

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item I-1**  
**June 28, 2022**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**  
**Vice Mayor Michael Mena**  
**Commissioner Rhonda Anderson**  
**Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.**  
**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**  
**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Deputy City Attorney, Cristina Suarez**  
**Assistant City Attorney, Naomi Levi-Garcia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Nelson Diaz**

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Agenda Item I-1[Start: 11:00 a.m.]  
End of Session Report from the City’s Lobbying Team

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item I-1, 10:30 time certain, city’s lobbying report.

Assistant City Attorney Levi-Garcia: Good morning, Mayor and Commissioners, Naomi Levi-Garcia, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager and Assistant City Attorney. I know we have a long agenda today, so I just want to jump right into it and introduce our lobbying team, Southern Group and Ron Book P.A. We have Nelson Diaz here, Kate Deloach and Rhonda Brown. And if I could just take a moment to sing their praises, because as much as the Commission’s engagement is so critical to our success in Tallahassee, so too is this lobbying team. If I need a meeting with the Governor, I can call on them and they can deliver. If I need a project sponsored 24 hours before the filing deadline, they make it happen. If I need five projects funded in the budget, this team can work miracles. So, I just want to say that, thank them. I couldn’t do what I do without them, and I

*City Commission Meeting*  
*June 28, 2022*

welcome them up here to give the presentation, take you through our journey in Tallahassee this session and tell you a little bit about our successes.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Diaz: Good morning Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. Thank you, Naomi, for those kind words. It really is a pleasure working with someone as competent and as hardworking as Naomi, and really working with a Commission as hardworking and competent as you all are. You guys made a little, not a lot, a little, but a lot of extra effort this session to engage and talk to legislators and talk to your legislators and to build those relationships, and that's critically important and it shows. First of all, Mr. Book wishes he could be here, he's not. He's not here today, but he sends his regards and his best. I want to introduce Rhonda Brown who works with Mr. Book and Kate DeLoach who works with the Southern Group as well. These two ladies, you need to come here. You guys worked really, really hard on behalf of the city and we really appreciate everything. So, I did send you – there we go, so I know that you guys are pressed for time. The presentation does include a wrap up of the last four, five years of our representation of the city, but in the interest of time, I'll kind of skip to the money and to 2022. It was a record year. There was a good deal of money in the budget, but there was a lot of hard work that went into these incredible successes. This year alone the city got of about \$2.5 million dollars, yes, \$2.5 million dollars in budget items, only one project was vetoed. I understand it was an important project for the city, but you faired a lot better than others. So, for example, the average dollar per resident that Coral Gables got this session was \$72; each Coral Gables resident got about \$72 from the Legislature. If you look at your sister city next door, City of Miami, there's was \$20 per resident. So, Coral Gables faired very, very well. You can see the septic to sewer conversion assessment got \$375,000 from the Legislature; the sewer system repair got half a million; the stormwater master plan got half a million, even though the Legislature doesn't really like to fund plans and assessments, we got it funded, and a lot of that is the hard work that the entire team put in. The Gondola Building got \$750,000; the Mobility Hub got almost a million, of course that ended up getting vetoed, but that was another million dollars that was there. And then there were two parks that were funded through the FERDAP Program at \$200,000 each. That total came to \$2.5 million dollars. We kind of went back and did some math, which was never my forte, but we did the math over the whole time that we represented the city, and we came to a return on investment of over 1400 percent on what its cost you to get these returns and what you've delivered for the city. So those numbers are pretty good that you can go back to your constituents and talk about that. The last thing I want to say is that you guys have incredible representation in Tallahassee – Senator Garcia and Representative Busatta Cabrera work incredibly hard to get your projects in on time, properly submitted, and funded, and they really do. I've seen it when I go see chairmen of this committee or that committee, and I talk to them about Coral Gables projects, and they'll put out their list and say, yes, Representative Busatta Cabrera

*City Commission Meeting  
June 28, 2022*

put that at the top of her list, Senator Garcia put that at the top of her list. These are personal requests that they make, and they fight for the city, and we owe them a debt of gratitude as well. So, with that, I'm happy to entertain any questions, thoughts.

