

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item C**  
**May 21, 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**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Richard Lara**  
**Maria Cruz**  
**Christina Vidal**  
**Umberto Silvestre**  
**Jackson Rip Holmes**

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Agenda Item C [10:11 a.m.]

**Public Comment**

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk we move onto Public Comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor, the first speaker today is Richard Lara.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Lara, good morning.

Mr. Lara: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, good morning, Commissioners. Thank you for allowing me to speak on a very important subject. As this Commission and the residents viewing online and in here, personally, at the last Commission meeting item F-16 was discussed and this was a

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Resolution to authorize the City Manager to approve and issue a reimbursement to the Actors' Playhouse Productions. During that meeting, which was an ordinance or I should say a resolution that was sponsored by Commissioner Menendez. He referred to an urgent need, as well as referring to the need described by him, to allow basically and mostly children with disabilities to be able to get to the second floor of the Miracle Theater. And for context, the city owns the Miracle Theater, the tenant of the Miracle Theater is the Actors' Playhouse Productions. Mr. Menendez, Commissioner Menendez says, he thinks there's a path forward to take care of this much needed assistance. The Actors' Playhouse is a party to a lease with the city and the lease provides that any ADA related issues, including compliance are the responsibility of the tenant. That said, at the last meeting, the only stated concern regarding this need to be able to access the second floor is that the current wheelchair lift didn't accommodate a larger wheelchair if it were powered. That represented the extent of the facts that were provided to this Commission to be able to vote as urged by Commissioner Menendez to reimburse the tenant \$41,000 to build a 24-foot ramp. Now mind you, is referred to as being a request for a reimbursement that the tenant never paid a penny. So, I don't know why its being referred to as a reimbursement, but that's how it was couched. The ramp happens to be one of the worst possible options for addressing what is an unknown issue, because the tenant never appeared before this Commission, never stated why they have a need for a reimbursement or assistance of any kind. But when questions were raised during that Commission meeting, none were answered. Yet at the urging of Commissioner Menendez, it was stated that there was a time issue, as well as a need to address a concern that had never been actually voiced. The city officials that were here at the last meeting stated that after inspecting the site the wheelchair lift, if I could be indulged on a very important matter, that after inspecting the site at the Miracle Theater, which involved rising approximately the same space and height as these three steps that you see here before the Commission dais. The statement made at the last Commission hearing was that the lift is obsolete, it can't be fixed, it cannot be modified, and it cannot even be replaced. Nothing can be further from the truth. Let me state that the present wheelchair lift is functioning. I actually attended the Friday night performance at the Miracle Theater of the Roxtails...I also noticed that Commissioner Fernandez, Commissioner Castro were also in attendance, on state receiving a few days after this hearing awards from the operator of the theater. I observed patrons using the lift without issue as they have done for many years. So with no specific or general explanation from the tenant, as to why the city should fund any of this major project, let alone grant \$41,000 of the taxpayers money without discussion or even an alternate bid. All that was provided to this Commission was a single page saying \$41,000 is due. The ramp option discussed is not only the most expensive option, its also the most disruptive, disruptive to the floor plan, and potentially violates safety, as well as standards for fire safety. Understand that if that ramp went in as proposed, it would eliminate the existing wheelchair lift and remove half of the present stairs that are being used presently to enter and exit the theater. Even if we were aware of what the problem is, which was never stated during this last Commission meeting, \$41,000 would still be horrifically overpriced for this ramp, not even knowing whether its viable or even needed a ramp. The logical and financially prudent option would be instead to replace or modify the existing lift. Either the problem involves convenience, ADA compliance, who knows, because we've never heard or seen from the tenant what the specific issue is, nor was it raised by Commissioner Menendez when he urged for a vote immediately at that hearing. Were the lift to be replaced or modified, it would not only be the cheapest option, it would also avoid disrupting the flow of traffic and it wouldn't disrupt the floor plan, and it would also represent the safest way

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to deal with whatever this problem might be. Pricing for a brand new lift would be substantially less than the \$41,000 that was voted on at this last hearing to be paid to the tenant for a ramp. In closing, the Commissioners who voted for this resolution, in my opinion, as a taxpayer, again, my name is Richard Lara, and I live at 1001 Coral Way, the Commissioners who voted for this have shown their lack of care, in my view, or concern for the use of taxpayer money once again. They have not received or requested from the tenant a factual basis for the need of any payment of \$41,000; and despite voting at the last Commission meeting that there will be two additional bids provided by today's hearing, to my knowledge not a single alternate bid has been sought or received. None has certainly been provided and indeed, this issue is not on the agenda for today inexplicably. Payment of \$41,000, assuming no other bid is provided, to me, under these circumstances will represent an abuse of the elected office and a misuse of the taxpayer's money. I am available if anyone on the Commission would like to ask me any questions today or after this hearing, because I have visited the site and I know that there is a cheaper and safer and better way to go about this, than simply having an urging of an unknown need and an unknown timing issue to justify the misspending of up to \$41,000. I entertain any questions should anyone on the Commission wish to ask me.

