

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-4
November 9, 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

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-4 [12:00 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing that, under certain circumstances, the City Manager submit a separate memorandum to the City Commission, during the budget process, highlighting increases to the salary of a certain class of employees. (Sponsored by Commissioner Menendez) (Sponsored by Commissioner Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item G-4.

City Attorney Ramos: A Resolution of the City Commission directing that, under certain circumstances, the City Manager submit a separate memorandum to the City Commission, during the budget process, highlighting increases to the salary of a certain class of employees.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Menendez, Commissioner Anderson.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes. Thank you, Mayor, sorry.

Commissioner Anderson: Start you up – it was that coffee.

City Commission Meeting

Commissioner Menendez: I was stuck in trash pits. This legislation – and I want to thank the administration for sitting down with me the other day and we had a lengthy discussion. First off, I want to say that it’s been a true pleasure professionally on a personal level to deal and meet and talk with the administration on many issues. They go above and beyond for their work; their diligence and they provide a lot of clarity on issues that sometimes aren’t as clear to perhaps me, perhaps some of my colleagues, to the public at large. Having said that, I always think that once you think you’ve done everything you can, then you, as an organization or individual have failed. So, always looking and striving to do more and better, I’m proposing, and I appreciate together with Commissioner Anderson, we’re both co-sponsoring simple piece of legislation, that when the budget cycle starts, we’ll highlight whenever there’s salary increases of 10 percent or more, for appointed officials and executive level employees as a class. This doesn’t have to do with one employee getting a raise here or another there, because I’m not here to single out anybody and I get very upset when folks in the community zero in on one member of our staff or two members of our staff, I think that’s uncalled for. This has to do with a class of employees that if there is an increase above a certain number, then we, as a City Commission is made public, we receive a memorandum detailing that, highlighting that. So basically, what this is, is getting one of those yellow highlighter markers and just highlighting a part that is of interest to the community and of interest to us. It’s simple, it’s clear, but I think it adds yet even another layer of enhancing our communication with our residents. Commissioner Anderson, I don’t know if you want to add.

Commissioner Anderson: Well, I’ve been also meeting with staff and going through this budgetary process and I do think highlighting these types of increases will help us do a better job, not only of managing the money, but also making sure that the employees in each category are looked at and not forgotten, from the upper level to the lower level, we can compare with what our competitors are doing out there, so to speak, whether its other municipalities competing with us for positions and bring those in line. So, this is a great start at bringing the transparency necessary for the residents to understand why these increases happen and put in place.

City Manager Iglesias: Let me say that we have no issue with this. Our increases are fairly standard throughout government. We have merit increases, we have loyalty increases that happen – merit increases apply for a certain time, generally 10 to 13 years when you are hired, and you get your maximum salary. After that then you have loyalty increases which occur at 10, 15, 20 and for certain employees at 20 maximum and certain at 25, that’s very standard in government. Then we have increases due to the fact that you are promoted, you’re promoted, that may be an increase of 10 to 15 percent, depending on the job that you are promoted to or how big a promotion it is. And then we have our COLA increases or cost of living increases, which apply to everyone, except elected and the appointed.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager will you highlight what the COLA was for the Commission.

City Manager Iglesias: It could have been 9 percent, we reduced it to 3 percent. The cpi is based on for the Commission and the Appointed is based on cpi, which is 9 percent, we limited it at 3 percent.

Mayor Lago: And your COLA increase could have been?

City Manager Iglesias: 9 percent.

Mayor Lago: And what did you get?

City Manager Iglesias: 3 percent. Which is similar to the merit increases that Police and Fire get, by the way. So, there's nothing that we've done here that is not normal, based again on merit increases, loyalty increases, COLAs, and promotions. If those four things coincide it may be a very large increase, but that is simply because a number of things coincided. You could have an employee that two years ago got a merit increase, a COLA increase, and a loyalty increase, and then the following year got a promotion. So, all those things add up, but that is how government works. I can tell you that's how City of Miami worked and I'm sure that's how Dade County and various other municipalities work, because that's very standard in government.

Commissioner Menendez: By the way, I just want to – thank you City Manager, for all the work that you and your staff do with regards to the Budget. People think it's a simple task. People think it's like a Kinkos, but we're a city government that handles multiple departments, multiple levels, multiple services, it's a complex institution, and to manage it, to forecast and to make sure that we have the proper funding for projects going forward, even for a rainy day your team had done an amazing job. I've been in local government for a while, and I've seen when things don't go well, because sometimes you don't have the right team, but you have the right team. So, I just want to emphasize the first whereas in the resolution so that there is no confusion here among the employees or in the community. Important first whereas, and we'll move from there: *“Whereas the City Commission trust that the City Manager and staff are dedicated and competent public servants who have the city's best interest in mind and who follow all rules and regulations, including those regarding how the budget is set and how raises are provided.”* You have our complete trust, and we appreciate the work that's done.

