

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-1
April 16, 2024
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, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Budget Director, Paula Rodriguez

Public Speaker(s)

Sergio Leymarie, Chairman
Maria Cruz

Agenda Item F-1 [1:10 p.m.]

An update on the Mayor's 2023-2025 Strategic Priorities Plan
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto time certain item, F-1 for 1 p.m. So, this is an update on the Mayor's 2023-2025 Strategic Priorities Plan, and I'd like to invite our Chair to join us. Thank you, sir, I appreciate you being here. I know you are very busy. I'd love for you to give a little bit of background and your engagement and your involvement in the city.

Mr. Leymarie: Absolutely. Good afternoon, everyone, Mr. Mayor, Madam Vice Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, Commissioners and all Coral Gables residents who are watching us today. So, it is an honor for me to serve as a volunteer and Chairman of the Mayor's Citizen Board of Advisors since last November, and I'm just going to go very quickly through what our board is and does. So, our

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board is comprised of six members and all Coral Gables residents of course, all volunteers. We want to think of ourselves as a free resource to the city and we are obsessed with serving the city. We meet roughly once a month in this room and all the meetings are accessible via Zoom, and the members, the six members, so we come from very diverse backgrounds and diverse professional backgrounds, including information systems, social intelligence, strategic advisership, foundations, we even have a Vice Mayor, Mayor Dorothy Thomson in our ranks. So, one of our activities over the past few weeks has been to review, discuss, provide input to the Strategy Priorities Plan for 24/25, and we believe this is a strong plan that its going to provide a very good focus for everyone in the city departments, city leadership, etc., to collaborate and amplify their success for the benefits of our citizens. Specifically, there are specific items in the plan that will improve the day-to-day living experience of our residents and there are also provisions that will help create new opportunities for residents. So, we consequently, we recommend that this plan be adopted and, of course, a good plan is a living document, right. So, it's never set in stone and as we keep learning, as we keep getting more input from our citizens, as we keep trying things we will have additional input, suggestions, recommendations, over the course of the year, but we believe this is a good plan. So, I'm happy to take any questions. You can reach out to me anytime, of course and I just thank you for having me here today.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may. First off, thank you, like I mentioned, and its important that we have you here, because it's important to ratify what the board is doing, and our friend, Sergio here represents the colleagues on the Council and he's here to discuss and support the Council's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan. It's a visionary document, like we discussed, that I had the honor to develop upon entering office, the strategic plan distinct from the city's strategic plan, outlines initiatives specifically designed to synchronize with and compliment broader city strategies. It represents a pioneering approach to urban governance, incorporating direct input from our community through the Council's efforts. Since its founding in 2021, the Council has achieved significant milestones, including notable success of securing funding for the city's mobile app last year, which is a big step forward, and I wish we had Raimundo here who could talk a little bit about that, but it's a big step forward. The achievement not only enhanced our technological engagement, but also set a precedent for how collaborative efforts between the Council and the City Commission can bring about tangible improvements to our community services. Looking ahead, the Council is committed to furthering the goals set out in the strategic plan. We encourage continued collaboration between the Council, the City Commission and other stakeholders to ensure these goals are realized, benefiting all city residents. We are grateful for the dedication of all council members. Their ongoing commitment is essential for our city's growth and improvement. It is my hope that the City Commission will review the plan and support the council's initiatives, as we strive to make our city a better place for everyone. Thank you, Sergio and all the members of the Council, for your inspiring leadership and for advocating so effectively for our community's best interest.

Mr. Leymarie: Thank you.
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Mayor Lago: So, I hope that everybody had a chance to take a look at the plan. If you hadn't, I want you to look at it, tweak it, tell me what you think about it, add, say listen, I don't support this, but the whole purpose of the council is just to do good and we were really able to achieve some great things last year and we had like over an 80 percent success rate of at least finishing or starting a lot of the tasks and I think the city's mobile app was a big step forward, especially getting funding. I think it was about \$150,000 in funding.

Mr. Leymarie: That's correct.

Mayor Lago: I don't want to say a number without being correct, but we were able to get that funded. So, if anybody has any questions or any ideas, I welcome them.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. This is the Mayor's Strategic Priority Plan, why do we have the Mayor's. This is not a strong Mayor government. Can we go ahead and change this to maybe the Commission, because we all work together as a full Commission, right.