Commissioner Castro: I do. I have a question.

Mr. Lara: Certainly Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: Since you were watching the same day that we were watching, did you take the time to talk to Barbara about this?

Mr. Lara: I didn't have a chance to speak to Barbara about this, but I did observe not only patrons using it, they were using it without any issue. I watched people go in with the wheelchair, it took approximately five seconds for the wheelchair to go up 24 inches and then go right to their seats. Did you have a chance to speak with Barbara?

Commissioner Castro: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. And I recommend that you speak with her, because some of the things that you are saying are inaccurate.

Mr. Lara: Would you name any of them.

Commissioner Castro: I would recommend you speak to her, because I don't want to put on the record things that are not 100 percent accurate, but I do recommend you speak to her. And I really, really hope you didn't take this opportunity to really attack one of my colleagues.

Mr. Lara: I'm sorry, I didn't hear, to do what?

Commissioner Castro: I really hope you didn't take this opportunity during public comment to attack one of my colleagues, because that's what it seems like.

Mr. Lara: Well, if you can spare calling out what was a lack of factual predicate, no basis for voting for \$41,000 as an attack, you are misusing the word attack. I'm a taxpayer. You are an elected official charged with guarding and safeguarding taxpayer money.

Commissioner Castro: I recommend you speak to Barbara and if you want next time, come back and we'll speak about this again.

Mr. Lara: Today, as in the last meeting I have heard no factual basis to support factual basis to support an award of \$41,000. Does anyone have a factual basis whether the tenant needs the money, whether the tenant has the money, whether the tenant has sought a grant, or has sought a donation from anyone to put in a ramp. Do we know any factual basis other than the conclusion, the conclusion that they want it so let's vote for it one, two, three.

Commissioner Castro: Barbara is the queen of donations, before she would even come up to any of us, she would look for other resources, this was her last. But if you could just take the moment to speak with her, I think you would opine differently.

Mr. Lara: Well, I wanted everyone to know I'm a supporter of the Miracle Theater. I'm in full support of the rights of the disabled, but I am also a champion and a full supporter of ensuring that our elected officials do not misuse and misspend our taxpayer money. Nothing on the record last Commission meeting and nothing today has changed the view and not a single fact has been put before this Commission to justify that vote, and if there is anything that you are aware of, Commissioner, that you are urging me to go speak to Miracle Theater about, why don't you just tell us what it is.

Commissioner Castro: Because I'm not going to put facts out there that are not 100 percent accurate.

Mr. Lara: Oh, I agree that we need facts to be accurate. I haven't heard a single fact though.

Commissioner Castro: Number one, I wasn't the one who sponsored this item, but I did take the opportunity to speak to Barbara and I do understand the necessity. But if you feel that \$41,000 is too much, find me quotes that are a lot cheaper.

Mr. Lara: On that point, Commissioner, the specific vote that was taken, as taken down by the City Attorney was that by today's meeting there would be two alternate bids, two alternate bids would be provided by today. Just a moment, may I speak without interruption. There has been no bid provided today despite the vote requiring that there be two by today. I do not understand why the tenant who is charged with coming up with a request supported by facts for a reimbursement has not appeared or provided the bids that you have voted needed to be provided today. Remember, this is not a procurement that the city is undergoing for improving or purchasing a product. A request was made for a reimbursement by the tenant who has the primary obligation to pay for it. So, to come before the Commission and say, I want \$41,000, I would respectfully state, they should appear and give cause, some reason. None has been given and you are now urging me to go find out on my own after two meetings without a bid. I would submit that since the motion was carried

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and the vote was that by today two bids needed to come in, this issue needs to be revisited and many more questions need to be asked, and more importantly, answered. I have no further comments. Does anyone have any questions.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you very much for coming.