City Manager Iglesias: Commissioner, if I can say I'm privileged to work with this team. It's an absolutely fantastic team. I don't know of any municipality that has a team truly as good as this one. It is a privilege for me to lead this team every day.

Vice Mayor Mena: May I?

Mayor Lago: Go ahead. I was going to add something.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, no, please.

City Commission Meeting

Mayor Lago: By the way, before the Vice Mayor, I've requested from the Manager in line with this resolution, I've requested that the Manager send to the Commission a memo breaking down the salary breakdown and the loyalties and all that kind of stuff for the employees, and that's the extent of it. It will be a memo that will be made public, as all memos are, like the one that I wrote today in regard to the Commission succession, and we will move on from that. Mr. Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Mena: I have no problem with asking staff to submit a memorandum or provide information on any topic, let alone this one. What I don't like about generally how this entire situation has been handled is that I think we need to stop being so reactionary to statements by small groups of people about topics. If somebody tells you that they have a problem with how compensation was handled for any person in the city, I think you should tell them great, thank you, I'll look into it. I think you can have the meetings that we've now had with staff before it's an item that's discussed at the Commission level to form an opinion and then if you have a problem with something that was done, bring it to the Commission. What's happened here is, nobody seems to have a problem with any of the raises that occurred here, at least I haven't heard anybody come out and say that. And the impression that's been given suddenly by this dais is that something, and I appreciate there is a whereas clause that says we trust our staff, but oh by the way, we are going to have these rules in place just in case. It's kind of you know – we are trying to make everybody happy, and again, I just want to encourage people on this dais now and in the future. If you have a problem with the City Manager's compensation, bring it and let's discuss it, but I've yet to hear anybody say they actually have a problem with what was done. And what was done was consistent with an executive compensation plan that this Commission passed, not the five people who are sitting here, but it was passed by the City Commission, and so, I just want to be careful that we give folks out there who have a problem with how this was handled, and they are entitled to have a problem with how it was handled. I don't begrudge anybody having an opinion on any topic in this city, but I just want us to be careful that we don't react first, engage in diligence after, and then come back with you know, things that make it appear like there needed to have been more controls in place in the first place. I'm all for transparency, that's why I'm saying. If you had another resolution on this agenda that said, we'd like to get a memorandum on spending on parks, I'd say, okay, great, that's fine. That's not a problem, but I just want to be careful that we don't give the impression, because I know from your comments that nobody up here believes that anything was done improperly or that any of the salaries are inappropriate. So that's my point. I feel like there's now been several items over the course of the last year that get put on the Commission, and again, it feels like react first, do due diligence after, and then come back, and I just feel like if we had had the meetings we now had with the City Manager to begin with, before having it on the Commission agenda, we all would have been satisfied that they did everything to the letter of the law, if you will, on the compensation plan that this Commission approved. And so, that's my broader comment. I get comments like all of you do from people in the community about these types of topics and sometimes, again, I appreciate what the first whereas clause, this

City Commission Meeting

gives the impression that there was a lack of controls in place, and I don't think there was. So, I'm happy to have more transparency, but to me, all that the City Manager and his staff did was follow our executive compensation plan that we approved. It was in the budget we discussed, and any one of us – I appreciate the Sunshine component of what we do, but each one of us regularly has the right to one-on-one go ask for any information we want, and if I wanted to ask the City Manager for more information on his salary, City Attorney salary, whoever salary, I could have done that, you could have done that, everybody up here could have done that. We didn't. So, I appreciate what this is trying to do, and again, I don't have a problem with it. I'm not against it. I want as a broader commentary say, we need to stand up for ourselves a little bit sometimes and we need to engage in, you know, honest dialogue about what the actual facts on things are, and not allow things to get taken out of context. That applies to everything that we deal with in the city, not just this topic.

Mayor Lago: And I think that we also need to be very, very careful, because people have agendas, they have their own agendas, and we have to be a little bit more meticulous when we do that and that applies to myself and that applies to everyone on this Commission. Like I asked the Manager, we should have done this from the beginning, I said, Mr. Manager, please provide me with a memo in regard to the following compensation, this has been brought to my attention and address it that way. I think it would have saved a lot of heartache and time, and again, for me, I welcome as much transparency. We have onsite meetings, we had two of them yesterday, Paula and I, with residents at their homes; we had open door Friday; we had a Town Hall meeting last week. Everybody has access to this Commission. We are always there, we are always present, we are always willing to meet and discuss an issue. Sometimes we agree, sometimes we will disagree, and that's the beauty of our democracy. To the sponsors of the resolution, how would you like to move forward?