Mayor Lago: So, I can answer you. Again, we're trying to do something good here. Let's not politicize everything. The idea is very simple. I've taken a step forward three years ago with the council of multiple people who wanted to engage on the efforts of bringing something good, of working hand-in-hand with the City's Strategic Plan to just bring some ideas and get people together collaboratively to sit down and have conversations and to really push something forward. I welcome that every single one of my colleagues start their own plan, I think it's great. I think it's a beautiful thing. It's an opportunity and I will support you on that effort. I will find funding for whatever that you would like to do. I think this is an effort that is only good for the city and it's an opportunity to get behind something.

Commissioner Castro: Absolutely. I agree with you. However, I think we need to work as a Commission-as-a-whole and not keep on dividing this Commission.

Mayor Lago: This is not divisive. This is only good.

Commissioner Castro: There are different strategic plans, we need to follow one as a Commission, not several different ones, and I love that idea of what your advisory board is doing, but then again, this is not a strong Mayor government. That being said, I am going to move to sunset the Mayor's Advisory Board.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Anyone else.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second that. I think that we have a strategic plan that we voted on as a Commission.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, we have a motion and a second on the floor for discussion.

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Commissioner Fernandez: Right, I'm having the conversation. I appreciate the work that you all have done, but you're asking us to vote on something that wasn't even attached to the agenda. So, we'd be voting on a strategic plan that we have not even seen.

Mayor Lago: I'm pretty sure that it was submitted. It was submitted.

Commissioner Fernandez: I checked.

Mayor Lago: And my understanding is that it's available on multiple different locations online.

Commissioner Fernandez: Its not on the agenda.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, may I make a suggestion, since the strategic plan whether it be the Commission's or the Mayor's and so forth, historically has had the Mayor's label on it. This particular Commission has taken exception to that, but you're trying to kill a good project, a good thing based upon linguistics. So if it bothers you so much that the Mayor's name is on it, we can make the Mayor's and the Commission's advisory board and not loose the ability to have the ideas of community members who have volunteered their time, come and thoughtfully discussed matters and try to offer some guidance to this Commission on issues of concern, just like people do here on public comment. So, you know, I don't get stuck on linguistics a lot of times, because I understand that this is supposed to work together, we're supposed to work together as a team to accomplish what the residents would like us to accomplish and not in-fighting back and forth and hanging all the process up on whose name is on something.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm comfortable with that solution. I too looked for it, at least online I haven't been able to see the strategic plan. I'd like time to look at it and review it and appreciate it. I've met with the gentleman in the past and before and I know a lot of the members there. They do great work, but I think I support the Vice Mayor's idea. I would like the Commission to have the opportunity, I know the meetings are open, but to be more engaged in the process with all the things that you are doing. I'd love for us equally to be engaged, but I'm more than supportive of the Vice Mayor's suggestion.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'd be in favor of sunseting the Mayor's Advisory Council and creating a Commission's Advisory Council.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I don't think we need to sunset.

Commissioner Fernandez: We can all appoint members to that council.

Mayor Lago: If I may add. We have a motion and a second. Let's go back to pickleball. When we discussed pickleball here and you brought up the idea, I didn't ask to co-sponsor the item with you. You've been pushing pickleball. I brought up an idea of a location that I worked on for an hour, walking around the park to see if maybe that would fit, because I think it's in the best interest of

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the city, its not about politics. I didn't say hey, I came up with the location, now I want to be co-sponsor of it. That's your project and I want you to run with it and I want you to bring it to the finish line and I'll support the funding, because I believe in the project. I don't politicize issues. If you want to sunset this, something that I've worked on for four years that anybody can go to a meeting, anybody can speak, in one year in public office, no one here has taken an interest in going to one of the meetings. I've gone to the meetings. I go to the meetings. I thank the staff. I'm there. I bring ideas. I work with people. I meet with the board. I say how can I work on things, give me ideas. Some ideas are great, some ideas are just unfeasible and some ideas I don't agree with. So, it's very simple, use the pickleball as an example. You're running with that idea, I'm going to support you on the location, support you on funding, finding ways to bring it to fruition, but the idea that everything has to be politicized and everything has to be destroyed just because you didn't have your fingerprints on it and I started it three years ago, and it just doesn't make sense, it doesn't make sense because again, its also an issue of this was started three years ago. If you're unhappy with it, I tell you, start a complimentary approach, but it's simple.