Mr. Lara: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Thank you for being here with us.

City Clerk Urquia: The next speaker is Maria Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: [Inaudible – off mic]... While I'm here, I'll introduce myself, its Mrs. Maria Cruz and in case some people cannot remember, I took the time to have a shirt printed, so from now on my name will continue to be Mrs. Maria Cruz, because my husband who's birthday was today, will be very proud of the fact that I still am Mrs. Maria Cruz, even though he's dead. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Billy, don't worry about the time, because the previous speaker spoke way more than three minutes, so please indulge me. First of all, these public comments have become campaigning moments, campaign moments. I'm sorry, we have somebody who's a candidate who announces his candidacy here and today has started attacking the person he is running against. Wonderful. I'm so glad that people can see that we're not interested in what's going on in the city. We're interested in, let's see, attacking, lying, doing whatever it takes, hopefully you will get the support of the establishment again, so the people can show that that doesn't help. Once again, Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, where I have lived since 1976. Maria Cruz, the one that comes here to every Commission meeting and when I've been unable to attend, I have done it by Zoom. I do not come here to announce my candidacy, even though some people have asked me to do so, because you know what, I'm a resident. I care about this city. I'm not here to run for office to get the support from the establishment. I'm here to make this city back to what it was, the best. First of all, I would like to thank, and Mr. Mayor, I would appreciate if you pay attention. If you're not going to pay attention, I'll stop.

Mayor Lago: You have my full attention.

Ms. Cruz: Thank you. And its Mrs. Cruz, I'll have your full attention. First of all, I'd like to, but you continue playing on your phone. Remember, I was a teacher, when teachers spoke people listened. First of all, I'd like to thank everyone, residents, employees, interested parties, who take the time to watch the Commission meeting, and I've heard wonderful things from people that claim that they wish that they could be here, but due to the circumstances, due to the bullying, the threats, etc., they don't think they should do so. So, I'm here to let you know that Maria Cruz is not moving away. I guess much to some people's disgust. Maria Cruz bought that house to be able to attend church, even when I became disabled, even when I have to use the wheelchair, I will be there and I assure you, that somebody will get me here too. Sooner or later, we will be here and we'll make sure that we don't show up only when we want to showcase what we want to be seen and known. Okay. I think my name is very well known for good or bad, for those that like me and those that do not, but its well known. My mother used to say, "el papel a won ta todo." I couldn't come up

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with a good translation. So, I'm going to give you my translation and I saw Mitch Kaplan around here, he was said I was his Spanish teacher. So, I will give you the best translation I can. The best way I can describe it, if the Mayor pays attention, I'll continue is that paper will take anything you write on it. Doesn't make it right, doesn't make it true, doesn't make it pretty. Whatever you write on a piece of paper, whatever you print, you color, paper will take it, and that's why I'm talking about this today. Our city continues to be in smoking mirrors phase. The residents, the employees, need to be careful when you read or listen to some of the elected officials continue to say everything is great in the city. We have no financial problems. I listen to the residents, more development will bring more money, more taxes. I want transparency and clarity. I'm here for you. I'm here to serve you. Wonderful words. Wonderful words, but don't forget because of me, you were able to fix your building because of me, you're able to open today, because those are said too. Take everything from the source and when in doubt take the time to watch the videos and you can watch the Commission meetings, you can watch the Town Hall meetings, and let me tell you, its very interesting to watch here, sit here and every other word is I, I, I, instead of we, we, we. Okay. We're not interested in saying what we have done, but what I have accomplished whether true or not. When you watch those videos, it may be an eye-opener for you, and may I suggest that you also look into asking for financial statements, because its important to follow the money. We're not in favor of out of town developers, but we certainly accept money from any developer that gives it to us. It is a very sad moment when even when the honorees talk, we have to stop and say, how I did this and I did that, taking away from the people that really did. And I'm going to tell you something, the Literacy Fair was wonderful, but it was very, very shameful to have people waiting for the arrival of the King, and it was very shameful to hear that only one person had something to do with the Literacy Fair, because some of us that have followed the School Committee know that there were other people involved that Mari Tere Rojas had some part, that the School System had some part, that Ariel Fernandez before he was a Commissioner had some part, but of course we couldn't utter those words because you know that would give credit to somebody who is not I. The only thing we talk about in this city and its time for you all to wake up and smell the coffee. It is not an I moment. It's a we moment like we used to do, and let me tell you, I'm tired of people blaming the new Commissioners. Well, first of all, Mr. Menendez is not a new Commissioner, they forgot that. So we talk about new Commissioners on the radio, newspapers all the time, the new Commissioners. I guess you left and came back, but the fact is that they new Commissioners, the Commissioners that have seen what's going on here instead of criticizing them, watch their demeanor, watch their behavior and you will see the difference. Okay. I'm sitting here and I'm watching them taking pictures. Things are being said. I see people watching and I see somebody on the phone. Okay. You know that doesn't show respect to the people that are here talking, and I'm sorry, I have the need to say that because I'm tired of reading, listening, and being told how wonderful one person is and not researching and not going back to the sources that you can verify how great and shame on anybody who comes here just to do his political campaign for free, because that's what it boils down to. One page in Gables Magazine, but you know what, every time we come here to campaign, the whole city sees it and that's wonderful because they see the reality. So, have a wonderful day. I hope you continue doing what you need to do. I'm very grateful that you all take the time to do what's best for the city and don't worry, everybody can see that. Smoking mirrors have never worked. It will not work again. Have a wonderful day.

