

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C
August 22, 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
Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz
Assistant Public Works Director, Deena Bell-Llewellyn**

Public Speaker(s)

**Maria Cruz
Javier Baños
Maite Haley
Jorge Diaz
James Dockerty
Jessica Keller
Carl Leon Prime
Gordon Sokoloff**

Agenda Item C [10:43 a.m.]
Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, let's move on to public comment, please.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, we need one more Commissioner.

Mayor Lago: They're here, right there.

City Clerk Urquia: Oh, there she is, sorry.

Mayor Lago: Right there.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker in public comment is Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Maria Cruz: Good morning.

Commissioner Fernandez: Good morning.

Ms. Cruz: Maria Cruz, 14 -- Mrs. Maria Cruz, I forgot. After 55 years, I should be used to it. 1447 Miller Road. And I'm taking this opportunity -- and you'll understand in a minute -- to apologize. Recently, I met with Jessica Keller and became very aware that I was played like a fiddle by Commissioner, now Mayor Vince Lago, who I trusted and believed to get me to go after Miss Keller. I have decided to apologize publicly to her because now I know that I was fed erroneous information to further his personal agenda. I'm so sorry, Jessica. I hope you accept my apology. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker, Javier Baños.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Javier Baños: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. To the members of the Commission, Javier Baños, 1253 Anastasia Avenue. So I'm here this morning to express my disappointment.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Baños.

Mr. Baños: Sorry, I apologize. My disappointment with some actions taken by the Commission as a whole, but specifically by Vice Mayor Anderson. We ran together in the same election. I always thought of her -- and I, you know, to recently thought of her as someone who had a vision for the City and who really believed in the mission for the City. Her recent actions in reference to Ms. Miro, the illustration of what I consider to be a raw power movement to completely change the makeup of the board under the pretext of absenteeism when she just reappointed the lady, just

don't ring true to me. I've expressed this to her. Being honest, I don't think anything is surprising. I don't think that that's the government we deserve. I don't think that's the government we elected. And more importantly, I don't believe that that is the reason she was elected. She was perceived, espoused, and talked to all the residents to be an agent of change, to modify what was the status quo. And I can't help but launch my dissatisfaction. Now, that doesn't mean that -- this is a disagreement. It doesn't mean for one second that I don't think that she is a committed public servant. She is. She wouldn't be here otherwise. Many of the opinions of residents may be considered by the Commission to be ill-advised or ill-informed or otherwise ill-conceived. And I'm sure she has dedicated a significant amount of her time and her effort to serve on the Commission and for that she should be commended. But it's not an opportunity, your office, in my perspective, my humble perspective, it's not an opportunity to just modify the makeup of a board because it benefits a political ally or because it benefits special interests or just because the other folks are not going to be presented. Now, that might be my perspective. I'm sure it's not your perspective and I'm sure that's not the way you brought it together, but again, I'm not someone to mince words and if I have to say something, I'll say it to you personally. I expressed this to you. I'm not bullying you. This is me expressing my opinion as a resident and my disappointment with the decision you made. And I don't think it's in the best interest of the City, not in the best interest of the residents, and certainly not in the best interest of the board. Thank you.

Vice Chair Anderson: Mayor, may I respond?

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Vice Chair Anderson: Ms. Baños, you know, your text to me, "Was it worth it," okay, that's what you started out with.

Mr. Baños: Correct.

Vice Chair Anderson: Clearly a political pressure statement. Facts matter, though, and the facts are, over the entirety of Ms. Miro's performance, her attendance record for the entire period was 42.86 percent. I spoke to her about her attendance in the same manner that I spoke to Tanya Jimenez about her attendance. Tanya Jimenez chose not to reapply for the board that I had appointed her to. Claudia said she really wanted to perform, and she would improve her attendance. But from January of this year, through the last meeting, which she also didn't attend, her attendance record was only 50 percent of the time. She attended less times. I went through her attendance record. There's a point in time where you don't play games by trying to get excused because you're in work. If you don't have time to do the job, you don't have time to do the job. Now, I didn't intend to bring these items up in this level of detail before this forum, but your statements now, together with Mr. Fernandez's blast to the residents, claiming that there was only one unexcused absence, distorts the truth. It foments anger in people that deserve to have a body sitting in that chair representing them. A person cannot be representing the residents if the seat is empty. Now, I chose Ms. Claudia Miro because in many ways she mirrored my thoughts and ideas

when I was running for office. But what she has mirrored was the dedication that it takes to do the job. When I had vacations to plan, or I had work obligations to plan, hearings to attend, trials to do, appellate briefs to turn out, travel to go see my clients, I did it around the Planning and Zoning Board meetings, just as I plan my travels with my family and my business meetings around these meetings as well. That was my message to Ms. Miro. She chose to respond to me in a manner that she wanted to fight this. I did not want to make a fight, that was her choice. It was your choice to come in here and continue to foment something that residents deserve a voice, not an empty chair.

Mayor Lago: With the indulgence of...

Vice Chair Anderson: That's...

Mayor Lago: If I may, I want to respond to you also.

Mr. Baños: I know it's fine, but with indulgence of the Chair, may I respond to what Commissioner Anderson said?

Mayor Lago: Let me just respond, because you insinuated that I had some hand in this.

Mr. Baños: I don't think I mentioned your name, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Well, you said it was a political favor or something to that effect.

Mr. Baños: I don't think I mentioned that.

Mayor Lago: Let me just respond.