Commissioner Fernandez: This is being...

Commissioner Castro: I have to say something.

Mayor Lago: I'm not done. I'm not done yet.

Commissioner Menendez: City Attorney, I think has a comment.

Mayor Lago: This is simple. Again, Madam City Attorney, you want to say something.

City Attorney Suarez: Just that the Mayor's Advisory Council was established by ordinance. So, if you all wanted to adopt the resolution today, it would be to direct staff to come back with an ordinance sunsetting the council or changing the council, whatever it is that the Commission wants to do.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm comfortable. I think this is something that may take a little bit more time to study, to look at, to find a solution that's fair. I think the first step, if the Mayor's good with the suggestion of the Vice Mayor, I can support that and I think the rest of it needs further study. I don't want to do a knee-jerk reaction here and I think you all have done amazing work and you are dedicated, so let's see if we can find a step where we can come together, and down the road we can look at things and perhaps suggest maybe another, we can appoint somebody as well, but right now, if the Vice Mayor is good with that suggestion, with the name.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think we should just study this. I'm quite frankly disappointed in the constant in-fighting here. You're killing good programs that were in existence before, they were never a problem before. You're making problems where there's no problems.

Commissioner Castro: The whole point of this is to stop this divisiveness.

Mayor Lago: We'll come back on the issue because I don't want to waste anymore of your time. You've got to get back to work and on behalf of myself, please send my apologies to the board members that are working tirelessly on behalf of the city, and we'll get to the bottom of it, and we'll figure out where we go from here, but we're going to defer. I'm going to defer as the sponsor of this item, I'll defer to another meeting.

Commissioner Castro: I didn't mean any disrespect at all.

Mr. Leymarie: No. I don't take any.

Commissioner Castro: I just feel that we need to start working together as a Commission-as-a-whole and the divisiveness has to stop.

Mr. Leymarie: Look, I think we are all united here with the desire that our city would prosper and our residents would prosper, right, that's the common thread in all those discussions and the common motivator across all the people in this room, and just see that you have a structure of...of six people who are volunteers, who are obsessed to serve, and just that. You know, would it be good for the city to dismantle that, so I leave you with that thought.

Commissioner Fernandez: What I would like if your board can consider taking the Commission's Strategic Plan and comparing it to yours and maybe coming back and presenting to us what the differences are, so I think that may give us a better idea.

Mayor Lago: If I may, as the sponsor of the item and someone that's worked on this for three years, I just ask you again, we'll defer it, we'll leave it alone and we'll move on from here. We're going to go to lunch.

Commissioner Castro: No, there's a motion on the table.

Mayor Lago: We have a motion, yes, go ahead, a motion and a second to dissolve the Mayor's Council.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Its an ordinance. It would have to come back.

Commissioner Castro: To direct staff, to direct staff, but just to change the name on the strategic plan. I don't want all that work to go to waste. I want us to read it, to consider it, and to make it ours as a Commission, not the Mayor's.

City Attorney Suarez: So, I'm sorry Commissioner, so its not to come back with an ordinance dissolving the, sunseting the...

Commissioner Castro: Its two different things. Its coming back to dissolve the Mayor's Advisory Board, maybe we could still use some and do a board for the whole Commission, some of the members and then the second one is to – their strategic plan to make it the Commission's strategic plan so that we can all have something as one. We don't have a whole bunch of different strategic plans. We're working together towards one vision.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, since you didn't have the opportunity to watch the Commission meetings prior to taking office and haven't had the opportunity to watch them since then, the Mayor's Strategic Plan was the Commission's Strategic Plan and we all...

Commissioner Castro: I've gone over both. I've gone over both during my Commission meeting, we compared them and there's Commissioner Fernandez', there's the city's, I'm not just talking out of nowhere. I'm talking for a purpose.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I understand, but you interrupted. We all contributed in the prior Commission to the Mayor's Strategic Plan and worked in a united fashion. It appears again that what we're doing is trying to create division on this Commission rather than work together. This is an ordinance and the City Attorney, please advise how this should be handled.