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Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Christina Vidal.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Just to make sure we correct the record. It was three minutes plus the 6:52, correct.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: So, it was ten minutes. Mr. Clerk are you keeping tabs on how much.

City Clerk Urquia: I am not, sir.

Mayor Lago: I want to make sure we start keeping tabs. I want everybody to have their fair share to be able to speak.

City Clerk Urquia: Christina Vidal.

Mayor Lago: Good morning. Thank you for being here with us.

Ms. Vidal: Mine will be shorter. So good morning. Thank you all, each and every one of you for your service. It's a lot of effort and a lot of work and we really appreciate every one of you. My name is Christina and I'm here with my mom, Diana. We live at 301 Alesio Avenue and it's a pleasure to be here, because there have been developments in the community with regard to sustainability, and it is inspirational. Since last summer an initiative has been incubating and this is an ideal moment to build on months of progress by proposing a Coral Gables Tree and Mangrove Working Group. This working group is to be a collective, inclusive effort to Mrs. Maria Cruz' point, that welcomes stakeholders and subject matter experts in a collaborative service to the community and to government. In early March of this year, a project concept vote was issued by our family, reporting on months of due diligence and answering to the need for an updated tree inventory, which should be the immediate focus of a Tree and Mangrove Working Group. This concept note has been circulating and if you have not received it, it is simply because making appointments requires time, but we'll get to you. The need for a tree inventory is an opportunity for the working group to contribute significantly to our quality of life and our fiscal well-being. It can ensure that deep consideration is given to the tools and methods for tree stewardship, natural capital accounting, and associated eco-system service benefits. If these latter terms are unfamiliar, it will be the purpose of the Tree and Mangrove Working Group to make them meaningful and familiar. So, thank you all and we look forward to elaborating further on this beautiful initiative. This is a pending project in the city and its a great moment to do it, because technology really supports us this time around. So, thank you, and I look forward to seeing you all again. And if you have any questions.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: I look forward to seeing you too. I didn't catch your last name now.

Ms. Vidal: Vidal. V-as in Victor; I – D as in David; A – L. And we've met.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, I know.

Ms. Vidal: I've seen you. We did the mangrove planting during the Pandemic which was fabulous.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right. Right. Right.

Ms. Vidal: Really fun.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let's catch up.

Ms. Vidal: Yes. Super.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I wanted to thank you and your mom. I know you've been working on this project for some time. We've met a couple of times to discuss this and I think this is something we may be able to put on the agenda, maybe not next meeting, but the July meeting to have a little time for everybody to meet with them, so that we can have further discussion. This is something that we've talked about since the campaign, the need to have a real tree inventory where we can start planning for future issues that may arise, temperature changes that could affect some of our tree canopy, and I know you've been proactive in trying to find the best way to do it. I don't know if you had the opportunity to meet with the Manager and our Landscape Management team.

Ms. Vidal: Not yet.

Commissioner Fernandez: But that should probably be the next step. Mr. Clerk, if we could put this on the agenda for the July meeting, I'd appreciate it.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Ms. Vidal: Thank you all.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Probably also have ready at that time, some background work I've been doing on our State Statute and some proposed amendments to address some gaps that we have, in order to be able to protect our tree canopy as well. I've been, I know you all know, working with our wonderful Landscape Division on diversifying what our canopy is, so it is more resilient in the future, but be able to prevent trees from improperly being taken out, based upon the current State Statute and the lack of any opportunity for our city to be able to rebut reports that are lacking proper foundation is a major gap that's reducing our tree canopy. So, I do want to forge forward on this.