Mr. Baños: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Just very quickly. So, four years ago, I had an appointment to the Planning and Zoning Board. It was an architect, and he was working on a lot of projects here in the City. And he served the City with distinction. I did not agree with certain positions and votes that he took, and I did not agree with him because while he voted one way in the Planning and Zoning Board, I voted a different way on the Commission floor. After having conversations with Maria Cruz and Ariel Fernandez and another individual, the recommendations were made for consideration of multiple different replacements. I decided after six months and interviewing these replacements to sit down with my Planning and Zoning Board appointment and say, listen, we're in the middle of the year. I know it's not a reappointment situation, but I think I need to change you now, and I really appreciate your commitment and your service on the Planning and Zoning Board. But we just don't fully align on issues. He goes, "Vince, why didn't you call me?" And I said, "Because I don't want to put myself in a position where I'm dealing with my appointees to boards and stirring them in one direction or another." But here, I want to make a clean break and I want to reappoint

-- I want to appoint somebody new to the Planning and Zoning Board. That appointment was heralded by everybody in this room. Everybody loved my new appointment. They viewed this individual as a person who was conservative in regards to views on zoning and entitlements, our downtown, and they supported me on that. I didn't wait until my term ended. I asked that person to leave, and I appointed somebody brand new. And that person now serves as the Vice Mayor of the City of Coral Gables. Her name is Rhonda Anderson. So, what I'm a big believer of, what I'm a big believer of is number one, anybody that wants to serve on a board, it's a beautiful thing for the City. It's a big benefit. But I'm not going to dip my toe into any of Commissioner Fernandez's appointments, or to Commissioner Menendez's appointments, or the Commissioner Melissa Castro's appointments, or the Vice Mayor's appointments. It's just not my right. I don't see any other cities doing that. And as you can talk to people who have worked in other cities, there's two things that are respected. We don't have one of them here. When you talk about other cities and elected officials, it's districts and appointments, board appointments. Because we don't have districts here, obviously, we're at large. If somebody wants to appoint somebody who I may disagree with, that's perfectly within their right. You've never heard me battle somebody here and say you shouldn't appoint that person. That's their decision. So I understand that you want to have her on that board, and there's a way to do that. It's a very simple way to do that. One of the other Commissioners can appoint them, can remove their individual and appoint Claudia Miro. Claudia's a friend, I've helped her before on multiple different fronts when she's asking for things. She has an existing \$500,000 contract with the City of Coral Gables that she lobbies for. So, at the end of the day, if that is so important to you, which I think it's within your right, why don't you have one of your colleagues and friends, you know, everybody in this Commission, consider her for appointment in that place? I think that's a, you know, feasible thing, but we've never seen that before and I can ask the Manager who worked in the City of Miami. Mr. Manager, have you ever seen another elected official try to forcibly make another elected official maintain somebody on a board?

City Manager Iglesias: In the City of Miami, there was almost total respect for districts and appointments.

Vice Chair Anderson: Well, I do have the chart of attendance and non-attendance, if any of you want to consider her for appointment on your appointees.

Mayor Lago: And like you say...

Mr. Baños: My question...

Mayor Lago: But hold on one second. And you say the facts matter -- right? -- and that we have to be careful and thoughtful about the things that are out there. You can't say that a person has missed one meeting when they've missed -- it's here. Look at -- the chart is there.

Vice Chair Anderson: The chart's here.

Mr. Baños: Mr. Mayor, I don't want -- this to be a colloquy with you and I. All I've asked is for your permission to respond to what Ms. Anderson said. Would we allow it?

Mayor Lago: Of course, I don't have an issue with that.

Vice Chair Anderson: Okay.

Mayor Lago: But I'm also clarifying the record where we should respect each other's appointments to different boards.

Mr. Baños: And if I may, I don't sit up there. You're welcome to respect her position because it is your responsibility to do it. As a resident, I'm taking issue with her actions, okay? Which is not to say that I believe in any way, shape, or form whatever your decisions are as to your appointment are good, bad, regular, or extra crispy, okay? It's your decision at the end of the day. If Mr. Menendez wants to appoint somebody and I don't agree with that, that's his prerogative. Ms. Anderson appointed a person, okay? I particularly think that she was doing a good job. She disagrees. I understand that. However, the timing, the structure, the way it was handled, okay, the entire perspective that she came in, took a vote, okay, after she had just been reappointed to that very committee, which is a very important, very significant, very salient part of the City. And as a direct consequence of her vote in that position, in my perspective -- that's not what Ms. Anderson is saying, I get it.

Mayor Lago: I think you're making assumptions.

Mr. Baños: No, I am -- I'm pretty savvy, but again, will you allow me to answer Ms. Anderson?

(MULTIPLE PARTIES SPEAKING IN UNISON)

Vice Chair Anderson: Okay, let me give you some facts to work with so you don't make improper assumptions.

Mr. Baños: Okay.

Vice Chair Anderson: After she was reappointed, right, in May, at two meetings, June 6, absent, July 12, she came in for 15 minutes and didn't sit for a single one of the substantive items that we're going to hear today.

Mr. Baños: Vice Mayor, I...

Vice Chair Anderson: Okay? I'm sorry, that is not what I want in a representative for these residents to make comments, to have constructive conversation. If you're up here, you may choose her. I'm going to ask the Clerk to put this on the record, to bring up this attendance record.

Mr. Baños: And if I may respond, but everything has been -- everything has been -- so I'll bring it down, but it's all been you talking and me asking to speak. So, Ms. Anderson -- well, Mrs. Anderson, I have -- I think I was very clear. My issue is not with her attendance. I don't have a problem with her attendance. And whether or not I have a problem with her attendance is irrelevant because I don't sit up there, okay. My issue is I think it's pretextual. I think the issue of the attendance is pretextual. I think it's a direct retaliation and the impression that I have, the pretty obvious situation, okay, she takes a vote, she gets removed, okay. Perhaps it was poor timing on your part, okay. Perhaps that's the impression you're creating. But I can tell you that plenty residents here and out there, okay, are taking the position that this is a retaliatory action for a vote that was taken in order to serve the interest of a few members of the Commission and special interests. If that's not what you intended to do, let me tell you that, in politics, unfortunately, perception is reality. And that is what you created, okay. You created...