Commissioner Anderson: Mayor, one other point.

Mayor Lago: Please take all the time you have.

Commissioner Anderson: I had asked the City Manager for basically providing a chart, so that we can do a comparison of salaries to see if we're adequately compensating all the employees and have a clearer picture then of both contract employees versus the exempt employees and look at and compare what they are being paid now versus what the competition is out there. And I'm going to ask when the City Manager completes that, that that also be shared with the complete dais, because if we are going to evaluate why are we having vacancies in certain departments or unable to fill certain positions, we may need to look a little more carefully at that and compare what other municipalities are paying and be able to track that talent here. This is really us just trying to look at more carefully and continue to fill these vacancies that we need to fill.

City Manager Iglesias: We have already initiated a compensation study. It should be done soon, and we will bring that to the Commission as soon as its finished and analyzed. As far as the executive benefits, it's extremely minor. It sounds like we're dealing with General Motors here, we're not. This is nothing to do with that. It's just a few things and I think the naming of that was actually incorrect because as you all have seen in our meetings, that its extremely minor. There is no - we go simply by what I've stated and that's what's been done in every case, and there is no issue.

Mayor Lago: I think we've explained enough on this issue. I think we've gotten away, and I'm just going to give you an example and put it on the record to what we've gotten to. We've seen multiple blog discussions that the city is in financial trouble. When the Manager went to Historic preservation to talk about finding solutions to address our broad needs for historic preservation through the TDRs, that's interpreted saying that we are in financial trouble. That the city cannot afford to do the Farmers Market in the North Gables. Can I explain on the record how that happened. I don't have a problem ever saying sorry, when I make a mistake, even though when I'm not wrong, I'll say it anyways, I don't have a problem. That was brought to my attention by Cabrera Jr., I brought it to the Manager, it was an oversight on my part. We moved so quickly, its such a good idea to have a second Farmers Market in the North Gables to really kind of push what we're trying to do in the North Gables – the medians, the landscaping, the cleaning, give that community which always says that they don't feel sometimes like they are part of Coral Gables, give them a sense of community and participation. We moved forward, I completely forgot to engage this young man in the process. When he came back and he found out about it, after he advertised, he came back to me, he was upset about it, as he so well deserved to be. I told him, after we finish one year, we are going to come back and I" going to give you a shot to get this done. We finished it off, everybody loved it, its continuing to grow. During that process of the off season, we went to meet with the Manager. I said, Mr. Manager, this gentleman brought this to our attention, as you remember, we want to give him a shot to do this. We gave him a shot to it. Takes stress off of our Parks and Recreation Department, which is doing a million-and-one things with the Country Club, all the things that are happening with the parks, the renovations. What is the story? The story is not that we did something right and we corrected an error that I made. No, the story was that we moved in a different direction so the Manager can have a raise. Let's be honest with ourselves. That's misleading. That's disingenuous. That's not who we are as a city. The city is in incredibly solid footing. We have a triple, triple bond rating. We have an immense amount of money in reserves; we are tackling major projects. What you're seeing right now is the issue of projects are doubling in cost as a result of the inflation, the labor cost, the construction cost. This is what I do for a living. But you're going to go out there and scare people in this community and tell people that we're not financially viable, that's gross, pathetic is what that is. So, I don't have anything else to talk here. I'm more than willing to pass a resolution, I don't have an issue with it.

City Commission Meeting

[Date]

6

November 9, 2022

*Agenda Item G-4 – Resolution directing that under certain circumstances
The City Manager submit a separate memorandum to the City Commission*

I think its great. We can move forward. I've asked for the memo from the Manager; the memo will be given to my office and to my colleagues on the Commission and we move forward.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, if I may say. We are the only city that has a number one rated Police Department, number one rated Fire Department, and triple A rating in all three agencies and we sit alone with that.

Mayor Lago: And the investment in infrastructure in parks, in police and fire, that we are making as a community, is the envy of everyone in this community, because everywhere I go people tell me, Vince, what you guys are doing on all these different fronts is incredible. How many parks have we inaugurated that we've renovated in the last six months that our Public Works Department, that our Parks and Recreation Department have been working? Again, we want to be perfect, but we're really good, we're really, really good.

Commissioner Menendez: I appreciate all the comments and they are well taken. We live in the best city, not only in Florida, but in the United States. Its community, its staff, its everyone working together, moving forward. No one person, no two person, no three person can dictate to the rest of us what's reality and what's not reality. We are here to work together. We appreciate what everybody does. We really care and we are grateful. And with that said, because I feel strongly that we should always take steps further forward even if they are little steps. So, this is one of those little steps that I'm co-sponsoring with Commissioner Anderson. Having said that, I'll move it.

Commissioner Anderson: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Commission Meeting