Ms. Vidal: It's a vast topic and its going to be a lot of fun. I think everyone is going to enjoy it.

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Mayor Lago: First off, thank you for being here. If you would indulge me, would you mind meeting with Ms. Bell before you leave. I don't think you've had the pleasure of meeting with her. She could go over quickly and just give you a little bit of groundwork on two things that happened years ago that were done already, it's a tree inventory for all the trees on the swale, and there is also a tree succession plan, which will give you an idea in regards to what is already budgeted every year, which I think is \$200,000 a year in the budget. I don't have the budget in front of me, but from what I remember. It's a \$200,000 reoccurring budget to, as trees are involved in, for example, an accident, a car accident or dies or lightening strikes, that there is monies in place already in the budget to replace those trees, especially in the canopy. So, if you would, if you would be so kind to meet with Ms. Bell and you can have a quick conversation with her and you can work together collaboratively on that effort, because I think you'll be very pleased to see that there's already a lot of information in regard to 40-plus-thousand trees on the swale.

Ms. Vidal: 42,000 – I did actually. I begun all my due diligence began last year, so my concept note that you will receive and I'll sit down and happily discuss it with you, was born out of a collective meeting, October 5<sup>th</sup> of 2023 that included Greenspace Management, Sustainability, IT, GIS and other departments of our city. It's a very thorough, very deep and broad piece of research that took me many months, but I did not do it alone. I stand here speaking, but it was a collective effort that involves stakeholders and subject matter experts at FIU, at University of Miami, at Miami-Dade, and at the national level. I'm interfacing with scientists at New York City, at Cornell Tech, they are the leading experts in the field, the designers of the tree-folio platform. So, I'm deeply, deeply knowledgeable and what I'm bringing here is months and months of work, countless hours, interfacing, meetings, and yes, I know Deena, don't know her as well I would like to, but we'll get there. So, its going to be a lot of fun and I look forward to working with all of you.

Mayor Lago: And it fits in perfectly with the city as a Tree City USA, 34 years running.

Ms. Bell: 39.

Mayor Lago: 39, I'm sorry.

Ms. Vidal: That's right. We have every reason to lead the way, not only for our county, but frankly, nationally. So, it's a great opportunity.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here. I appreciate your hard work. Thank you.

Ms. Vidal: Thank you. Bye-bye.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk: Umberto Silvestre.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Silvestre, good morning.

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Mr. Silvestre: Good morning. Good morning, ladies, good morning gentlemen of the Commission. Thank you. Thank you for serving. This is really tough, you guys hearing us out. So, appreciate it. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me, Mr. Mayor, thank you for taking the time to meet with me, Mr. Fernandez. Appreciate your message. I'm speaking on behalf of preserving the Youth Center field. It seems like we've aligned on that. I really appreciate that you guys have heard the community and taken the time to understand the needs and kind of some of the things that we speak on. Also, Rhonda, thank you for highlighting and leading the Sunday effort to open the Youth Center on Sundays, that's really awesome and I appreciate that we'll have that Youth Center for us for an extra day. So, I just wanted to follow up, it's a really great honor that you guys have acknowledged and so we kind of communicated that in the petition that we started that we've been heard, right. We know that things aren't done, right. We're still trying to find an ideal place for the pickleball courts. Our message is thank you for preserving the field. We've met with the pickleball community, we support them. While its not really our place to dictate where the fields will be at, we just support you guys in finding the best and optimal place that could be, and we just thank you for standing up for the field and trying to find an optimal solution for everybody. So, I'd really love to hear some of your thoughts one-on-one, maybe if I could meet with you, Melissa, because it seems like from what I've heard from some of the Commission, we're aligned, right, and this city is continuing. It used to be a place where we do 5-0 votes, right, we're all aligned and we are all unanimous. I just wanted to thank you. Congratulate you guys for hearing us. Continue to work hand-in-hand. I know its not done. I don't want to take up too much time, but something that I think was a little outdated though, I think from the Gables Insider. When was the May issue published – was it like early in the month.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm not part of the Gables Insider.

Mr. Silvestre: I'm not sure.

Commissioner Fernandez: In fact, I haven't even looked at the last two editions.