Vice Chair Anderson: Unfortunately, there are folks that publish things that are false, send them out to the residents as false to foment anger and misinform the public and that in itself in my book is unethical.

Mr. Baños: That's the media.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Baños.

Commissioner Fernandez: Since I'm...

Mr. Baños: You're welcome...

Mayor Lago: Give me one second.

Commissioner Fernandez: Since the Vice Mayor is attacking me...

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: I want to respond.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, listen, please, we're not going to do this up here. We're not going to litigate.

Mr. Baños: That's why I asked for your permission to do it.

Mayor Lago: We have public comment. Let's move on. We have a lot of things. We have a really packed agenda. We have a 5 o'clock time certain.

Mr. Baños: Mr. Mayor, I don't want to have an argument with you, but I appreciate it. Ms. Anderson, you've heard my thoughts, okay. I welcome any comments from anybody else, but I don't think I have anything else to say.

Vice Chair Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: It's a pleasure to see you, sir. Thank you very much.

Mr. Baños: Same here. Take care.

Commissioner Fernandez: In response to the Vice Mayor's comments, if what you expect is for me to not have an opinion that is formulated from the residents that I represent, that's not the way this is going to work. I have a responsibility to the residents of the City of Coral Gables to represent their interests. The interest of the residents of Coral Gables, as was dictated during this last election or mandated this last election was very clear. They want us to curb overdevelopment. I find it very funny that after the vote is taken to appoint a moderate thinking board at large member who could change the dynamics of that board, you immediately respond by removing Claudia Miro who you had just reappointed two meetings before. I've had several conversations with Ms. Miro. You never spoke to her about her attendance record until you told her you were removing her.

Vice Chair Anderson: Well, apparently...

Commissioner Fernandez: And your letter removing her...

Vice Chair Anderson: She forgot our conversation out in the parking lot walking into this building.

Commissioner Fernandez: Your letter removing her was condescending, was attacking her as a mother, as an employee. I mean, it was completely unbecoming of a member of this Commission.

Mayor Lago: So, Commissioner, let's not call people unbecoming and different things like that because we could be here for days if we start talking.

Commissioner Fernandez: We definitely could.

Vice Chair Anderson: Okay, you framed this as condescending when I pointed out to her because, you know, Meg Daly also stepped down from boards because she had other obligations. What I pointed out to her is I explained to you during my call today it's apparent that your work and personal matters have not made it possible for you to regularly attend and participate in board meetings." Those are facts. You know, in the letter outlined in the percentage of absences, I would be remiss if I continued to fail to fill a seat that she is filling -- failing to fill. Two meetings she missed after being reappointed. That speaks volumes to me. Actions speak a lot louder than words or your distortion of the attendance record. The attendance record speaks for itself. It doesn't matter if it was excused or unexcused. If I am too ill to be able to perform this job, I will step

down. If I am too busy to be able to do this job, I will step down. We make choices on whether or not we take jobs. And when you can't perform the work, you should step down.

Commissioner Fernandez: And yet you were trying to...

Mayor Lago: Commissioner...

Commissioner Fernandez: You supported a candidate for this Commission who had a similar attendance record.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, with all due respect, we're moving on, okay. Mr. Clerk.

Vice Chair Anderson: No.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Our next speaker is Maite Haley.

Mayor Lago: Can we -- before we move on really quick, because this is back and forth, just put this on the record. Out of the last 11 meetings, how many meetings did Ms. Miro miss? 11 meetings, how many?

Vice Chair Anderson: On this chart, I've got six that are missed, and the last two were the most recent.

Mayor Lago: So, we have 6 out of 11 meetings.

Commissioner Fernandez: And how many were excused?

Mayor Lago: I'm not done yet. I'm not done yet. Let me finish. Okay, please.

Vice Chair Anderson: The record's there.

Mayor Lago: Six meet -- six meetings in the most important board in the City of Coral Gables. That's one issue. One issue for the Vice Mayor. Number two, let us all remember that appointees to boards work at the pleasure of the Commissioner, or the elected person that appoints them. So, at the end of the day, I removed somebody from the Planning and Zoning Board in midstream and appointed somebody else who was -- everybody here loved at that point. But now you're upset about this issue and it's understandable and it's perfectly fine, but it's her decision and I think it's pretty clear when you miss 6 out of 11 meetings, we can't conduct business like that. There's issues of quorum, there's issues of, like you said, representing the residents of the City. Why can't you make meetings? Why can't you be here? So we move forward and that's it. And we respect

the ability for each one of us to appoint a member to each one of the boards that we've so deemed fit. Move on. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Maite Haley.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, how are you?

Maite Haley: Good morning. Good morning, everybody. Thank you for having us here. Not to diminish the importance of issues before the Commission today, I have to say we can't say pickleball without smiling, okay?

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Ms. Haley: That's a word...

Vice Chair Anderson: That's true.

Ms. Haley: That's easy to smile through.

Vice Chair Anderson: I hope to make it there this week, but we'll see how long these meetings run.