Mayor Lago: I think your presentation speaks for itself. This Commission along with your help have worked in tandem to ensure that we can bring home the most money that has ever been brought home that I'm aware of, to the City of Coral Gables. I want to thank Naomi, I want to thank Chelsea, I want to thank Martha who also went with us to Tallahassee and my colleagues. This is the first time that an entire Commission has been to Tallahassee. We didn't just go once; we went four times; four times to Tallahassee to ensure that we sat down with our legislators and that we explained to them that why they should reward good behavior, why they should be grateful that they have cities like Coral Gables, which play by the rules, which do not indebt themselves by spending money that they do not have, and why we deserve to have per capita of \$72 per resident be brought back to this community. So, we made that commitment, we are beyond grateful for your continued effort, your leadership, your guidance throughout the process. Having gone up there four times during session, it was a heavy, heavy lift, but it was well worth it, and the proof is in the pudding as they say. You can see it right before you. I want to just very quickly say, thank you to Representative Duran for always opening his doors, along with Senator Garcia, incredible work, Representative Cabrera, she has been incredible to us. She's been very gracious in her leadership. Senator Avilla, which was Representative Avilla, now Senator Avilla, it pains me to say that he is not going to be in the County Commission, which he was running for, but he's going to be up there, so he's an ally for us and he always advocates on our behalf. Speaker Danny Perez, we are blessed to have him serving, hopefully Speaker in three or four years, two years, excuse me, I apologize. We'll have an advocate up there who understands the needs of our community. Governor de Santis – not many cities can say that they had a meeting with the Governor. He listened. We sat down at another meeting with members of his staff to drill down on issues, along with the Lieutenant Governor. Tallahassee opened its doors to us, and it was because we went up there and we committed to helping, to come into an agreement with Tallahassee playing by the rules. And I want to thank you again for your leadership, for your unwavering commitment and for guiding us throughout this process. Thank you.

Mr. Diaz: It's certainly been our pleasure and again, we couldn't have done it without Naomi, without the whole team, without you guys, and you are very blessed. I would venture to say that Coral Gables got the most money of any city that's not in the district of a presiding officer, more than likely that's true. I haven't confirmed it.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you.

Mr. Diaz: Thank you guys. It's been an honor to work with you all.

*City Commission Meeting  
June 28, 2022*

[Date]

3

Mayor Lago: By the way, just really quickly. I know that Naomi is working on it. I had a conversation with Representative Duran. I ran into him and actually Pepe Diaz, the old state rep was the one that actually turned me onto it that there are \$150 million-dollar additional possibilities that's at the state level now for funding. Do you know anything about that?

Mr. Diaz: Yes. So, there's a super fund, I don't know if you want to jump in. I actually think its \$170 million.

Unidentified Speaker: \$175 million.

Mayor Lago: \$175 million. I would really...

Mr. Diaz: We'll be sending that out hopefully tomorrow – oh, you sent it, okay, so they sent it.

Mayor Lago: Finally, when I spoke to Representative Duran, obviously, I think as per Pepe's guidance, he told me that he's engaged on that committee.

Mr. Diaz: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Any other Representatives that can help us, I told Naomi to let's put forth our best foot forward in regard to projects that obviously the Governor would really appreciate. Let's not put up the Mobility Hub knowing that he's not a fan.

Mr. Diaz: It doesn't go through the normal process. The Legislative Budget Commission is awarding, they are sort of like a grant process.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Diaz: So, the Governor will not be able to veto it. That being said, there is a state law that says, you can't fund something that has already been vetoed, so you couldn't submit the Mobility Hub, for example.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Okay. So again, I leave that up to Naomi and the City Manager, but this is something its another opportunity to have, not being greedy, but again, I'll take it where I can get it, to bring home.

Mr. Diaz: And its mostly House driven, if I'm not mistaken. So, Demi, Representative Busatta Cabrera or Representative Duran or even Representative Avilla, because he's still technically in the House.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Menendez: I just want to add it was an impressive session, everyone was laser focused, everyone worked together. Mayor, you did an amazing job leading our team to

*City Commission Meeting  
June 28, 2022*

Tallahassee multiple times. I guess in the spirit of being greedy, one of my favorite items, important items was the funding for Venetian Pool, that unfortunately didn't make it this round, but hopefully in the future we can do our best to keep things like that, because those are, the Venetian Pool impacts so many residents and it's a national historic landmark, and I know sometimes they have to pick and choose, but that's very dear to my heart, but overall very impressed, as Rhonda knows that been up there in the past and I can honestly say the work done was impeccable. So, congratulations on an incredible job.

Mr. Diaz: And you can submit that project again, if you'd like. Just know the Legislature chose not to fund it once, but you can submit it again and see if it can get funded.

Unidentified Speaker: And I would also encourage the city to look for...grants for that or some type of grant...[off mic – inaudible].

Commissioner Menendez: We'll pursue. Thank you for that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your hard work.

Mr. Diaz: Thank you guys.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, great work.