Mr. Silvestre: You're good. You're good. But it seems like that there is really consistent messaging, right. So, I just want to make sure that that is across the board. So appreciate.

Commissioner Fernandez: Now that you're up here, I do want to correct. Coral Gables Magazine did have an error in what they published. It said that there was a 5-0 vote to approve a facility at the baseball field. That is not the case. We never voted to approve or constructing any facility at the Youth Center and like I talked to you, and I've talked to many members of the community that came out to talk to me. We've actually had several meetings over the last two weeks with the Manager's office, with Parks, with our Parking Director, Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, to look for a place that works for everybody and I think the Chamber of Commerce was a great opportunity because our Parking Department wasn't even realizing some of the needs that they had from some of the businesses over there. So, we are working on this, that's why its not on the agenda today. I have committed to everybody that I'm working behind the scenes to try to find options and then we will probably have a community meeting that's what I'm working towards, so that we can work through those options and have a community discussion and get everybody's input.

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Mr. Silvestre: Thank you so much.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, if you – the young ladies that are in the offices, our Commission Aides, they can tell you when I’m available, because I’m available this Friday, next Friday, I’m not sure, because I’m scheduled for jury duty.

Mr. Silvestre: Absolutely. Just thank you guys. Thank you, Mayor, for leading us.

Mayor Lago: See you on Friday. Send my best to your father. Thank you.

Mr. Silvestre: You guys are great. Just thank you. We’ll stay on it and we’ll be diligent.

Mayor Lago: Take care. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Lynn Blustein.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Commissioner Castro: So good to see you.

Ms. Blustein: Thank you. Bear with me just a second. Lynn Blustein, 4330 S.W. 15<sup>th</sup> Street. My home in Little Gables for 35 years, and I think I’m going to need an extra minute and-a-half, if I may. Many thanks to those that answered my email regarding the exact language of the proposed Straw Ballot on annexation. This is exactly what will be on the August 20<sup>th</sup> ballot. None-binding straw ballot question, possible annexation of Little Gables into the City of Coral Gables. Would you support the city pursuing the annexation of Little Gables, the area generally bounded by Southwest Eighth Street to the north, Southwest 16<sup>th</sup> Street to the south, Cortez Street to the west, and Southwest 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the east, into the City of Coral Gables via Miami-Dade County’s Annexation Process and absorbing all associated annexation costs – yes or no. At the February 27<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting, a discussion of costs associated with annexation was brought up. You can watch it unfold on that meeting video, item H-1, scroll over to 7 hours and 4 minutes. There was lots of hemming and hawing about what the cost will or might be to the residents of Coral Gables. For those that might not be familiar with this old-fashioned expression, here is the definition, hem and haw means to speak in an evasive, vague, roundabout way to avoid responding to a question or making a definite statement. It was then and only then that the last few words of the ballot question were added. Those last few words are, “absorbing all associated annexation costs.” Well, from the November 14<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting presentation prepared by your staff, on the line of total expenses, it seems clear to me Coral Gables will spend \$23,594,000 for just the first five years, if annexation were to take place. I constantly read and hear all about the improvements and necessities and repairs that the residents of Coral Gables need and want and the expenses that go along with those improvements and necessities and repairs. Dear intelligent and fair-minded residents of Coral Gables, do you really want your city to spend \$23, 594,000 on annexing Little Gables when you need this money for your own quality of life. Please do go out of your way to vote no on this annexation question. Expanding your tax base to include Little