Ms. Haley: I want to start my comments by complimenting our Parks Department and the head of our Parks Department who's sitting right there, my buddy, Fred Couceyro. And Mr. Manager, I want you to know that this gentleman is so collaborative and so helpful with our community. We may not always each get exactly what we want, but we're working together. You know, when the budget was here, the budget meeting that I attended back in July, you said, work it out. You told Fred, let's work something together. We put a plan together; he sat with us. I then went to each of you to review the plan over a couple of weeks while we got some people back from vacation and all that. And you know, it's working. It's working. Last week when we realized that we weren't going to have something we used to have, some of our junior, our younger members of our pickleball community got very passionate, put together a petition, and trust me, they wanted to do a lot more than that, and I had to talk them down. You know, Fred was immediately responsive, and we worked that out. And I want to thank him publicly and thank him from the pickleball community's heart. I just want to remind everybody, let's not look at this as a tennis model, okay? Remember pickleball is really more like a pickup basketball game, very short games, 10, 15 minutes. You rotate through. You generally don't get a group of people together and go and play. It's a basketball pickup game kind of mentality. And it's not a fad. This is not going away. Something like 48 million Americans have at least played pickleball at least once in the last year. And the age is skewing younger and younger. And this is why it's so great that we have the open play on Tuesdays and Thursday nights because that's where all the young people are. I asked some of them to come. One was starting law school yesterday. Another one was going to the fire academy. I'm not sure, you know, where he hopes to play, but I hope -- or hopefully here. He

was at that meeting this morning, so they couldn't come, but we have more and more young people coming to play with us. And what I'd like us to do is find opportunities to program, and we're talking about that too. Children are playing pickleball. We have had seven-year-olds, 11-year-olds, you know, young teens come and play, families come and play at open play. It's very exciting to see that. Instead of seeing the kids on their phones, they're out there getting sun, getting fresh air, doing all those good things, and seeing more young people. And you know, once college scholarships start coming together, I think we're going to be seeing a need for young people programs, because everybody's going to want their kid to play pickleball. One last quick point I wanted to make, I went through -- and I think I've sent this to most of you. I went through and researched all the pickleball courts, it's not -- almost all, it's not conclusive, available in Dade County. Dade County's behind the times. We are a prime community in the United States. We are an athletic community. We're a community where people love to come for events. We need to be hosting the nationals here. They kicked them out of Indian Wells in California. They're going to Dallas, the courts at Dallas are not enough. And I know because my brother's complaining about it. And I think there's some things that may be happening in the next couple of years that we may see a really large county type facility, but for our residents, we need to get more than just the five part-time courts that we're going to have and the two full-time. So, I thank you all for your work, for listening to us, and let's play pickleball. I hope to see you out there. I've seen about almost all of you out there. Mr. Mayor, you need to come play with us one day.

Mayor Lago: I have a pickleball court at home.

Ms. Haley: Mr. Men -- I'm sorry?

Mayor Lago: I have a pickleball court at home.

Ms. Haley: Well, that's great.

Vice Chair Anderson: She didn't invite me.

Commissioner Fernandez: We should open it up.

Ms. Haley: But you know what? There's people I've met. George is here. He's going to speak. There's so many people I've met. That's so great that I never would have met unless I played at public courts.

Mayor Lago: So very quick.

Ms. Haley: Yes.

Mayor Lago: We have a lot of -- a big agenda.

Ms. Haley: Yes, sir. Yeah, I'm (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: We have an item, again, pickleball. F-6 is coming up.

Ms. Haley: Right.

Mayor Lago: We'll talk about pickleball. I know that Fred gave us an update in regards to some quick opportunities to install pickleball courts here in the City. There's a big tournament that a friend of mine is actually doing in January here in Miami, which we're going to get a bunch of free tickets for Coral Gables residents, which is happening on Key Biscayne. They have over 100 pickleball courts for that tournament. And I spoke to the Manager, and I've asked him with his leadership and his guidance to talk about the mobility hub, to potentially do something on the rooftop instead of what's programmed now there. It will save us money, and it will potentially be able to put pickleball courts on top of the mobility hub. A great idea that came from the Manager and we were talking about it the last few days. And it could be something, and again, we also got to remember, if a park in the county took money -- if a park in the City took money from the County, we're in a tough position because then it opens it up to everybody in the community. So when you...

Ms. Haley: I get that.

Mayor Lago: Talk about the mobility hub, for example, and you can put a few pickleball courts on top, or you talk about a park, now we got -- we can't take County money. We got to make sure it's City money and it's programmed in a way that it's just for residents first.

Ms. Haley: And I think that we have opportunities to do that through programming, through memberships. I mean, these are all things we're talking about. So, yes, residents first.

Mayor Lago: It's being worked on, it's being worked on.

Ms. Haley: Residents first, absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Ms. Haley: But we need to get more here.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Ms. Haley: Thank you, sir.

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

City Clerk Urquia: Jorge Diaz.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Diaz.

Commissioner Fernandez: And while Mr. Diaz comes up, we've got to congratulate the Clerk who came in third in the Homestead Pickleball Tournament, correct?

(APPLAUSE)

Mayor Lago: Mr. Diaz, good morning. Good morning, sir.

Jorge Diaz: Good morning. My name is Jorge Diaz. My wife, Carmen, and I have been Coral Gables residents since 1989, for 34 years. Our kids went to the Youth Center. We -- and they enjoyed soccer and baseball and had a great time. I want to thank the City for providing me the opportunity for playing pickleball open play. Pickleball open play is a great thing. Maite got me into it, and it keeps me active. It keeps me interacting with people of all types, of background, gender, ethnicity, young people, people who are 30 years old and 40 years old and 50 years old. There're people in their 70s playing together with camaraderie that you don't find it anywhere else. It's something that is -- and people, instead of looking at their phones, they're interacting. And it's the open play that gives it that dynamism that you don't get if you have a private court where only you and your body is played. Or if you have to -- Salvadore Park is great, I love it, but there you have to coordinate with somebody at what time. You end up -- you don't have this brotherhood bringing together in a way that is magic. Again, in 34 years, I haven't seen that, and I hope it doesn't go away. Thank you, sir.

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

City Clerk Urquia: Veronica Brewer. Veronica Brewer.

Mayor Lago: Next.

Unidentified Speaker: Veronica had to leave.

City Clerk Urquia: James Dockerty. James Dockerty?

James Dockerty: (INAUDIBLE).

City Clerk Urquia: It is, but you said you wanted to speak during public comments.

