said, Madam Mayor, Madam City Attorney, maybe the mayor one day, that was funning. I was thinking about the Vice Mayor, I like Madam Mayor on you, it sounds good. What do you think about a twelve-month ban or should it be more. I think maybe more, by the way, what do you think? If we are going to do this, let's do it right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think we need to be consistent. We've used two years before. Let's be consistent, it makes sense.

Mayor Lago: You think the Herald will cover this. Herald didn't cover the reduction of salaries, or a reduction of our terms, but they love to cover the extension of terms. I wonder if they are going to cover this. Let's see.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There are probably more exciting things happening in other cities right now.

Mayor Lago: But this is good legislation. Again, remember it is transparent, and it is putting the residents first, which is what we are here to do. So, if there's no further comments, Mr. Clerk, please call the roll.

Commissioner Castro: No

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

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Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 4-1)

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, on second reading I look forward, before second reading sitting down with you and having a discussion, along with my colleagues, please make sure that they are in the loop on this issue.