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Gables will not be worth it to you in the long run. That tax base ship sailed last year, with the very loud rejection from High Pines and Ponce Davis neighborhoods who resoundingly told Coral Gables to take a hike, and that's putting it mildly. I could say lots more, but I know my time is limited. My last item is a question for Mayor Lago. I watched your interview of April 21<sup>st</sup> with Jackie Nespral on Channel 6. You said something that I couldn't believe I was hearing. I listened to it a number of times. You were speaking of meetings with the heads of the Dade County Fire Union and Coral Gables Fire Union. This is exactly what you said and I'm bringing it up because I would really like you to explain this. Quote, "And I met with these individuals. I met with the county at Café Abbracci and he told me you have two options; Option A is you allow us to absorb the City of Coral Gables Fire Department and I'll allow you to annex Little Gables or I'll ruin your name if you keep moving forward with the annexation process." So how did my life, my home, my future, and my neighbors and my neighborhood become part of the seemingly quid-pro-quo exchange. Who is allowing what to whom? If these agreements and negotiations are actually taking place behind the scenes regarding annexation, I think everyone should just stop immediately and take a good look at this. So please explain Option A. When one can eliminate any and all injustices, they will never have to worry about their name. And thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Let me respond to you. First off, this was already responded to with the gentleman Billy McCallister, who is the head of the Fire Union from the County. I had multiple witnesses. He requested that meeting of me, and I said, let's meet at Café Abbracci. He wanted to discuss what would happen in regard to services, in regard to the residents of Little Gables versus Coral Gables potentially taking over. He was very clear, and he threatened me on the record and said, if you continue moving forward with annexation I'll destroy your reputation. I said listen, we're here to discuss about the residents and what we as a city would like to potentially engage in the annexation process. I'm not going to allow anyone to intimidate me. I mentioned this, this is the second time on this dais that I mentioned it. I said it in front of Mr. McCallister, who is here, this is old news. It was not an issue of quid-pro-quo even though I know you would like to define it and probably potentially members of this Commission would like to define it as that, but that is furthest from the case. What happened was that I was not going to allow Mr. McCallister to intimidate me. Now, Mr. McCallister is also part of the recall effort. He helped fund it and so did another developer in this community, but at the end of the day, the residents of the City of Coral Gables will have a ballot. They will be able to vote moving forward. That was decided by Commissioner Menendez. It will move forward and decide whether to annex or not. It will be a decision of the residents. So, I always, always am grateful for you to be here. You always have a platform and an opportunity to speak, but I just appreciate if we not try to muddy the waters and we try to truly, truly tell the truth in regards to what the issues are. He tried to intimidate me at a restaurant, and I put it on the record here in the Commission and it was a question that was asked to me by Jackie Nespral and I spoke on the record. That's it. That's what it is. Thank you.

Ms. Blustein: Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Another little thing. The person that came up with the idea that we needed to display something on the language that associated to cost was me, and I did push very hard for numbers to be there, but there is a certain number of characters that are allowed to be on the ballot,

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that's one; and number two, I really, really wanted numbers to be there, even if it was only the numbers, but Finance told me that they are not 100 percent accurate and it could be misleading.

Ms. Blustein: This was your presentation from November 14<sup>th</sup>.

Commissioner Castro: I know.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Ms. Blustein: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Have a nice day.

Ms. Blustein: And you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Rip Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes, good morning.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you. Its great citizen public comment forum. I want to thank our new City Manager, Amos Rojas. He's the reason I'm here. He has reopened City Hall to the voters, to the residents and the sad story is before you came, I wasn't here, because it was like a torture chamber, but anyway. So, I want to get into two important updates that I think are of interest to every person on the dais. I said once in the past two great news items that Citizens United could be approximately overturned. There is a setback there, I want to give you the update, and then I also said another great news item is that the Governor of California was suing Big Oil, and so maybe we're not going to all drown after all by sea level rise. Its like a battle of survival. Who survives the oil companies or Coral Gables where we get flooded out forever, you know. And so, my hero is whatever else he does, right or wrong, the Governor of California suing Big Oil. We've seen the Supreme Court – what's the bad news update, but we've got to stay concerned is that the Supreme Court is worse than ever. They actually have no ethics code that is applicable to the Supreme Court. Every other judge in the country can be tossed or disciplined if they don't follow an ethics code and there is none that apply to the U.S. Supreme Court and they are acting like it. They are more out of control than ever, but my recommendation to you on the dais and to everyone listening that's concerned about Citizens United is, follow Sheldon Whitehouse on YouTube. He's the Senator from Rhode Island. He has proven that that decision was the result of bribery by the Federalists Society. There is a basis for overturning it and remember, that's what's done our city in. That's the worst cause of the developer-ocracy we all face. If we can overturn Citizens United, we don't need superman Amos Rojas as much as we do now without overturning Citizens United. The second update I'd like to give is relating again to the lawsuit against Big Oil. I don't think you all will be totally surprised that – I'll be finished very shortly. When the Governor of California sued Big Oil, cynicism lives in all of your hearts and my hearts. Is it a big surprise to us that there's suddenly a recall effort against him. Do we believe in coincidences or was the recall effort financed

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by Big Oil, but the thing is, what has he proven to us. We could probably sue Big Oil ourselves. I think we should continue to evaluate the option of suing Big Oil ourselves. So that's the update. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

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