Mr. Dockerty: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: If you wish, yes, sir.

Mr. Dockerty: All right. (INAUDIBLE). By the way, so you can tell. Hello, Mayor and Commissioners. Good morning. Jim Dockerty. I live at 1230 Catalonia. I'm here -- and I own

two buildings in the 4200 Block of Ponce de Leon Boulevard in the Design and Innovation District. I want to commend the City for all the things they've done to make that area a really great part of Coral Gables. It started with the mall 20 years ago, and then a few years ago you created the Design and Innovation District. I've owned the properties on Ponce almost 20 years, so I've seen so much of what's there now get built. I also want to commend the Building Department of the City for the excellent job they do keeping these developments on their sites when they get developed. You'll probably hear some people complain about the construction process in that neighborhood, but I have witnessed a great job of the City keeping everything going smoothly, most recently the Belmont Village project. I'm here to speak in favor of the two amendments to the plan for the Design and Innovation District, the allowance of transfer development rights, and more importantly, the allowance of height, limit additional height in return for parkland. There's a project that I'm very excited to support. I know it's not a subject today, but I own the two buildings that are across the alley from the proposed project at 4241 Aurora. I very much would like to see a park on that parcel in return for 18 feet of height. It's in the middle of the neighborhood. It's not near Bird Road. It's not near Le Jeune. It's not near any housing areas. It's in the middle of the district. And I think trading 18 feet of height for a park at street level is what the residents and owners of property in the neighborhood want. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Jessica Keller.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Jessica Keller: Hi, I'm Jessica Keller. I'm a resident of Coral Gables. I wasn't planning on speaking during public comment, but Maria Cruz, for those of you who missed it, made a pretty big statement where she apologized for me for all the things that have happened over the years. It was about two years ago that she celebrated the end of the hit list. And she did one of these. And Rhonda smirked; Melissa, you weren't here. Jorge Fors was in that seat. He had a big toothy grin. You smiled; you weren't here. But Mike Mena had a big toothy smile, and Kirk Menendez, you looked down at your hands, and Peter had the biggest smile of all. Facts matter. They really do. I'm glad that you're acknowledging that. The choice to say yes to comfort and not stress yourself affects more than one incident. It becomes a cause set in motion and a reason to perpetuate undesired behaviors and again and again. Do you do the easy thing, or do you do the right thing? You have a lot of decisions to make today. Do the right thing, not the easy thing, unless it is the right thing. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Carl Lee Prime.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Prime, good morning.

Carl Leon Prime: Good morning. Carl Leon Prime, 141 Florida Avenue. I just changed addresses. Items E-6 and E-7 on today's agenda trouble me. You know, the City Beautiful includes being able to see the sky. Trouble me. You know, the City beautiful includes being able to see the sky. Regardless of your proposed compromises, how much more concrete, steel, and glass is needed in the City Beautiful? Careful development, responsible development will move the City forward. Coral Gables does not need to become another Brickell canyon. Please consider this when you go through your proposals for today. You're opening the door to something that cannot be closed. Secondly, Items E-8 and 9 are of concern. Moving our elections removes the singleness of purpose for the event. Including it within November general elections overshadows its meaning. Municipal portions are at the end of what tend to be lengthy ballots. Citizens' voices must be heard singularly. One of the things that makes our city great is the scheduling of elections where the focus is on Coral Gables. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Gordon Sokoloff.

Mayor Lago: Dr. Sokoloff, good morning.

Gordon Sokoloff: Hi, good morning. I wasn't going to speak at this point. I was going to speak later on, on G-6 through G-10, but because the Claudia issue came up, I just wanted to make a few comments because facts do matter. And the one person who's not here to defend herself is Claudia. I think -- I'm not her attorney and I'm not her best friend, but I am an acquaintance of hers, and I am aware of some other facts that did occur. And one, you know, important point is that at the town hall meeting that Commissioner Fernandez and Castro had, you know, she was approached, or she conferred with Commissioner Anderson, at which time she said that you complimented the job she was doing and said you were appointing her for another two-year term. That was -- and then the next thing she knows, you know, she is being booted off the board without any kind of a warning shot. I served on boards for over 10 years, and I was your appointment, and I had an issue with a resident who complained about me, and you dutifully looked at the video and saw that I wasn't rude to this person, and I was given a fair shake. I don't think Claudia was. I don't think Claudia was given any kind of opportunity to make good on it. And you said that she missed the June meeting. It was an excused absence. All of her absences were excused except one. I mean, that's playing it by the rules. I was also denied the opportunity to be on the Transportation Board because of a buried fact about you have to be from a different zone. You know, I think that this Commission needs to either apply the laws, you know, as they should be across the board, or you don't. But to kind of spot-check people is not fair. I think Claudia should have been given, like I said, a fair shot. And I think that the optics of this are not good. I think the optics are not good because the person that she voted against, when she did appear at the July meeting, and she did appear, albeit for only a few minutes, is the guy who wants to replace her, Chip Withers. Nothing against Chip. I know Chip. I like Chip. But I think that those optics do not look good. This was

the very first time at this Planning and Zoning meeting that I saw -- and I was there, I attended that meeting -- that I saw a resident-friendly P&Z board. And it was kind of refreshing, it was kind of nice, but it didn't seem to last but one meeting with her being booted off. I think it's unfair and I think the Commission has to do better. Thank you.

Vice Chair Anderson: Come visit me and I'll give you the rest of the facts that you're missing.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is going to be on Zoom, Mr. Mayor, is Ms. Cheryl Gold.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold, good morning.

Cheryl Gold: Hi, good morning, Mayor and Commissioners. Can you hear me?