City Attorney Suarez: So, there could be action taken today that directs staff, it directs my office, directs staff to come back with an ordinance that can sunset that Mayor's Advisory Council. I understand the second part of the request is to, I guess, bring back this strategic plan as a Commission's proposed Commission strategic plan for you all to consider and perhaps adopt next meeting. However, there was another Commission's strategic plan that was already adopted, so will that supplant this. I think we need some more direction as to what the intent is. Would this one supplant that one; is there further consideration.

Mayor Lago: I know the intent of my colleagues. The constant battle here. So, why don't we dissolve the Mayor's Council, as their wish of the Commission and then they can come back and replace it with something else they'd like in the future. That's what they want. I'm not going to fight anymore. Let it go. Three years of work, let it go.

Commissioner Menendez: I personally would like everything deferred and we can come back and study it, think about it, and propose suggestions and maybe there's something we do and something we don't, but I think right now to do this, we have a meeting that police union and we have a lot of things and I think right now perhaps we need to step back and then give it some thought.

Mayor Lago: So, Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second to dissolve the Mayor's Council.

Commissioner Castro: No.

City Clerk Urquia: It would be for the City Attorney to bring back legislation to dissolve the Mayor's Council.

Mayor Lago: Then we have that.

Commissioner Castro: Its to direct staff. It's not to make a decision right now.

City Clerk Urquia: Before I take the vote, Mr. Mayor, we have a member of the public requesting to speak on the item, Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. I appreciate your hard work. Thank you.

Mr. Leymarie: Thank you.

Ms. Cruz: Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Believe it or not, I was a member of the original Mayor's Council for actually, I think two, three years, so I can tell you that we proposed the defibrillators in the parks and we're still waiting for that. That was one – something that we really thought it was important, and guess what, it was pushed back, and it never happened, and that was done, and we brought it to the Commission and there was discussion and we never got to it. I think this may be the answer. If you have a Commission group, a Commission board that will be appointed by different people then when you come here you will have consensus as opposed to one person with his ideas deciding what should be done. I'm still hurting for not having the defibrillators because we, that Mayor's Council where I sat for, I think two or three years, we proposed that, and it was never pushed along.

Mayor Lago: So, as the sponsor of this, number one, the defibrillators, we were working on having them installed in some of the parks. My understanding is that they are in the budget. I have to speak to the Finance Director to see exactly which ones, which parks were in the process of installing those or we can speak to the Manager. Mr. Manager, are you aware of which parks are going to be, where the defibrillators are going to be installed.

City Manager Rojas: No sir, I do not.

Mayor Lago: Okay. In reference to ...

Budget Director Rodriguez: I have my book downstairs, but I have to doublecheck, but we did have discussions in the last budget process to fund the installation of defibrillators. I don't recall in this very moment; I'm trying to picture it whether we actually chose to fund it or not.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think we did.

Budget Director Rodriguez: So, the Commissioner is saying – so we may have.

Commissioner Fernandez: We funded a pilot program.

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Budget Director Rodriguez: Right. We funded a pilot program. I don't know the status of that, we can certainly get the status for you of the installation. I know that there were some questions at one point about exactly how it was going to work. So, we can get the status of that project.

Mayor Lago: If you can get me the status that'd be great.

Budget Director Rodriguez: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: There is a motion and there's a second on the floor to ask the City Attorney to dissolve the Mayor's Council, to bring legislation to dissolve the Mayor's Council.

Commissioner Menendez: Before we vote, I personally prefer suggestions to come back on how to modify the council in a way that perhaps the other members have representation, instead of just – I rather just come up with a solution of how it could evolve as opposed to just shutting it down then having nothing. I'd rather do it.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, can we get a roll call vote.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I would prefer that as well. I'm not prepared to vote on this item today.

Commissioner Fernandez: Are you willing to amend your motion.

Mayor Lago: Vice Mayor...

Commissioner Castro: I'm willing to leave it for next Commission meeting and I do have an idea. Somebody in his advisory board, I could definitely take as my appointee to not dissolve completely the board. He could keep another one that would make four left, I don't know.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, we could defer it.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, you withdraw your motion.

Commissioner Castro: Till next Commission meeting.