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Ms. Gold: Okay. As a member and supporter of the Coral Gables Museum, I'd like to add my congratulations to Elvis and Jose Valdez-Fauli for the exceptional exhibitions and community engagement. Now I'd like to move on to my prepared comments, which I'm going to read for sake of timing. By rejecting the Mayor's slate of candidates and voting in Residents First Commissioners Ariel Fernandez and Melissa Castro, citizens sent a message loud and clear that they oppose overdevelopment and business as usual at City Hall. It is apparent that some on the dais are tone deaf to this message since many of the items on today's agenda are an attempt to circumvent the democratic process and instead continue the approach that you know what is best for residents. Why is today's agenda chock-a-block full of items that will change the future of the City being rushed through while it is still summer? Even traffic studies are not done until the fall when residents are back from vacation and parents have already settled their children in school. What is the urgency to pass election date changes, zoning and planning amendments without notifying or noticing sunshine meetings with residents to inform them and get their input? Number one on the list of objectionable rules is Commissioner Anderson's demand for Claudia Miro's resignation in order to install Chip Withers, the perennial pro-development board member. Your constituents recognize this action for what it is, a brazen abuse of power to regain control of the Planning and Zoning Board to benefit developers. If Ms. Miro's performance was a concern to Ms. Anderson, why did she recently reappoint her to the board for a two-year term? It was only after the developers lost the votes on the board at the first meeting that Rhonda took the unprecedented action to remove her. Now to get to other items. The proposed amendment creating a new zoning district, MX 2.5, and two revisions to the comprehensive plan warrant public notice, resident engagement, and consideration. All would give developers a repeat of what happened with the zoning overhaul without public notice or input that resulted in the upzoning of Biltmore Section north of Biltmore Way with two properties spot zoned for developers. Commissioner Anderson's description of a postage size green space as a park misrepresents reality in order to deliver more height to developers. I'm getting to the end. Please accommodate me. At the very least, these items should have been scheduled for a time certain at 5 p.m. While not required by City Charter, all zoning and comp plan changes warrant a noticed sunshine meeting with residents.

After all, you were elected to represent the people, not advance your own agendas, but to advance the agendas of the people you were elected to serve. I appreciate that Commissioner Menendez has removed Item E-5 and asking the Administration for a sunshine meeting with residents. I ask Rhonda Anderson to do the same with the two comp plan items. Lastly, but of great importance, is the proposal to move the election date to coincide with the general election in November. This is also a brazen abuse of power. The residents should be able to vote on such a change that could result in extending the Mayor's term to almost four years without having to run for re-election. Same goes for Rhonda Anderson. There is no guarantee that voters will vote down ballot for local elections. The savings doesn't justify turning our local elections into partisan politics. The bottom line, residents reject the lack of transparency, special deals for special interests, the lies masquerading as truth, and the authoritarian form of governance. We're observing your actions and closely following the news. We will not be fooled again.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold...

Ms. Gold: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold, before you leave, if you could please put her -- I just want to just put something on the record for you. You said that you will not be fooled. You've been fooled. I was on three different national and international platforms this week. Tomás Regalado's show, I was also on Mario Andres' show, and yesterday, just to make sure that I put it in the public record, I filmed a video stating my position in regards to the elections. I've been very, very clear on the record, both on six different radio programs and three TV shows that I've done over the last two weeks. And I filmed yesterday in my office a two-minute clip with an update in regards to the elections. You've been bamboozled again by a blog here in the City, which is running the agenda of many different people here that want to confuse you to believe that I want to extend my term by 20 months. I have been adamantly clear. I don't know how else to say this. I do not want to extend my term. I have -- it's to the point where it's comical. It's comical. Mr. Clerk, on the record, how many times have I talked to you, and we've been working on this, that I've said very clearly, I do not want to extend my term?

City Clerk Urquia: Multiple.

Mayor Lago: Multiple. I will say it again. Please stop listening to the blog in question that is being paid by people to give you misinformation. Don't do it. I have no interest. The problem is that I will not respond to that blog when they call me. I don't. I have -- if you see on my phone, I have saved all the harassing voicemails from this individual. Whether if you don't give me a comment, I'm going to post the following. If you don't do this, I'm going to say this about you. To the point that it was -- the last one was on Saturday. I have it here. So -- and the amount of public records that are coming in every single day, which are perfectly fine, from this person and from other people asking insane things about my office. It's perfectly fine. You can do it. We're going to give you the documents, but please, Ms. Gold, I've been helping you for years. Do not allow yourself to be bamboozled by a blog that you're reading that says that I want to extend my

term by 20 months. I've been very clear. I'm putting it on the record as long as the City Attorney allows me to, as long as I can say it. May I say it again?

City Attorney Suárez: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: Okay. I'm in favor of reducing my term. I will be voting for reducing my term. I will be voting to move to the election to November, which will save the City money and hopefully get three or four or five times the amount of people to come out and vote, which I think is the democratic thing to do. So, please, please, just like I've answered individuals who have written me emails about any issue, like you, Ms. Gold, who have written me emails over the few years, dozens and hundreds of emails, I always respond, even if it's late, and I will tell you where I'm going to vote. I will never blindside you. So, the point is stop listening to the blogs. Don't read the Herald. This is -- these are all pay-for-play social media propaganda organizations and they want you to do is to click it and put a comment and trash somebody. We are better than this in the City of Coral Gables. We can do much better. We don't need blogs. You can get all your information from the City website, and you will see it live. Go to my Instagram and you will see the video that I posted yesterday along with Tomás Regalado, along with Mario Andres Omega, along with five different radio stations that I was on last week. So, don't believe the rumors, please. God bless you. By the way, I hope you're doing well.

Commissioner Castro: I believe she had something to say.

Ms. Gold: Mayor, I would like to respond to something that you...

Mayor Lago: Of course, you're always welcome to respond.

Ms. Gold: You're insulting my intelligence. Number one, you're telling me that The Herald is propaganda.

Mayor Lago: It is.

Ms. Gold: Number two -- oh, it is. Okay, I want The Herald to know that you said that it's propaganda that they publish. Number two, how many of the...

Mayor Lago: Can I answer that? Can I answer that for you? Can I answer that for you? I have - - I tell the Herald when they call me that they're propaganda. And I...

Ms. Gold: How many of the radio stations were in English? Okay, you do have English constituents.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Ms. Gold: Okay, I heard you say a whole bunch of Spanish language radio that you were on. Did -- were you on any English radio?

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold...

Ms. Gold: And third, don't say that you've helped me all these years. Yes, you've sat and had meetings, and yes, you've answered emails. Yes, we've had phone calls. And we have absolutely nothing to show. There are no results from all the conversation, all the years. But what we do have resulting is rezoning of our neighborhood. We still have no trees. We have the biggest urban heat island on Biltmore Way. It goes on and on. So, don't say you've helped me because there's been no help for our neighborhood, none.

Mayor Lago: May I answer you? May I answer you, Ms. Gold, just to put it on the record, please? First off, when we don't agree -- we're not always going to agree on everything. One of the things that we agree on is that Biltmore Way is a priority, but also Biltmore Way is -- Mr. Manager, what are we looking at in regards to the cost?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, it depends on the scope of the work. It can be anywhere from a million to eight million dollars depending on...

Mayor Lago: I'm fully in favor of doing what you want to do on Biltmore Way. I need my colleagues to also be in favor, and we'll put it in the budget over the next two years to address the issue. I'm fully in favor. But let me...

Ms. Gold: We just want trees that we asked for seven years ago.

Mayor Lago: I understand.

Ms. Gold: Trees. It (INAUDIBLE) a lot of money to do the silver cells, the trees, and the sidewalk. It's minimum...

Mayor Lago: But they're also -- there's...

Ms. Gold: Seven years ago it would have cost a lot less.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold.

Ms. Gold: And it'll be ten years before the trees even provide any shade or benefit, so you know...

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold, you -- I'm being very clear with you. The comments that you brought here right now were saying that you had heard that I'm doing something that's self-serving. I'm answering you. If I did anything in English, yes. Yesterday, I posted on my own Instagram and on my Twitter and on my Facebook, and I was very clear, and I responded to this question to make

sure that it was memorialized on social media so that everybody understood what my position was. It's okay, if you want to get your news from blogs, it's perfectly fine. I don't -- everybody's entitled to do whatever they want to do here, but I just want to set the record straight, so you understand my position and I've been doing it for the last two weeks. If NPR invites me to speak on their radio station, I'll go on the radio station. If an English station, you know, asks me to be on, I'll be on it. If I'm asked to be on Channel 10, Channel 7, Channel 6, I'll be on it without a problem. I've done it before. It's been some time, but I also have to be invited onto these stations to deliver a message in regards to the City of Coral Gables. So I can only do my best, and yes, we're not always going to agree but my door is always open and it's always great to hear from you. Wishing you the best, Cheryl.

Vice Chair Anderson: Mayor, just a couple quick things that so there's not unclear information out there. The item regarding the zoning change, there was a sunshine meeting in the neighborhood that is impacted. And Ms. Gold's neighborhood will not be impacted. The MacFarlane District, where Mr. Prime lives, even Golden Gates, will not be impacted. This only affects the industrial district and responds precisely to the requests of the residents that lived in that community that were given two choices. They were given the choice to follow the zoning code as it currently is written, which would mean that they wouldn't have any park space there at all, okay. Or we could take the FIR that was at the ground floor level and stack it up on top of the building only 18 more feet of height, it's stepped back from the property line, and they will gain something that they didn't have to eliminate that claustrophobic effect. In the same manner that the Blue Ribbon Committee, shortly after I was elected, expressed that how a building meets the ground and how much ground floor area is available is really where the pedestrian interaction with the building occurs. So if you're building up to the sidewalk, if you're only allowing trees on bulb outs on a sidewalk and you don't have any space, that's where you create that canyon effect. Then I'm responding to what the residents want. They had a sunshine meeting. This is the first reading today on a multi presentation item. It'll be back again. Additional public comment can be heard, and we'll move forward. Regarding the election item, I put two options on the calendar so everybody could read it. And again, it's a two -- it's an ordinance, it takes two readings. I've been clear where I stand on it, I'll shorten my term. I have no problem with that. Let the people vote.

Mayor Lago: Okay, can I ask you just one quick --? Mr. Manager, we're in the middle of the budget season, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right, so let's do this. This is an important project we've been talking about with Ms. Gold. Can we have a conversation at the next budget hearing? And I'm asking my colleagues to decide what projects they want to cut to basically replace in the budget these items. Don't forget, I mean -- so I want to talk about --

City Manager Iglesias: If I may say something, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: In the next budget hearing -- so if we're going to do, let's say, a \$4 million project, do we take it from Phillips Park?

City Manager Iglesias: The problem...

Mayor Lago: Do we take it from sidewalks? Do we take it from Venetian Pool? Do we take it from --? I don't know, you can take it from the public safety building, you can take it from the fire station, you can take it from any -- just figure out what it is, and I would like for my colleagues to tell me what are priorities that we can cut or push back to bring this project to the front.

City Manager Iglesias: Let me say, Mayor, just to clarify that we have engaged Dover Kohl on two studies.

Mayor Lago: I know we have.

City Manager Iglesias: One is for the Biltmore Way area and the other is for Flagler Section. And the idea is to determine what the residents feel that is appropriate so we can set up appropriate budgets and we can present that to the City Commission. And we're waiting until the end of summer because if we do it during summer, many people are out. So, Dover Kohl has been engaged to do multiple (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: So, let me ask you a question, Mr. Manager, if I can because I want to put a timestamp on that. I want to put a timestamp on that, it's important. When did we engage Dover Kohl?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I don't remember, it was months ago.

Mayor Lago: But it was before the last election, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, it was at the beginning of the year.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so what I want to make sure is that people understand this didn't -- this Dover Kohl study didn't happen because of the new election. This Dover Kohl was done by the previous Commission. And this is a study that's going to study this area and review certain designs and bring it before the residents and say, what would you like to see? And then we will put a price tag to that and then budget it. If we want to budget, let's say \$4 million, \$3 million, \$2 million, whatever the number is that the Commission deems appropriate and they want to do that, fine. Tell me what we cut or tell me what we redirect money from a certain project to start putting money away, like we were doing -- for example, we're doing the same thing with Phillips Park. We put \$9 million, the number, in regards to that. We're not starting Phillips Park this year. We're designing it, and then we're trying to put together all the money so we have it budgeted. So, when it's done with the design, we start the project. We can start doing the same thing with Biltmore Way. But the bottom line is that there's only so much money to go around. So if you want to do

that, then we need to take money from somewhere else. Where are we going to take that money? But please, Ms. Gold, two things, two points. Number one, budgeting takes time. Budgeting takes time. You just don't have an endless credit card. So, when you talk about the elections, I'm pretty clear in regards to where I stand with the elections. You've heard me. And number two, you already know that we're taking steps. Dover Kohl has been engaged, and we're waiting for the summer to end because it wouldn't be appropriate to do it in the summertime, like you said, and get public and resident input to move forward with that project.

City Manager Iglesias: We've been engaged with substantial public input.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

City Manager Iglesias: Substantial public -- the engagement includes substantial public input, so we have an idea as to what the scope of the work is because it could vary tremendously. Signalization could be millions of dollars. Without signalization -- so there's a complete street reconstruction or repaving to setting trees. There's a gamut of things that can be done, and the cost is quite different from millions of dollars in differential costs, depending on what the scope of the work is -- what the scope of the work is determined to be.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to add that recently I met with the Manager and his team regarding the budget and different items and I made it clear to the Manager, might be a drop in the bucket, but with regards to a line item for the Youth Center, I'm more than happy to make at least \$200,000 available, and I'm sure maybe the \$200,000 can help with the tree situation. So, that was a conversation we had, and I was willing to, you know, allow -- have \$200,000 go to another need in the City.

Vice Chair Anderson: Manager, you know, I've had some discussions about putting some trees out in front of City Hall here, and along the sidewalk. Specifically, we're talking about, I think, seven gumbo limbo trees, or eight gumbo limbo trees, and some white tabs in between. Remind me, approximately how much money was that?

City Manager Iglesias: I don't remember.

Vice Chair Anderson: I thought it was -- Deena would know.

City Manager Iglesias: Deena would know, she's downstairs. But we can -- maybe she can -- maybe -- we have the Public Works Director, if he remembers. I don't...

Vice Chair Anderson: Do you recall what that figure was for putting the trees in with the guttering that we discussed so that we can reduce the cost of the overall project?

Public Works Director Diaz: So -- and I apologize if I'm not 100 percent sure about the numbers.

Vice Chair Anderson: No, no, no, but I'm unclear right now. I thought it was 800, but...

Public Works Director Diaz: One of the options that we looked at was Biltmore Way has about 12 foot wide sidewalks. So, the idea of removing sidewalk flags, removing soil, because you cannot just plant it, you got to put structural soils and then you got to do the next five over, we estimate about a million dollars, roughly.

Vice Chair Anderson: I'm just talking about the one side here on City Hall so it's a new perspective.

Public Works Director Diaz: Oh, you want here.

Vice Chair Anderson: So, there's a framework of reference for folks. So, like, you know, when we have the farmers market, there's some shade, and guess who just walked in?

Public Works Director Diaz: I'm trying to remember, because I know we had a similar idea on this block right here of adding some smaller trees and with some bump outs.

City Manager Iglesias: I do remember that the other project was a million dollars. That's why I said a million to eight million. I don't recall, maybe...

(COMMENTS MADE OFF THE RECORD)

Public Works Director Diaz: Was that what it was?

City Manager Iglesias: 200.

Public Works Director Diaz: Okay. So, okay, that sounds about right. But it wasn't just put bump outs out. It's the same -- remove some of the sidewalk flags and put smaller trees and the wide sidewalks. And I forgot how many bump outs we were going to put on the parking. It was seven?

Unidentified Speaker: Seven.

Assistant Public Works Director Bell-Llewellyn: I believe it was seven, and we talked about gumbo limbo trees.

Public Works Director Diaz: We could share that with everyone at the Commission. Like I said, unfortunately, we're...

City Manager Iglesias: We need to be careful with that estimate because we could have drainage issues there, so we need to be (INAUDIBLE).

Public Works Director Diaz: 100 percent, and that was -- you know, that was a high level estimate.

Vice Chair Anderson: Yeah.

Public Works Director Diaz: We don't know what utilities could be underneath at this point. We don't know -- there's some work to get there. So, roughly, I think Deena's recollection is right, but we could definitely share that with everyone.

City Manager Iglesias: Vice Mayor, it's a very preliminary number.

Public Works Director Diaz: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: So, let's -- Vice Mayor, do you have anything else you'd like to add to it?

Vice Chair Anderson: No, no, I was just trying to get a handle on the number.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Vice Chair Anderson: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, if I may, I'd like to be added as a co-sponsor to the elections discussion, but only to the one that reduces my term.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: Just I don't know how much clearer I can be. I just called to rent a plane. I'm going to write it over the City. See how that works. Maybe that'll address the issue. What do you think? So, okay, anything else on that topic? Thank you, thank you very much.

Public Works Director Diaz: Thank you.

Vice Chair Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Moving on to public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: We're done with public comment.

Mayor Lago: We're done, perfect, good stuff.